

A EUDAIMONIST CONCEPT OF LIBERTY
RELATION, ROLES, AND PROPER FUNCTIONING

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for Randi & Filippa

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Abstract

In this thesis, I theorise novelly about the essence of political liberty. And the novelty lies, somewhat paradoxically, in the theorisation's ancient orientation: I attempt to arrive at a eudaimonist concept of liberty by way of Anscombian analytical Aristotelianism. On this route, we find liberty to be the state of proper functioning — and, specifically, a relational property that characterises and is essential to proper functioning social roles. And that relational property is the actualisation of one's potencies, the unfolding of the specific soul that one is. An important implication of this concept is that liberty cannot be untied from rationality and goodness. Moreover, rather than antithetical to obligation, we come to know liberty as profoundly entwined with it.

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Bewildering Phenomena and the Sirens' Spell

Certain phenomena are bewildering in that there is consensus about the phenomena's existence, but not their essence: there is agreement on the fact *that* such phenomena are, but disagreement on *what* they in fact are. And political liberty — merely 'liberty' or, alternatively, 'freedom' hereafter — is bewildering in that exact sense. Indeed, political theorists, and especially those that parish to political liberalism, tend to agree not only that liberty actually (or potentially) exists, but also that liberty, *ceteris paribus*, is good and perhaps even valuable as such, that is, 'independently of the value of the particular things it leaves us free to do'.¹ Yet the very same theorists disagree on what such liberty essentially consist in, and thus also on the manner in which state and citizen ought to pursue its goodness.

It would, of course, be hubristic to believe that one could somehow lead the way to consensus. I am under no such delusion. But I shall nevertheless attempt to theorise novelly about the essence of liberty. And the novelty lies, somewhat paradoxically, in the theorisation's ancient orientation: I attempt to arrive at a eudaimonist concept of liberty by way of Anscombian analytical Aristotelianism.²

¹ Carter, 'The Independent Value of Freedom', 845; cf. Brennan, 'Political Liberty'.

² Thompson, *Life and Action*, 6.

Tradition, method, and preparation

Immediately, some might object that this pursuit is not only peculiar, but also that it is futile: did not Aristotle justify slavery and disdain democracy? Certainly, Aristotle justified slavery (esp. *Pol.* 1.2 1252^a30–34) and disdained democracy (esp. *Pol.* 5.9 1310^a25–35; 6.2 1317^a40–^b16). But that does not in itself doom the eudaimonist concept to futility: although profoundly Aristotelian, the concept does not predicate everything that Aristotle ever theorised. I shall make evident precisely what premises we embark from, how the arguments lead us to the concept's conclusions, as well as why they are quite reasonable — indeed, we might even come to appreciate that Aristotle's discussions of slavery and democracy shed remarkably interesting light on these premises, arguments, and conclusions.

Even if that might convince the objector that a eudaimonist concept is not doomed to futility, their suspicion might linger. Is not such a concept still peculiar, and, by virtue of its peculiarity, unlikely to compellingly make sense of liberty? The objection has two facets. The first concerns the philosophical tradition in general, and its canonical texts: what is the value — for contemporary practical philosophy — of engaging in an ongoing discourse on the texts of the tradition? My response shall be Nussbaumian: 'whereas much of what is written in any given generation of philosophy is superficial and too simple', the texts of the tradition are typically complex, subtle, and deep — simply because they have endured.³ These texts can therefore root and nourish our thought so that our own thinking grows in complexity, subtlety, and depth. Moreover, our thought can be broadened, as the tradition contains a variety of distinct positions and paradigms, forcing us to break out of contemporary complacencies, whatever these may be. That, in turn, enables us to think from different, unfamiliar angles, thus challenging the unexamined presuppositions, categories, and schemes of thought that our generation, consciously or not, and like every other, fosters and defends. As such, our labour might ultimately generate unanticipated fruits.

³ Nussbaum, 'Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities', 103.

The value of the philosophical tradition, then, is not found in blind submission to authorities, but in wrestling with and over texts to improve our thinking, so that our own writing — ideally — might contribute to the tradition. That implies that we need to preserve a space between ourselves and the texts of the tradition, yet simultaneously allow ourselves to be led by them, so as to understand things in other ways — a ‘very delicate balancing act’⁴ indeed. This is not a matter of keeping the tradition at arm’s length, merely picking out the parts that already appeal to our emotions and intuitions, preferences and prejudices. On the contrary, if wrestling with and over the texts of the tradition is to lead us to interesting places, it has to be done systematically and comprehensively. That is, we have to seriously try to reconstruct positions and paradigms as wholes in order to explore and evaluate the sense they make of the world.

The objection’s second facet concerns Aristotle in particular: what are good reasons for pursuing a eudaimonist concept of liberty by way analytical Aristotelianism? I shall make three terse responses. Firstly, with virtue ethics, there has been a ‘revival’⁵ of Aristotelian naturalism, conjured by Elizabeth Anscombe and then Philippa Foot — the mother and daughter, as it were, of modern, analytical Aristotelianism.⁶ Secondly, and relatedly, this revival has more or less confined itself, it seems, to ethical theory: there is no comparable revival of analytical Aristotelianism in political theory (which I take to encompass political philosophy also), but for certain notable exceptions *à la* Alasdair MacIntyre and the aforementioned Martha Nussbaum.⁷ Thirdly, and perhaps predictably, I am convinced that the basic position and paradigm of Aristotelianism is true, and therefore that a eudaimonist liberty concept *should* be pursued by way of analytical Aristotelianism. However, the meaning of such ‘analytical Aristotelianism’ remains rather diffuse. I am confident that it will become clearer as we go — but I should still say a word or two about what to expect.

⁴ Nussbaum, ‘Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities’, 104.

⁵ Hacker-Wright *et al.*, ‘Aristotelian Naturalism’, 3.

⁶ E.g. Anscombe, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’; Foot, ‘Moral Arguments’.

⁷ E.g. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*. This is especially the case if we keep out contributions that are first and foremost historical, such as Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics*. Moreover, this is certainly not to say that nothing is happening in political theory, see for instance the very recent Rogers, *The Authority of Virtue*.

I do not attempt to bring forth any learned or unlearned exposition of the historical Aristotle, even though Aristotle's texts — especially the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* — shall guide our endeavours. Thus, if we were to stumble over anything of historical value, it would be entirely incidental. That is not at all an oblique declaration of irreverence for historical investigations, to the contrary. The point is rather that I aim, like Michael Thompson, 'to bring my own thoughts about the matter at hand — however unworthy these may be — into what we might call the Aristotelian tradition in philosophy and practical thought'.⁸ The defining mark of that tradition is a naturalism that is based on teleological forms of nature and within which the human being obtains a very special place.⁹ This special place is due to our extraordinary being-in-the-world, manifested in our capacity for rational observation of, discussion about, and contemplation on existence and reality. The qualifier 'analytic' refers to such philosophical activity — exercised critically, in the spirit of Anscombe — and does not signal any distance to continental philosophy, far from it. In the Aristotelian tradition, then, we concern ourselves with the concrete human organism, not abstract notions of 'agent', 'self', or 'person'. Thus, when I do refer to this or that agent, self, or person, it will be an abbreviation for this or that *human* agent, self, or person.

That is all that we need to know about analytical Aristotelianism, at least for now. But that does not entail that our preparations end here. I must also do crudely and selectively what others, such as David Miller,¹⁰ have done rigorously and systematically: map the landmarks of various routes that theorists have taken to grasp the essence of liberty. I should stress that my purpose is to provide an overview of the intellectual landscape of liberty, and, as such, intricate circumstances will be simplified, perhaps even oversimplified. But the map will still equip us with an understanding of the landscape, from an Aristotelian point of view, with all its deceitful traps — in turn rendering our own theorisation far better than it otherwise would have been.

⁸ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 11.

⁹ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 7–8.

¹⁰ Miller, *Liberty; The Liberty Reader*. See also Carter *et al.*, *Freedom; Gray, Freedom*.

An Odyssean journey through liberty concepts

The distinction between positive and negative liberty concepts can be traced back to Immanuel Kant, if not further.¹¹ Whereas the former is the *presence* of mastery or fulfilment, the latter is the *absence* of restrictions or interferences. The concepts can also be distinguished in terms of internal and external factors. Theorists of positive liberty are principally concerned with factors that are internal to the agent: positive liberty is mastery of agency, the fulfilment of fundamental purposes. Conversely, theorists of negative liberty are principally concerned with constraints that are external to the agent, such that the agent has negative liberty in so far as various options are available to it. Thus, in a sense, the positive concept emphasises a certain kind of activity, whilst the emphasis of the negative concept is on potentiality.

However, although the positive and negative concepts are different, they are not logically inconsistent. That is, if one *assumes* that mastery of agency is logically consistent with restrictions and interferences, then the simultaneous realisation of the positive and negative concept is possible. But that assumption is controversial. Moreover, in practice, the concepts — in their theoretically uncompromised variants — often do contradict each other. And such contradiction is depicted especially vivid in Alexander Pope's marvellous translation of the Sirens passages in Homer's *Odyssey*.

The basic theme of the Homeric epic is that of homecoming (*nostos*): having secured victory in the Trojan war, Odysseus, king of Ithaca, set off on his journey home, where his wife Penelope and their son Telemachus await him. But to return home, Odysseus and his sailors must pass the island 'where the Sirens dwell'.¹² The goddess Circe cautions Odysseus that the Sirens' song beguiles those who listen to it, captivating them, so that they nevermore return from their island:

¹¹ See Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', esp. 18–21.

¹² Homer, *Odyssey*, 178.

Unblest the man, whom music wins to stay
Nigh the cursed shore, and listen to the lay.
No more that wretched shall view the joys of life,
His blooming offspring, or his beautiful wife!
In verdant meads they sport; and wide around
Lie human bones that whiten the ground:
The ground polluted floats with human gore,
And human carnage taints the dreadful shore.
Fly swift the dangerous coast; let every ear
Be stopp'd against the song! 'tis death to hear!
Firm to the mast with chains thyself be bound,
Nor trust thy virtue to the enchanting sound.
If mad with transport, freedom thou demand,
Be every fetter strain'd, and added band to band.¹³

Odysseus' desires to return home, but also to hear their song. Thus, on Circe's council, Odysseus orders his sailors to bind him to the mast after he has stopped their ears with beeswax. And then, as Odysseus is bound to the mast, 'the Siren shores like mists arise', upon which the Sirens immediately raise their voice, begging him to stay:

Oh stay, O pride of Greece! Odysseus, stay!
Oh cease thy course, and listen to our lay!
Blest is the man ordain'd our voice to hear,
The song instructs the soul, and charms the ear.
Approach! thy soul shall into rapture rise!
Approach! and learn new wisdom from the wise!
We know what'er the kings of mighty name
Achieved at Troy in the field of fame;
What'er beneath the sun's bright journey lies.
Oh stay, and learn new wisdom from the wise.¹⁴

¹³ Homer, *Odyssey*, 178.

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, 182 (I have exchanged 'Ulysses' and 'Illion' with 'Odysseus' and 'Troy').

Odysseus cannot resist their song; his soul takes ‘wing to meet the heavenly strain’ — and by signs he orders his sailors to unbind his body, struggling ‘to be free’.¹⁵ But the sailors refuse to obey. In fact, Perimedes and Eurylochus does exactly the opposite, they tighten the bonds, while the others fall to their oars, rowing on, until the Siren shores yet again descend into the horizon. And only then is Odysseus loosened from his bonds.

The passages raise interesting questions about liberty — questions to which the negative and positive concept provide very different answers. On the negative concept, Odysseus is unfree when bound to the mast, demanding to be loosened: the bonds restrict his movements and thus interfere with his desire to go to the Sirens. But is not this restriction and interference aligned with Odysseus’ will? That depends on *which* Odyssean will we are referring to: we should differentiate between Odysseus before entering the realm of the Sirens ($t = 1$), within that realm ($t = 2$), and after passing through it ($t = 3$). I label them ‘Odysseus¹’, ‘Odysseus²’, and ‘Odysseus³’ respectively — referring not to different agents, of course, but to the different internal states (emotional, conative, volitional) of the identical agent under different external conditions. The sailors’ restriction and interference were aligned with the will of Odysseus¹, but not Odysseus². On the negative liberty concept, therefore, Odysseus² was unfree. The fact that the will of Odysseus³ is identical to Odysseus¹ does not alter that. On the positive concept, however, Odysseus² is free also. And that is because the restriction and interference, on the positive concept, is necessary for Odysseus² to master his agency, and specifically to fulfil his fundamental purpose of returning home. On the positive concept, therefore, Perimedes’ and Eurylochus’ tightening of the bonds is not only justified, but also liberating.

It can be objected that it does not make sense to treat Odysseus² as a quasi-agent that is different from Odysseus¹ and Odysseus³. That is because Odysseus² has not, for instance, demonstrated consistency over time, and does therefore not — in contrast to Odysseus¹ and Odysseus³ — represent Odysseus *qua* Odysseus. Two responses

¹⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 182.

should be made, one from the perspective of the negative concept, the other from the positive concept. Odysseus¹ and Odysseus² represent conflicting internal states that, depending on the external conditions, will come to define Odysseus' agency. If the sailors did not bind Odysseus to the mast, then he would go to the Sirens, and perhaps remain on their island forevermore. That is, if Odysseus² were not restricted and interfered with, then Odysseus² *would come to* define Odysseus' consistency over time. It would indeed break with the consistency over time that Odysseus¹ represents — but at this juncture in which Odysseus is bound to the mast, confronted with two different possible agential consistencies over time, it is not evident that we should prefer Odysseus¹ to Odysseus² simply because it used to define Odysseus' agency. To the contrary, that would make our present and future self captive to the past. For theorists of the negative concept, then, it makes no sense to appeal to agential consistency over time in order to answer the kind of liberty questions that we are considering. And for the theorist of the positive concept, the notion of consistency over time is not even valuable in itself. Imagine that Odysseus' lived in denial of his role as father, husband, and king for a very long time, pursuing all sorts of exciting adventures. But that would not alter the fact that he *is* father, husband, and king — and thus that fulfilling his fundamental purposes is predicated on returning home, even if that would break with his agential consistency over time up until that point.

Thus, the negative and positive concepts do not only provide different answers to the liberty questions that the Sirens passages raise; they are also inconsistent. The very same conditions that render Odysseus² free on the positive concept, render him unfree on the negative concept: enabling Odysseus² to master his agency and fulfil his fundamental purposes necessitates, in this situation, restriction and interference. Herein lies the problem of political liberty: should the state restrict or interfere with its citizens to enable them to master their agency and fulfil their fundamental purposes? Or, put differently: what should be the political *ideal* of liberty?

Critics of the positive concept, such as Isaiah Berlin, contend that the state cannot really enable its citizens to master their agency so as to fulfil their fundamental

purposes — and even if it could, it *ought* not to do it. Specifically, Berlin's contention is that the positive concept, as a political ideal, slides into the very antithesis of liberty: 'brutal tyranny'.¹⁶ And that is because the positive concept is predicated on the notion of a divided self. When Odysseus² demands to be unbound from the mast, so that he can go to the Sirens, it is because he is overwhelmed by desire for the Sirens' intimate secrets. If it were not for the bonds that held him back, Odysseus² would have acted on this desire. However, while Odysseus¹ also desires the Sirens' intimate secrets — otherwise he would not have perceived the danger of remaining unbound — Odysseus¹ acts on the very opposite desire: to *not* go to the Sirens, to not risk the dangers of satisfying his desire for their intimate secrets. That is a desire which is set aside in Odysseus², only to come to the fore again in Odysseus³. And granted that Odysseus¹, Odysseus², and Odysseus³ refer to the identical agent, namely Odysseus, it is reasonable to assume that Odysseus' second order desire — albeit suppressed by the first order desire of Odysseus² — is to *not* desire to go to the Sirens. Indeed, the bonds that hold him back and the sailors that tighten their hold are manifestations of this second order desire. As such, Odysseus is bound to the mast because he is a divided self, because his first and second orders of desires are inconsistent.

Both orders of desires cannot be satisfied. Which desire, then, *should* Odysseus pursue? The answer to that question is intuitive, the theorist of positive liberty might claim: Odysseus should pursue his second order desire because it is aligned with his fundamental purpose of going home — or, put differently, with John Elster, only the second order desire is truly rational.¹⁷ Perhaps intuitive, the theorist of negative liberty might object, but that is simply because the narrative incites this intuition in us. Thus, we should be sceptical about it. The theorist of positive liberty might respond that it such scepticism is unwarranted: it is self-evident that the first order desire represents a baser self and the second order desire a nobler self. The Sirens appeal to the lust for adulation, pleasure, and augury — which are merely spuriously related to verity, virtue, and reality. No reasonable agent *truly* desires to be such a baser self, thus, *ipso facto*, the

¹⁶ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 178. See also 179–181.

¹⁷ Elster, 'Ulysses and the Sirens', 469.

nobler self is the agent's true self. On the positive concept, therefore, it makes perfect sense for the sailors to comply with the order of Odysseus¹ (i.e. bind me to the mast), defy the order of Odysseus² (i.e. loosen my bonds), and then comply again with the order of Odysseus³ (i.e. loosen my bonds). Odysseus had to be liberated from his baser self. Similarly, on the positive concept, the state should liberate agents from irrational first — and second — order desires, such as excessive smoking, notorious infidelity, or ingrained idleness.

Theorists of the negative concept might admit that the positive concept does capture something significant about liberty in an existential sense. But it is still profoundly unsatisfactory as a *concept* of liberty: from the fact that the nobler self might be morally superior to the baser self, it does not follow that the nobler self is *freer* also. Moreover, the positive concept is especially unsatisfactory as a concept of *political* liberty: where does the state get the authority to decide who and what the nobler self is? If it is not the agent itself that is the authority in such matters, Berlin contends, then the state's ideal of liberty has already begun sliding. And the sliding picks up speed as theorists of positive liberty identify the desires of the nobler self with the desires of some collective, which they often do — be it 'a State, a class, a nation, the march of history itself'.¹⁸ Thus the positive concept becomes an instrument of tyranny.

For Berlin, the danger of this slippery slope was not simply theoretical: both communist and fascist ideologies attempted to crush baser selves so as to liberate nobler selves, as these were construed by the respective ideologies. The negative concept of liberalism, however, carved out (or *preserved*, the theorist of positive liberty might prefer) a political space within which the agent simpliciter — that is, not simply *an* aspect of the agent, such as its nobler self — is protected against the tyranny of the positive concept. In this space, the agent should be allowed to pursue its desires, whatever these are, as long as it does not trespass on the space of others by restricting or interfering with their liberty.

¹⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 181.

But even if some kind of non-restriction and non-interference were a necessary condition for liberty, it is not at all evident that it is a sufficient condition. Charles Taylor criticises the negative concept for reducing liberty to an opportunity concept, thus equating liberty with the potency for doing things — but liberty is also to actually do certain things, which implies that our liberty concept must encompass an exercise concept also.¹⁹ The reductionism of the negative concepts renders liberty something different from what it really is. The reason for that is twofold. Firstly, returning to Odysseus: if the first and second orders of desire are inconsistent, then the first order desire is *per se* restricting or interfering with the second order desire (and *vice versa*). It is arbitrary to neglect such restrictions or interferences simply because their existence is internal to the agent. Secondly, it is not the case that all restrictions and interferences can be reasonably said to diminish liberty. Odysseus, for instance, is not only bound to the mast; he also finds himself stuck on a ship. The sea is an obstacle, as it were, that makes it difficult — but not impossible — to go to the Sirens. As such, on the negative concept, the sea restricts Odysseus' movement, interfering with his desire to go to the Sirens, thus diminishing his liberty. But then again, is it the presence of the sea that diminishes Odysseus' liberty, or is it the absence of wings that could carry not only his soul, but also his body, to the Sirens' shores? In any case, it is not evident at all that it makes sense to regard the mere presence of the sea or the absence of wings as something that diminishes Odysseus' liberty. A theorist of negative liberty might attempt to draw distinctions between constraint by omission and commission: the former does not really diminish liberty, and the latter is typically exerted by humans. But such distinctions are *ad hoc*. Thus, the negative concept cannot be a sufficient condition for liberty: the concept arbitrarily fails to recognise a certain category of constraints, and within the category it does recognise, it fails to distinguish between constraints that truly restrict liberty and those that do not.

