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A Defense of Egoism

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Dedication

To my mother, Lilan Tran.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Egoism is the view that self-interest is the exclusive standard of morally right action. In this dissertation, I present two arguments for egoism: a naturalistic argument and an intuitive argument.

The naturalistic argument grounds egoism in a theory of what the end of every living thing is: The end of a living thing is, I will argue, only to survive. I set the stage for and develop this argument across the first four Chapters. In Chapter 1, I present the case for the prevailing, neo-Aristotelian view of the end of a living thing: The end of a living thing is to instantiate its species. The pursuit of this end is typically understood to involve not only survival, but also flourishing, reproducing, and helping other members of one's species, all in species-characteristic ways.

In Chapter 2, I argue that the aforementioned species view is false.

In Chapter 3, I develop the view that the end of every living thing, including every human living thing, is only to survive.

In Chapter 4, I argue that human well-being (or self-interest), the notion of what intrinsically benefits a human being, consists in and only in survival.

In the fifth and final Chapter, I develop the intuitive argument, which adopts the method of reflective equilibrium. I argue that egoism aligns well with a critical mass of our intuitions about the moral life.

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Introduction

This dissertation is a defense of egoism, the view that self-interest is the exclusive standard of morally right action.

It consists in five Chapters. In Chapter 1, I present the prevailing view of the ultimate end of a living thing, viz., that it is to instantiate its species.[1] In Chapter 2, I present my critique of the view. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to a naturalistic defense of egoism, viz., a defense of egoism that appeals to normativity in living things generally. In Chapter 3, the centerpiece of the dissertation, I argue for and develop the thesis that survival is the ultimate end of every living thing, including every human living thing. In Chapter 4, I argue that human well-being, the notion of what intrinsically benefits a human being, consists in and only in survival. In Chapter 5, I offer an argument for egoism that I take to be an adjunct to the main naturalistic argument of Chapters 3 and 4: I defend egoism using the method of reflective equilibrium, i.e., bringing widely accepted intuitions about how to live into alignment with egoism.

My defense of egoism differs from all other defenses of egoism and of views that are in the vicinity of egoism. When thinking of philosophers who have advocated egoism, first and foremost who come to mind are Rand, Nietzsche, and Hobbes. Taking Rand first, she offered a brief argument for the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive (for a non-academic audience) (Rand, 1961, pp. 16-17). My naturalistic argument

[1] Aristotle and contemporary neo-Aristotelians (Anscombe, 1958; Foot, 2001; Hursthouse, 1999; Lawrence, 2005; Thompson, 1995, 2004, 2008) have developed this view.

differs from hers in two significant respects. First, my argument is developed in far greater detail, raising and addressing many issues that she did not address, including: A criticism of the view that reproduction and helping other living things are normative for a living thing, an elucidation of the nature of survival, an elucidation of the idea that human well-being consists exclusively in survival. Second, based on certain passages of hers (Rand, 1961, pp. 17-21), Rand seemed to hold that the ultimate end of a living thing is determined by the kind to which it belongs (in this respect, she is similar to Aristotle and contemporary neo-Aristotelians); by contrast, I reject and criticize this view.

In addition to her naturalistic argument, Rand throughout her fiction and non-fiction portrayed selfish behavior as morally attractive. She never, however, developed a congealed, systematic philosophical treatise for an academic audience that defends its moral attractiveness. My defense of egoism through the method of reflective equilibrium (in Chapter 5) is such a treatise.

Nietzsche did not defend egoism as the right *moral* theory so much as criticize the morality of self-sacrifice—viz., by arguing that adherence to it has pathological consequences for its practitioner and that advocacy of self-sacrifice stems from a sick condition of the soul—and advocate immoralism, which I take to be something like the claim that we should move beyond morality (and for Nietzsche, towards an as yet undefined conception of human perfection). My defense of egoism differs from Nietzsche's defense of immoralism in at least three significant respects. First, it defends egoism as a *moral* theory, not as a rebellion against morality. Second, it actually *defends* the moral attractiveness of selfishness; Nietzsche by contrast assumed that selfishness—

or, more in his language, anything that was life-affirming—was a good thing. Third, my defense of selfishness does not involve an *ad hominem* criticism of proponents of self-sacrifice.

Hobbes' moral views are quite ambiguous (and he is known primarily as a political philosopher), but I take it that to the extent he can plausibly be interpreted as advocating ethical egoism, that his grounds for doing so would be that of psychological egoism, or at least something like it, viz., human beings by nature seek to preserve themselves. In contrast to this way of understanding Hobbes, my defense of egoism does not draw on psychological egoism (which I think is false).

After Rand, Nietzsche, and Hobbes, we have eudaimonist approaches to ethics—associated primarily with the Greeks, especially Aristotle, and with contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics—which hold that our ultimate end is happiness and thus which might come to mind as advocating egoism or at least something in its vicinity.[2] Eudaimonist approaches to ethics are distinct from egoism, however, in holding that there is an independent conception of morality that is normative, other-regarding, and must be in some way harmonized with self-interest. My defense of egoism, by contrast, does not hold this position, and instead argues for self-interest as the *standard* of morally right action.

[2] Some might classify Rand as a eudaimonist, since she does hold that happiness is one's ultimate end and that the pursuit of it involves the development and exercise of virtues, but given (1) her sharp advocacy of egoism and the general trend in academic philosophy of distinguishing egoism from virtue ethics and (2) that she is regarded as an egoist and not so much as a virtue ethicist, I set her apart from the eudaimonists.

Apart from eudaimonist approaches to ethics and from Rand, Nietzsche, and Hobbes, there are some philosophers who have advocated positions that might in some sense be regarded as egoistic. One notable example is Henry Sidgwick's position that a person is rationally justified in being egoistic rather than in being moral (Sidgwick labored at length in defense of a utilitarian conception of morality) (Sidgwick, 1874). Another notable example is David Brink's theory of perfectionist egoism, which conceives of self-interest as consisting in the perfection of an agent's deliberative capacities and holds that concern for others can be grounded in its service to self-interest, so conceived (Brink, 2006). I differ from Sidgwick in that I am defending the *morality* of egoism, as opposed to defending the rational justifiability of choosing egoism over a purportedly non-egoistic and correct morality. And I differ from Brink in that I uphold and defend a very different conception of self-interest than he does (survival, as opposed to the perfection of deliberative capacities); furthermore, in Chapter 3, I operate from a garden notion of self-interest that will be uncontroversial to most people (whereas Brink's conception of self-interest is rarefied).

I hope the reader sympathizes with my defense of egoism.

Chapter 1: The Case for Species-Based Natural Normativity

Michael Thompson's case for species-based natural normativity (SBNN), the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to instantiate its species (or life-form), has two parts. The first part is a criticism of the possibility of an alternative version of natural normativity.[3] This criticism ends with a programmatic introduction of the notion of a life-form, which is the centerpiece of SBNN. The second part, an outgrowth of the first, is a development of the notion of a life-form. Thompson's development consists in further elaboration on what a life-form is and it ends with his claim that life-forms are normative.[4]

This Chapter has two sections, paralleling the two parts of Thompson's case. In Section I, I present Thompson's case against the possibility of a certain alternative version of natural normativity. This will occupy most of the Chapter. In Section II, I present the remainder of Thompson's case for SBNN: his development of the notion of a life-form. I will add at the end of Section II a presentation of work from Lawrence, Foot, and Hursthouse that develops on SBNN and will be relevant to my critique of SBNN in Chapter 2.

Section I. The Case against the Possibility of Individual-based Natural Normativity

In the first part of his case for SBNN, Thompson argues that it is not possible to give an account of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing, i.e., an

[3] This is done in Chapters 2 and 3 of Thompson (2008), "Can Life Be Given a Real Definition?" and "The Representation of the Living Individual," respectively.

[4] This is done in Chapter 4 of Thompson (2008), "The Representation of the Life-Form Itself."

account of what *determines* that a region of space-time is a living thing, that does not appeal to the species to which the individual living thing belongs.[5] He characterizes proponents of such an, what he calls, "individualistic account" (Thompson, 2008, p. 54) of the living thing as having an "individualistic ambition" (Thompson, 2008, p. 53) and as advocating an "extreme individualism. (Thompson, 2008, p. 49)" His argument against the possibility of an individualistic account constitutes a tacit criticism of the possibility of an alternative version of natural normativity. To identify this alternative version explicitly, it holds that the good of a living thing is determined by–not the *species* to which that living thing belongs, but rather–its *individual nature*. I will call this version of natural normativity, individual-based natural normativity (IBNN), as opposed to SBNN. No one has yet developed the idea of IBNN. It is rather merely a theoretical option that Thompson tacitly criticizes in such a way as to introduce and make his case for SBNN. The viability of IBNN, according to Thompson, depends on the premise that it is possible to give an individualist account of what makes a region of space-time a living thing, viz., an account of what makes a region of space-time a living thing that does not appeal to the species to which that living thing belongs.

Thompson attacks this premise in two moves. In the first move, he argues that attempts to give what he calls a *metaphysical analysis* (to be explained momentarily) of what it is to be an individual living thing are doomed to fail. Rather, according to

[5] I take the phrase "region of space-time" from Thompson's usage. See, for example, Thompson (2008, p. 49). In the phrases "what makes a region of space-time a living thing" and "what determines that a region of space-time is a living thing," I leave open whether the maker or determiner is what Thompson would call a *metaphysical* feature (or features) of that region of space-time, where metaphysical means that the feature is in the region of space-time, or whether the maker or determiner is something else, namely, for Thompson, various *a priori* concepts. Thompson criticizes the former answer and defends the latter.

Thompson, *life* is an *a priori* concept. Part of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing is that we can, to use his word, *stamp* this concept onto it (Thompson, 2008, p. 56).[6]

In the second move, he argues that being able to stamp the *a priori* concept *life* onto a region of space-time is a *consequence* of being able to stamp an *a priori* concept for a life-form onto that region of space-time. The fact that a region of space-time, according to Thompson, can be stamped with a life-form concept is logically prior to the fact that it can be stamped with the concept *life*. Part of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing, more fundamentally than that we can stamp the concept *life* onto it, is that we can stamp a life-form concept onto it. Being a living thing, for Thompson, is a consequence of having a life-form.

Thompson takes these two moves to establish that it is impossible to give an account of what makes something an individual living thing that does not appeal to the species to which that individual living thing belongs. Therefore, IBNN is impossible. In the two sub-sections that follow, I will present these two moves of Thompson's criticism of the possibility of IBNN, respectively.

[6] On the page cited, it is the concept for a life-form (a notion that will be introduced later in this section) that he refers to as being stamped onto regions of space-time. I will use Thompson's notion of stamping for all the concepts he claims are *a priori*, such as *life*. It is not clear whether Thompson would say that it is an actual stamping of a region of space-time with an *a priori* concept at a particular time that makes it so that that region of space-time has the property specified by that *a priori* concept at that time (where this claim would imply that in stretches of time during which the region is not being so stamped, it is not true that it has the property) or whether it is the ability to be stamped, regardless of whether any mind is stamping it at any given time, that makes it so that the region of space-time has the property. As the latter interpretation, in my view, sounds more plausible, I will opt for it on Thompson's behalf.

First Move: *Life* Cannot be Given a Metaphysical Analysis

Thompson does not offer a canonical definition of the notion of a metaphysical analysis of life. Based on how he uses the notion and on various other formulations that he intends either to be equivalent or at least proximate to the notion[7], it refers to the following: A metaphysical analysis of life is the set of features[8] of a living thing that (a) are necessary and sufficient to determine that thing to be a living thing and (b) are metaphysical, where what it means for a feature to be metaphysical is for the region of space-time that corresponds to that living thing sufficiently to determine that that living thing has that feature; an appeal to an *a priori* concept(s) has no role in determining that the living thing has that feature. Let me qualify condition (a) and then unpack it into two sub-conditions that together constitute it, to yield a three-condition formulation—the two sub-conditions that together constitute (a) and condition (b)—of what a metaphysical analysis of life is supposed to be, a formulation to which I will henceforth be referring in this Chapter.

To qualify condition (a), Thompson does not explicitly claim that the features must be necessary and sufficient; I mention these criteria to capture an idealized manner

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[7] Thompson associates the idea that *life* can be given a metaphysical analysis with several other ideas: (a) that *life* can be given a real definition (Thompson, 2008, p. 35), (b) that it is possible to give "a teaching about 'what life consists in,'" (Thompson, 2008, p. 35) (c) that "something on the order of criteria, not symptoms" can be given of *life* (Thompson, 2008, p. 35), (d) "that *living things are just some among the concrete individuals we think about, marked off from the others in quite definite ways*," (Thompson, 2008, p. 33) (italics original) (e) that the concept *life* expresses a particular characteristic of those objects that correspond to living things, (Thompson, 2008, p. 33) and (f) that there is a possible account of "*how things must be in a given region of space* if we are to say, 'A living thing is there' – or, perhaps better: what a *region of space-time* needs to be like, if it is to be occupied by a four-dimensional object corresponding to an individual organism of the sort we meet in experience." (Thompson, 2008, p. 49) (italics original)

[8] I leave open the possibility that there might be only one offered feature, but I will stick to the plural usage of features.

in which the features determine a thing to be a living thing. Thompson might accept this idealized interpretation or he might accept a less strict one. There is some evidence that he accepts a less strict one (see footnote 18). Now to unpack condition (a), based on Thompson's ensuing discussion of the possibility of a metaphysical analysis of life, condition (a) is constituted by two sub-conditions: (1) The features distinguish living things from non-living things (i.e., living things have these features and non-living things do not)[9] and (2) The features contribute (i.e., each feature contributes) to an understanding of the concept *life*. Replacing condition (a) with these two conditions which together constitute it, a metaphysical analysis of life is a set of features that satisfy three conditions: (1) they distinguish living things from non-living things, (2) they contribute to an understanding of the concept *life*, and (3) they are metaphysical.

If *life* can be given a metaphysical analysis, i.e., if there is a set of features that satisfies the three conditions above, then possession of these features would suffice to make a region of space-time a living thing. These features would constitute an account of *life* that does not require an appeal to the species to which a living thing belongs. Such an account is a necessary condition, according to Thompson, of making IBNN a viable theory.

Thompson criticizes the possibility of a metaphysical analysis of *life* by considering six features of life that are commonly offered in writings on biology as

[9] It is unclear how stringent Thompson intends this requirement, viz., whether he requires that a feature, to satisfy this condition, be present in *all* and *only* living things, or whether some weaker version of this condition would be acceptable to him, e.g., that the feature is normally distinctive to living things. Thompson tacitly appeals to different interpretations at different times.

contributing to a metaphysical analysis of *life* and arguing that each feature fails to satisfy at least one of the three conditions. From the failure of these six, Thompson implicitly generalizes, suggesting that a critical examination of *any* feature(s) proposed as contributing to a metaphysical analysis of *life* will fail to satisfy at least one of the three conditions. The project of giving *life* a metaphysical analysis, he concludes, is doomed to fail.

The six features Thompson examines are:

1. Living things are highly organized.
2. Living things contain DNA.
3. Living things respond to stimuli.
4. Living things take energy from the environment and convert it into other forms.
5. Living things grow and develop.
6. Living things engage in self-movement.

He discusses features 1 and 2 together, 3 on its own, and 4-6 together. I will now cover his critical examination of these features, following his grouping of the features.

(1) Organization, (2) DNA

The first proposed feature I will discuss is that living things exhibit a distinctive metaphysical organization. The idea is that living things consist in complex organizations of atoms and molecules, a complexity that is never found in non-living things (Thompson, 2008, p. 36).[10] Thompson first expresses skepticism about whether the notion of organization has sufficient content. He suggests that it is unclear what

[10] Thompson here quotes from a biology textbook, Curtis (1979).

organization in this context is supposed to mean and how one would measure something as more organized than something else. Having said this, he goes on to consider two conceptions of organization that he holds or at least entertains as sufficiently contentful, and argues that each fails to meet the second condition, that of contributing to an understanding of the concept *life*.

The first conception of organization is that of thermodynamic organization, which I take Thompson to mean something like the idea that living things are organized in such a way as to make use of energy much more efficiently than non-living things do, and the second is that of being composed of "larger organic macromolecules [that] are not normally found in inanimate matter." (Mayr, 1982, p. 54) The problem with both these suggestions, according to Thompson, is that, though both might be metaphysical and (at least normally) distinctive of living things as against non-living things, neither contributes to an *understanding* of *life*. The idea is that we do not learning anything about what *life* is from learning that living things are thermodynamically organized or that they are composed of larger organic macromolecules that are not normally found in inanimate matter. They fail to meet the second condition.

"Has DNA," Thompson claims, is a feature like being thermodynamically organized and being composed of larger organic macromolecules in this respect: Though it is a metaphysical feature and though perhaps all and only living things have DNA, having DNA does not contribute to an understanding of *life*. (Thompson, 2008, p. 37)

Thompson also rejects as contributing to a metaphysical analysis of *life* two more features closely related to the feature that living things are highly organized: (1) living

things are organisms and (2) living things have organs. These two features, according to Thompson, are merely different perspectives on the feature that living things are highly organized. An organism, Thompson suggests, is just something that exhibits the organization that is distinctive to a living thing, i.e., vital organization. An organ is just a part of a vital organization. Both concepts appeal to the concept of vital organization, which Thompson has argued, cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. Thompson's claim here is not that having organs does not contribute to a metaphysical analysis of life on grounds that having organs presupposes being alive; rather, his claim is that no metaphysical analysis can be given of organs, because the notion of an organ presupposes and appeals to *an understanding* of life (rather than contributes to an understanding of it).[11]

While Thompson denies that living things exhibit a distinct *metaphysical* organization that contributes to an understanding of *life*, he does agree that a certain kind of organization is distinctive to living things and does contribute to an understanding of *life*. This kind of organization, Thompson concludes, must be *a priori*. The notions of an *organism*, of an *organ*, and of *vital organization* (the organization distinctive to a living thing), Thompson claims, are all *a priori*. We stamp these concepts onto certain regions of space-time and not others, in virtue of which stamping we recognize that the former and not the latter are organisms, have organs, and exhibit vital organization. The distinctive organization of living things does not contribute to a metaphysical analysis of life because such organization cannot be given a metaphysical analysis.

[11] Gavin Lawrence brought to my attention the idea of making this clarification.

(3) Stimulus and Response

The third proposed feature I will discuss is that living things respond to stimuli. Living things respond to aspects of their environment in ways that non-living things do not. Scallops, to use an example of Thompson's, respond to the approach of a starfish by leaping to safety. (Thompson, 2008, p. 39) While Thompson seems to agree that living things respond to stimuli and that their doing so is distinctive to them, he denies that their responding to stimuli refers to a metaphysical feature(s) of living things that non-living things do not exhibit. Just as a plant, to use his example, is said to respond to the stimulus of sunlight by turning toward the sun, so asphalt can be said to respond to the stimulus of sunlight by becoming warmer. (Thompson, 2008, p. 40) There is no metaphysical difference between the two cases. In both, all we have is "chemistry and physics." (Thompson, 2008, p. 41) Responding to stimuli, then, in the sense understood as a distinctive feature of living things, does not refer to a metaphysical feature(s) of living things. This feature fails to meet the third condition.[12]

Yet Thompson thinks that the idea that living things respond to stimuli is seizing onto a truth. From this criticism of the possibility of a metaphysical analysis of responding to stimuli, Thompson claims that we have an *a priori* concept of *vital process*, which he seems to regard either as equivalent or very close to our ordinary idea of a living thing's responding to stimuli. We stamp this concept onto certain regions of space-time and not others, in virtue of which we recognize that certain things that go on in the

[12] It does not fail to meet the first condition, according to Thompson, because he thinks or at least entertains here the idea that there is a sense of *responds to stimuli* that is distinctive to living things and this is the sense he is stipulating here. Gavin Lawrence brought to my attention the idea of making this clarification.

former, such as a flower's moving toward sunlight, count as a vital process, where as certain things that go on in the latter, such as asphalt's getting warmer, does not.

(4) Energy Conversion, (5) Growth and Development, (6) Self-movement

The remaining three proposed features that I will discuss are that living things (4) take energy from the environment and convert it to other forms, (5) grow and develop, and (6) engage in self-movement. Thompson criticizes these three features together.

Taking energy from the environment, growing, and self-moving, according to Thompson, are forms of a living thing's doing something "in some restricted and italicizable sense." (Thompson, 2008, p. 43)[13] They are forms of a living thing's exercising a "form of *agency*," (Thompson, 2008, p. 43) (italics original) not necessarily rational agency, but agency in the sense that the living thing is doing something in the italicizable sense Thompson introduced. The relevant feature of which these three features are forms is that living things *do* things, whereas non-living things do not, in the italicizable sense. That living things *do* things is offered as contributing to a metaphysical analysis of *life*.

According to Thompson, there is no possible metaphysical analysis for the feature that living things *do* things. Both a tree and a trash heap, Thompson points out, can grow. Yet no metaphysical differences between the growth of the former and the latter account for the fact that the tree's growth is its *doing* while the trash heap's growing is not its *doing*. (Thompson, 2008, p. 46) Likewise, to use another of his examples, a bird's exit

[13] I did not include development here along with growth because Thompson regards development as a form of *vital process*, which is his *a priori* conception of the feature that living things respond to stimuli, which he regards as distinct from the feature of living things' *doing* things.

out of a baseball stadium might be due to its flying out or due to its being hit with a bat. (Thompson, 2008, pp. 44-45) The former qualifies as self-movement but not the latter. Yet, Thompson suggests, no metaphysical difference between the two cases accounts for what self-movement is.

The notion of a living thing's *doing* something, then, cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. In light of this, Thompson introduces the concept of a *vital operation*, which he claims is *a priori*, and which refers to the idea of a living thing's *doing* something. We stamp this concept onto certain regions of space-time and not others, in virtue of which we recognize that certain physical processes that go on in the former, count as self-movement, whereas similar physical processes that go on in the latter, do not.

After discussing the above six proposed distinctive, meaningful, and metaphysical features of living things, and taking himself to expose each of them as failing to meet all three conditions, Thompson implicitly generalizes, suggesting that a critical examination of *any* feature(s) proposed as contributing to a metaphysical analysis of *life* will fail to satisfy at least one of the three conditions, and concludes that *life* cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. In the process of making this criticism, Thompson introduced various, according to him, *a priori* concepts: "*organism*; *organ*, 'part' or 'member'; *vital order* or *organ*-ization; *life-process* [vital process]; and *vital operation*." (Thompson, 2008, p. 47) (italics original) *Life*, Thompson seems to hold, is the master *a priori* concept here, encompassing all these others.

Regions of space-time, for Thompson, are not alive independently of our ability to stamp onto them the *a priori* concept of *life* and a set of other *a priori* concepts that Thompson encompasses under *life*, i.e., *organism*, *organ*, *vital organization*, *vital process*, and *vital operation*. Rather, Thompson suggests that part of what makes a region of space-time a living thing is that we can stamp that region of space-time with the *a priori* concept *life*.[14]

Second Move: Being a Living Thing is a *Consequence* of Having a Life-form

In the second move, Thompson argues that being able to stamp the *a priori* concept *life* onto a region of space-time is a *consequence* of being able to stamp an *a priori* concept for a life-form onto that region of space-time. The fact that a region of space-time, according to Thompson, can be stamped with a life-form concept is logically *prior* to the fact that it can be stamped with the concept *life*. Part of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing, more fundamentally than that we can stamp the concept *life* onto it, is that we can stamp a life-form concept onto it. Being a living thing, for Thompson, is a consequence of having a life-form.

His argument for this claim begins as follows.

> If a thing is alive, if it is an *organism*, then some particular vital operations and processes must go on in it from time to time – eating, budding out, breathing, walking, growing, thinking, reproducing, photosynthesizing; and it must have certain particular organs or 'parts' – leaves, legs, cells, kidneys, a heart, a root, a spine. (Thompson, 2008, p. 56)

A region of space-time is a living thing, Thompson suggests in this passage, because it has features of a living thing. The question Thompson will address now is: What makes it

[14] Going forward, I will refer only to *life*, setting aside the set of *a priori* concepts that Thompson encompasses under it.

so that a region of space-time has features of a living thing (and thus that a region of space-time is a living thing)? Equivalently, what determines a region of space-time to have such features? I use the phrase "feature of a living thing" to include both the parts of a living thing, e.g., leaves, legs, *etc*., and the life activities it engages in, e.g., eating, budding out, *etc*.[15]

Thompson offers the following answer:

> [I]f any of these things [a part of a living thing or a life activity] *is there*, or *is happening*, then this is not something fixed or determined by anything in the organism considered in its particularity or as occupying a certain region of space. That they are there or happening, and thus that we have an organism at all, presupposes the existence of a certain 'wider context'; it is this that stamps these several characters onto things. (Thompson, 2008, p. 56)

The claim Thompson is making here is that whether a region of space-time has features of a living thing is determined not wholly by the region of space-time in its particularity but also in part by a wider context. According to Thompson, the wider context is a life-form. (For present purposes, one may think of life-form as equivalent to species.[16]) The claim, then, is that whether a region of space-time has features of a living thing is determined not wholly by the region of space-time in its particularity but also in part by a life-form. Another formulation of this claim, the one I will rely on primarily, is this: *What*

[15] I use *life activities* to include both what Thompson calls vital operations and vital processes. In his criticism of the possibility of a metaphysical analysis of *life*, he distinguishes between vital operations and vital processes, and would regard some items on the above list of activities as operations, such as walking, and other items as processes, such as photosynthesis. Retaining this distinction is not important for my purposes.

[16] Thompson later discusses in more detail his notion of life-form, not as part of his criticism of the possibility of an IBNN, but rather as part of his introduction to SBNN. I will present his further discussion of the notion of life-form after I finish presenting his criticism of the possibility of IBNN.

makes something a living thing is that it has a life-form. I will call this claim Species-metaphysical.

Species-metaphysical, for Thompson, is a metaphysical formulation of a thought that also has an epistemological formulation. (Thompson, 2008, pp. 56-57)[17] According to the epistemological formulation, merely observing a region of space-time that corresponds to a living thing is insufficient for coming to know what features that region of space-time has. Rather, *we know that something is a living thing by appeal to a life-form*. I will call this claim (in italics) Species-epistemic.

Thompson defends Species-metaphysical and Species-epistemic by presenting five examples that purport to illustrate these two claims. I have named the examples (1) Shark, (2) Mitosis, (3) Plants, (4) Human Cells, and (5) Swamp-Thompson. Thompson does not clearly distinguish the two claims in his presentation of the examples. Based on the nature of the examples, the first two seem to argue for Species-epistemic and the remaining three seem to argue for Species-metaphysical. I will now present the examples.

Shark

To bring out the force of Shark more clearly than Thompson does, I will present it in a modified and more detailed way. Consider some existing species[18], S, of shark whose form of nourishment is to chase down smaller fish, swallow them, and then later pass out

[17] Note in particular the phrase at the bottom of. 56: "This is a purely metaphysical formulation of the thought . . . ."

[18] Thompson uses the word *kind* here: "kind of shark" (Thompson, 2008, p. 54). For Thompson, *kind*, *species*, *form*, and *life-form* are equivalent (with one qualification about the relation between *species* and *life-form*, a qualification which I will present in Section II and which does not affect the propriety of using *species* and *kind* equivalently here). I use *species* here in order to remain consistent with my usage of *species* everywhere else in this Appendix.

waste. Suppose one observes a member of S–call him Original Shark–chase down a smaller fish, swallow it, and later pass out waste. One might infer that Original Shark was nourishing himself. And one might take one's identifying Original Shark as nourishing himself as being a straightforward case of identifying a feature of a living thing by observing only the region of space-time (that corresponds to Original Shark) in its particularity, i.e., what Thompson also calls observing only "the mere spectacle of the thing here and now." (Thompson, 2008, p. 55)

According to Thompson, however, it was not exclusively by observing "the mere spectacle of the thing here and now" that one was able to identify Original Shark as nourishing himself. To illustrate this, Thompson asks us to imagine a new species of shark. This new species also engages in the process of chasing down smaller fish, swallowing them, and then later passing out waste. For this species of shark, however, this process is not a form of nourishment, but rather a form of self-defense. This new species of shark engages in nourishment by absorbing nutrients from the surrounding water. The waste that this species of shark passes out is actually a brew that frightens away predators.

Suppose one observes a member of this new species–call him New Shark–chase down a smaller fish, swallow it, and later pass out waste. Thompson suggests that from observing this region of space-time in its particularity, we would not be able to know that that region of space-time is engaged in self-defense as against nourishing itself. Rather, in order to know that this region of space-time is engaged in self-defense, we need to appeal to the *life-form* that New Shark bears. The life-form that New Shark bears would specify

that chasing down smaller fish, swallowing them, and later passing out waste constitutes a form of self-defense. By contrast, the life-form that Original Shark bears would specify that this process constitutes a form of nourishment. This example, according to Thompson, illustrates Species-epistemic: In order to know what features of a living thing that a region of space-time has (and *that* it has features of a living thing and *thus* is a living thing), one must appeal to the life-form of that region of space-time.

Mitosis

Mitosis occurs both in an amoeba and in a human being. In the case of an amoeba, mitosis is "a phase in a process of reproduction," while in the case of a human being, mitosis is "a part of growth or self-maintenance." (Thompson, 2008, p. 55) Of this difference in what mitosis amounts to between these two species, Thompson says that "[t]he distinction between the two cases of mitosis is not to be discovered by a more careful scrutiny of the particular cells at issue . . . ." (Thompson, 2008, p. 55) Thompson is saying that merely observing mitosis in an amoeba is insufficient for coming to know that the amoeba is reproducing and likewise that merely observing mitosis in a human being is insufficient for coming to know that the human being is growing or self-maintaining. Observing the mitosis by itself does not tell us what, if any, life activity is going on in a region of space-time. In order to grasp what life activity that mitosis amounts to in an amoeba and what life activity that mitosis amounts to in a human being, one must appeal to more than the regions of space-time that correspond to that amoeba and that human being: One must appeal to the life-forms of these two regions of space-time. The life-form that the amoeba bears would specify that mitosis is "a phase in a

process of reproduction." By contrast, the life-form that the human being bears would specify that mitosis is "a part of growth or self-maintenance." This example, according to Thompson, illustrates Species-epistemic.

Thompson then addresses an objection to his claim that the difference in what mitosis amounts to between an amoeba and a human being is determined by a life-form. The objection is that "the DNA will have a different structure in the different cases [of the amoeba and human being]," and, to fill what I take to be the rest of the objection, thus that it is the DNA of a region of space-time that (wholly or in conjunction with other aspects of the physical nature of the living thing) determines what features it has. It is the DNA of an amoeba that determines that mitosis for it counts as reproduction and it is the DNA of a human being that determines that mitosis for him counts as growth or self-maintenance. The broader form of this objection is that what features of a living thing a region of space-time has are determined by one or more aspects of the physical nature of that region of space-time (such as its DNA) and not by a life-form. This objection attacks Species-metaphysical. Thompson attacks this objection with remaining three examples, in which he defends Species-metaphysical.

Plants

Consider two species of plant. One evolved in the Arctic and the other evolved in Brazil. Consider a plant of each of these species. These two plants are phenotypically different, i.e., different in their observable physical characteristics, in any way(s) one cares to imagine. In Thompson's particular example, "[o]ne has red flowers and one has white; one is compact and creeping and one is tall and upright; one is pollinated by bees

and one by a special sort of moth; etc." (Thompson, 2008, pp. 56, fn53) Yet, the seeds from which these two plants grew, and thus their genetic material, we are supposing, are "alike in every physical detail." (Thompson, 2008, pp. 56, fn53) All the phenotypical differences between these two plants are due to environmental differences between the Arctic and Brazil. These two plants have different features and yet the same DNA. Therefore, the DNA of a region of space-time cannot determine what features it has, a consequence which supports Species-metaphysical.

Human Cells

Suppose, on the one hand, in a lab in New York, technicians maintain a vat of human cells that keep multiplying. Suppose, on the other hand, in a certain lake in South America, there evolves "a race of one-celled vegetative creatures" who are as alike as one wishes to the human cells in that vat. (Thompson, 2008, p. 55) "[I]f we ladle up a bit of the lake and take it back to the lab in New York, no test, however subtle, will ever disclose the difference [between the human cells and the vegetative creatures]." (Thompson, 2008, p. 56) The vegetative creatures also multiply in the same way the human cells multiply. Yet in the case of the vegetative creatures, their multiplying constitutes reproduction of the species, while in the case of the human cells, their multiplying does not so count. Moreover, the vegetative creatures are individual living organisms, while the human cells are not. In this case, both the DNA and phenotypes are the same. The conclusion Thompson implicitly draws here is that whether a region of space-time has features of a living thing is determined not wholly by the region of space-

time in its particularity but also in part by a life-form, i.e., that Species-metaphysical is true.

Swamp-Thompson

Thompson's final example is inspired by Donald Davidson's famous Swampman example. (Davidson, 1987) Suppose lightning strikes some swamp muck and as a result a creature emerges that is physically identical to Thompson. I will name the creature Swamp-Thompson. Thompson accepts not only the conclusion Davidson would draw (that Swamp-Thompson has no thoughts) but also that Swamp-Thompson is not even a living thing.

> [Swamp-Thompson] has no ears to hear with and no head to turn; it has no brain-states, no brain to bear them, and no skull to close them in; prick it, and it does not bleed; tickle it, and it does not laugh; and so forth. It is a mere congeries of physical particles and not so much as alive. (Thompson, 2008, p. 60)

Thompson's ground for claiming this is that because Swamp-Thompson was "a product of sheer accident . . . we can associate it with no *determinate* life-form at all; and so the ground of all vital description is removed." (Thompson, 2008, p. 61) (italics original) The original non-swamp Thompson, by contrast, can be associated with a life-form, and because of this can be said to have arms, legs, *etc*., and to be a living thing. Swamp-Thompson he thus takes to support Species-metaphysical.

With these five examples, Thompson takes himself to have established Species-metaphysical and Species-epistemic, which he regards as two formulations of the same thought.[19] Though Thompson's discussion places emphasis on both claims—and actually,

[19] Species-metaphysical, according to Thompson, "is a purely metaphysical formulation of the thought." (Thompson, 2008, p. 56)

arguably more emphasis on Species-epistemic—it is Species-metaphysical that seems to do actual work in his criticism of the possibility of IBNN.[20] What determines that a region of space-time is a living thing, Species-metaphysical holds, is its life-form. Thus, it is impossible to give an account of what makes a region of space-time a living thing that does not appeal to the species (i.e., life-form) to which it belongs.

I have finished presenting Thompson's criticism of the possibility of IBNN. Let me summarize it. IBNN is the view that the good of a living thing is determined by—not the species to which that living thing belongs, but rather—its individual nature. Thompson criticized the possibility of IBNN by attacking a premise that he takes it to be based on. The premise is that it is possible to give an account of what *makes* a region of space-time an individual living thing, i.e., an account of what *determines* that some region of space-time is a living thing, that does not appeal to the species to which the individual living thing belongs.

Thompson attacked this premise in two moves. In the first move, he argued that *life* cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. *Life*, he concluded at the end of this move, is an *a priori* concept, and part of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing is our being able to stamp this concept onto it. In the second move, Thompson argued that being able to stamp the concept *life* onto a region of space-time is a *consequence* of being able to stamp a *life-form* concept onto that region of space-time. Part of what makes a region of space-time an individual living thing, more fundamentally

[20] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that Thompson might take Species-epistemic to be explained by Species-metaphysical; that we must appeal to a life-form in order to know that something is alive is explained by the fact (according to Thompson) that what makes something a living thing is a life-form.

than that we can stamp the concept *life* onto it, is that we can stamp a life-form concept onto it. Being a living thing, according to Thompson, is a consequence of having a life-form.

With these two moves, Thompson takes himself to have established that it is impossible to give an account of what makes something an individual living thing that does not appeal to the species to which the individual living thing belongs. Therefore, IBNN is impossible. In this criticism of the possibility of IBNN, Thompson introduced the notion of a life-form, which is the centerpiece of SBNN. Section II begins with a presentation of Thompson's development of the notion of a life-form, which constitutes the remainder of his case for SBNN.

Section II. The Development of Species-based Natural Normativity

The development of SBNN that I will present in this Section has three sub-sections. In the first sub-section, "Thompson on the *A Prioricity* and Normativity of Life-forms," I present the remainder of Thompson's case for SBNN, viz., his development of the notion of a life-form, which ends with the claim that life-forms are normative. In the second and third sub-sections, I present work from Lawrence, Foot, and Hursthouse that develops on SBNN and will be relevant to my critique of SBNN in Chapter 2. In the second sub-section, "Lawrence on Life-forms as Sets of Boundary Conditions," I present an important aspect of life-forms that Lawrence discusses: that they are sets of *boundary conditions* that define the good of a living thing. In the third, and last, sub-section, "Foot and Hursthouse on How the Content of Life-forms is Determined," I present Foot and Hursthouse's accounts of what determines the content of life-forms; they maintain that

the content of life-forms is determined by facts about what is necessary for living things to achieve their normative ends.

Thompson on the *A Prioricity* and Normativity of Life-forms

Thompson regards the notion of a life-form as "more or less" equivalent to the notion of a species. (Thompson, 2008, pp. 28, fn25)[21] He has a reservation, however, about using the word *species* and prefers the word *life-form*. Lawrence echoes a similar sentiment: "[I]t may be that 'species' – at least if understood in terms of modern biology – is not quite the right concept, and we need something more like "form of life." (Lawrence, 2005, p. 139) Thompson's reservation about using the concept *species* in the context of discussing neo-Aristotelian moral philosophy is that *species* is regarded by some as an empirical concept, one that can be employed in empirical science, whereas the concept *life-form*, according to Thompson, is *a priori* and needs to be *a priori* if SBNN is to be a viable theory.[22] I will now present why he takes *life-form* to be *a priori* and then why he takes its *a prioricity* as necessary for the viability of SBNN.

While Thompson claims that the concept *life-form* is *a priori*, what he actually presents is an argument (which I will present momentarily) for a slightly different claim: Concepts for particular life-forms, e.g., the Rabbit, the Bobcat, (henceforth, life-form concepts) are *a priori*. Perhaps, according to Thompson and/or in fact, the *a prioricity* of *life-form* follows from the *a prioricity* of life-form concepts, whether directly or with

[21] He also refers to the notion of a *kind* as equivalent to life-form and species, e.g., "*kind* or *form* or *species*" (Thompson, 2008, p. 29) and "kind or species or life-form." (Thompson, 2008, p. 81)

[22] His claim that *life-form* is *a priori* can be found in a number of places in Thompson (2008). See, for example, p. 19.

some supplemental argumentation that needs to be provided. I will not pursue this issue. Turning, then, to his argument for the *a prioricity* of life-form concepts, Thompson holds that if life-form concepts were empirical, it would mean that we would be able to identify features of individual living things based on observation of the regions of space-time to which they correspond and without appealing to an antecedently existing life-form concept. Life-form concepts in this case would be empirical ones that are derived from such observation. However, as Thompson takes himself to have shown in the five examples I discussed in Section I, an appeal to a life-form is presupposed in our being able to know that a region of space-time has features of a living thing to begin with.

> [W]e are wrong to think of the concepts of the various life-forms as reached through abstraction from features of their particular bearers. *That* notion takes for granted a picture of the terrestrial biosphere as offering us a magazine of living individuals, which we then carve up in accordance with certain principles. The error is not overcome, but only complicated, by the Realist notion that, after all, we 'carve nature at the joints'. What is wrongly called *carving* is already a part of thinking of individual things as alive, as organisms available for 'classification'. (Thompson, 2008, p. 59)

I will set aside the fact that his argument pertains to life-form concepts rather than the concept *life-form* and instead focus on his claim that the concept *life-form* is *a priori*, which seems to be the more important claim for Thompson. Let me now present why Thompson takes the *a prioricity* of *life-form* as necessary for the viability of SBNN. Thompson holds that if the concept *life-form* were empirical, then SBNN would be open to a range of objections that render it a non-viable theory. SBNN

> might seem, for example, to constitute a sort of vulgar evolutionary ethics: a system, in any case, which doesn't know how to distinguish a mere 'is' from the genuine moral or normative 'ought' . . . . And such a theory might seem to give a wrong position to natural facts in the formation of ethical judgment, to turn ethics into a sub-discipline of biology, and thus to deny what is legitimately called the 'autonomy of ethics.' It might seem to lend an 'unconvincing speaking part', as David Wiggins puts it, to facts about our nature. It might seems to express an unsound desire to give a sort of external 'grounding' to ethics, as John McDowell has put it, a grounding ethics doesn't need and can't have. It

> might, finally, seem to medicalize moral badness, to reduce it to a sort of psychological and volitional ill health. (Thompson, 2004, pp. 62-63)

Thompson does not develop the above objections at all; the above passage completes his presentation of them. Elsewhere, he summarizes the upshot of the objections as follows: "in employing such notions as *life* and *organism* and *life-form* or *species* [, where we take these notions to be empirical,] we introduce something *foreign*, in particular something 'biological,' or crudely empirical, into the elements of ethical theory." (Thompson, 2008, p. 31) (italics original) In arguing that *life-form* is *a priori*, Thompson takes himself to be defending SBNN against these objections that he regards as forceful.

