

# Aristotelian Naturalism and the History of Ethics

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TERENCE IRWIN'S MONUMENTAL THREE-VOLUME *The Development of Ethics* is a masterful reconstruction and assessment of figures, traditions, and ideas in the history of ethics in the Western tradition from Socrates through John Rawls.<sup>1, 2</sup> The three volumes weigh in at over 11 pounds and span 96 substantial chapters and over 2,700 densely formatted pages (large pages, small margins, and small font). *The Development of Ethics* covers not only familiar figures, such as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Hutcheson, Butler, Hume, Smith, Reid, Kant, Hegel, Mill, Green, and Sidgwick, but also a rich variety of ancient sources (including the Cynics, Cyrenaics, Sceptics, and Church Fathers, including Augustine), medieval, renaissance, and reformation sources (including Scotus, Ockham, and Machiavelli), sources for natural law (including Hooker, Vasquez, Suárez, Grotius, Pufendorf, and Barbeyrac), continental rationalists (including Spinoza and Leibniz), British moralists (including Cumberland, Cudworth, Shaftesbury, Clarke, Balguy, and Price), post-Kantians (including Marx, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) and twentieth-century English-language sources (including Moore, Ross, Stevenson, Ayer, Lewis, and Hare). This is just a sampling of the more familiar historical sources that Irwin

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<sup>1</sup>This is a review essay of Irwin, *DE*. In the 2011–13 academic years at the University of California, San Diego, Sam Rickless, Don Rutherford, and I taught a four-quarter sequence of graduate seminars on the history of ethics. I taught the first and last legs of the sequence, Don taught the second leg, and Sam taught the third leg. Though the seminars were focused on the primary texts, the sequence was inspired by Irwin's three-volume work. I would like to thank students in those seminars and Don and Sam for helping me think about the history of ethics. Special thanks go to Don and Sam for comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I would also like to thank Terry Irwin himself for all that I have learned from him about the history of ethics in various ways over more than three decades.

<sup>2</sup>In a review that must be as wide-ranging in the history of ethics as this, it is not feasible to provide textual references for every historical attribution or interpretive claim. Consequently, my references will be selective, confined primarily to a few pinpoint references and locating the sources of distinctive claims that play an important role in my substantive discussion below.

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discusses. He also discusses a wealth of less familiar philosophical and theological figures. For the most part, the chapters are organized chronologically, rather than thematically. Most chapters are devoted to individual figures, and several figures get multiple chapters (Aristotle gets four, Aquinas nine, Scotus two, Suárez two, Hobbes three, Hutcheson two, Balguy two, Butler four, Hume five, Reid two, Kant seven, Hegel two, Mill two, Sidgwick three, and Rawls two). A few chapters discuss traditions and themes.

The combination of scope and depth in *The Development of Ethics* is, as far as I know, without precedent. Existing comprehensive histories of ethics, such as Henry Sidgwick's *Outline of the History of Ethics* and Alasdair MacIntyre's *A Short History of Ethics*, as their titles suggest, are, however valuable, both less comprehensive and less thorough. Even important recent studies that deal with the history of modern ethics in significant detail, such as John Rawls's *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Stephen Darwall's *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640–1740*, and Jerome Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy*, concern only modern philosophy and, even there, have less comprehensive ambitions. The broad scope of Irwin's inquiry pays various dividends, not the least of which is that he is able to show that some ideas and themes often taken to be distinctive of modern ethics have their origins and antecedents in antiquity. Fortunately, Irwin has the skills necessary to make good on the ambitions of his study. Indeed, it is hard to think of anyone else as well qualified historically, philologically, and philosophically to undertake such an ambitious interpretive and philosophical task and carry it out with such authority. Any reader (or reviewer) of Irwin's three volumes should find the process humbling.

Though Irwin has a keen sense of the context of the figures and ideas he discusses, he is focused on and relentless about understanding and assessing the philosophical content and implications of the texts. Though he provides self-contained reconstructions and assessments of various figures and traditions that make good sense of those figures and traditions on their own terms, two general principles emerge from and guide his discussion.

The first principle is a methodological commitment to *Socratic dialectic*, as refined and practiced by Aristotle (*DE* §2). As a rough first approximation (but see §1 below), this makes Irwin's approach to the history of ethics essentially *comparative*. In understanding and assessing the philosophical claims of a particular figure or tradition, he finds it fruitful to compare the philosophical commitments and resources of that figure or tradition with the commitments and resources of other figures and traditions. This is valuable, Irwin maintains, whether those different figures and traditions were in actual and conscious conversation or not.

The second principle is a substantive set of commitments that are perhaps clearest in Aristotle and Aquinas but that Irwin thinks influence, in various ways, much of the history of ethics. This principle Irwin calls *Aristotelian naturalism* (*DE* §3). As a rough first approximation (but see §2 below), Aristotelian naturalism takes the central ethical concept to be a *teleological* conception of a final good, which should be identified with the agent's happiness or *eudaimonia*. Conceptions of *eudaimonia* should be constrained by *human nature*. According to Aristotelian naturalism, this implies that the principal ingredient of the human good must

be the realization of our *rational nature*. The virtues, including the moral virtues, must be understood as essential expressions of this rational nature. If we think of Aristotelian naturalism as receiving its fullest expression in Aquinas, then we can understand a good bit of how Irwin approaches the history of ethics. Though few figures accept every element of Aristotelian naturalism, many figures accept one or more elements. Those who accept several elements and who, therefore, figure as central characters in the Aristotelian naturalism narrative are Aristotle, the Stoics, Aquinas, Suárez, Butler, Kant, and Green (*DE* esp. §§3–4, 712, 969–73, 1241–42). Even those who cannot plausibly be viewed as Aristotelian naturalists can still be usefully understood, Irwin argues, as contesting one or more elements of Aristotelian naturalism.

Irwin highlights the importance of these two guiding principles when he describes an “ampler” title (or possible subtitle) that he might have given the book in the spirit of some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical titles (*DE I 1*).

The Development of Ethics  
being a selective historical and critical study of  
moral philosophy in the Socratic tradition  
with special attention to  
Aristotelian naturalism  
its formation, elaboration, criticism, and defence

Not everyone will agree with Irwin’s two organizing principles. Some may think that there are significant discontinuities in the history of ethics that limit the value of Socratic method practiced across different time periods and traditions or that its focus on common issues makes it less likely to reveal novel or distinctive ideas in different figures and traditions. Others may think that the narrative of Aristotelian naturalism is Procrustean and ignores important issues and debates in the history of ethics. For the most part, the application of Irwin’s two guiding principles appears surprisingly elastic, ecumenical, and fecund. No doubt, different organizing principles would highlight somewhat different issues and debates. But Irwin’s two principles exclude fairly little of systematic importance. The debates he explores are fruitful and important. And, in any case, there is a great deal of interpretive and systematic work that Irwin does that does not presuppose either Socratic method or Aristotelian naturalism.