The flaws of the positive concept are however not eliminated by the fact that the negative concept has flaws also. Philip Pettit therefore takes a different route, a variation of the negative concept: the republican concept. On this concept, liberty is the

¹⁹ Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty', 143–145.

‘absence of domination’ *qua* the robust absence of arbitrary power, where arbitrary power is every relational force that does not align with the agent’s avowed (or readily avowable) interests, and thus restricts and interferes with the agent.²⁰ The *robust* absence of such arbitrary power implies not only the absence of actual restriction and interference, but also the mere potential for restriction and interference.

Consider, again, Odysseus². Perimedes and Eurylochus tighten the bonds, further diminishing Odysseus’ liberty on the negative concept, preserving it on the positive concept. Although a variation of the negative concept, it seems that Perimedes and Eurylochus do not diminish Odysseus’ liberty on the republican concept: their restriction and interference are aligned with Odysseus’ avowed interests. But then again, as Odysseus is bound to the mast, they *could* have tightened the bonds for reasons that are not aligned with Odysseus’ avowed (or readily avowable) interests — if they aspired to captaincy, for instance, or were sick and tired of Odysseus’ adventures. Indeed, we come to know Eurylochus, the ship’s second-in-command, as a cowardly figure that undermines Odysseus and stirs trouble. They, and especially Eurylochus, could therefore defy the order to loosen him. And *ceteris paribus*, that mere possibility, even if not realised, diminishes Odysseus’ liberty on the republican concept. That is because liberty, on the republican concept, is not merely the absence of restrictions or interference, or the presence of mastery of agency, but the *robust* absence of a certain category of structural relationships: those in which arbitrary power can be exercised.

But that concept is unsatisfactory, Christian List and Laura Valentini contends, because its notion of domination is moralising in a fashion similar to the positive concept.²¹ When Perimedes and Eurylochus tighten the bonds, their restriction and interference align with the avowed interests of Odysseus¹ — but it is certainly not aligned with the avowed interests of Odysseus². Which, then, constitutes Odysseus’ *truly* avowed or avowable interests? Surely, it must be Odysseus¹: the Sirens will draw

²⁰ Pettit, *Republicanism*, 51. See also Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; cf. Pettit, ‘Keeping Republican Freedom Simple’.

²¹ List and Valentini, ‘Freedom as Independence’, 1058–1066.

Odysseus into death and destruction, Circe admonished. But why should Odysseus trust Circe, indeed a goddess, but a deceitful one at that, which herself attempted to bewitch Odysseus, so as to make him stay on *her* island? Indeed, in ‘flowery meads the sportive Sirens play’,²² Odysseus extols, which does not resemble anything comparable to death and destruction. Moreover, Odysseus is not like other men: perhaps he is able to satisfy his desire for their intimate secrets and live magnificently, just as the Sirens proclaim? Indeed, perhaps a magnificent life is predicated on their intimate secrets (even if they were to ultimately lead to death and destruction)? Perhaps it is not, after all, Ithaca that is Odysseus’ true home — perhaps the responsibilities and commitments of kingship render him unable to truly master his agency, and thus to fulfil his fundamental purposes? And perhaps this reality only can be revealed to him by the Sirens’ song?

The specific answers to these questions are not so important; what is important is that such questions can be asked — and that the republican concept’s answers are of a moralising kind. Again, it is not viable to appeal to agential consistency over time, since what is at stake, is the very definition of Odysseus’ agency: why should that which defined Odysseus’ consistency over time in the past continue to do so in the future? Put differently, and more fundamentally: what *is* Odysseus’ consistency over time? It seems to be the desire to go home — but that is plausibly merely a means to an end: fulfilling his fundamental purposes. If so, and the Sirens’ song reveal to him that going home will *not* fulfil his fundamental purposes, then consistency over time seems to demand that Odysseus does not go home.

Such speculation serves to demonstrate that the republican concept is predicated on the possibility of accessing the *truly* avowed or avowable interests of Odysseus². But the problem is that there is no such thing as simply accessing the truly avowed or avowable interests of an agent since the very meaning of ‘truly’ avowed or avowable interests is controversial. The solution, then, is to identify ‘truly’ with certain internal states and not others, like preferring the avowed or avowable interests of Odysseus¹

²² Homer, *Odyssey*, 182.

to Odysseus² — and that entails moralisation. The republican concept therefore slides into a kind of tyranny, just like the positive concept. At least such a slippery slope is possible, which implies that the very political relationship that republican liberty structures is subtly yet inevitably itself dominating: it does not *robustly* block the sliding into a structure of arbitrary power. That is especially the case when the agent's avowed interests are identified with the 'avowable common interests',²³ which mirrors the tendency of theorists of the positive liberty to identify the desires of the nobler self with the desires of some collective.

There is, however, a further complication to the republican concept: it seems to refute itself whenever its ideal is implemented. After Odysseus' ship has passed through the Sirens' realm, Odysseus is unbound. But the sailors can, if they desire, overthrow Odysseus — and bind him to the mast yet again. It seems, then, that the sailors dominate Odysseus. If so, then Odysseus is not free even after the bonds have been loosened. In fact, it is only the sailors *as collective* that is free. Just as Odysseus' can be bound to the mast if the sailors so desire, any other single sailor can be bound to the mast also. Correspondingly, if the citizens of a state are to be free, then they must collectively be able to resist the state — but if they are able to collectively resist the state, then they must also be able to dominate any individual citizen, as well as any minority group of citizens.

List and Valentini therefore point in the direction of another concept of liberty, which is yet another variation of the negative concept: the independence concept. On this concept, liberty is the robust absence of restriction and interference.²⁴ Odysseus is only perfectly free, then, if there are no sailors (and perhaps especially no Eurylochus) around to bind him to the mast. Unlike the republican concept and like the negative concept, the independence concept holds that even restriction and interference that align with the agent's avowed or readily avowable interest diminish liberty. It might be justified in terms of goodness and rationality to do so, but it still diminishes the

²³ Pettit, 'Keeping Republican Freedom Simple', 345.

²⁴ List and Valentini, 'Freedom as Independence', 1067. See also 1068–1069.

agent's liberty. And unlike the negative concept and like the republican concept, the independence concept holds that liberty is not truly liberty if it is not robust: the mere potential for restriction and interference diminishes liberty, even if that potential is not actualised.

The independence concept's elimination of Odysseus' sailors reveals, however, a profound flaw. That flaw is shared with both the negative concept and the republican concept: perfect liberty is consistent with the absolute elimination of relationship. On the negative concept, the complete absence of restriction and interference is seemingly contingent on the absolute elimination of relationship. On the republican concept, liberty is diminished by the dominating structural relationships, and thus, if relationship simpliciter is eliminated, then there can be no domination. Indeed, this is the only kind of perfectly robust non-domination, as all relationships *can* become emotionally and psychologically dominating. Moreover, on all these variations of negative liberty, there is a normative motion towards isolation: we typically become freer by having fewer and lesser relationships. That is because strong and close relationships make us emotionally and psychologically dependent on the other, and thus vulnerable to their domination — not to mention that such relationships restrict and interfere with our lives. And, given that humans are not only rational animals, but social also, that is thoroughly unsatisfactory. On these negative concepts, then, to be perfectly free is to not be human, which, for a human being, must be an existence of perfect unfreedom.

Thus, we are, in a sense, back at the beginning: the path to liberty is treacherous, whenever we attempt to follow a route, we end up in the wrong place. Perhaps, then, our very *point de départ* was mistaken? That is Gerald MacCallum's understanding: negative and positive liberty can be reduced to a 'triadic relation' such that *x is free from y to do z*.²⁵ Discussions about the essence of liberty should therefore be recast as a discussion about the extension of the triadic relation's variables: what counts as restriction and interference (y) and what might the agent (x) be free to do (z)? Notice that the triadic relation contains both a negative element and a positive element; there

²⁵ MacCallum, 'Negative and Positive Freedom', 102.

is absence from something (y) and presence of something else (z). For MacCallum, there is no dichotomy, therefore, between negative and positive liberty: there is a whole range of interpretations of the uniform, fundamental concept of liberty that is the triadic relation — and thus a whole range of different interpretations of the conditions under which the agent is free. Odysseus, for instance, is unfree in two distinct senses. Firstly, the beguilement of the Sirens prevents him from going home. Secondly, the sailors and their bonds prevent him from going to the Sirens. When it comes to liberty considerations, we should, on the triadic relation, leave it at that.

However, although providing a helpful tool for dissecting claims about liberty, MacCallum fails to provide a concept of liberty. And the failure consists in a fallacy: the triadic relation assumes that it is immediately clear what it means to be free, that is, what it is for x to be *free* from y to do z — but it is not. In fact, that is precisely the point on which theorists of different liberty concepts disagree: what *is* liberty, and, specifically, what is it for this or that specific agent to be free? The theorists of the different variations of negative liberty might not accept that the Sirens' beguilement amounts to liberty diminishing restriction and interference, whereas the theorist of positive liberty might claim that Odysseus cannot be free to go to the Sirens, nor that the bonds preventing him from doing so, diminishes liberty. And thus the triadic relation is question begging: it simply assumes that the meaning of liberty is uncontroversial, despite the fact that its controversiality is the very crux of the matter.

Liberty, obligation, and human nature

None of the routes have led us to an adequate concept of liberty. But having mapped them, we can recognise pitfalls that must be avoided, and especially the negative concept's — and variations thereof — normative motion towards isolation and the positive concept's slippery slope to tyranny.

So, then, where and how do we begin anew? Even though MacCallum's triadic relation is a *cul-de-sac*, it does suggest something interesting about liberty, which will enable us to navigate towards a better concept: liberty is a relational property. Liberty is something which characterises certain kinds of relations. And relations cannot be isolated from the relata that is being related. It is therefore misguided to theorise about what it means for x to be free from y to do z without also theorising about what x in fact is. Consider, for instance, these expressions of the triadic relation:

- P Odysseus is free from the Siren's spell to go home to his son, wife, and kingdom.
- Q Perimedes and Eurylochus are free from the Siren's spell to go home to their son, wife, and kingdom.
- R Odysseus' ship is free from the Siren's spell to go home to its son, wife, and kingdom.

Although P can be either true or false — for Odysseus³ it is true, for instance, but not Odysseus² — it is indisputably the case that P makes sense. While Q does make some sense in that Eurylochus has a royal wife to return to, namely Odysseus's sister Ctimene, it is still *Odysseus* that is king, and thus Eurylochus cannot return to *his* kingdom — at least not in the sense that Odysseus can. And even if Perimedes has a family to return to, which we know nothing about, it is probably not royal, as he is a mere sailor. Thus, it makes even less sense to claim that Perimedes is free to go home to his kingdom. Moreover, we should note that Eurylochus and Perimedes will not return to the son and wife of Odysseus. Thus, even if we bracket the kingship issue, the proposition means something different for Eurylochus and Perimedes than for Odysseus — simply because they are not Odysseus.

When it comes to R, however, there is no real meaning to be found at all. Obviously, the ship has no son, wife, and kingdom, and thus cannot be free to return home to them either. It is also unclear what it would mean for the ship to be free to go home — even if 'home' is interpreted allegorically, as the harbour which the ship belongs

to. Since the ship does not exhibit agency, it does not in any substantial sense *go* anywhere, it is always *taken*, in this case by Odysseus and the sailors. And if it cannot go, then it makes no sense to claim that the ship is *free* to go either. Similarly, the spell of the Sirens distorts the desires, will, decisions, and acts of agents. The Sirens cannot, then, beguile the ship, and thus they cannot diminish its liberty either.

The meaningfulness of any instance of the triadic relation depends, therefore, on the specific *x* and its relation to *y* and *z*. Thus, since I am theorising about citizens, I must begin by theorising about the nature of citizens *qua* humans. Who and what are these human beings whose liberty we are theorising about? And that leads us to Aristotle, for whom ethical and political theory are parts of a whole,²⁶ that is ‘the philosophy of human affairs’ (*NE* 10.9 1181^b15–16), or better yet,²⁷ in W. D. Ross’ translation: ‘the philosophy of human nature’. Ethical theory concerns human nature, and political theory predicates an understanding of human nature: any theory of the state, the ordering of human society, as well the concepts that are integral to such theories, originates, ultimately, from a theory of human nature. To begin with human nature is therefore in itself Aristotelian — and I shall begin with an *Aristotelian* theory of human nature.

It could be objected that this is a detour leading into a rather nasty chapparal, demanding that we make all sorts of ethical and political commitments. My response shall be that we deceive ourselves, if we believe that contemporary discussions on liberty avoid commitments to theories of human nature — and, subsequently, to other ethical and political theories — simply because such underlying theories are disguised.²⁸ By stating that *x* is free from *y* to do *z*, we inevitably make claims about the nature of *x* and its relation to *y* and *z*, which impose ethical and political commitments upon us. For instance, the reason why *P* makes sense, *Q* some sense, and *R* no at all, is that humans and ships are essentially different: ships *qua* ships are not rational, intentional beings, rendering it meaningless to claim that the ship can be constrained from or free

²⁶ Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics*, 13.

²⁷ See Keil and Kreft, ‘Introduction’ to *Aristotle’s Anthropology*, 2.

²⁸ See Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty*, esp. chap. 1.

to exercise agency. If some were to claim that R in fact makes sense, then they would also radically alter the essence of ships: for R to make sense, the ship would have to be an agent. And that would in turn have ethical and political implications. We would, for instance, absurdly have to consider the kind of rights that ships might have.

Thus, rather than being a detour, I hope that we shall come to see that our Aristotelian route opens the landscape of liberty in surprising and stimulating ways. Indeed, I will show, suggestively rather than decisively, that it makes us able to find a way to a good concept of yet another bewildering phenomenon: obligation, and specifically political obligation, which concerns the ground for and limits of the state's coercion of its citizens, for instance to pay taxes or fight wars. And such obligation is typically construed in terms of the negative liberty concept, that is, as antithetical of liberty. Yet the Aristotelian route to liberty leads precisely to obligation also.

Human Nature as Socio-Rational

Our Aristotelian route to liberty leads into the woods, wherein we find ourselves, just like Philippa Foot, ‘evaluating the roots of a particular oak tree’.²⁹ The oak’s roots are sturdy and stout — thus we take delight in them. And the delight springs out from our recognition of the roots’ *natural goodness*. The roots are good in the sense that they contribute to the oak’s flourishing: they ground a strong and solid trunk which, in turn, enables the oak to carry its glorious crown. Sturdy and stout roots are, however, not good simpliciter. For an ivy, spindly and shallow roots would be good. But the oak, by virtue of being an oak, could not flourish if its roots were spindly and shallow. We would thus diagnose spindly and shallow oak roots as defected, as bad *oak* roots.

Although entirely mundane, these evaluations suggest something startling: that nature is imbued with normativity concerning flourishing *qua* proper functioning. The intelligibility of evaluations such as ‘that oak has good roots’ or ‘these are bad oak roots’ is predicated on a notion of ideality; it is relative to a normative standard that it makes sense to describe the roots as good or bad. And since the evaluations are *prima facie* intelligible, it is reasonable to believe, *prima facie*, that this normative standard exists.³⁰ But according to Christine Korsgaard, the existence of such a normative

²⁹ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 46.

³⁰ See Thompson, ‘Apprehending Human Form’, esp. 54–56.

standard — proper functioning — is nevertheless typically dismissed as ‘a piece of antique metaphysics’.³¹

There is a profound asymmetry, therefore, between our intuitive rational observation of nature on the one hand, and the modern academy’s analysis of nature on the other hand.³² And since the eudaimonist concept of liberty springs out of this intuitive rational observation, associating it with an antiquated metaphysics, I must give reasons for believing that the normative standard exists not only *prima facie*, but also *ultima facie* — which I shall do by rationally reconstructing Aristotle’s controversial function argument, whose conclusion is that there is even such a thing as proper functioning for humans (*NE* 1.7, esp. 1097^b22–30).

Nature, form, and function

Nature is that whole to which every living being, every organism, ultimately is a part. And in the Aristotelian tradition, these organisms are substances (*ousia*): matter with form (*M* 7–9). Organism of the x-kind comes to be x, as the kind of being that x is, when matter merges with an x-form.³³ Even though both matter and form are essential in the sense that both are necessary for the organism to exist as the kind of being that it is, the form is essential in a sense that matter is not: it is the form (*eidos*) rather than the matter that is the essence of the organism. If you cut down a tree and make a house out of it, it will no longer be a tree, even if every single atom of it were preserved. The form has changed, and thus the tree *qua* tree has ceased to exist, even though its matter prevails. It is in terms of the form, therefore, that we should define the organism’s essential properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours — or, in Aristotelian parlance: the organism’s function (*ergon*). Thus, for Aristotle, normativity is found in the very substance of nature: function is interrelated with form, and to function *properly*, I take it, is to become the kind of substance that one is, which just is flourishing.

³¹ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 133.

³² Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 7–10.

³³ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 135.

(Speaking of which, I should mention that although ‘eudaimonia’ is also translated ‘wellbeing’ and ‘happiness’ in the literature, I prefer ‘flourishing’. That is partly because ‘flourishing’ connotes a natural activity, contra ‘wellbeing’ and ‘happiness’, and partly because of its floral connotations — the significance of which will become clear as we go.)

It is in terms of its special relation to form that we should understand the significance of function. And since the form of *x* seems to concern the structure of *x*, it is tempting to go on to define form and then function in structural terms: as humans, we function in a certain manner because our flesh, organs, and bones are arranged in a certain structure.³⁴ But that cannot be right, as different structures — for instance ‘a woman and a man, an adult and a child’³⁵ — have the same human form, and thus the same human function. Again, the form of an organism just is its essence, such that to ‘know a thing is to know its essence or form (*M* 7.7 1032^a)’.³⁶ And that implies that form cannot be defined in terms of structure: if we found a dead exemplar of a completely unknown organism, we would not come to know it simply by dissecting it, that is, by coming to know its structure. But if we found it alive and were able to observe its properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours — that is, its function — in various contexts, then we would be able to come to know the organism even without dissecting it. That, however, seems to leave us in a tautology: having defined function in terms of its relation to form, we are now defining form in terms of function.

Both ditch edges can and must be avoided: the reductionism of form to structure on the one hand, and form to function on the other. Indeed, the function and structure of a substance cannot be completely isolated from one another. Although certainly different, the structure of woman and man, adult and child, are nevertheless substantially similar. Despite their differences, these variations in structures are therefore compatible with the organisms having the same function. That becomes evident when

³⁴ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 137.

³⁵ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 137.

³⁶ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 136.

comparing the variations among humans to plants. Our oak cannot function as a human because its structure is incompatible with the human function (and *vice versa*) — there is, for instance, no structure of the mind that can enable rational, intentional exercise of agency.

But how, then, should we understand this special relation between form and function? I take a given function to be a manifestation of a specific form such that the function of organism *x* grants us an epistemic path to *x*'s form *qua* essence — that is, that which makes *x* an *x*. And I assume that this epistemic path is trustworthy: *x*'s function gives us true and sufficient knowledge of *x*'s form. I shall not speculate about the precise ontological status of such forms: perhaps they do not exist independently of matter, as Aristotle believed, or perhaps they do, as Plato thought — and, if they exist independently of matter, then perhaps they do so transcendently, forever beyond our reach, so that we can only hope to grasp them empirically, imperfectly, as Kant would come to have it. Although certainly interesting, such speculation will side-track the purposes of our pursuit.

Apropos purpose: some might be concerned that this understanding of form and function smuggles in controversial notions of *purpose*. That is, the statement such as '*x* has the *x*-form and therefore functions properly by *x*-ing' seems to be a variation of '*x* realises its purpose by *x*-ing'. And proper functioning is indeed conceptually connected to purpose. But 'purpose' need not be interpreted controversially: it can be interpreted, for instance, as the 'teleological will to flourish', or 'conatus', or 'principle of self-preservation', or even simply 'self-interest' — that is, as the organism's keeping and deepening and widening of its function *qua* form *qua* essence *qua* existence (as the kind of organism that it is).