Returning to the topic of Thompson's development of the notion of a life-form, so far I have covered that, for Thompson, *life-form* is "more or less" equivalent to *species* and the concept *life-form* is *a priori*. I turn now to another issue for the notion of a life-form that Thompson discusses briefly, that of what the metaphysical status of a life-form is. Thompson is aware that one might be skeptical of the metaphysical status of life-forms. Lawrence expresses (but does not sympathize with) this skepticism: "It [talk of life-forms] may be claimed to be a non-sensical way of talking, reaching for some bogus metaphysical 'glue' . . . a mere *facon de parler*, or an historical-cum-folk-psychological hangover from a theistic view of the natural world as a divine artifact." (Lawrence, 2006, p. 58) Thompson dismisses skepticism about the metaphysical status of life-forms. In the following passage, he makes some remarks on behalf of one who wants to know what the metaphysical status of life-forms is, and then dismisses the project of trying to answer this question:

> . . . perhaps, if we stress the "form" in our preferred expression "life-form", the thing will even be sought in a platonic heaven, or in the mind of God. Here the associated ideas are

> respectively of things to the right and left of me, or of something "within" me, or of something somehow "above." But all such images should be cast aside. I think our question should not be: What is a life-form, a species, a *psuchē*?, but: How is such a thing described? (Thompson, 2008, p. 62)

So the question "What is a life-form?", taken as an inquiry into the metaphysical status of life-forms, Thompson dismisses. Instead, Thompson introduces the task that he thinks should take the place of a discussion of the metaphysical status of life-forms: It is the task of presenting how a life-form is described.[23] I will now present Thompson's account of how life-forms are described. This account, as we will see, is the ground for Thompson's answer to what a life-form is (where this question will be given a sense other than one of metaphysical inquiry) and is the ground for his claim that life-forms are normative.

According to Thompson, life-forms are described by a distinctive form of sentence. Paradigmatic examples of descriptions of life-forms are found, according to Thompson, in nature documentaries, nature field guides, and the like, which present information about different species of living things. In a documentary film on bobcats, for example, one might hear: "When springtime comes, and the snow begins to melt, the female bobcat gives birth to two to four cubs. The mother nurses them for several weeks . . . . As the heat of summer approaches, the cubs will learn to hunt." (Thompson, 2008, p. 63) In reading a field guide, one might read the name of some species and then a description of it: "Four legs. Black fur. Nocturnal. Lives among rocks near rivers and streams. Eats worms and fish. See plate 162." (Thompson, 2008, p. 64)

[23] The turn from metaphysics to grammar, Gavin Lawrence has informed me, is Wittgenstinian.

The canonical form of such descriptions, according to Thompson, is: "The S is/has/does F." S refers to a life-form, e.g., the Rabbit. F refers to some feature, broadly construed, predicated of it, e.g., has four legs, has a brightly colored tail, has deep and sturdy roots. Some examples of canonically expressed descriptions of life-forms are: "The Rabbit has four legs." "The Peacock has a brightly colored tail." "The Oak has deep and sturdy roots." Thompson calls these descriptions, natural-historical judgments.

Natural-historical judgments have, according to Thompson, a peculiar feature. They are not claims about what all, most, some, or even any of the bearers of the life-forms they are describing, are like. "The Rabbit has four legs," for example, is a correct part of the description of the life-form of the Rabbit, but it is not the claim that all rabbits have four legs—or most, or some, or any. "The Rabbit has four legs" would hold true even if no existing rabbit had four legs, e.g., even if one were to cut off a leg of every four-legged rabbit. "A natural-historical judgment may be true though individuals falling under both the subject and predicate concepts are as rare as one likes, statistically speaking." (Thompson, 2008, p. 68)

Returning to the question "What is a life-form?", while Thompson dismisses this question when taken as an inquiry into metaphysical status, he does offer an answer to this question when taken as an inquiry into an *a priori* account of what a life-form is. The natural-historical judgment, for Thompson, is the basis for an *a priori* account of what a life-form is *and* of what a living thing is.

> We may say that a concept is a *life-form-concept* if it provides a possible subject for this form of judgment [the natural-historical judgment]. A *life-form* or *species* (in the broad sense) is anything that is, or could be, immediately designated by a life-form-concept or a life-form-word . . . An *organism* or *individual living thing*, finally, is whatever falls under a species or 'bears' a life-form. (Thompson, 2008, pp. 76-77) (italics original)

Thompson is saying here that *life-form* is logically prior to *life*, where by "logically" I mean that the *a priori* account of *life* appeals to the concept *life-form*. Life-forms, then, are what are referred to by life-form-concepts, which are concepts that can occupy the subject place of a natural-historical judgment. A life-form is described by a set of natural-historical judgments.

I am finished presenting what Thompson has to say about what a life-form is. Now I will present the claim that Thompson makes at the end of his discussion of life and life-forms—a claim that moves us into ethics. Thompson suggests that the life-form of a living thing is the standard for what that living thing should be like: "What merely 'ought to be' in the individual [living thing] we may say really 'is' in its [life-]form." (Thompson, 2008, p. 81) Natural-historical judgments, which specify the content of life-forms, are norms for assessing excellence and defect in living things: "The system of natural-historical propositions with a given kind or [life-]form as subject supplies . . . a standard" for evaluating living things as naturally excellent or defective." (Thompson, 2008, p. 80)[24] As indicated both in the canonical form of natural-historical judgments—"The S is/has/does F"—and the examples presented above—e.g., four legs, black fur, eats worms and fish—these norms specify both what *parts* a particular living thing should

[24] In this quote, Thompson refers to natural-historical judgments, not the life-forms that occupy their subject places, as being normative; this suggests that Thompson might prefer the formulation "natural-historical judgments are normative" rather than "life-forms are normative." I have chosen the latter formulation because (1) life-form can be thought of as equivalent to a set of natural-historical judgments without doing any violence or at least significant violence to Thompson's precise views, (2) there is a line from his discussion which suggests that he would support my formulation, viz., "What merely 'ought to be' in the individual we may say really 'is' in its [life-]form," (Thompson, 2008, p. 81) and (3) I prefer to use a term (life-form) that is generally understood across the neo-Aristotelian moral tradition rather than a technical term specific to Thompson's views (natural-historical judgment).

have and what *activities* it should be engaged in or should be going on within it. A living thing can be excellent/defective in regard to either. Mrs. Muff is defective if she has only three legs, one ear, etc.; as well as if she is unable to forage, digest, etc.

I use *excellence* (or goodness) and *defect* (badness), following Thompson and other neo-Aristotelians, to mean conformity and non-conformity to what is normative, respectively.[25] Excellence, then, is equivalent to non-defective. Note that this usage of excellence may be different from what some might expect. Some would expect *excellence* to refer to something better than normal, and in turn take *normal* to be a state in between *excellence* and *defect*.[26] Mrs. Muff's having four legs, some might claim, does not quite count as an *excellence*, but rather as *normal*. Whatever may be said in favor of this usage of excellence, I want to follow the standard neo-Aristotelian usage of these notions. Excellence, then, following neo-Aristotelian usage, encompasses what some might regard as merely normal but not excellent.

The formulation of SBNN that I find most felicitous, on account of its precision, simplicity, and clarity, and that I will rely on primarily, comes from Foot: *The good (or final end) of a living thing is to instantiate its life-form*. (Foot, 2001, p. 92) By instantiate is meant to realize, or conform to, or achieve conformity to. Mrs. Muff instantiates her

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[25] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that for the usual neo-Aristotelian, an excellence is a disposition to perform some activity well. Granting that the usual neo-Aristotelian would endorse this characterization, my characterization captures more accurately, on behalf of the usual neo-Aristotelian, how they understand the notions of excellence and defect in the context of SBNN. First, SBNN theorists evaluate the parts of living things, not just their activities. Second, a part or activity of a living thing can only qualify as excellent if is it normative. Supposing Mrs. Muff could phi well, but phi-ing is not part of her life-form, then phi-ing well would not count as an excellence.

[26] By *normal*, I mean conforming to what is normative, not statistically average. Gavin Lawrence brought to my attention the idea of making this clarification.

life-form to the extent she conforms to the specifications of her life-form, e.g., four legs, eats grass, *etc*.

I have finished presenting Thompson's two-part case for SBNN. The first part consisted in a criticism of the possibility of IBNN. In this criticism of the possibility of IBNN, Thompson introduced the notion of a life-form, which is the centerpiece of SBNN. The second part consisted in a development of the notion of a life-form, ending with the claim that life-forms are normative.

Presenting Thompson's case for SBNN was the primary purpose of this Chapter. The content of the remaining two sub-sections will, relative to the bulk of the Chapter so far which has been devoted to a systematic presentation of Thompson's case, have a less structured form. It will consist in a presentation of developments of SBNN that will be relevant to my critique of SBNN in Chapter 2.

Lawrence on Life-forms as Sets of Boundary Conditions

Lawrence writes that life-forms are "*boundary* . . . *conditions* that define or, more generally, demarcate the creature and its world whose best life it is we are seeking to specify, and without which we would be unable to determine in what the organism's good or bad consisted." (Lawrence, 2005, p. 138) (italics mine)

An aspect of the claim that boundary conditions define the good of a living thing, according to Lawrence, is that they set limits on what can qualify as a defect in a living thing of a certain species. Boundary conditions for the human being, Lawrence claims, include facts about our mortality, "our various physical, emotional, social, and intellectual capacities and needs," how we develop, age, and decline, and also facts about

the environment and its historical contingencies, such as facts about the state of technology and medicine of the world, and the risks of illness and accidents. (Lawrence, 2005, pp. 138-139) That a human being gets "physically and mentally tired" in old age and that he dies does not, at least ordinarily, qualify as a defect. "[T]he Human cannot run as fast as the Cheetah nor calculate as fast as the Computer." (Lawrence, 2005, p. 143) It is not a defect in a human being if she cannot run as fast as a cheetah or calculate as fast as a computer. The form of life of the Human and the form of life of the Cheetah are different; and "we measure the individual against the natural norm of the species." (Lawrence, 2005, p. 143)

Understanding that life-forms are sets of boundary conditions serves to emphasize the fact that the good of a living thing is to instantiate itself such that it falls within *determinate* parameters of the sort exemplified in the many ordinary examples of life-form descriptions. The Rabbit has *four* legs, *not* three, five, or any other number. The Tortoise defends itself by *withdrawing into its shell*, *not* by camouflage, as the Chameleon does. The Oak maintains its foundation in the earth by having *deep and sturdy roots*, *not* by bending with the wind, as the Reed does. In whatever ways a living thing violates, i.e., falls outside of, the range of parameters that define its good, it is defective.

Foot and Hursthouse on How the Content of Life-forms is Determined

When the topic of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics—and more specifically, the appeal to nature, viz., SBNN, which is fundamental to and part of this tradition—comes up either in the literature or in conversation, it is not Thompson's case for SBNN that

come to mind (his case for it is almost entirely ignored and generally unknown), but rather the work of Foot and Hursthouse. Their work in the tradition is the most well-known and developed (setting aside that neither argues for SBNN). Foot and Hursthouse independently take SBNN as a starting point and then develop it from there.

The core part of Foot and Hursthouse's developments of SBNN—the part I am going to present—consists in their accounts of how the content of life-forms is determined.[27] The question of what determines the content of life-forms is one Foot and Hursthouse introduce into the contemporary history of SBNN; the question is not found or discussed in Thompson's work. Foot and Hursthouse offer the same answer to this question: The content of life-forms is determined by facts about what features a living thing needs to have in order to serve *ends* that are normative for it. The details of their accounts differ. I will start with Foot's.

A life-form, again, is described by a set of statements canonically expressed as, "The S is/has/does F." Not just any statement that can be expressed in the form "The S is/has/does F," however, according to Foot, qualifies as part of the life-form of a living thing. Rather, the proposed feature must serve one or more of the *ends* that are normative for that living thing. Consider Foot's example: "The male peacock has a brightly colored tail." The brightly colored tail serves the end of reproduction (the tail attracts female peacocks), and because of this, having a brightly colored tail is part of the life-form of the male peacock. By contrast, consider Foot's example: "The blue tit has a round blue patch

[27] Foot explicitly uses Thompson's notion of life-form. Hursthouse uses it implicitly. She discusses how to determine norms of goodness and defect for living things, but does not use the word "life-form" to refer to the set of norms for a given species.

on its forehead." This round blue patch, Foot claims, serves neither the survival nor the reproduction of the blue tit, and because of this, having a round blue patch on its forehead is not part of the life-form of the blue tit.[28]

The major move here that Foot (and as we will see shortly, Hursthouse) make is the introduction of *ends* that they claim are normative for living things and ground the content of life-forms. For Foot, the content of the life-form of every living thing is determined by what is necessary for the three ends of "development, self-maintenance, and reproduction."[29] (Foot, 2001, p. 51) She seems to equate self-maintenance with sustaining oneself (Foot, 2001, p. 29) and with survival. (Foot, 2001, p. 42) Self-maintenance includes both the "obtaining of nourishment" and self-defense. (Foot, 2001, p. 31) She also refers to flourishing as the ultimate determiner of the content of the life-form. (Foot, 2001, p. 44) This suggests that, for Foot, flourishing is an ultimate end that encompasses development, self-maintenance, and reproduction.

On Hursthouse's account of the ends, what ends are normative for a living thing depends on how complex its species is. Hursthouse works her way up the ladder of nature—from simpler to more complex non-human living things—identifying classes of living things. For all the species of living things in a given class, certain aspects of the living things of those species are evaluated as good or defective with respect to certain ends. As Hursthouse moves up classes, she adds aspects and ends.

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[28] Discussion of both examples is in Foot (2001, p. 30).

[29] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that this specification of ends seems reductive. I take this to mean that Foot (and presumably Hursthouse) seem to be offering an account of what grounds the content of life-forms that presupposes and appeals to the content of life-forms. If this is true, then it constitutes a major problem for Foot and Hursthouse's project.

Hursthouse distinguishes identifies five classes of living things, in order of increasing complexity of the species that belong to them: (1) plants and simple animals (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 198), (2) animals that can act rather than merely respond to stimuli (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 199), (3) animals that can feel pleasure and pain (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 199), (4) animals that can experience emotions and desires (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 200), and finally (5) social animals (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 201).

The first class consists of plants and simple animals. Simple animals are animals that merely react to stimuli rather than act. Two ends are normative for plants and simple animals: survival and the continuation of the species. They are normative for two aspects of the living things in these classes: their parts and their operations. Plants and simple animals are evaluated as good or defective in respect of their parts and operations according to whether their parts and operations contribute, "in the way characteristic of such a member of such a species, to (1) individual survival through the characteristic life span of such a member of such a species [henceforth I will refer to this as just survival] and (2) continuance of the species." (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 198)

The second class consists of animals that do not merely react to stimuli, but also act. For animals that act, a third aspect is added: whether they act well, in the way characteristic of their species. So for these animals, their parts, operations, and actions, are evaluated as good or defective in respect of whether they contribute, in the way characteristic of their species, to survival and continuance of the species. The continuation of the species, for animals that act, involves more than reproduction: It may involve taking care of one's young, in the way characteristic of one's species. "A lioness

who does not suckle her cubs, and then feed them, and then teach them to hunt is thereby defective." (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 199)

The third class consists of animals that can feel pain and pleasure.[30] "Characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic pleasure or enjoyment" is a third end by which we evaluate the parts, operations, and actions of animals that can feel pain and pleasure. (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 199) Hursthouse adds that the qualification of "characteristic" is important. Not just any pain counts as a defect. Rather, pain may serve the end of survival, and thus be good. "A dog that feels no pain when the pad on its foot is cut is not *better* than the usual run of dogs, but defective." (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 199) (italics original)

The fourth class consists of animals that can experience, at least in some minimal way, emotions and desires.[31] For these animals, a fourth aspect is added: emotions/desires (Hursthouse treats desires and emotions together as one aspect). The four aspects of parts, operations, actions, and desires/emotions are evaluated according to the three ends of

[30] Two points here: (1) Presumably, Hursthouse would hold that lions feel pain and pleasure as well. Her use of the example of the lioness to illustrate the preceding feature of action should not be taken to imply that she thinks lions do not also exemplify the features of pleasure and pain. It is perhaps a somewhat infelicitous choice of example on her part to choose a living thing that belongs to a higher class to illustrate a feature of a lower class. (2) She mentions that the point on the ladder of nature at which animals begin to feel pain and the point at which animals begin to feel pleasure may be different.

[31] Echo the first point from the prior footnote: Presumably, Hursthouse would or might hold that lions and dogs experience emotions and desire as well. Her reference to these species in illustration of features of the lower classes should not be taken to imply that that she thinks these species do not belong to a higher class. Again, perhaps her example choices were somewhat infelicitous.

individual survival, the continuation of the species, and "characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic pleasure or enjoyment."[32]

The fifth class consists of social animals, for whom "a fourth end comes in, namely (iv) the good functioning of the social group." (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 201)"The function of such a group is to . . . foster [its members'] characteristic" pursuit of survival, the continuation of the species, and freedom from pain and enjoyment.[33] (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 201)

[32] Andrews Reath has brought to my attention a possible critical question one might raise against Hursthouse's five classes of living things: Are the second, third, and fourth classes really distinct? That is, can an animal genuinely act if it does not feel pleasure or pain, or if it does not have desires? One might claim, as Reath also pointed out to me, that genuine acting involves guiding one's movement through one's perception of what is beneficial and harmful; and that perception of benefit and harm presupposes the capacity for pleasure and pain and perhaps the capacity for emotion and desire.

[33] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that Hursthouse's notion of social animals is obscure and might be pressed for clarification, e.g., there seems to be a difference between a herd animal and a social one, whether bees and ants are social.

Chapter 2: A Critique of Species-based Natural Normativity

> "Shaped by Plato's essentialism, the Western mind has tended to think in terms of unchanging types and essences and to regard variation as fleeting and unimportant. The thinking of the dominant schools of philosophy has throughout been incompatible with an adequate consideration of the importance of variation." (Mayr, 1976, p. 2)

> ". . . only individual phenomena have reality . . ." (Mayr, 1976, p. 12)

Natural normativity is the view that every living thing has a good, i.e., a *telos* or ultimate end that is normative for it. Species-based natural normativity, SBNN, is a view about what the good of a living thing is, viz., that the good of a living thing is the instantiation of its life-form.

A common objection to SBNN, and natural normativity, as such, is that neither can stand without the assumption of metaphysical teleology in living things, an assumption which is unjustified. I addressed this objection in Chapter 1. In this Chapter, I will assume natural normativity, viz., that every living thing has a good, but argue that the good of a living thing is *not* the instantiation of its life-form, i.e., that SBNN is false.

In this Chapter, I present two criticisms of SBNN. First, I will grant the existence of life-forms and argue that a living thing can violate its life-form in a way that counts as an excellence; thus the good of a living thing is not to instantiate its life-form. Second, I will argue that the case for the existence of life-forms fails; thus belief in their existence is unjustified.

The reason for this order is that I want to begin my criticism of SBNN by addressing what SBNN sympathizers find intuitively attractive about SBNN, which is—

not any elaborate, technical argument for the existence of *a priori*, metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical life-forms, but rather—the belief that life-forms do a great deal of normative work; namely that they are the correct standards of excellence and defect for a living thing. The second criticism cements my first criticism, by addressing those who, due to being impressed with the technical complexity of Thompson's case for the existence of life-forms, are inclined to think that SBNN must be true and that my first criticism can somehow be surmounted. I present these two criticisms in the two remaining sections of this Chapter, respectively, viz., "First Criticism of SBNN: Life-forms do not extend to all Cases of Excellence in Living Things" and "Second Criticism of SBNN: The Failure of the Case for the Existence of Life-forms."

First Criticism of SBNN: Life-forms do not extend to all Cases of Excellence in Living Things

I will begin by presenting counterexamples to SBNN. These are examples in which a living thing violates its life-form in some respect (i.e., a living thing does not conform to the specifications of its life-form in some respect), yet where the respect in which it violates its life-form counts as an excellence. It follows from this that the good of a living thing is not the instantiation of its life-form. I will then address a range of replies that capture all the ways that I have found suggested in the literature, in conversations (especially with sympathizers with SBNN) across several years, and from my own thinking across several years, in which one might try to defend SBNN against my counterexamples.

Though one counterexample suffices to falsify SBNN, I will present three counterexamples, for the following two reasons. First, if I only presented one counterexample, one might wonder whether the counterexample was cherry-picked. In light of this possible concern, the three counterexamples below show that one can easily conceive of *indefinitely* many counterexamples that illustrate an *immense variety* of ways one can conceive life-forms to be violated; I will briefly elaborate on this point after presenting the counterexamples. Thus, there is nothing cherry-picked about the counterexamples. Second, including all three counterexamples below motivates and sets me up for addressing all the replies that I have encountered against the criticism of SBNN by counterexample, whereas including only one or two of them would motivate only a subset of these replies and set me up for addressing only a subset as well.

The counterexamples have as their subject a certain bearer of the life-form the Rabbit. Her name is Mrs. Muff.[34]

(1) Faster Muff: Suppose the life-form of the Rabbit specifies that the Rabbit flees between twenty and thirty miles per hour. Now, suppose Mrs. Muff can flee at thirty-one miles per hour, one mile per hour faster than the top speed specified by her life-form, and thus violating her life-form, and suppose her being able to run one mile per hour faster allows Mrs. Muff to flee predators more successfully than were she only able to run thirty miles per hour.

(2) Five-legged Muff: Suppose Mrs. Muff is born with five legs, violating her life-form, and her fifth leg allows her to escape predators more successfully, perform

[34] I borrow Mrs. Muff from Foot (2001, p. 28).

better in melee against them, and climb steeper hills, than were she without the fifth leg.

(3) Winged Muff: Suppose Mrs. Muff is born with (let us say, two) wings, violating her life-form, and her wings allow her, by flying, to escape predators more successfully and scout for food at further distances than were she without wings.

Now that these counterexamples are on the table, note how easily one can conceive of *indefinitely* many counterexamples that illustrate an *immense variety* of ways one can conceive life-forms to be violated. One can conceive of the addition of some part (leg, wings, eyes, teeth); the enhancement of some part (stronger legs, faster wings, better eyesight, stronger enamel); the addition of some activity that was previously not possible to a living thing (flying, camouflaging swimming, jumping); the enhancement of some activity (faster flying, improved camouflage, faster swimming, higher jumping). There is nothing cherry-picked about the counterexamples.

In the rest of my first criticism of SBNN, I will be focusing mainly on the above three counterexamples. SBNN is committed to holding that, in all these counterexamples, the respects in which Mrs. Muff violates her life-form qualify as *defects*, on grounds that they violate Mrs. Muff's life-form. Recall that the life-form of a living thing specifies that a living thing should have specific parts (and not any other parts) with a host of qualitative and quantitative aspects—e.g., number, size, internal structure—organized in a certain way, and engaging in specific activities (and not any other activities). A rabbit should have four legs, of a certain size, two ears, of a certain size, eat, sleep, not have leaves, not photosynthesize, *etc*.

Yet, in each counterexample, the life-form violating features count as excellences. Here I adopt talk of excellence from neo-Aristotelians and understand excellence in the spirit that they do. Foot, for example, would say that Mrs. Muff's having four legs counts as an excellence because they enable her successfully to achieve her ends; following the same understanding of excellence, five legs would be even more excellent.

One might not share my intuition that Mrs. Muff's fifth leg counts as an excellence.[35] In this case, perhaps there is a fundamental and as yet irreconcilable difference between my intuitions and those who would not share them. The latter I imagine are so deeply committed to SBNN that they genuinely would not share the intuition that Mrs. Muff's fifth leg counts as an excellence. Perhaps further pressing might soften some SBNN hardliners to my intuitions: Supposing Mrs. Muff's fifth leg made the difference between her survival and her death (e.g., the fifth leg enabled her successful escape from a predator), would the hardliner then grant that the fifth leg is an excellence? I suppose a hardliner might say, "Rather would Mrs. Muff have four legs and die," but this is implausible to me. A hardliner might also say "It would be more excellent if she could escape with only *four* legs." I would say "Then wouldn't it be even *more* excellent if she could escape with only *three* legs or even with far fewer capabilities (e.g., Houdini Muff)?" The hardliner would probably say "No, because Mrs. Muff, being a bearer of the life-form Rabbit, should have *four* legs; and she should escape the predator with *four* legs, not three, and not five." I find implausible this constraining of the means by which Mrs. Muff is permitted to escape a predator; the hardliner would disagree. At

[35] Gavin Lawrence brought this suggestion to my attention.

the end of the day, some hardliners will simply not share my intuitions. I will proceed on the assumption of at least some sympathy to my intuitions.

As I have learned across years of conversation with different people, including advocates of SBNN, the above counterexamples rarely convince people that SBNN is false. Instead, the general reaction to my counterexamples is that they can be dealt with by drawing on one or more of a range of replies, which I have encountered both in conversation and suggestions from the literature. There are eight of these replies and I will summarize them before presenting them in more detail and addressing them. What follows as the summary of each reply is an official formulation in italics, followed by brief remarks that capture the intuitive force of the reply. Replies 2-7 would be applied to some but not all counterexamples:

1. *Counterexamples that focus on parts rather than activities have less force*

   The reason that Five-legged Muff's fifth leg is excellent is that it makes her better at performing the activities specified by her life-form.

2. *The living thing in question is metaphysically impossible*

   A rabbit with wings?!

3. *Life-forms do not need to be completely accurate*

   The content of life-forms need be only approximate, there may be exceptions to the norm, and these exceptions are the minority and not a problem, e.g., so Faster Muff can run a little faster—big deal![36]

[36] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that I am using *norm* in the average sense (e.g., most rabbits have four legs) as opposed to the sense of a norm of a life-form (The Rabbit has four legs). It is indeed true that I am doing so, and notably, *charitably to and on behalf of* my opponent, rather than in my favor. One might charge my opponent with equivocating between two senses of norm. On *behalf of* my opponent, I am

4. *The life-form subsumes the putative violation*

   In some cases, we may have been wrong in our specification of the life-form. For example, the life-form of the Rabbit really does cover Faster Muff's speed.

5. *The living thing bears a different life-form*

   In some cases, the life-form in question is different from what was previously thought, e.g., Winged Muff isn't really a rabbit.

6. *The living thing's life-form is indeterminate*

   In some cases, it is indeterminate what the life-form is, e.g., it may be indeterminate what Winged Muff's life-form is.

7. *The putative violation is an adaptation*

   Faster Muff, Fived-legged Muff, and Winged Muff, and all counterexamples, are examples of an adapting life-form.

8. *It is a burden on me to provide an alternative account of the good of a living thing*

   Well, if the good of a living thing is not the instantiation of its life-form, what is it, then?!

I will show that the replies fail to salvage SBNN from my counterexamples.

Reply 1: Counterexamples that focus on parts rather than activities have less force

One might claim that the more important aspect of a life-form is its specification of *activities*—e.g., eating, fleeing, etc.—rather than *parts*, e.g., having four legs, two ears, etc. Parts, one might claim, are important only insofar as they enable a living thing to

allowing the equivocation in order to consider her reply at face value. (I want to consider the reply at face value because it is a reply that I have often encountered.)

perform the activities that are specified by its life-form. The reason Five-legged Muff's fifth leg and Winged Muff's wings count as excellences, for example, is that they better enable Mrs. Muff to flee and find food, activities that are specified by her life-form. Since the excellence of the parts is grounded in appeal to a life-form, counterexamples that focus on parts have either less or no force.[37]

My first reply to Reply 1 is that, at best, it establishes that counterexamples that focus on parts have *less* force, not that they have *no* force. Even supposing that the excellence of a part that is referred to in some counterexample is grounded in its service to the life-form activities of a living thing, life-forms nevertheless still specify what parts a living thing should and should not have. Thompson, Foot, and Hursthouse are explicit in maintaining that a living thing should have a certain set of parts, as determined by its life-form; and they would all regard having four legs as a paradigm norm for a rabbit. The SBNN defender must still contend with these counterexamples.

My second reply is that there is no clear distinction between the activities that a life-form specifies and the parts that it specifies. Built into a life-form's specification of an activity are specifications of the parts that should and should not be involved in the execution of the activity. According to the life-form of the Rabbit, for example, Mrs. Muff should nourish herself *in a certain way*, viz., as specified by her life-form: This way involves parts that include a mouth, teeth, a stomach, all organized in a certain way, and with various qualitative and quantitative requirements on these parts. Supposing Mrs.

[37] Andrews Reath brought this possible reply to my attention.

Muff had no mouth but rather absorbed vegetables through her skin, she would no longer be nourishing herself in the way that according to SBNN she should.

My third reply is that, even supposing that there is a clear distinction between the activities and the parts that are specified by a life-form, and even supposing that counterexamples that focus on parts have no force, counterexamples that involve activities are easily conceived. Winged Muff is such a counterexample: Flying is an activity that violates the life-form of the Rabbit. Indefinitely many others can be conceived, e.g., Mrs. Muff who can change color, breathe underwater, photosynthesize, etc.

Reply 2: The living thing in question is metaphysically impossible

The second reply holds that

(1) In some counterexamples, it is metaphysically impossible for the living thing to have the feature in question, e.g., perhaps Winged Muff is metaphysically impossible; and

(2) The metaphysical impossibility of a counterexample undercuts its force against SBNN.

By metaphysically possible, I mean possible given the nature of the actual universe (the totality of what exists). A living thing of certain specifications, e.g., Winged Muff, is metaphysically possible if it is possible for it to exist given the nature of the actual universe; given, for example, the potential and limits of evolution and genetic engineering, the size of the universe, and the nature of various environments.

I have five replies to Reply 2. In my first two replies, I grant (1) and (2), and argue that Reply 2 accomplishes at most very little for the advocate of SBNN. In my third and fourth replies, I argue that (1) needs justification and is false, respectively. In my fifth reply, I argue that (2) is false. I will summarize the replies before presenting them in further detail.

a. Reply 2 cuts against SBNN as well, and thus does not count against my counterexamples with respect to the dispute between the defender of SBNN and myself.
b. There are still indefinitely many counterexamples which are not metaphysically impossible, and thus which have force against SBNN.
c. One would need to provide evidence for the claim that a given counterexample is metaphysically impossible and no evidence is given.
d. There is evidence to believe that a given counterexample might be metaphysically possible.
e. Whether a counterexample is metaphysically impossible is irrelevant to its force.

Reply a. *Reply 2 cuts against SBNN as well*. A problem with Reply 2 is that even if some counterexamples are metaphysically impossible and even if their being metaphysically impossible poses a problem for them, SBNN is saddled with a similar problem. Consider a three-legged Mrs. Muff (suppose she was born with only three legs). The SBNN theorist would judge Mrs. Muff as defective in respect of the number of her legs; Mrs. Muff should, according to the SBNN theorist, have four. Yet, as far as we know, it is metaphysically impossible for Mrs. Muff to grow a fourth leg. If it is

metaphysically impossible for Mrs. Muff to grow a fourth leg, and if the metaphysical impossibility of a living thing's being a certain way entails that it cannot be normative for a living thing to be that way, then it cannot be normative for Mrs. Muff to have four legs.[38] Reply 2, assuming it is correct, actually undermines SBNN.

Reply b. *Reply 2 does not address all counterexamples.* Even if the reply of metaphysical impossibility poses a problem for some counterexamples, such as Winged Muff, there would be indefinitely many counterexamples which are not metaphysically impossible, such as Faster Muff, or Muff with improved vision, or hearing, or digesting, *etc*. The advocate of SBNN might have other replies that attempt to deal with the remaining counterexamples (and in the ensuing pages, I present and address all the replies I have encountered over several years), but the point here is that the reply of metaphysical impossibility, even if it poses a problem for some counterexamples, leaves indefinitely many counterexamples against SBNN that would still need to be addressed in order to defend SBNN. Even granting (1) and (2), Reply 2 has limited force against my counterexamples.

Reply c. *No evidence for metaphysical impossibility*. (1), furthermore, is missing a defense and seems false. Replies *c* and *d* will elaborate each of these charges, respectively. Regarding the problem of a lack of defense, one would need to provide evidence for the claim that a given counterexample is metaphysically impossible and no

[38] Gavin Lawrence has suggested to me that we would naturally say of thalidomide babies (who have malformed limbs) that they should be different. My criticism of Reply 2, however, far from undercutting the legitimacy of this thought, is friendly to it. I am *criticizing*, not supporting, the view that the metaphysical impossibility of a living thing's being a certain way entails that it cannot be normative for a living thing to be that way.

evidence has been offered to me by any of the interlocutors who have presented me with this claim. The claim that Winged Muff is metaphysically impossible, for example, would need a defense; there is no reason simply to take it as a default truth.

It might be replied here that we have a good idea of what rabbits can and cannot do, being what they are. A rabbit can't turn into chocolate ice cream, jump over the moon, or recite Shakespeare. A fifth leg does not fit into what we currently understand of rabbit physiology.[39] In reply to this reply, I would say that, granting for the sake of argument that a swath of cases are metaphysically impossible (e.g., a rabbit's turning into chocolate ice cream), it seems that there is a swath of cases that cannot justifiably be claimed to be metaphysically impossible, e.g., a fifth leg. That a fifth leg does not fit into our current understanding of rabbit physiology does not entail that a five-legged rabbit is metaphysically impossible.

Reply d. *Positive evidence for metaphysical possibility*. There is evidence to support that a given counterexample, e.g., Winged Muff, is metaphysically possible. One, giant, piece of evidence is evolution, which for billions of years has produced and continues to produce an immensely wide variety of living things—e.g., from single-celled organisms, to an immensely wide variety of bacteria, fungi, plants (grass, vines, trees), and animals (insects, larger animals, including dinosaurs), regularly introducing via mutation individuals with novel features. A second, giant, piece of evidence is continually improving genetic engineering technology; it is eminently reasonable to believe that genetic engineering has the potential to create a wide variety of living things.

[39] Gavin Lawrence brought this reply to my attention.

Reply e. *Metaphysical possibility is irrelevant*. (2), the claim that the metaphysical impossibility of a counterexample undercuts is force, I will now argue, is false. Whether a counterexample is metaphysically impossible is irrelevant to its force. Even if Five-legged Muff is metaphysically impossible, this fact is irrelevant to the fact that we can conceive of Mrs. Muff as having a fifth leg that enhances her ability to escape predators and that we can evaluate her as excellent in respect of her fifth leg. Our correct judgment of excellence about this feature, whether or not it is metaphysically impossible, shows that SBNN is false. We, rightly, do not conceive of the good of Five-legged Muff to be the instantiation of her life-form. Reply *e* is the most important reply because the (putative) force of Reply 2 comes from (2). The falsity of (2) shows that Reply 2 has no force to begin with.

Reply 3: Life-forms do not need to be completely accurate

The third reply is that life-forms do not need to be completely accurate. Life-forms capture *approximately* the good of a living thing; they can be inaccurate to some degree. Quibbling, then, over a one-mile per hour difference between Mrs. Muff's top speed and the upper limit of flight speed specified in some nature guide on the Rabbit does not have any force against SBNN.

The reply confuses an attempt to specify a life-form with the life-form itself. Our specifications of any given life-form might be rough and inaccurate to some degree; but the life-form itself consists in a set of facts and these facts *constitute* the standard of accuracy for life-form specifications. Our specifications of the speed range of the Rabbit may be inaccurate, but the point is that the life-form of the Rabbit includes *some* speed

range, whatever in fact it is and however close our specification matches it. My counterexamples are stipulated such that the feature in question violates the *actual* life-form of the Rabbit.

Replies 4-5: (4)The life-form subsumes the putative violation; (5) The living thing bears a different life-form

I group replies 4 and 5 together because I have the same reply to both. According to the fourth reply, in some counterexamples, the life-form subsumes the putative violation, by which I mean that the way in which the living thing putatively violates its life-form in fact conforms to its life-form. Its life-form specifies that the living thing ought to have the feature in question. For example, the defender of SBNN might claim that in the case of Faster Muff, the putative violation is so small that we must infer that we were mistaken about the life-form and that we should now hold that the life-form subsumes the putative violation. According to the fifth reply, in some counterexamples, the living thing bears a different life-form than previously thought, and according to the true life-form, the feature in question counts as an excellence rather than a defect. For example, the defender of SBNN might claim that in the case of Winged Muff, the putative violation is so large such that Mrs. Muff bears a life-form different from the Rabbit, one according to which her wings would count as an excellence.

My reply to both of these two replies is that, even assuming they counter Faster Muff and Winged Muff, they only counter a subset of all possible counterexamples, viz., those in which my opponent regards the violation of what was taken to be the life-form as either "too small," e.g., Faster Muff, or "too large," e.g., Winged Muff. An indefinite

number of counterexamples, however, can be conceived of in which the violation is neither, according to my opponent, "too small" nor "too large." Five-legged Muff is one; two more are Three-eyed Muff and Two-hearted Muff, each of which could be elaborated in a way similar to my three original counterexamples so as to establish that the way in which Mrs. Muff violates her life-form counts as an excellence. Note that this reply does not falsify the claim that the life-form of the Rabbit subsumes Faster Muff's putative violation or that Winged Muff has a life-form different from the Rabbit. Rather, it shows that Replies 4 and 5 have at best very limited force: Indefinite counterexamples still face SBNN.

Reply 6: The living thing's life-form is indeterminate

The sixth reply is that in some cases, the life-form of a living thing may be indeterminate.[40] Those who have suggested this reply of indeterminacy might mean by *indeterminate*, epistemically indeterminate or metaphysically indeterminate. It is epistemically indeterminate what life-form a living thing bears if we do not know and perhaps cannot know its life-form (even though we know that it bears a life-form). It is metaphysically indeterminate what life-form a living thing bears if it bears no life-form. Andrews Reath has suggested to me a formulation of what it means for the life-form of a

[40] Hursthouse claims that the life-form of a living thing may be indeterminate (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 203-204). I am taking her claim and framing it as a reply to my counterexamples. Gavin Lawrence has presented this reply to me in conversation and suggested an explanation of why certain cases might be regarded as indeterminate: A variation may be introduced to one or more bearers of a life-form that, with a changing environment, might either result (1) in all the bearers of the life-form's being wiped out or in (2) the evolution of a new life-form. It might be claimed that whether the life-form has a growing number of defective members or is evolving into a new life-form depends on which result will happen. Pending the result, it is indeterminate, then, whether the members with variations are the last defective members of the old life-form or are the first new non-defective members of the new life-form. There may or may not be theoretical reasons for calling for a decision on this issue.

living thing to be metaphysically indeterminate that one might regard as different from my formulation: The living thing bears a life-form but there is no fact of the matter about what life-form it bears. Against this formulation, however, I do not think it is possible for a living thing to bear a life-form while at the same time not bear a particular life-form or other, e.g., the Rabbit, etc. If a living thing bears a life-form, then it bears some particular life-form. The notion of bearing a life-form and the notion of bearing a *particular* life-form seem to me equivalent. The addition of *particular* emphasizes that bearing a life-form just means bearing some particular life-form or other, e.g., the Rabbit, etc. Now, I will consider epistemic and metaphysical indeterminacy separately and in turn.

My reply to the reply of epistemic indeterminacy is that regardless of whether we know or can know what life-form a given living thing bears, according to the advocate of SBNN, it bears *some* life-form. Whatever life-form it bears, viz., whatever boundary conditions its life-form specifies[41], counterexamples could be constructed in which a living thing of that life-form has some feature which violates its life-form yet counts as an excellence.

For my reply to the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy, I will take Winged Muff as a case in which the advocate of the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy would claim that the living thing has no life-form (Winged Muff seems as plausible as any other case in which the advocate would make this claim).