The length, detail, and analytical depth of *The Development of Ethics* ensure that no one can read through an entire volume, much less all three volumes, quickly. Its comparative and cumulative narrative means that the treatment of individual figures is not completely self-contained, which will place some limits on its use as a reference work. But those working in the history of philosophy and especially in the history of ethics have reason to be grateful that Irwin undertook such an ambitious project. It represents a unique and lasting contribution to our understanding of the history of ethics. It will repay careful study and restudy.

Space limitations and limitations in my expertise force me to be selective about which issues to discuss in greater detail. Moreover, it seems appropriate to focus on issues raised by Irwin’s two guiding principles. In what follows I will examine

Irwin's Socratic and Aristotelian principles more fully and explore some issues that arise for combining different elements of Aristotelian naturalism that Irwin does not, I think, fully address and resolve.

#### I. SOCRATIC METHOD

Socratic method is introduced in Plato's early dialogues where Socrates employs his dialectical method of question and answer (*elenchus*) to examine the nature of the virtues. Socrates's interlocutors are sometimes ordinary and sometimes prominent Athenians, many of whom claim to have ethical knowledge. In this way, the Socratic dialogues investigate both common and prominent views about the virtues. Famously, Socrates exposes puzzles for and problems in these ethical views. Despite the negative conclusions of the Socratic dialogues, many readers conclude that Socrates introduces and defends various positive doctrines in these dialogues as the best resolution of these conflicting appearances. Certainly, Plato defends many of his own positive doctrines as the most defensible response to ideas and puzzles introduced in the Socratic dialogues.

Aristotle also practices Socratic method. He begins most of his philosophical works with a statement of the appearances (*phainomena*) on that subject, which include the beliefs (*endoxa*) of the many and the wise. Taken collectively, these beliefs produce puzzles (*aporiai*) that reflect tensions or at least apparent tensions in the beliefs of the many and the wise. A central task that Aristotle sets himself is to examine the appearances and the puzzles set by his predecessors, and an important test of adequacy for his own theories and doctrines is that they should explain the source of philosophical disagreement and resolve the disagreements in a way that preserves as many of the appearances as possible or at least those that, on reflection, seem the most important.

As in the other cases, we must set out the appearances, and first of all go through the puzzles. In this way we must prove the common beliefs about these ways of being affected—ideally, all the common beliefs, but if not all, most of them, and the most important. For if the objections are solved, and the common beliefs are left, it will be an adequate proof. (*NE* 1145b3–7)

Irwin follows this Aristotelian use of Socratic dialectic, situating figures in relation to their predecessors (and sometimes successors), examining how their positions respond to the strengths and weaknesses in earlier views and assessing the philosophical progress the figure makes in resolving puzzles in previous positions. These comparisons of Y with W and X and sometimes Z are always well reasoned and worth taking seriously. Sometimes, they become quite complex, as in this example.

If Smith is right to agree with Hutcheson against the rationalists, Balguy is wrong to suppose that Cudworth's argument against Hobbes's legal positivism also undermines Hutcheson's sentimentalism. (*DE* II.679)

Irwin invariably sets the stage for these complex comparisons, and they are among his most thought-provoking claims, but they will challenge readers, especially those who have not read the chapters on the various figures being compared in close proximity to each other.

Irwin's methodology is Socratic in another way as well. It is not just that he compares Y's views with his predecessors W and X and argues for judgments about philosophical continuity, discontinuity, and progress. He also addresses and engages the figures and traditions he discusses. In reconstructing and assessing Y's view, Irwin often voices concerns about Y from X's perspective, considers Y's resources for response, and so on through several epicycles. Irwin often goes through a similar dialectical process in assessing tensions in Y's view. Various strategies for reconciliation are tried; some are judged successful, others not. Sometimes, the result will be an unanswered objection to or unresolved tension in Y's views. If this is a central feature of Y's view, this may prove a reason to be dissatisfied with Y. This is one way to read Irwin's verdict on naturalist criticisms of voluntarism and naturalist and realist criticisms of sentimentalism. But often the offending feature of Y's view, even if important, may not be literally essential. For this reason, sometimes the result of Irwin's dialectical engagement with Y is a judgment about what is most important and worth preserving in Y. This interpretation of the defensible Y might be quite different from some received interpretations of Y. This is one way of reading Irwin's sympathetic but not uncritical discussion of Kant in which he disagrees with Kant's appeal to transcendental freedom and his criticisms of eudaimonism and defends a realist understanding of Kant's grounding of moral requirements in an appeal to rational nature.

Of course, to some extent any historian of philosophy with some analytical ambitions will assess the contributions of the figure under discussion and offer judgments about which elements of the position are most important and which elements might need rethinking. In this sense, the author is always an interlocutor in the history she examines. But some interlocutors aim to be intelligent and fair moderators in discussions led by others. Though Irwin's voice does not eclipse the voices of his historical figures, he plays the role of a distinctive, prominent, and vigorous interlocutor. Like Socrates, he is not simply a moderator but a central participant in the inquiry (*DE I.3*).

Irwin acknowledges that approaching the history of ethics as a collective Socratic inquiry influences his treatment of various figures and traditions. Adherence to this methodological principle does not seem to exclude many from consideration, if only because the scope of Irwin's treatment is so comprehensive. But it may affect how different figures and traditions are discussed, stressing the contributions of those figures whose work is most thoroughly dialectical or focusing on those themes in a particular figure that make him more readily comparable with other figures (*DE I.3*). Perhaps some figures would receive less attention (e.g. Aquinas) and other figures more attention (the utilitarians and Nietzsche) in a less dialectical approach, and perhaps a less dialectical approach would spend less time discussing the attitudes of later writers to Greek ethics. But it is hard to dispute the importance of the themes and debates that emerge as common on this dialectical approach. A selective perspective brings potential benefits as well as costs.

However, one concern about applying Socratic method across large stretches of time is that it may seem to presuppose that there is a common conception of the central ethical problems and viable answers. Socratic method may seem to commit us to finding philosophical continuity in the history of ethics. It may be

no surprise that Irwin finds a substantive principle such as Aristotelian naturalism to be a touchstone in the history of ethics if he starts by assuming continuity in the history of ethics. But this may be a problematic assumption precisely because many commentators have found significant intellectual discontinuity in the history of ethics, especially between ancient and modern ethics. For instance, Henry Sidgwick claimed that whereas the central ethical concepts of antiquity were attractive, the central ethical concepts of the modern period were imperatival and juridical (*Methods*, 105–6). This contrast is sometimes also understood as a contrast between axiological concepts, such as the good, and deontological concepts, such as the right. Both Sidgwick and Bernard Williams have contrasted the egocentric character of Greek ethics with the impartiality of modern moral conceptions.<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe thought that modern ethics was dominated by the notion of obligation, which only made sense in the context of a lawgiver and accompanying theological commitments and, hence, made no sense in a secular age.<sup>4</sup> She recommended the return to what she believed were quite different ideas about moral character and the virtues that were central in antiquity. This recommendation presupposes both that an ethics of happiness and virtue and one of obligation and natural law are fundamentally opposed and that the ethical concepts of the ancients are still accessible to us moderns. Relatedly, both Darwall and Schneewind have claimed that modern ethics is importantly discontinuous with ancient ethics, precisely because it makes the idea of an obligation central, and have insisted that obligation must be understood in broadly voluntaristic terms, as involving the will.<sup>5</sup> On this reading, the modern focus on obligation culminates in the Kantian focus on autonomy. They agree with Anscombe about the discontinuity between ancient and modern ethics but disagree with her insofar as they think that the modern focus on obligation is defensible and important.