What does such proper functioning consist in? Fundamentally, Korsgaard explains, two activities: on the one hand, 'through the continuous self-rebuilding activities of nutrition, which maintain its form in a spacio-temporally continuous stream of matter', and on the other, 'through reproduction, by which it imposes its form on individually

distinct entities'.³⁷ Although terms like 'proper functioning' might ring foreign, then, it is not suspicious to assume the truth which they attempt to capture. That is, they need not amount to any 'controversial metaphysical thesis about what living things are *for*, but rather a definition of "living"'.³⁸ And as a definition of living, there is no way around proper functioning. Consider, for instance, the implications of assuming that no fundamental notion of proper functioning whatsoever is found in nature. It is unclear whether everyday statements such as 'a is advantageous for x' or 'b is beneficial for x' would even be intelligible. And it would certainly render us unable to distinguish between healthy and sick organisms, what is wrong with the sick organism, how to heal its sickness, *etcetera*. These evaluations diagnose malfunction, and subsequent judgements attempt to restore fundamental proper functioning, that is, *living*. It is no viable option, therefore, to avoid proper functioning altogether.

However, we are not only pursuing a definition of living, but an understanding of living *well*. And for us human beings, living well is the highest good.³⁹ Thus, in the Aristotelian tradition, the *polis* exists 'not only for sake of living, but more for the sake of living well' (*Pol.* 3.9 1280^a30–32). Here, in this transition, from living to living well, from a fundamental to a holistic notion of proper functioning, we enter controversial territory. Indeed, we do well in noting, and stressing, that it is precisely in *this* transition that proper functioning becomes controversial: the locus of controversy concerns the meaning of living well, of flourishing. And it is into this territory we are now heading.

Since our path is Aristotelian, we shall direct our attention to that which living well *is* — namely activity. Living well is the *activity* of considering, choosing, and then *acting* in a way that contributes to filling out the particularities of the general, 'broad outlines' of the good life (see *NE* 1.7 1098^a22–25).⁴⁰ Thus we turn to action, which, in the Aristotelian tradition, is construed in relation to potency.

³⁷ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 141.

³⁸ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 141 (my emphasis).

³⁹ Vogt, *Desiring the Good*, esp. chap. 2.

⁴⁰ Bentley, 'Loving Freedom', 107.

Action and potency

Consider, again, the oak that we observed. A very long time ago, the tree was a nut, and as time passed, it became a sprout, which rooted and grew, and then grew more and more — becoming, ultimately, a tree. The changes are astonishing, from the little nut that we could carry in our pocket to that of the mighty tree under which we stood. Yet, apparently, it is the identical *thing* throughout. And that appearance makes sense when interpreting the changes in relation to form: the nut-*cum*-tree goes through an astonishing cycle of changes that nevertheless are intelligible because that cycle describes the life cycle of an oak *qua* oak.

The oak nut *qua* oak nut has the potency to become an oak tree. This potency is not simply the empty possibility for change, that is, whatever the change happens to be. Potency is the possibility for a very specific kind of change, such that the potency of the oak nut is inherently different from that of the ivy seed. It would not make sense to claim that an ivy seed has potency to become an oak tree. That is because, ‘taken concretely and in its proper intelligibility, we understand potency as ordered to a proper fulfilment’.⁴¹ And the ivy can *per se* not be properly fulfilled as oak. This positive ordering towards fulfilment is not *added* to potency, such that potency can retain its essence without it: the ordering ‘belongs to its essence’.⁴²

Ontologically, potency is derivative of action (*energeia*): potency is always the potency to a certain action, thus the potency to ϕ cannot exist without ϕ -ing already, in a significant sense, existing. One could not define the *potency for growth*, for instance, without reference to the *act of growing* — or not so controversially: the *potency for journeying* without reference to the *act of journeying* — but one could certainly do the opposite. In the Aristotelian tradition’s interpretation of change, therefore, actuality is primary. Change, like that of growth, is a horizontal motion through spacetime

⁴¹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 327.

⁴² Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 327.

yet simultaneously a vertical motion of ‘descent of actuality into potency, or an ascent of potency to higher levels of actuality’.⁴³ These are different perspectives on the same movement of unfolding: the horizontal motion through spacetime, from nut to tree, is also a vertical motion through the levels of actuality that constitutes the oak’s life cycle. Put differently, when the oak becomes a tree, the integrity of the oak remains intact because this just is the unfolding of the oak form. Significantly, then, the nut experiences no ontological change at all upon becoming tree: although the oak certainly changes in shape and size, from nut to tree, the form remains the same.

Organisms’ intelligible change, such as the movement from nut to tree, is *action*. And to the extent that the action is true — that is uncorrupted, not merely unintelligible change resembling intelligible change — it is an instance of proper functioning. Indeed, ‘*energeia*, activity, and *ergon*, function, are etymologically linked (*M* 9.8 1050^a21–22)’.⁴⁴ I must, however, immediately clarify that I obviously do not mean that the mere occurrence of intelligible changes in and by organisms implies that the organism acts intentionally. Yet there is a sense in which the oak acts non-intentionally as its form unfolds, moving from nut to tree. This action is passive in that it is *moved* from the outside: the oak participates passively in the unfolding of its form by receiving this unfolding. When a nut is placed in fertile soil, and the sun shines upon the sprout, the oak can let its form unfold — indeed, paradoxically, it cannot help *but* let its form unfold, yet we cannot coerce it to. The oak allows for being pulled out of itself, as it were, through the confinement of the nut’s shell, actualising its potency.

For animals, which here is shorthand for ‘non-human animals’, this participation becomes active. The capacity for perception enables animals to imagine what is demanded for its unfolding, stirring certain desires, such as for nourishment and reproduction, which in turn produces actual movement. The activity of animals is therefore ‘both moved by what is good, *and* a self-motion, a motion that originates in the soul’⁴⁵

⁴³ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 329.

⁴⁴ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 135.

⁴⁵ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 334.

— where ‘soul’ simply is Aristotelian parlance for the form’s concrete manifestation in plants, animals, and humans. The animal is not only pulled out of itself, by the need for goods such as nourishment and reproduction; it also pushes itself towards these goods. The animal then, is *actively* active. And here we begin to recognise the kind of action that we — and specifically Aristotle (*NE* 6.2 1139^a19–21) — typically affiliate with the term ‘action’, that is, a very specific kind of active action.

In humans, the active participation of animals is transformed, enabling *rationally* active action, which is marked by an intentional quality. For humans, this is true action, and I will therefore simply refer to it as ‘action’ in the context of human life. I will elaborate on the transformation of action later, but for the moment, consider contemplation. The act of contemplation is essentially about truth: through contemplation, the truth unfolds in the rational soul. Humans significantly receives the truth — it is always already given in that it exists independent of the minds that attempts to grasp it — and thus we also significantly receive the ability to contemplate. The good of truth is both internal and external to the human that contemplates, unlike the good that animals pursue, which is entirely external. Truth unfolds on the inside of the soul; yet we receive from the outside the object and structure of such unfolding. However, we cannot receive this truth without giving ourselves to the act of contemplation. That implies that humans, when contemplating, are both *moved* by the good that is truth (just like plants and animals are moved by goods outside them) and simultaneously *move* ourselves so as to participate in the movement of the good. As such, contemplation becomes the paradigmatic act of the rational soul: movement stirred on the outside flows seamlessly together with self-movement welling up from the inside.

Contemplation is constitutive of the good life, therefore, but not because it entails isolation — in fact, as we shall come to appreciate, contemplation does not at all entail isolation. Contemplation is constitutive of the good life because it enables us to participate so profoundly in the rationality of goodness. And, as such, contemplation is a paradigm of our proper functioning: the good does not only infuse contemplation with meaning, it infuses *all* true actions with meaning in that it defines the fulfilment

towards which potency is ordered, and which actions actualise. It is this goodness that is the normative standard of proper functioning. We should therefore not be surprised that we take delight in such fulfilment, like that of the mighty oak in front of us. Its astonishing cycle of (intelligible) changes *qua* passive acts — its proper functioning — is not only meaningful, but also good in that the oak realises the good-for-itself.

This relation between proper functioning as (true) action on the one hand, and the good on the other, remains, however, vague. What does it mean that the normative standard of proper functioning is goodness? Or that the good orders the fulfilment towards which potency and thus its actualisation is ordered? To answer such questions, we must inquire further into the conceptual structure of proper functioning.

The structure of proper functioning

I follow Foot in construing proper functioning as twofold, that is, as both descriptive and normative.⁴⁶ The descriptive component is the set of facts that describes the life cycle of members of a species — which Thompson refers to as ‘Aristotelian categoricals’.⁴⁷ The Aristotelian categoricals concern the context within which properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours make sense for a given organism. Consider, for instance, that I spot a bird, point to it, and tell you that it is a male bullfinch. If you were to ask me why that bird is a male bullfinch, and not some other kind of bird, I would give you an answer in terms of Aristotelian categoricals: ‘male bullfinches have this and that shape and colour’ and ‘male bullfinches attract females by singing such and such song’. These categoricals enable us to identify the bird as a male bullfinch, and distinguish it from, say, a male chaffinch: the male bullfinch, unlike the chaffinch, has a red underpart and black cap, feeding on tree buds in the spring, singing certain mournful whistles to attract females.

⁴⁶ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 46.

⁴⁷ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 65. See also ‘The Representation of Life’.

It can be objected that although these categoricals may be true in that *most* male bullfinches have this and that shape and colour and sing such and such songs to attract females, it is not true for *all* bullfinches. This is an important objection, and two connected responses should be made. Firstly, the Aristotelian categoricals describe the form of bullfinches generally, abstractly. And, in the particular bullfinch, that form will manifest itself slightly differently, and even in varying degrees, depending on the specific conditions under which that bullfinch finds — and has found — itself. Secondly, this form is predicated on normality. That is, *ceteris paribus*, the male bullfinch *qua* male bullfinch has a red underpart and black cap, feeding on tree buds, and singing certain mournful whistles to attract females in the spring. Various kinds of malfunctions, such as diseases, can curtail and disrupt the manifestation of the form — indeed, that is precisely what disease is: distortion of form such that the organism is deprived from the full unfolding of its soul. It does not make sense for a male bullfinch to have a yellow cap and brown underpart, feed on caterpillars, and sing cheerful whistles to attract females. And the locus of such *sense* resides in the bullfinch's form. Particular members of a species are evaluated against the general background of their respective species, their (abstract) form, enabling us to determine whether a concrete aspect of an organism is good or bad — and, as such, leading us from the descriptive to the normative.

The normative component is 'that without which good cannot be or come to be', referred to as 'Aristotelian necessities' by Elizabeth Anscombe.⁴⁸ Aristotelian necessities are normative in the sense that they 'determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do'.⁴⁹ And these Aristotelian necessities are derived from the Aristotelian categoricals: the normative standard of species S is derived from the set of facts that describes the life cycle of members of S, that is, the context within which certain properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours make sense for a given organism.

⁴⁸ Anscombe, 'On Promising and its Justice', 15.

⁴⁹ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 15.

Even though we come to know concepts such as ‘proper functioning’ and ‘malfunctioning’ descriptively by rational observation of different organisms, these concepts are not reducible to their descriptiveness. And that is because these concepts have a certain logical structure in which the natural world enmeshes with the domain of practical philosophy.⁵⁰ It is not the case, as Bernard Williams suggests, that natural fact and ethical considerations must be *linked* together if we are to ‘adequately determine one kind of ethical life as against others’.⁵¹ They are already naturally imbricated. Obviously, things are complicated when we turn from plants and animals to the ethicality of different *human* lives. But, firstly, we will consider that transformation in due course, and secondly, the point that natural fact and ethical considerations are naturally imbricated rather than extra-naturally linked together remains. Put differently: nature is imbued with normativity — and, specifically, organisms *qua* substances are imbued with normativity.

It might be objected that the transition from Aristotelian categoricals to Aristotelian necessities commits the naturalistic fallacy: the fact that some properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours appear to be natural for a species, does not in itself imply that it is good for a member of that species to have those properties, qualities, processes, and behaviours. Furthermore, it is to move from fact to value, to neglect the distinction between is and ought. But an Aristotelian would respond that what is natural, granted that ‘natural’ is construed ontologically, does indeed determine what is good, and that we can move from fact to value and is to ought via reason. Thus, an Aristotelian like myself will simply not accept the validity of these fallacies.⁵²

But for those sceptical to the Aristotelian tradition, this is not a sufficient response: even if one were not dogmatical about the validity of the naturalistic fallacy (and distinctions between fact-value and is-ought), it nevertheless seems that deriving norms from nature brings *something* foreign into our analysis. Yet this is not different from

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 31–32.

⁵¹ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 47.

⁵² See Nussbaum, ‘Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics’, 102.

deriving judgements concerning benefit or advantage from nature: to claim that a or b is advantageous or beneficial for x is to make normative claims, it is to claim that a and b are in some sense good for x — and thus that there are norms such that, *ceteris paribus*, x should pursue a and b (or, at the very least, x has reasons for doing so).⁵³ It is not evident, then, that this foreignness concerns the substance of Aristotelianism, rather than its terminology or method. Moreover, as already hinted at, foreignness does not in itself imply dubiousness. Indeed, for Aristotelians such as Hans Jonas, such foreignness simply demonstrates that the modern academy is on the wrong track — resulting from a wrong turn taken a long time ago: away from Aristotelianism, towards Cartesianism.⁵⁴

Rationality and double normativity

Organisms *qua* substances are imbued with normativity, from which we can deduce, *a fortiori*, that humans are imbued with normativity also.⁵⁵ There seems, however, to be some reluctance to this deduction. I believe that is due to several reasons. One of them follows from the aforementioned Cartesian turn: humans are not really part of nature, but something altogether different from it, and thus we are not really organisms imbued with the normativity of *natural* goodness (which allegedly imbues other organisms) — we are *res cogitans* rather than *res extensa*. Although valid, therefore, the deduction is based on at least one false premise, yielding a false conclusion.

But it is, of course, controversial to claim that humans are not part of nature. It is unclear what it even means. Moreover, the implications of rejecting the existence of proper functioning would be, as indicated, devastating. We would be incapable of grasping elementary facts about human life, like the difference between cutting hair versus cutting off a leg — even if we neglect the pain, the latter is obviously tragic in

⁵³ See Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness*, esp. chap. 6.

⁵⁴ Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 33–37. See also Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature*, e.g. 57–58; Mathews, *The Ecological Self*, e.g. 16–18.

⁵⁵ See Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 100.

the sense that the former is not, and that is because it curtails proper functioning. It could be countered that our body might be imbued with normativity, but our mind is not, and that what is truly human concerns the mind rather than the body. But that claim is predicated on a controversial metaphysical dualism.

Another reason centres on the human mind, but without predicating any metaphysical dualism: since humans can pursue a vast array of different goods, unlike plants and animals, it is not evident that humans have a single function. A reluctance based on this reason is of course warranted, calling into question the analytical utility of proper functioning: if each and every human being considers for themselves what is good for them, and then chooses their way of life, then we would have just as many human functions as human beings. That would, in turn, make it meaningless to analyse the life of a human being against the background of some general, abstract human function. To respond to this reluctance, I must expand on the human function — and demonstrate that it, although universal, can incorporate the pursuit of different goods.

As already suggested, humans' proper functioning is *sui generis* — yet 'a common conceptual structure remains'.⁵⁶ Just as bullfinches build nests, for instance, humans build houses. Yet humans' proper functioning is *sui generis* in that bullfinches go for the *good thing that they see*, whereas humans go for *what they see as good*.⁵⁷ Bullfinches go for the twig that they see, because it is good for building a nest. Humans go for the tree that they see, not only because it will be good for building a house, but also because *that* will be good, in that it will contribute to living a good life. And this rather subtle distinction — between going for the good that one sees versus going for what one sees as good — is the very basic expression of human's rational form, and specifically the capacity for practical reason.

⁵⁶ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 51.

⁵⁷ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 56.

Here we can begin to sense that practical reasoning is related to the good.⁵⁸ That is, practical reason is not merely figuring out what means realise certain ends, but, essentially, what ends *should* at all be realised. By finding twigs for their nests, the bullfinches figure out, in a sense, what means realise their end. However, the bullfinches do not contemplate on this end, such as why it is good to build nests and how it can be done best. And it is this contemplation, from which consideration and choice flow, that captures the essence of practical reasoning, and makes the activity of house-building significantly different from nestbuilding. In an allegory, practical reasoning is to find the right path (rather than merely stumbling over it), which is predicated on knowledge of the destination. And for humans, the destination is the good.

I should pause to clarify the meaning of ‘consideration’ and ‘choice’. Following Øyvind Rabbås, I believe that proper functioning practical reason is a fourfold process.⁵⁹ Firstly, we come to perceive a specific situation correctly by applying concepts and norms that are constitutive of our practical life. Secondly, we respond immediately both emotionally and conatively to this perceived situation, and in a manner that is adequate to the situation-from-our-position. Thirdly, we figure out and decide, on the basis of deliberation, what is the best thing to do in the situation-from-our-position, and align our volition with our decision. And, fourthly, we act on our decision. The terms ‘consideration’ and ‘choice’ simply abbreviate this process, where the former emphasises that which comes before the decision, and the latter on such decision, as well as that which comes after it, until the transition to action.

Other than that, I shall not assume any detailed theory of practical reason. But an implication of this crude understanding, is that a human agent does not function properly if it is unable to reason practically. Such a human would be unable to consider and choose, in Rawlsian terms, a ‘conception of the (highest) good’.⁶⁰ And this conception is crucial in that it constitutes the context within which the agent can

⁵⁸ See Quinn, ‘Rationality and the Human Good’, esp. 223–225.

⁵⁹ See Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 101.

⁶⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 19 (my parenthesis).

evaluate the rationality of their acts. For the agent, ϕ -ing is a rational act to the extent that it contributes to the good under the agent's conception of the good (however, since the agent's conception of the good can itself be better or worse, it is not necessarily the case that what appears to be rational for the agent is in fact rational — which is the very *raison d'être* of practical philosophy). As such, a human life is not the product of causal mechanisms, which is the case for animals, not to mention plants. Instead, the acts that make up a human life are the outcome of a 'causality of reason' which might also be called 'free will'.⁶¹ Whereas nature is imbued with normativity, then, *human* nature is imbued with double normativity: natural goodness *as* reason.

To better understand this double normativity, consider the three dimensions of the human form according to Aristotelianism. The fundamental dimension is vegetative, and concerns nourishment and reproduction. Plants only have the vegetative form, whereas animals have a further dimension to their form: sensibility. Thus, animals are distinguished from plants in that they can perceive and imagine, and thus participate in active action, contra the passive action of plants. Humans are distinct from other animals in that we possess reason also, so that we can participate in rationally active action. This rational dimension supervenes on the sensible dimension which supervenes on the vegetative dimension — and the superventions in turn submerge the dimensions upon which they supervene.⁶² This causes the transformation: the passive action of plants is transformed to active action in animals. Like plants, animals have a need for nourishment and reproduction. Unlike plants, however, the satisfaction of such needs — like bending towards the sun or dispersing of seeds — cannot be exhaustively accounted for in terms of physics or biochemistry. That is because, in animals, these needs emerge in consciousness as *desires* for feeding or mating. In addition to passive acts, such as digestion or ovulation, the desires dictate instinctual, but nevertheless active acts: the animal can imagine food and mate, as well as where and how to find it, and when it indeed perceives these goods, then it goes for it.⁶³

⁶¹ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 101.

⁶² Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 142.

⁶³ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 98.

Similarly, reason transforms the vegetive and sensible dimensions. Humans certainly do things that animals do, yet these activities are ‘*transformed* when they are part of human life, and that is because the way we perform these activities is informed by reason’.⁶⁴ Like animals, needs emerge as desires in consciousness. But unlike animals, these desires do not simply dictate instinctual behaviours. For humans, a desire ‘manifests itself as a representation of the object as something to be appropriated, something that will satisfy the need that grounds the desire’.⁶⁵ But this representation does not have the power to demand anything from us; it rather amounts to a proposal to do certain things. The human agent must itself consider the proposal and choose to endorse it right now, wait, or perhaps reject it altogether. And that process will be guided by the agent’s conception of the good.

Say that a nun in black habit and veil passes by us in the woods. For all that we know, she might be quite hungry, yet reject the desire to eat, because she is devoting herself to fasting. Or, similarly, she might experience a longing for marrying and having children, yet nevertheless remain celibate, because she believes that it is the right thing to do, given her vows to her convent and religious sisters. Fasting and celibacy are spiritual disciplines that nuns typically participate in, demonstrating very clearly that desires do not *dictate* action. The sisters have, under a conception of the good, considered and chosen specific ends, manifested in the practice of a certain comprehensive doctrine. And the satisfaction of some of their desires might undermine those ends. That is, to embrace their specific kind of unity with the divine just is to refuse the satisfaction of certain other desires.