[41] See Chapter 1, Section II: The Development of Species-based Natural Normativity, sub-section 3, "Lawrence on Life-forms as Sets of Boundary Conditions," for a discussion of life-forms as sets of boundary conditions.

I have two replies to the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy. My first reply is that an appeal to metaphysical indeterminacy is inconsistent with a claim that Thompson, Lawrence, and Foot accept, viz., species-metaphysical, which (recall from Chapter 1) is the claim that what makes a region of space-time a living thing is a life-form. If one accepts species-metaphysical, and one claims that the life-form of Winged Muff is metaphysically indeterminate, then one is committed to accepting the absurd consequence that Winged Muff is not alive. By Thompson, Lawrence, and Foot's own lights then, viz., by their acceptance of species-metaphysical, it is impossible that a living thing has no life-form. So the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy is unavailable to one who accepts species-metaphysical.

My second reply is that the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy undercuts SBNN. Winged Muff's wings, in virtue of their helping her to look for food and escape predators, are clearly an excellence, i.e., are clearly part of her good. If Winged Muff bears no life-form, it follows that something other than a life-form determines her wings to be excellent, i.e., that her good is something other than the instantiation of her life-form, i.e., SBNN is false. To summarize my two replies against the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy, the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy, first of all, is unavailable to the advocate of species-metaphysical, and second of all, undercuts SBNN.

Now, the defender of SBNN might claim that Mrs. Muff's wings do not count as an excellence, and they do not so count precisely because Mrs. Muff has no life-form. We cannot evaluate Mrs. Muff as excellent or defective in any respect unless she bears a life-form. My reply to this reply is that it is absurd to claim that Mrs. Muff's wings do not

count as an excellence. It is intuitively clear that Mrs. Muff's wings count as an excellence (the wings help her find food and escape predators). If one wants an even clearer illustration of their excellence, compare Mrs. Muff with wings where her wings allow her to find food and escape predators to Mrs. Muff with wings that are just dead weight. It is clear that in the former case, Mrs. Muff's wings count as an excellence and, in the latter, a defect. To claim otherwise would be absurd.

Now, the defender of SBNN might claim that I could not even set up my comparison, because for it to be true that Mrs. Muff has wings, eats food, escapes predators, i.e., for it to be true that Mrs. Muff is engaged in life activities (and is alive), she would have to have a life-form that would determine that the metaphysical goings-on in Mrs. Muff count as these life activities. But the advocate of this reply fails to comprehend that this reply is just the claim of species-metaphysical, that to be a living thing one has to have a life-form (because what makes a region of space-time a living thing is a life-form). In making this claim, the defender of SBNN must either withdraw the claim that Winged Muff's life-form is indeterminate, in which case the reply of metaphysical indeterminacy does not explain away Winged Muff, or claim that Winged Muff is not alive, which is absurd.

Reply 7: The putative violation is an adaptation

The seventh reply is that, in some cases, the feature is an adaptation. This reply has been suggested to me in conversation with defenders of SBNN, who make this reply without explaining its meaning or relevance, and instead tacitly taking it to have transparent meaning and relevance. It is unclear, however, what the meaning or relevance

of this reply is. Thinking on their behalf, of all the counterexamples against which the advocate of SBNN might reply with the reply of adaptation, the force of the reply of adaptation might depend on the counterexample. Against some counterexamples, the meaning and relevance of the reply of adaptation might be that the feature in question is subsumed under the life-form (because the life-form, according to the reply, has changed) (Reply 4). Against other counterexamples, the meaning and relevance might be that the living thing bears a life-form different from the one previously ascribed to it (because the life-form it bears is a result of adaptation, i.e., evolution, from a previously existing life-form) (Reply 5). Against still other counterexamples, the meaning and relevance might be that the life-form of the living thing is indeterminate (Reply 6). In this case, the reply of adaptation would consist in a story of why the living thing's life-form is indeterminate, viz., a new life-form will eventually come into existence and the living thing in a counterexample in question lies in the transition between the previously existing life-form and the as yet to exist life-form. The reply of adaptation, then, seems to reduce for any given counterexample either to Reply 4, 5, or 6; and I have addressed these three replies. Perhaps the advocate of SBNN takes the force of the reply of adaptation to be something other than the force of any of these three replies. If so, I do not know what it could be. I suspect that defenders of SBNN appeal to adaptation because the notion jumps out in their mind and *seems* relevant to bring to the discussion. In fact, however, until someone establishes its relevance, appeal to adaptation is a red herring.

Here I want to consider three sets of remarks that might be offered in support of Reply 7.[42] First, it might be suggested that the use of highly fictional examples makes it harder to engage the topics of change in life-forms and in what counts as an excellence.[43] To illustrate this suggestion, one might offer for consideration the following thought experiment: If I drop what looks like a milk carton on the floor and it disappears in a puff of green smoke, was what I dropped a milk carton? It is not clear.

It is not fully clear to me what the purported force of this suggestion is, but operating from an impressionistic sense of its force, I can offer three replies. First, I think it would be better to use an example of a living thing—as opposed to a milk carton—in order to support the above claim about the use of highly fictional examples, since the topics pertain to living things. Second, the question about the milk carton, transposed to the case of a living thing—e.g., is Winged Muff a living thing?—seems to have been addressed in my discussion of Reply 6. Third, supposing that examples such as Winged Muff—granting the claim that they are highly fictional—make it harder to engage the topics of change in life-forms and in what counts as an excellence, what is the import of this fact? The implied, putative import seems to be that putative counterexamples to SBNN can be ruled out on grounds of being highly fictional. Why, however, is this true? I argued in my discussion of Reply 2 that it is not. I would suggest, rather, that the use of highly fictional examples makes these topics harder (for some) because the examples

[42] Gavin Lawrence brought to my attention all three sets of remarks.

[43] Gavin Lawrence brought this suggestion to my attention as well as the following thought experiment.

legitimately challenge the deeply ingrained presumption of SBNN; a topic is harder if facing it requires critically examining a deeply held belief.

Second, it might be suggested that it is a complex issue whether a variation in some individual living thing—e.g., a genetic modification that results in a change in color—counts as an excellence or a defect. For example (to illustrate the complexity), a variation might start out as a defect, but then over time, if that variation starts to appear in more living things that are classified under the same life-form, and if the variation helps the living things of that life-form in some way, e.g., such as by aiding reproduction, then that variation may become an excellence.

In reply to this suggestion, what complexity is involved in figuring out, from the perspective of one who accepts SBNN, whether some variation is an excellence or defect is irrelevant to my critique of SBNN, *since my critique of SBNN is a critique of SBNN*. I am claiming, *contra* SBNN, that Winged Muff is excellent in respect of her wings. Whether, years from now, the life-form of the Rabbit will change to include having wings (or whether the living things under the life-form will be re-classified under a different life-form, which will include having wings) is irrelevant to the force of this claim.

Third, it might be suggested that I am using species ends to measure the excellence/defect of an adaptation. The suggestion, as I understand it, is an objection to my counterexamples: I appeal to SBNN in my putative counterexamples to it. My reply to this objection is that I am not using species ends to measure the excellence/defect of an individual variation because the individual variation, e.g., Mrs. Muff's fifth leg, is stipulated to lie outside the determinate parameters of its species ends. One of Mrs.

Muff's species ends is to survive with four legs, not five. The excellence of Mrs. Muff's fifth leg, then, cannot be grounded in its service to species ends.

My opponent might reply that an individual variation, e.g., Mrs. Muff's fifth leg, is now part of the life-form, but there are two problems with this reply. First, it is *ad hoc*; my opponent is just changing the content of a life-form in order to accommodate any given counterexample. Second, it guts life-forms of—by the lights of an SBNN advocate—their essential characteristic of being *determinate parameters*, e.g., has four legs, two ears, eats grass, etc.; if life-forms now include any and all content, then they are no longer life-forms and SBNN is no longer SBNN.

Alternatively, my opponent might reply that an individual variation, though not part of the life-form, may be of instrumental service to the living thing's instantiating its life-form; and that I am grounding the excellence of the variation in its instrumental service to life-form instantiation. My reply to this reply is that it is implausible to suppose that Mrs. Muff's fifth leg and pair of wings are merely instrumental to maintaining her four legs and that her four legs are (partly) constitutive of her good. Why not suppose with equal plausibility (or implausibility) that the four legs are merely instrumental to maintaining the fifth leg and the pair of wings, and suppose that her fifth leg and pair of wings are (partly) constitutive of her good? The answer that the SBNN theorist would give is "Because SBNN is true," which would just lead us back to my critique of SBNN.

Alternatively, my opponent might reply that an individual variation, though not part of the life-form and thereby qualifying as a defect according to SBNN, might result

in success accidentally.[44] This reply, however, actually *supports* my critique of SBNN. If it is granted that an individual variation might result in success, and granted that success is not determined by life-form parameters—relative to which an SBNN advocate would make judgments of what is an "individual variation," what is an "adaptation," what is "excellent," what is "defective," what is an "accident" (I put these words in scare quotes to highlight that they are part of an SBNN-style of thinking)—then the good of a living thing is to succeed and our attention should flow, in light of the failure of SBNN as an account of its success, to inquiring what success is for a living thing.

I have replied individually to seven replies that the defender of SBNN might make against my counterexamples. I have two further criticisms to make of Replies 2-7: they are (1) *ad hoc* and (2) merely asserted. They are *ad hoc* in that they just assume SBNN is true and try to salvage it on a case by case (counterexample by counterexample) basis; they do not show or even gesture at any attempt to engage the genuine force of the counterexamples overall, viz., that the counterexamples show that it is wrong to conceive of the good of a living thing as the instantiation of its life-form. Regarding the second criticism, it is a burden on the defender of SBNN to do more than just assert that metaphysically impossible features cannot qualify as counterexamples (Reply 2), that life-forms do not need to be completely accurate (Reply 3), that in such-and-such counterexample the life-form actually subsumes the putative violation (Reply 4), that in such-and-such counterexample the living thing actually bears a different life-form (Reply 5), that in such-and-such counterexample the life-form is epistemically or metaphysically

[44] Gavin Lawrence brought this suggestion to my attention.

indeterminate (Reply 6), and that in such-and-such counterexample the feature is an adaptation (Reply 7).

Reply 8: Burden on me to provide an alternative account of the good of a living thing

Across many conversations over several years with those who sympathize with SBNN, when I presented my counterexamples, I frequently received the question "Well then what *is* the good of a living thing, if not the instantiation of its life-form?" Sympathizers of SBNN have asked me this question in a way that seems to imply that it is a burden on me to provide an answer and that if I do not, my criticism of SBNN can justifiably be dismissed. This thought is false. Answering this question is not necessary for my purpose of criticizing SBNN. My criticism of SBNN does not depend on an alternative answer to what the good of a living thing is. It is true that in Chapter 3, I present an alternative account of the good of a living thing, but my criticism of SBNN does not burden me to provide an alternative account, and the merits of my criticism of SBNN are not affected by the merits of my alternative account. Reply 8 is a red herring.

At this point, assuming the advocate of SBNN is persuaded by my refutation of all eight replies, she might resort to a reply that concedes ground to my counterexamples while still attempting to salvage part of her view. The inspiration for my conceiving of this reply on behalf of the advocate of SBNN comes from a claim that Richard Kraut makes in his discussion of what is good for a living thing. I will present Kraut's claim in this paragraph and in the next develop a reply to my counterexamples that is inspired by it. Kraut claims that "[s]ome of what we know [about what is good *for* a living thing, S,] pertains to the particular circumstances and idiosyncrasies of that particular individual,

though other facts we must know pertain to the species to which S belongs." (Kraut, 2007, p. 4) One troupe of monkeys may face different circumstances from another troupe of monkeys, e.g., a different type of fruit, requiring the use of different techniques to open the fruit; one human being may have a talent for music while another has a talent for painting, entailing that playing music may be very good for the former but not the latter.[45] In this quote, Kraut is discussing the good *for* a living thing rather than the good *of* a living thing, i.e., discussing what constitutes a living thing's benefit, advantage, or well-being, rather than what constitutes its ultimate end. There is an issue of whether the good *of* a living thing is what is good *for* a living thing and there is also an issue of whether the notion of what is good *for* a living thing has sense, both of which issues are raised by Gavin Lawrence. (Lawrence, 2009) For my present purpose, I will take what Kraut presents in this quote and apply it to the notion of the good *of* a living thing.

So applied, Kraut's quote gestures at a reply to my counterexamples to SBNN. The advocate of SBNN might concede that my counterexamples show that SBNN, unmodified, is false and seek to modify SBNN in order to accommodate my counterexamples. She might offer what I will call *soft SBNN*, according to which the good of a living thing is only in part to instantiate its life-form. The good of a living thing is at least in part to instantiate its life-form and may also be in part to instantiate that part of its good that is determined by its "particular circumstances and idiosyncrasies." Mrs. Muff's wings, the advocate of soft SBNN might hold, are an idiosyncratic feature of hers rather than a feature that is part of her life-form, e.g., as her four legs are. The advocate

[45] Gavin Lawrence brought these examples to my attention.

can grant that Mrs. Muff's wings count as an excellence, on grounds of her idiosyncrasies rather than her life-form, and still maintain that her life-form grounds the excellence of other features, e.g., having four legs, etc.

In Chapter 3, I present my account of the good of a living thing, according to which the entirety of the good of a living thing is determined by its individual nature. This account constitutes my full response to the preceding reply. Here, I will present a briefer response: *Whether a feature of a living thing is an idiosyncrasy or part of its life-form is irrelevant to what makes the feature excellent*. Considering Five-legged Muff, the soft SBNN theorist must say that four of Five-legged Muff's legs are excellent in virtue of her life-form and the fifth is excellent in virtue of her "idiosyncrasies." To this, I ask "Why is the fifth leg *excellent* rather than *defective*?" The answer, I take it, is that the fifth leg enables or better enables Mrs. Muff to find food, escape predators, *etc*. Now, I suggest that this answer is also the answer to why her other legs are excellent; and why any other of her excellent features are excellent. It is implausible to claim that four of her legs are excellent because they conform to her life-form while the fifth is excellent because it enables or better enables her to do X, Y, Z. The excellence of all features has the same explanation: The latter, more plausible, one.

I have completed my first criticism of SBNN. I will end this section by pointing out an implication of my criticism of SBNN, namely that it serves also as a criticism of the idea that the good of a living thing is the instantiation of any *kind*.

The Good of a Living Thing is not the Instantiation of any Kind

SBNN is a form of a broader idea, which I will call kind-based natural normativity, according to which the good of a living thing is the instantiation of a (living) *kind*. I construe *kind* broadly, as encompassing species (on any plausible understanding of the term species) as well as kinds that are higher up in the taxonomy than (biological) species, such as plant or animal. Kind-based natural normativity can be found in Aristotle, who in his Function Argument divided living things into three kinds (plants, animals, and human beings), and in contemporary writings in the neo-Aristotelian tradition (in Hursthouse, for example, we find a division of living things according to their complexity, i.e., plants and simpler animals, animals that act, animals that feel pain and pleasure, animals that can experience emotions and desires, and social animals). Foot and Hursthouse refer to the categories of plants and animals and they imply that the good of a certain living thing is to instantiate its kind, and its kind may be that of a plant, and may also be a more specific species of plant. My criticism of SBNN is also a criticism of kind-based natural normativity: Any living kind will be defined according to a set of boundary conditions and any boundary condition is vulnerable to counterexamples. Even though my attack on SBNN is also an attack on the broader and idea of kind-based natural normativity of which SBNN is a form, my official target is SBNN because in discussions of natural normativity—i.e., kind-based natural normativity, since it is, currently, the only version of natural normativity—*species* is regarded as the primary kind and is the most developed and focused on.

In the next section, I will present my second criticism of SBNN.

Second Criticism of SBNN: The Failure of the Case for the Existence of Life-forms

In my first criticism of SBNN, I granted the existence of life-forms and argued that the good of a living thing is not the instantiation of its life-form, since a living thing can violate its life-form in a way that counts as an excellence. In my second criticism of SBNN, I will argue that the case for the existence of life-forms fails, and thus belief in the existence of life-forms, and thus belief in SBNN, is unjustified. SBNN is committed to the claim that there are such things as life-forms. Recall that a life-form, for SBNN advocates, is not an empirical, biological concept/taxon among many—and no more special than—any other empirical, biological concepts/taxa (whether higher up or lower down on the taxonomy), under which we classify living things. Rather, a life-form is a special, *a priori*,[46] and metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical[47] kind that makes a region of space-time a living thing.

Thompson's argument for the existence of life-forms consists in two moves, which I covered in detail in Chapter 1 and will summarize now. In the first move, Thompson argues that what makes a region of space-time a living thing is not wholly something(s) in the individual, metaphysical nature of the living thing (the individual chunk of matter to which the living thing corresponds), i.e., Thompson argues that life

[46] Some neo-Aristotelians might not accept that life-form concepts are *a priori*. Thompson certainly does hold that they are *a priori*; Foot explicitly endorses Thompson's notion of a life-form and his treatment of the notion in (Thompson, 1995) but never explicitly accepts that life-form concepts are *a priori*; Hursthouse and Lawrence are silent on the issue of *a prioricity*. Both Lawrence and Foot claim that without appeal to a life-form concept, we could not identify something as a living thing, a claim which suggests—and which Thompson takes himself to show—that life-form concepts are *a priori*.

[47] Neo-Aristotelians—e.g., Thompson, Lawrence, Foot, Hursthouse—are dodgy on the issue of the metaphysical status of life-forms; I add *quasi* to accommodate their dodginess.

cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. Rather, *life* is an *a priori* concept and what makes a region of space-time a living thing is that it can be stamped with this concept.

In the second move, Thompson argues that what makes a region of space-time a living thing is our ability to stamp a life-form concept onto that region of space-time. This is the claim of Species-metaphysical, as I named it in Chapter 1. Life-form concepts are thus *a priori* and refer to life-forms, which are quasi-metaphysical or metaphysical things that he claims living things bear.

I will present a criticism of Thompson's second move. The criticism will suggest that Thompson's first move is questionable, that it might be possible to give life a metaphysical analysis.

In his second move, Thompson argues that (1) what makes it so that a region of space-time is a living thing is our ability to stamp a life-form concept onto that region of space-time (this is the claim of Species-metaphysical, as I named it in Chapter 1) and therefore (2) life-form concepts refer to life-forms (which exist). I will grant Thompson that (2) follows from Species-metaphysical. What I will do is criticize his argument for Species-metaphysical.

Let me summarize Thompson's argument for Species-metaphysical and then summarize how I will criticize it. Species-metaphysical, according to Thompson, follows from two premises. The first premise is that if some region of space-time is a living thing, then it must have features of a living thing. I will call this claim LifeImpliesFeature. One might press Thompson for further specification of this claim: Must it have only one feature of a living thing or must it have some set of features that are all necessary for the

region of space-time to be alive? I will set this question aside, as my criticism of Thompson's case for Species-metaphysical does not require further specification of LifeImpliesFeature. The second premise is that what determines that a region of space-time has features of a living thing is—not the individual, metaphysical nature of that region of space-time, but rather—a life-form concept that we can stamp onto it. I will call this claim LifeformMakesFeature. The structure of Thompson's argument seems to be a deductive one and henceforth I will treat it as such:

P1: If some region of space-time is a living thing, then it must have features of a living thing (LifeImpliesFeature)

P2: What determines that a region of space-time has features of a living thing is a life-form concept that we can stamp onto it (LifeformMakesFeature)

C: What determines that a region of space-time is a living thing is that we can stamp a life-form concept onto it (Species-metaphysical)[48]

I will present three criticisms of the above argument: (1) Thompson's case for P2 fails, leaving P2 in need of justification, *and* P2 is false; (2) even if P2 were true, the argument is invalid anyway, i.e., C does not follow from P1 and P2; and (3) C is false. I will present these criticisms in the order just stated.

[48] I cast Thompson's argument as a deductive one because it seems to have the structure of a deductive argument and because casting it as a deductive argument and criticizing it as a deductive argument will clarify the argument and what is wrong with it, respectively. It is important to note, however, that the merits of my criticism do not depend on whether one (including Thompson) takes the argument to be deductive. One might alternatively claim that the LifeformMakesFeature and LifeImpliesFeature are reasons to support Species-metaphysical, without claiming that the relation between the reasons and the conclusion as a deductive one.

Thompson's case for LifeformMakesFeature fails and LifeformMakesFeature is false

Thompson's case for the claim that what determines that a region of space-time has features of a living thing is a life-form concept that we can stamp onto it (LifeformMakesFeature), to summarize what I covered in Chapter 1, consists in presenting five examples which he takes to illustrate the claim. I named the examples Shark, Mitosis, Plants, Human Cells, and Swamp-Thompson. In what follows, I will assume the reader is familiar with the examples (presented in Chapter 1) and assess whether they establish the claim. My conclusion is that none of the examples do.

Let me first consider Shark and Mitosis. I will grant Thompson the claim that in Shark we need to appeal to the different life-forms of the two sharks in order to know what features each has and the claim that in Mitosis we need to appeal to the different life-forms of the human being and of the amoeba in order to know what mitosis amounts to in a given human being and a given amoeba. I will grant Thompson the generalized claim that in order to know what features a living thing has, we need to appeal to its life-form. This claim is an epistemic claim. Granting this *epistemic* claim, Thompson has not established the *metaphysical* claim that what *determines* that in one shark the elimination of wastes is going on and in the other self-defense is going on or that what determines that in an amoeba reproduction is going on and that in a human being self-maintenance is going on, is life-forms. Generalizing, Thompson has not established the metaphysical claim that what *determines* a region of space-time to have some feature of a living thing is a life-form, i.e., Thompson has not established the metaphysical claim of

LifeformMakesFeature. The metaphysical claim does not follow from the epistemic claim. This is the problem with Thompson's case for LifeformMakesFeature.

One might claim that, supposing that I am correct that Thompson's case for the metaphysical claim consists in an inference from the epistemic claim and that the former does not follow from the latter, that it is best to re-do his case to make it as strong as possible.[49] In reply to this suggestion, I do not know how this would be done. Thompson simply has no other case for the metaphysical claim apart from the epistemic claim.

I suppose one might re-do the case as a bare assertion of the metaphysical claim, but I take it that this would be an even weaker case, for, setting aside that Thompson's case for LifeformMakesFeature fails, LifeformMakesFeature should not even be taken as the initial and intuitive view of what determines a region of space-time to have some feature of a living thing. For there is an alternative and more intuitively and initially plausible view: What determines a region of space-time to have some feature of a living thing is whatever determines a region of space-time to have any other feature of any other object, e.g., the keys of a keyboard.[50] Whatever assumptions underlie our ordinary grasp of objects and attributions of features to them—e.g., assumptions about ontology, the nature of objects, mereology—are plausibly taken as the initial and intuitive view of what determines a region of space-time to have some feature of a living thing, and as justifying the following very ordinary thoughts: That the nourishing shark is nourishing is

[49] Gavin Lawrence brought this suggestion to my attention.

[50] Actually, I think this view is false, but my thinking so is irrelevant to the purpose for which I employ the view here, viz., to put on a table a view that is more initially and intuitively plausible.

determined by facts such as that its stomach is digesting the fish it swallowed and sending nutrients throughout its body, which aid its cells in performing various activities. That the self-defending shark is self-defending is determined by facts such as that it does not extract nutrients from the fish it swallows but rather forms a substance that frightens away predators. That mitosis in an amoeba constitutes reproduction is determined by facts such as that mitosis will result in a new amoeba. That mitosis in a human being constitutes self-maintenance is determined by facts such as that mitosis does not produce a new human being and that mitosis results in new cells that perform activities that maintain the human being and that the older cells die off.

Now let me consider Plants. I will grant Thompson that the fact that two plants with the exact same DNA have different features—e.g., "one is compact and creeping and one I tall and upright" (Thompson, 2008, p. 56)—shows that the DNA of a living thing does not wholly determine what features it has. Nevertheless, Plant does not establish LifeformMakesFeature because the sense of *determines* it refers to is not the one relevant for supporting LifeformMakesFeature. What *determines* means in Plants is *causes*: Plants shows that DNA cannot be the sole *cause* of what features a living thing has. The relevant sense of *determines*, however, is that of what makes it so, i.e., what makes it true, that a chunk of matter in a living thing corresponds to some feature, e.g., being compact. Plants does not address this issue; so, it does not support the answer of LifeformMakesFeature to this issue. One might suspect that I am misunderstanding Thompson's use of *determines* here—that in fact Thompson uses it in the latter sense rather than the former sense—and perhaps one reasonably so suspects, given that the

latter sense is the relevant one and the reasonable presumption that Thompson would be discussing the relevant one[51]; to this suspicion I would simply reiterate that Thompson here uses *determines* in the former sense.

Now let me consider the final two examples, Human Cells and Swamp-Thompson. The one-celled vegetative creatures and the human cells are "as alike as you like."(Thompson, 2008, p. 55) Yet the division of the former counts as reproduction while the division of the latter does not. What determines these two facts, according to Thompson, cannot be their individual, metaphysical natures because their individual, metaphysical natures are stipulated to be identical. What determines these two facts, rather, is the (different) life-forms that each thing bears. The human cells bear the life-form of the Human and the one-celled vegetative creatures bear a different life-form.[52] Considering now Swamp-Thompson, Thompson claims that Swamp-Thompson does not have features of a living thing: "the thing has no ears to hear with and no head to turn [*etc*.]" (Thompson, 2008, p. 60)

To Human Cells and Swamp-Thompson, I have two replies. My first reply will consist in articulating intuitions about these two examples that conflict with and are at least as plausible as Thompson's intuitions. My second reply will consist in appealing to other intuitions to defending the intuitions that I will have just articulated. Both replies support both the claim that Thompson's case for LifeformMakesFeature fails and the

[51] Gavin Lawrence brought this suspicion to my attention.

[52] I will note that Thompson claims that the human cells bear that life-form of the Human and yet are not individual living things and that this claim seems to be in tension with his claim that bearing a life-form determines something to be a living thing.

claim that LifeformMakesFeature is false. Beginning with the first reply, following are intuitions I have about the two examples. If the "one-celled vegetative creatures" are really metaphysically identical—and here I will grant and follow on behalf of Thompson any conception of what it is to be metaphysically identical (I imagine Thompson would offer something on the order of "identical as regards chemistry and physics")—to the human cells in the vat, then I claim that either both the creatures and the cells are engaged in reproduction or neither is. If Swamp-Thompson is really metaphysically identical to Thompson, then I claim that either both have ears, a head[53], *etc*., or neither does. If the one-celled vegetative creatures are reproducing and the human cells are not, then I claim that there must be some metaphysical difference between the one-celled vegetative creatures and the human cells that determines this difference. If Thompson has ears and Swamp-Thompson does not, then I claim that there must be some metaphysical difference between the two that determines this difference. Without giving any defense of my intuitions, I take my intuitions to be immediately *at least* as plausible as—if not (much) more plausible than—Thompson's conflicting intuitions. My intuitions support the claim that it is not the fact that a mind is able to stamp a life-form concept onto that region of space-time that determines it to have features of a living thing.

[53] Gavin Lawrence suggested to me that it would make no sense to say that Swamp-Thompson's head could be misshapen while it would make sense to say that Thompson's head could be. However, even supposing this is true, it would not undercut, or at least not by much, the plausibility of the intuition that Swamp-Thompson has a head. Lawrence also, if I understand him correctly, has asked the question "What makes it so that Swamp-Thompson's head refers to what is there above the neck as opposed say to above the eyes?" I would answer: Whatever it is that makes it so that Thompson's head refers to what is there above the neck. The SBNN theorist would claim, "And that thing is a life-form," which is a claim that I am in process of criticizing.

Now I will support my intuitions about Human Cells and Swamp-Thompson by appealing to intuitions about the living things that existed before there were any minds. Before there existed any minds—*a fortiori*, before there existed any minds able to stamp life-form concepts onto regions of space-time—living things existed for billions of years. Considering all the living things that existed prior to the existence of the first mind that was able to stamp a life-form concept onto a region of space-time, what determined that these living things had features of living things? Was it really, as Thompson would have to maintain, that what determined them to have features was that eventually—billions of years later—there would be living things with minds that could stamp life-form concepts onto them? So, considering the first single-celled organism that came into existence on earth from inanimate matter, what made it true that it was nourishing itself was that billions of years later, a living organism with a mind would come into existence that would stamp this single-celled organism with a life-form concept? I submit that this proposal is implausible. (Thompson might reply by denying that living things existed before there were minds able to stamp life-form concepts onto them; my reply is that this reply is implausible.)[54] A more intuitive answer to the question "What made it so that that

[54] Gavin Lawrence, if I understand correctly, has suggested that my discussion of the issue of what made it so that living things existed prior to human beings is irrelevant. In proffered support of this suggestion, he claims (and I agree) that things were going on in the world prior to the existence of human beings and would have gone on even if there would never be human beings. The relevance of my discussion is that it points out an implausible implication of Thompson's case for the existence of life-forms, viz., that it entails an implausible answer to what made it so that living things existed before human beings.

single-celled organism was nourishing itself?" is: Whatever made it so that there were rocks and galaxies before there were human beings.[55]

I have argued that Thompson's case for LifeformMakesFeature fails. None of the examples he takes to support LifeformMakesFeature support the claim. I have also argued that LifeformMakesFeature is false: the alternative position on the issue of what determines a region of space-time to have a feature of a living thing is more intuitively plausible.

Species-metaphysical does not follow from LifeImpliesFeature and LifeformMakesFeature

The claim that what makes something a living thing is that it bears a life-form (Species-metaphysical), according to Thompson, follows from the claim that if something is a living thing, then it must have features of a living thing (LifeImpliesFeature) and the claim that what determines a region of space-time to have features of a living thing is a life-form (LifeformMakesfeature).

The preceding argument, however, is invalid. Even if a life-form determines that an object has features of a living thing, it does not follow that a life-form determines that an object is a living thing, unless *what makes something a living thing is that it has features of a living thing*. It is this latter claim that Thompson needs as a premise of his argument (instead of the claim that if something is a living thing, then it must have features of a living thing, i.e., LifeImpliesFeature). Call the claim that what makes

[55] Actually, I think this view is false, but my thinking so is irrelevant to the purpose for which I employ the view here, viz., to put on the table a view that is more initially and intuitively plausible.

something a living thing is that it has features of a living thing, FeatureMakesLife. Mrs. Muff may be a living thing and she may have features of a living thing, e.g., eyes, ears, etc., but is the possession of such features *what makes her* a living thing? Thompson would need to defend the answer "Yes." In the next subsection, I defend the answer "No."

Species-metaphysical is false

Thompson's argument for the claim that what makes something a living thing is that it bears a life-form (Species-metaphysical), I argued above, to make it valid, rests on the premise that what makes something a living thing is that it has features of a living thing (FeatureMakesLife). I will argue that FeatureMakesLife is false[56], which argument will lead to my arguing that Species-metaphysical is false.

The reason FeatureMakesLife is false is that a region of space-time can have features of a living thing and not be a living thing.[57] Suppose we grab Mrs. Muff, a living thing, from her forest, take her back to a lab, dissect her features—eyes, nose, mouth, ears, neck, *etc*.[58]—spread them out over a table, and then glue them back together. The resulting object, named Glued Muff, has features of a living thing—eyes, nose, *etc*.—and yet is not a living thing. Therefore, FeatureMakesLife is false.

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[56] I would like to note that regardless of the merits of my case for the falsity of FeatureMakesLife, the claim still needs a defense. So even if my case against it fails, it does not follow that FeatureMakesLife is true.

[57] Here I follow Thompson's—I take it colloquial—understanding of the notion of features of a living thing; one might press a defender of Thompson's case for life-forms for further clarification of this notion, but I will grant a colloquial understanding on behalf of the defender.

[58] It is not important how her features are individuated.

The immediate objection to my argument would be that Glued Muff does not really have features of a living thing, and so I have not demonstrated a case in which a region of space-time has features of a living thing but is not a living thing, and so I have not falsified FeatureMakesLife. I will address this objection momentarily; for now I will assume my argument succeeds and proceed to rehearse what in my view *does* determine a region of space-time to be a living thing in a way that strengthens confidence in my falsification of FeatureMakesLife. Doing this will put me in position then to address the objection.

Why exactly is Mrs. Muff a living thing and yet Glued Muff is not a living thing, even though both have features of a living thing? A plausible answer is that Mrs. Muff's features are integrated with each other in some holistic way as to yield that Mrs. Muff is alive. Glued Muff's features are not so integrated, which is why she (or it) is not a living thing; more precisely, there is no living thing in the matter out there. "What is the nature of this integration?" is a big question that might be pursued and that is not necessary to answer here. (I offered an answer in Chapter 1, viz., the process of self-sustenance that underlies the determinate form of a living thing.) The material point here is that we grasp that there is some kind of integration among the features that makes Mrs. Muff alive.

Having identified what must be true about the features of a region of space-time to be a living thing, the having of features of a living thing drops out of the explanation of what makes a region of space-time a living thing as irrelevant. By direct implication, then, what determines a region of space-time to be a living thing is not a life-form, i.e.,

not the thing that is offered as determining that a region of space-time has features of a living thing; Species-metaphysical is false.

Now let me address the objection I raised earlier, viz., that Glued Muff does not really have features of a living thing. My reply to this objection is that granting the claim that Glued Muff does not have features of a living thing, what the example of Glued Muff shows is that what makes Mrs. Muff alive and Glued Muff not alive is—*not* that the former has features of a living thing and the latter does not, but rather—that the former exhibits the relevant kind of integration while the latter does not. It is the *integration* of the features, then, that makes the features, features *of a living thing*.

Conclusion

My first criticism of SBNN showed that the project of defending the existence of life-forms is unmotivated. The motivation that neo-Aristotelians have for defending the existence of life-forms is to defend SBNN, viz., the claim that the good of a living thing is the instantiation of its life-form. As I established in my first criticism of SBNN, however, the good of a living thing is not the instantiation of its life-form.

My second criticism of SBNN showed that belief in the existence of life-forms is unjustified.[59] It does not show that there are no life-forms, but rather that it has not been shown that such things exist; just as it has not been shown that, say, invisible butterflies exist. To be very clear, my second criticism claims nothing about the empirical concept of *species* that is used in biology and ordinary conversation or about the meaning or

[59] "What is it for a life-form to exist?" is a question that Thompson skirts and on behalf of his case for the existence of life-forms I did not take issue with a lack of an answer. (Gavin Lawrence brought the question to my attention.)

legitimacy of sentences of the sort “The rabbit has four legs” when not taken to imply the existence of life-forms. The concept of an *a priori* metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical life-form is different from the empirical concept of a species.

Chapter 3: Survival is the Ultimate End

Introduction

According to Aristotle and several neo-Aristotelians, every living thing has an ultimate end—or a good, a *telos*—that is normative for it to realize. Aristotle and different neo-Aristotelians may differ on the finer details of the ultimate end, but they are all agreed on one fundamental tenet about it: The ultimate end of a living thing consists in the instantiation of its *species* (which neo-Aristotelians also call a natural kind or life-form).[60] The ultimate end of, say, an oak tree, a rabbit and a human being, according to this species-based view of the ultimate end, depends on the nature of the species to which these living things belong. An oak tree's ultimate end includes developing deep and sturdy roots, a rabbit's ultimate end includes developing four legs and eating grass, and a human being's ultimate end—as Aristotelians and neo-Aristotelians argue—includes the development and exercise of rationality and other virtues.

In this paper, I develop an alternative view of the ultimate end of a living thing: The ultimate end of a living thing is to survive and only to survive; and to survive, not as a member of its species, but as a living thing (what this means will be explained in depth).

[60] This view is expressed in Aristotle's Function Argument (Nichomachean Ethics, Book 1). For expressions in the neo-Aristotelian literature, see Anscombe (1958), Part One of Thompson (2008), Foot (2001), 2001; Part Three of Hursthouse (1999), (Lawrence, 2006). It is also arguably the view of Rand (1961, pp. 16-27): She held that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive—in this respect the view I develop in this paper aligns with hers—but she, like Foot and Hursthouse, also seemed to understand survival as survival *as a member of one's kind* (a view from which I depart in this paper).

I develop my view in four Sections. In the first Section, "Criticism of the Species View," I briefly identify what I think is most problematic about the aforementioned species-based view of the ultimate end of a living thing, so as to motivate and set the stage for the development of my positive view: The problem is that it holds that the ultimate end of a living thing has a *determinate form* in terms of activities and parts of the sort we ordinarily ascribe to living things, e.g., breathing, photosynthesizing, lungs, leaves. The ultimate end, I argue, has no determinate form of this sort.

In the second Section, "Other-regarding Behavior is Not Normative for a Living Thing," I argue that other-regarding behavior is not normative for a living thing. By other-regarding behavior, I mean tokens of helping other living things and reproducing that are not tokens of promoting individual survival. I present why we take survival, understood colloquially in this Section, to be normative for living things and to be the most paradigmatic normative end for a living thing; and I argue that the position that other-regarding behavior is also normative expresses a methodology for investigating normativity in living things that is implausible, on grounds of being so contrary to how we think about the normativity of survival.

In the third Section, "Survival is the Ultimate End of a Living Thing," I elucidate a new and what I take to be correcting understanding of the nature of survival, viz., that it refers to the process of self-sustenance that underlies any determinate form that a living thing might have at any given time. Survival does not mean bare subsistence or sub-optimal living, as opposed to "flourishing," but rather the process of self-sustenance that underlies all determinate forms of a living thing, including determinate forms that some

would classify under "bare subsistence" or "sub-optimal living" as well as under "flourishing."[61]

In the fourth Section, turning to discuss *human* living things, I programmatically elaborate on what implications my view that survival is the ultimate end of a human being (as of any living thing) has on inquiry into human well-being and into morality (for human beings): I develop the idea that these inquiries are aspects of inquiry into human survival.

Criticism of the Species View

Neo-Aristotelians have offered different accounts of the normative ends of a living thing. Foot holds that there are three normative ends for every living thing: development, self-maintenance, and reproduction. (Foot, 2001, Chapter 2) Hursthouse holds that there are four possible normative ends—survival, continuation of the species, pleasure and enjoyment and freedom from pain, and the good functioning of the social group—and that which of these ends are normative for a given living thing is determined by the complexity of the species to which that living thing belongs. (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 197-205) I will use the term *flourishing* to refer to a living thing's successful realization of its ultimate end, whatever the normative ends precisely are (with the

[61] The notion of the survival of a living thing when the living thing is considered as a member of a certain kind—e.g., the survival *of a rabbit* (or rabbit survival), the survival of *a human being* (or human survival)—I will argue refers to a determinate conception of survival for a group of similar living things, a conception that can serve as a rough, practical guide for benefactors to help those living things survive and/or, for those living things that have the power of choice and during the time periods in which they have this power, guiding those living things in their pursuit of survival.

assumption that the ends are roughly like the ones that are specified in the aforementioned, prevailing accounts of the normative ends of a living thing).

Let's assume that living things do have natural and normative ends (or at least one) and that truth about them can be found in prevailing views of what the ends are. I will later examine several of the ends that are proposed as normative, arguing that some are not normative and that others are, and that the ones that are, are actually aspects of the single ultimate end of survival. Before doing so, however, I want to challenge a view about the ultimate end of a living thing that is implicit in and fundamentally shapes the preceding views.

The view is that flourishing must take a certain determinate form, a form that is associated with the species to which the living thing belongs; a form in terms of having certain parts and engaging in certain activities (with detailed specifications of these parts and activities) and by implication not having other parts and not engaging in other activities. Whatever are the ends of a living thing and however they are more precisely understood by prevailing accounts of the ultimate end of a living thing, they all share the feature that flourishing is flourishing *as a member of one's species*. Flourishing for a rabbit, for example, involves developing four legs and eating grass; flourishing for an oak tree involves growing deep and sturdy roots. I will call these norms that specify what it is for a living thing to flourish as a member of its species—e.g., the rabbit has four legs, etc.—*species norms*.

I would like to present two major problems with the species-based view of flourishing. The first is that a living thing can flourish in ways that violate its species

norms. The second, which will emerge upon due consideration of the first problem, is that appeal to species norms does not *explain* the flourishing of a living thing: Actually, as I will argue, our constructions of species norms *presuppose* identifications of flourishing of a living thing. They do not offer any illumination into what counts as flourishing.