These contrasts raise large issues that cannot be addressed adequately here. But several observations are worth making. First, any commitment to continuity in the diachronic application of Socratic methods is *defeasible*. We might try to situate Y's concerns in relation to her predecessors and assess how well her central claims address and resolve disagreements and puzzles in the claims of W and X, but after attempting to do so we may find that there is simply too little common ground to make direct comparisons and assess progress. Of course, that is not the conclusion Irwin reaches. But it is not precluded by his adoption of a Socratic methodology.

Second, as we will see, Aristotelian naturalism provides an elastic analytical framework, and positions can be identified in terms of their attitudes, positive or negative, to various aspects of Aristotelian naturalism. So some of the discontinuities that other commentators claim to find in the history of ethics can be

<sup>3</sup>Sidgwick, *Methods*, 91–92; and Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

<sup>4</sup>Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

<sup>5</sup>Darwall, *British Moralists*; and Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*; see also Darwall, "Grotius." Both Darwall and Schneewind follow Barbeyrac in thinking that Grotius's focus on obligation marked a fundamental transition in modern ethics, though they understand Grotius's innovation somewhat differently. Irwin reads Grotius differently from either and sees his contributions as more continuous with ancient and scholastic sources (*DE II.70–99*).

represented within Irwin's framework. For instance, we might agree with Sidgwick that many moderns reject the teleology or the eudaimonism that was central in antiquity. While we could not sensibly claim that all of modern ethics repudiated naturalism, we could agree with Darwall and Schneewind that a distinctive and important feature of modern ethics involved commitment to a voluntarist focus on obligation. In short, the kind of continuity Irwin claims to find in the history of ethics is more ecumenical than one might initially think.

Finally, Irwin explicitly considers many of these discontinuity narratives (*DE* §§6–7, 453–68). He disagrees with them on a variety of issues, including how best to interpret certain modern figures, such as Suárez, Grotius, Butler, and Kant, and how defensible voluntarism is. But, more generally, he thinks that once we take a more comprehensive look at the history of ethics, both ancient and modern, not only will we see the modern period as more complex and not dominated by a single commitment or theme (Aristotelian naturalism is itself a compound of several distinct commitments) but also we will see that there were already precedents for many allegedly modern ideas in ancient and medieval ethics.

## 2. ARISTOTELIAN NATURALISM

Irwin believes that Aristotelian naturalism provides a useful lens through which to view many developments in the history of ethics, both ancient and modern. Aristotelian naturalism, we noted, has several distinguishable elements.

1. *Teleology*. Ethics and practical reason are teleological in the sense that they are properly regulated by a final good.
2. *Eudaimonism*. The appropriate final good for each agent is her own eudaimonia or happiness.
3. *Naturalism*. The correct conception of the final good should reflect our nature.
4. *Rationalism*. Human nature is a life of reason in which one responds appropriately to objective goods and reasons, and ethical requirements are requirements of reason.
5. *Virtues*. The virtues, including the moral virtues, express this rational nature.
6. *Common Good*. The moral virtues involve a concern for a good that is common between the agent and others.

Irwin's initial discussion of Aristotelian naturalism makes the first five commitments explicit (*DE* §3). But the claim that moral virtue must be concerned with a common good appears as a reasonable condition of adequacy for any eudaimonist ethical theory and is an assumption embraced by most figures in both ancient and modern ethics. Each of the six commitments ends up playing an important role at various stages in Irwin's narrative.

What does it mean to view the history of ethics through the lens of Aristotelian naturalism? Of course, Irwin recognizes that Aristotelian naturalism is contested and that many figures and traditions in the history of ethics are skeptical of one or more of its claims. Nonetheless, he thinks it provides a useful focus.

For one thing, many figures and traditions can be understood in terms of their attitudes to the constitutive commitments of Aristotelian naturalism. This is easy to

see in the case of those philosophers who develop and defend most, if not all, of the constitutive commitments of Aristotelian naturalism. Here, we might consider briefly those philosophers who figure as central characters in Irwin's narrative.

Though there are interesting intramural disputes between Aristotle and the Stoics about the exact role of the virtues in happiness, the existence and importance of moral luck, and the role of divine providence in ethics, the Stoics clearly embrace some version of each element of Aristotelian naturalism. However, they expand the ethical community to include all rational beings, and they recognize as a form of natural law precepts of reason that apply to all rational beings. Indeed, it is these features of Stoic ethics that lead some commentators to see it as bridge between ancient and modern ethics.

Aquinas gives the fullest expression to Aristotelian and Stoic ideas (*DE* §§3, 235–36), which explains why Irwin gives inordinate attention to him.<sup>6</sup> Aquinas provides needed defense of Aristotle's assumption about the importance of a final good and of the importance of the will in our understanding of the virtues. He insists on the importance of natural law and universal conscience (*synderesis*), which grasps first principles of natural law. But he does not think that the emphasis on natural law is foreign to the Aristotelian account of practical reason. Practical reason is prudential deliberation about the composition of the agent's own happiness. The prudent agent has reason to display intellectual love for others and to promote a common good. Though Aquinas read Aristotle's texts in Latin translation, he follows Cicero's lead in recognizing that the concept of the fine or fitting (*kalon*) in Aristotle's ethics, which is sometimes translated into Latin as *bonum*, is best captured by the Latin *honestum*, with its connotation of moral goodness. In this way, Aquinas makes clear that Aristotelian ethics already contains the idea of moral goodness (*DE* §§332–34). Significantly, Aquinas thinks that these Aristotelian doctrines can be reconciled with Christian doctrines. He famously defends a naturalist, rather than a voluntarist, conception of the relation between God's will and moral value. The familiar virtues concern natural law and ensure a natural good. But this is a pagan virtue. A fully virtuous agent needs the proper recognition of and devotion to God and the divinely infused virtues, which guarantee a supernatural and, hence, more complete good.<sup>7</sup>

Suárez offers a more sustained account of natural law, one that defends the essentials of Aquinas against voluntarists such as Scotus and Ockham. Suárez agrees with the naturalists, such as Aquinas and Vasquez, that there is intrinsic good and evil and that natural law is indicative of natural value. But he also thinks that God's willing what is intrinsically good provides additional reason, in the form of obligation, for us to obey the law. Though our obligations may depend upon natural law and the will of God, there is a moral foundation for natural law that does not

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<sup>6</sup>Irwin devotes nine chapters and over 200 dense pages to Aquinas. Some readers might have wished for a briefer treatment of Aquinas here, which might have allowed Irwin to publish a more extended treatment of Aquinas as a separate book.