The difference between oaks and bullfinches on the one hand, and nuns on the other, is therefore tremendous. For the nuns, like all humans, reason transforms the shape of desire, making it rational, so that they can consider which desires to satisfy, as well as how to satisfy them, and then choose to pursue that satisfaction. Although nutrition

⁶⁴ Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 100.

⁶⁵ Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 100.

and reproduction describe the fundamental proper functioning of humans, the nuns' relation to these goods are rather complex: they only function properly when pursuing nutrition under the right circumstances and abstaining from marriage and sex while participating in a community in which *others* reproduce (otherwise their convent would die out). Moreover, reason also transforms the content of their desires: animals simply cannot desire such things as purity, honour, or the kind of unity with the divine that the nuns pursue.⁶⁶

These desires and their satisfaction are evaluated under a conception of the good that itself can, and should, be evaluated by the agent — typically in critical conversation with other agents.⁶⁷ Ultimately, the agent's conception of the good must derive from (better or worse) contemplation on the good. And such contemplation is a kind of theoretical activity — involving perception and imagination of the good — that urges us to engage in practical activity: namely the pursuit of the good's manifestations in spacetime.⁶⁸ Formulated in general and abstract terms: if an agent adopts and acts on an adequate conception of the good, then it will be able to do the right thing at the right time in the right way and for the right aim (see *NE* 2.9 1109^a25–30). The agent will know, adequately, what is worth doing for the sake of what — its ends will be of a kind that makes the means worth doing, so that 'the entire action is a thing worth doing for its own sake'.⁶⁹

And this is where the double normativity makes itself evident: humans' proper functioning is normative in a sense that it is not for plants and animals.⁷⁰ Like that of plants and animals, a human life can, and should, be evaluated against a normative standard, namely proper functioning *qua* the good life. But unlike plants and animals, humans must consider and choose a conception of the good under which the very idea of 'a good human life' is intelligible. Then, having considered and chosen a conception of

⁶⁶ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 101.

⁶⁷ See Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 103.

⁶⁸ See Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 102.

⁶⁹ Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 147.

⁷⁰ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 103–104.

the good, we must consider and choose the ways in which *we* should pursue the good and its manifestations in *our* life (under the conception of the good), that is, the ways in which we should practice our comprehensive doctrine.⁷¹ Different lives can be good in different ways. For instance: keeping her conception of the good constant, the nun could have ended up pursuing a very different life — for instance raising children with a husband — that would also have been good, but not for the nun *qua* nun. Or as Samuel Scheffler puts it: ‘nobody can value all valuable things’.⁷²

This is not indicative of relativism about the good: although we participate in forming our specific soul by considering and choosing a way of life, such formation must be pursuant to its general rationality. Our particular way of life, then, can and must be evaluated up against this general, rational form. That is, even though nobody can value all things valuable, we can still differentiate between valuable and unvaluable ends. Imagine, for instance, that the nun also happened to be an anorectic: we would evaluate the fasting of the nun *qua* nun quite different from that of the nun *qua* anorectic — just as we would evaluate the nun’s celibacy differently, if it was not a way to practice religious discipline, but to avoid experiencing and exploring her own sexuality, perhaps out of shame. Whereas the nun desires the good of spiritual discipline, the anorectic desires extreme bodily thinness. And even if we were to contest the good of the nun’s spiritual disciplines, the anorectic is irrational in a very distinct sense: her conception of the good, unlike that of the nun, distorts the integrity of her organism. The anorectic might disagree, of course — but she cannot do so *rationally*: her way of life is inconsistent with proper functioning in that extreme bodily thinness leads to deterioration of the body and eventually death.

The anorectic might attempt to reject the normativity of rationality. But, in fact, she cannot, because her form just *is* rational.⁷³ To assume that humans can reject or accept the normative standard of goodness and its rationality would bring in ‘an ontological

⁷¹ Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 108.

⁷² Scheffler, ‘Valuing’, 37.

⁷³ Rabbås, ‘Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity’, 109.

gap between being human and doing the thing that constitutes our form and essence *qua* human'.⁷⁴ And that would be absurd: it would entail that humans can intelligibly consider whether we would like to exist as humans, and choose not to — which is only possible if assuming some kind of dualism between mind and body (suicide does not suggest otherwise, as it is about continuing to exist, not to exist as something other than human).⁷⁵ Such dualisms are of course unacceptable for Aristotelians; the fashionable transhumanists variants are to be regarded as merely the latest advancement of the aforementioned Cartesian turn.

Perfection, self-sufficiency, and sociability

For humans, the good life can be pursued in different ways. But what characterises these ways, providing universality to the human form and function? Since they are directed to the good, these ways of life must be worthy of being lived — and such worthiness is characterised not only by perfection (*teleiôtês*) but also self-sufficiency (*autarkês*).⁷⁶ Thus, the good life must be characterised by perfection and self-sufficiency also (*NE* 1.7 1097^b21–22).

I take perfection to be the bliss that emanates from a properly functioning organism (see *NE* 10.7 1178^a5–10). In that organism, the qualia of the bliss a kind of pleasure (see *NE* 10.4 117^b33–35).⁷⁷ And such perfection is conceptually dependent on self-sufficiency, the idea that a part is ontological inferior to the whole, and that the whole is fundamental if and only if it is self-sufficient (*Pol.* 1.2 1253^a19–29). And that is because the part cannot be perfected by itself. The perfection of the part is contingent on the perfection of the whole. Perfection, therefore, comes with self-sufficiency. Indeed, self-sufficiency can be defined in terms of perfection: x is self-sufficient if and

⁷⁴ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 108.

⁷⁵ Rabbås, 'Eudaimonia, Human Nature, and Normativity', 108.

⁷⁶ See also Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*, 18–20.

⁷⁷ See Gonzalez, 'Aristotle on Pleasure and Perfection'.

only if it is characterised by perfection when isolated from other organisms (see *NE* 1.7 1097^b15–17).

No human, then, is self-sufficient. And that is because the human being is not only a rational animal (*zoon echon logon*), but also a social animal (*zoon politikon*). Specifically, no human can function properly if not a part of the whole that is the *polis* (*Pol.* 7.4 1326^b23–25). Without activities like worship, art, education, trade, *etcetera* — all of which are actualised in the *polis* — human life would utterly be void. The proper functioning of a human *qua* citizen is therefore contingent on the proper functioning of the *polis*: just as a limb can only be perfected as limb-on-body, the citizen can only be perfected as a citizen-in-*polis*. And since the perfection of the *polis* is not contingent on any other organism — except for the natural world, the cosmos, in which it finds itself, and which is the only absolutely fundamental self-sufficient whole — the *polis* is self-sufficient. As such, the *polis* is ontologically prior to the citizen; it is the perfected *polis* that determines the meaning of the perfected citizen. That, however, does not imply that the citizen is reduced to a means for the *polis*' end. The *polis* is for the good life of its citizens. Thus, ethics is political, and politics ethical.

The pursuit of the good life leads, then, in different ways, to the self-sufficient *polis*. As such, it is the end of the proper functioning *polis* that determines what ways are open, as it were, to the human agent — what ways it makes sense to pursue. Here, however, there seems to be an internal-external contradiction, that is, between rationality and sociability. On the one hand, proper functioning consists in considering and choosing certain ends and pursuing them, implying that proper functioning is internal to the agent. On the other hand, these ends are consummated in the self-sufficiency of the *polis* — and since the *polis* is ontological prior to the citizen, this end appears to be external to the agent.

It is my belief that there is no such contradiction. Indeed, the Aristotelian logic is that *because* humans are rational animals, we are not merely social animals, but social animals *par excellence* (*Pol.* 1.2 1253^a7–10). And the logical relation between

rationality and sociability is the double normativity of human nature: to function properly, humans must engage in ethical discourse — not only to consider and choose a way of life, but also justify it in discussion with others.

This reality is captured in the very notion of *logos*, which has two derivative meanings: firstly, ‘that which is expressed or explained in speech’, the intelligibility of something, and secondly, ‘the capacity or faculty of speech’, which is reason.⁷⁸ To be a rational animal is to be conversing animal, a discursive animal — ‘to live a human life is to live a life centered around discourse’⁷⁹ — and that just is to be a social animal that participates in the life of the *polis*.

The profoundness of the socio-rational entanglement cannot be reduced to discussion, however, although that is certainly significant. It is also the case that practical reason is predicated on and substantiated by sociability, and specifically our social roles, such that being rational, for humans, just is being socio-rational — or so I shall theorise.

Roles and socio-rational entanglement

I shall revise an Epictetian theory of social roles, a theory which itself was ‘a modification and extension’⁸⁰ of Aristotelian proper functioning. Specifically, I shall demonstrate that practical reason is predicated on and substantiated by the human agent’s social roles. And to do that, I must begin by defining social roles, which I simply refer to as ‘roles’ hereafter:

⁷⁸ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 781.

⁷⁹ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 781.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 181. See also Masvie, ‘The Self and its Roles’.

Definition: If A is in relation to B, and R is the form of the A-B relation, then $R^{A \rightarrow B}$ is A's role in relation to B, where this role is the function A must realise in order to keep, deepen, and widen the form of A's relation to B. If A realises this function in relation to B, then A functions properly in relation to B.⁸¹

Corollary: If A is in relation to B, then B, tautologically, is in relation to B so that: $R^{A \rightarrow B}$ iff $R^{B \rightarrow A}$. If the form of the A-B relation is to be kept, deepened, and widened, then A and B must both function properly in relation to one another. If they do, then the form of their relation unfolds.⁸²

By virtue of being part of communities, the individual has communal functions: for the whole to function properly, each part must function properly. And the individual's function in a community is equivalent to its role in that community, 'whether cosmic or local'.⁸³ To function properly as the persons that we are, then, we must identify and then realise our roles.⁸⁴ Such roles are sometimes determined externally, be it the community or other kinds of circumstances in which we find ourselves, and sometimes internally, by individual capacities or desires — and sometimes by a combination thereof.⁸⁵ And Aristotle emphasises three kinds of roles, pertaining to family, friendship, and *polis* (see *NE* 8.9 1160^a1–15). I shall therefore centre on these roles, and, for now, especially those pertaining to the family. That is because these roles are so visibly and tactilely based in our physical, biological composition, and thus clearly resembling structures that also characterise other organisms in the natural world, while simultaneously engendering the specific environment in which we become *human*, that is, practical reasoners.

⁸¹ Masvie, 'The Self and its Roles', 7.

⁸² Masvie, 'The Self and its Roles', 7 (I added the final conditional).

⁸³ Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 36.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 93, 181.

⁸⁵ Masvie, 'The Self and its Roles', 10.

By stepping into the role as parents, fate places, *ipso facto*, another human being into the role of being their child — perhaps a daughter. These are roles that neither the parents nor the daughter can step out of. From that point on, they *are* mother, father, and daughter. And to be parents is to realise the universal function of parenthood and to keep, deepen, and widen the form of their relation to *that* other specific human being that is their child. That form has a certain universal outline, then, but it is only by forming and colouring it with unique particulars that the parents can come to make the roles their own, internalising it into the core of their being, so that they can feel, think, and act *as* mother or father.⁸⁶

Upon being thrown out of the womb and into the world, the child immediately seeks its mother, her warmth, and milk. If the mother were to reject her daughter, then there would, *ceteris paribus*, be something wrong with her; she would not function properly. Her malfunctioning might be due to postnatal depression, which then would be treated by her physician or psychologist. It can also be due to disordered or wrong desires; the mother might have desired a boy rather than a girl. That, of course, should be criticised, hopefully compelling her to take action: by virtue of being a mother, it is irrational to reject her daughter. Similarly, there would be something wrong with the daughter if she were to reject her mother; she would not realise her function in relation to her mother and, as such, not function properly. Unlike its mother, however, the daughter's malfunctioning cannot be criticised — and that is because she is not yet a practical reasoner, and thus cannot be held accountable for her irrationality.

Yet proper functioning parents nevertheless, and rather remarkably, engage with their child *as if* it were a practical reasoner in pursuit of the good (which is very differently from the manner in which they engage with their dog, for instance) — thus enabling their child to become precisely that, namely a practical reasoner in pursuit of the good. For instance, the parents speak to their child before it has language, so as to enable it to understand and respond. Then, as the child comes to know words and speak back, in the tongue of its mother, the child also comes to conceptualise the world — which,

⁸⁶ See Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus*, 118–119.

when developed further, enables it to differentiate between means and ends, how to use means to realise ends, and what ends it *ought* to pursue. That is, proper functioning parents do not teach their child to slavishly do that which is ‘dictated by *its* (i.e. the child’s) desires or *their* (i.e. the parents’) demands’, but to pursue that which is good.⁸⁷ The child must learn ‘to stand back’ from desires and demands.⁸⁸

This is something that the child learns in ‘a facilitating environment,’ Donald Winnicott maintains, ‘especially at the start when a condition of dependence obtains which is near absolute’.⁸⁹ And such an environment is naturally provided by ‘ordinary good’⁹⁰ mothers and fathers — that is, not by being the ‘best’ parents, whatever that means, but simply by being ‘good enough’.⁹¹ It is an environment brimming with affection, within which the child is safe to test things out, good as well as bad, coming to know the world and one’s relation to it.⁹² And when the child does so in a manner that is not aligned with properly functioning practical reason, it is corrected, because it respects the influence of its parents. In ‘that process of affectionate correction, the child learns what it is to function properly as a practical reasoner’.⁹³ Indeed, the child learns this *as* child, and the parents teaches their child *as* parents — which is reflected in Aristotle’s emphasis on the relationship between virtue on the one hand, and education and habituation on the other (see *NE* 2.1 1103^b15–20). Since education and habituation are significantly given to us, we are given the opportunity to be virtuous. And when parents do not give their child this opportunity, then that deprivation is likely to frustrate the child’s proper functioning.⁹⁴

Like the nut-*cum*-tree, the child goes through an astonishing cycle of changes, from not being a practical reasoner to being one. That change is intelligible because it

⁸⁷ Masvie, ‘The Self and its Roles’, 12. See also MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 84.

⁸⁸ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 83.

⁸⁹ Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From*, 144.

⁹⁰ Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From*, 123.

⁹¹ Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From*, 144.

⁹² MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 89–90.

⁹³ Masvie, ‘The Self and its Roles’, 12.

⁹⁴ See Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From*, 144.

represents the unfolding of the human form, brought about by the realisation of specific and mutually dependent roles. The parents and their child function properly in relation to one another, that is both $R^{A \rightarrow B}$ and $R^{B \rightarrow A}$ are realised, such that the form of their relation unfolds — upon which the form of the child *qua* human being unfolds. And that just is to become a practical reasoner. Practical reason is therefore predicated on roles: it is because we were children *qua* children that we can function properly as (adult) practical reasoners. But in what sense do roles also substantiate practical reason? This becomes evident when considering appropriateness, a kind of goodness and rationality that is role specific. For instance, it is appropriate for the father to defend his daughter — perhaps against other children, such as bullies at school — *because* he is the daughter’s father. Moreover, it is appropriate for him to raise his daughter, but not necessarily other children, *because* he is her father. That does not imply that the father has no obligations to the child next door or across the globe, but that he has special obligations to this specific child. It can be objected that such appropriateness is not derived from his *role* as father, but rather from the *fact* that he is a father. And then it should be responded that there is no real distinction between the role and the fact: ‘if you are a father, then you are, tautologically, in the role of a father’.⁹⁵

For the father, the very fact that he is a father forms what it is to be good and rational as the person that he is. Thus, since the form of the father-daughter relation is characterised by a certain kind of awareness and affection, he cannot, as father, be indifferent to his daughter. Such indifference would be to malfunction, not only as a father, but as the person that he is. And such malfunctioning would curtail the proper functioning of his daughter. That does not imply that the child can be morally blamed for its father’s malfunctioning: $R^{A \rightarrow B}$ is not reducible to $R^{B \rightarrow A}$. But the proper functioning of the daughter *qua* daughter is still frustrated, comparable to the manner in which disease would frustrate her proper functioning: the form of her relationship to her father is prevented from unfolding as it should. Conversely, and very differently, the proper functioning of the father is contingent on the proper functioning of his daughter. If she were to deny her parents affection, influence, and respect — and thus, for instance,

⁹⁵ Masvie, ‘The Self and its Roles’, 14.

join a group malevolent and reckless kids that bully other children at school — then the parents will malfunction because they are not able to realise their role in relation to their child: to bring forth a practical reasoner in pursuit of the good.⁹⁶ As such, the proper functioning of both the child and its parents is significantly vulnerable.

The appropriateness and vulnerability of proper functioning do not only characterise roles that are based in our physical, biological composition; these are also characteristic of predominantly socially constructed roles (which should not be confused with ‘unnatural’ roles; the social construction can be more or less according to nature). Imagine that our nun coincidentally meets a man that she is immediately attracted to. Having taken her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, she stands in a certain relation to her religious sisters, making it inappropriate to court him. That is, because she has taken on the role of religious sisterhood, interaction that would otherwise be appropriate is no longer so. If her vows were still conditional, which they are upon entering the convent, then she might consider to not make them permanent — and if she were to choose that, then she could appropriately court the man. Certainly, some might not be convinced that courtship is inappropriate for the nun. Be that as it may: to function properly as humans demands precisely that we discuss what is appropriate in various roles. But the nun must, at the very least, consider whether courtship is appropriate or not in a manner that she did not have to prior to entering the convent.

Moreover, the nun is also vulnerable in relation to her religious sisters. Her proper functioning is not reducible to the proper functioning of her sisters, but if they malfunction, she is unable to realise the good of her role. Such vulnerability is inherent to proper functioning because individuals can only function properly in community: to reason practically, we must know who we are — and it is in community that we come to know who we actually are as practical reasoners in pursuit of the good, as well as who we potentially can become as such practical reasoners.⁹⁷ That is because our knowledge of our self ‘depends in key part upon what we learn about ourselves

⁹⁶ Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From*, 140.

⁹⁷ See Carreras, ‘Aristotle on Other-Selfhood and Reciprocal Shaping’, esp. 327–330.

from others, and more than this, upon a confirmation of our own judgements about ourselves by others who know us well, a confirmation that only such others can provide'.⁹⁸ Significantly, therefore, 'I can be said truly to know who and what I am, only because there are others who can be said truly to know who and what I am'.⁹⁹ And the other's knowledge of myself is given to me in different roles — also those that might be provisional, such as student or teacher, or even superficial, like buyer or seller — because I can only be in relation to others in roles.

None of this implies that human agents are reducible to their roles. But it does imply that roles are constitutive of the self — or, in an analogy: roles are to self, what skin is to the body.¹⁰⁰ Function properly, therefore, consists in realising the good of the roles that I stand in, and those that I should step into.

Tautology and axiom

And thus we are through the woods and can continue towards our eudaimonist concept of liberty. But before doing so, we should pause briefly to *précis* the kind of commitments that this route has forced us to make. The central commitment is a recognition of nature as imbued with normativity *qua* proper functioning — and that this is true for humans also. And from this commitment, the Aristotelian logic leads us to certain other commitments: the essential dimension of humans' proper functioning is reason, especially practical reason. Such practical reason is predicated on and substantiated by roles — implying that human nature is inherently socio-rational.

Together, these commitments, and the logic that bind them together, make up our philosophy of human nature — rough and rudimentary, indeed, but nevertheless, for our purposes, necessary and sufficient (see *NE* 1.7 1098^a22–25). I have given reasons for believing that these commitments are reasonable. Clearly, these reasons are not

⁹⁸ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 94.

⁹⁹ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Masvie, 'The Self and its Roles', 20.

decisive. But the aim here is rather to provide suggestive reasons, demonstrating, if nothing else, that our route is ‘certainly not crazy’.¹⁰¹

Perhaps not crazy, the sceptic might contend, but certainly not worthwhile either: the route is circular. Take the anorectic nun, for instance. If she does not immediately accept the conclusion that her way of life is inconsistent with proper functioning, then what argument can be offered to her? None, it seems, other than a tautology: the pursuit of extreme bodily thinness is inconsistent with proper functioning because it leads to death, and death is inconsistent with proper functioning — put simply, the anorectic’s way of life is inconsistent with proper functioning because it is inconsistent with proper functioning. But even if the anorectic were to accept the premise that her way of life (possibly) leads to death, she must not accept the premise that this death renders her way of life inconsistent with proper functioning. That is, although death is certainly inconsistent with proper functioning in one sense, in that it prevents the continuation of proper functioning, it is not necessarily so in the relevant sense. The anorectic might believe she functions properly because she pursues extreme bodily thinness — with death as an unwanted, but possible, consequence. But that possible consequence does not in itself demonstrate that her way of life is inconsistent with proper functioning. Say that our nun suffered martyrdom for her faith, for instance. Is she not functioning properly in the relevant sense, even though her way of life led her to death?