The first problem can be readily appreciated by considering indefinitely many and easily conceived examples in which a living thing, realistically or theoretically, might flourish in ways that violate its species norms.[62] Mrs. Muff, a rabbit, might grow a fifth leg, or a pair of wings, or develop some novel form of nourishing herself, all of which changes would violate her species norms. Whether any of these changes are realistically possible is irrelevant here. The point is that these species norm-violating changes, supposing they were to happen to Mrs. Muff, would constitute promotions of Mrs. Muff's flourishing, or at least would, if suitably supplemented with further details, e.g., the wings enable Mrs. Muff to fly and find food more quickly. The flourishing of a rabbit, according to the species-based view, consists in having four legs, not five, in having no wings, in eating grass, and not in developing a novel form of nourishing herself.

One might reply that counterexamples to the species-based view, especially unrealistic ones, pose at best a minor problem for the account, since it remains true that most real life cases of flourishing of a living thing conform to species norms. One might furthermore reply that counterexamples can be nullified in various ways: If a living thing undergoes a flourishing-promoting change that violates its purported species norms,

[62] This point has been alluded to by Copp and Sobel (2004, p. 539).

perhaps the species norms need to be revised (perhaps now we will say that flourishing for a rabbit involves nourishing itself in way X), or perhaps the living thing should be reclassified under a different and perhaps new species (according to the norms of which flourishing for members of this species involves nourishing in way X).[63]

These replies, however, illustrate the second problem for the species-based account: They illustrate that our species norms are a *product* of *independent* observations of *flourishing* of living things.[64] (So, *of course* most real life cases of flourishing of a living thing conform to species norms, since we construct species norms so that they fit these cases.) We note, say, that Mrs. Muff has developed wings, that the wings promote her flourishing, and that her wings violate her species norms. These observations lead us to wonder whether this flourishing-promoting change is happening to other rabbits and whether we should revise the species norms of rabbits or whether perhaps we should construct a new species. The *explanation* for what makes Mrs. Muff's wings a flourishing-promoting change to her is not that they conform to species norms; and species norms do not contribute to our understanding of the flourishing of a living thing.

[63] One might also suggest that perhaps there is no species under which the living thing can be classified at this time (perhaps there is process of evolution that is going on in many members of a certain species, a process that will eventually yield a new species; we will wait and see), but this suggestion poses a problem for the species-based view: If Mrs. Muff has no species, then no species norms are applicable to her, which means that her flourishing cannot be explained by appeal to species norms.

[64] An objection that might be raised and further developed against this claim is that (a) it is not possible to identify flourishing in a living thing independently of species norms because (b) it is not possible to describe an individual living thing without appealing to such norms. (b) has been elaborated by Thompson (1995); a later version of this essay constitutes Part One of Thompson (2008). (b) has also been endorsed by Foot (2001, pp. 28-29) and Lawrence (2005, pp. 139-140). I do not have space here to develop or address this objection at length, but I can offer a simple response to it: The fact that we can straightforwardly grasp the counterexamples suggests that the objection fails.

Counterexamples show that the flourishing of a living thing is not limited to any determinate form of the sort exemplified in species norms, e.g., having certain parts (legs) and not others (wings), engaging in certain activities (running) and not others (flying). They also show that there is no such theoretical state as the "highest good" (or highest point or level) that a living thing's flourishing can attain. It be might be thought, mistakenly, that there is such a state. For example, some might claim that the "highest good" of an acorn is to become a "fully developed" oak tree. Such claims, however, are just claims about what is realistically possible for acorns. The notion of the highest good for a living thing—and related notions such as the notion of a living thing's living well, optimally, or excellently; of its having a high or the highest possible level of flourishing; of its life's going well or optimally—are evaluations of a living thing according to what is realistically possible for members of its species, i.e., to species norms. Setting aside what is realistic, the purportedly "fully developed" oak tree could theoretically always flourish more, e.g., the growth of new parts, including weird parts that violate the inherently species-based notion of the "highest good" of a living thing. Our "fully developed" Mrs. Muff, to consider a second example, might develop thousands of legs, wings and all sorts of novel forms of activity (and, notably, might several times throughout the course of her life be re-classified under different species or under no species at all).

The point that there is no theoretically optimal state for a living thing also supports the claim that it is never normative for a living thing to deteriorate or die.[65] Though some may regard this claim as obvious, others might deny it, claiming that it is normative for a living thing to grow, reach its optimal state, and then begin deteriorating towards death. (One can imagine an advocate of the species-based view's claiming that if a rabbit has reached its optimal state and then does not begin deteriorating as it should, it is defective.) In criticism of the idea that deterioration and death are normative for a living thing, however, given that there is no theoretically optimal state, there is no theoretical basis for the claim that at a certain point it is normative for a living thing to deteriorate and die. If Mrs. Muff can find a way to keep growing and to live forever, then good for her (more precisely, normative for her).[66] Furthermore, even *if* there were a theoretically optimal state—and in entertaining this supposition we are in *really* thin air because there is no sense to the notion of a theoretically optimal state for a living thing; not even a vague, intuitive sense—it would still be implausible to suppose that thereafter it is normative for a living thing to deteriorate towards death. The reason is that natural normativity, i.e., having an ultimate end, pertains to being a *living* thing, i.e., *alive*.

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[65] Set aside here cases in which behavior other than deterioration and death that is regarded as normative might nevertheless entail deterioration and death, e.g., a living thing gets hurt or even dies in an act of reproduction or helping another living thing (an act that is presumed normative). In these cases, it's the behavior at issue that is regarded as normative, e.g., reproduction, not that the reproduction *per se* results in the deterioration or death of the living thing.

[66] One might claim that Mrs. Muff should not grow too much because doing so might come at the expense of other rabbits or other living things, e.g., drain their resources, take up too much space in the universe. Let us set this claim aside; even supposing it is normative for Mrs. Muff to limit her growth for the sake of the growth of other rabbits or other living things, there would still be a question of what is normative for Mrs. Muff if there were no such conflict and it would seem that this is the more fundamental question of what the ultimate end of a living thing is.

Claiming that it is normative for a living thing to move toward inanimacy, i.e., death, entails claiming, implausibly, that it is normative for a living thing to defy the very source of normativity.

I take myself to have shown that, whatever are the normative ends of a living thing, they need not take a determinate form of the sort inherent in species norms; and that neither deterioration nor death are ever normative for a living thing. Now, what are the normative ends of a living thing? I will argue in the next Section that other-regarding behavior is not normative for a living thing; rather, only survival is. In the subsequent Section, I will elucidate the nature of survival.

Other-regarding Behavior is Not Normative for a Living Thing

I will call the view that at least one end other than survival is normative for living things—such as helping other living things, reproducing, or relating in a certain way(s) to inanimate phenomena—OtherRegarding.[67] I will argue against OtherRegarding in three steps. First, I present a dialectic between the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist—the two mainstream candidates that uphold OtherRegarding—as a way of showing problems for both views, problems which I hope convince the reader that OtherRegarding should be seriously questioned.

Second, I argue that even if we set aside the problems that face the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist—by the lights of the methodology with which the neo-

[67] More precisely, I refer here to instances of helping, reproduction and relating that are not instances of promoting the individual survival of the living thing. If Mrs. Muff's benefiting the bacteria in her gut is understood as promoting her own survival (the bacteria aids her digestion), then her benefiting the bacteria would not count as an instance of helping other living things.

Aristotelian and ecologist generally operate, a methodology which upholds making normative inferences from observable patterns among living things and the inanimate environment—the view that the ultimate end is only to survive is at least as plausible, if not much more plausible, than either of these competing views.

Third, I argue that facts outside a living thing are irrelevant to its ultimate end. Attraction to OtherRegarding, whether a given advocate of the view leans neo-Aristotelian or ecologist, stems from (plausibly) inferring normativity from robust and old (billions of years old) patterns of living things' helping other living things and reproducing, and being functionally equipped, i.e., well-suited, to do so. However and as I will argue, facts outside a living thing, and thus any patterns that might exist among such facts, are irrelevant to what the ultimate end of a living thing is.

1. Problems for the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist

The usual neo-Aristotelian will claim that it is normative for living things to reproduce members of their species and to help other members of their species in characteristic ways, e.g., it is normative for Mrs. Muff to have between such-and-such number of children and such-and-such number of children, and for her to care for them in such-and-such ways and for such-and-such period of time.

Now, however, the ecologist enters and claims that the ultimate end of a living thing includes other-regarding behavior with respect to phenomena other than members of its species.[68] Many ecologists would point out all the symbiotic patterns among living

[68] There is a view here that has some currency and is different from the neo-Aristotelian and the Ecologist. I mentioned it as an aside: Many biologists will be less concerned living things' helping of other members of

things of different species and claim that it is part of the ultimate end of a living thing to help members of other species as well. The would also claim that patterns within and across species are parts of larger ecosystems, which constitute webs of interrelationships among living things, and that the ultimate end of a living thing includes playing a certain role in its ecosystem, e.g., the tropical rain forest or the desert in which it resides. Some ecologists would even claim that the inanimate matter of these ecosystems—e.g., soil, sand, dirt, water, rocks, mountains—have intrinsic value, and that the ultimate end of a living thing includes serving not only patterns among the other living things in its ecosystem, but also patterns among the inanimate phenomena of the ecosystem. Some ecologists would even claim that Mother Earth herself is one giant ecosystem that comprises all other ecosystems and that part of a living thing's ultimate end is to play its role in serving Mother Earth.

Which of the two views—the neo-Aristotelian's or the ecologist's—if either, is true and how do we know this?

The neo-Aristotelian might defend her view against the ecologist in four ways. First, she might argue that *species* is normatively special. What a living thing *is*—in a metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical sense of *is*—is a bearer of a species, which contains norms for the living thing, norms the conformity to which manifests *intrinsic* goodness in the living thing.[69] This is why norms for other-regarding behavior within species—e.g.,

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their species and more with reproduction, and tend to view reproduction as primarily for the sake of passing on their genes (as opposed to the neo-Aristotelian, who regards reproduction as part of species norms).

[69] Michael Thompson develops this argument in Part One of Thompson (2008).

Mrs. Muff has children, Mrs. Muff tends to her children—are justified and any other proffered norms—e.g., ones that pertain to symbiotic relationships, ecosystems, or Mother Earth—are not.

Second, she might argue that the notion of intrinsic value to which the ecologist appeals is questionable. The ecologist claims that living things, species, ecosystems and possibly inanimate phenomena are intrinsically valuable and on the basis of this claim holds that it is part of a living thing's ultimate end to serve these things in various ways. However, the neo-Aristotelian might question whether the notion of intrinsic value has any sense. She might argue that only the notion of being good or valuable *for* a living thing has sense; the notion of being valuable in itself does not.[70]

Additional support for skepticism about intrinsic values, the neo-Aristotelian might claim, stems from the fact that it is a matter of arbitrary speculation how one would know what phenomena have intrinsic value and what role a given living thing has in service to these intrinsic values. How do you even precisely isolate and define the things that according to you may have intrinsic value (such as symbiotic relationships, ecosystems and inanimate phenomena)? How do you know what things have intrinsic value? How do you know what role a particular living thing has in regard to these purportedly intrinsic values? What justifies an ecological perspective on a living thing? These questions seem insurmountable and they throw doubt on the very existence of intrinsic values.

[70] See, for example, Kraut (2007, 2011).

Third, the neo-Aristotelian might argue that, even supposing there are intrinsic values, they are beside the point of an investigation into natural normativity, i.e., the ultimate end of a living thing. The neo-Aristotelian might claim that she is not claiming that species have intrinsic value. Rather, she is claiming that a living thing is a bearer of a species, and in virtue of this, its ultimate end is to instantiate its species. Its instantiating its species does not have intrinsic value; it simply is the ultimate end of the living thing. The notion of intrinsic value then is beside the point of an investigation into the ultimate end of a living thing. It is normative for Mrs. Muff to tend to her children, not because her children have intrinsic value, but because "rabbits tend to their children in such-and-such ways" is a norm for rabbits.

Fourth, the neo-Aristotelian might claim that the ecologist's view is biased: It is motivated by a moral vision for human beings to which the view lends support (whether in the form of actual grounding or as a source of rhetorically powerful analogies). One who has a moral vision of human beings' serving Mother Earth in various ways will be attracted to a view of the ultimate end of a living thing according to which its ultimate end includes serving Mother Earth.

Let us consider how the ecologist might reply to the neo-Aristotelian's four arguments. Regarding the neo-Aristotelian's case for the normatively special status of species, the ecologist might criticize it in two ways.[71] First, neo-Aristotelians tend to

[71] The following criticism is not one that appeals to any view that is distinctive to the ecologist. I am simply framing the criticism as one that the ecologist might raise against the neo-Aristotelian in their debate about the ultimate end of a living thing.

avoid or skirt the issue of the metaphysical status of species[72], which is an issue they should not avoid or skirt if they are seriously claiming that living things are—in some special sense of *are*—bearers of their species.[73] Second, the argument that neo-Aristotelians offer to defend the normativity of species norms is also available to the ecologist: Neo-Aristotelians argue that we have certain thoughts, e.g., "The rabbit has four legs," that are not empirical claims, which suggests that they are normative claims.[74] The ecologist can likewise argue that the thoughts "The rabbit aids the bacteria in her gut" likewise are not empirical, which suggests that they are normative. Mrs. Muff can be thought of as a bearer of an ecosystem just as plausibly as she can be thought of as a bearer of a species.

In regard to the charge that it seems to be a matter of arbitrary speculation what has intrinsic value and what role a given living thing has in serve to intrinsic values, the ecologist might offer two replies. First, she might appeal to thought experiments, e.g., would not the universe seem less valuable if all the beautiful mountains on Earth disappeared? Does it just not seem that it is normative for Mrs. Muff to aid the bacteria in her gut and to contribute to the maintenance of the forest in which she resides? Second, she might claim that a similar charge can be pressed against the neo-Aristotelian: How do you know what same-species other-regarding behavior a living thing should enact? How

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[72] Thompson (2008, p. 62), for example, raises and explicitly dismisses the issue of what exactly are the purported life-forms that he claims to exist.

[73] Lawrence (2006, p. 58) articulates this objection, though he is not sympathetic to it.

[74] This is the essence of the argument that Thompson (2008, Chapter 4) makes for the normativity of species norms; Foot (2001, pp. 28-29) endorses the argument.

do you know how many children a rabbit should have and how many years a rabbit should tend to her children and in what precise ways she should do so? These questions press you, the neo-Aristotelian, just as similar ones press me (the ecologist), e.g., how do I know what symbiotic relationships Mrs. Muff should engage in and what role she has to play in her ecosystem?

In reply to the second reply, the neo-Aristotelian might argue that species-same empirical patterns are generally much more robust than ecosystem-based empirical patterns. The latter seem more subjective and arbitrary. The ecologist might reply to this that even if this is true, there are still pretty robust patterns (and even more robust patterns for symbiotic relationships, e.g., Mrs. Muff aids the bacteria in her gut).

More importantly, the ecologist might reply that the neo-Aristotelian, by the lights of her own views, is not allowed to appeal to empirical reality. Species norms, according to neo-Aristotelians, are *a priori*; they do not depend on empirical facts. (Thompson, 2008, Chapter 4)

The neo-Aristotelian might reply that although species norms are *a priori*, they can and do arise *with* experience even if not *from* experience. (Thompson, 2004)

The ecologist might reply that this distinction is highly suspicious and seems like a jerry-rigged attempt to make species norms *a priori* while at the same time have it be that the particular norms that we purportedly intuit by *a priori* means just happen to coincide with the norms that we would have constructed and seem to construct through empirical observation.

Now, regarding the neo-Aristotelian's charge that even supposing there are intrinsic values, they are beside the point to natural normativity, here the ecologist and the neo-Aristotelian might be at a stalemate as regards fundamental commitments. The ecologist will claim that if, say, an ecosystem has intrinsic value, this has or at least may have implications on what it is normative for a given living thing to do; the neo-Aristotelian will disagree and also might raise again the issue of how the ecologist knows what these purported implications are (taking us back to the dialectic between the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist about how to know what are the norms for a living thing).

In reply to the charge of moral bias, the ecologist might reply that the neo-Aristotelian also has this bias. One who has a moral vision of human beings' living the sort of life advocated by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics—something like the pursuit of one's happiness, where one's happiness includes caring for close ones and the development and exercise of traits that are generally accepted as virtues—will be attracted to a view of the ultimate end of a living thing according to which its ultimate end includes tending to others of the same species and the development of features that are plausibly analogized to virtues in human beings (as Peter Geach claimed, "Men need virtues as bees need stings" (Geach, 1977, p. 17)).

In reply to the ecologist, the neo-Aristotelian, assuming that she agrees that she has a moral bias, might argue that there is room for arguing that a moral bias in investigating natural normativity is justified. (The ecologist might also argue for the same.) It is not clear if we can approach an investigation of natural normativity without prior acceptance of and being influenced by some value system; so perhaps we just need

to accept this, recognize that bias may there and continue moral debating in tandem with investigation of natural normativity.

The above questions and criticisms that the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist can present against each other show at the very least that OtherRegarding is not an apodictic truth: It should be seriously questioned.

2. Survivalist view is at least as, if not more, plausible

Both the neo-Aristotelian and ecologist agree that (a) patterns among living things are normatively significant and (b) patterns can change, e.g., mutation, adaptation, evolution, changes in the role that living things are purported to play in ecosystems. On behalf of both the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist, let us set aside any skepticism about intrinsic value, about life forms, about the normative significance of patterns, about the ability non-arbitrarily to identify them and let us set aside any concern about illicit influence of moral vision on inquiry into natural normativity. Let us suppose that patterns are normatively significant and that we have a good enough handle on how to identify them. On this supposition, an appeal to patterns should be taken to support my view that the ultimate end is solely to survive at least as much as, if not *much more*, than it does any other-regarding view (such as the neo-Aristotelian's or ecologist's).

Let us begin with the weaker thesis that patterns support my view *at least as much* as any other view. Survival-promoting behavior can always be claimed, by the lights of my opponents' methodology of taking patterns to be normatively significant and changeable, as the beginning of a change in normative patterns, with at least equal plausibility to the claim that any other behavior marks the beginning of a change in

normative patterns. Consider two living things, LT 1 and LT 2. If LT 1 promotes its survival in some way rather than helps LT 2 or reproduces Junior LT, this is at least a plausible change in normative pattern as any other change, e.g., LT 1 helps LT 2 rather than promotes its own survival. Survival then should always be regarded as excellent (or non-defective).

Now let us consider my stronger thesis that patterns support the Survivalist view much *more* than any other view. Between the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist, most people find the former view more plausible. Why? I suggest that they do so because the neo-Aristotelian view leans in the direction of regarding survival as the ultimate end of a living thing. Reproduction and helping other members of one's species are plausibly taken to be normatively significant because robust patterns of these activities occur in and against *the backdrop of the normal and full lifecycle of a living thing's survival*. Survival, for neo-Aristotelians, is the *paradigmatic* end for a living thing, viz., the unquestionable, foundational and focal end for a living thing, and thereby should be the presumptive model for a normative end for a living thing, a model that we have in mind when we entertain any other proffered ends for a living thing.

I want to offer a point in support of the neo-Aristotelian view that survival is the paradigmatic end for a living thing. It is the paradigmatic end for a living thing because a living thing has it in virtue of being a living thing and regardless of what the outside world is like, e.g., what patterns might exist in it, whether any other living things exist or have ever existed, whether any inanimate objects exist or have ever existed, and whether the living thing is even functionally equipped (or well suited) to flourish. By contrast, any

other proposed end depends on facts outside the living thing, such as that there are other living things or an ecosystem to serve, that there is some living thing with which to reproduce, that the environment is conducive to a living thing's reproductive organs' playing a role in reproduction. That a living thing has the end of survival in virtue of being a living thing and regardless of what the outside world is like—whereas this is not true with any other end—is a strong indicator, as I will argue in more detail later, that survival is the sole end. For now, the point I want to make here is that this fact makes survival the paradigmatic end.

That survival is the paradigmatic end is all the more plausible in light of the fact, as I presented in the prior Section, that there is no upper limit to the determinate form that a living thing's survival can have. One's intuitions about normative patterns can and should take into account theoretically far more—*infinitely* more—potential in the determinate form of the survival of a living thing, LT; its survival is not bound by determinate norms of the sort inherent in species norms.

As views of the ultimate end of a living thing move away from survival, empirical patterns that might lend support to them become vaguer and looser; and the entrance of more subjective, arbitrary intuitions becomes more frequent. For example, is it part of Mrs. Muff's ultimate end to enable, say by excreting her wastes, the growth of grass in the forest in which she lives? We are getting much looser, more arbitrary, and subjective; *because* we are distancing ourselves from survival.

So, supposing that patterns are normatively significant, survival should always be regarded as excellent. Even if it is not the sole normative end, exclusive pursuit of it

should always be regarded as excellent. Furthermore, there is ground for regarding it as the sole normative end: It is the paradigmatic end appeal to which lends plausibility to the most plausible other-regarding views. The more proffered other-regarding norms deviate from survival, the more implausible they are.

3. Facts outside a living thing are irrelevant to its ultimate end

To date, all investigation of the ultimate end of a living thing has assumed that patterns among interactions between living things (and, according to ecologists, also patterns among interactions between living things and inanimate phenomena) are normatively significant (an assumption which I entertained on behalf of my opponent in my second step above). The ancients regarded the kind to which a living thing belongs as normatively significant; and it is only in virtue of the existence of multitude other living things, similar to and different from one another in various ways, that kind concepts could be constructed. Contemporary neo-Aristotelians take as normatively significant billions of years of living things' surviving, helping others of their species and reproducing. The ecologist does as well and would add on patterns of living things' helping others of different species and of serving inanimate phenomena in various ways, claiming them to be normatively significant.

I will argue here, however, in three steps for the view that *facts outside a living thing (and thus any patterns among such facts and that living thing, no matter how robust or large-scale any pattern is) are irrelevant to its ultimate end*. First, I will elaborate on how survival, the paradigmatic end for a living thing, is normative for a living thing regardless of facts outside the living thing. This step establishes a presumption in favor of

the view, for which I will build increasing intuitive support throughout the remaining two steps. In the second and third steps, I will appeal to the view to argue in turn that none of (1) serving one or more inanimate phenomena in the universe, or (2) helping another living thing(s) or reproducing, are normative for a living thing.

3.1. Facts outside a living thing are irrelevant to the normativity of survival

Suppose that no life currently exists or has ever existed in the universe. Suppose also that no inanimate phenomena exist in the universe except a vast expanse of pure space. Now, in this vast expanse of pure space, a non-sentient living thing, LT, comes into existence.

By the fact that we now have a living thing, we neo-Aristotelians believe that LT has an ultimate end. By contrast, we did not think that the space that constituted the universe had any end. Nor would we think that any other inanimate phenomena, supposing they existed, e.g., asteroids, stars, planets, has any ultimate end. Now, what is LT's ultimate end?

To answer this question, the usual neo-Aristotelian would want to ask, "To what species does LT belong?" LT, however, has no species: There are no other living things; *a fortiori* there are no living things that are similar enough to LT[75] as to warrant the construction of a species concept under which to classify LT; nor are there even minds around to be able to construct any such concepts. So, we know that whatever LT's ultimate end is, it is not determined by a (LT's purported) species.

[75] Nor are there living things that are different enough from these living things, in virtue of which difference we could claim that the similar living things are similar.

LT's end, it is plausible to suppose, is survival. After all, we think that LT has an ultimate end *because LT is a living thing*. And if LT dies, then we no longer have anything in this universe that has an ultimate end. LT's end then must have something to do with being a living thing. Survival is an unquestionable end for LT.

That LT's end is to survive, furthermore, is determined wholly by facts about LT. Facts outside of LT are irrelevant to the fact that survival is LT's end[76]; and we can very sharply appreciate this since the only other fact is the vast expanse of space in this universe. Even supposing this universe was populated by a bunch of inanimate phenomena of the sort we are familiar (e.g., galaxies, stars, asteroids, and planets), whether LT emerged in this or that galaxy; in space, in the middle of a star, on an asteroid, or on a planet; wherever on a certain planet, supposing LT emerged on this planet, LT emerged, and whatever the environment around LT is like, that LT's end is to survive is unaffected by any of the preceding considerations. If LT moves or gets moved from one planet in one galaxy to another planet in a different galaxy, LT's end would not change.

[76] One might offer the following objection to my claim that facts outside LT are irrelevant to the normativity of survival for LT. Thompson (2008, Chapter 1) argues that what makes an object a living thing is not wholly facts about the object, but rather in part an *a priori* concept, viz., *living thing*, that we project onto the object. Thompson might argue that supposing on my behalf that something has the end of survival if, only if, and because it is a living thing, then whether something has the end of survival depends on facts outside it, since whether the something in question is a living thing depends on facts outside it (viz., the *a priori* concept *living thing*). In reply to this argument, even supposing that Thompson is correct, the sense in which Thompson would claim that facts outside LT are relevant to the normativity of survival for LT is different than the sense in which I am claiming that facts outside LT are irrelevant to the normativity of survival for LT. By facts outside a living thing, I mean anything we encounter in our ordinary experience that is outside it, e.g., the chair next to it, the air around it, the sky above it, the ground underneath it, etc. By contrast, in his claim that what makes an object a living thing is in part a fact outside it, Thompson is not referring to phenomena we encounter in ordinary experience that are outside the living thing, but rather something that structures our ordinary experience (the purported *a priori* concept *living thing*).

What facts outside LT *are* relevant to, is what LT's survival *can possibly look like or will look like (whether likely or certainly)*—i.e., the *determinate form of* survival that is possible, likely, or certain for LT. Such facts are relevant to how long LT can survive, e.g., whether LT is doomed to die within seconds[77] or whether LT can live for one thousand years, and to what LT can look like, e.g., various factors such as gravity, weather, and available nutrients may affect how large LT can or will become, what parts LT can or will develop (and the details of what these parts look like).[78]

So, we have the paradigm end for LT, viz., to survive, and we know that facts outside LT are irrelevant to survival's being its end. Now let us consider whether it might be an additional end for LT to relate to the inanimate phenomena of the universe in some way.

3.2. It is not normative for a living thing to relate to inanimate phenomena

All there is outside of LT is space. Is it normative for LT to relate to the space in some way? Implausible, so no. Let us suppose we populate the universe with some inanimate phenomena. Suppose a speck of dust materializes hundreds of lightyears away from LT. Is it normative for LT to relate to this speck of dust in some way? Still implausible; and still implausible if we changed the speck of dust to an asteroid, or a

[77] We can see that whether LT is functionally equipped (or well suited) to survive is irrelevant to the normativity of survival.

[78] One might claim that the role a part, e.g., heart, lungs, plays in LT's survival depends on facts outside LT. *Yes*, which is why, as I will elaborate on in the next Section, it is wrong to understand survival in terms of the sustenance of *particular parts*.

planet, or a star; and still implausible if the speck of dust or asteroid, etc., emerged a few inches next to LT.

Let's richly populate our universe with inanimate phenomena such as the aforementioned. And let's suppose now that LT starts interacting with some inanimate phenomena and that its interactions have robust patterns: Suppose for example LT is collecting asteroids and building pyramids out of them. Now here we can ask one or both of two questions: (1) *Was it* normative for LT to build the asteroid pyramids that it built? (2) Is it normative *in the future* for LT to build asteroid pyramids?

I could see why one might entertain the answer of "Yes" to both questions. Perhaps it is plausible to think or at least entertain the thoughts that asteroid pyramids exhibit an order such that they can be plausibly called an end; and thus that LT's building of them seems like an end-driven activity; and thus perhaps it was normative for LT to build the asteroid pyramids that it has built and perhaps it is normative for LT to keep building asteroid pyramids in the future, given that that's what it's done in the past. An answer of "Yes" to (1) and (2) is even more plausible, one might claim, if LT were *functionally equipped* (or well suited) to build asteroid pyramids, i.e., if LT has one or more parts that are well suited to the building of asteroid pyramids, this would fact would lend further support to "Yes."

Let's even consider a wilder thought experiment, one that I think would constitute the strongest possible case for holding that it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate order in some way. Suppose the universe, prior to LT's existence, for zillions of years consisted in one giant, naturally occurring inanimate Rube Goldberg-like structure

(henceforth, The Structure) that consists in zillions of complex inanimate parts that interrelate in zillions of complex, refined ways; and suppose that for zillions of years, inanimate parts have popped into existence, served The Structure in complex ways, and popped out of existence. Now suppose that the first animate object, i.e., living thing—LT—emerges, and is well suited to serve and immediately serves a role in The Structure that one of the inanimate parts that just popped out of existence had been well suited to serve and served for zillions of years. It is plausible, one might claim, to suppose that LT's end is to serve the The Structure.

Though I can see why some might claim that it is normative for LT in the above case to serve The Structure and in the preceding case to build asteroid pyramids, I want to present two problems for the view that it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate phenomena.

First, the advocate of the view fails to treat a living thing as a living thing, viz., as a bearer of a special kind of normativity. She views LT as if LT were just an inanimate part of The Structure; she would recognize that LT is a living thing but this fact would have no bearing on what she takes to be normative for LT. Yet LT's being a living thing grounds a special normativity for LT. By contrast, any normativity that might be claimed to apply to the inanimate parts and to The Structure is of a different kind. Even supposing that in some sense one can attribute a function, or an end, or normativity to The Structure and its inanimate parts, it is not a normativity that is grounded in the phenomenon of *life*. The fact that LT has an ultimate end, whereas the inanimate parts of The Structure do not (or at least not in the same sense), must have something to do with its *being a living*

thing. The fact that LT is well suited to serve and is serving The Structure has nothing to do with its being a living thing.

Second, the contingency of inanimate phenomena and any order among them makes the view that that any inanimate order is normative for a living thing, implausible. The fact that such order is contingent strikes me as straightforwardly making implausible the claim that the ultimate end of a living thing is dependent on such order. There might not have been any asteroids or The Structure. The universe might have been just a vast expanse of space, in which case very plausibly LT's ultimate end is solely to survive. The view that if asteroids or The Structure materialize, then it is normative for LT to relate to one or more of these in certain ways, and if they do not materialize, then it is not, strikes me as implausible. The normativity of survival does not depend on contingencies of the outside world and survival's being the paradigmatic end for a living thing justifies a presumption in favor of the view that what is normative for a living thing does not depend on such contingencies.

Furthermore, supposing LT's ultimate end does depend on contingencies about what inanimate phenomena exist, it is not at all clear how LT is supposed to relate to these inanimate phenomena; which casts suspicion on the supposition. Earlier and on behalf of my opponent, I chose a thought experiment in which only one phenomenon of order exists in the universe, viz., The Structure, and in which LT is suited only to serve that order. There may, however, be no single inanimate order with which LT can be associated. In another universe (such as our universe), there are different orderly phenomena and LT might be serving and well suited to serve different phenomena, e.g.,

LT might have built some asteroid pyramids, might have arranged specks of space dust into spheres, might have assisted in the formation of planets. Questions naturally come to mind: Was it normative for LT to perform all these actions exactly as it did? Was it instead normative for LT to build one more asteroid pyramid and one less space-dust-sphere? Is it normative in the future for LT to build more asteroid pyramids and more space-dust-spheres? If so, how many of each and why that answer? These questions do not present "merely" a technical problem of how to determine what order is normative, but rather suggest that the proposal that order is normative to begin with is implausible: A proposal about an end for a living thing that leaves the content of the end so indeterminate, elastic and subject to what seems like arbitrary speculation is implausible.

An aspect of the contingency of inanimate order that renders particularly questionable the view that it is normative for LT to relate to it is that at least much of inanimate order seems to be mind-dependent. It does not seem that there is an order inherent in inanimate matter that is independent of any mind; it does not seem, for example, that The Structure is mind-independently more orderly than the set of its zillions of parts, disparately spread across the universe and floating randomly about; or that LT's movements in service to The Structure are mind-independently more orderly than LT's, say, darting around the universe in what comes across to us as a schizophrenic manner, or floating randomly about; or that LT's completing an asteroid pyramid is more mind-independently orderly than LT's completing three quarters of it and then floating away or knocking the asteroids into disparate places in the universe. Inanimate order's being mind-dependent puts further into doubt the suggestion that it is normative for LT to

relate to it: It is implausible to claim that the ultimate end of a living thing is determined in part by what order our minds happen to grasp in inanimate matter, an order furthermore that often seems vague, arbitrary, disputable and to be a result of anthropomorphic sentiments; and to imply that whether it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate phenomena depends on whether we (and our minds) happen to exist.

The view that it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate phenomena, then, is unjustified. Attraction to the view stems from inferring normativity from thought experiments about inanimate order and living things' being well suited to relate to inanimate order in orderly ways, and so relating. This view, however, (1) fails to treat living things as living things, as bearers of a special natural normativity, (2) upholds an implausibly contingent, indeterminate, and elastic end for a living thing.

The inanimate phenomena in the universe have no bearing on what LT's ultimate end is. And I hope through the preceding discussion that I have garnered increased confidence in my proposal that *facts outside LT are irrelevant to its ultimate end*.

3.3. It is not normative for a living thing to help other living things or to reproduce

Here I want to present two problems for the view that it is normative for a living thing to help other living things and reproduce (call this view OtherLifeRegarding) that are similar to the problems I presented for the view that it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate phenomena.[79] The first is that OtherLifeRegarding fails to treat a living thing

[79] The reason that I am criticizing OtherLifeRegarding separately from my preceding criticism of the view that it is normative for LT to relate to inanimate phenomena is that, to many people, it may intuitively seem

as a living thing, viz., as a bearer of a special kind of normativity. The second is that the *contingency* of patterns of other-regarding behavior—of helping other living things and reproducing—renders implausible their purported normativity.

First problem: OtherLifeRegarding fails to treat a living thing as a bearer of a special kind of normativity

Considering the first problem first, just as LT's being functionally equipped to build asteroid pyramids or serve The Structure (henceforth I will call whatever patterns of relating to inanimate phenomena that might be proffered as normative for a living thing to participate in, the Inanimate Order), does not make it normative for LT to do so, so LT's being functionally equipped to serve whatever patterns of helping and reproduction that a given advocate of OtherLifeRegarding takes to be normatively significant[80] (henceforth, I will call these patterns the Animate Order) does not make it normative for LT to do so. The advocate views LT as if LT were just an inanimate part of Animate Order; she would recognize that LT is a living thing but this fact would have no bearing on what she takes to be normative for LT. To appreciate this, suppose there were inanimate parts that served the Animate Order exactly as LT is serving it. Would it be

more plausible to claim that it is normative for LT to help other living things and to reproduce than it does to claim that it is normative for LT to build asteroid pyramids or serve The Structure. In my ensuing criticism of OtherLifeRegarding, I will elucidate the two above problems in a way that I hope will nullify what people find especially intuitively appealing about OtherLifeRegarding.

[80] Those who accept OtherLifeRegarding do so on grounds that there exists on Earth robust and old (billions of years old) patterns of living things' helping other living things and reproducing, and being functionally equipped, i.e., well-suited, to do so (especially in the case of reproduction). Advocates of OtherLifeRegarding infer normativity from these patterns. Different advocates of OtherLifeRegarding will take different patterns as relevant. The neo-Aristotelian will have a different conception of the Animate Order than the ecologist; and different ecologists may have different conceptions from each other.

normative for these inanimate parts to serve the Animate Order? Even supposing that in some sense one can attribute a function, or an end, or normativity to such inanimate parts, it is not a normativity that is grounded in the phenomenon of *life*. The fact that LT has an ultimate end, whereas the inanimate parts that serve the Animate Order do not (or at least not in the same sense), must have something to do with its *being a living thing*. The fact that LT is well suited to serve and is serving the Animate Order has nothing to do with its being a living thing.

We see here that there is no normatively significant difference between the Inanimate Order and the Animate Order. Whether the order consists in the functioning of a giant, inanimate Rube Goldberg-like structure or in the functioning of a giant ecosystem that consists in zillions of living things, the notion of normativity at play in the claim that it is normative for LT to serve this order is not natural normativity. The following thought experiment might cement the plausibility of my preceding claim: Suppose the giant ecosystem that it is purportedly normative for LT to serve is actually one miniscule part of one of zillions of inanimate parts of the Inanimate Order. In this case, is it normative for LT to serve the Animate Order only to the extent that doing so serves the Inanimate Order or to serve the Animate Order even if it stops serving the Inanimate Order? This is not a serious question, or at least would only be a serious question within the cottage industry of assessing what order it is normative for a living thing to serve. The question is intended to illustrate the implausibility of suggesting that order among any phenomena, inanimate or animate, is naturally normative for LT to serve.

A defender of OtherLifeRegarding might reply that a living thing has intrinsic value, while inanimate phenomena do not, and because of this, helping or producing a living thing, as opposed to relating to inanimate phenomena, seems to have normative significance. It is more plausible, then, to claim that it is normative for LT to help other living things and to reproduce than it is to claim that it is normative for LT to serve inanimate phenomena.

I want to present three problems for the above reply. First, even supposing a living thing has intrinsic value, the claim that it is *normative* for a living thing to relate in certain ways to things that have intrinsic value appeals to an understanding of normativity that is different from natural normativity. The sense in which it is claimed that it is *normative* for LT 1 to help LT 2 has nothing to do with LT 1's being a living thing, which is suspicious, because we are investigating here natural normativity, i.e., the view that a distinctive normativity is grounded in being a living thing. To appreciate that the sense in which it is claimed that it is *normative* for LT 1 to help LT 2 has nothing to do with LT 1's being a living thing, suppose some inanimate phenomena are also functionally equipped, even *better* equipped than LT 1, to help LT 2. The advocate of the position has no ground for claiming that it is normative for LT 1 to help LT 2 but not normative for these inanimate phenomena, which are *better* equipped to help LT 2, to do so. (Appeal to the fact that inanimate phenomena lack choice is unavailable, because LT 1 lacks it also.) That she must say that it is normative for these inanimate phenomena to help LT 2 illustrates that the notion of *normativity* involved in the claim that it is

normative for LT 1 to help LT 2 has nothing to do with LT's being a living thing, since the notion applies equally to inanimate phenomena.

Second, the plausible answer to the question "Why take it that a living thing, e.g., LT 2, has intrinsic value?" better supports the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive than the view that it is normative for another living thing, e.g., LT 1, to help LT 2. The plausible answer is that a living thing is something that survives, i.e., sustains its life; this is what distinguishes it from inanimate phenomena and what semi-plausibly leads one to think that a living thing has intrinsic value whereas inanimate order does not. This answer, however, straightforwardly supports the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive; and better supports this view than it does the view that it has intrinsic value.

Third, even supposing a living thing has intrinsic value, and even supposing its having intrinsic value makes it normative for another living thing to help it or to produce a living thing, and even supposing the sense of normativity at play in the preceding supposition is natural normativity, none of these suppositions support the argument for OtherLifeRegarding that appeals to Animate Order. The intrinsic value of a living thing would not make it normative for LT to serve a certain *ordering* of living things, e.g., the Animate Order. Animate Order does not have any intrinsic value as such: Two or more living things considered together do not constitute a living thing (or something that is alive or has life). Only a living thing is alive. Yet the *prima facie* plausible ground for

accepting OtherLifeRegarding is an appeal to Animate Order, specifically to historical patterns found on Earth of living things' helping other living things and reproducing.[81]

Second problem: Contingency of patterns renders questionable their purported normativity

The first problem for OtherLifeRegarding, to repeat, is that it fails to treat a living thing as a living thing, viz., as a bearer of a special kind of normativity. Now, let me turn to the second problem for OtherLifeRegarding: The contingency of such patterns renders implausible the view that they are normatively significant. I want to present five ways in which they so render.

First, the fact that such patterns are contingent strikes me as straightforwardly making implausible the claim that the ultimate end of a living thing is dependent on such patterns. These patterns might not have emerged. The view that if patterns of helping and reproducing happen to emerge, then it is normative for living things to help and reproduce, and if they do not, then it is not, strikes me as implausible. The normativity of

[81] In reply to the third problem, the advocate of OtherLifeRegarding might draw on one or more of the following three replies. (1) She might abandon the view that it is normative for living things to help other living things and to reproduce according to an Animate Order, and instead claim that it is normative for living things to help other living things and reproduce in any way. (2) She might claim that it is not true that only a living thing is alive, and rather that one or more of the following are alive and thus have intrinsic value: a set of living things, an ecosystem which includes inanimate phenomena, Mother Earth. (3) She might claim that Animate Order does have intrinsic value.