<sup>7</sup>Irwin insists that the sort of naturalism ingredient in Aristotelian naturalism does not preclude appeal to an immanent or transcendent god (*DE* §3). Presumably, this sort of naturalism can include natural theology.

depend on God's will. Though Suárez focuses on natural law and defends claims that go beyond Aquinas, he can and does accept Aquinas's Aristotelian naturalism about the moral foundations of natural law (*DE* §§452, 712).

Irwin's reading of Butler treats him as importantly continuous with Greek ethicists (*DE* §§3, 679, 711–12). In particular, Butler's appeal to the nature of complex systems allows him to recognize superior principles whose function it is to regulate the passions. Here, Butler makes explicit the fundamental distinction between the *strength* and the *authority* of particular passions that was latent in Greek sources (*Sermons*, II 14). The principle of self-love is one such superior principle, and conscience is another. Though Butler recognizes a nearly perfect coincidence between the dictates of self-love and conscience, they have distinct sources. The principle of self-love depends on recognizing that individual passions are different parts of a synchronically and diachronically unified self. That principle recognizes reasons grounded in an agent's temporally extended self. But our reactive attitudes, especially those involving recognition of merit and desert, reflect the operation of a superior principle that recognizes each agent as part of a community of agents with both rights and responsibilities. Just as particular passions are appropriately regulated by the principle of self-love, so too self-concern is appropriately regulated by the principle of conscience. In this respect, Butler may depart from the eudaimonism ingredient in Aristotelian naturalism. But, like the Greeks, he thinks that the passions and action should be regulated by superior principles that are part of our constitution and nature. Unlike the naturalism of Hobbes, Hutcheson, and Hume, Butler's naturalism is normative, not reductive. Responsiveness to reason is part of our nature, and so a conception of virtue grounded in human nature constrains and regulates the passions.

As Irwin recognizes, many would not regard Kant as a natural ally of Aristotelian naturalism. Though he is a rationalist, he is a sharp critic of eudaimonism and opposes attempts to found morality on human nature as heteronomous. Moreover, he embraces a form of non-naturalism insofar as he thinks that morality is possible only if agents are noumenally free. But Irwin thinks that in important respects Kant's most central commitments are compatible with Aristotelian naturalism and that a sympathetic defense and articulation of Kantian ideas would treat him as part of this tradition (*DE* §§4, 6, 238, 897, 907, 932, 934, 969–73, 1241–42). Kant is a rationalist insofar as he agrees on the importance of a supreme regulative principle of practical reason. His criticisms of Greek eudaimonism rest on a subjective and, ultimately, hedonist conception of the good that is alien to most Greek thinking about the good and, hence, vitiates his criticisms. Indeed, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic conceptions of eudaimonia understand it as a life regulated by reason and expressing virtue. Though Kant reasonably resists attempts to ground morality in reductive appeals to human nature, his own conception grounds morality in our rational nature as agents. But then Kant's chief objection to naturalism is to reductive or empirical naturalism, not to the rationalist and normative conception of naturalism accepted by the Greeks and Butler. If Kant's own appeal to transcendental freedom proves problematic, it may be best to defend his central ethical commitments, in particular, his claims about negative and positive freedom, by appeal to a naturalistically acceptable form of compatibilism in terms

of the capacity to be guided by superior principles. Aristotelian naturalism, as Irwin understands it, involves a commitment to objective goods and reasons to which a virtuous agent responds appropriately. Irwin defends a realist, rather than constructivist, interpretation of Kant's claims about the relation between the moral law and rational agents, in which agents impose the law on themselves but do not decide on its content (*DE* ch. 72). These claims explain why Irwin thinks a strong case can be made for seeing Kant as part of the tradition of Aristotelian naturalism.

It is less clear that Kant does or ought to embrace eudaimonism, even if his explicit reservations about eudaimonism rest on misconceptions about that doctrine. This is because Kant believes that practical reason is fundamentally impartial, as reflected in the Formula of Humanity version of the Categorical Imperative (*Groundwork*, 4:429). We do have reason to be concerned with our own rational nature, but only as part of a concern for rational agents as such. Whereas eudaimonists recognize other-regarding virtues and reasons for the agent to be concerned about the well-being of others, they must ground this kind of tuistic concern in the agent's own eudaimonia. By contrast, Kant seems to agree with Butler's claims about the independence and superiority of conscience. Like Butler, Kant may satisfy enough features of Aristotelian naturalism to fit within the tradition, but they both appear skeptical of the eudaimonist strand in Aristotelian naturalism.

Though Green is an unfortunately neglected figure in the history of ethics, it is clear why he fits the Aristotelian naturalist mold. Indeed, he is arguably the clearest Aristotelian naturalist in the modern period. Green's major philosophical work, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, aims to synthesize the best elements in ancient and modern ethical traditions, in particular, Aristotelian and Kantian claims (cf. *DE* §§1241–42).<sup>8</sup> He criticizes empiricist and, especially, hedonist conceptions of desire, the will, and the good. Following Butler and Kant, he argues that agents have capacities for practical reason that allow them to distinguish between the intensity and authority of desire, to deliberate about their ends, and to regulate their actions according to superior principles. In doing so, he explicitly criticizes Kant's appeal to transcendental freedom and defends a compatibilist understanding of the will. Like the Aristotelians, Green understands acting on superior principles in terms of acting on a conception of one's own overall good and interprets the agent's own good in terms of self-realization. The demand for self-realization is appropriate given our nature, not as humans (a biological kind), but as persons (a normative or forensic kind). Because this demand is grounded in features of moral personality or agency, Green regards its dictates as categorical, rather than hypothetical, imperatives. Like others in the eudaimonist tradition, Green thinks that proper self-realization requires a constitutive concern for others. Like the Stoics, he thinks that this other-regarding concern should be genuinely cosmopolitan in character, involving respect for all other rational agents. He agrees with Kant about the importance of the Humanity formula of the Categorical Imperative, but he understands these moral demands as grounded in self-realization.

<sup>8</sup>For analysis of Green's ethics, see Brink, *Perfectionism and the Common Good*.