The tautology of proper functioning is not only unavoidable, but also indispensable. If proper functioning is indeed a meaningful concept, then it cannot be coextensive with its negation, namely malfunctioning. And the difference between these concepts is ultimately *experienced* through the kind of rational observation that humans intuitively approach the world with. It was rational observation, for instance, that enabled us to recognise the flourishing oak as good. Through rational observation, then, we enter the tautology of proper functioning — that is, we come to recognise the natural world as enmeshed with practical philosophy. We can give reasons for the existence of this enmeshment, but these reasons will not — indeed cannot — be decisive for the

¹⁰¹ Korsgaard, ‘Aristotle’s Function Argument’, 130.

sceptic. That is because proper functioning is a basic constituent of reality, comparable to rationality or goodness. And the existence of these constituents cannot ever be proven; it can only be experienced through rational observation, and then explored through discussion and contemplation.

Put differently, the basic constituents of reality are not conclusions of arguments, but axioms from which arguments can be made. The sceptic, of course, can cast the axioms in doubt, with the inevitable, and rather self-defeating implication that their own ability to understand reality is cast into doubt. And that, I believe, is not a way worth pursuing. Moreover, as David Chalmers points out, ‘all arguments have to start somewhere’,¹⁰² and that somewhere is typically *given* to us by intuition. If some were to reject that ‘two and two are four’, for instance, then what argument could we give for its conclusion, other than tautologically appealing to the intuitive truth of the propositions logic? None, really. Although ethical and political intuitions are certainly controversial in a sense that mathematical intuitions are not, the case is similar: in order to reach conclusions, our argument has to start from somewhere — and that somewhere is ultimately a tautology. Or, as Plato noted in *Meno*, one cannot really look for something unless one has already, in a certain respect, found it.

¹⁰² Chalmers, ‘Intuitions in Philosophy’, 542.

Liberty as the State of Proper Functioning

As a means for navigation, I have made use of Gerald MacCallum's triadic relation: x is free from y to do z. Having theorised about the nature of x — which in our case is the human being, and specifically the citizen — we can now move on to explore the meaning of liberty as a relational property: how do x relate to y and z, when x is *free* in relation to them? I begin by considering Aristotle's liberty concept. Then I proceed from that concept, in line with our philosophy of human nature, turning back where Aristotle made wrong turns, going further where he should have pressed on.

Aristotle, concept, and anachronism

It must state plainly at the very outset that Aristotle does not provide us with any explicit definition of liberty in the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Politics*. But we get something that approximates a definition in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle states that liberty is to exist for one's own sake rather than for another's (1.982^b25–26).¹⁰³ Certain scholars have therefore contended that it is 'anachronistic'¹⁰⁴ to ascribe a liberty concept — in our modern sense — to Aristotle. According to Herman Hansen, for instance, Aristotle uses the term *eleutheria* and its cognates 'in the ordinary and

¹⁰³ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 495.

¹⁰⁴ Hansen, 'Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle', 26.

literal sense of being a free person — preferably a citizen — and not a slave owned by a master'.¹⁰⁵ Thus, for Hansen, Aristotle's use of *eleutheria* does not capture any liberty concept as such.

However, Hansen's position strikes me as somewhat question begging: what does it *mean*, for Aristotle, to be free in 'the ordinary and literal sense', rather than enslaved? Is not an 'ordinary and literal' concept of liberty still a concept of liberty? And is it not anachronistic to simply assume that what was 'ordinary and literal' liberty for Aristotle coincides with our modern understanding?

Even though Aristotle does not provide us with any explicit definition of liberty in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, Aristotle certainly has views on liberty. Notably, and indeed as already noted, Aristotle controversially discusses liberty in the context of slavery and democracy. In both cases true liberty seems to concern flourishing, and enslavement or false liberty with the lack thereof. It can be reasonably assumed, therefore, that Aristotle operates with some implicit, rudimentary concept of liberty.

That does not, however, imply that this concept was central to Aristotle, nor that it can simply be excavated from his texts: conceptual reconstruction is necessary. That is, although we find traces leading to a liberty concept in Aristotle, the path is incomplete, and thus our reconstruction will be an innovation of sorts. And that reconstruction will inevitably be marked by modern biases, such as our very preoccupation with liberty *qua* liberty. It is therefore not likely that 'Aristotle's liberty concept' can be attributed to the historical Aristotle — but then again, it's the *textual* rather than the historical Aristotle that we are concerned with. In referring to 'Aristotle's liberty concept', then, I mean that liberty concept which is the most consistent with the views on liberty found in Aristotle's texts.

¹⁰⁵ Hansen, 'Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle', 27.

Slavery and democracy

For Aristotle, certain human beings are slaves by nature. Slavery is regarded as natural ‘on the ground that slaves have no practical reason to take care of their own lives, and are, therefore, fit only for the kind of heavy labour that is an indispensable factor in human culture’.¹⁰⁶ Thus, to the extent that the slavery in the *polis* are confined to such natural slavey, it is compatible with justice.

We should, of course, vehemently refuse this inference. It is even unclear that its central premise makes sense on Aristotle’s own terms: if the human form is rational, then that seems to entail that there is no such thing as a human being without practical reason.¹⁰⁷ In any case, as a category defining the essence of certain humans, natural slavery is inconsistent with *our* philosophy of human nature — and that is because a malfunctioning does *per se* not define the organism’s essence. We shall therefore deviate from Aristotle on this point (granted that our interpretation here is the best interpretation, which is certainly not undisputable)¹⁰⁸ and construe natural slavery as category describing a certain kind of malfunctioning that can affect us all: the incapability of ‘looking ahead by using its thought’ (*Pol.* 1.2 1252^a30–35), that is, of foreseeing with the mind. And with that correction, we can return to Aristotle’s discussion.

Moira Walsh suggests that this rather obscure malfunctioning — of not being able to foresee with the mind — concerns practical reason in two distinct senses. Firstly, it is the incapability to know precisely which means lead to given ends. Secondly, and ‘perhaps more plausibly’,¹⁰⁹ it is the incapability to know which ends one ought to pursue. In both cases, the natural slave is characterised by a malfunctioning practical reason. Conversely, the natural master, the free citizen, is characterised by a proper functioning practical reason. Liberty, therefore, predicates the ability to find appropriate means to appropriate ends.

¹⁰⁶ Frede, ‘The Deficiency of Human Nature’, 263.

¹⁰⁷ Frede, ‘The Deficiency of Human Nature’, 263.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. Heath, ‘Aristotle on Natural Slavery’.

¹⁰⁹ Walsh, ‘Aristotle’s Concept of Freedom’, 497.

According to Walsh, then, Aristotle's discussion of natural slavery seems to imply that having liberty is predicated on *having* reason, rather than merely perceiving it. Since natural slaves do not have reason, their masters must impose ends upon them — ends which the slaves, through their perception of reason, can find means to realise. Natural slaves, then, do not really belong to themselves because they are unable to direct themselves. And since it is the natural master that directs them, the natural slaves belong to their natural master. Moreover, that tends to entail that the natural slaves realise ends that are external to themselves, so that they, in Kantian parlance, are treated — and indeed treat themselves — as means to other ends. And thus the contours of Aristotle's implicit liberty concept become clearer: humans that are free are able to know, through the use of reason, what ends ought to be pursued, and how to realise those ends. These ends are not imposed upon them, nor are they external to their self: the ends are for the sake of their flourishing.

There are several interesting dimensions to these contours. Firstly, Aristotle's liberty concept is not binary. It is not the case that either we are free or unfree. For Aristotle, liberty comes in degrees. Humans can be better or worse at exercising their capacity for practical reason, that is, to grasp appropriate ends and find means that realise those ends appropriately. And the fact that 'it would be slavish to work for the sake of any good less than the virtuous life' implies that liberty that is not perfect entails *slavishness*, but not slavery as such.¹¹⁰ To be in perfect liberty is to exercise the capacity for practical reason perfectly, to function not only properly as in 'adequately', but as in 'flawlessly'. Secondly, to function properly *qua* flawlessly is not at all inconsistent with the restrictions and interference of community. On the contrary, for Aristotle, strong and close friendships are integral to flourishing, and therefore to liberty also — something which we shall return to.

These contours become clearer yet when considering Aristotle's discussion of democracy. Aristotle maintains that democracies are corruptible because their constitutions

¹¹⁰ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 499.

typically — if not inevitably — ‘define freedom incorrectly’ (*Pol.* 5.9 1310^a26). And his criticism of the democratic liberty ideal is twofold (*Pol.* 6.2 1317^a40–^b16). Firstly, Aristotle rejects the assumption that the rule of the people is necessarily compatible with liberty. By dictating law L, the people decides to be ruled according to L, and since the citizen in a sense is the people, the democratic liberty ideal postulates that the citizen’s liberty is consistent with L also. But if L does not harmonise with the good, then L cannot be compatible with reason, and thus not with liberty either. Secondly, for Aristotle, the democratic ideal of liberty is incapable of robustly harmonising the laws with the good: on this ideal, doing what one likes and craves is characteristic of liberty. ‘But this is base’, and thus slavish (*Pol.* 5.9 1310^a33).

For Aristotle, then, liberty is not the ability to pursue and realise whatever ends one happens to desire; it is rather to desire, pursue, and realise that which is truly and objectively good. That good incorporates not only the good of the individual, but also the good of the communities to which the individual belongs. And the community of communities is the *polis*. Thus, *a fortiori*, the good of the citizen incorporates the good of the *polis*. As Walsh demonstrates, this becomes especially evident if one assumes that the *polis* is properly functioning, whose end is the proper functioning of its citizens — the realisation of such a *polis* is the highest good that a citizen could contribute to (see *NE* 1.2 1094^b7–12).¹¹¹ Put differently, such a *polis* is a perfected whole which perfects its parts. And it is in realising such perfection that we are made truly free.

Walsh’s interpretation of Aristotle’s implicit liberty concept must be distinguished from that of W. L. Newman, for instance, who reduces Aristotle’s concept to ‘obedience to rightly constituted law’.¹¹² On Walsh’s reading, obedience to a rightly constituted law can be evidence of liberty, but it is not at all a definition of liberty. That is because it does not capture the *internal* character of Aristotle’s liberty. For Walsh,

¹¹¹ Walsh, ‘Aristotle’s Concept of Freedom’, 403.

¹¹² Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 411.

then, Aristotle's liberty is to exercise the capacity for practical reason such that one realises the *polis*' communal flourishing by flourishing as an individual within it.¹¹³

Indeed, on Walsh's understanding, it is 'difficult to find a significant difference between his conceptions of what it is to be an *eleutheros* and what it is to be a rational animal'.¹¹⁴ When our capacities as rational animals improve, our apprehension of reality is refined, including that of our own nature, and specifically our appropriate ends and their appropriate means. However, if we are to experience liberty, such intellectual virtues must go hand in hand with moral virtues: we are not free if we do not *desire* appropriate ends and then pursue and realise them. Reason does not suffice, that is: the ability to align our passions with reason is also necessary.¹¹⁵ As such, Aristotle's implicit liberty concept is fundamentally a condition of the rational soul, rather than a civil status as such: it is 'the capacity to direct oneself *to those ends which one's reason rightly recognizes as choiceworthy*'.¹¹⁶

It is not immediately clear, however, on this interpretation, what distinguishes liberty from the proper functioning of practical reason. Nor does Walsh attempt to make that distinction: she states that to justify the kind of liberty concept she traces in Aristotle — and perhaps clarify precisely the tension between liberty and practical reason — 'would take us far afield into discussions of philosophical anthropology, ethics, and politics'.¹¹⁷ Yet that is precisely the route that we have embarked on and shall continue on. And that leads us to D. C. Schindler's brilliant investigation into the metaphysics of liberty in Aristotle.

For Walsh, however, this might be a surprising turn: Walsh claims that Aristotle's concept of liberty is 'more moral and political than metaphysical'.¹¹⁸ But Walsh

¹¹³ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 503.

¹¹⁴ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 503.

¹¹⁵ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 504.

¹¹⁶ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 496.

¹¹⁷ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 507.

¹¹⁸ Walsh, 'Aristotle's Concept of Freedom', 496.

neither explains what she means by this, nor does she square it with the fact that it is in the *Metaphysics* that Aristotle approximates a definition of liberty. Indeed, according to Schindler's interpretation, which we shall follow on this point, Aristotle's implicit concept of liberty is only moral and political *because* it is already metaphysical.

Two mirror images of liberty

Liberty is essentially about action. If an organism were permanently, totally, and inherently inactive (although such an organism is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of) — that is, if it had no potency for action whatsoever — then it would also be meaningless to inquire into its liberty. Thus, whereas the oak or bullfinch can be free or unfree, a stone cannot. And true action is the unfolding of form. For human agents, whose form is rational, that implies rationally active action: we are *moved* by the good and simultaneously *move* ourselves to the good, so as to participate in the movement of the good that is our proper functioning. This dual movement is the very essential dynamic of rationally active action, that is, of our proper functioning.

But if such self-movement is genuine *self*-movement, then it must be voluntary. And voluntariness should be grounded in and ultimately defined in terms of reason. Since denying reason would be slavish, voluntariness is only truly free if it is consistent with reason (see *NE* 9.8 1069^a1–3). If an agent were compelled by some irrational impulse to ϕ , then, *ceteris paribus*, ϕ -ing would be inconsistent with voluntariness and thus with liberty. Conversely, if the agent were compelled by reason to ϕ , then, *ceteris paribus*, ϕ -ing would be consistent with voluntariness and thus with liberty. Similarly, consideration and choice are 'not something "in addition" to reason, but the specific form that reason takes in relation to a particular kind of object'.¹¹⁹ Consideration and choice are specific manifestations of reason in the agent. And reason directs consideration and choice towards the good, which the rational soul, like the animal soul, comes to sense through perception. But our knowledge of this end is certainly not

¹¹⁹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 344.

reducible to our perception of it: when the good outside the agent is apprehended by the agent, that is, by its intellect, so that the agent can imagine it, that good becomes internal to the agent. The good comes into the agent, as it were, and infuses its self-movement with a sense of direction. To be free is not to be able to reject this direction and its ultimate end — that would be tantamount to finding liberty in the denial of reason. Rather, to be free is to participate in the movement of the good.

The end that the agent should pursue is ultimately that which Schindler, rather platonically, describes as the unconditional, unchanging, ‘absolute’ good.¹²⁰ And that absolute good is only approached as *manifestations* which are formed by the specific agent and its context. Take our nun, again, upon considering making her temporal vows perpetual: she finds herself at a juncture, confronted with two conflicting ways of life, both of which she desires. She can either remain in the convent with her sisters and pursue that kind of life. Or she can pursue her relationship with the man that she is falling in love with, and perhaps marry him and have children with him. These different ways of life are represented by the very different kinds of roles that she can step into, both of which are good. And as such, her conflict reveals the paradoxical metaphysical category of the good life: it is a conditional and changing manifestation — or, rather, *possession* — of absolute goodness.¹²¹ Put differently, it is a way through a conditional and changing reality towards the unconditional, unchanging good — and as such, the way is itself good, conditionally and changingly. The agent must therefore consider carefully its way of life as the kind of agent that it is, in its specific context — and then choose to pursue it, and indeed participate in making it. And such consideration and choice can surely go astray, for instance by weakness of will.

Like Richard Kraut, then, I believe the good only exists as a good *for* someone or something.¹²² But unlike Kraut, I am not entirely convinced that this implies that the notion of absolute goodness or good simpliciter is rendered void for practical

¹²⁰ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 347.

¹²¹ See Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 347.

¹²² Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness*, esp. chap. 6.

philosophy. And that is because absolute goodness seems to be necessary to make sense of goodness for something or someone. Consider again our claim that stout and sturdy roots are good for the oak, while spindly and shallow roots are good for the ivy. Although it makes sense intuitively, it is rather odd, in that the manifestation of the good for the oak is so very different from its manifestation for the ivy — yet the ‘good’ nevertheless seems to be a single, unitary concept. Indeed, for the claim to be intelligible — that is, for very different claims about the good for something or someone to make sense — there must be a simpler, universal notion of the good underlying its manifestations. And, I believe, with Schindler, that this is absolute goodness.

It can be objected that we are getting back into a discussion about Plato and Aristotle on the ontological status of the forms, which I described as a side track. But it seems that we cannot entirely avoid it. A common understanding of the relation between Plato and Aristotle, is that for Plato, the form of the good is absolute goodness, and that Aristotle denies the existence of this form of the good: the form is instantiated in particulars and thus itself particular. An abstract notion of ‘good’ can be deduced from these particulars, which captures the meaning of the term, it is just that this formal definition is inherently relational and that it does not exist outside of its instantiations in various particular good-for relations. Analogously, there is an abstract definition of ‘above’ and ‘below’, but this definition is inherently relational — there is, as far as we know, no ‘up’ or ‘down’ in the universe so there is no ‘above simpliciter’ or ‘below simpliciter’. There is just an ‘above’ and ‘below’ relative to our planet’s gravitational force. Similarly, we can deduce the abstract principle that runs through all the individual instances of good-for relations without goodness simpliciter existing.

This analogy is misleading, however, in that the relation between relata in spacetime is categorically different from normative relations. In the dimensions of spacetime, relation just is relativistic: for a to be in an above-relation x, and b in a below-relation, only makes sense relativistic to x’s position (relative to a and b) in spacetime. But in the Aristotelian tradition, claims about goodness are relational but *not* relativistic. The good is relational, that is, but nevertheless objective. And that objectivity demands a

notion of goodness simpliciter. Does this imply that I am diverging from Aristotle, here? As Lloyd Gerson has conclusively demonstrated, Aristotle was a Platonist, such that the discussion of forms — which I believe Aristotle moved in the right direction — were significantly within Platonism.¹²³ It shall therefore be my assumption that the good simpliciter is not inconsistent with the fact that, for the purposes of practical philosophy, this good is always and everywhere a good-for: the conditional, changing good of the means are actualized by consideration culminating in choice.¹²⁴ As such, for us humans, goodness can only ever be possessed through the particularities of rationally active action. It cannot be hoarded and stored away; it is a wellspring, flowing through rationally active action.

On Schindler's interpretation, Aristotle's implicit liberty concept entails an entering into the actuality of the good, which requires the soul's coming out of itself in rationally active action. And to describe what this rationally active action looks like, Schindler points to two mirror images of liberty: an ethical and an intellectual virtue. The ethical virtue is generosity (also, fittingly, translated 'liberality'), a simultaneous receiving and giving of concrete gifts. As such, generosity can be contrasted to 'meanness, which is receiving without giving, and prodigality, which is giving without receiving'.¹²⁵ The delight of receiving appropriately or *nobly* — that is, 'in relation to the good'¹²⁶ — is not found in saving something for oneself, but rather in the invitation to participate in giving something in return. When a daughter gives a drawing to her father, it has value for none other than the father. He takes delight in it because the daughter has responded to his gift of love, by giving love in return. As such, the giving is also an invitation to continue giving — and thus the form of their relationship unfolds. Put differently, when simultaneous receiving and giving occurs, the goodness remains an actuality, it does not collapse into static potency. Thus, in the *act* of simultaneous receiving and giving, the agent, on Schindler's interpretation, experiences

¹²³ Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, esp. chap. 7–8. See also Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 323–324, esp. 324n2.

¹²⁴ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 347.

¹²⁵ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 349.

¹²⁶ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 349.

true liberty. And the more complete this action is, and thus the more profound the experience of liberty is, ‘the more it simultaneously wells up from within and receives from without, in a beautiful unity of self and other’.¹²⁷ Put differently yet again: proper functioning relationships just are various kinds of reciprocal giving — and since liberty is a relational property on such relationships, liberty predicates reciprocal giving.