Regarding (1), the claim that it is normative for living things to help other living things and reproduce in any way is wildly arbitrary (and to my knowledge no advocate of OtherLifeRegarding has ever held it). Regarding (2), the claim is, first of all, implausible, and second of all, any degree of plausibility that it might have is parasitic on the much stronger plausibility of the view that a living thing is normatively special in that it is something that survives. It is only by analogizing a group of living things, an ecosystem, or Mother Earth, to *an individual living thing*, that the claim that any of the first three are alive has plausibility, e.g., the view that Mother Earth has different interrelating parts just as an *individual living thing* has. Regarding (3), Animate Order's having intrinsic value would neutralize the third problem only if it has intrinsic value in virtue of being alive (so, only if (2) holds); otherwise, there is no normatively significant difference between Animate Order and Inanimate Order.

survival does not depend on contingencies of the outside world and survival's being the paradigm end for a living thing justifies a presumption in favor of the view that what is normative for a living thing does not depend on such contingencies.

An advocate of OtherLifeRegarding might claim that helping and reproducing are normative even if there do not exist patterns of helping and reproducing, but this is implausible. Let us consider helping first. Suppose LT 1 is the first and only living thing in the universe. Is it normative for LT 1 to help other living things? Well, there are no other living things, and if there are no living things, it is implausible to suggest that it is normative for LT 1 to help them.

Suppose then a second living thing, LT 2, emerges in the universe, trillions of lightyears from LT 1. Is it normative for LT 1 to help LT 2? Nothing suggests so; so, no. One might have the felt sense (as I do) that the emergence of LT 2 in the universe has some special significance (as opposed to the emergence, say, a speck of dust). I do think it does, but the significance is not that we now have something that has altered LT 1's ultimate end; the existence of LT 2 has no more bearing on LT 1's ultimate end than the existence of a speck of dust. Rather, the significance is that we now have a second thing in the universe that has an ultimate end; and LT 2's ultimate end, like LT 1's, is to survive (and provisionally only to do so).

Suppose instead that LT 2 emerges right next to LT 1 (going forward this supposition will hold). It is still implausible to suggest that it is normative for LT 1 to help LT 2.

Now suppose LT 1 actually helps LT 2 once. Does that show that it was normative for LT 1 to do so or that it is normative for LT 1 to do it again? Both are implausible and arbitrary; it is equally plausible (or implausible) to say that it was really normative for LT 1 to kill and eat LT 2, or ignore LT 2 and build an asteroid pyramid, and that it is normative to do either of these alternative things in the future.

Is it normative for LT 1 to reproduce? Some people would say that to answer this, we need to know whether LT 1 is functionally equipped to reproduce (and if so, whether asexually or sexually, and if sexually, whether there is another living thing around that is sexually compatible). Let us suppose LT 1 is functionally equipped to reproduce. (I take it that if LT 1 is not so equipped, then the claim that it is normative for LT 1 to reproduce is implausible.) Is being functionally equipped to reproduce sufficient grounds for claiming that it is normative for LT 1 to do so? There is some plausibility to the answer "Yes" but at the same time the mere fact of being functionally equipped to reproduce does not seem to establish with any significant degree of confidence the normativity of reproduction. Would LT 1's actually reproducing once, whether asexually or sexually with LT 2 (and in addition to being functionally equipped to reproduce) establish that it was normative for LT 1 to do so or that it is normative for LT 1 to do so again? Nothing suggest that either is the case. It is just as plausible or implausible to claim that it was normative for LT 1 to do something else and normative for it to do something else in the future, e.g., help LT 2, kill LT 2, build an asteroid pyramid.

The second way in which the contingency of patterns renders implausible the view that they are normatively significant is that patterns could theoretically have

emerged that look like anything under the sun, which makes even more implausible that the ultimate end of a living depends on patterns. We tend to think of the patterns that happened to happen on Earth, in which zillions of living things have been born, reproduced and helped others, all in robust and large scale patterns, patterns that have existed for billions of years and are shaped by evolution. Consider, however, alternative possibilities. Suppose that there has never been any reproduction and that no living things have ever had reproductive organs. Instead, all living things emerge out of a black hole, or a sea of primordial goo on some planet, or just materialize in space at random locations and times. Alternatively or in addition, suppose that offspring will materialize out of the mass of existing living things at random times, not from any reproductive organs, but just out of any chunk of mass in the existing living things. And suppose this reproduction yielded unpredictable numbers and kinds of offspring. At a given time, one living thing or a million living things might materialize out of LT; and an offspring might look like LT or wildly different, e.g., imagine a fern's materializing out of a T-Rex, or a rabbit's materializing out of a cockroach. Suppose living things help each other, kill each other, are indifferent to each other, randomly and in myriad ways. Suppose all the patterns of reproduction and helping—and *not* reproducing and *not* helping or even killing—among living things served The Structure, floating in the center the universe.

Third, if one pays attention to the gaps of time during which patterns change, I think one will find even less plausible the view that patterns establish normativity. By the lights of the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist, norms for the living things that belong to some kind or system—e.g., a species, an ecosystem—might change over time. For

example, rabbits might change over time such that the neo-Aristotelian would say that, before, a norm for them was to have between three and five children, and, now, it is to have between three million and five million children; and such that the ecologist would say that, before, a norm for them was to provide food (their offspring) for the living things of a certain set of species, and, now, it is to provide food for the living things of a much larger set of species. In between changes in norms, there will be gaps of time during which the neo-Aristotelian and ecologist will claim that what is normative for the living things (of some species or ecosystem) is indeterminate; that we must wait and see how patterns change. I think it is implausible to hold that there is such flux in the normativity of helping and reproducing.

Fourth, these patterns, at least to a significant extent, seem to be mind-dependent and their being so renders even more questionable their normativity. Frequently helping LT 2 is no more mind-independently orderly than doing so once (and then moving onto different actions, e.g., building an asteroid pyramid), or rarely, disparately spread across different times, or helping LT 2 many times and then killing and eating LT 2, or just killing and eating LT 2 the moment LT 2 emerged into existence.

Fifth, if we bring in the idea that there is no upper limit to the determinate form that the survival of a living thing can have, then, theoretically, large-scale and robust patterns could exist in an individual living thing's flourishing, patterns that would overshadow any patterns of helping and reproducing. Consider **Transcendentally Complex Muff**. Suppose Mrs. Muff, born as one insignificant part of the Animate Order, which in turn is one insignificant part of the Inanimate Order, has the potential to grow

infinitely larger and more complex than the Inanimate Order that contains the Animate Order, such that the Inanimate Order that contains the Animate Order now just serves some insignificant function in one of Mrs. Muff's zillions of cells. In this case, by the method of inferring normativity from robust and grand-scale patterns among living things, it is plausible to regard Mrs. Muff's ultimate end as solely to survive. And if every living thing has a theoretical shot at becoming transcendentally complex, it is all the most plausible to hold that its end is solely to survive.

Summary of criticism of OtherRegarding

Let me summarize my three-step criticism of OtherRegarding, the view that at least one end other than survival is normative for living things. In the first step, I presented a dialectic between the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist—the two mainstream candidates that uphold the view that other-regarding behavior is normative for living things—as a way of showing problems for both views, problems which I hope convince the reader that the view that other-regarding behavior is normative should be seriously questioned. Against the neo-Aristotelian, there are criticisms of the argument for the view that species concepts are normatively and metaphysical special, questions about how to determine what the species norm are, especially in light of the neo-Aristotelian position that the norms hold independently of empirical facts, and charges of moral bias. Against the ecologist, there are criticisms of the notion of intrinsic value, pressing issues of how to determine what things have it and what role a given living thing has in regard to the things that have it, the argument that intrinsic value is irrelevant to natural normativity, and charges of moral bias (which I added might be defended and also largely set aside).

In the second step, I argued that, even if we set aside all the problems that face the neo-Aristotelian and the ecologist—by the lights of the methodology with which the neo-Aristotelian and ecologist generally operate, a methodology according to which patterns among living things and the inanimate environment are normatively significant—the view that the ultimate end is only to survive is at least as plausible, if not much more plausible, than either of these competing views.

Third, I argued that facts outside a living thing are irrelevant to its ultimate end. Attraction to the view, whether a given advocate of the view leans neo-Aristotelian or ecologist, stems from (plausibly) inferring normativity from robust and old (billions of years old) patterns of living things' helping other living things and reproducing, and being functionally equipped, i.e., well-suited, to do so. The normativity at issue in the view that patterns of helping and reproducing are normative for a living thing, however, has nothing to do with being a living thing and is therefore irrelevant to what is naturally normative for it. I also argued that the contingency of such patterns renders implausible the view that they are normative. And I hope through presenting these two arguments to have garnered increased confidence in my proposal that *facts outside LT, including both any other living things that exist as well as inanimate phenomena, are irrelevant to its ultimate end*.

The ultimate end of LT is determined by the one constant that persists amidst all possibilities of what the facts outside LT are, including facts about the inanimate surroundings, about whether there are other living things and if so what they are like, about what patterns we might find in the interactions among facts outside LT and

between LT and any of these facts: The constant is that LT is a living thing, and thereby has an ultimate end, which is only to survive.

Survival is the Ultimate End of a Living Thing

Assuming that I have been successful in arguing that other-regarding behavior is not normative for a living thing, we are left with the view that self-regarding behavior is normative, i.e., that the ultimate end of a living thing is to engage in self-regarding behavior. I want here to explore this idea. I will start with what I take to be a reasonable and uncontroversial view of what self-regarding behavior consists in: *growth* and *self-sustenance*, where these notions are understood, for now, colloquially, i.e., in their everyday, ordinary sense. Growth refers to an increase in the size of the living thing, which can involve the growth of new parts and the further growth of existing parts. Self-sustenance (a living thing's sustaining itself) refers to the various parts and activities of a living thing's sustaining themselves and the life of the living thing.[82]

From this starting point—the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to grow and sustain itself—I want to refine and develop this view in four steps, concluding with the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive. First I will argue that it is not the growth of particular parts *per se*—e.g., a wing, a heart—that is normative for a living thing, but rather the growth of the living mass of the living thing, i.e., the growth of the living thing, considered as a whole.

[82] Self-sustenance more or less captures what is colloquially understood as a living thing's *surviving*. I want to reserve the term *survival*, however, to refer to my notion of self-sustenance, *after* it has been fully developed in my investigation. I will offer my developed notion of self-sustenance—according to which, as I will argue, growth is a form of self-sustenance—as the technically correct understanding of survival.

Second, I will argue that our usual way of describing and understanding self-sustenance, viz., in terms of parts and their activities that sustain themselves and the life of the living thing, is not technically accurate, because it refers to activity that is only *instrumental* to something that is normative for a living thing. Self-sustenance, I argue, is the activity that underlies this instrumentally normative activity: It is the activity of living mass' sustaining itself.

Third, I will argue that the growth of living mass is actually just a form of self-sustenance of living mass; it is a result of the more fundamental activity of self-sustenance. The ultimate end of a living thing, then, consists exclusively in self-sustenance.

Fourth, I will argue that self-sustenance is the technically correct and precise understanding of *survival*, i.e., of being alive, remaining alive, persisting as a living thing in the face of death. Survival might alternatively be understood in one of two ways: On the first understanding, survival refers to the bare minimal amount of *activity* that needs to go in a living thing for it to remain alive. On the second understanding, survival refers to *living* suboptimally relative to an implicitly accepted notion of *living* optimally, i.e., "merely limping along in life" as opposed to flourishing. I will argue that both understandings are problematic in a way that supports understanding survival as self-sustenance. Once we clarify and get accurate about what survival is, we will see that survival actually refers to the above italicized notions of *activity* and *living* to which these understandings refer. And this activity, this living, is self-sustenance. The ultimate end of a living thing, then, consists exclusively in survival.

1. Growth of the living thing as a whole, is normative

I will argue here that (1) the growth in a living thing of particular parts—e.g., heart, wing, leg, red blood cell, etc.—is not *per se* normative, but rather only instrumental to something that is normative, and appreciating this will make plausible that (2) it is the growth of a living thing, considered *as a whole*, as a *holistic chunk of living mass*, that is normative.

Beginning with (1), consider Mrs. Muff's growing a particular part, e.g., a second heart. If we ask ourselves why it is that the growth of the heart is normative for Mrs. Muff, we will find that our answers only support the claim that the growth of the heart is *instrumentally* normative. The heart will enable *future* effects in Mrs. Muff, e.g., pump more oxygen and nutrients into her blood, enable her to run faster, make her stronger, etc. (A question that surfaces would be whether any of these effects are (intrinsically) normative or whether they themselves are also only instrumentally normative to other effects.) In what sense would the growth of the heart be *intrinsically* normative? If we reflect on this question, we will find that no answer comes to mind. There is no good reason to believe, then, that the growth of a part is intrinsically normative for a living thing.

One might offer the alternative view that it is normative for Mrs. Muff to grow a particular, isolated chunk of living mass, a chunk that may correspond to a particular part (heart, cell, etc.) but which fact is irrelevant to an understanding of normativity. With the growth of Mrs. Muff's heart or the growth of a cell, one might suggest, it is the growth of

the chunk of living mass that happens to correspond to a heart or a cell that is normative for her.

I think this alternative view, however, is just another formulation of the preceding view, because the notion of a particular, isolated chunk of living mass is inseparably bound up with the notion of a part. Some rhetorical questions will illustrate this: Why regard the living mass *that corresponds to her second heart* as a particular, isolated chunk of living mass the growth of which is normative? Why not say that the left half of the heart, plus a bunch of cells adjacent to left side of the heart, together correspond to a particular, isolated chunk of living mass the growth of which is normative? (Note that even in referring to the growth of *cells* one is referring to the growth of parts.) Furthermore, assuming—as advocates of this alternative view would seem to have to—that the growth of a particular, isolated, chunk of living mass begins at a certain time and ends at a certain time, why regard that time period as the relevant one? Why not say that the mass that grew in the first half of this time period corresponds to a particular, isolated chunk of living mass the growth of which is normative, and that the mass that grew in the latter half corresponds to a different chunk the growth of which normative?

I think there are no good answers to these questions and that this fact shows that it is mistaken to think that the growth of purported, particular, isolated chunks of living mass is normative for a living thing. Rather, we should accept my above claim of (2), that it is the growth of a living thing, considered *as a whole*, as a *holistic chunk of living mass*, that is normative.

2. Self-sustenance of the living thing as a whole, is normative

I will argue here that (1) much of the activity we colloquially would label as "self-sustaining" is only instrumentally normative for a living thing, and appreciating this will make plausible that (2) self-sustenance, in the sense of being intrinsically normative for a living thing, is the sustaining of living mass.

Beginning with (1), consider the following activities, all of which would generally be grouped under the notion of "self-sustaining activity": Digestion, breathing, the circulation of blood, photosynthesis, locomotion, sensation, waste elimination, and the fight or flight response. I would classify all these as merely instrumentally normative for a living thing.

I will elaborate on a few of these examples. Considering digestion, by which I mean the process of breaking food down into smaller bits, it is normative for a living thing only because living things need food in order for various other activities to go on (and we may find intrinsic normativity in some of these other activities). Considering locomotion, it does not seem normative for a living thing to change location in the universe; rather, locomotion is only instrumentally normative, e.g., in enabling a living thing, say, to find food. Considering sensation, by which I mean a grasp of some aspect(s) of the external or internal world—through taste, touch, interoception, etc.—it is normative only when and because it enables future effects (that are intrinsically normative or instrumentally normative), e.g., the finding of food and shelter, the avoidance of predators. Considering the fight or flight response, it too is normative only when and because it enables a living thing to achieve certain ends, e.g., the marshaling of,

say, a lion's body, for a fight with a gazelle, is normative only because it enables the lion to kill and eat the gazelle.

All of the above activities and the parts that enable them contribute to sustaining the living thing, but now what exactly is the *intrinsic* normativity of self-sustenance? I suggest that underlying our individuation of activities and parts in a living thing is the chunk of living mass that it is, sustaining itself across time. Self-sustenance, in the sense that is intrinsically normative for a living thing (which is how I will continue to understand it going forward), is a feature of the living thing as a whole, i.e., of its living mass as a whole. It refers to living mass' sustaining itself across time (this is the claim of (2)), and not to activity in a living thing that is merely instrumental to a future sustaining of living mass. Self-sustenance is a continuous, holistic process that is manifested by the living thing as a whole, from birth until death. It is not a feature of any particular *part* of a living thing, e.g., stomach, heart; nor is it a feature of the all the parts of a living thing even when considered as an interrelated whole. Such a whole still refers to merely instrumentally normative activity, e.g., digestion, blood circulation.

3. Growth is a form of self-sustenance

The growth of living mass and the self-sustenance of living mass, I have argued, are normative for a living thing. Now I want to ask: Are growth and self-sustenance two distinct forms of normativity or are they in some way fundamentally connected? I am inclined to think that there must be some fundamental connection between the two and I

suggest that the growth of living mass is a form of self-sustenance of living mass.[83] Here I want to offer a two-step argument for this suggestion. First I will defend the claim that there is no sharp distinction between the growth of living mass and the self-sustenance of living mass. Second I will defend the claim that former is a form of the latter.

Beginning with the first step, the claim that there is no sharp distinction between the self-sustenance of living mass and the growth of living mass, I submit, is plausibly inferred from the fact that there is no sharp distinction between the *sustaining* of parts in a living thing—e.g., heart, lungs, etc.—and the *growth* of parts. What we refer to as Mrs. Muff's *sustaining* her heart over time, for example, consists in the *growth* of parts, e.g., the growth of new cells that replace old cells. Whether we would say that Mrs. Muff's heart *grew* over a certain period of time or whether we would say that her heart was merely *sustained* in that period of time, is just a matter of whether the pace of growth of parts exceeded the pace of destruction of old parts; exceeded enough to result in a net increase in size of the heart that is significant enough for us to say that the heart *grew* (we would not normally say, for example, that Mrs. Muff's heart grew as a result of the growth of one cell, especially if the growth of this cell was preceded by the death of a pre-existing cell). Given that there is no sharp distinction between the sustaining of parts and the growth of parts, it is plausible to infer that there is no sharp distinction between the sustaining of living mass and the growth of living mass.

[83] It also resonates with me to say that growth is a *byproduct* of self-sustenance. I am not sure which term, *form* or *byproduct*, is better, but going forward I will stick with *form*.

Now, moving to second step, I think the growth of living mass is a form of self-sustenance of living mass for two related reasons. First, I think self-sustenance is the more fundamental activity in the sense that its presence is necessary for making a living thing a living thing, i.e., for making living mass, *living*, whereas this is not the case for growth. We can imagine a living thing that never grows but I submit that we cannot imagine a living thing that is not self-sustaining. We first have self-sustaining mass, which can then grow.

Second, I suggest that the growth of living mass is a *result* of the activity of self-sustenance in the mass. When self-sustaining mass grows, it grows *as a result of* its being self-sustaining. If we appreciate this, I think it becomes plausible that what is normative for a living thing is really just the activity of self-sustenance, which underlies and is responsible for the growth of itself, i.e., of self-sustaining mass. This is not to withdraw the claim that the *growth* of living mass is normative for a living thing, but rather to add the claim that growth is so in virtue of being a form of self-sustenance.

I conclude that *self-sustenance is what is normative for a living thing and is the only thing that is so*.

4. Self-sustenance is survival

Survival is typically understood as equivalent to being alive, remaining alive, or persisting as a living thing in the face of the threat of death. I offer self-sustenance as the technically correct and a more illuminating understanding of survival. Survival is the sustaining of living mass, which is the activity that underlies the growth of living mass and as well the growth of particular parts, e.g., hearts, etc.

Let me contrast my account of survival as self-sustenance against four alternative phenomena with which survival might be, mistakenly as I will argue, equated or at least associated: 1. Bare subsistence 2. Suboptimal living 3. Health 4. Longevity. I will argue that equating or associating survival with any of these four phenomena is mistaken in a way that lends support to my account of survival as self-sustenance.

First, some people would suggest understanding survival as bare subsistence, i.e., as the *bare minimal activity* that needs to go on in a living thing in order for it to be alive. Call this the Minimalist account of survival. I think the Minimalist account is mistaken because it has an implication that exacts enormous violence on our colloquial use of the word *survival*, which use which I presume is legitimate: The implication is that almost all activity in almost all living things that we ordinarily regard as survival (or living) activity would not count as survival activity. Suppose we take Mrs. Muff and remove all the activity that is not necessary for her to be alive: We remove all her legs, both ears, both eyes, her nose, her mouth, her tail, a bunch of her insides, and shave off all of her fur (and thus all activity that is associated with any of these parts), leaving us with a smaller, immobilized and helpless chunk of flesh. If we remove any more activity in Mrs. Muff, she will instantly die. Call this chunk of flesh Bare Chunk Muff. The Minimalist would have to say that all the activity in Bare Chunk Muff is survival activity, but that if any more activity is added—say, the growth of a cell—that activity is not survival activity. Yet, we ordinarily would say that the growth of that additional cell counts as survival activity, just as all the other activity counts as survival activity. My account of survival

offers good grounds for saying this: Underlying the growth of that additional cell, as well as all the other aforementioned activity in Bare Chunk Muff, is self-sustenance.

The second way people might understand survival is as living *suboptimally*, i.e., "merely limping along in life" as opposed to living *optimally*, i.e., what some might call *flourishing*. Call this the Suboptimal account of survival. If Mrs. Muff loses an eye, an ear, a leg and acquires several wounds all over her body from a predator attack, but can still in some sense limp along in life, according to Suboptimal-ists, she is *surviving* but certainly not living *optimally*, i.e., not flourishing. She would be flourishing if she had two eyes, two ears, etc.

A problem with the Suboptimal account of survival is that it presupposes the false claim that there is such a thing as *optimal* living for a living thing, relative to which the further from this optimum a living thing is, the more it is to be regarded as "merely" surviving, as opposed to living optimally, i.e., flourishing. There is, however, no optimum. Theoretically, Mrs. Muff can attain and continue infinitely to improve on a wildly transcendental state, a state that can have, and be infinitely improved on in any one of, an infinite number of determinate forms, e.g., a million legs, a million wings, a million parts we have not yet imagined, etc. Given that there is no optimum, labeling living things as failing to live optimally, i.e., as "merely" surviving, lacks sense.[84] (Would Mrs. Muff be "merely" surviving if she had merely a thousand legs as opposed to

[84] If one wants to use *survival* to refer to living that is suboptimal relative to a conception of the *realistically* achievable optimum for a certain living thing, then one is no longer engaged in a theoretical investigation of the ultimate end of a living thing, but rather simply in an investigation of what a living thing's pursuit of its ultimate end realistically can look like, given particular facts about that living thing and the world in which it lives.

a million?) Survival, I suggest, is more plausibly understood as the activity of *living* in the Sub-optimalist's notions of *living* sub-optimally and *living* optimally. And that activity of living is the activity of self-sustenance.

Another and deeper problem with the Suboptimal account, as well with the Minimalist account, is that they mistakenly understand survival as consisting in a *set of parts*, e.g., cells, hearts, brains, and in activities that are associated with these parts, e.g., mitosis, pumping blood, directing the movement of appendages; an envisaged "minimal" or "suboptimal" set. Understanding survival in this way, advocates of these accounts would claim that any parts and associated activities that are *added* to this minimal or suboptimal set are distinct from and surpass the "mere" survival of the living thing. This understanding of survival in terms of a set of parts, however and as I argued earlier, is mistaken: The parts of a living thing are only of instrumental service to its survival, which consists in the living mass, considered as a whole, i.e., in the living thing, considered as a whole.

A third way people might understand survival is that it refers to health. Health would be understood here as something along the lines of the parts and associated activities of a living thing's functioning well, i.e., conforming to such-and-such norms, and being free of any illness or injury. The main problem with this understanding of survival is that it mistakenly understands survival as having a determinate form, in terms of parts and activities. A second problem is that the label of health (or lack of health) is a *state* that the determinate form of a survival process is in; yet survival is not a state. The parts and activities of a living thing sustain themselves across time; *that's* what survival

(understood as having a determinate form) refers to. Whether at any given time the parts and activities conform to a state of health or lack of health is irrelevant to understanding the nature of survival.

Further to illuminate and cement the preceding claim, the notion of *physical* health, which is often contrasted against the notion of *mental* health (or equivalently *emotional* health or health in regard to the consciousness of a living thing that possesses consciousness), is also irrelevant to understanding the nature of survival. Some might be inclined to understand survival as referring to a living thing's being *physically* healthy (and not referring at all to whether the living thing is *mentally* healthy). There is a problem with this understanding of survival (in addition to the problem, as I just presented, that survival should not be understood as health to begin with). This understanding mistakenly implies that the state of the non-conscious parts of a living thing, e.g., cells and kidneys, relates to survival in a way that the state of the conscious parts of a living thing (for those living things that are conscious), e.g., thoughts and emotions, does not. Rather, both non-conscious and conscious parts have the same relation: They are distinct from the living thing's survival and can be only of *instrumental* service to the living thing's survival. Likewise, the non-conscious and conscious parts of a living thing's conforming to any proffered norms of health bear the same relation: Being healthy—whether physically, mentally, or both—is distinct from survival and can be only of instrumental service to survival.

One might suggest that, though survival is perhaps not equivalent to health, nevertheless the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive is the view that

the ultimate end of a living thing is for its survival process to be healthy (or to maximize its level of health). There are two problems with this suggestion. First, a survival process can always surpass any set of norms that are associated with the label of health or optimal living, e.g., Mrs. Muff can grow another leg. Second, the suggestion mistakenly assumes that the ultimate end of a living thing is something *independent* of its survival process, viz., the survival process' having achieved a certain state, e.g., health, optimal living. The activity of survival is not like the activity of building a house. In the latter case, the end, viz., the house, is distinct from the activity, viz., the building of it, and in relation to the end we assess whether the builders are building well or poorly. Survival is not a means to an independent end relative to which we assess the relative success or failure, or excellence or defectiveness, of the survival process. Rather, survival is its own end.

The fourth understanding of survival as referring to longevity also rests on the aforementioned mistake of thinking that the ultimate end of a living thing is something independent of its survival process. The ultimate end of a living thing is not for its survival process *to exist as long as possible*. The ultimate end is the *surviving* itself.

I hope that consideration of the above four phenomena—bare subsistence, suboptimal living, health, longevity—one or more of which might be equated to or associated with survival, lends further support to understanding survival as self-sustenance. The ultimate end of a living thing, then, is to survive and only to survive.

Now I will turn to the issue of whether there is a truth about what a given living thing's survival *should look like*, i.e., what determinate form it should have; about

whether, for example, it should grow two arms or three; or whether it should live one second, ten years, or a million years.

What should a living thing's survival look like?

There is no theoretical truth about what a living thing's survival should look like. There are two reasons for this. First, given that survival is not theoretically bound by any determinate form, that theoretically a living thing could live forever and develop zillions of parts and engage in zillions of activities that we might not be able even to imagine, it is not even clear what the theoretical notion of "what its survival should look like" even means. It is not clear what it would mean, for example, to claim that a living thing should develop a certain set of billions of parts rather than a different set of billions of parts. Why the former set and not the latter? And why not trillions of parts? I think there is no answer to these questions.

Second, the determinate form of a survival process is different from the phenomenon of survival itself. The determinate form of a living thing can be of instrumental service to its survival; its survival is the process of self-sustenance that underlies whatever determinate form it has at any given time. An inquiry that is purported to be an inquiry into what the survival of a living thing should look like, then, is really an inquiry into what determinate form (that is distinct from and can be of instrumental service to survival) should have, i.e., into what parts and activities (distinct from and possibly of instrumental service to its survival) it should have.

Now, while there is no theoretical truth about what the survival of a living thing should look like, there are, however, two practical and legitimate motivations for

constructing determinate conceptions of survival for living things. First, we might want to help a given living thing at a particular time to survive, and to do this, we need to be guided by some determinate conception of how its survival would be promoted, i.e., what changes in parts and activities would promote its survival. Second, for living things that have the power of choice, a determinate conception of how their survival would be promoted can guide their choices. I will consider these two motivations and the associated need to construct a determinate conception of survival, in turn.

1. Helping living things to survive

Given a living thing at a particular time, to construct a plausible determinate conception of how its survival would be promoted that could guide us, we reflect in an interrelated way on (1) in what ways it is realistically possible for that living thing's survival to be promoted, given its determinate form at this time, its environment, and what is possible for us to do for it, and (2) our intuitive judgments about which possibility is best. To elaborate on (2), supposing it is realistically possible to give Mrs. Muff a second heart or to give her a pair of wings but it is not possible to do both, we would use intuitive judgment to make a call on which alternative would be best. This intuitive judgment will appeal to myriad other intuitive judgments about what would promote Mrs. Muff's survival and intuitive comparisons of alternative promotions. In comparing the second heart to a pair of wings, for example, we would compare our estimates of what the second heart would do for Mrs. Muff in the future to our estimates of what the pair of wings would do for her in the future, a comparison which would involve myriad intuitive

comparisons (that might happen subconsciously and extremely quickly in our minds) between the details of our estimates.

It is here—in the project of helping living things to survive—that the sort of norms that are referenced in discussions of species-based views of the ultimate end of a living thing—e.g., animals feed on organic matter, rabbits eat grass, plant absorb water through their roots, oak trees have deep and sturdy roots, etc.—have a legitimate role. I will now elaborate on this claim.

These kind norms are knowledge that we have empirically acquired of what is generally realistically possible for the survival process of the living things that fall under that kind to look like, and with respect to the features that are associated with that kind. Mrs. Muff at any given time may fall under several kinds (kinds that we have constructed based on grouping living things that are similar in various ways in determinate form), e.g., animal, mammal, rabbit. Norms that pertain to animals, to mammals, to rabbits and to any other kinds Mrs. Muff may fall under at any given time, may at various times be of practical use in helping Mrs. Muff survive.

To be clear, *kind norms do not specify the ultimate end of a living thing*. The ultimate end of a living thing, again, is to survive, and its survival process theoretically can break out of any determinate form that is specified by any kind norms. Rather, kind norms are rough, practical guides for helping the living things that currently fall under that kind to survive.

If there is a legitimate role for the evaluation of the parts and activities of a living thing, as well as of the determinate form of a living thing overall, as *excellent* or

defective, *good* or *bad*, *right* or *wrong*, as they or it *ought to be* or ought *not to be*[85] *qua* member of a certain kind (animal, rabbit, plant, oak tree, etc.), the role is this: These evaluations enable helping a living thing to survive. Evaluating Mrs. Muff's heart as defective (by whatever standards of defect one cares to supply here), for example, may enable a veterinarian to help Mrs. Muff's heart. Evaluating Mrs. Muff's heart as excellent (by whatever standards of excellence one cares to supply here), may enable the veterinarian to conclude that she might be better able to help Mrs. Muff's survival by looking at other parts of Mrs. Muff, for her heart is already excellent; alternatively, the veterinarian (one sympathetic to my view of the ultimate end of a living thing) might try to make Mrs. Muff's heart even better, viz., beyond excellent, or perhaps even give Mrs. Muff a second heart, one that would enormously promote Mrs. Muff's survival; or perhaps even give Mrs. Muff a pair of gills that will enable her to breathe underwater; or a pair of wings that will enable her to fly.

2. Guiding a living thing's choices

Of living things that have the power of choice (or agency or practical rationality) and during the time periods in which they have this power, the question surfaces of what they should choose to do. The answer is that they should choose to pursue their ultimate end, viz., survival.[86] Going forward, I will use the notion of *should* to characterize what is

[85] I use all these normative notions synonymously; *ought*, as I am using it here, does not imply that a living thing has the power of choice over whether it is as it ought to be or ought not to be.

[86] Some might object to a move from an *is* to an *ought* here—viz., the move from the claim that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive to the claim that what a living thing should do, if it has the power of choice, is to pursue its ultimate end—but I am assuming here sympathy to the project of natural normativity, i.e., of looking for the source of normativity in the nature of life.

normative for choice in living things that have choice. So, when I say that *a living thing should survive*, I am referring only to living things that have the power of choice (and during the time periods in which they have this power), and claiming that what they should choose to do is survive.

The claim that a living thing should survive does not imply anything about what determinate form of survival—as regards parts, their associated activities and longevity—it should pursue. Should our living thing, LT, endowed with the power of choice, (try to) develop legs? Arms? Should it (try to) live for five seconds? A million years? How should it make trade-offs between different possible forms of survival promotion in those cases in which it cannot pursue all alternatives, e.g., between developing two legs or two arms, or between living longer but being physically smaller, or being physically larger but living shorter? Plausible answers to these questions depend on what is realistically possible and intuitive judgments.

To elaborate on how the plausibility of proffered norms for choice depends on what is realistically possible, it cannot be true that a living thing should pursue a form of survival that is impossible for it to choose to pursue. The impossibility might be due to facts about what a living thing is capable of being motivated to do and/or to any other facts about its determinate form or the world. It might be impossible for Mrs. Muff to choose to grow a thousand wings, for example, because she is not capable of being motivated to do so (supposing here that it is not possible for Mrs. Muff to choose to do something that she cannot be motivated to choose) and/or because it is not possible due to other facts about her nature and the nature of the world.

Kind norms could be constructed for the choices of living things that fall under that kind (a kind with which the power of choice is associated, and so based on the fact that the living things under this kind generally have this power). Supposing that oak trees in general now have the power of choice, they might construct norms such as that rational oak trees should grow deep and sturdy roots. This norm would be plausible only if rational oak trees in general were capable of choosing to grow deep and sturdy roots.

For kinds of living things that have choice, the distinction between kind norms that pertain to choice and kind norms that pertain to other aspects of those living things is not sharp, because what is generally realistically possible for the other aspects of these living things to look like is influenced by what is generally realistically possible for these living things to choose to do. Growing deep and sturdy roots would be a plausible kind norm for rational oak trees only if oak trees were generally capable of choosing to grow them.

For kinds of living things that have choice, then, all kind norms can be thought of as kind norms for choice. These kind norms can serve as rough, practical guides for the choices of the living things that are currently under that kind. A rational oak tree can consult the kind norms that other rational oak trees have constructed over time for rational oak trees, to pursue its survival. Violating these kind norms, it should be noted, does not entail that our rational oak tree failed to choose what it *should* have chosen or that our rational oak tree chose to do what it *should not* have chosen. There are two reasons for this. First, if it is impossible for our rational oak tree to choose, for example, to grow deep and sturdy roots, then it cannot be true that it should choose to do so, even

if "rational oak trees grow deep and sturdy roots" is a plausible kind norm for rational oak trees (plausible in part on grounds that, in general, rational oak trees can choose to grow deep and sturdy roots; the one in particular here cannot so choose). Second, our rational oak tree might choose to develop a different and perhaps far superior way to survive than by growing deep and sturdy roots.

Let me summarize this Section. The ultimate end of a living thing is to survive. Survival does not mean bare subsistence, or suboptimal living, or health, or longevity. It means self-sustenance, which is the activity that underlies what is often labeled as "flourishing" in living things. In inquiring into what the survival of a particular living thing should look like, one is inquiring into something different from survival itself: One is inquiring into what determinate form that is of instrumental service to survival a living thing should have. There is no theoretical truth about what the survival of a living thing should look like. The determinate form of the survival process of a living thing at any given time can theoretically be promoted in an infinite number of ways, including in ways that shift the living thing out of one kind classification and into another or perhaps no classification at all, e.g., from "human being" to "bacterium" to "oak tree" again to "human being" to "transcendent alien creature" to "miscellaneous."

There are, however, two practical motivations for constructing determinate conceptions for a living thing's survival: To help a living thing to survive and to guide a living thing's choices (for those living things that have choice and during the time periods in which they have choice). At a given time, if a living thing has the power of choice, what it should choose to pursue is its ultimate end, viz., survival. This does not imply

anything about what determinate form of survival it should choose to pursue, except that it cannot be true that it should choose a determinate form of survival that is impossible for it to choose. We can construct kind norms to serve as rough, practical guides for helping a living thing to survive and to serve as rough, practical guides for the choices of living things that have the power of choice and during the time periods in which they have choice.[87] We construct kind norms based on what is generally realistically possible for the survival of the living things of a certain kind to look like and on our intuitive judgments about what such realistic, determinate form of survival is ideal for them.

Survival is the Ultimate End of a Human Being

The view of the ultimate end of a human being that is offered in this paper can be well captured by repeating the final two paragraphs of the prior Section, with a replacement of occurrences of "living thing" with "human being," as follows.

The ultimate end of a human being is to survive. Survival does not mean bare subsistence, or suboptimal living, or health, or longevity. It means self-sustenance, which is the activity that underlies what is often labeled as "flourishing" in human beings. In inquiring into what the survival of a particular human being should look like, one is inquiring into something different from survival itself: One is inquiring into what determinate form that is of instrumental service to survival a human being should have. There is no theoretical truth about what the survival of a human being should look like. The determinate form of the survival process of a human being at any given time can

[87] These norms are only possible if there are enough other living things that are sufficiently similar in determinate form so as to justify the construction of a kind of living thing (and associated norms for this kind) under which to group these living things.

theoretically be promoted in an infinite number of ways, including in ways that shift the human being out of one kind classification and into another or perhaps no classification at all, e.g., from "human being" to "bacterium" to "oak tree" again to "human being" to "transcendent alien creature" to "miscellaneous."

There are, however, two practical motivations for constructing determinate conceptions for a human being's survival: To help a human being to survive and to guide a human being's choices (for those human beings that have choice and during the time periods in which they have choice). At a given time, if a human being has the power of choice, what she should choose to pursue is her ultimate end, viz., survival. This does not imply anything about what determinate form of survival she should choose to pursue, except that it cannot be true that she should choose a determinate form of survival that is impossible for her to choose. We can construct kind norms to serve as rough, practical guides for helping a human being to survive and to serve as rough, practical guides for the choices of human beings that have the power of choice and during the time periods in which they have choice. We construct kind norms based on what is generally realistically possible for the survival of human beings to look like and on our intuitive judgments about what such realistic, determinate form of survival is ideal for them.

The project of inquiry into human *well-being* and the project of inquiry into *morality* (for human beings), I suggest, should be understood as *aspects of the inquiry into a plausible determinate conception of human survival* (henceforth just inquiry into human survival).

Considering well-being first, inquiry into human well-being (or welfare, self-interest, happiness, flourishing[88]) is generally understood to mean inquiry into what the best life or at least a very good life for a human being, as far as benefit to her is concerned, consists in. Human well-being I suggest is not something distinct from human survival. Rather, human well-being refers to a state of human survival that we intuitively regard as an ideal that should guide our living. The goods that feature in the debate about what human well-being consists in—goods such as pleasure, desire-fulfillment, and what are often called objective goods, such as knowledge, friendship, love, meaningful work and the appreciation of art—should be understood as proffered candidates for a plausible determinate conception of human survival. Pleasure, desire-fulfillment, etc. are crucial for human survival just as are breathing, eating and drinking water. A human being who is deprived of pleasure, desire-fulfillment, etc. will tend to lose motivation to live, to be healthy and to be more prone to disease, earlier death and to commit suicide.

Now considering morality, my suggestion that inquiry into morality should also be understood as an aspect of inquiry into human survival, rests on sympathy to a neo-Aristotelian outlook on morality. Neo-Aristotelians have criticized the view that morality by its nature is something distinct from and in conflict with self-interest and instead uphold happiness (or flourishing or *eudaimonia*) as the ultimate end of a human being and as the orienting concept for moral inquiry.[89] They tend to understand moral inquiry as inquiry into how to live generally, and specifically into what human flourishing

[88] I use all these terms equivalently here.

[89] See, for example, Hursthouse (1999).

consists in and how to realize it; perhaps with special emphasis how one should treat other people, but if so an emphasis that is an aspect of the bigger picture of how to live generally. I think this understanding of morality is correct and that one of its virtues is that it does not prejudge morality as inherently opposed to self-interest.

Adopting this understanding of morality, I propose that there is one and only one theoretical principle of morality: Survive.

This principle, however, is not practically useful, because it does not entail anything about what survival should look like. Thus, we need to construct a determinate conception of human survival (which involves acquiring knowledge of what is generally realistically possible for the determinate form of the survival process of human beings to look like and reflection on our intuitive judgments about which determinate form is ideal). This determinate conception would include moral norms that are more concrete than the theoretical norm "Survive," e.g., be honest, courageous, keep your promises, do not kill, etc.