As this brief account of the figures central to the narrative of Aristotelian naturalism demonstrates, that narrative provides a useful perspective on the history of ethics in part because these and other important figures in ancient and modern ethics subscribe to many, if not all, of its constitutive commitments. Aristotelian naturalism can also provide a useful perspective on those parts of the history of ethics that dispute its main claims. For instance, we can understand Scotus and Ockham and, later, Pufendorf and Barbeyrac as rejecting Aristotelian naturalism and the naturalism of Aquinas, Vasquez, and Suárez, concluding that Christian doctrine requires voluntarism. Augustine is often read as thinking that Aristotelian naturalism is committed to pagan virtue, which cannot be reconciled with Christian doctrines. Irwin argues that the details of the Augustinian critique of pagan morality can be read so as to complement and complete, rather than undermine, Aristotelian naturalism.

Though different in important ways, Hobbes, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith can be understood as defending a form of ethical naturalism that is at odds with rationalism. Here, Irwin puts the traditional debate between rationalists and sentimentalists in a new light. Some rationalists, such as Clarke, Balguy, Price, Whewell, and Sidgwick understand moral requirements as precepts of reason that are self-evident and not in need of justification by appeals to human nature. This appeal to self-evidence can seem inadequate both epistemologically and motivationally, which explains the attraction of egoist and sentimentalist appeals to human nature of the sort we find in Hobbes, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. But this is an empiricist conception of human nature that shares the voluntarist's difficulties recognizing objective and immutable moral principles. In the context of this familiar debate, we can see the possibility of a middle ground that is rationalist insofar as it treats moral demands as rational requirements but justifies moral principles by a normative, rather than an empiricist, conception of human nature. This sort of naturalistic rationalism, which conceives of the relevant kind of nature in terms of moral personality or agency, is what separates Aristotle, Aquinas, Butler, Kant, and Green from traditional rationalists, on the one hand, and sentimentalists, on the other hand.

If this is a fair characterization of the heroes of Irwin's narrative, it raises a question about how exactly he understands Aristotelian naturalism. The six constitutive commitments clearly cannot be individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for membership in the tradition, because several of his central figures reject at least one commitment, and Kant appears to reject several. Perhaps only Aristotle, the Stoics, Aquinas, and Green accept all six elements of Aristotelian naturalism. Alternatively, one might treat Aristotelian naturalism as a prototype whose clearest expression is perhaps Aquinas or Green. Individual figures might then be treated as Aristotelian naturalists insofar as they embrace the commitments present in the prototype. But even this reading cannot be right as it stands. For some figures that Irwin does not take to express the main commitments of Aristotelian naturalism arguably score higher in terms of similarity to the prototype than figures whom Irwin does take to express some version of Aristotelian naturalism.

For instance, one might have thought that the Epicureans were closer to Aristotle than Kant is. They endorse a teleological conception of practical reason that understands the final good in terms of eudaimonia; they claim that the pursuit of pleasure is natural; and they recognize the virtues, including social virtues such as justice, as character traits that promote eudaimonia. By contrast, Kant rejects eudaimonism and most appeals to nature. Perhaps Irwin thinks that the Epicureans embrace less central aspects of Aristotelian eudaimonism, because they are hedonists about the good, reductive naturalists, and instrumentalists about virtue.

Moreover, one might have thought that utilitarians, including Mill and Sidgwick, embraced at least as many elements of Aristotelian naturalism as Kant. The utilitarians did not embrace the egocentrism of Aristotelian eudaimonism, but neither did Kant. Sidgwick, at least, recognized a dualism between egocentric and impartial perspectives on practical reason. As utilitarians, both Mill and Sidgwick embraced a teleological conception of ethics and practical reason. While Sidgwick may have been a rational intuitionist, Mill grounds his conception of happiness in human nature, and a good case can be made for thinking that his naturalism is a form of normative naturalism, appealing to our nature as progressive beings, not a reductive form of naturalism.<sup>9</sup> One might conclude that Mill, if not Sidgwick, fits the prototype of Aristotelian naturalism at least as well as Kant. Here, Irwin's doubts about the adequacy of utilitarian interpretations of the common good may help explain why he is prepared to regard Kant as a clearer heir to Aristotelian naturalism than Mill or Sidgwick.

Perhaps what this shows is that Irwin does not regard all elements in the prototype of Aristotelian naturalism as equally important. I am not sure that he ever acknowledges this explicitly or says which elements of Aristotelian naturalism are most important. But if we are to square the heroes of the narrative with the narrative itself, it may be necessary to treat a naturalistic rationalism (or rationalistic naturalism) as the most important commitment of Aristotelian naturalism. Even then, there may be room for debate about who the central figures in the tradition should be. If the narrative structure of Aristotelian naturalism requires judgments about which elements of the prototype are most important, one can see how Aristotelian naturalism may not determine a unique narrative structure for the history of ethics.

### 3. EUDAIMONISM, RATIONALISM, AND THE COMMON GOOD

We can explore some choices that may need to be made about and within Aristotelian naturalism by looking more closely at the relations among some of its constituent elements. We might begin by recalling Sidgwick's idea that Greek ethics is egocentric in a way that modern ethics is not (*Methods*, 91–92). Here Sidgwick is contrasting the eudaimonism characteristic of Greek ethics with modern ethics. Eudaimonism implies that the agent's own eudaimonia is the central ethical concept and should govern her deliberations. The eudaimonist recognizes virtues

<sup>9</sup>See Brink, *Mill's Progressive Principles*.

as states of the agent's character that contribute causally or constitutively to her own happiness. Though the Greeks recognize familiar other-regarding virtues, such as justice, these traits must contribute to the agent's own happiness to be genuine virtues. In this way, the eudaimonist must treat tuistic concern and conduct as having a derivative justification. This gives rise to legitimate questions about the scope and stability of the tuistic concern that can be recognized by the eudaimonist. Whereas Sidgwick thinks that Greek ethics is eudaimonist, he thinks that modern ethics tends to recognize concern for others as a fundamental demand. This is especially true of modern ethical theories, such as Kantianism and utilitarianism, that represent moral demands as fundamentally impartial.

Sidgwick is surely right about half of this contrast. Virtually all of Greek ethics is eudaimonist in character.<sup>10</sup> Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics all embrace the eudaimonist egocentric constraint. However, the modern period is more mixed than his contrast might suggest. Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Bradley, and Green all defend, in different ways, egocentric conceptions of practical reason and moral demand. Perhaps Sidgwick regards these cases as aberrations in an otherwise consistent impartialist narrative in modern ethics. One can see non-derivative impartial concern manifested in different ways in different modern figures and traditions—in rationalists, such as Clarke and Balguy, who recognize fundamental precepts of benevolence and equity or justice; in sentimentalists, such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith who recognize fundamental motives of sympathy and empathy; in Butler's recognition of conscience as a superior principle; in Kant's Formula of Humanity version of the Categorical Imperative; and in Mill's and Sidgwick's utilitarian insistence on promoting happiness impartially. Even if modern ethics is not consistently impartialist, Sidgwick may well believe that this is the predominant and distinctive tendency of modern ethics, in contrast with ancient ethics.