We have already briefly looked at generosity’s mirror image: the intellectual virtue of contemplation. And contemplation reveals the *meaning* of generosity’s reciprocal giving: the objects (and subjects) that are received and given should be loved rationally — which is not in any sense to love coldly or distantly, but rather to love ‘exactly in the way that they ought to be loved, no more but also no less’.¹²⁸ And that is to possess the gift generously just as ‘philosophical wonder possesses its objects’.¹²⁹ It is to take delight in the gifts contemplatively. And Schindler supplements that ‘the more truly good an action is the more it proceeds *from* the soul in the soul’s pursuit of a reality that remains distinct from it; the soul receives the good by doing the good, by making its own contribution from its own inner substance’¹³⁰ — that is, by giving of itself.

Despite the brilliance of Schindler’s investigation, however, it does not elucidate the distinction between liberty and reason. That is, Schindler does make it clear that liberty is rational in the sense that liberty is ‘goodness made fruitful’,¹³¹ and good action is essentially rational. But that does not really shed light on the distinction between liberty and reason — it is simply to point to another unclear distinction: between liberty and goodness. It is therefore not evident what liberty *is*. What purpose does liberty *qua* liberty serve if it is reducible to good action? Somewhat ironically, then, Schindler leaves us with a brilliant investigation into the metaphysics of liberty — taking the analysis of Walsh significantly further — yet we nevertheless remain uncertain about what liberty *as such* really is, that is, in its very essence.

¹²⁷ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 349.

¹²⁸ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 352.

¹²⁹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 352.

¹³⁰ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 352.

¹³¹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 358.

Thus, from Walsh's and Schindler's interpretations of Aristotle we have come to conceptualise liberty as a state of the soul, characterised by activity according to reason, consisting in participation in the good. And that participation is a dual movement: we are moved by the good outside ourselves, in the sense that the good stirs and directs a desire for itself to itself, and simultaneously there is a self-movement welling up inside us, such that the good is considered and chosen. What makes this liberty concept intuitively plausible, is the fact that there appears to be something unfree about deviating from rationality and rejecting the good. Yet, as already suggested, that is also what makes it suspect: it seems that liberty is reduced to rationality and the good?

Together, then, Walsh and especially Schindler have provided us with a bountiful account of liberty's entwinedness with reason and goodness — that is, with proper functioning — but not an adequate concept of liberty. That does not mean that their analysis and investigation have gone terribly wrong. To the contrary, I shall also theorise that proper functioning and liberty are essentially entwined. But although they cannot be untied, they nevertheless can and should be distinguished from one another. My contribution shall therefore be to proceed on their route, via Schindler's excellent lexical study of the ruins of European languages,¹³² so that we can come to grasp the nature of this entwinedness, and thus the nature of liberty *qua* liberty.

Unimpeded growth

Scholars typically agree that terms such as '*eleutheria*' as well as 'libertas' and 'freedom', although seemingly different, share an 'original principle'.¹³³ And that original principle is to belong to a people that is designated a metaphor of natural, organic growth: to be free is to belong to a people that flourishes. As Schindler calls attention to, it is not difficult to find this notion of liberty in Aristotle, for whom freedom is

¹³² Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 287–290.

¹³³ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 287.

restricted to the freeman *qua* citizen. The slave is not free, for obvious reasons, but neither is the metic, whose life is characterised by a set of possibilities that are quite similar to that of the citizen. That is because the metic, just as the slave, comes from another place, they are not part of the *polis*' natural, organic whole.

The *polis*, therefore, is not only defined as an external organisation of cooperation. It is also defined by an internal relation: the *polis* has 'natural roots in the organic unity of a people'.¹³⁴ From this principle, a profoundly positive notion can be derived from *eleutheria*: to be part of a natural, organic whole that is characterised by *growth*. This growth is a superabundance: the seed yields numerous new seeds which in turn yields numerous new seeds, *etcetera*. And, according to Richard Onain, this notion of superabundance is also found in both 'libertas' (and thus 'liberty') and 'freedom'. There is, for instance, an etymological and semantic connection between 'liberty' and 'libation', that is the pouring out of liquid in celebratory religious ritual, as well as 'libido' and 'love'.¹³⁵ Liberty, then, is related to the pouring out of life seed in joyous desire — concretely in ritual and sex — so as to bring together and further a family or tribe.¹³⁶ The notion of generosity is also implied here, through fertility: genitals, generativity, generation, generosity. And precisely this relation between love, fertility, and generosity is found in the 'freedom' also, with clear reference to the noble.¹³⁷

Thus, if we follow Schindler in this lexical study, we find that '*eleutheria*', 'liberty', and 'freedom' were terms that, originally, captured something which manifests life and gives it on, an active superabundance: an organism's natural, organic growth.¹³⁸ And Robert Muller demonstrates that when the natural and organic is emphasized, we

¹³⁴ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 288.

¹³⁵ Onains, *Origins of European Thought*, 473–474 (cited in Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 289).

¹³⁶ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 289.

¹³⁷ Onains, *Origins of European Thought*, 474–76 (cited in Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 289–290).

¹³⁸ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 290.

instinctively envisage the growth as the full, abundant actualisation of the seed's potential — that is, we envisage the growth as *unimpeded* growth.¹³⁹

Although there is a sense in which such unimpeded growth evokes the negative notion of non-restriction and non-interference, it is unclear if it can be coherently derived from the primary, positive notion. The reason for that is twofold. Firstly, if the negative notion is derived from the positive notion, then it would be odd if the derivative, negative notion is inconsistent with the elementary, positive notion — yet, as the Sirens passages demonstrate, positive and negative concepts of liberty can be precisely that: inconsistent. Secondly, if the *unimpeded* growth is construed in terms of non-restriction and non-interference, then that would detach it from the natural and organic growth from which we got unimpeded growth. As gardeners know, plants can impede their own growth if it not correctly pruned. As such, unimpeded growth is not necessarily inconsistent with external constraints — to the contrary, for plants it is necessary for actualising potential. Moreover, the *polis* should not be compared to a wild forest where the unimpeded growth of one plant comes at the expense of another, in an arms race often associated with a massive waste of resources. It should rather be compared to a garden in which the individual plants are pruned such that they function properly as a collective. And the unimpeded growth of these plants is very much consistent with the idea that liberty is a matter of persevering a space within which the plant can flourish *as it is*. Indeed, here the communal and individual dimensions of liberty come together: liberty does not only concern the natural roots and organic unity of an organism; it is also about respecting the organism's integrity.

In the archaeology of the European languages, therefore, we find an original principle of liberty quite distinct from that which is operating today: we find the superabundance of unimpeded growth. And the seed or nut is a helpful representation of this original principle: like the seed, the nut quite literally wells up from within, unfolding, spilling over certain boundaries, such as its shell, but always in harmony with its

¹³⁹ Muller, *La doctrine platonicienne de la liberté*, 55 (cited in Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 288).

ontological boundaries, its internal logic. And the nut-*cum*-tree carries within it not only this transformation, but also another: fruitfulness, regeneration — wellspring. In a sense, then, we find ourselves back at where we started: the flourishing oak. But what kind of liberty concept have we arrived at? And how can it be justified?

The justification needs to respond to two objections. Firstly, although the negative notion of liberty might be historically derived from the positive notion, it does not follow that the former is logically derived from the latter. Secondly, even if the idea of unimpeded growth was the original principle of liberty, it does not follow that is the best principle of liberty. And I shall respond to these objections by defining liberty directly and explicitly.

Towards a definition

The essential dimension of our proper functioning is reason, especially practical reason. And the essential dynamic of practical reason is to be moved by the good whilst moving ourselves to the good. That movement is predicated on and substantiated by roles: the appropriate means and ends *for me*, as the human that *I am*, are formed by my roles. If I am unable to know the reality in which I find myself, the nature of my being, and the roles that I embody, then I simply cannot be free in the sense that I will be inherently unable to get going in the right direction. And that is a confused and disoriented existence; it is ontological imprisonment. To be free, then, must be to live the opposite kind of life:

Definition: Liberty is the state of proper functioning and, specifically, a relational property that characterises and is essential to proper functioning roles. And that property is the actualisation of role specific potencies.

Corollary: Constraints (external or internal) on proper functioning are constraints on liberty.

The eudaimonist concept of liberty is a cultivation of the original principle of liberty; also the eudaimonist concept can be represented as the superabundance of unimpeded growth. (Here it seems appropriate to accommodate Kant: who ‘would want to introduce a new principle, and as it were, be its inventor, as if the world had hitherto been ignorant of what liberty is, or had been thoroughly wrong about it?’¹⁴⁰) The flourishing oak therefore becomes a token of eudaimonist liberty: the oak is free to the extent that it flourishes. Obviously, this freedom is transformed — and indeed complicated — in the transitions from plants to animals to humans. And that transformation is due to the aforementioned transformation of activity, from plants’ passive activity to animals’ active activity to humans’ rationally active activity.

The oak’s state of flourishing is reducible to facts that can be evaluated unambiguously from the outside. That is not the case for humans: significant aspects of the human state of proper functioning are found on the inside, such as appropriate emotions, desires, and intentions. And although that which is within the agent typically manifests itself in activity that can be evaluated from without, such activity can only be exactly evaluated from the inside, by the agent itself. Moreover, the human state of proper functioning includes the qualia of flourishing not only as human, but also as the kind of human that *I am*. And that is to function properly in my roles.

I have been placed into some of these roles, whereas others I stepped into. Indeed, since my practical reason is predicated on and substantiated by my roles, I am always and everywhere an agent *in* my roles. I am not only human, for instance, but citizen of the nation that is Norway, and the city of Oslo — I am also son and brother, husband and father, as well as friend, and indeed student and teacher, buyer and seller, dog owner and amateur chess player and cross-country skier. And to the extent I function properly in my roles, I will be free. I am only free *in relation* to others: liberty is a relational property. Specifically, that relational property is a becoming of who *I am* and can be, the actualisation of *my* potencies, the unfolding of the specific soul that *I*

¹⁴⁰ Kant, ‘Preface’ to *Critique of Practical Reason*, 8 (my accommodation consists in exchanging ‘duty’ with ‘liberty’). See also Thompson, *Life and Action*, 31–32.

am. Those potencies are given to me through the capabilities of my body and the character of my environment (natural, cultural, social). Yet my soul cannot fully receive them all; I must consider and choose to actualise some of the potencies that I have been given. And in doing so, I give myself soul to certain roles, participating in the formation of myself — which can only be a true formation if pursuant to the rationality of goodness — and thus my subsequent unfolding.

Since liberty, on the eudaimonist concept, is a relational property, it will look differently for different agents — because we can rationally pursue different ways to the good. Moreover, there can be, in Rawlsian terms, reasonable disagreement about the good, and especially about the meaning of pursuing the good rationally. Consider again parenthood. Except for antinatalists (yet another late advancement of the Cartesian turn), most agree that it is good to bring forth and up children, yet there might be reasonable disagreement on the best way of doing so. Parents should love their child — but should they also demand obedience? And punish disobedience? If so, then when, and how? Disagreement about the answer to such questions reflect a dispute about what it means to realise the role of parenthood. And the answer cannot be reducible to empiric parameters, although they certainly can be informative: goodness is quantifiable only on certain conceptions of the good. Thus, even roles that are visibly and tactilely based in our physical, biological composition are controversial: due to practical reason, all roles are inevitably also socially constructed.

In a conditional and changing reality, we must find our way to the unconditional and unchanging good by participate in making this way. But we can only make ways that are already significantly open for us — that is, open for being made. And that is partly an individual exercise, in that *I myself* must find *my* way to the good as *I* am led by it. And that exercise typically entails searching and struggling with ones' own soul (and that which is in it) and cosmos and everything in between. It is also partly a collective exercise, manifested not only in the socially constructed aspects of roles, but also, for instance, tradition. The goodness of tradition is its ability to let generations that came before us lead us closer to the good according to their searching and struggling. And

in different cultures, that roads that have been made to the good might look very different from each other, even if their destination is the same.¹⁴¹

It is still not entirely evident, however, what is the precise relation between liberty and the rationality of goodness. That is, on the eudaimonist concept, is liberty a good? And if so, what kind of good is it? Should it be pursued for its own sake? Or, if we were to predicate Aristotle's three categories of goods — goods of the body, goods of the soul, and external goods (*Pol.* 7.1 1323^a24–26) — then which of these categories would liberty belong to?

To answer these questions, I shall turn to Roderick Long, for whom it is 'uncontroversial that liberty is an external good'.¹⁴² That is, for Long, liberty consists primarily in facts about an agent's environment, rather than its his body or soul. My contention shall be that nothing about this is uncontroversial. Indeed, on the eudaimonist concept liberty concerns our environment only secondarily, and body and soul primarily.

Goodness, analogy, and paradox

There are at least two different senses by which a good can be external, according to Long. On the one hand, there are external₁ goods, which are goods that are outside body and soul, consisting 'largely or solely in facts about the agent's environment'.¹⁴³ An external₂ good, on the other hand, is outside the agent's flourishing, 'its value is purely instrumental'.¹⁴⁴ These subcategories of external goods are not coextensive: even though a good is external to body and soul (external₁), it is not logically necessary that it be external to the agent's flourishing also (external₂). Long points to Aristotle's reflections on virtuous friendship as an example: friends are to be valued for

¹⁴¹ See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 192–193.

¹⁴² Long, 'Aristotle's Conception of Freedom', 787.

¹⁴³ Long, 'Aristotle's Conception of Freedom', 787.

¹⁴⁴ Long, 'Aristotle's Conception of Freedom', 787.

their own sake, and thus they are ‘clearly an external₁ good’ rather than an external₂ good.¹⁴⁵ What kind of good, then, if any, is liberty?

‘An external₁ good, to be sure’, Long asserts — but ‘is it also an external₂ good? Not necessarily’.¹⁴⁶ And Long’s doubt is based in three different passages in Aristotle. Firstly, self-sufficiency is one of Aristotle’s formal requirements for realising the highest good. And slavery, that is the absence of liberty, is inconsistent with self-sufficiency (*Pol.* 4.4 1291^a10). It seems, therefore that the absence of liberty ‘is not merely causally but logically inconsistent with the good life’.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, Aristotle defines liberty as the condition under which the agent exists for its own sake, rather than for another’s (*M.* 1.982^b25–26). And that ‘sounds more like a constituent of the eudaimonic end than like a mere external means to that end’.¹⁴⁸ Thirdly, Aristotle believes that the virtuous are spirited and that spiritedness involves an inclination towards liberty (*Pol.* 7.7, esp. 1327^b20–35) — which seems to ‘draw a close link’ between liberty and the virtues, a central component of flourishing for Aristotle.¹⁴⁹

Together these passages suggest, for Long, that liberty is not an external₂ good. If it is granted that Aristotle allows some external₁ goods to be included in flourishing, which Long believes should be granted, then the most natural reading of the ‘passages supports the inclusion of liberty as a constitutive element in eudaimonia’.¹⁵⁰ I believe that this conclusion is right, but only accidentally so, as the argument’s central premise is wrong: liberty is not an external good at all, not even an external₁ good (indeed, as I will return to: it is not clear that friendship is an *external* good either). It is my conviction that liberty primarily is about body and soul, and only secondarily concerns facts about the agent’s environment — something which becomes evident when reading Aristotle through the lens of the eudaimonist concept.

¹⁴⁵ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 788.

¹⁴⁶ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 788.

¹⁴⁷ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 788.

¹⁴⁸ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 788.

¹⁴⁹ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 788.

¹⁵⁰ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 789.

On the eudaimonist concept, liberty is the state of flourishing. And such flourishing entails harmony between the agent's body and soul, as the latter is the form of the former. It also entails a kind of harmony between the agent and the environment in which it finds itself in — after all, the agent *qua* citizen is a part of the whole that is the *polis*. This leads to an important point: the distinction between Aristotle's three categories of goods are not so clear cut as they might seem. It is not clear, for instance, where the oak's body and soul *qua* matter and form ends, and where its environment begins. Of course, I can be certain that I climb the oak, rather than the ivy. But although the oak's centre of being can be straightforwardly identified, its borders are not. The roots of the oak go stoutly and sturdily, for instance, enabling fungi, worms, and ants to flourish in the soil, which in turn renders the soil more fertile than it would otherwise be. Although the oak might be able to function properly without those concrete fungi, worms, and ants, it would not be able to survive without fertile soil. And the soil is made fertile by fungi, worms, and ants. Just as sturdy and stout roots are an Aristotelian necessity for the oak, derived from certain Aristotelian categoricals, the fertile soil is an Aristotelian necessity for the oak — and fungi, worms, and ants are Aristotelian necessities for making the soil fertile. Thus, *a fortiori*, fungi, worms, and ants are Aristotelian necessities for the oak also.

It can be objected that an implication of this logic is that everything that is necessary for something that is necessary for something that is necessary for an organism's flourishing is an Aristotelian necessity. And that implies that the extension of the Aristotelian necessities of a singular organism is cosmic. A response to that objection is that we should conceive of the Aristotelian necessities in terms of concentric circles. For the oak, there is an immediate dependence on concrete stout and sturdy roots, namely its own stout and sturdy roots — but these roots can flourish in different kinds of soils, made fertile by different kinds of fungi, worms, and ants. Thus, as an Aristotelian necessity, there is an ontological distance between the oak and the fungi, worms, and ants that do not exist between the oak and its roots: they are external to the oak's ontological boundaries whereas the roots are internal. So although there is a chain of

dependencies that culminates in the cosmos itself, the status of the chains' elements changes upon moving further away from the organism's centre of being.

Yet it is still the case that the very meaning of being a plant of the oak kind is intelligible only within the context of a certain kind of environment — just as the oak maze-gill, a mushroom only found on oaks, is only intelligible within the context of the oak. The fact that the oak can exist in the woods and not on the steppes or savannah implies that it can only be a meaningful part of the whole that is the woods, but not the steppes or savannah. In a sense, therefore, the oak mazegill and the oak are comparable to a finger on an arm: the finger can only be a finger-in-the-context-of-arm, the arm can only be an arm-in-the-context-of-body. And even though the part's intelligibility is not reducible to the whole, the whole is still constitutive of the part's meaning. The distinction between organism and environment is therefore blurrier than what it might seem at first glance, even when ontological boundaries are firmly recognised.

And this organism-environment blurriness is also true for humans. Our environment has certainly formed us, and we partake in the forming of our environment, be it the natural, cultural, or social environment — which in fact are not really different environments, but different dimensions of the same environment: our engagement with nature, for instance, cannot be isolated from the cultural assumptions of cosmology, and specifically those concerning what nature *is*, which in turn are propagated through the relationships of the social environment. To be free, then, we must contribute to an environment in which we can be free.

Consider, for instance, a completely malfunctioning relationship between a father and his daughter. The relationship devastates the daughter *qua* daughter: by virtue of being his daughter, she needs and desires to be in a loving relationship with him. Yet he neglects his responsibilities for providing her with the context within which the form of their relationship can unfold. This malfunctioning relationship restricts the daughter's liberty in significant ways: she is not unfolding as she should, which implies that her proper functioning is restricted. Specifically, the fulfilment of her role as daughter

is constrained. But the daughter *qua* daughter will not be free if she were to detach herself from his father. To function properly as a daughter, she must be in a proper functioning relationship with her father. The only way to become free *as daughter* is therefore to correct the relationship with her father. And the daughter can only do so much: her role consists not only of *her* relationship to her father ($R^{A \rightarrow B}$), but also of *his* relationship to her ($R^{B \rightarrow A}$). That is, just as proper functioning is vulnerable, liberty is vulnerable — which I shall return to. For now, it suffices to point out that the daughter can *contribute* to forming an environment in which she is free as daughter (and only if that leads nowhere, detachment might be the least bad option).

Since the distinction between body, soul, and environment is blurry, liberty cannot be placed exclusively in either category. The good of proper functioning transcends these categories of goods, and thus liberty does so also. Indeed, on the eudaimonist concept, it is not even the case that the emphasis is on the environment; it is rather on the soul, and therefore also on the body since the soul is the form of the body. And that is because I am free insofar as I function properly in my roles — that is, insofar as my soul unfolds. And although the fullness of that unfolding is dependent on others, and thus my environment, the locus of my unfolding remains in my soul.