Any proposed moral norm must be evaluated according to whether the norm serves human survival, i.e., serves the realization of a plausible determinate conception of human survival that is continually reflected on and in principle revisable according to changes in intuitive judgments and in what is realistically possible. The norm "in general, do not kill" is a plausible moral norm, because following it generally serves human survival, e.g., most people would be terrified of killing another human being, suffer extreme trauma from doing so, probably suffer retaliation from others from doing so, and whatever genuinely survival-promoting good they might seek from doing so (e.g., the

release of feelings of hatred) could have been attained by other means, ones that are less self-destructive (e.g., psychotherapy).

If our intuitions about human survival change, which would happen if facts about what is realistically possible change, then we rightly would revise our moral norms. Suppose, for example, the world changed such that human beings could remain alive only by killing and eating other human beings. In this case, the norm "in general, kill and eat human beings" would be a plausible moral norm, because following it generally serves human survival.[90] Also plausible, supposing it realistic (and hopefully it would be), would be the norm "try to find a way for human beings to coexist without killing each other," because following it generally serves human survival (one could live in less fear of other human beings; more possibilities for friendship and love open up).

Though I discussed well-being and morality separately, I follow the neo-Aristotelian tradition in its rejection of a purported distinction between self-interest and morality and of a purported distinction between, on the one hand, self-interest and/or morality, and, on the other, the naturalistic ultimate end of a human being (which I have argued is survival rather than the instantiation of one's species). Norms for well-being and for morality are survival norms. I suggest that it is not important whether any given survival norm—e.g., take care of yourself physically and emotionally, find and nurture

[90] Some might claim that if a proffered moral norm is so distant from anything that we would ordinarily understand as a *moral* norm, then perhaps this norm, even if it is plausible as a guide for living, should not be called a *moral* norm. Hursthouse expresses this thought when she writes: "It is a contingent fact, if it is a fact, that we can, individually, flourish or achieve *eudaimonia*, contingent that we can do so in the same way as each other . . . and contingent that we can do so all together, not at each other's expense. If things had been different, ethics would not exist, or would be unimaginably different." (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 264) Allowing room for this position, I would then say that "in general, kill and eat human beings" is a plausible norm for living, regardless of whether it should be called a *moral* norm.

loving relationships, engage in meaningful, productive and enjoyable activities, do not kill people, develop virtues X, Y, Z, etc.—is classified as a well-being norm or a morality norm; or, at least, we should start seriously questioning whether, and if so why and to what extent, the classification is important.

A plausible set of survival norms is only a rough, practical guide for an individual human being. To the extent that adherence to these norms conflicts with the pursuit of survival, then one should not adhere to these norms. It might not be possible for a human being to adhere to a particular norm; and a human being theoretically might always exceed any norm. Coco, who at present is a human being, might figure out a way to live a billion years, develop the capacity to form intimate relationships that are wildly different from and far superior to any of the relationships with which we are familiar (friends, romantic partners, etc.), invent fields of art and science that are beyond the grasp of any human being, fly and breathe in space, teleport to different galaxies and explore them with novel sense organs that she developed in her lab and surgically placed in herself.

All the more power to Transcendental Coco.

Chapter 4: Well-being is Survival

Introduction

The notion of human well-being is the notion of what is intrinsically beneficial to a human being. Of the three dominant types of theories of human well-being on offer today—hedonist theories, desire theories, and objective list theories—I think the best theory is one that is standardly classified as an objective list theory: The neo-Aristotelian theory that human well-being consists in flourishing as a human being.[91] The general thrust of the notion of flourishing is that it consists in the development, exercise, and maturation of human features. According to the flourishing account, the many things that we take to be good for human beings—e.g., health, happiness, a long life, pleasure, desire-fulfillment, knowledge, meaningful activity, intimate connections—are good for human beings in virtue of being instrumental to or constitutive of their flourishing as human beings.

What I find most attractive about the neo-Aristotelian account is that it is naturalistic: By this, I mean that it recognizes that all living things, not just human living things, can benefit, and that a theory of human well-being would be strengthened if it takes this fact into account rather than ignores it; if it fits within a wider theory of benefit

[91] This theory influences much of ethical thought in the neo-Aristotelian tradition. See, for examples, Hurka (1993), Hursthouse (1999), Foot (2001), and Annas (2006). Kraut (2007) develops this theory at length. Rand (1961, pp. 16-27) also arguably accepts something like the aforementioned theory: She held that benefit to a living thing consists in survival—and in this respect the view I develop in this paper aligns with hers—but she, like Foot and Hursthouse, also seemed to understand survival as survival *as a member of one's kind* (a view from which I depart in this paper).

to living things generally.[92] What intrinsically benefits any living thing, according to neo-Aristotelians, is to flourish as a member of its species.[93] The claim that what intrinsically benefits a human being is to flourish as a human being is an instance of this more general theory of well-being of a living thing.

Though I think the neo-Aristotelian account of human well-being is the best on offer today, I think the account is mistaken, due to having a mistaken account of intrinsic benefit to living things generally. I think that what intrinsically benefits a living thing is not "to flourish as a member of its species," but rather to survive; and not to survive "as a member of a species," but to survive *simpliciter*. It follows from this alternative account of intrinsic benefit to a living thing that intrinsic benefit to a human being also consists exclusively in survival: The many things that we take to be good for human beings, such as the above examples, are good for human beings in virtue of being instrumental to survival.[94] I will call the view that benefit to a living thing consists exclusively in survival, the Survivalist account (of intrinsic benefit to a living thing).

The argument I gave in Chapter 3 for the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive is also an argument for the view that intrinsic benefit to a living thing

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[92] See Kraut (2007, pp. 145-158) for an elaboration of this naturalistic aspect of the neo-Aristotelian account.

[93] Kraut, for example, writes "what is good for the member of some . . . biological species is to flourish as a member of that species." (Kraut, 2007, p. 131, fn1)

[94] Thus, I think that the relationship between survival and other goods—e.g., happiness, desire fulfillment, friendship, knowledge, etc.—is the opposite of the dominant view that survival is only instrumentally beneficial to the attainment of other goods.

consists exclusively in survival.[95] Going forward, I will assume the truth of the Survivalist account.

My aim in this Chapter is to show that the Survivalist account can be applied to human beings—i.e., that we can hold that intrinsic benefit to human beings, as to all living things, consists exclusively in survival—without doing violence to our common-sense beliefs about benefit to human beings. The many things we take to be good for human beings—e.g., happiness, friendship, the development of various capacities, the appreciation of art—are still good for human beings. They are so, however, and as I will argue, to the extent and because they are instrumental to survival.

Benefit to a Human Being is Survival

In investigating human well-being[96], it is crucial to distinguish between inquiry into what *intrinsically benefits* a human being and inquiry into what *the good life overall* is for a human being. In the philosophical literature on well-being, the notion of *well-being* is usually and more officially understood in the first sense, viz., the *intrinsic benefit* sense, which is how I have been understanding well-being thus far, but it is also often understood in the second sense, viz., the *good life* sense, and the two senses are sometimes, and unfortunately, conflated.

[95] Specifically, the first four subsections under the Section "Survival is the Ultimate End of a Living Thing"—viz., 1. Growth of the living thing as a whole, is normative; 2. Self-sustenance of the living thing as a whole, is normative; 3. Growth is a form of self-sustenance; and 4. Self-sustenance is survival—constitute an argument for the Survivalist account.

[96] Henceforth and unless otherwise noted, I will refer to human well-being as just well-being.

An inquiry into well-being in the *good life* sense is an inquiry into an overarching and practically useful conception of what a good life overall is for a human being. One might, for example, hold that the good life overall for a human being is a long, healthy, and happy life, full of activity that she finds meaningful and deep emotional connections with others. People implicitly appeal to this notion of well-being in the good life sense when they talk of a human being's *level* of well-being. Many hold that a human being—at a certain moment in time or relative to a certain chunk of her lifetime, including perhaps all of it—has some *level* of well-being, which might be high, or average, or poor; and according to some even negative. A person who has fully achieved the good life for a human being would be said to have a high level of well-being; a person who is far from having achieved it would be said to have a lower level of well-being.

We can readily appreciate the difference between these two senses of well-being by noting that one might not yet have achieved the good life for a human being yet still one can intrinsically benefit. One can still eat breakfast, socialize with friends, enjoy art, etc., and presumably there is intrinsic benefit associated with these activities; one can then inquire into what intrinsic benefit consists in (pleasure? desire-fulfillment? Etc.). The question "What is intrinsic benefit to a human being?" and "What is the good life for a human being?", then, are different.

I will defend and elaborate on the view that intrinsic benefit to a human being consists exclusively in survival. Anything else that we might correctly take to benefit a human being—e.g., eating a meal, gaining knowledge, making love, appreciating a piece of artwork, experiencing pleasure, fulfilling a desire, developing and exercising a

virtue—is beneficial only instrumentally, relative to the one intrinsic benefit of survival. I defend and elaborate on this view in the first subsection, "Intrinsic Benefit to a Human Being is Survival."

In the second subsection, "Human Well-being," I will defend the following three claims about how we should understand inquiry into well-being in the *good life* sense[97]: 1. It may not be so important to develop a theory of well-being, because for the most part we can already pursue our self-interest successfully without one.[98] 2. To the extent that it *is* of practical use to theorize about well-being, inquiry into well-being should be understood as inquiry into larger scale *instrumental* benefits that help guide living, not inquiry into intrinsic benefit. 3. The notion of a *level* of well-being is figurative rather than literal; the only well-being that exists literally is intrinsic benefit, which is survival.

Intrinsic Benefit to a Human Being is Survival

The claim that intrinsic benefit to a human being consists solely in survival may initially sound implausible. It seems completely prudentially rational to make trade-offs between survival and other goods, e.g., to pursue pleasure and desire-fulfillment at some sacrifice to one's health and longevity; even to commit suicide in order to avoid the chronic and acute pain of a terminal illness; which means that survival cannot be the only intrinsic benefit. Furthermore, one might claim that survival is not even *an* intrinsic benefit: We care about surviving only because we care about pursuing other goods that

[97] Henceforth, I will use *intrinsic benefit* to refer to well-being in the first sense and *well-being* to refer to well-being in the second sense.

[98] I am influenced here by T.M. Scanlon's discussion of well-being (Scanlon, 1998, Chapter 3).

require our continued survival, e.g., pleasure, desire-fulfillment, friendship, etc. Survival seems only instrumentally beneficial.

Surely, then, it is more plausible to look for candidates for intrinsic benefit in the three mainstream philosophical theories of well-being—e.g., hedonist, desire theories, and objective list theories, which uphold various so-called objective goods, such as friendship, love, and *flourishing* (as opposed to merely surviving)—and in theories of well-being that are found in psychology, e.g., positive psychology's focus on states of mental flow and positive affect, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (according to which survival is only the bottom level of a multi-level conceptualization of benefit to a human being).

I will argue, contrary to prevailing views of benefit to a human being, that (1) survival would still be at least *an* intrinsic benefit, (2) it is plausible to understand all other proffered intrinsic benefits as only instrumentally beneficial to survival, and (3) the issue of whether it is ever prudentially rational to sacrifice some health and/or longevity for the sake of other goods is different from the issue of what intrinsic benefit consists in. Regarding the third point, whatever one's view of how health, longevity, pleasure, and any other goods are to be balanced against each other in prudentially rational deliberation, my agenda is only to claim that to the extent any of these goods are beneficial to a living thing, they are so in virtue of promoting the intrinsic benefit of survival.

Survival would still be an intrinsic benefit

Supposing for the sake of argument that there is something(s) other than survival that is intrinsically beneficial to a human being, e.g., pleasure, etc., my first reply is that survival would still be *an* intrinsic benefit to a human being, i.e., one among at least one other. Survival would not suddenly become merely an instrumental benefit.

I argued earlier that survival is intrinsically beneficial to a living thing. Assuming this argument was successful, survival would still be intrinsically beneficial to a living thing even if we stipulate that it suddenly developed the capacity to achieve some new form of intrinsic benefit. Let's suppose that pleasure is intrinsically beneficial to anything that can experience it and that Daffy, a daffodil, at some point in her life develops the capacity for pleasure and pain.[99] In this case, now there are two things that are intrinsically beneficial to Daffy: survival and experiencing pleasure. It would be implausible to suppose that survival drops out as an intrinsic benefit to Daffy and instead suddenly becomes merely instrumentally beneficial to her. It would be implausible to suppose that intrinsic benefit to Daffy, before her development of a pleasure capacity, consisted solely in survival; that suddenly when Daffy developed a pleasure capacity, intrinsic benefit became pleasure and only pleasure; and that, supposing Daffy later on loses the pleasure capacity, survival again becomes intrinsically beneficial.

Just as it would be implausible to claim of Daffy, during a period(s) of time in which she can experience pleasure, that intrinsic benefit to her consists only in pleasure

[99] Any story could be supplied here about how the capacity comes about, e.g., magical lightning strike, a drug, mutation.

and that survival is merely instrumentally beneficial, so it would be implausible to claim the same of Coco, a human being. Yet this is exactly what the hedonist implausibly claims. And what goes for pleasure goes for the addition of any other capacity that is stipulated to ground a new form of intrinsic benefit, e.g., desire, rationality, more sophisticated affect, virtue, friendship, the appreciation of art, etc. Survival would still be intrinsically beneficial to a human being even if one or more of these other goods are also intrinsically beneficial.

Understanding all other benefits as instrumental

Just as photosynthesis, digestion, hibernation, blood circulation, and many other activities and effects on living things are only instrumentally beneficial—to their survival—so I suggest, pleasure, desire-fulfillment and engagement with various objective goods are also only instrumentally beneficial to survival. Just as it would be implausible to claim that photosynthesis, digestion, etc., are intrinsically beneficial (and even more implausible to claim that survival is only instrumentally beneficial to these aforementioned activities!), so I suggest that it is implausible to claim that pleasure, etc., are intrinsically beneficial and as well (as per the first move above) to claim that survival is only instrumentally beneficial to these goods.

Resistance to my suggestion that pleasure, etc., are only instrumentally beneficial, I suspect, stems from two premises that many people implicitly accept. The first is that intrinsic benefit is constituted at least in part by a state of consciousness. This premise is implied by the sorts of goods that are offered by various theories of intrinsic benefit: They tend to refer to aspects of our *consciousness*, e.g., positive affect, participating in

friendship, acquiring knowledge, appreciating art, exercising rationality and virtues, pursuing desires.

The second premise is that intrinsic benefit consists in what we desire for its own sake. This premise is implied by the methodology that philosophers tend to employ when they inquire into what is intrinsically beneficial. They reflect on what most human beings care about deeply and care about for their own sake, i.e., as ultimate desire or ends.

These two premises lead people to think that intrinsic benefit must pertain at least in part to our *consciousness*; and that our survival process, i.e., the sustaining of living mass, being a *non-conscious* phenomenon, is only instrumentally beneficial to intrinsically beneficial states of consciousness.

These premises, in my view correctly, are challenged by neo-Aristotelian thought about benefit to human beings. Benefit, according to neo-Aristotelians, applies to all living things and not all living things are conscious; and benefit applies to them holistically as living things, not just to one aspect of some living things, viz., the capacity for consciousness. It is more plausible, then, to understand consciousness as relating to benefit to a living thing in the same way any other capacity, e.g., photosynthesis, digestion, relates to benefit to a living thing.

I suggest that the relationship between consciousness and survival is the reverse of the one that is implied by mainstream theories of well-being. I suggest that it is *consciousness that is instrumentally beneficial to survival* (which is intrinsically beneficial), *not the other way around*. Like photosynthesis and digestion, consciousness—and all capabilities that come with it, e.g., pleasure, friendship,

rationality, desire—can be a feature of living things, i.e., of survival processes, and are beneficial to the extent and only to the extent they further the survival process.

Let me offer additional support for the claim that objective items and desire-fulfillment are only instrumentally beneficial, by drawing on a corollary of the survivalist account of intrinsic benefit, a corollary that I think many people would find plausible even if they are not yet persuaded of the survivalist account. The corollary is that intrinsic benefit to a living thing occurs wholly *in* a living thing. Alternatively formulated, the locus of intrinsic benefit is *in* the living thing. If a living thing has benefited, then that benefit happened in the living thing; something that happens outside a living thing has no intrinsically beneficial or harmful effect on a living thing. Let's consider this corollary first vis-à-vis objective items.

Many goods that philosophers would call objective items can be ruled out as candidates for intrinsic benefit on grounds that they refer to phenomena that are *external* to a living thing, e.g., appreciating art, enjoying a lover or a friend, pursuing a career, and acquiring knowledge all refer to phenomena in the external world, viz., the art, the lover, the friend, the world in which one pursues one's career, the world to which one's knowledge corresponds. During participation in an objective item, e.g., romantic love, there may be *effects in* a living thing that may be intrinsically beneficial. Intrinsic benefit may occur in Coco when she interacts with her lover or when she thinks of him. Various effects occur *in* her—e.g., cognitive, emotional, and sensory goings-on; activities of the liver, the heart, the pancreas, etc. Intrinsic benefit to her is located *within these effects*. The existence of her lover in the external world, by contrast, does not intrinsically benefit

her. External phenomena may *produce* or *contribute* to producing intrinsic benefit in Coco, but they are not part of the intrinsic benefit itself.

Desire-fulfillment, even the fulfillment of desires that refer only to one's organism, e.g., Coco's desiring that her heart function well, are also ruled out as candidates for intrinsic benefit, on grounds that the *fulfillment* of a desire *per se* is something separate from any *effects in* the organism that might occur in association with the fulfillment; desire-fulfillment is external to the organism. Let us suppose that Coco is intrinsically benefited from her heart's functioning well, i.e., that, within whatever one takes "Coco's heart's functioning well" to consist in, there is intrinsic benefit going on. The locus of intrinsic benefit would be in the *effects in* the living thing that is Coco; *not* in the fact that her desire that her heart function well was fulfilled. As with participation in objective items, in any given instance of fulfilling a desire, there may be *effects in* a living thing that may be intrinsically beneficial, but the fulfillment of the desire *per se* is not intrinsically beneficial. If Coco desires to spend time with her lover and fulfills that desire, any intrinsic benefit associated with this fulfillment consists in effects *in* Coco that were produced by her interaction with her lover.

Understanding trade-offs between different goods in life

One might offer the following argument for the view that pleasure, etc. are intrinsically beneficial: It is plausible to suppose that it can be prudentially rational to pursue certain goods—e.g., pleasure, desire-fulfillment—even at some sacrifice to one's health and longevity. It seems true, for example, that it might be prudentially rational for Coco to enjoy alcohol and rich foods, even if she will not be as healthy during her

lifetime as otherwise and even if she will not live as long as she would otherwise. It seems true that it might prudentially rational for Coco to pursue her passion, say, of climbing Mount Everest or of pursuing some other dangerous activity, even if there is a significant chance of death. It even seems true that it might be prudentially rational for Coco, in light of her being terminally ill, suffering chronic and acute pain, and rapidly deteriorating mentally and physically, to commit suicide. If it can be prudentially rational for a person to pursue some good at some or even total sacrifice to her health and/or longevity, then it follows that survival is not the only intrinsic benefit and that there is at least one other good that is intrinsically beneficial, a good(s) that is rightly weighed against survival in prudential deliberation.

There are two problems with the above argument. First, the argument mistakenly equates survival with health and mistakenly contrasts this (mistaken) understanding of survival against pleasure. Rather, both health and pleasure—and any other good—have the same relation to survival: They are instrumentally beneficial to survival. Being healthy (according to whatever norms of health one cares to supply here), like experiencing pleasure, can often promote survival. Sacrificing some health for pleasure, then, is not equivalent to sacrificing some survival for pleasure. Rather, sacrificing some health for pleasure, or some pleasure for health, or making any tradeoff between any two goods, may yield intrinsically beneficial and/or intrinsically harmful effects on a human being. The survivalist account of intrinsic benefit takes a position on what constitutes an intrinsic benefit and what constitutes an intrinsic harm, viz., promotion of survival and reduction of survival, respectively.

Second, the argument mistakenly takes the survivalist account of intrinsic benefit to be or imply an account of what the survival process for a human being should look like if she is acting prudentially rationally, which would involve an account of how to weigh various goods or benefits against each other. However, the issue of what the survival process for a human being should look like—e.g., should a human being pursue friends or not? If so, in what way and what kind of friends? And how important are friends in relation to other goods, such as health and work? Etc.—is another issue entirely; and I take it that this issue is one of the ones that philosophers inquire into when they inquire into human well-being (in the second sense, the sense of what is a good life overall for a human being). The survivalist account of intrinsic benefit is exactly and only an account of intrinsic benefit, i.e., of what constitutes an intrinsic benefit to a living thing. It is not an account of how to make tradeoffs between goods, it is not an account of how to assess whether a human being is prudentially rational or irrational in her pursuit of survival, and it is not an account of well-being. (I take it that all three such accounts are highly related and perhaps, at least two or more are, equivalent.)[100]

[100] It is a task for an account of well-being (in the sense of a life's going well overall)—not an account of intrinsic benefit—to prescribe what the pursuit of survival should look like for human beings. Judgments of prudential rationality presumably appeal at least implicitly to assumptions about well-being (in the sense of a life's going well overall).

The prescriptions "Survive" or "Maximize your survival" or "Survive as well as you can" are not informative (and the latter two are meaningless), and thus not good accounts of any of the above three types, for at least four reasons. One is that there are an indefinite number of ways to promote survival at any given time, including ways not yet even imagined. A second is that what counts as a better or worse way to promote survival at any given time depends on our intuitions and on what implications a promotion has on our future survival. A third is that what counts as a better or worse conception of the duration we assign to "our future survival" also depends on our intuitions. A fourth is that we do not innately know how to survive, e.g., which mushrooms are poisonous, whether there is a cure for a certain disease; rather we must discover how to survive. It's the job of an account of well-being to offer guidance, e.g., say by including as a good the development and use of reason.

An inquiry into what the survival process for a human being should look like would take into account facts about human nature; especially pertinent here are facts about what human beings are psychologically capable of doing. If, for example, human beings, given their nature, cannot pursue health at the sacrifice of all pleasure in life, then assessments of whether someone is being prudentially rational or irrational must take this fact into account. It might be prudentially rational to sacrifice some health for the sake of pleasure and even to end one's life in order to avoid the unwanted symptoms of a terminal illness. This does not mean that pleasure or the avoidance of pain constitute an intrinsic benefit; rather, it means that we are only able to pursue what intrinsically benefits us—viz., survival—in certain ways and under certain conditions—e.g., we can survive only if we are able to experience certain pleasures and avoid certain pains—and that assessments of prudential rationality and irrationality must take this fact into account.

The fact that objective items, desire-fulfillment, and pleasure are only instrumentally beneficial to survival does not at all negate their importance as goods to think about and pursue in life (as far as prudence is concerned). These goods are crucial to our survival.

Human Well-being

I will defend here the following three claims about how we should understand inquiry into well-being: (1) It may not be so important to develop a theory of well-being, because for the most part we can already pursue our self-interest successfully without one. (2) To the extent that it *is* of practical use to theorize about well-being, inquiry into well-being should be understood as inquiry into larger scale *instrumental* benefits that

help guide living, not inquiry into intrinsic benefit. (3) The notion of a *level* of well-being is figurative rather than literal; the only well-being that exists literally is intrinsic benefit, which is survival.

Theorizing about well-being may not be so important

How important is it that we have a theory of well-being, i.e., an overarching and practically useful conception of what a good life overall is for a human being? There seems to be truth both in the view that it is important and in the view that it is not.

The former view might be traced back to Aristotle, who claimed that knowledge of the human good enables a human being better to aim at it.[101] The chief purpose of a theory of human well-being, on this view, is to guide an individual human being's pursuit of her self-interest.[102] This view is also found in contemporary literature. Roger Crisp suggests that "people do use the notion of well-being in practical thinking. For example, if I am given the opportunity to achieve something significant, which will involve considerable discomfort over several years, I may consider whether, from the point of view of my own well-being, the project is worth pursuing." (Crisp, 2016) And: "Consider a case in which you are offered a job which is highly paid but many miles away from your friends and family." Crisp suggests that a theory of well-being would be useful,

[101] Setting aside the interpretive issue of whether by the human good, Aristotle meant the self-interest of a human being or the ultimate end of a human being (which conceptually differ), I am simply adopting the former interpretation for present purposes.

[102] Other purposes include: To guide a benefactor—which could be an individual human being or a government—in promoting another person's self-interest, to compare the well-being of two or more people (to assess who has a higher level of well-being), to compare the levels of well-being within one person at different times of her life, and to assess the overall amount of well-being in part of or the whole of a person's life. My focus will be on the chief purpose. I draw these purposes from Scanlon (1998, pp. 108-109).

perhaps necessary, in order to decide whether to accept the job. Thomas Hurka suggests that a theory of well-being is necessary so that one does not pursue a short-term benefit that makes one's life as a whole worse. (Hurka, 2006, p. 371)

On the other hand, T. M. Scanlon has defended a skeptical position about the project of and motivation for inquiry into well-being. According to Scanlon, we do not need a theory of well-being in order successfully to pursue our self-interest; we get along fine with a vague, rough, and intuitive idea of well-being. There are things that we know are good for us: Scanlon articulates the claims of hedonism, desire-fulfillment, and objective theories, viz., positive affect, achieving one's well selected aims, as well as other goods, e.g., valuable personal relationships, excellence in art and science. This knowledge is enough for us to pursue what is good for us, to decide between alternative courses of action, and in general to pursue our self-interest successfully. We do not need a theory of well-being that unifies these goods into a comprehensive life plan. It is doubtful, furthermore, according to Scanlon, whether such a theory could be developed: Since so much of what one's successful pursuit of self-interest looks like depends on what aims one has chosen, any such theory is likely to be unavoidably abstract and indeterminate, and thus useless. (Scanlon, 1998, pp. 124-133)

There seems to be truth in Scanlon's view that most of the time people do not need to appeal to a theory of well-being in order to act in their self-interest; and that theories of well-being do tend to be abstract and indeterminate such as to throw into doubt how useful they are as guides to self-interested action. There also seems to be truth in the views that that there *are* useful theories, both in philosophy and psychology, of

what is a good life overall for a human being, theories the learning and application of which do benefit people's lives; and that many people *do* benefit from reflecting on their lives as wholes and trying to shape them into a unified whole.[103] The truth about how important well-being inquiry is probably spread across these contrasting sets of views.

Inquiry into well-being falls under inquiry into instrumental benefit

Whatever the level of importance of inquiry into well-being, such inquiry, I want to argue here, is part of a broader *inquiry into instrumental benefit*, by which I mean and which I will elaborate on momentarily, inquiry into goods whose pursuit is fundamental to our pursuit of what *is* intrinsically beneficial to us (survival). I have two motivations for locating inquiry into well-being in this broader inquiry. (1) I want to clarify that inquiry into well-being is different from inquiry into what *intrinsically* benefits human beings. (2) Articulating this project of inquiry into instrumental benefit creates space for us to inquire into what instrumentally benefits human beings, *for* action-guiding purposes, and *without* the pressure to come to a comprehensive, overarching conception of what a good life overall is for a human being. Henceforth, when I refer to benefit, I will mean instrumental benefit. (Any benefit is beneficial only instrumentally to the one intrinsic benefit of survival.) I will elaborate what I mean by inquiry into benefit and then elaborate on how inquiry into well-being is part of inquiry into benefit.

[103] The Aristotelian notion of organizing our lives into a coherent whole is expressed in neo-Aristotelian literature. See, for examples, Annas (2006, p. 520) and Lawrence (2004, pp. 297-299).

Inquiry into benefit encompasses *all* thinking about what benefits any human being for the purpose of pursuing self-interest in the real world.[104] It includes an individual's inquiring into what benefits herself as well as inquiry into what benefits human beings generally, where "human beings generally" can refer to most or even all human beings, as well as to significant portions of human beings, including significant portions of certain kinds of human beings, where kind is broadly construed, e.g., male, female, infant, child, adult, introvert, extrovert. Henceforth, when I refer to inquiry into what benefit *us*, the *us* is a variable that can refer to an individual or human beings generally. Inquiry into benefit presupposes and is relative to assumptions about what we are like, including facts about what we desire and are capable of desiring, and what our environmental conditions are like.

We already can and do figure out things that benefit us, without appealing to a theory of well-being, i.e., prior to constructing anything that would be called a theory of well-being. I will call these things, *goods* or *benefits*. Here's a non-exhaustive list of goods: food, air, water, health, sleep, shelter, freedom, medicine, surgery, money, education, work, knowledge, achievement, a sense of purpose, positive affect, desire-fulfillment, social connection, love, sex, romance, art, vacations, travel, rest, relaxation, reflection, psychotherapy, personal growth, developing one's mind, developing virtues. One could add "survival" to this list, but since survival is special in its being the sole

[104] The qualifier "for the purpose of pursuing self-interest in the real world" serves to rule out the otiose exercise of coming up with things that would benefit human beings with unrealistic psychologies and capabilities and in unrealistic situations, e.g., it would benefit Coco to develop a thousand legs and a thousand arms, etc.

intrinsic benefit relative to which any other benefit is instrumental, I will understand a good or benefit to refer to anything that benefits a human being—including but not limited to all the above items—except survival.[105]

What then is inquiry into well-being? Based on the understanding of well-being as a conception of what a good life overall is for a human being, the difference between claims about well-being and claims about benefit (but not well-being) is a difference in *scope*, not in fundamental kind. Inquiry into well-being is inquiry into benefits that are *larger in scope* than at least most of the benefits in the above list. These larger scope benefits are more abstract and are purported to cover our lives more comprehensively than are benefits that we would not put under a theory of well-being. It might be claimed, for examples, that Maslow's hierarchy of needs, research in positive psychology on happiness, the Greek conception of the virtuous life, and the mainstream academic theories of hedonism, desire-fulfillment, and various objective lists, are positions on well-being. By contrast, claims that are smaller in scope—e.g., food is good for human beings, water is good for human beings, etc.—do not qualify as claims about well-being. Identifications and elucidations of larger scope benefits will tend to be products of reflection on what benefits seem more fundamental than others (and on what relevant senses of fundamentality there might be), and tend to organize and elaborate on these benefits in a way that purportedly yields a useful guide for the pursuit of self-interest in a

[105] Note that the word *survival* is often understood to refer to physical health and the maintenance of one's parts, overall structure, and overall functionality, an understanding that differs from the technically correct notion of survival as the sustaining of living mass. Understood in this colloquial way, survival would be an instrumental benefit (to the intrinsic benefit of survival, understood technically correctly) that could be added to the preceding list.

larger rather than smaller time periods and as regards more rather than fewer aspects of our lives.

The notion of a level of well-being is figurative

In the philosophical literature on well-being, there is often talk of a person's "level of well-being," which, it is claimed, may increase, decrease, and even be negative. People ordinarily make judgments of how well their lives are going for them, i.e., whether their lives are going well, averagely, or poorly. These judgments might be made of how well their lives are going at a particular time, how well chunks of their lives have gone for them, and how well their whole lives have gone for them so far (or perhaps a judgment one makes on one's deathbed). Sometimes the notion of an *amount* of well-being is used instead of the notion of a *level* of well-being; e.g., it is asked how *much* well-being one has at a particular time or with regard to a chunk of time.

Those who advocate talk of a level of well-being might address the following four issues that pertain to the notion. One issue is whether one's level of well-being is subjective or objective. Is a person's life going well for them just in case they believe it to be so[106], even, say, if they are destitute, have no friends, are riddled with diseases, and are constantly plagued with depression and anxiety? Or are there standards for assessing their level of well-being that are independent of their belief about how well their lives are going for them, e.g., such as standards for health, economic security (e.g., Amartya Sen's capabilities approach)?

[106] I assume that all the people in my discussion are autonomous.

A second issue is whether a person has only a *relative* level of well-being, a level that depends on a comparison to other people, or whether there is such a thing as a person's *absolute* level of well-being, a level that does not depend on a comparison to others.

A third issue is whether appeal to the notion has any practical value. One source of skepticism about its practical value may be found in Scanlon's skepticism about the practical value of the notion of and inquiry into well-being itself, i.e., the notion of an inquiry into a comprehensive, overarching conception of what a good life is for a human being. If the notion of well-being is so indeterminate as to be otiose, then so is the notion of a level of well-being.

A fourth issue is whether the notion has any clear, single meaning. It seems that the notion of *well-being*, in a sense required for the notion of a *level* of well-being, is something of "a 'mongrel concept'," as Ned Block . . . called the concept of consciousness: the ordinary notion is something of a mess. We use the term to denote different things in different contexts, and often have no clear notion of what we are referring to." (Haybron, 2011)[107]

The one claim that I do want to make about the notion of a level of well-being may have implications on one or more of the preceding issues: I suggest that well-being is not a literal property of a living thing. It's not as though Mrs. Muff has a tank inside her that stores her "well-being," as a car has a tank that stores gas; and that Mrs. Muff's

[107] Haybron was discussing the notion of happiness, which he distinguishes from well-being; I am applying his suggestion to the notion of well-being.

"level of well-being" rises and falls, as the level of gas in a car rises and falls. The notion of a level of well-being, rather, is a figure of speech.

The only well-being that exists literally is intrinsic benefit, which is survival.

Chapter 5: A Defense of Egoism

1. Introduction

Egoism is the view that self-interest (i.e., one's own well-being) is the exclusive standard of morally right action. In Chapters 1-4, particularly Chapters 3 and 4, I provided a *naturalistic* argument for egoism, an argument that grounds egoism in a theory of normativity in all living things. In Chapters 1 and 2, I presented and criticized, respectively, the prevailing, species view of the ultimate end of a living thing (according to which the ultimate end of a living thing is to instantiate its species), in a way that set the stage for and gestured at my alternative view. In Chapter 3, I developed my alternative view that the ultimate end of a living thing is exclusively to survive. In Chapter 4, I argued that human well-being consists exclusively in survival. Given that the ultimate end of a human being is to survive and that well-being is survival, it follows that the ultimate end of a human being is exclusively to pursue her own well-being. This is egoism (formulated in neo-Aristotelian, teleological language).

In this Chapter, I develop an *intuitive* argument for egoism: I will argue that egoism aligns with *and explains* a critical mass of widely held intuitions about moral living. By a critical mass, I mean a minimum amount of our intuitions such as to warrant taking egoism seriously and thinking about it further. I think I achieve more than the minimum in this paper, but I will stick to a conservative formulation of my official thesis. Even if I do not persuade many people of the strong claim that egoism is totally correct, I hope to persuade

them that the pursuit of self-interest is far more morally attractive[108] than they previously thought.

My defense of egoism has three steps, corresponding to the three remaining Sections of this paper (2-4). In Section 2, "Selfishness is Generally Morally Attractive," I characterize what selfish behavior generally looks like in the real world. If we grasp what it looks like in the real world, we will intuitively find it to be generally morally attractive. In Section 3, "Egoism and Helping Others," I argue that an egoistic policy toward helping and not helping others well aligns with and explains our intuitions about when and why we should help and not help others. In Section 4, I do the same for an egoistic policy toward harming and not harming others.

I constructed this three-step defense of egoism to address what I think are the two strongest sources of resistance to egoism. The first is the view that there is nothing morally attractive about the pursuit of self-interest; it is at best amoral. The second is that egoism conflicts with common-sense morality, according to which we should help others and not harm them; the pursuit of self-interest, it is widely believed, is often incompatible with adherence to these common-sense norms. The first step addresses the first source of resistance and second and third steps address the second.

My defense of egoism might be helpfully thought of as a further development of the program, revived in contemporary literature in the tradition of neo-Aristotelian virtue

[108] By calling selfishness, i.e., the pursuit of self-interest, morally attractive, I mean that it in general merits the esteem that is given to other behaviors that are generally regarded as moral behaviors, e.g., beneficence, nonmaleficence, respect for autonomy, honesty. Selfishness is, at least generally, not something base, distasteful, or inferior as compared to behaviors that are regarded as moral (such as the aforementioned examples).

ethics, of arguing that there is substantial harmony between morality and self-interest.[109] My defense shares with writings in this tradition the feature of deep and sustained reflection on the relation between the pursuit of self-interest and adherence to widely accepted moral norms, in real life. At the same time, however, there is an important difference between my defense of egoism and the neo-Aristotelian harmonization program. According to the harmonization program, there are apodictic moral norms that are independent of self-interest, with which the pursuit of self-interest must be reconciled. By contrast, I am not arguing that pursuing self-interest is morally attractive on grounds that we can reconcile self-interest with such norms. Rather, I am arguing that one should help others, not harm others, etc., to the extent that and *because* doing so promotes one's self-interest.

2. Selfishness is Generally Morally Attractive

I will understand *selfishness* as the pursuit of self-interest. To act selfishly means to act in one's self-interest, with the usual qualification of "to the best of one's knowledge." By self-interest, I mean the realization of one's true or actual self-interest; not the fulfillment of whatever interests one happens to have, the pursuit of which might be *self-destructive* rather than self-interested.[110] It is not, for example, *selfish* to destroy one's mind and body with drugs and alcohol. It *is* selfish, by contrast, to pursue a long life, health and happiness, deep relationships, a career and hobbies one enjoys, to develop one's mind, to

[109] In the writings of Foot (2001) and Hursthouse (1999, Part Three), for example, we will find much argumentation for the position that conformity to widely accepted moral norms advances people's self-interest in general and in the real world. Ayn Rand has also been interpreted as holding this position (Smith, 2006).

[110] I take no position on what theory of self-interest—e.g., hedonist, desire-fulfillment, or objective list—is correct. I will use self-interest in a way that will be uncontroversial to most people.

grow, and to deepen one's appreciation for life. No moral judgment is built into my definition of selfishness. It is an open question to what extent and with what qualifications selfishness is morally attractive or unattractive. This is what I am investigating; though, just from the brief exemplification of selfishness above, the case for its intuitive moral attractiveness has already been started.

I assume that the moral attractiveness of a type of behavior—selfish behavior, unselfish behavior, honest behavior, etc.—is a function of our intuitive reactions to what that type of behavior generally looks like in the real world. Let us then consider a paradigmatic example of selfishness, i.e., an example that illustrates what selfishness generally looks like in the real world.

Consider **Selfish Coco**. Coco, with the aim of achieving happiness, puts in enormous effort over a decade to transform herself from a socially awkward, spiteful, destitute, miserable, and lonely woman, into a socially adept, warm woman with a well-paying career she loves and the love of her life by her side. This decade-long paradigmatically selfish behavior can also be thought of as encapsulating thousands or more of smaller selfish actions, e.g., that particular morning she looked at herself in the mirror and said to herself, "I'm going to turn my life around"; that day she decided to see a therapist; that night she signed up for an online dating site, despite all her fears.

Upon confronting Selfish Coco, we find that selfishness is highly morally attractive. We do not regard it merely as amoral, but rather as great, beautiful, and admirable. Why exactly is selfishness morally attractive? Why do we morally admire Selfish Coco? One reason is that we intuitively regard our own life and happiness as great

things. A second is that life is *short*, making it important to make the most of it *for ourselves*. A third is that, for many if not most people, achieving happiness is very challenging, requiring enormous dedication, and we find such dedication to one's self admirable. Coco has, suppose, a possible ninety years of life and that's it (I am assuming a secular worldview). What should Coco do? *Fight for her happiness*, because it's a great thing, she doesn't have long on this Earth, and it won't come automatically. She has one shot; she'd better not waste it; she'd better be selfish.

Let me now consider two objections to my position that Selfish Coco illustrates the general moral attractiveness of selfishness. The first is that Selfish Coco is not a paradigmatic example of selfishness. The second is that what makes Selfish Coco morally attractive is the virtuous activity she exhibited, not the fact that she is selfish.

Beginning with the first, many people would not regard Selfish Coco as an example of selfishness, let alone a paradigmatic one, because they assume that selfishness is *per se* morally wrong and do not see anything wrong with Selfish Coco's behavior. Instead, most people would call *selfish* those people who characteristically try to gain[111] at the expense of others, e.g., using other people for money, rides to the airport, career advancement, emotional support, while never helping others in return; lying to people, manipulating them, physically assaulting them to obtain something they want.