This contrast between eudaimonism and impartiality poses various issues for how we should understand Aristotelian naturalism, and different figures and traditions have different commitments on these issues. Moderns might doubt that eudaimonists can give an adequate account of impartial moral demands. But this is not just a modern concern about ancient ethics. It is a concern within Greek ethics itself. Eudaimonism implies that genuine virtues must benefit their possessor. It is not hard to see how apparently self-regarding virtues, such as temperance, might benefit the agent. But what about familiar other-regarding virtues, such as justice? How do they benefit the agent? This is a question that Plato addresses squarely in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, where he considers eudaimonist doubts about justice and argues that justice contributes constitutively to the agent's own happiness. The question whether justice is a genuine eudaimonic virtue also arises for Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. Aristotle explains how justice, like friendship, both involves a concern for the common good and benefits the agent (*NE* books viii–

<sup>10</sup>The main exceptions to the generalization that Greek ethics is eudaimonist are the Cyrenaics (see *DE* §§28–34). The Cyrenaics resist the appeal to the agent's overall good, appealing instead to her momentary good (pleasure). If anything, this sort of solipsism of the moment makes for an even greater contrast with modern impartial demands than eudaimonism does.

ix). The Epicureans argue that justice is instrumentally valuable for the benefits of cooperative activity that it makes possible, developing ideas first introduced by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Plato's *Republic* (*KD* 31–37; Cicero, *De Fin* i–ii). The Stoics agree with Aristotle that justice is to be valued and practiced for its own sake; they defend concern for all rational beings by appeal to our rational nature (Cicero, *De Fin* iii–iv).<sup>11</sup>

The Greek eudaimonists all recognize the need to provide egocentric justification of some familiar patterns of tuistic concern, and Irwin provides an excellent reconstruction of the different egocentric strategies found in the ancient tradition. Aristotle and the Stoics conceive of this as providing a eudaimonist justification of concern for a common good. They arguably conceive of the common good somewhat differently. Aristotle's conception of the common good is parochial. Justice, like friendship, is to be practiced toward those with whom one has the appropriate kind of shared history. But there are some with whom we have no shared history, and we have more shared history with some than with others. As such, tuistic concern for Aristotle has *limited scope* and *variable weight*. By contrast, the Stoic conception of the common good is *cosmopolitan*, combining ethical concern with unlimited scope and apparently equal weight.<sup>12</sup>

The common good and eudaimonism are both commitments of Aristotelian naturalism. So one question for Aristotelian naturalism is the purely internal question whether these two constitutive commitments are compatible. Eudaimonists are committed to an *inside-out* constraint on the justification of tuistic concern, since such concern must be shown to benefit the agent causally or constitutively. How well Aristotelian naturalists can reconcile eudaimonism and the common good will depend on the adequacy of these inside-out strategies of justification. It may also depend on how exactly we interpret the common good, because it seems harder to justify a genuinely cosmopolitan conception of the common good than a more parochial conception, at least if we limit ourselves to inside-out strategies available to the eudaimonist.

Aristotle's strategy of justifying justice by appeal to friendship explains why his conception of the common good looks parochial. If one's reasons for concern for another depend on shared history, then one will owe less to those with whom one has less shared history, and one will owe nothing to those with whom one has no shared history. The Stoics clearly reject this parochialism. But it is harder to understand their eudaimonist justification of cosmopolitanism. We all may be equally rational beings, but we are numerically distinct rational beings, and it is not obvious how my concern for my own rational agency guarantees a concern for any and all other rational agents. Stoic beliefs in divine design may help to bridge this gap, but it is not clear if the relevant assumptions about design are sufficient or defensible.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>See also Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, esp. §§57–66.

<sup>12</sup>The cosmopolitan character of the Stoic conception of the common good is perhaps clearest in Hierocles (*Hellenistic Philosophers*, §57G).

<sup>13</sup>See Cooper, "Eudaimonism, the Appeal to Nature, and Moral Duty." I compare the resources of Aristotelian and Stoic eudaimonism to justify a cosmopolitan conception of the common good and defend the superiority of Aristotelian eudaimonism in Brink, "Eudaimonism and Cosmopolitan Concern."

One might reasonably harbor doubts about whether the Aristotelian naturalist's commitments to eudaimonism and the common good can be reconciled, especially if one has an impartial and cosmopolitan conception of the common good. Because the conception of the common good in modern ethics tends to be more impartial and cosmopolitan, it is perhaps less surprising that modern ethics tends to reject the eudaimonism of antiquity. It may seem that in order to defend a genuinely cosmopolitan conception of the common good, one must abandon egocentric assumptions about practical reason and recognize impartial concern as a fundamental, non-derivative commitment.

One could embrace a cosmopolitan conception of moral demand without giving up an egocentric conception of practical reason if one were willing to be an externalist about the authority of morality, treating moral demands and the demands of practical reason as distinct and potentially conflicting. But, with a few exceptions, including perhaps Mill, this has not been a significant trend in modern ethics, which has tended to combine rationalism with impartiality, treating impartiality as a non-derivative commitment of practical reason.

Even Butler and Sidgwick, who each recognize self-love as a fundamental demand of practical reason, also embrace a further impartial demand of practical reason as at least equally fundamental and authoritative. For Sidgwick, the demands of egoism and utilitarianism appear to be equally authoritative, which is what produces his dualism of practical reason (*Methods*, xv–xxi, 496–509). Though Butler recognizes self-love as a superior principle, he seems to think that conscience is naturally superior to self-love (*Sermons*, Preface 24). On Irwin's interpretation, just as Butler thinks that it is natural for us to subordinate particular passions to our nature and needs as synchronically and diachronically unified selves, so too he thinks that it is natural to recognize ourselves as part of a larger community, and to see one's own needs as one set among many requiring accommodation (*DE* §§695–98). Irwin sees Butler making this kind of naturalistic argument by appeal to our reactive attitudes of desert and responsibility, which presuppose that these attitudes are justified because concern and respect are owed to rational beings, capable of regulating their conduct by superior principles (*DE* §§702–7). When I resent being wronged by another, Butler believes, I presuppose that he ought not to have treated me that way and that he had good reason not to. Though conscience is not egocentric, it is unclear that Butler's conception of conscience is genuinely cosmopolitan, inasmuch as the reactive attitudes appropriate for A toward B seem to depend on the relationship and shared history between A and B. We expect more from friends than strangers. Though conscience is closely connected to benevolence, Butler regards the two as distinct, treating conscience as a form of benevolence that is constrained by justice and veracity (*Dissertation*, paragraphs 8–11).

