INTERVIEW

The Grammar of Goodness

An Interview with Philippa Foot

HRP: At the beginning of *Natural Goodness*, you recall an intervention of Wittgenstein's at a seminar at which a speaker realized that what he was about to say was, though seductive, clearly ridiculous. The speaker was trying to hit on something more sensible, and Wittgenstein said: "No. Say what you *want* to say! Be crude, and then we shall get on." Why do you think this is good advice for philosophers?

Foot: I begin *Natural Goodness* with this remark, since I have found it excellent advice. Whenever I find myself tempted to pass over a weird thought, I try to do the opposite, and give this thought its day in court. So I advise people to stick with their seductive but really ridiculous thoughts, because one may well strike gold just there.

HRP: How do you mean "strike gold"?

Foot: I think an analogy may help, though one must always be careful with

Philippa Foot is Griffin Professor, Emerita, at UCLA and an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College at Oxford. Foot describes her career as one of slow progress in developing a distinctive line of thought on the nature of moral judgment and the rationality of acting morally. Asked to characterize herself as a philosopher, she says, "I'm not clever at all. I'm a dreadfully slow thinker, really. But I do have a good nose for what is important. And though the best philosophers combine cleverness and depth, I prefer a good nose over cleverness any day." She is also known for her writing on medical ethics. Her articles on these topics are collected in Virtues and Vices *and* Moral Dilemmas. *The recently published* Natural Goodness *is her first book. This interview was conducted at Oxford by Alex Voorhoeve of University College London in September 2002. Alex Voorhoeve's work was supported by the Mind Association Research Studentship 2002-2003.*

analogies. If one is talking with a therapist, and one finds oneself about to say something disreputable, the last thing one should do is to say something respectable instead. It is the same in a way with our philosophical thinking: the philosophical interest is where the *trouble* is. And that is why we should focus on the odd or crude thought that we actually had. At the beginning of *Natural Goodness,* I give the example of being puzzled by the expression "if I were you." I remember when I was a child someone saying "I'd take my medicine if I were you!," and thinking "no you wouldn't, for I'm not going to take it!" I later realized that my puzzlement at this expression was due to a philosophical entanglement.

Perhaps it is because of this peculiar nature of philosophical questions that philosophy is very difficult to *explain* to non-philosophers. You know, Wittgenstein said that one lesson in philosophy is as useful as one lesson in piano playing, and I think that's right!

HRP: How did you become interested in philosophy, and how did you come to study it?

Foot: I had no formal education as a child. I lived in the sort of milieu where there was a lot of hunting, shooting, and fishing, and where the girls simply did not go to college. But one of my governesses, who herself actually had a degree, said, "you could go to university, you know." And so I decided to work for it. I was extremely ignorant, which is not surprising because most governesses weren't themselves highly educated, and they were supposed to be able to teach you everything! Anyway, I took some correspondence courses and to my surprise was accepted by Somerville. I had put in for Somerville because I had heard that it was a college that was intellectually but not socially snobby, and I was working my way out of this socially snobby background. I decided to do the course in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics because I wanted to do something theoretical. I couldn't do mathematics, by lack of education and talent. So I thought economics and philosophy would be the theoretical subjects I could do.

HRP: What brought you to focus on moral philosophy?

Foot: I was always interested in philosophy. But it was significant that when I came back to Oxford in 1945, that was the time when the news of the concentration camps was coming out. This news was shattering in a fashion that no one now can easily understand. We had thought that something like this could not happen. This is what got me interested in moral philosophy in particular. In a way, I was always more interested in the philosophy of mind, and still am. But in the face of the news of the concentration camps, I thought "it just can't be the way Stevenson, Ayer, and Hare say it is, that morality in the end is just the expression of an attitude," and the subject haunted me.

HRP: What is it in the idea that morality is simply the expression of an attitude that seemed to you so wrong in the face of the Holocaust?

Foot: What these theorists tried to do was construe the conditions of use of sentences like "it is morally wrong to kill innocent people" in terms of a speaker's feelings or attitudes, or of his or her commitment to acting in a certain way. And this meant that, according to these theories, there is a gap between the facts, or grounds, for a moral judgement and that judgement itself. For whatever reasons might be given for a moral judgement, people might without error refuse to assent to it, not finding the relevant feelings or attitudes in themselves. And this is what I thought was wrong. For, fundamentally, there is no way, if one takes this line, that one could imagine oneself saying to a Nazi, "but we are *right*, and you are *wrong*" with there being any substance to the statement. Faced with the Nazis, who felt they had been justified in doing what they did, there could simply be a stand-off. And I thought: "Morality just cannot be subjective in the way that different attitudes, like some aesthetic ones, or likes and dislikes, are subjective." The separation of descriptions from attitudes, or facts from values, that characterized the current moral philosophy had to be bad philosophy.