There are three problems with people's tendency to associate selfishness with gaining at others' expense. First, cases of gain at the expense of others are not paradigmatic

[111] By gain, I mean fulfill a desire, without implying either way whether the desire-fulfillment actually benefits, i.e., promotes the self-interest of, the person who has gained.

examples of selfishness, because it is generally not in people's self-interest to gain at the expense of others.[112] I will adduce support for this empirical claim throughout the paper. For now, I will limit myself to brief remarks that capture most fundamentally why this claim is true: Attempting to gain at the expense of others will typically make others resent you, make relationships more dysfunctional and internecine, make them less willing to help you in the future, reduce intimacy and opportunities for intimacy with others—and intimacy is a crucial value to one's happiness; a habit of trying to gain at the expense of others will only exacerbate these consequences. It is rather to people's self-interest to participate in mutually beneficial relationships.

Second, most cases in which people gain at the expense of others are possible only because those being expended are *not being selfish*. If they were, then they would not be willing for others to gain at their own expense and would act to prevent that from happening.[113] Cases of gain at the expense of others, then, even *if* they were paradigmatic examples of selfishness (which they are not), are not examples of selfishness that are relevant for the current discussion: The reason is that I am arguing that selfishness is morally attractive as a principle for *everyone* to live by, *not* as a principle for some but not

[112] For some defenses of this empirical claim in the virtue ethics literature, see Foot (2001, Chapter 7) and Hursthouse (1999, p. Part Three). This empirical claim is also supported by the following considerations: (1) common wisdom, as acquired from life experience and reflection on people in real life, (2) the testimony of practicing mental health counselors who deal with real life day in and day out.

[113] Note here furthermore that it is actually the prevalence of the view that it is morally attractive to incur harm to oneself for the sake of another's gain that to a large extent enables these examples of "selfishness" to exist. The more people there are who are willing to be harmed for the sake of another's gain, the more there will be people who gain at the expense of others.

others to live by. Thus, we must exemplify what selfish behavior would look like in the real world if it were practiced *generally*.

Third, in cases of gaining at the expense of others, even if the gain genuinely benefits the gainer, it is the very activity of gaining *at the expense of others* that people find morally unattractive; *not* that the gaining benefited the gainer. Supposing Coco robs a store so that she can afford some things that will make her happy, it would be the *stealing* that people think is morally wrong; *not* that the stealing was selfish. To appreciate this even more sharply, note again that gain at another's expense can be—and, per the first point, is generally—self-destructive, e.g., Coco robs a store so that she can sustain her drug addiction.

The fact that the notion of selfishness, in most people's minds, is so disconnected from actual self-interest and so illicitly linked with behavior that is widely thought to be immoral, makes it all the more important—if we are to give the case for egoism a fair hearing—to fasten onto Selfish Coco as a paradigm example of selfishness. Doing so is a way of counteracting the deeply ingrained tendency for people, when reflecting on selfishness, to jump to examples of behavior that (1) they regard as morally unattractive, (2) that is not actually selfish, and that (3) even if it *were* selfish, its being so would not be the reason it is morally unattractive.

The second objection to my argument for the general moral attractiveness of selfishness is that what's morally attractive about Selfish Coco is not that she was selfish, but rather the virtue she exhibited, e.g., courage, persistence, the overcoming of obstacles.

My reply to this objection is that Selfish Coco's exhibition of virtue are morally attractive *because they are selfish*, i.e., *because they served her happiness*. To appreciate this, transpose her virtues to a case of *self-destructive* behavior and note how our intuitive reaction changes. Suppose Coco, who is regularly being emotionally abused by her husband, thinks, "I really want to leave my marriage because my husband keeps emotionally abusing me, but I had better not be selfish—for selfishness is immoral—so instead I will muster up the virtue that is necessary for me to withstand a lifetime of being emotionally abused." Notice here that Coco's virtues do not make her behavior morally attractive. Why? Because they are *self-destructive*.

Let me add two more examples further to illustrate my claim that selfishness can make the overcoming of obstacles and exhibition of virtues morally attractive. Imagine telling a student who, after several years of schooling and simultaneous working to support herself, has just earned her college degree, "You get moral credit for the all the hard work you have done, but not for doing it *for yourself*. In fact, you would get more moral credit if you did it for *someone(s) else*, e.g., your parents, to please them." Imagine telling an oppressed woman in the Middle East that her struggle to fight for a life in which she is not raped, beaten, and imprisoned at home, gets moral credit for exhibiting the virtues of courage and dedication, but no moral credit for the fact that she is trying to *improve her life*. I suggest that such thoughts are wrong. It is morally admirable to lose weight, battle

depression, search for love, earn a college degree, pursue a fulfilling career, try to avoid being raped and beaten, *etc*., *for your own sake*.[114] Selfishness *itself* is morally attractive.

Now, continuing with the idea that selfishness can make the exercise of virtues morally attractive, not only is this true, but also, *such exhibitions of virtue are essential to being selfish*, i.e., essential to the practice of selfishness in the real world. This point is key to appreciating the moral attractiveness of selfishness and I want to elaborate four aspects of it.

First, inherent in being a *bona fide* selfish choice is that it is a choice to act selfishly *in the face of obstacles*; obstacles, here, refers to unselfish courses of action that have some pull with one. For example, if Coco, after much internal struggle, decides to leave an abusive relationship, *that is a selfish choice*; that is paradigmatically selfish behavior, for she experiences some or even great pull to stay in the abusive relationship and she makes a conscious choice to leave it. By contrast, suppose Coco has high self-esteem and would never even consider dating an abusive man. In this case, Coco's not getting into an abusive relationship is not an act of selfishness; the possibility of getting into one did not even occur to her. Now, if she were seriously considering getting into an abusive relationship, and then out of dedication to her own happiness decided not to, then this decision would be selfish, in a paradigmatic sense of selfishness. Inherent to the meaning of selfishness, then, is that it is the pursuit of one's happiness *in the face of obstacles*.

[114] One might claim here that, even supposing that selfishness can make the exercise of virtue morally attractive, so can unselfish regard for others, e.g., the courage that is displayed by those who risk their lives for strangers. I will address the claim that unselfish regard for others is morally attractive in Section 3. My focus here is on elucidating selfishness as a ground for the moral attractiveness of virtue.

Second, *life is hard for almost everyone*. Few people would claim that achieving and maintaining happiness is an easy task; and I think those who do are wrong. It is already very challenging to accomplish a particular selfish goal, e.g., losing weight, quitting an addiction, leaving an abusive relationship, acquiring self-esteem, making peace with decline and death. Imagine then how much more challenging it is to get *one's whole life* in happy order and *across one's whole lifetime*.

Third, in its highest form, *selfishness is the deepest, most courageous and persistent commitment to achieve true happiness*. Many people will label as selfish the behavior of people who do not want to face their problems, do not want to get their lives together, do not want to achieve inner peace, deep happiness and fulfillment, but rather run away from their problems with excessive partying, drinking, drug use, gambling, sex, and—*significantly—helping of others*. Running away from obstacles, however, is the diametric opposite of selfishness. Rather, I would suggest that a paradigmatic illustration of selfishness at the deepest level is the psychotherapeutic process. In psychotherapy, ideally, a client turns her attention inward to face the most difficult of thoughts and emotions in order to heal, transform, grow, and continually develop herself into an ever stronger, greater, happier, more fulfilled human being. Most people are afraid to undertake this process; this illustrates my contention that selfishness is the deepest, most courageous and persistent commitment to achieve true happiness

Fourth, as there is no upper limit to one's development, by its nature selfishness *is the search for more obstacles to overcome*. The goal of selfishness is not to overcome obstacles so that one can get to a point where there are no more obstacles to overcome (a

point that would never be achieved anyway), but rather to keep finding new obstacles to overcome, i.e., to keep developing, e.g., to find more and deeper ways to enjoy life, to develop inner and outer resources to contend with future adversity.

I hope I have established in this Section that selfishness, at least generally, is a very positive thing. Now let us consider the plausibility of an egoistic policy toward helping others.

3. Egoism and Helping Others

An egoistic policy toward helping others would consist in helping others only to the extent that and because doing so promotes one's self-interest. Many people would claim that this policy is morally repugnant and rather that, to count as having moral credit, helping others must stem from *unselfish* motivation. This unselfish motivation is typically understood in one or more of three ways, which I will call the sentimentalist view, the Kantian view, and the self-sacrificial view. The first—associated with moral sentimentalism, ethics of care, and virtue ethics—is that one should help others out of *feelings of concern for them*, e.g., love, caring, compassion, empathy, kindness; on this view, helping someone out of feelings of concern is contrasted against helping someone out of selfish motivation. The second, chiefly associated with Kant, is that one should help others *because it's the right thing to do*, where the presumed criterion/criteria for what makes the helping right, on this view, is (a) non-egoistic and (b) contains no prescription about what feelings one should or should not have in so helping. The third, widely accepted and advocated in the culture, is that the exact *opposite* sort of helping to selfish helping,

viz., *self-sacrificial* helping of others, is morally attractive; it is morally attractive to *incur net harm to oneself* for the sake of others.[115]

In this Section, I will defend an egoistic policy toward helping others against these three forms of resistance to it. In subsection 3.1, in criticism of the sentimentalist view, I will argue for an egoistic policy in regard to developing feelings of concern for others and helping others out of feelings of concern for them. In subsection 3.2, I will criticize the Kantian and self-sacrificial views in a way that lends further intuitive support for an egoistic policy toward helping others.

3.1 The sentimentalist view of unselfish regard for others

I agree with the sentimentalist view that it's important to help others out of feelings of concern for them. Contrary to the sentimentalist view, however, I think that such helping can be selfish; and that it should be. I will argue here that one should have a selfish policy in regard to (1) developing or trying to develop feelings of concern for others and (2) deciding when to act on feelings of concern for others.

Let us consider (1). If it would *hurt* Coco to try to develop or nurture feelings of concern for others, then she should not do so; perhaps she should even try to *reduce* her feelings of concern for them. Coco should *not*, for example, try to develop or nurture feelings of concern for people who will emotionally abuse her, because doing so will increase the chances that she will get into a self-destructive relationship with them. Now if

[115] This view might be regarded as a form of the Kantian view, but I separate it because the Kantian view is usually understood to be silent on what effects such helping has on one's well-being; by contrast, according to the third view, it is precisely incurring net harm to oneself for the sake of others that makes one's helping morally attractive.

it is in Coco's *self-interest* to try to develop or nurture feelings of concern for others, then doing so would be morally attractive. In searching for friendships and lovers, for example, if she finds that a prospective friend or lover would be *good for her*, then it would be morally attractive to allow and nurture feelings of concern for them.

Now let us consider (2). If acting out of feelings of concern for someone would *hurt* Coco, then she should not do it, e.g., she should not forgo studying for a final exam in order to tend to a friend's emotional needs, she should not keep giving tender loving care to someone who is toxic to her life. If helping friends, lovers, family, co-workers, the poor, anyone, out of feelings of concern *adds* to her life rather than *subtracts* from it, i.e., benefits her rather than hurts her—and in this connection it is important that she choose friends, lovers, and family who are *good for her*—then doing so would be morally attractive.

A great many people would already find the above egoistic policy toward developing and nurturing feelings of concern for others, and acting out of feelings of concern for others, to be morally attractive. This is especially true for mental health counselors, who believe very strongly in the policy and try to instill it in their clients; to get their clients to leave relationships that hurt them and to nurture relationships that benefit them. This egoistic policy aligns with and explains at least a great many of our intuitions about when and why it is morally attractive to try to develop and nurture—and to try to *reduce*—feelings of concern for others, and when and why it is morally attractive to act *and not act* on such feelings, and therefore deserves serious and further consideration.

Resistance to an egoistic policy toward developing and acting on feelings of concern for others stems to a large extent from a straw-manned understanding of

selfishness and a whitewashed understanding of unselfishness. Instead of using selfishness to mean the pursuit of one's actual self-interest—e.g., of one's true, long-term, deep happiness—which involves caring relationships and acting out of feelings of concern for others, selfishness is instead associated with the pursuit of so-called merely material goods—e.g., money, the things money can buy, and with the often cited and vague notions of "power," "advantage," and "personal gain," which are generally associated with the pursuit of material goods—and with lack of sympathy for the well-being of others. And instead of using unselfishness to refer to behavior that *undercuts* one's true, long-term, deep happiness, unselfishness is instead associated with the pursuit and nurturing of caring relationships and acting out of feelings of concern for others.

The pursuit of material goods, the pursuit of caring relationships, the development and nurturing of feelings of concern for others, acting out of feelings of concern for others, as well as efforts to *reduce* feelings of concern for others and choosing *not* to act out of feelings of concern for others, *can be selfish or unselfish*. Doing so is selfish if it is done for the sake of one's true happiness and unselfish if it is done at a net expense to one's happiness. It would be an act of *unselfishness*, for example, for Coco to spend money on bass fishing equipment rather than on medical treatment for her husband, whose well-being is far more important to her happiness than is bass fishing equipment. It would be an act of *selfishness* for Coco to spend money to save her husband, whose well-being is crucial to her happiness.[116]

[116] It is a strawman of the notion of helping someone solely because they benefit you to dissociate such helping from being motivated by feelings of concern. It is in Coco's *self-interest* to find love, to feel love, to nurture love, and to act from love. If Coco's saving her husband is not motivated by love for him, *this* is a sign that she was *not* selfish in her selection of a husband and conduct in her marriage. If a certain behavior

Some will resist the above egoistic policy, not due to any misunderstanding of it, but rather due to having the view that it's precisely unselfishness, understood accurately as a willingness to incur net harm to oneself for the sake of others, i.e., to be self-sacrificial, that's morally attractive. I will criticize this view in the next subsection.

3.2 The Kantian and self-sacrificial views of unselfish regard for others

I said earlier that many people hold that helping others, to count as moral, must stem from *unselfish* motivation, and that the nature of this unselfish motivation is typically understood in one or more of three ways, viz., the sentimentalist view, the Kantian view, and the self-sacrificial view. I criticized the sentimentalist view in the prior subsection, by defending an egoistic policy toward developing and acting on feelings of concern for others.

Now I turn to criticize the self-sacrificial view, and in so doing I will also be criticizing the Kantian view. The latter—viz., the view that one should help others *because it's the right thing to do*, not because it's in one's self-interest to do so, where the presumed criterion/criteria for what makes an action right, on this view, is (a) non-egoistic and (b) contains no prescription about what feelings one should or should not have in so helping—is an expression of the view that *unselfish* regard for others is morally attractive. And this view is equivalent, or at least *de facto* equivalent, to the view that self-sacrifice for others, i.e., incurring net harm to oneself for the sake of others, is morally attractive. In criticizing self-sacrifice, then, I am also criticizing the Kantian view.

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that seems morally repugnant, e.g., Coco's coldly saving her husband rather than lovingly doing so, would tend to arise only due to prior *lack* of selfishness, this fact offers *support* for egoism.

One might offer the following objection to my claim of equivalence between the two views: There are cases in which one can act out of unselfish regard for others, i.e., help others because it's the right thing to do and not because it's in one's self-interest so to help, but at the same time, one might incur no loss from doing so, or perhaps even benefit from doing so, and one might know this. In such cases, acting out of unselfish regard is not acting self-sacrificially, since one incurs no harm from so acting.

In reply to this objection, to the extent that one investigates the attractiveness or unattractiveness of unselfish regard for others by focusing on cases in which the agent, in acting out of unselfish regard, is not harmed and possibly even benefited, one's investigation is improper; and I think the preceding was a *major* understatement. If it is really *unselfish* regard for others that one wants to defend, then the *unselfishness* of the regard, i.e., the net harm to the agent, must be the salient feature in cases that one wants to offer as lending intuitive support to the purported moral attractiveness of such regard. To the extent the moral attractiveness of purportedly unselfish regard for others is defended by appeal to examples in which such regard is in one's self-interest—in an *accurate* rather than straw-manned understanding of self-interest—one is not defending *unselfish* regard for others but rather egoism; and one is *illicitly* co-opting the moral attractiveness of selfishness in trying to defend the moral attractiveness of purported unselfishness. Let us then examine self-sacrifice straight on.

Prevailing moral opinion both does and does not take seriously the view that self-sacrifice is the essence of moral excellence; that the more self-sacrificing one is, the more morally excellent one is (and this is an inconsistency in prevailing moral opinion). On the

one hand, few people regard a life of self-sacrifice, or at least a life of extreme and habitual self-sacrifice, as the right way to live. Most people value and take themselves rightly to value individual happiness, boundaries, mutually beneficial relationships (as opposed to sacrificial ones), values that they might say express a "healthy amount of selfishness." Most people would say that there should be a "healthy balance" between selfishness and self-sacrifice; just as too much self-sacrifice is a bad thing, so is too much selfishness.

On the other hand and at the same time, self-sacrifice *is*—explicitly, loudly, and ubiquitously—upheld as the moral ideal in the culture. Mother Teresa and Jesus Christ are upheld as moral ideals because of their self-sacrifice. The same goes for fictional heroes and other real people who are regarded as heroes. They are upheld as moral ideals on grounds of the claim that they risk their lives, and die, for strangers. The more one acts to benefit others *without regard to one's self-interest*, according to prevailing moral opinion, the more morally excellent one is. This idea is also advocated in academic moral philosophy: the notion of the *supererogatory*, of incurring *greater cost to oneself* for the sake of others than is morally required, expresses the moral ideal of self-sacrifice.

Let us get very clear on what self-sacrifice is by distinguishing it from four other types of behavior that involve helping others and that might, mistakenly, be associated with self-sacrifice. Being self-sacrificial, or altruistic, again, consists in *sacrificing* one's self-interest *for the sake of others*; in incurring a net harm to oneself for the sake of others.

First, self-sacrifice should not be associated with *finding happiness from* helping others, e.g., a physician who enjoys helping others. Finding happiness from helping others is the diametric opposite of self-sacrifice, i.e., of incurring *harm* to oneself for the sake of

others. Rather, it should be associated with a physician who is miserable as one, but who remains a physician because her parents want her to be one and out of self-sacrifice for her parents.[117] The question "What if you get happiness *from self-sacrifice*?" reflects this extreme misunderstanding of self-sacrifice. It should be regarded as even more senseless than the question "What if you get happiness from being set on fire?" because it is only a contingent matter that no human beings would gain happiness from being set on fire, whereas it is *definitional* to self-sacrifice that one is *hurting* oneself.

Second, self-sacrifice should not be associated with helping others out of feelings of concern. Doing so, as I argued earlier, can be selfish.

Third, being self-sacrificial does not mean simply giving up something one desires for the sake of helping someone else. For, as I argued earlier, one could so give up a desire *selfishly*: the other person's well-being may be more important to one's happiness than what one gave up. If one gives up money, a career opportunity, time, or something else that is important to one's happiness, in order to help someone one loves and whose happiness is more important to one's own than is what one gave up, then this is not an act of self-sacrifice, but of selfishness. An act of self-sacrifice is an act in which one incurs *net* harm; not just any amount of harm and not just any lack of desire-fulfillment.

Fourth, self-sacrifice should not be associated with cases in which the purportedly negative effect on one's well-being from helping others is miniscule (and in many such cases it is reasonable to hold that there was no negative effect at all), e.g., someone drops an orange that rolls across the street and you undertake to fetch it for her, someone on the

[117] In clarifying the nature of self-sacrifice, we already begin to question whether it is morally attractive.

street asks for some change and you just give it. These cases obscure the nature of self-sacrifice by downplaying the cost to the agent. And often, they are cases in which most people would simply feel like helping and gain some happiness from doing so.

Having clarified the nature of self-sacrifice, I will now turn to criticize it. My strategy for criticizing self-sacrifice will be the following. I will begin with a case of self-sacrifice that I think illustrates the moral unattractiveness of self-sacrifice. This will be my foundational case, by which I mean the intuitive fixed point that I think captures in a palpable, real life way the essence of self-sacrifice and in my view its unattractive nature. I will then address a range of objections to the effect that my foundational case was cherry-picked and by itself does not show that self-sacrifice is generally morally unattractive. In the course of addressing these objections, I think it will become gradually and increasingly plausible that self-sacrifice is generally morally unattractive, and so *because selfishness is generally morally attractive*; and that my foundational case is a paradigmatic case of self-sacrifice, not a cherry-picked one.

The foundational case is called **Self-sacrificial Coco**. Suppose Coco's parents request that she abandon her career in America, move back to Vietnam even though her husband will leave her if she does so, and then devote herself to the family restaurant, which she must do even though she would hate it, because, as they claim, it is morally wrong for her be selfish and morally right for her to sacrifice herself to others; in this case to her parents. Adhering to the view that self-sacrifice is morally excellent, she obeys her parents, giving up her happiness and living the rest of her life in misery.

I think it would be wrong for Coco to self-sacrifice and I think the reason it would be wrong is precisely that *self-sacrifice* is morally unattractive. And I think self-sacrifice is morally unattractive precisely because I think selfishness, as I argued in the prior Section, is morally attractive. Self-sacrifice is a form of self-destructive, i.e., unselfish or anti-selfish, behavior. I offer my claim that self-sacrifice is morally unattractive as another perspective on my claim that selfishness is morally attractive. This point is crucial to my defense of selfishness, as my criticism of self-sacrifice is a way of elaborating the moral attractiveness of selfishness. It is great to pursue one's happiness, as I argued in the prior Section. What a tragedy it would be, then, for Coco to give up her happiness.[118]

I take it that most people would agree with me that it would be wrong for Coco to self-sacrifice and would be sympathetic at least in this case to the reason that I think it would be wrong, viz., that it would *be self-sacrifice*, i.e., self-destructive. Many, however, would raise objections to my suggestion that this one case illustrates that self-sacrifice is generally morally unattractive: 1. The request that Coco's parents are making is unreasonable. 2. The benefit to be produced is not that great. 3. The sacrifice is in this case is extreme. In offering an example of self-sacrifice that has these three features, some might claim, I have offered a cherry-picked example of self-sacrifice, i.e., a case that does not represent the general nature of the behavior. I will proceed to argue why these other proffered considerations fail to undercut my position that Self-sacrificial Coco illustrates the moral unattractiveness of self-sacrifice.

[118] Michael Thompson, remarking on this self-sacrificial view of virtue, writes: "to bring someone up into such 'virtue,' to counsel its acts, is to injure her. How could that be any more respectable, morally speaking, than binding her feet?" (Thompson, 2008, p. 154, fn7).

3.2.1 Self-sacrifice vis-à-vis unreasonable requests for self-sacrifice

Considering the first objection, viz., Coco's parents' request is unreasonable, one might press the objector to explain what makes a request for a sacrifice reasonable or unreasonable. I suspect that if we explored this issue, we would find that to a significant extent, people implicitly regard the requests for self-sacrifice that they think are unreasonable as unreasonable precisely because they at least implicitly regard self-sacrifice as morally unattractive; this result would provide significant leverage for the view that selfishness is morally attractive. Instead of pursuing this line of thought, however, I will grant my objector that *prima facie* some requests are reasonable and some are unreasonable, and that the distinction between the two types of requests is at least to a significant degree orthogonal to the ethics of selfishness. My reply to the objection is that, by the lights of prevailing morality, many requests for self-sacrifice would be regarded as unreasonable—e.g., asking a stranger to give you his vital organs so that you can use them to save your daughter—and yet at the same time, the performance of such sacrifices would be regarded according to prevailing moral opinion as morally attractive. According to prevailing morality, then, whether a request for a sacrifice is reasonable does not seem to be relevant to the ethics of the sacrifice.

3.2.2 Self-sacrifice vis-à-vis helping others

According to some people, if we raise the stakes, e.g., the survival of millions of strangers depends on Coco's sacrificing her happiness, then intuitively it becomes more morally attractive for Coco to sacrifice her happiness. Self-sacrifice is more morally attractive if the benefit to be produced is greater. This suggestion purports to make self-

sacrifice more morally attractive by appealing to the idea, widely taken as plausible, that it is more morally attractive to produce more benefit rather than less, e.g., to save millions rather than just one person. Let us call this idea *beneficence*. I have three objections to this move of appealing to beneficence to bolster the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice. I present them in what I take to be *descending* order of strength.

First, I challenge the *right* of advocates of prevailing morality to make the move. I do not think they have the right because they would deny that beneficence bolsters the moral attractiveness of selfishness, illustrating that their primary concern is with upholding *self-sacrifice* and condemning *selfishness*, and not with *beneficence*. Consider **Greedy Coco**, whose passion is to make a lot of money. After a decade of research, she discovers a cure for cancer and sells it for as high a price as she can get away with, i.e., the price that would maximize her profit; none of which profit she will donate to charity, but rather all of which she will use to purchase a fleet of yachts and populate them with champagne pools and handsome men. Suppose her cure has saved millions of lives. Compare Greedy Coco to **Dead Coco**, who sacrifices her life to save one stranger by jumping in front of the trolley that would otherwise hit him. Prevailing morality would regard Greedy Coco as deserving of no moral credit, because she acted out of selfishness, even though she saved millions of lives, and would regard Dead Coco as a paragon of moral excellence, because she self-sacrificed, even if the benefit she produced was pale in comparison to the benefit that Greedy Coco produced. If advocates of prevailing moral opinion want to claim that *producing benefit* is morally significant, they must first question their giving Dead Coco moral credit but not Greedy Coco.

Second, the appeal to beneficence to bolster the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice, if we are thinking about the real world, appeals to the self-interest of the agent; and it is illicit to appeal to the self-interest of the agent in order to defend self-sacrifice. If one raises the stakes—e.g., millions of lives depend on a person's sacrifice as opposed to one—it generally becomes more in one's self-interest to help others, i.e., less of a sacrifice to do so. Here are three notable ways in which helping more rather than fewer becomes more in one's self-interest. First, it is human nature that we feel concern for others, and so if many lives are at stake as opposed to just a few, we will feel more concern; we will feel more grief if millions die than if one does. Second, allowing all those people to die eliminates all the benefit that might have come to one from their remaining alive, e.g., money, friendship, sex, appreciation. Third, the higher the stakes, the more others will want one to perform the action that helps and the more they will shame one and in general treat one poorly if one does not do so.

If it is really *self-sacrifice* that one wants to defend by appeal to beneficence, then one must construct scenarios in which greater beneficence does not make it more to the agent's self-interest to help; better yet, in which greater beneficence makes the *self-sacrifice* greater. For example, suppose that the feeling we get from helping others is the feeling of being raped and that everyone will hate us and want to kill us for helping others, including those people we would be saving; *then* consult one's intuitions about whether beneficence bolsters the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice. I propose that beneficence in this case would make self-sacrifice even more unattractive.

Third, I would question whether advocates of prevailing moral opinion really believe, as they profess to, that beneficence bolsters the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice. Dead Coco 1 sacrifices her life to save one stranger while Dead Coco 2 sacrifices her life to save two strangers. It is true that Dead Coco 2 will receive more appreciation, e.g., appreciation from two sets of families rather than one, but was Dead Coco 2's sacrifice more morally attractive than Dead Coco 1's? It would seem that advocates of prevailing moral opinion would regard both Dead Coco's as equally morally attractive, in virtue of self-sacrificing.

3.2.3 "Small" self-sacrifice

Consider now the objection that the sacrifice I portrayed in Self-sacrificial Coco is cherry-picked on account of the self-sacrifice's being extreme. Coco is sacrificing her *entire happiness for the rest of her life* for the sake of her parents. I have not addressed cases of non-extreme self-sacrifice, e.g., she only has to sacrifice a month or a week of her life.

I have seven replies to this objection. First, prevailing morality already endorses cases of self-sacrifice that are far more extreme than Self-sacrificial Coco, e.g., giving up one's life for strangers. What justifies charging my example of Self-sacrificial Coco with being extreme? One might answer that the benefit to be produced from Coco's self-sacrifice is not large enough to make the sacrifice morally attractive; whereas if she enacted that self-sacrifice to save a stranger's life, *that* would be morally attractive.[119] However, as

[119] Would it?

I argued earlier, advocates of self-sacrifice do not have the right to the move of appealing to beneficence to bolster the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice.

Second, it's significant that extreme self-sacrifice is morally unattractive, because prevailing moral opinion upholds extreme self-sacrifice as morally attractive. Mother Teresa and Jesus Christ are not regarded as paragons of moral excellence because they practiced *non-extreme* self-sacrifice! And it is widely believed that the more you sacrifice for others, the more moral you are; and a sacrifice of your very life would be truly morally excellent.

Third, intuitive inclination to regard non-extreme self-sacrifice as morally attractive and not to regard extreme self-sacrifice as morally attractive, actually supports egoism. Why would it be that *extreme* self-sacrifice is morally unattractive yet *non-extreme* self-sacrifice is morally attractive? Well, let me point out something right under our noses: it is an appeal to the moral attractiveness of *self-interest* that makes the latter morally attractive as opposed to the former. It is *less* self-destructive to make a small sacrifice than a large sacrifice; and *this* is the reason people are more inclined to regard small sacrifice as morally attractive. If this is the case, then I would ask: Why regard *any* self-sacrifice—any self-destruction—as morally attractive to begin with? I suggest that this position would be just as arbitrary as the position that one should maximize utility, *less five hedons*.

Fourth, by showing that "extreme" self-sacrifice is morally unattractive, I have undercut the justification that prevailing moral opinion offers for the claim that "non-extreme" self-sacrifice is morally attractive. The justification offered is *not* that only *non-extreme* self-sacrifice is morally attractive, but rather that self-sacrifice *per se* is morally

attractive; and by corollary, that the more self-sacrificing you are, the more morally excellent you are. I offered the extreme case of self-sacrifice in order to illustrate sharply the moral unattractiveness of self-sacrifice *per se*.

Fifth, as cases of self-sacrifice become less extreme, they are more plausibly explained as cases of selfish regard for others, e.g., helping out of concern when doing so serves your happiness.

Sixth, given the first five points, I submit that it should be a burden on one who advocates the moral attractiveness of any self-sacrifice to defend this claim, rather than a burden on one who denies the moral attractiveness of self-sacrifice to defend this denial.

Seventh, we can look directly at cases of "small" and putatively morally attractive self-sacrifice and discover their moral unattractiveness. Consider **Aspiring Actor Coco**, who has a deep and authentic love for acting and is working hard toward her dream of becoming a great actor. The work involves university study, waiting tables for money, and hours of daily practice in acting in her studio apartment, to craft her skill. Influenced, however, by moral messages from the culture that one should be focused less on one's own happiness and instead sacrifice more for others, Coco decides to volunteer regularly at a soup kitchen. The volunteering eats away at her happiness. She feels stress, irritation, resentment, and dread about volunteering; she dislikes doing it; she feels that she is wasting her time; and the pursuit of her dream is delayed (she will take longer to finish college and she won't develop her acting skills as quickly as otherwise, which may hurt her future job prospects).

Now, on behalf of my objector who wants me to discuss a "small" case of self-sacrifice, I leave it to my objector to interpret the extent of Coco's self-sacrifice in whatever way she pleases, such that the self-sacrifice would not count in her view as "extreme" (so long as it is still interpreted as a self-sacrifice, of course). If, for example, some level of stress, resentment, setback to her career, *etc*., would strike the objector as making the case an "extreme" case, then the objector is welcome to stipulate that a lower level applies in this case. Now, however my objector pleases to interpret the sacrifice, I would claim: It is morally unattractive for Coco to make that sacrifice. Why? Because, as I intuit, Coco's pursuit of her happiness is a sacred thing and any setback to that, no matter how "small," is wrong.

I would even furthermore deny the claim that some amount of self-sacrifice could genuinely be labeled as "small." There are two reasons to reject this claim. First, an allegedly "small" amount of self-sacrifice might yield *major* negative implications on Coco's future happiness and success. Let us consider three ways in which "small" self-sacrifice might so yield. First, consider concrete examples of "small" self-sacrifice that may turn out to be large sacrifices: Just a "small" bit of increased stress, for example, might influence her later to take a rest instead of look at one more job ad, or might prevent her from having a sudden idea (of the "Eureka!" variety) later that day; and the act of looking at another job ad or having that idea might change her life dramatically for the better.

Second, a "small" sacrifice might make Coco disposed in the future to make "bigger" sacrifices; especially if she is making the "small" sacrifice clearly and explicitly on the principle of altruism.

Third, the moral principle of making "small" self-sacrifices undercuts *emotional freedom*. Fundamental to our level of happiness and growth, is feeling and acting on *emotional freedom*; feeling emotionally free to do what we want to do and not do what we do not want to do; by *wanting* here, I mean a primitive, felt sense impulse to do something, which includes thinking, resting, pondering, and imagining, not just acting in the world. This emotional freedom is the source of creativity, planning for the future, the discovery of more knowledge of ourselves and of the world, knowledge which may have huge impacts on our future happiness. The belief that one must serve others at "small" sacrifice to oneself will undercut the emotional freedom that is so fundamental to our happiness.

The second reason for rejecting the claim that some amount of self-sacrifice could be genuinely labeled as small is this: The claim is *prima facie* attractive only to the extent that one is *not* really talking about a paradigmatic, *bona fide* self-sacrifice, i.e., about the sacrifice of a *selfish* self. It is to a person who is *not dedicatedly selfish to begin with* that some act may plausibly be regarded as a "small" self-sacrifice. Consider, for example, **Vegetative Coco**, who sits at home all and every day, watching television, who has no goals in life, and who feels indifferent what activity she is participating in, and in general to her life and future. Of Vegetative Coco, some would claim that it would be a "small" self-sacrifice" for her to, instead of wasting one afternoon on television, spend an hour in volunteering at a soup kitchen. I would suggest, however, that it is not even clear if she is making *any self-sacrifice at all*. If Vegetative Coco was not *pursuing her happiness to begin with*, i.e., if she was not a *selfish* self to begin with, it is dubious whether she can be correctly described as sacrificing herself for others.

By contrast, suppose that Vegetative Coco, while volunteering at the soup kitchen, has the deep spark to become an actor. And suppose that over the next few months she transforms herself into a person who has dreams (the acting) whose achievement will draw upon her *whole self over a lifetime*, i.e., transforms herself into Aspiring Actor Coco. An afternoon at the soup kitchen would be a true self-sacrifice.

Comparing Vegetative Coco and Aspiring Actor Coco, a criticism emerges of the claim that it is morally attractive to practice "small" self-sacrifice: The idea is a euphemistic cover for the claim that there is a limit to how much one is allowed to value one's happiness. Observe that the hungrier and more fiery one's selfishness is, the larger an allegedly "small" sacrifice is. It is wrong, according to the advocate of altruism, to value your happiness so much such that sacrifices on your part that such advocates would want to call *small* would be *significant* sacrifices. I say the altruist is wrong. I say that we only live once, every moment is precious, and there is no limit to how much we are allowed to value our happiness.

Now let us consider the plausibility of an egoistic policy toward harming others.

4. Egoism and Harming Others

Causing harm to others, e.g., stealing, raping, murdering, is considered to be immoral, at least in most cases. An objection often raised against egoism is that it has the morally repugnant implication of endorsing one's harming of others to the extent and because doing so promotes one's self-interest. I will call this objection the Maleficence objection.

I will defend egoism against the Maleficence objection in two steps.[120] First, in subsection 4.1, "Prejudice against selfishness in the Maleficence objection," I will argue that Maleficence objection is often not made in good faith, but rather stems from an underlying prejudice against selfishness. To the extent that this objection is raised out of underlying prejudice against selfishness, resistance to egoism on grounds of this objection is unjustified. Second, in subsection 4.2, "Defending an egoistic policy toward harming others," I argue that an egoistic policy toward harming others well aligns with and explains our intuitions about when and why it is moral to harm and not harm others.

4.1 Prejudice against selfishness in the Maleficence objection

I have three reasons for thinking that presentations of the Maleficence objection often stem from an underlying prejudice against selfishness. First, parallel versions of the Maleficence objection could be and are presented against other ethical theories, e.g., utilitarianism, but are not presented with nearly the same intended force. Stock counterexamples to utilitarianism, e.g., it would be immoral to kill an innocent person for her organs to save five innocent people, do not preclude utilitarianism from being regarded as a respectable ethical theory, i.e., as having something important to say about the moral life. Similar purported counterexamples to egoism, then, should not prevent egoism from being so regarded. Yet people take the force of such purported counterexamples to egoism to be so great as to rule out egoism from serious ethical theory. This betrays prejudice against egoism.

[120] The second step is the one in which I directly challenge the Maleficence objection. The first step lays important groundwork for my direct challenge. It, hopefully, will soften the reader to hearing the direct challenge.

Second, the Maleficence objection, to an *enormous* extent, seems to be motivated by a consequentialist consideration, viz., by concern for the well-being of humanity in general, rather than concern about the ethics of the action of causing harm. Most people would say that it would be moral to kill an innocent person to save a million innocent persons, i.e., most people would say that if the consequences are great enough, then they trump any purported deontic consideration. And most people, if they could summon in themselves enough objectivity in relation to their concern for the well-being of humanity in general, (a) would hold that it is more important that there be less murder than that it be a moral truth that murder is wrong, and (b) would endorse the moral rightness of murdering if doing so (paradoxically) entailed that there be substantially less of it. To the extent the Maleficence objection is motivated by this consequentialist consideration, the actual and underlying objection to egoism here is that the consequences of societal adherence to egoism would be terrible.[121] Focus on the Maleficence objection rather than the actual and underlying objection betrays prejudice against egoism.

Third, people (who accept prevailing moral opinion), even if they purport to be concerned about what they take to be egoism's counterintuitive implications in regard to the ethics of causing harm to others, are actually much more concerned to condemn selfishness than they are to condemn behavior that causes harm to others, illustrating a very deep prejudice against selfishness. There are six aspects of this claim that I want to present.

[121] It should be regarded at least as an open question whether social adherence to the pursuit of *actual* self-interest would lead to terrible consequences; it might instead lead a renaissance of human flourishing.

First, *prejudice against selfishness makes people tend to condemn the harming of others, when associated with a selfish motive, far more than when associated with an unselfish motive*. Consider, for example, that both Stalin and Hitler killed[122] *millions of people*, yet Hitler is *far more* the go-to example that people offer as a paradigmatic evil than Stalin or any other brutal dictator. Why is this? I suggest the answer is that Stalin's killing of millions is associated with a cause that is regarded as more morally noble than the cause with which Hitler's killing of millions is associated. Stalin's murdering of millions is associated with the advancement of a political system (communism) that rests on an underlying ethics of self-sacrifice for the collective, an ethics which is widely believed good. By contrast, though Nazism (socialism) also so rests, Hitler's murdering of millions is associated in people's minds with the idea of White supremacy, which is associated in people's minds with White privilege, which is associated in people's minds with the political right, which is associated in people's minds with capitalism, greed, and money, which is associated in people's minds with selfishness.[123] Stalin's harming of others is associated with self-sacrifice while Hitler's is associated (through a chain of associations) with selfishness. What we see here is that prevailing moral opinion regards the harming of others—even the killing of millions—when it is done out of expression of the ideal of self-sacrifice for the collective, as morally superior to the harming of others when it is done (purportedly) out of selfishness.

[122] I use "kill" broadly here to include ordering the killing of people.
[123] I am silent here on to what extent these associations are justified.

Second, *prejudice against selfishness makes people tend to condemn someone who allows harm to others, when associated with a selfish motive, far more than someone who allows harm to others, when associated with what they take to be a less selfish motive; even, furthermore, when the magnitude of the harm allowed by the second person is far greater and when the first person has already been massively beneficent, and far more so than the second person.* To illustrate this, I want to compare what would be common reactions to the following two cases. Consider first **Painter Coco**. Suppose that Coco has a great talent for pharmaceutical science and if she becomes a pharmaceutical scientist, she will save the lives of 50,000 children who suffer from disease X (and also make a lot of money for herself). Coco, however, wants nothing to do with medical research and would be absolutely miserable as a pharmaceutical scientist. Instead, she loves painting, that's what makes her happy, and that's what she wants to do with her life. Let us assume that the benefit her paintings will confer on others will pale in comparison to the benefit of saving 50,000 children.

Many people would say that it would be morally right for Coco to pursue her happiness instead of save the 50,000 children; to pursue her happiness and in so doing, let those 50,000 children die. And of those who would say that Coco should sacrifice her happiness for the sake of the 50,000 children, most would still have significant sympathy with her choice of pursuing happiness instead. Few people would morally condemn Painter Coco in any strong terms for pursuing her happiness.