Kant does not appear to recognize self-love as an independent authoritative principle. Love of my rational self, as opposed to my empirical self, is a requirement of practical reason, but apparently only as part of the demand to value any rational being in itself. For Kant, self-love is not coordinate with impartial concern, as it is for Butler and Sidgwick. Rather, such authority as (proper) self-love has is entirely derived from impartial concern for rational agents. Kant's conception of moral

demand and practical reason seems genuinely cosmopolitan. When we ask what a given agent would will just insofar as she is a rational agent and independently of her contingent empirical aspects, Kant thinks, we will see that she is concerned with herself as a moral person capable of setting ends. The fact that concern for herself is grounded in respect for rational agents means that she has reason to care about rational agents as such, and not just her own rational agency. This is how he gets to the impartial regard for rational agents required by the Humanity formula (*Groundwork*, 4:426–29). But then an agent's reasonable self-love is derived from impartial regard for rational agents.

In the modern period, it is only Green, I think, who believes that a cosmopolitan conception of the common good does not require a non-derivative commitment to impartiality. Like the Greeks, he accepts the eudaimonist constraint, and, like the Stoics and unlike Aristotle, he thinks that cosmopolitan concern can be derived from eudaimonist essentials. That derivation conforms to the inside-out constraint insofar as Green argues that I more fully realize my normative capacities when I contribute to a larger and more permanent good with other people. By investing in larger projects and the lives of others, Green thinks, I broaden my interests and earn a share of the value of these projects and lives.

Sidgwick's contrast between ancient and modern ethics in terms of the distinction between egocentric and impartialist perspectives may be overstated. As Irwin insists, ancient writers recognize the common good. But, as eudaimonists, they subordinate the common good to the agent's own happiness. This may not make their commitment to the common good weak or purely instrumental, but it does make this commitment derivative, and that may affect the plausibility of their defense of the common good and their conception of how impartial the common good is. Moreover, although Sidgwick is wrong to suggest that modern ethics consistently eschews this eudaimonist perspective, he is right to claim that in the modern period we see the emergence of a non-egocentric interpretation of the common good that recognizes some form of impartial demand as a fundamental and underived requirement of morality and practical reason. This important idea, found only in the modern period, is recognized by Butler and receives its fullest expression in Kantian ethics and (at least some strands of) utilitarian ethics. This contrast between ancient and modern ethics raises some interesting questions for Aristotelian naturalism.

First, this contrast indicates an important divide between ancient ethics and several modern traditions over the nature of practical reason. Greek ethics and a few modern writers embrace eudaimonism, but many important modern writers reject eudaimonism, either recognizing impartiality as a fundamental demand of morality and practical reason coordinate with self-love or, instead, subordinating self-love to impartiality. If eudaimonism is an important constitutive element in Aristotelian naturalism, then central modern figures, including Butler, Kant, and Sidgwick, reject an important tenet of Aristotelian naturalism. So it can seem somewhat disconcerting to find Irwin treating Butler and Kant as heirs to Aristotelian naturalism. This is not to dispute the important continuities he sees between Butler and Kant and the ancients. Especially interesting and important is Irwin's thesis that Aristotle, Butler, Kant, and others share a commitment to

normative naturalism that focuses on our nature as reasons-responsive agents. But this important continuity does not gainsay their important differences over matters of normative architecture. These differences make it hard to treat Butler and Kant as Aristotelian naturalists without important qualification.

Second, there is an interesting and difficult question about the significance of this contrast between ancient and modern ethics. As Irwin notes, the Greek eudaimonists and the British idealists recognize some conception of the common good. They disagree about how cosmopolitan this conception of the common good should be and about the details of the way in which the common good is egocentrically justified. They are united in treating the common good as derivatively justified, that is, as a theorem derived from the eudaimonist axiom. By contrast, Butler and Kant recognize impartial moral demand and practical reason as a fundamental commitment, that is, as an axiom, rather than a theorem. For Butler, self-love, benevolence, and conscience are superior principles, but conscience is superior to both self-love and benevolence. For Kant, impartial moral demand and practical reason is the sole axiom; reasonable self-love is a theorem derived from this axiom. This suggests that there is a difference in normative architecture between the eudaimonists and their modern impartialist opponents. This raises questions about how significant this difference in normative architecture is and whether Butler's and Kant's repudiation of eudaimonism represents philosophical progress. Irwin's commitments on these issues are not entirely clear.

If we are doubtful about the adequacy of eudaimonist derivations of the common good—for instance, if we have doubts about the scope or stability of their defense of the common good—we may look favorably on modern attempts to establish impartial moral demand and practical reason on a non-derivative basis. Aristotle's justification of the common good as a form of friendship may support a conception of the common good that seems too parochial. The Stoic conception of the common good is more cosmopolitan and may, therefore, seem more adequate to modern readers. But we may wonder whether they can provide an adequate eudaimonist defense of this more robust conception of the common good. For it is unclear how the fact that A and B are both rational beings shows that A's concern with her own rational nature should involve an equal concern for B's rational nature. Green hopes to do better. Indeed, he hopes to show that the good of rational beings cannot conflict (*PE* §§191, 200, 232, 244, 376). But even if there are some reasons for me to seek a more permanent good that includes other rational beings—for instance, family and friends—it is unclear why I should seek a genuinely cosmopolitan good. If we do not think that our commitment to the common good should be hostage to the success of these eudaimonist arguments, we might turn to Butler and Kant for a defense of impartial moral demand and practical reason.

But we might have doubts about whether impartial regard for all rational beings is in fact a fundamental demand of practical reason. I may wonder why I should make what appears to be a sacrifice of my own interests as a rational being for the sake of other rational beings who stand in no special relationship to me. If we are to be able to answer this question, we need to explain why we should embrace impartialism.

Butler assumes that my reactive attitudes, such as resentment toward others who harm me, presuppose that they have reason to treat my interests as making claims on them. But perhaps my attitudes really just reflect reasons I have to care about how others treat me, rather than beliefs about what reason demands of them. Or, more elaborately, my reactive attitudes may reflect expectations of others, predicated on a system of rights and responsibilities, the rationality of which is a matter of mutual advantage. And even if my reactive attitudes did show commitment to a rational common good, it is not clear that this would be an impartial or cosmopolitan common good, inasmuch as my expectations of others seem profoundly influenced by the relationship in which they stand to me. I have much more significant expectations of associates than of non-associates.