Moreover, it is not the case that liberty is a good *in itself*. This point has two facets. The first is an analogy: Aristotle distinguishes between true and false pleasure (*NE* 7.12 1153^a30–35). If the agent takes pleasure in ϕ -ing, then it is only a *true* pleasure if ϕ -ing is good. That is, pleasure is the experience that ensues from unhindered virtuous activity. In itself, therefore, pleasure is not good, but it is good in that it perfects proper functioning. If we have a wrong understanding of proper functioning, then our understanding of true pleasure will be wrong — we will mistake false for true pleasure. Analogously, if we come to believe that ϕ -ing is good, whereas it is in fact bad, then we come to believe ϕ -ing can contribute to liberty whereas it really does not. The agent doing ϕ might think that ϕ -ing is constitutive of proper functioning, and therefore experience liberty in doing so. But such liberty is false; true liberty is a relational property that is essential to proper functioning roles. That does not imply that liberty

is not good, but rather that is not a good in itself. But it does imply that liberty is only good in the sense that it captures an element of the good life.

The second facet is a related paradox: if one pursues liberty in isolation, one renders oneself unfree — precisely because liberty is a relational property that is essential to proper functioning roles. It is the *proper functioning roles* that must be pursued, rather than the relational property as such. As an independent and isolated object of pursuit, liberty is always and everywhere elusive. It is good to pursue liberty, therefore, but only as the relational property that characterises and is essential to proper functioning roles — because it is only there it can be found.

Here, however, we sense a tension: roles confer obligations on the agent. And obligations, it can be objected, are typically antithetical to liberty. If so, then liberty is found in the same place as its antithesis, which seems to render the eudaimonist concept otiose, and perhaps even incoherent. My response shall be that the assumption that obligations are antithetical to liberty is false: obligations can be antithetical to liberty, but that is never due to the obligation *qua* obligation.

Liberty in obligation

Obligations are inherently woven into the fabric of relationships — indeed they are the sternest of ties between agents. True obligations are therefore internal to roles, not external constraints. Indeed, the substance of family, friendship, and *polis* consist essentially of obligations to specific other agents. Obligations, then, are the substance of the good life, of being human. If obligations are antithetical to liberty, such that being free just is being free from obligations, then perfect liberty must be antithetical to being. But on the eudaimonist concept, obligations are not antithetical to liberty. And I will demonstrate that by considering the aforementioned three kinds of roles that pertain to family, friendship, and *polis*.

We begin by revisiting territory that should be familiar by now, namely the community in which the individual *becomes* a practical reasoner: the family. Consider again the child that has joined a group of kids that bully other children at school. Although the parents might discipline her, they cannot *coerce* their daughter to adhere to their affection and respect their influence — the daughter must let her parents realise their role in relation to her. And she does that by realising her own role in relation to them, which entails that she lets her parents realise their roles as mother and father. By not granting her parents access into that inner space in which her agency can be formed, the daughter restricts the proper functioning of her parents *qua* parents, thus restricting their liberty as parents. Moreover, in doing so, the child restricts its own liberty: she gives her inner space, her character, to the formation of seemingly vicious peers — agents which should not have that kind influence. And here we can begin to see more clearly how liberty is entwined with obligation: when the daughter and her parents fulfil their obligations to one another as daughter and parents, then, only then, can they be free as daughter and parents. That is, only then can the form of their relation fully unfold, and with it, their souls as daughter and parents.

It is in the family that the child becomes a proper functioning practical reasoner — yet, for Aristotle, friendship is just as important. Indeed, for Aristotle, friendship is a kind of extension and indeed idealisation of family: friends ‘want to live with their friends’ (*NE* 9.11 1172^a5–35), so that they can enable one another to function properly by ‘mutual correction’ (*NE* 9.11 1172^a13). And that just is family at its best. When the child has become an adult, it should therefore not seek back to the family for formation, but rather onwards to *friends*, that is strong and close relationships with virtuous peers. Now, Aristotle distinguishes between different kinds of friendship, depending upon what they are orienting towards, be it pleasure, utility, or virtue — and it is only virtue friendship that is regarded as *true* friendship. Such friendship does not negate pleasure or utility, but its essential characteristic is a unity that pushes and pulls the friends towards the good. The energy of this pursuit is the need and desire for flourishing: the love of a friend that is friendship, is in fact a mutual ‘extension of

self-love'.¹⁵¹ In pursuing the good together, friends enable one another to be better than they could have become alone. That is because friends form each other's character, reciprocally, making one another virtuous *together*, such that there is a '*shared being* between the friends'.¹⁵² In friendship, then, pursuing one's own flourishing just is to pursue the other's flourishing — their flourishing is mutually 'constitutive'.¹⁵³

There is a distinct sense, then, in which friends are liberating: without them, without being drawn out of ourselves, we are confined to ourselves — which makes us less able to pursue the good. Indeed, the crux of books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that our flourishing 'is essentially a *shared* goodness, by its very nature'.¹⁵⁴ The goodness of proper functioning, emanating from one's own soul, comes to a higher perfection when one *also* contemplates and receives that same goodness as emanating from the soul of *another*, of a friend. Friendship opens a space for us in which we are pulled out of ourselves, pushed toward the good — which is necessary for proper functioning. Schindler observes that 'two together show forth the meaning of the good in its most good mode: one alone might suffice, but goodness requires more than what is necessary'.¹⁵⁵ And the opening up of this space, and the maintaining of it, is based on a set of obligations: since the friend's proper functioning is constitutive of my proper functioning, I have a special set of obligations to the particular agent that is my friend, obligations that I do not have to other citizens of the *polis* (*NE* 8.9 1160^a1–10). For Aristotle, this implies concrete obligations such as, for instance, living in the same concrete community as the friend (*NE* 9.12 1172^a5–8).

And just as I have special obligations to family and friends — upon which both their and my liberty are predicated — I have special obligations to the *polis* also: mirroring the concentric circles of the oak's dependencies, my obligations extend outwards in

¹⁵¹ Carreras, 'Aristotle on Other-Selfhood and Reciprocal Shaping', 320.

¹⁵² Carreras, 'Aristotle on Other-Selfhood and Reciprocal Shaping', 325.

¹⁵³ Carreras, 'Aristotle on Other-Selfhood and Reciprocal Shaping', 330.

¹⁵⁴ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 353.

¹⁵⁵ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 356.

‘concentric circles’,¹⁵⁶ from family to friendship to *polis* (*NE* 8.9, esp. 1159^b25–1160^a15) — and ultimately to the cosmos. Thus, just as friendship is a kind of extended family, the *polis* is a kind of extended friendship (*NE* 8.1 1155^a24–30). And that has implications for liberty: since the individual citizen cannot function properly except for in a community of family-friends-*polis*, liberty is not found in detachment from these communities, but in participation.

Indeed, fascinatingly, for Aristotle, spiritedness (*thymos*) is not only the quality of the soul which begets friendship since it enables love (*Pol.* 7.7 1327^b38–41). Spiritedness also, as Long suggested, involves an inclination towards liberty as well as ruling. And that is because the spirited ‘is both fit for rule and indomitable’ (*Pol.* 7.7 1328^a5–7). Rather strikingly, then, Aristotle brings together the desire to love, be free, and to rule. But does not such rule entail domination over others? Not necessarily: it can be taken to be the ability to contribute to the consideration and choosing of ends, which is the opposite of slavishness.¹⁵⁷ And the proper functioning citizen contributes indeed to such consideration and choosing. Thus, the same spiritedness that drives the citizen towards liberty, also drives it toward love, friendship, and the *polis*.

There still something contradictory about this: if the citizen is to command, that is to rule, then that seems to entail that other citizens must be ruled — curtailing their liberty. But this contradiction is resolved if we come to recognise, with Schindler, that ‘ruling is not a controlling of others, but a *liberation*, since to rule is ‘to communicate the generosity of actuality, the liberation of form’.¹⁵⁸ And that enables us to better understand how and why the politician, for Aristotle, is subordinated to the philosopher: it is the paradigm of the philosopher (as type) that should inform the politician because the philosopher *qua* philosopher receives and gives on ‘a goodness that transcends both the individual and the *polis*, because it transcends all things simply’.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 783.

¹⁵⁷ See Bentley, ‘Loving Freedom’, 109–110.

¹⁵⁸ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 358.

¹⁵⁹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 358.

The liberty of citizens in a properly functioning *polis* therefore *reflects* ‘the same sense that resonates in contemplation and genuine action, as expressed in the virtue of liberality [that is generosity]: a coincidence of giving and receiving, which creatively receives what is good “from above” and passes it on to others’.¹⁶⁰ As such, their liberty *appears* ‘as the full flourishing of being, a completeness that is not sealed up in itself like a treasure locked and stored away, but is rather an exuberant superabundance, order from within to generous and generative relation to what is other’.¹⁶¹ And that is because their liberty *is* a relational property — the unfolding of their specific souls — that characterises and is essential to proper functioning. And that proper functioning includes their proper functioning as citizens in relation to the *polis*.

Back to Odysseus, and beyond

We should return to Odysseus, ever briefly, to consider the sense it makes of the Sirens passages. On the positive and negative concepts of liberty, very different answers were given to the liberty questions that were raised. Put all too simply, Odysseus, when bound to the mast, is free on the positive concept, and unfree on the negative concepts. On the eudaimonist concept, however, no simple answer can be given: Odysseus is both free and unfree.

By ordering his sailors to bind him to the mast, Odysseus functions properly as father, husband, and king — and thus he is free in those roles. But whilst bound to the mast, Odysseus is certainly not functioning properly as father, husband, and king. He is willing to risk everything and everyone to know the intimate secrets of the Sirens. That does not imply that Odysseus’ freedom and unfreedom cancel each other out. To the contrary, as Elster has demonstrated: to function properly as a (human) practical reasoner is to take it into account that moments or even periods of irrationality might

¹⁶⁰ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 358.

¹⁶¹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 359.

overthrow our reasoning.¹⁶² Put differently, to function properly as father, husband, and king involves the neutralisation of moments or periods in which one does not desire to pursue the good of these roles.

It is this underlying notion of proper functioning that gives meaning to the Sirens passages. Although Odysseus, while beguiled by the Sirens' song, comes to value their intimate secrets higher than the goods of his roles as father, husband, and king, it is not rational for him to do so. That is because Odysseus *is* a father, husband, and king. To be rational *qua* functioning properly as *Odysseus*, then, just is to function properly as father, husband, and king — demanding that the Sirens' intimate secrets are valued lower than returning home. As such, it is rational for Odysseus to be bound to the mast because it enables him to function as properly *as possible* in these roles, that is, to become who he is as father, husband, and king.

Of course, Odysseus is not reducible to these roles, even though they are constitutive of his being. But if the Sirens' intimate secrets were to compel him to not go home, then he would remain unfree in his roles as father, husband, and king, whereas avoiding the Sirens' intimate secrets cannot confer any such constraints on the realisation of his roles. Thus, although not entirely free when bound to the mast — beguiled by the Sirens, desiring to jump off the boat to go the Sires — Odysseus is as free as possible, granted the circumstances the circumstances that he finds himself in. The Odyssean journey is therefore a fine representation of liberty, capturing not only the manner in which liberty is a relational property that characterises and is essential to properly functioning roles, but also the searching and struggle that come with it.

Relation, roles, and proper functioning

Whereas the Odyssean journey is a fine representation of the complexities of eudaimonist liberty, the flourishing oak is a handier token it: liberty is unimpeded growth.

¹⁶² See Elster, 'Ulysses and the Sirens', 518.

And for humans, that implies that liberty is a relational property — the actualisation of *my* potencies, the unfolding of the specific soul that I am — that characterises and is essential to proper functioning roles. It makes no sense, therefore, to construe obligation as antithetical to liberty: obligations are strings in the fabric of relationships, and since liberty is a relational property, liberty and obligations are entwined.

On the eudaimonist concept, therefore, liberty is ‘not simply something we need to protect and regulate’; it is something we can keep, deepen, and widen.¹⁶³ That is, we should not principally understand liberty as a *mere* ideal, but rather as a ‘well-spring’.¹⁶⁴ And that wellspring is the soul’s unfolding — its actualisation of its specific potencies, so that it becomes the being that it is and can be.

¹⁶³ Schindler, ‘Aristotle’, 361.

¹⁶⁴ Schindler, ‘Aristotle’, 359.

Positive, Negative, Eudaimonist

Having arrived at the eudaimonist liberty concept, we must ask ourselves: did we avoid the pitfalls of the other liberty concepts? The answer, I believe, is that we did.

Unlike the negative concept, the eudaimonist concept does not make arbitrary distinctions between internal or external constraints on liberty: if the agent is not functioning properly, then the agent's liberty is *ipso facto* constrained. Nor does the concept reduce liberty to opportunity: only opportunities that are important for proper functioning are relevant for liberty considerations — but the emphasis is on action, that is, what the agent in fact does. And unlike the republican concept, it does not regard the mere possibility for arbitrary power as unfreedom, which implies that the republican concept's self-refutation is avoided. Since the eudaimonist concept is inherently relational, the independence concept's normative motion towards isolation — which is also present in the other variations of negative liberty — simply does not make sense. Moreover, unlike the positive concept, our concept does not distinguish between a higher and lower self and is thus less prone to slip to tyranny.

Yet there is something suspicious about the eudaimonist concept, in that it deviates so significantly from contemporary concepts of liberty. This deviation demands justification: does the eudaimonist concept really capture that which other liberty concepts

attempt to capture? Moreover, the concept that the eudaimonist deviates the least from, the positive concept, is typically regarded as the most objectionable contemporary liberty concept — does not that suggest that the eudaimonist concept is objectionable for that very reason? Indeed, even though the eudaimonist concept does not distinguish between a higher and a lower self, it is based on another normative idea of agency: proper functioning. Thus, albeit perhaps less prone to slip into tyranny, does it not nevertheless slip?

Intuition, folk concept, and cosmology

I believe it is indeed the case that the eudaimonist concept captures something different from other liberty concepts. But I am unconvinced that it is objectionable: discussions on liberty concepts are not merely descriptive, but also ameliorative. Whereas descriptive discussions seek to reveal ‘the objective type that our usage of a certain term tracks’, ameliorative discussions seek to reveal ‘the concept that we should be using, given our purposes and goals in that inquiry’.¹⁶⁵ But it is not evident that these discussions can be entirely kept apart.¹⁶⁶ And for liberty discussions, it is certainly not the case: discussions about liberty concepts do not only concern what liberty *is* in the collective conscious, but also what it *should* be.

This makes it difficult to evaluate the merit of different liberty concepts up against one another, granted that the concepts that are evaluated are not obviously flawed, for instance by being inconsistent. And these inconsistencies must typically be *internal* inconsistencies. As we have seen, a theorist of negative liberty might argue that the positive concept is inconsistent, since its political implication is the very negation of liberty. But a theorist of positive liberty is unlikely to be persuaded: there is only an inconsistency if a non-positive concept of liberty defines the meaning of ‘the negation of liberty’ — and it is unreasonable to expect a theorist of positive liberty to accept

¹⁶⁵ León, ‘Descriptive vs. Ameliorative Projects’, 170. See also Haslanger, ‘Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?’

¹⁶⁶ León, ‘Descriptive vs. Ameliorative Projects’, 185.

such a definition (indeed, *that* would be internally inconsistent). Conversely: whereas a theorist of positive liberty might dismiss the negative concept on the ground that it reduces liberty to opportunity, the theorist of negative liberty might accept the negative concept on the very same ground. The usual strategy, then, if there are no internal consistencies, is to centre on the next best thing: counter intuitive implications. And that is precisely what Berlin and Taylor do. Berlin points to the counter intuitive implication of the slippery slope to tyranny,¹⁶⁷ and Taylor to scenarios that are not intuitively characterised by unfreedom yet identified as decisively unfree on the negative liberty concept.¹⁶⁸

I have appealed to this strategy myself. But insofar as the strategy entails an appeal to intuitions, it is a business that we should be very wary of. And that is because it is unclear to what extent our intuitions — that is, the agent's immediate reactions to real or hypothetical encounters with the world — grant us true knowledge. Indeed, intuitions concerning the very definition of knowledge vary across cultures.¹⁶⁹ That is not only interesting because it demonstrates cultural variation in intuitions, but also because such variation can give rise to slightly different concepts of knowledge itself. And that, in turn, casts into doubt what it at *means* for intuitions to grant us true knowledge.

This is the problem of intuitions. And I believe it is reasonable to assume that the problem is intensified when moving from intuitions of a theoretical character to intuitions of a practical character. We should for instance not expect any deviations across cultures when it comes arithmetic intuitions like 'two and two are four'.¹⁷⁰ But we should expect variation in intuitions concerning practical philosophy. Imagine that I declared, just as the nun passed us in the woods: 'that Christian is trespassing on holy ground; we should sacrifice her to the oak'. I would make a claim about the good thing to do and therefore about practical philosophy. Obviously, the claim, predicated

¹⁶⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', esp. 180.

¹⁶⁸ Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty', esp. 149.

¹⁶⁹ See Stich, 'Knowledge, Intuition, and Culture'.

¹⁷⁰ See Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, chap. 11.

on the idea that certain humans are inferior to certain oaks, strike us as not only outrageous and malicious, but also utterly foolish. But for our European ancestors, before the spread of Christendom, the claim would not at all have been regarded as foolish. The ancient Kelts and Prussians believed that deities dwelled in oaks, which bestowed upon them supernatural significance.¹⁷¹ Certain oaks were thus to be venerated by sacrifice, and on occasion even human sacrifice — for instance as amends, if their sacred ground were defiled by the mere presence of a ‘stranger’ Christian.¹⁷²

What causes this variation in intuitions? A variation in folk concepts, I believe, concerning deities, holiness, veneration, defilement, humanity, *etcetera*. And by ‘folk concept’ I simply mean that concept in the collective conscious, which is mirrored in the academy’s abstraction, definition, and demarcation. Such folk concepts emerge from and within specific cosmologies, that is understandings of the origin, evolution, and structure of reality and existence — thus cosmology and metaphysics overlap, indeed, cosmology is in a sense the folk concept of metaphysics.¹⁷³ With the spread of Christendom in Europe, for instance, the pagan cosmologies were driven out: the Christian cosmology centred on a divinity whose holiest manifestation was humanity. It no longer made sense, therefore, to sacrifice humans to oaks. Thus, oaks were cut down to build churches wherein humans could participate in ceremonial unity with the divine. If one were to put it simply: the new Christian cosmology begot new folk concepts that in turn begot new intuitions.

Although, that is perhaps putting it too simple. It is not only the case that cosmologies shape and colour intuitions (via folk concepts); intuitions also shape and colour cosmologies. By virtue of being humans, we share the same rational form and thus the same mode of being.¹⁷⁴ There are, therefore, certain basic, universal aspects that humans *qua* humans share — which suggest that we share certain basic, universal intuitions. This is reflected in the fact that there is not cultural variation in all intuitions

¹⁷¹ Chadwick, ‘The Oak and the Thunder-God’, esp. 26, 32.

¹⁷² Chadwick, ‘The Oak and the Thunder-God’, 32.

¹⁷³ Mathews, *The Ecological Self*, 11.

¹⁷⁴ See Masvie, ‘The Emergence of I’, esp. 90–91.

concerning practical philosophy, at least not to the same degree.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, if the human form is indeed rational, such that our mode of being is rational, then it is reasonable to further assume that these basic, universal intuitions grant us valid perspectives on truth. It is therefore not altogether futile to appeal to intuitions, and especially not the basic, universal kind. And, if any, then it seems that intuitions about the flourishing of the natural world belong to the category of basic, universal intuitions — simply because the flourishing of the part is dependent on that of the whole, such that humans with precise intuitions about the flourishing of the natural world in general, and the human organism in particular, are likelier to in fact flourish.

Both the pagan and Christian cosmologies were ancient, in that they did not operate with clear distinctions between life, soul, and transcendence on the one hand, and matter and nature on the other. That distinction came with the ‘modern cosmology’¹⁷⁶ — the turn towards Cartesianism, away from Aristotelianism. That shift brought with it substantial changes in folk concepts; liberty included. To the extent that the meaning of language approximates folk concepts, we have already observed — in the archaeology of the European languages — such changes: the original principle of liberty is not identical to the contemporary principle. Then liberty concerned a superabundant notion of unimpeded growth, now a tangent subset thereof, that is, non-constraint. But if the folk concept of liberty has changed, and thus also corresponding intuitions, then does not that very fact cast into doubt what it is that liberty concepts ought to capture? And if so, then why should we trust *our* intuitions?