Now consider **Price Gouging Coco**. Suppose Painter Coco, influenced by the idea that it is morally good to sacrifice your happiness for others, decides to sacrifice her

happiness to save the 50,000 children. She is now a pharmaceutical scientist and is absolutely miserable. After a decade of unhappiness, she finally decides that enough is enough; now she wants to be *less* self-sacrificial but still self-sacrificial and substantially so. Out of regard for the ethics of self-sacrifice, she will still remain in her career rather than abandon it for the pursuit of painting (which would make her truly happy), but out of some regard for her self-interest, she will try to make more money (doing so will offset some of her misery as a pharmaceutical scientist). Coco decides to increase the price of her treatment. As a consequence, the families of only 20,000 of these children will be able to afford continuation of life-sustaining treatment. The remaining 30,000 children die. Let us call this Coco, who decided years ago to sacrifice her happiness by becoming a pharmaceutical scientist, and then later decided to reduce her unhappiness by increasing the price for her treatment, thereby letting 30,000 children die, Price Gouging Coco.

Most people, in contrast to their sympathy with Painter Coco, would strongly morally condemn Price Gouging Coco. Yet, Price Gouging Coco *sustained the lives of 50,000 children for several years* and then *sustained the lives of 20,000 children for subsequently indefinite years*, allowing only 30,000 children to die (*and so after sustaining them for several years*), compared to Painter Coco's allowing all *50,000* children to die several years earlier. Price Gouging Coco was *far more* beneficent than Painter Coco; yet Price Gouging Coco is condemned and Painter Coco is not. What explains this? Prejudice against selfishness. The pursuit of money is symbolic for selfishness, and this is what people are condemning when they condemn Price Gouging Coco. This prejudice is *so deep*, furthermore, that it overrides concern about the well-being of 50,000 children *and* it fuels

continued straw-man representations of selfishness and whitewashes of unselfishness: Price Gouging Coco is associated with selfishness more than is Painter Coco even though Painter Coco is *more selfish* (*and* let more children die). Painter Coco decided to pursue her happiness instead of save 50,000 children; Price Gouging Coco decided to save 50,000 children and then be less self-sacrificial but *still* self-sacrificial in continuing to save 20,000 children. (Note that if Coco decides, instead of price gouging, to abandon her career as a pharmaceutical scientist to pursue painting, i.e., to pursue her true happiness, thereby letting 50,000 children die, she would not be nearly as condemned as Price Gouging Coco, even though she would be letting 50,000 children die instead of only 30,000; prejudice against selfishness makes people more approving of letting *more* children die if doing so is less associated with a selfish motive.)

Third, *prejudice against selfishness makes people tend to condemn an allowing of harm to others, when associated with a selfish motive (and even if the person who allowed harm has been massively beneficent), far more than an actual causing of harm, when associated with a less selfish or unselfish motive.* To appreciate this, consider the following variations of a Coco who harms or advocates the harming of others, in increasing order of magnitude of harm. **Murderer Coco** (or perhaps Garden Variety Murderer Coco) murders her husband after finding out he was having an affair. **Terrorist Coco** regards Westerners as immoral for being concerned with wealth, material goods, and pleasure on Earth, and so plots to murder as many as she can. **Brutal Dictator Coco**, for the sake of securing the well-being of her citizens, murders swaths of them. **Misanthropic Environmentalist**

Coco holds that mankind is a plague that threatens the non-human environment and that it would be nice if a virus came along to wipe out all human beings.[124]

Most people, if pressed to compare the moral status of these four Coco's against that of Price Gouging Coco, would officially claim that these four Coco's are more immoral than Price Gouging Coco. Setting aside, however, these moral verdicts, most or at least a great many people would feel much more *visceral repugnance* toward Price Gouging Coco than towards any of these four *and* would more publicly and widely morally condemn Price Gouging Coco than they would any of the other four Coco's. Of Murderer Coco, many people would feel sympathy and/or amusement with her rather than repugnance toward her, even though she *murdered* someone. Of Terrorist Coco, most people would fear being killed by a terrorist and would desire to eliminate any threat posed to them by terrorism, but they, or at least many, would not feel a moral repugnance towards Terrorist Coco that approaches the level they feel toward Price Gouging Coco, even though Price Gouging Coco is no threat to them, and in contrast, could be the savior of their children, and even though Terrorist Coco is a threat to their children. Rather, many would be reluctant morally to condemn Terrorist Coco and would instead reach for paper-thin justifications for such reluctance—e.g., "she has her reasons," "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom

[124] The inspiration for Misanthropic Environmentalist Coco is a quote from David M. Graber (1989, p. 9), a National Park Service biologist: "We are not interested in the utility of a particular species, or free-flowing river, or ecosystem, to mankind. They have intrinsic value — more value, to me — than another human body or a billion of them. Human happiness, and certainly human fecundity, are not as important as a wild and healthy planet. I know social scientists who remind me that people are part of nature, but it isn't true. Somewhere along the line — at about a billion years ago and maybe half that — we quit the contract and became a cancer. We have become a plague upon ourselves and upon the earth. . . . Until such time as Homo sapiens should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along." Compare this program, and that of Murderer Coco, Terrorist Coco, and Brutal Dictator Coco, to Price Gouging Coco's program: "I just want to make as much money as I can to reduce my unhappiness."

fighter," "she's doing what she feels is right"—while confidently condemning Price Gouging Coco for selfishness. Many would have similar reactions to Brutal Dictator Coco and Misanthropic Environmentalist Coco. To add a few reactions that may be particular to these two, of the first, some would add that "her goal, the well-being of her citizens, is noble." Of Misanthropic Environmentalist Coco, many might not even condemn her at all for declaring that it would be good if all human beings were wiped out, but rather amusingly regard her as kooky and avant-garde; perhaps even, in their misanthropic moods, many would *sympathize* with her. *People will condemn a nonmaleficent savior of children's lives over a garden variety murderer, a terrorist, a brutal dictator, and one who explicitly preaches the destruction of all mankind, due to their prejudice against selfishness*.

Fourth, *prejudice against selfishness makes people tend to describe and want to describe an allowing of harm to others, when associated with a selfish motive, as a causing of harm (which they regard as more immoral), and will want to describe and want to describe an actual—or at least very arguably an actual—causing of harm to others, when associated with an unselfish motive, as an allowing of harm to others (which they regard as less immoral)*. To appreciate this, let us compare common reactions to Price Gouging Coco to common reactions to a new case, **FDA Regulator Coco** (a different Coco), whose purported job is to protect the health and safety of the public by regulating food and drugs. FDA Regulator Coco forbids the Coco would who later become Price Gouging Coco from selling her treatment to begin with, on grounds that she (FDA Regulator Coco) judges the treatment to be unsafe for the public (on grounds, say, that there is a 10% chance of death

from undergoing the treatment; we can suppose this is true). Consequently, 50,000 children die due to lack of treatment.

If anyone here is to be accused of killing children, it is FDA Regulator Coco; and if anyone here is *not* to be accused of killing children—let alone to be praised for saving children's lives—it is Price Gouging Coco.[125] Yet, even though Price Gouging Coco did not cause any children's deaths, people *would want to* hold that she did; they *would want to hold* that she is responsible for those deaths in a way that is normally attached to actions that cause deaths. They would use and be sympathetic to descriptions of Price Gouging Coco's actions that suggest that she actively harmed those children, e.g., "She pursued profit at the expense of those children's lives." And even though FDA Regulator Coco enacted legislation that prevented Price Gouging Coco from saving 50,000 children, most people would resist holding that she in any way brought about the deaths of those children. Why do people want to describe Price Gouging Coco's action as that of harming children, even though it clearly does not fit this description, and want not to describe FDA Regulator Coco's action this way, even though it clearly or at least far more arguably does? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness: Price Gouging Coco's action is associated with a selfish motive and FDA Regulator Coco's action is associated with an unselfish motive.

Fifth, *prejudice against selfishness makes people tend to describe and want to describe a causing of harm to others, when associated with a selfish motive, as intentional*

[125] The children who would die from Price Gouging Coco's treatment and the children's lives that would be saved due to FDA Regulator Coco's regulation will be discussed below (when I get to the sixth aspect).

(which they regard as more immoral), and tend to describe and want to describe a causing of harm to others, when associated with an unselfish motive, as unintentional (which they regard as less immoral). Supposing that both Price Gouging Coco's action and FDA Regulator Coco's action constitute a harming of children—and supposing that we will set aside the fact that FDA Regulator Coco harmed 20,000 more children than did Price Gouging Coco, who furthermore sustained those children for several years—whatever one's views of what counts as an intentional action or an intentional harming, Price Gouging Coco and FDA Regulator Coco are on a par vis-à-vis the intentionality or unintentionality of their harming. (Or at least it would be a burden on one who denies this to defend one's denial.) If Price Gouging Coco intentionally harmed those children, then so did FDA Regulator Coco; if FDA Regulator Coco did not intentionally harm those children, then neither did Price Gouging Coco. Yet people would want to hold that Price Gouging Coco *intentionally* harmed those children while FDA Regulator Coco *did not intentionally* harm them. Why is this? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness: Price Gouging Coco wants to make money (a goal that is symbolic of selfishness) while FDA Regulator Coco is associated with unselfish beneficence.

Prejudice against selfishness is so deep that, even if people (probably reluctantly) conceded that Price Gouging Coco harmed no children, that rather she saved and sustained and continues to sustain thousands of children's lives, and that FDA Regulator Coco did in some significant sense actively bring about the deaths of thousands of children, they would still be more inclined to condemn Price Gouging Coco over FDA Regulator Coco. Appreciating this will further cement my third point above. *Prejudice against selfishness*

makes people tend to condemn someone's allowing of harm, even if this person was massively beneficent, when associated with a selfish motive, far more than someone who arguably caused massive harm, when this person's action is associated with an unselfish motive.

Sixth, *prejudice against selfishness* infects people's intuitions about (a) what counts as a violation of autonomy and (b) the degree of immorality they ascribe to a violation of autonomy.[126] Let us consider (a). Many people hold that people who are destitute and hungry, because of their desperate condition, do not fully autonomously consent to working in, say, a sweatshop, for low wages; "they have no other choice, and so they have no real choice," it is often claimed. A solution that is offered to this purported problem of employers' hiring workers without getting their fully autonomous consent, is *not to allow* these destitute and hungry people to work for such low wages (by not allowing employers to offer jobs at such wages). So, the solution to this purported problem of not having a fully autonomous choice is *to deprive them of the choice to begin with*. Why is not allowing the poor person a choice at all *not* regarded as a violation of autonomy, let alone far more of a violation that the purported one of accepting a person's (for the sake of argument, not fully autonomous) choice to work for one? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness: The employer's acceptance of the poor person's (for the sake of argument, not fully autonomous) choice is associated with a selfish motive, viz., making money; while the not allowing of the poor person to make this (for the sake of argument, not fully

[126] Violation of someone's autonomy is often taken to be a particularly significant form of harming others; for this reason, I give it individual treatment.

autonomous) choice is associated with an unselfish motive, viz., protecting her autonomy (!), beneficence to the poor (the thought goes, if we mandate a higher wage, on the whole, employers will offer the higher wage rather than withdraw job offers to the poor[127]).

It may be replied here that mandating a higher wage (not allowing the poor person to accept a job at a lower wage) promotes the poor person's autonomy by increasing the number and quality of her options in life, e.g., she will have jobs available at higher wages. Granting the truth of this claim for the sake of argument, this promotion of autonomy comes at the expense of decreasing the number and quality of other people's options in life, e.g., the employer who wants to hire at a lower wage. Why is the decrease in number and quality of the employer's options in life not regarded as a violation of her autonomy (or at least not one that comes into people's mental radar) while the disrespect for the autonomy of the poor person is? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness: Protecting the employer's autonomy is associated with enabling selfishness and protecting the poor person's autonomy is associated with unselfish beneficence.

Turning to (b), let us compare common reactions to the following two cases. Consider first **Sharp Practicing Businessperson Coco**, who, for the sake of making as much money as possible with her treatment for children, engages in all manner of activities that are normally associated with dishonesty in business dealings, e.g., deceptive advertising, withholding information, outright lying, pressure tactics, manipulation, appeal to the consumers' emotions, trying to bypass the consumers' reasoning. Now consider **Sharp Practicing Environmentalist Coco**, who for the sake of protecting the non-human

[127] Classical economists, especially Austrian economists, argue that this thought is false.

environment from what she regards as the cancer that is humankind, engages in the same sorts of activities.[128] Most people would morally condemn Sharp Practicing Businessperson Coco far more than Sharp Practicing Environmentalist Coco, even though both, let us suppose, are on a par vis-à-vis their disrespect for others' autonomy. Why is this? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness.

Now let me make due on addressing the harm and benefit that result from Price Gouging Coco's treatment and FDA Regulator Coco's regulation, respectively. Let us suppose that some children die from Price Gouging Coco's treatment (or that we can expect that some will die based on available information) and let us suppose that some children are saved from FDA Regulator Coco's regulation (viz., those same children that would have died). Consider the following reactions that people would have. 1. People would be inclined to credit FDA Regulator Coco for saving those lives and inclined to ignore all the children's deaths she enabled. 2. People would be inclined to blame Price Gouging Coco for the deaths of the children who died due to her treatment and would be inclined to ignore all the lives she saved with her treatment. 3. People would be inclined wholly to ignore the fact that FDA Regulator Coco's saving of lives involved a massive violation of autonomy (*forcibly preventing* the treatment from being sellable to the public) while Price Gouging Coco's saving of lives involved no violation of autonomy (people are not forced to buy her treatment). 4. People would be inclined wholly to ignore the fact that the children's deaths that were enabled by FDA Regulator Coco's regulation resulted from *forcibly preventing* the parents from buying the treatment while the children's deaths due to Price Gouging

[128] See Simon (1996, Chapter 36) for examples of such practices.

Coco's treatment resulted from their parents' *choosing* to buy her treatment. 5. People would be inclined to question whether the parents' choice was really autonomous (e.g., were they "fully informed"? Was Price Gouging Coco fully honest and transparent about the nature of her treatment?) while ignoring that, granting—charitably—any and all sharp practice one wants ascribe to Price Gouging Coco, any lack of full autonomy involved in the parents' choice *pales* in comparison to the lack of autonomy involved in being *forcibly prevented* from buying the treatment. What explains these reactions? Prejudice against selfishness and in favor of unselfishness.

The intuitive reactions that I presented and discussed above I think well illustrate that the Maleficence objection to egoism often stems from an underlying and strong prejudice against selfishness. If it is really the harming of others that people want to condemn, then Environmentalist Coco, Brutal Dictator Coco, FDA Regulator Coco, Terrorist Coco, and Murderer Coco should be condemned—and FDA Regulator Coco should be condemned *far more* than Murderer Coco—and Price Gouging Coco should not even be on people's mental radar when reflecting on the ethics of harming others. Also, Stalin should be condemned on a par with Hitler. And if it is really beneficence that people care about (as opposed to self-sacrifice), Price Gouging Coco should be put on a moral pedestal, especially when compared to Painter Coco, who saved no lives, let alone Murderer Coco, who took one, *let alone* FDA Regulator Coco, who took 50,000.

4.2 Defending an egoistic policy toward harming others

Egoism aligns with and well explains our intuitions about when and why it is morally right to harm and not to harm others.

In general, real life cases of harming others that are judged immoral are also self-destructive, in at least one of the following ways: (1) the particular act hurts the harmer, psychologically, (2) the act is part of a pattern of behavior that is self-destructive to the harmer, (3) the act or pattern of behavior stems from underlying *unhappiness*. The harmer would be *happier* if she reduced how much she harms others, e.g., if she learned ways of increasing her happiness that involve less harming of them. Furthermore, in general, the degree of immorality ascribed to acts of harming others tends to correlate to the degree of self-destructiveness of the acts: Most people consider physical harming more immoral in general than emotional harming, and note that physical harming is in general far more self-destructive than emotional harming. Most people are in general afraid of hurting other people's feelings, *let alone physically harming* them. The psychological toll of physically harming others is in general greater than the toll of emotionally harming them.[129]

And, in general, real life cases of harming others that are self-interested are judged as morally permissible. For example, most people believe that it is moral to harm others in self-defense, i.e., to harm or even kill one's rapist or potential murderer. Most even believe that it can be moral to kill innocent people in self-defense. Suppose a hostile nation lands an army of tanks on U.S. soil and whose mission is to kill as many Americans as possible. The hostile nation has strapped innocent babies to their tanks, in hopes that we will chose

[129] In support of the claim that cases of emotional harming that are judged as immoral are generally self-destructive, notice that we think it is no harm to the emotional abuser if her victim—*selfishly*—stops willing to be abused. I suggest that her victim's decision no longer to tolerate abuse is *good for* the abuser; it makes more likely—even if just slightly—that the abuser will learn more self-interested ways of dealing with her pain.

to let ourselves be destroyed rather than to kill those innocent babies. (Suppose there is no way to neutralize the tanks without killing the babies.) Most people believe that it would be moral to kill those innocent babies. Considering emotional harming, one of the greatest emotional harms that people inflict on others is that of ending a romantic relationship with them. Most people believe that it is completely moral to do so, notably, when ending the relationship *serves one's happiness*.

There is, then, tremendous overlap between self-destructive harming and harming that is generally judged as immoral. And there is tremendous overlap between self-interested harming and harming that is generally judged as moral.

Opponents of an egoistic policy toward harming and not harming others would have us believe that these overlaps are merely happy coincidences. Of the first overlap, the opponent would claim that it is nice that cases of immorally harming others are generally not in our self-interest, but that this is not the reason such harming is immoral; many opponents would furthermore suggest that this reason is *irrelevant*. Of the second overlap, the opponent would likewise claim that selfishness is not what morally justifies physical harming in self-defense. She would offer other considerations that justify such harming, e.g., a moral right of self-defense, the Doctrine of Double Effect.

These coincidences are not believable and constitute an extremely unfair dismissal of egoism. It is far more plausible to infer from the overlaps what they straightforwardly suggest: An egoistic policy toward harming (and not harming) others, viz., harm and do not harm others to the extent and because it serves one's self-interest to do so, is true.

This policy is all the more plausible in light of the case for the moral attractiveness of selfishness that I have so far developed. We would find the following sentiment objectionable (and just plain bizarre): "It makes me truly happy, my dear husband, the love of my life, to emotionally abuse you and perhaps would make me truly happy to murder you so that I can inherit your money, but I will concede that it is wrong for me to emotionally abuse you and would be wrong for me to murder you; so I will sacrifice my happiness for you by going to therapy, so as to reduce the chances that I will murder you and to reduce how much I emotionally abuse you." We would find this alternative sentiment very attractive: "*For my own happiness*, I am going to go to therapy to figure out what is going on inside me that motivates me to emotionally abuse you and to consider physically harming you." It is a very morally attractive act to go on a deep soul-search, to explore and heal the labyrinthian depths of one's soul, to figure out why one is abusing others and otherwise sabotaging the development of healthy relationships, *for one's own sake*. This is an *extremely* selfish act and that's why it's so morally attractive. To the wife's claim, "My husband, I will go to therapy for *your* sake, not mine," he, if I may use him as my mouthpiece, would rightly respond, "No, do it for *you*."

Though I think that proffered justifications for harming others that purport not to be self-interested—e.g., a moral right of self-defense, the Doctrine of Double Effect—are false, I think I understand their motivation: Since, according to prevailing moral opinion, selfishness is at best amoral, people are motivated to find grounds other than selfishness for justifying self-interested harming. It is a way of having your selfishness—e.g., being morally permitted to physically harm others to preserve your life, to end a relationship for

the sake of your own happiness—while eating it, too, i.e., denying that selfishness is what morally justifies your behavior. Well, from my vantage point of being pro-selfishness, the project of finding non-egoistic defenses of selfish harming does a disservice to selfishness, for it further ingrains in people's minds the false idea that selfishness is at best amoral.

If other justifications—e.g., a moral right of self-defense, Doctrine of Double Effect—have some proper role in moral reasoning, I suggest they do so because they help guide selfish living in the real world. Consider for example the idea that self-defense is morally right and that it's good to have this in mind *because*, in the real world, cases of self-defense are paradigmatic among the cases in which physically harming others is beneficial to us.

Now, one might object that even if an egoistic policy toward harming others and not harming others is generally morally attractive, there will still be cases, at least theoretical and probably also realistic, in which acting selfishly requires immorally harming others, e.g., assaulting and murdering innocent people. Let us call these cases *hard cases*.

Granting for purposes of argument that there are hard cases, i.e., theoretical and realistic cases in which acting selfishly requires immorally harming others, I want to offer four replies that will mitigate how much of a problem hard cases pose for egoism.

First, hard cases do not negate the above work I have done so far in defending egoism, i.e., in defending that selfishness is generally morally attractive and in defending a general egoistic policy toward helping and harming others; or at least one would need to supply an argument that hard cases do so.

Second, the problem of hard cases should not preclude egoism from being regarded as a respectable ethical theory, i.e., regarded as have something important to say about the moral life. There are hard cases for currently respected ethical theories as well, e.g., utilitarianism, Kantian ethics. Denying respectable standing to egoism on grounds of hard cases is a bad faith move.

Third, the problem of hard cases is actually less of a problem for egoism than for at least many other ethical theories, in the following respect: In general, non-egoistic ethical theories require that one *submit* to harm if another person's harming one is morally right, whereas egoism does not so require. According to utilitarianism, if it maximizes happiness for society to enslave a minority, then the minority must submit to enslavement; according to egoism, the minority would be allowed—*encouraged*—to fight back. According to Kantian ethics, if the survival of mankind requires that Coco tell a lie, and if Coco decides to tell the truth, the rest of us must allow her to do so; according to egoism, we would be justified in using any means necessary to get Coco to lie. According to egoism, supposing that it is in Coco's self-interest and therefore morally right for her to orchestrate a genocide against a group of people, it is also morally right for them to kill her first.

Fourth, the above work I have done so far in defending egoism should make people start to question their judgments in least some hard cases; e.g., would it really be immoral to kill an innocent stranger in order to save the love of one's life? Even if one holds to a "Yes," egoism at least explains why it would be *more moral* to kill the stranger to save one's lover than to kill one's lover to save the stranger: the moral attractiveness of selfishness and the moral unattractiveness of self-destructiveness.

Conclusion: Could Life Be Metaphysical?

My argument for the view that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive (call the view Survivalism), as presented in Chapter 3, is that the view is a normative perspective on—i.e., the normative corollary of—the claim that what a living thing *is*, is an instance of the ultimate end of survival.[130] This argument can be understood as my official argument for Survivalism.

Thus far in this dissertation, I have not made any claims about the metaphysical status of life and my official argument for Survivalism does not depend on any such claims. I have thus far implicitly taken living things as phenomena in the universe that are on a par with all other phenomena—e.g., rocks, rivers, breezes, galaxies, knives, houses—and without assuming any particular metaphysical claims about any of these phenomena, except the uncontroversial assumption that all these phenomena *exist*, in some uncontroversial and colloquial sense of *exist*.

In particular, I have been silent with regard to Thompson's claim and argument for the claim that life cannot be given a metaphysical analysis. A metaphysical analysis of life, according to Thompson, to repeat from Chapter 1, would be an account of what makes a region of space-time a living thing in terms of the living thing's individual, metaphysical nature. It would consist in a set of features that (1) distinguishes living things from non-living things, (2) contribute to an understanding of the concept *life*, and

[130] I understand the question "What is a living thing?" here as asking for an account of a living thing that will strike us as really capturing and illuminating what a living thing is, an answer that resonates with us, and inspires the reaction, "Ah, that has a ring of truth to it. Of the myriad facts that one can list about living things, that fact(s) seems really to capture what a living thing *is*."

(3) are metaphysical, where what it means for a feature to be metaphysical is for the region of space-time that corresponds to that living thing sufficiently to determine that that living thing has that feature. I will alternatively call the claim that life can be given a metaphysical analysis of life, the claim that life is metaphysical, or equivalently, the life exists metaphysically.

Now, though the issue of whether life is metaphysical or not is irrelevant to my official argument for Survivalism, to conclude this dissertation, I do want to offer for consideration a set of metaphysical claims, of which the central one—i.e., the one that is most interesting in the context of investigating natural normativity—is the claim that life is metaphysical. If these metaphysical claims, especially the central one, are true, then they constitute a deeper grounding for Survivalism than my official argument provides. As this is not a dissertation on metaphysics, I am not offering anything that would be called a full or comprehensive defense of these metaphysical claims, but rather simply putting them on the table for consideration.

The metaphysical claims arose in me as intuitions that themselves arose out of reflection on all the work of this dissertation, notably on (1) Thompson's argument that life cannot be given a metaphysical analysis, (2) a certain passage from Ayn Rand on the nature of life, (3) objections that have been leveled against the content of Rand's passage, and (4) my conception of life as a process of self-sustenance that is not bound by any determinate form in terms of parts or activities. As I further meditated on and developed the intuitions, they became stronger.

I will understand the claim that something—e.g., rocks, phones, rivers, life—is metaphysical as the claim that the matter to which that something corresponds wholly determines it to be that something. There are five metaphysical claims:

1. Inanimate phenomena—e.g., rocks, phones, rivers—are not metaphysical.
2. The features and activities of a living thing—e.g., stomachs, leaves, digesting, photosynthesizing—are not metaphysical.
3. Living things, considered as members of kinds—e.g., rabbit, plant—are not metaphysical.
4. Life is metaphysical: Specifically, a metaphysical form of matter that sustains itself as that metaphysical form of matter.
5. Inanimate matter is metaphysical.

Let me begin by setting the context that gave rise to my thinking about the issues on which the five above claims are positions: The passage from Rand on the nature of life as well as objections that have been leveled against it. The passage is as follows:

> There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or nonexistence—and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not: it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. If an organism fails in that action, it dies; its chemical elements remain, but its life goes out of existence. (Rand, 1961, p. 16)

I will do a significant amount of interpretive work on the above six sentences. First, just taking them at face value, here are four objections that might be pressed against their content:

1. Some claim that Rand's claim that the alternative of existence or nonexistence pertains only to living things, is false; they offer counterexamples, e.g., a house

faces the alternative of existence or nonexistence. Similarly or even equivalently, some claim that Rand's idea that only living things can be destroyed, i.e., cease to exist, is false; a house can be destroyed, i.e., made to stop existing.[131]

2. Some claim that Rand's claim that "[t]he existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not: it depends on a specific course of action," is false; they offer counterexamples, e.g., the continued existence of a ship or a car depends on a specific course of action, e.g., replacing parts, general upkeep.
3. Some criticize Rand's definition of life—viz., "a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action"—claiming that there are/could be non-living things that engage in self-generated action, e.g., a moving robot, and self-sustaining action, e.g., a moving robot which seeks out new batteries and spare parts to replace its old batteries and decaying parts.
4. Some, drawing on one or more of the preceding criticisms, claim that Rand has failed to show in what sense the alternative between life and death is, according to her, the one fundamental alternative in the universe. (Robert Nozick, for example, in his criticism of Rand's argument for the normativity of survival, argues that the alternative of life and death is not the only one that faces a living thing. Other alternatives, at least in the case of a human being, according to Nozick, include that of whether God is praised or not and whether talented people are respected or

[131] Michael Huemer, who rejects the naturalistic approach to normativity and has extensively defended ethical intuitionism (Huemer, 2005), has presented these objections against Rand's argument (Huemer, undated).

not. (Nozick, 1971, p. 251)[132] Thus, according to Nozick, Rand is committed to holding that praising God and respecting talented people are equally plausible contenders for normative ends as is survival. Nozick further objects that, even assuming that the alternative of life or death does establish a normative end for a living thing, Rand has not established that *life* rather than *death* is a normative end. He claims that Rand "begs the question against death's being a value." (Nozick, 1971, p. 253))

Defenders of Rand's passage reply to the objections by holding to the idea that the distinction between life and death is (somehow) special, and from this perspective arguing that the objections overlook this fact. "Don't you just see that there is an important difference between living things and non-living things? Between a house's being destroyed and a living thing's dying?" Critics of Rand's passage reply by claiming that her defenders are just begging the question against them: They assume that the distinction between life and death is special (in a way that is purported to nullify the objections), when the claim that the distinction is special is the very one that the objections are targeting. "No, we don't see. Rand attempted to show what the important difference is in the passage above and her attempt seems to amount to a potpourri of false or at least unjustified claims (with the exception of the last sentence)."

For over a decade, I have been thinking about the six sentences that comprise the above passage from Rand as well as the dialectic between her defenders and opponents;

[132] Note that neither of these alternatives faces all living things. Rather they face only human beings. This point could be developed into an objection against Nozick's criticism, but I will not do so here.

often sympathetic to both parties. On the one hand, I sympathized with the objections: They seem like straightforward, pressing ones. On the other hand, I do have the intuition that the distinction between life and death is special and that the objections showed no sympathy for this intuition; they seem instead to focus on isolated aspects of Rand's reflection on living things, out of context, and without any sense of the core idea Rand was trying to communicate. However, on the other hand *again*, *what is this core idea*, i.e., *what is so special* about the difference between life and death, has not been fully clear to me (or to Rand's opponents), which is why the objections have been presented in the first place, and which is why the passage has vexed me for over a decade.

I think I have finally figured out the core idea that Rand was presenting, implicitly but pretty nearly explicitly, that should shape how we understand the passage, and that to my mind is extremely provocative and philosophically significant: The idea is that living things exist *metaphysically* while inanimate phenomena *do not*.[133] Let us consider inanimate phenomena first.

1. Inanimate phenomena are not metaphysical

When Rand claims, first of all, that "Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist," the context around this sentence makes clear that she is

[133] This interpretation of the passage is further supported by a sentence Rand writes later in the article: "*Metaphysically*, *life* is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action." (Rand, 1961, p. 18) (Italics on *metaphysically* added.)

Regardless of the accuracy of my ensuing interpretation of Rand's passage, the content of my interpretation captures my views and I offer the content in that respect. (I am delivering my views in the manner of an interpretation of Rand's passage because my views arose from an attempt to interpret this passage and because I think my views do represent an accurate interpretation of this passage.)

referring to *inanimate* matter here, and excluding *animate* matter, i.e., living things. (On this point, both defenders and critics of her passage seem to be agreed.)

Now, critics of her passage, such as Michael Huemer, interpret her as claiming that *particular inanimate phenomena*, e.g., houses, rocks, are indestructible. But I think this is not the right interpretation: Rather, I think Rand is claiming that *inanimate matter as such*—the whole of inanimate matter as such—as opposed to individuated chunks of inanimate matter that are grasped by beings with certain epistemic natures as corresponding to certain phenomena, is indestructible. Inanimate matter, she says, can *change forms*—and by this I think she would have in mind things like a house's being burned down or a rock's being pulverized—but it cannot in her view be destroyed, i.e., cease to exist.

In claiming that inanimate matter can change forms but not cease to exist, I think Rand is using the notion of *being destroyed* or *ceasing to exist* in a way that only applies to phenomena that (according to her) have *metaphysical* existence. Something can be destroyed only if it exists metaphysically; otherwise, Rand would say that that something can only change forms. Rand seems to be suggesting then that *inanimate phenomena do not have metaphysical existence*.

As this is not a dissertation primarily on metaphysics, I won't get into the weeds with the issue of what case can be made for accepting this claim. Pursuing this issue would involve following up with the abundance of philosophical attention that has already been given to variations of the idea that the ordinary phenomena of our experience are not metaphysical (e.g., the debate between metaphysical realists and

idealists). I will limit myself to the remark that those who are sympathetic to the idea that inanimate phenomena do not have metaphysical existence would find persuasive thought experiments such as the following. We could imagine an alien species, whose epistemic nature is different from ours, such that when they look out into the universe, they individuate inanimate phenomena very differently. The chunk of matter that, by the lights of our epistemic natures, corresponds to a rock, may, by the lights of their epistemic natures, not do so. The nature of the matter to which a rock corresponds, then, does not wholly determine it to be a rock; *parri passu* for all other inanimate phenomena.

Supplemental argumentation could be provided here for the claim that a specific class of inanimate phenomena, viz., artifacts, are not metaphysical. If no living things used certain knife-shaped chunks of matter as knives, and no living things had any need to cut anything, any concept of cutting anything, or any concept of a certain type of object that well serves the task of cutting things, then these knife-shaped chunks of matter would not be knives. That they *are* knives in our actual world is determined by considerations other than the nature of the matter to which the knives correspond, considerations such as the preceding.[134]

2. Features and activities of living things are not metaphysical

Before turning to living things as such, I want to consider the *features and activities* of living things and then living things, considered as members of kinds. This material is from my own thinking and based on the dissertation work so far. By the

[134] Note that I am *not* here attempting to give anything that would be called an ontological account of artifacts, i.e., an account of what is involved in determining an artifact to be the artifact it is. My aim here is only to offer support for the claim that artifacts are not metaphysical.

features and activities of living things I mean those that we ordinarily refer to—e.g., arms, legs, breathing, photosynthesizing—with, however, the exception of survival (which might be taken as a feature or activity). (I will discuss *survival* later.) One reason that features and activities of a living thing are not metaphysical is that, as I covered in Chapter 3, they make implicit reference to the external world, i.e., to things that are external to the matter that corresponds to the living thing.

3. Living things, considered as members of kinds, are not metaphysical.

Living things, *considered as members of kinds*, are also not metaphysical. By a kind, I include any and all kinds under which we ordinarily classify living things—e.g., unicellular, multicellular, plant, animal, oak, rabbit, flying thing, creeping-crawling thing—with the exception of the kind *living thing* (if one wants to call it a kind). (I will discuss *living thing* later.) One reason that, say, a *rabbit* does not exist metaphysically is that kinds refer to features and activities, which, as just discussed, are not metaphysical. A second reason is that whether Mrs. Muff is a rabbit depends on the existence of a swath of other living things and on our examining them, identifying similarities and differences among them, creating kind concepts—e.g., a new species, a new subspecies, etc.—as theoretical and practical considerations warrant, and classifying them and Mrs. Muff under these kinds. If Mrs. Muff were the only living thing in the universe, there would be no kind concepts at all. No one would be around to have them; and even if there were, there would not be enough living things (to put it mildly) to examine and for which to construct kind concepts. So Mrs. Muff would not be a rabbit (or an herbivore or a mammal or a multicellular organism, etc.).

4. Life is metaphysical, viz., a metaphysical form of matter that sustains itself as that metaphysical form of matter

Now, considering the living thing itself or as such, my interpreting Rand as claiming that living things are metaphysical is based on how she contrasts living things against inanimate phenomena, viz., she claims that only living things can be destroyed while inanimate phenomena can only change forms; as well as on a sentence she writes later: "*Metaphysically, life is* the only phenomenon that is an end in itself." (Rand, 1961, p. 18)[135]

The idea that life is metaphysical, in tandem with the idea that inanimate phenomena are not metaphysical[136], may be pressed with the following objection: If one believes that inanimate phenomena are not metaphysical, it would seem that one should also believe that animate phenomena are also not metaphysical; there does not seem to be any metaphysical difference between the two. Thought experiments that support the claim that inanimate phenomena are not metaphysical would apply also to animate phenomena, i.e., living things. We could imagine an alien species, whose epistemic nature is different from ours, such that when they look out into the universe, they individuate animate phenomena very differently. Perhaps they see different things as alive; perhaps, by their lights, the chunk of matter that by our lights corresponds to a rock, to them would correspond to a living thing. Perhaps, by their lights, the chunk of

[135] Emphasis on *metaphysically* added.

[136] Henceforth, I will always consider the claim that life is metaphysical in tandem with the claim that inanimate phenomena are not.

matter that by our lights corresponds to a living thing, to them corresponds to some inanimate phenomenon. Alternatively, perhaps they do not see anything as alive; by their lights, there are no animate phenomena, and by corollary, no *inanimate* phenomena either, since the notion of inanimacy presupposes and contrasts against the notion of animacy. These aliens might grasp individual phenomena to which a distinction between animate and inanimate is simply inapplicable. Perhaps they do not even grasp individual phenomena *at all*; perhaps the universe to them is just an undifferentiated plenum.

I do not have a defense of the claim that life is metaphysical that does not presuppose sympathy to the intuition that it is. What I can offer by way of a defense, however, is a set of three considerations that, at least in my case, led to the intuition's developing and strengthening within me; I suspect there will be others who would develop the same intuition in light of one or more of the following three considerations.

First, upon due reflection, it just seems to me that, while members of an alien species could rightly not regard what we rightly regard as a pebble, as a pebble, that whether there are living things out there is a matter that is independent of the nature of any mind, ours or the aliens'. Supposing these alien creatures were extremely tiny, e.g., the size of subatomic particles, they would certainly not regard what we regard as a pebble in the same way. To them, a pebble would be a gigantic something; perhaps they would have another concept for it; perhaps they would not even conceptualize it as a distinct phenomenon. By contrast, regardless of whether the aliens or we are in a position to grasp some living thing as alive, it just seems to me that that living thing would still be a living thing. A chunk of inanimate matter may for us rightly correspond to a pebble

while for the aliens rightly correspond to something else or no phenomenon in particular. But a chunk of animate matter is a living thing because of the nature of the matter. If a human being crushes a pebble into dust, then by our (human beings') lights, a pebble has been destroyed; but perhaps not so by these aliens' lights. However, if we kill Mrs. Muff, then something independently of any mind has been destroyed, viz., a living thing.

Second, my inquiry into life strengthened my intuition that life is metaphysical. A living thing need not have any determinate form of the sort SBNN theorists have in mind, e.g., hearts, lungs, digesting, photosynthesizing. Rather, a living thing is a process of self-sustenance, i.e., of survival, which can take any determinate form. *That living or being self-sustaining is the undercurrent that gives theoretically infinite variations of determinate form the reality of constituting a living thing*, strengthened my intuition that self-sustenance is metaphysical.

Third, the intuition, as I will argue, provides a plausible interpretation of Rand's passage that addresses the objections to them. The objections, to repeat, are: (1) Living things are not the only things that face the alternative of existence or nonexistence, (2) The existence of life is not the only thing that is unconditional, i.e., not the only thing that depends on a specific course of action, (3) Living things are not the only things that are a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action, (4) Rand has failed to show in what sense the alternative between life and death is the one fundamental alternative in the universe.

The idea that life is a metaphysical form of matter that sustains itself as that metaphysical form of matter, addresses all the above objections. In reply to (1), living

things are the only things that face the alternative of *metaphysical* existence or nonexistence. In reply to (2), life is the only *metaphysical* thing whose existence depends on a specific course of action. In reply to (3), living things are the only things that are a *metaphysical* process of self-sustaining and self-generated action.[137] In reply to (4), life and death are the one fundamental alternative in the universe in the sense that they are the one *metaphysical* alternative in the universe.

5. Inanimate matter is metaphysical, viz., a metaphysical form of matter that does not self-sustain

As a matter of logic, if either animate matter or inanimate matter is metaphysical, it follows that the other is as well; either both are metaphysical or neither is. Animate matter's being metaphysical means that what makes animate matter animate is wholly the nature of the matter, i.e., that what makes animate matter animate is that the matter satisfies condition X (what X is, is irrelevant here). It would follow then that inanimate matter, i.e., matter that is *not* animate, would be matter whose nature does not satisfy condition X. (Likewise, if it's true that inanimate matter is metaphysical, on account of the nature of the matter's satisfying condition *not* X, then it would follow that animate matter is metaphysical, on account of the nature of the matter's satisfying condition X.)

I take it that animate matter is metaphysical: I take that my above defense of the claim that animate matter is metaphysical makes the claim at least plausible enough to justify entertaining for purposes of argument. Animate matter is a self-sustaining form of

[137] (1) and (2) I think are aspects of (3): Regarding (1), living things face the alternative of metaphysical existence or nonexistence in the sense that they *sustain* their existing as living things and regarding (2), the specific course of action is self-sustenance.

matter. Assuming then that animate matter is metaphysical, it follows that inanimate matter is metaphysical. Inanimate matter is a non-self-sustaining form of matter.

In my view, then, there are two and only two metaphysical forms of matter: animate and inanimate, i.e., living and non-living. The metaphysical picture of the world here, then, is that of a plenum of inanimate matter, studded with chunks of animate matter, i.e., living things.

At any given time in the universe, the number of things that exist *metaphysically* equal the number of living things plus one (the plenum of inanimate matter).

Conclusion: The Deepest Argument for Survival as the Ultimate End

My official argument for Survivalism, i.e., for the claim that the ultimate end of a living thing is to survive, again, is that the claim is a normative corollary of the claim that what a living thing *is*, is an instance of survival, i.e., an instance of the *ultimate end of* survival.

If the metaphysical picture that I introduced in this final section is true, then it gives deeper support to the official argument: Survival is a—and the only—*metaphysical* end, an end built into the nature of the universe itself.

Survival—not life-form—is your *natural normativity*.

At any given time in the universe, there are as many sources of normativity as there are living things.

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