HRP: Before we turn to your response to subjectivism, I'd like to dwell a bit longer on your early influences in moral philosophy. When one reads your work, one clearly sees the influence of Anscombe and Wittgenstein. How would you say they have influenced your work?

Foot: Anscombe, above all, influenced me. My excellent tutor, Donald MacKinnon, was more of a theologian than a philosopher, really. He taught me about Hegelian philosophy. And about Kant, which was wonderful. But MacKinnon didn't really believe in modern, analytic philosophy. So it took Anscombe to bring me to see the good in that. She herself was a difficult character, not quite the person to be a college tutor and help all the undergraduates through their exams. So she was hard to fit into the Oxford setup. But Somerville happily saw her merits. They thought she was marvelous, and found one research fellowship after another for her, not wanting to let her go. This was marvelous for me because it was natural for us to talk together day after day. After lunch in college, we'd sit down and talk philosophy. She'd propound some topic, and, and though she hardly ever agreed with what I said, she was always willing to consider my objection, and to wonder why I had made it. At one crucial moment, I remember saying of some sentence that it must have a mix of descriptive and evaluative meaning. And she said, "Of what? *what*?" And I thought, "my God, so one doesn't have to accept that distinction! One can say *what*?!"

So you see my position was incredibly privileged because Anscombe is one of the very best philosophers of our time. And moreover, she must have been putting to me the problems that Wittgenstein had put to her; she must have had discussions with Wittgenstein on topics like the ones that I was discussing with her. She didn't talk about Wittgenstein, but she was teaching me something of his way of thinking. I'm sure she didn't think of herself as teaching me, but that was what was going on. She would often come to my seminars, and I would always attend hers, where I usually opposed nearly

everything she said. Naturally, I was regularly defeated. But I would be there, objecting away, the next week. It was like in those old children's comics where a steamroller runs over a character who becomes flattened— an outline on the ground—but is there all right in the next episode. I was like one of those characters.

This went on for about five years, I think. Then Norman Malcolm came over and gave a talk which got me interested in the *Philosophical Investigations*. So I started reading it, I mean *really* reading it, and I said to Anscombe, "Why didn't you tell me?" And she said, "Because it is very important to have one's resistances." She thought that it was very important *not* to accept what Wittgenstein wrote, but rather to try everything against it. She would not have liked it if I had too easily agreed with anything that she said. On a personal level, we were friends of course. She was, as you know, more rigorously Catholic than the Pope, while I am a card-carrying atheist, so we didn't agree on ideological grounds at all. But we had these marvelous discussions, and her children used to come and see me quite a lot.

HRP: You approach moral philosophy by focusing on the virtues. What attracted and attracts you to this way of doing moral philosophy?

Foot: I believe it was reading Aquinas that got me started. I was on leave, and Elisabeth Anscombe had said, "I think you ought to read Aquinas." I got interested in the second part of the *Summa Theologica,* which is about particular virtues and vices. And it struck me that there were always good reasons for saying of something that it was a virtue or a vice. I recall reading the bit where Augustine calls loquaciousness a vice, and thinking "what an extraordinary idea!" But if you take seriously a particular question about a particular virtue, you see that it isn't just subjective, that you can't say anything you like. There must be a *reason* why this is a vice, if indeed it is a vice. I put this question to a pupil of mine: "Why on earth should loquacity be a vice?" And she said, "well if one is always talking, one doesn't have time to think." I was very interested in this, which wasn't Aquinas's reason but seemed to me to be right. I repeated what she had said in a lecture; and some young man caught me on the way out and said (this was a long time ago you know) "but perhaps *my girlfriend* doesn't need to think." And I said, straight out, "*everybody* needs to think!"

That kind of approach is the key to all my work right down to the writing of *Natural Goodness.* One doesn't just have to say, "There *must* be grounds for moral judgements." For it was obvious in the case of individual virtues and vices, that one could ask *what* grounds there were. One could ask, for instance, "Is there a virtue of chastity, and if so what might the grounds for it be?" And with this, the whole subject of moral philosophy thickened up in my mind. Before that, I had simply thought "there *must* be objective grounds for moral judgement," without being able to say much except that they would have to be connected to human welfare or something like that. But looking in detail, as Aquinas made me do, made me see that a virtue-vice point of view provided an excellent way to make an idea of ob-

jectivity in moral judgement concrete. If one only considered a proposition such as "this act is wrong," it didn't lead one on to particular reasons or judgements in the way "loquacity is a vice" did.