Our answer to these questions tends to be that our folk concepts are better. However, not only Jonas, but also Alasdair MacIntyre and Freya Mathews, as well as Arne Johan Vetlesen, have excellently criticised this answer in various ways.¹⁷⁷ But to stay on course, I shall simply point to the changes in the folk concept of human nature: then

¹⁷⁵ See Curry *et al.*, ‘Is it Good to Cooperate?’, 47

¹⁷⁶ Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 7–10.

¹⁷⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, esp. chap. 9; Mathews, *The Ecological Self*, esp. chap. 1; Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature*, esp. chap. 3–4. See also Masvie, ‘On That Which Emerges from the Cartesian Abyss’.

humans were conceived of as parts of wholes, now as ontologically atomistic and morally autonomous in themselves. Society's fundamental components has morphed, that is, from interdependent communities such as households to individuals in conflict. My contention is that it is not *self-evident* that this change is for the better. And granted our atomistic-autonomist folk concept of human nature, it is no wonder that our liberty intuitions are profoundly negative, and if positive, then usually in the sense of subjectively defined self-realisation. Indeed, as already suggested, the negative liberty concept only makes truly sense if we assume such a philosophy of human nature: on the negative concept, perfect liberty is consistent with absolute isolation — which cannot be true for an organism that is a part of a whole.

It can be objected that the modern cosmology and its reconception of human nature liberated us from the authoritarianism of the *ancien régime*, to make use of the Tocquevillian term. Its authoritarianism was rendered unjust *because* the agent was reconceived as atomistic and autonomous. The criticism of the modern cosmology and its folk concept of human nature is therefore also, it seems, a reactionary rebellion against the anti-authoritarianism of the *modern régime*, that is, political liberalism.¹⁷⁸ Or so the objection goes. And that is what I shall respond to.

The liberty of the citizen

The cosmology of the ancients was profoundly flawed, and it certainly sanctioned authoritarianism. It is therefore not only impossible but also quite undesirable to go back in history, to some *ancien régime*. That does not, however, imply that we should be at peace with the place we are at. And the eudaimonist liberty concept, with its philosophy of human nature, nudges us forward, in a different direction — but does it avoid authoritarianism in doing so? The objective ends of proper flourishing, upon which liberty is predicated, seems to entail that citizens can be made free by coercion, that is, to act for the sake of the right ends.

¹⁷⁸ See Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', 3.

Walsh finds this objection ‘unwarranted’, from an Aristotelian perspective.¹⁷⁹ She responds that someone who is forced to act in a particular way, even if one were to grant that this way is objectively good, resembles Aristotle’s natural slave more than the *eleutheros*, insofar as such agents would not be self-directed, but have their ends set for them. Indeed, it could be added with Long that ‘Aristotle regards civilian disarmament as tantamount to slavery’ (see *Pol.* 2.8 1268^a16–20).¹⁸⁰ which seems to imply that the only authoritarianism that Aristotle finds just, is the one that the citizens freely concur to. Thus, Aristotle finds no justice in authoritarianism *qua* authoritarianism. And although there is something to these responses, they are not very convincing: what if the proper flourishing of a *polis* demands a kind of authoritarianism that most or many, but not all, of the citizens concur to? It seems that such authoritarianism can be justified after all. Yet Walsh has nothing further to say and thus does not give us reasons to think otherwise.

I shall have something further to say — specifically, I shall have something further to say about what it means to be free as an individual citizen, that is, to be free as a limb on the body polity. And I want to begin by formulating the most compelling version of the authoritarianism objection, which I take to be this: even if it is granted that the eudaimonist concept is true, it cannot be the political ideal which we model the political order after, because the closer we get to the ideal, the greater is the possibility of collapsing into authoritarianism. It is not the case that the eudaimonist is logically self-defeating, but it is the case that it very plausibly will be.

The token of the eudaimonist concept is our flourishing oak. Its unimpeded growth demands a space within which it is sheltered from violation of its integrity. But does it prevent authoritarianism? That is, can authoritarianism, at least certain kinds, be likened to pruning, and thus be legitimate? The answer to this question is unclear insofar as the character and extension of the sheltered space is unclear. Perhaps it is

¹⁷⁹ Walsh, ‘Aristotle’s Concept of Freedom’, 507.

¹⁸⁰ Long, ‘Aristotle’s Conception of Freedom’, 799.

only an abstract space, which does not really manifest itself in the political realm? Or might it be so small that it allows for a lot of authoritarianism, even though it is not consistent with total authoritarianism?

To define and demarcate the space in question, I shall derive two political principles from the eudaimonist concept. The first principle is the constitutive choice principle. On the eudaimonist concept, there can be no liberty without actualisation of potential: to be free is to grow roots, sprout, and ultimately yield fruit. But the oak nut cannot be *coerced* to flourish by its gardener. The oak must, significantly, participate in its actualisation of potential. Similarly, political authorities cannot in any meaningful sense coerce its citizens to function properly. Humans must participate in their own proper functioning. And there can be no participation without consideration culminating in choice. That is because our proper functioning demands that we in fact *choose* to function properly. As we have seen, proper functioning does not only amount to a set of external circumstances and consequences; it is also an internal state of being. This is best captured in our roles: to be a proper functioning nun, for instance, it does not suffice to do the sort of things that nuns typically do — it is also necessary to do so with the right motivation and intention. And for the nun to have the right internal state of being as nun, she must choose to be a nun. Thus, choice is constitutive of proper functioning, which in turn implies that there can be no liberty without choice.

This has important political implications. The eudaimonist concept does not open for any positive right to do that which is bad, as the part has no positive right to damage the whole of which it is a part. But we have a duty, and therefore a positive right, to do that which is good. And that right opens a space which can be exploited to do that which is bad. This is a subtle, yet substantial distinction. On the one hand, this distinction rejects the idea that liberty entails a distance to rationality and goodness — that the agent must or even can be at arm's length from the good, in a position to rationally and thus legitimately consider whether to do good or not. This idea of liberty as distance from rational goodness is nonsensical on the eudaimonist concept; liberty is inherently entwined with the rationality of goodness *qua* actualisation of

potential. But such actualisation of potential is predicated on participation — which, again, must be chosen. And for there to be a choice to do ϕ , it must be *possible* to choose otherwise, even if that other set of choices is not worthy of being chosen. I should stress that such choice must be construed in its broadest sense. Our nun, in order to live a good life as nun, must not convert from some other belief, so as to make a very profound choice. If tradition in her secluded village lead her to desire to become a nun, then her choice could have been just as real: to allow oneself to float along a good culture is just as much of a choice as going against the stream of a bad culture.

An interesting practical case is found in Aristotle's discussion of property. For Aristotle, it is not only good for the citizen itself, but also for the *polis*, that citizens share property. In the best *polis* property 'should be communal in use, as it is among friends' (*Pol.* 7.10 1329^b41–1330^a1). If a citizen does not share their property, then that citizen curtails not only their own flourishing, but also that of other citizens. Indeed, since justice is derivative of friendship (*NE* 8.1 1155^a27–29), the flourishing of the *polis* is curtailed also. That is, the whole is damaged by the part. And since the *polis* is indeed the whole to which the citizen is a part, that seems to suggest that the *polis* can legitimately enforce generosity — which is Martha Nussbaum's understanding precisely: the sharing of private property is not really voluntary for Aristotle.¹⁸¹

However, Robert Mayhew has demonstrated that this understanding is flawed.¹⁸² That is because sharing, for Aristotle, is done *from* and *for* virtue, and in the manner of friends, all of which connotes voluntariness. Moreover, for Aristotle, the private space corresponds roughly to the aforementioned space which is sheltered from intrusion. Thus, even if it is not morally optional to be generous, the *polis* cannot coerce its citizens to be it either. But that produces a conundrum: on the one hand, the *polis* is the whole to which the citizen is a part, on the other Aristotle seems to allow (even indirectly enable) that part to damage the whole. This is interesting in that variants of

¹⁸¹ Nussbaum, 'Aristotelian Social Democracy', 232; 205.

¹⁸² Mayhew, 'Aristotle on Property', 819–820. See also Masvie, 'The Function of Property in Aristotle's Political Theory', esp. 5–6.

the conundrum is likely to occur under the eudaimonist concept also, if it avoids authoritarianism: is it not inconsistent to maintain that, firstly, the citizen is a part of the whole that is the *polis*, secondly, the part has no right to damage the whole, thirdly, the *polis* should rule in the interest of the whole, and fourthly, authoritarianism is not justified even if citizens damage the whole of the *polis*?

I believe the constitutive choice principle brings these positions together consistently. The right to do good is contingent on there being a space in which one can tread wrong, even wilfully — even though there is no political right to tread wrong, nor morally optional to do so. There are, however, limits to the extent to which the citizen is allowed to tread wrong: the *polis* should not force its citizens to share property, but ‘neither should any citizen be in need of food’ (*Pol.* 7.10 1330^a1–2).¹⁸³ And upholding this space is in the best interest of the *polis*, as the flourishing of the citizens is contingent on it, and thus also the flourishing of the *polis*. As such, the eudaimonist concept is able to ground a political order is very similar to that which is found in the constitutions of the *modern regime*, while avoiding its typical and unrealistic consensual basis of legitimacy — which even political liberalists have tended to abandon, as it collapses into the opposite of authoritarianism: anarchism or extreme libertarianism.

That does not imply that consent is entirely unimportant. Aristotle, for instance, frequently suggests that legitimate governments have broad consent amongst the governed, while despotic governments rule against the people’s will (see e.g. *Pol.* 3.14 1285^a27–^b21; 4.10 1295^a15–24; 5.10 1313^a3–10). And for Aristotle, a specific kind of consent is paramount: consent to the constitution, such that ‘none of the parts of the *polis* as a whole would even wish for another constitution’ (*Pol.* 4.9 1294^b38–39). That does not imply that citizens’ liberty is found in consent as such, whatever the constitution. Liberty is rather found in *consent of the right constitution*, that is, a constitution which is just and thus enables liberty. If that consent is present, then it is not necessary to consent to all laws that are enacted under the authority of the

¹⁸³ See Mayhew, ‘Aristotle on Property’, 819–829.

constitution.¹⁸⁴ And for that reason, liberty is contingent on civil armament for Aristotle: it provides citizens with the power to express or withhold consent to the constitution — in the *modern regime* secured by free and fair elections.

From the constitutive choice principle, a further principle can be derived: the epistemic constraint principle. The constitutive choice principle holds that the right to do good implies a space in which choosing the good becomes a meaningful exercise. If that space is undermined, then proper functioning is undermined also. The epistemic constraint principle is predicted on the recognition that there can be reasonable disagreement about what that good in fact is, because the human predicament is tainted by inherent fallibility — which in turn limit legitimate interventions.

As we have already explored, reasoning about the good life begins with certain axioms and makes certain premises — and it is not self-evident which of these axioms and premises are true. Thus, depending on the axioms and premises that one believes to be true, diverging conclusions concerning the good life will be reached. Our nun, for instance, might be entirely convinced that her comprehensive doctrine is true, and thus regard lives undevoted to the divine as disgraceful. Yet her comprehensive doctrine is based on axioms and premises that others might believe to be false — for instance that the divine was incarnated and crucified for our sins so that we can be personally united with the divine. If this comprehensive doctrine was forced upon other citizens, then they could not flourish under it: the doctrine and its axioms and premises must be *chosen* to be believed, and only then can the doctrine engender flourishing. That does not entail, however, that we should avoid influencing one another in the right direction. Take the anorectic nun, for instance. We should do everything in our power to treat her disease — everything short of coercion. That is not at all because she has a right to ruin herself, and it is not *only* because it is unclear whether coercion can contribute to treating her disease. It is rather because the anorectic nun, to be truly healed, must let others heal her to be healed, and thus participate in that healing.

¹⁸⁴ Long, 'Aristotle's Conception of Freedom', 793.

Thus, the political philosophy of the eudaimonist concept is profoundly tragic: for the citizens to flourish, they must participate in their own flourishing, yet they often do not — and there is only so much that the political authorities can do about it. But that does not imply hopelessness, that the citizens' flourishing is out of reach of the political order; it simply implies that we must reconsider the meaning of the *political* order.

The eudaimonist concept as synthesis

The eudaimonist liberty concept is both positive and negative — or more precisely, a synthesis thereof. The eudaimonist concept recognises the positive ontology of liberty as unimpeded growth, and that such growth only can occur within a space characterised by a certain kind of non-constraint. Such non-constraint must derive from the organism's unimpeded growth *qua* proper functioning. And for humans, that implies that the space of non-constraint is defined and demarked by the principles of constitutive choice and epistemic constraint. On the eudaimonist concept, therefore, the positive ontology of liberty *entails* negative political liberty. This does not imply that the eudaimonist concept collapses in a negative liberty concept. The political ideal remains eudaimonist — which is something I must briefly elaborate on.

Unlike Aristotle, we can distinguish between state and *polis*. And that will enable us to sketch, in conclusion, the outline of the *modus operandi* of a political order that is aligned with the eudaimonist liberty concept — which must be filled in on another occasion. The state is the overarching structure of a nation, preserving the identity of the nation, while enforcing the negative dimensions of liberty. The logic of its structures is a constitution composed of principles such as constitutive choice and epistemic constraint — as well as checks and balances, rule of law, fundamental human rights, *etcetera*. The state is based on a eudaimonist philosophy of human nature, and cannot, therefore, be neutral about the good. But precisely because of this underlying philosophy of human nature, its structure cannot coerce its citizens to take on any specific comprehensive doctrine about the good. Indeed, that would not only be unjust,

but also prevent the citizen from considering and choosing the right doctrine, whatever it is, and thus function properly under it. It is upon our eudaimonist philosophy of human nature, therefore, that it makes sense to build a political structure that opens a space for different and indeed conflicting comprehensive doctrines about the good.

Within that structure which is the state, we find various *poleis* with different constitutions — which should be taken in its allegorical sense: *poleis* are delineated communities that centre on different comprehensive doctrines about the good, that is, bodies which we can be functioning limbs on. Thus, on the eudaimonist concept, liberty does not consist in deconstructing normative forces that pull and pushed us in this or that direction. These normative forces are the vigour of communities centred on comprehensive doctrines about the good. And liberty consists in becoming a limb on a body that is *good*, that is, to be pulled and pushed in the right direction. And it is indeed the *poleis* that should be the locus of such normative forces: it is *here* that we can be meaningful parts of a whole, where we can consider and choose comprehensive doctrines about the good — where we can function properly in our roles. Thus, it is in the *poleis* that eudaimonist liberty is realised, and only derivatively in the state.

As such, the purpose of the state's structure is twofold. On the one hand, it is to preserve the integrity of different *poleis* and their ability to centre on different and conflicting comprehensive doctrines about the good. And on the other, it is to preserve the integrity of the citizen — enabling it, for instance, to leave a *polis* and join or initiate others, which is a kind of Aristotelian civil armament on the *polis* level. It is important not to collapse this duality of the political order, as it is such collapse that causes authoritarianism — be it the overt kind of the *ancien regime*, or the subtler kind of the *modern regime*.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, we should recognise that the political is primarily about the *polis*, and only secondarily about the state: the purpose of the state's twofold structure is to ensure the proper functioning of *poleis*.

¹⁸⁵ E.g. Skjervheim, *Det liberale dilemma og andre essays*, 15.

We are citizens not only of states, therefore, but also, or should be, of a *polis*. Yet the negative liberty concepts of modernity have driven us out of such *poleis*, towards isolation. As such, and admittedly rather counterintuitively, our nun — perhaps a Benedictine? — is a witness to true liberty, as it is envisaged on the eudaimonist concept: the nun is a citizen of a *polis*, that is her cloister, energising her to flourish under a comprehensive doctrine that she has considered and chosen to take upon herself. And, like the nun, we must find our way back to our own *polis*, without which true liberty is impossible: the state protects the space in which unimpeded growth is possible, but the unimpeded growth is energised by a *polis* in rational pursuit of the good. We must therefore participate in such *poleis* in order to be free, that is, in order to unfold as the specific souls that we are.

Coda

Having arrived at the eudaimonist liberty concept, this flourishing oak, where do we go? Many, of course, just want to go back to where they came from: the roots of the concept are very Aristotelian, laying plainly and unabashedly in the open — a fact that many will find unacceptable. So they leave. Back stand a modest company of Aristotelians. And for us, there are several exciting untrodden paths to discover. What is the legitimate size and extension of the state, and specifically, the modern welfare state? How should the state protect and promote a concrete notion of the nation without trespassing on the domain of the *poleis*? Why is a congruent state full of conflicting *poleis* even feasible, when their conflicts might concern fundamental issues like abortion and euthanasia?

Our route to the eudaimonist liberty concept prompts us to ask the fundamental questions of political theory anew. But this is neither the place nor the time to answer them: our journey has come to an end.

The end of theory

The politician should first and foremost be a philosopher: it is the paradigm of the philosopher (as type) — who receives, and so pass on, a goodness that transcends both individual and community — that should guide the politician. But there is a challenge: we philosophers are very fond of theorisation — often, it seems to me upon

introspection, too fond. We are therefore currently not fitted to guide, at least not to guide properly. It is therefore appropriate, upon ending, to remind ourselves about the end of theory. I have not in mind a Fukuyamian end of theory, that is, the *modern régime* as Hegelian end of history. I suspect unsurprisingly, the end that I have in mind is Aristotelian or eudaimonic. And the eudaimonic end of theory is practice, or better yet: participation. The philosopher becomes philosopher as a citizen of a *polis* that participates in the rational pursuit of the good, this Odyssean journey of liberation.

And the purpose of the *polis*' journey is not only to flourish itself. It is also to compel other *poleis* to espouse their constitution, their comprehensive doctrine about the good. That is because the different *poleis* find themselves in the same state, belonging to the same nation, and should thus be friendly to one another. And friendliness implies that one desires the best for the other — which is to wish for my friend to encounter the good under my conception of it. Such flourishing and corresponding friendliness cannot be produced by the state; it can simply structure an environment in which it is encouraged and enabled. Thus, the nation only flourishes insofar as its *poleis* flourish.

As such, the nation is on an eternal journey, where different *poleis* and their citizens attempt to move it, within the structure of the state, according to their respective comprehensive doctrines about the good. Although eternal, this journey is substantially different from that of Michael Oakeshott. For him, political activity is to sail 'a boundless and bottomless sea' where there is 'neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination' — the 'enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel'.¹⁸⁶ If taken seriously, this voyage is dreadful. What is the meaning of sailing without *any* idea of a goal, of a good to be reached? Indeed, without such a good, practical reason — which is oriented towards the good — is otiose. As such, Oakeshott's political activity is not only robbed from the good, but it is also profoundly irrational. According to Oakeshott himself, this 'should depress only those who have lost their nerve'.¹⁸⁷ Yet to me the opposite seems to be the case: if we do

¹⁸⁶ Oakeshott, 'Political Education', 60.

¹⁸⁷ Oakeshott, 'Political Education', 60.

not dread this voyage, we shall not only have lost our senses, but also have significantly ceased to be *human*.

The ‘enterprise’ that Oakeshott depicts is imprisonment, and not because there is sea as far as the eye can see, and we have no wings to take us away — but because we find ourselves on a ship that has lost its course because the commanders lost their conviction there is a goal to navigate after. Thus, if not ravaged by the sea, then the ship will be steered by the desires of the strongest person on deck. In either case we will find ourselves imprisoned as a nation because we cannot rationally pursue, as a nation, the good.

The dreadfulness of the metaphor is due, I believe, to its collapse of the political orders. The goal of political activity on the state level is to encourage and enable the *poleis* to rationally pursue their comprehensive doctrines about the good whilst conserving by carrying on the nation’s identity and its uniting vivacity, rather than enforcing any such doctrine upon the nation. On the *polis* level, however, the goal of political activity is indeed to rationally pursue the good life under a comprehensive doctrine about the good — and when that pursuit is on track, we can sense the liberty to which our nun is a witness, the oak is a token, and Odysseus’s journey is a representation.

Indeed, the Oakeshottian voyage should be recast precisely as a kind of Odyssean journey: the state should steer the ship of the nation towards the highest good indirectly, by letting the *poleis* pursue the good directly within the sheltered space defined and demarked by the principles of constitutive choice and epistemic constraint — hopefully getting ever closer to the goal of the highest good, yet never hoping to immanentize the eschaton, for even if we were to get ever closer, the goal will always be forever in the horizon, never to be fully reached before the end of time.

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