Kant clearly has a more cosmopolitan conception of the common good, inasmuch as the Formula of Humanity enjoins treatment of each rational agent as an end in himself, which requires not simply not treating rational beings as mere means but also caring about and promoting their rational agency (*Groundwork*, 4:429–30). But we may doubt whether Kant has a convincing defense of the rational authority of this sort of impartial regard. He begins by looking for the source of categorical imperatives, concluding that they must apply to agents just insofar as they are rational, and independently of empirical motives (4:408; cf. 4:427). This leads him to the Formula of Universal Law version of the Categorical Imperative (4:421). He seems to reason that what each can will just insofar as she is a rational agent is a concern for rational agency itself. If so, then each should be concerned about any rational agent, as the Formula of Humanity claims (4:426–29). But it is not clear why each should not be concerned about *her own rational agency*. As Irwin insists, Kant is wrong to resist the idea of a categorical imperative of rational prudence, grounded in an agent's own rational nature (*DE* §§910–11, 935). But one might well claim that it is this categorical form of prudence, rather than an impartial regard for all rational agents, that should be the conclusion of the Universal Law. But then we should only be interested in the Formula of Humanity insofar as it could be represented as a theorem derived from categorical prudence. If we have these doubts about the adequacy of Butlerian and Kantian defenses of impartial moral demand and practical reason, we might look favorably on attempts to provide an egocentric derivation of some conception of the common good.

Irwin's own attitude to this disagreement within Aristotelian naturalism between ancient and modern sources is unclear. On the one hand, he seems to endorse Butler's and Kant's non-egocentric claims about practical reason (*DE* §§704–5, 711, 917–25, 961–64). On the other hand, he seems to think that there is a fundamental egocentric demand of practical reason and expresses reservations about Kant's criticisms of eudaimonism (*DE* §§907–11, 935, 960, 963). Perhaps Irwin is attracted to the idea that egocentric and impartialist demands are independent, fundamental, and coordinate demands, neither more fundamental than the other. This would appear to leave us with a potential dualism of practical reason, not unlike the one Sidgwick recognized. Sidgwick's dualism was between two hedonist doctrines, hedonistic egoism and hedonistic utilitarianism. But a dualism might hold between egocentric and impartialist demands for perfection of rational nature. Irwin thinks that a perfectionist dualism may be less intractable

than a hedonistic one (*DE* §1206). One might try to reconcile the two elements of such a dualism by showing that they converge on a common conception of the common good, albeit from different perspectives. This would require the success of the eudaimonist justification of a reasonably robust conception of the common good. If there is no good argument for the supremacy of the impartialist perspective, the friend of impartial moral demand and practical reason has good reason to look favorably on eudaimonist efforts to justify the common good.

In other words, what we make of the significance of the debate between eudaimonists and impartialists over the normative architecture of moral demand and practical reason must depend on complex substantive questions about the adequacy of eudaimonist derivations of the common good and of attempts to justify impartiality as a more fundamental norm of morality and practical reason.

Third, and finally, we might wonder whether Aristotelian naturalism is self-sufficient. To see this issue, begin by considering eudaimonist forms of Aristotelian naturalism. The most promising forms of eudaimonism, Irwin argues, are perfectionist. They claim that an agent's final good consists in realizing or perfecting her rational nature. This requires developing and exercising capacities to recognize and respond to objective reasons and goods. At several points, Irwin insists on treating these reasons as *external reasons*, not grounded in the agent's antecedent and contingent desires (*DE* §§259, 268, 276, 359, 480).<sup>14</sup> But this suggests that the appeal to the agent's rational nature or perfection is not itself an adequate guide for conduct inasmuch as it has to be supplemented by a list of external reasons or objective goods that should guide deliberation. A similar claim might be made about impartialist versions of Aristotelian eudaimonism. Suppose we accept the Formula of Humanity version of the Categorical Imperative as the sole principle of moral demand and practical reason. It instructs us to respect rational nature and promote rational agency, whether in one's own person or that of another. But what is it to respect and promote someone's rational agency? If what anyone's rational nature consists in involves her being responsive to external reasons, then it seems that we cannot apply the Formula of Humanity without some specification of a list of external reasons. Irwin seems committed to this claim about Kant (*DE* §§908, 935). But then impartialist appeals to rational nature appear to be incomplete in much the same way that eudaimonist appeals to rational nature seem to be.<sup>15</sup>

Matters may be worse for eudaimonist appeals to rational nature. It is not clear why there should be an egocentric constraint on the content of external reasons. Some causes and activities may be objectively worthwhile independently of their contribution to the value of the agent's life. Perhaps finding a cure for cancer or reducing world hunger is an external reason in the relevant sense. It seems to follow that a rational agent's choices should be guided by such reasons. But then an individual's perfection should be shaped by such external reasons. We could still formulate the fundamental ethical demand as the requirement that each agent

<sup>14</sup>Irwin's conception of external reasons conforms roughly to the conception articulated in Williams, "Internal and External Reasons."

<sup>15</sup>For a related discussion, see Regan, "The Value of Rational Nature."

promote her own eudaimonia by harmonizing her deliberations and actions with external reasons and objective goods. But if the external reasons and objective goods determine the content of individual perfection, and they do not need to obey an egocentric constraint, it seems misleading to think of the resulting ethical demand as genuinely eudaimonist.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

So there are various questions about how exactly to understand and assess Aristotelian naturalism and its implications for the history of ethics. We need to decide which constitutive commitments of Aristotelian naturalism are most central to decide which figures and traditions are best interpreted as its heirs or its opponents. In particular, we need to decide how essential eudaimonism is to Aristotelian naturalism, inasmuch as there is a significant difference between ancient and many modern writers over the egocentric assumption in eudaimonism. This debate between eudaimonists and impartialists is in any case central in assessing how best to understand and assess the common good as a constraint on moral demand and practical reason. Finally, we need to decide if the perfectionist appeal to rational nature, whether it takes a eudaimonist or impartialist form, is in principle a complete ethical guide, or whether it needs to be supplemented by a list of external reasons. If the latter, then we need to know what constraints, if any, there are on external reasons, and how their recognition might affect the shape of Aristotelian naturalism.

Despite these and other questions about Aristotelian naturalism, it can and does provide one very useful perspective on the history of ethics, both because a significant number of the most important and influential figures in the history of ethics subscribe to many of its constitutive commitments and because many of the most important and influential figures who do not qualify as Aristotelian naturalists can be profitably understood in terms of their reactions to those constitutive commitments.

One might accept the validity of Aristotelian naturalism as an interpretive tool in this way while remaining quite agnostic about its merits. Of course, Irwin is not himself agnostic. He endorses the essentials of Aristotelian naturalism as embodied in this tradition. The historical analysis of *The Development of Ethics* can and should be read as part of an extended and cumulative defense of these essentials. This brings us back to Socratic methodology, perhaps clearest in Aristotle and Green, which defends ethical principles and commitments that emerge from a fair comparison of rival historical traditions. Whether this historically based defense of Aristotelian naturalism is successful is, of course, too large a topic to be addressed here. But there can be little doubt that Aristotelian naturalism provides one especially fruitful framework with which to understand and assess the history of ethics and that Irwin has made a powerful case on behalf of the essentials of Aristotelian naturalism that every thoughtful reader should take seriously. We should all welcome the opportunity to study and respond to Irwin's magnificent *tour de force*.

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