However, after this discovery, I still didn't have the general conception of goodness as pertaining to the capacities, dispositions, and actions that are necessary for a particular way of life, which forms such an important part of my arguments about the grounds of moral requirements in *Natural Goodness*. For a long time, I couldn't find such a general basis for morality, and I was too lazy to write more than a few articles with my inconclusive thoughts. So I went on to medical ethics, which was very much in demand. I didn't despise the subject, but I left it as soon as I could see how to approach the foundational questions that I address in *Natural Goodness*. That wasn't until the mid 1980s. And it took me a long time after that to get around to publishing the book. At the launch of *Natural Goodness*, the Oxford University Press editor picked up on the line from Wittgenstein with which I open the book—the one that says that it is difficult to do philosophy as slowly as it should be done—and he said, "Well, that is a problem that Philippa seems to have solved."

So that was the progression of my thought: from thinking subjectivism must be wrong to thinking that when we look at the individual virtues and vices we can actually begin to see an objective basis for particular moral judgements, and on from there.

HRP: You didn't see this basis for morality in other foundational concepts used in contemporary moral philosophy, like the ideas of 'good states of affairs' or rights and obligations?

Foot: Exactly. You see, all I could do at first was to reject subjectivism and insist that somehow there was objectivity in moral judgement, and that it had something to do with human welfare, without sinking into utilitarianism. But I couldn't get my feet on the ground with concepts like 'the best state of affairs' or "good" in the abstract, whereas concepts like virtues and vices had made sense to me. I realized, however, that to really answer those who had a different theory of morality, I needed a whole alternative theory of moral judgement.

HRP: So where did you find this alternative?

Foot: It was only in the 1980s when I found a new beginning by thinking about plants and animals. Not that I thought that you could argue from "such-and-such is important to animals" to the conclusion that "such and such is important." Rather, I was saying "look, there is a particular logical category here." I had an absolutely excellent graduate student at UCLA, Michael Thompson, who is now in the Pittsburgh department. He'd been influenced by Elisabeth Anscombe, even at a distance, because he had very good taste in philosophy. He had this super idea that he had picked up from her writing, where she had talked about the proposition "humans have 32 teeth."

Very few humans actually have 32 teeth. So what is the logical status of this proposition? It is not that it says "all people have 32 teeth." It doesn't even state that "most people have 32 teeth." Nor does it mean merely "some people have 32 teeth." So if you think of quantification, you see that it simply doesn't fit the logical categories that we have. It is of a different logical status from propositions like "gardens have railings." Michael Thompson realized that there is a logical peculiarity of the way we talk about living things, and we both started thinking about this special way in which we can talk about them. That's what got my latest work going.

HRP: You write that this special way of talking reveals itself in our judgements about plants and non-human animals when we think about the way we judge particular members of a species to be defective or to be, on the contrary, "as they should be." To make such judgements about plants and non-human animals, you argue that we need two things. Firstly, a set of propositions describing the lifecycle of the species, with particular focus in the case of plants and animals on growth, self-maintenance, and reproduction; and secondly, a set of propositions saying how, for the species under consideration, these things are achieved: how nourishment is obtained, how it defends itself, how development takes place and how reproduction is secured. From these two kinds of propositions we can derive norms for individual members of the species. These norms state that the key functions should be carried out by the means specified. I'd like to question a few elements of this grammar of natural normativity, starting with the idea of certain capacities or characteristics being necessary for the way of life of a certain species. What kind of necessity do you have in mind here? For in the case of teeth, for example, it is not necessary for our way of life, not even of any great consequence, if we do not have a full set of teeth. And yet, this was Anscombe's original example.

Foot: Well, it is an imperfection if you have fewer than 32 teeth, since it is typically when the tooth gets knocked out, or gets rotten, that one loses it, so there is still a tie-in with health and disease and accident, even though it isn't always a problem, since one can chew one's food with fewer teeth. I admit the original example of teeth is not the best one. But I have a different example. Compare the color in the tail of a peacock with that of a bird I have in my garden, the blue tit. Now, the color in the tail of the male peacock is necessary: it needs it to get its mate. On the other hand, as far as I know, the little patch of blue in the blue tit has no such role in the life of that bird. So if it lacked it, it would be an oddity, a rarity, but not a defect.

HRP: Does the concept of necessity you are using depend on the particular circumstances in which the species in question finds itself? Would one say that in humans a lack of natural teeth used to be a defect, but that it has ceased to be one since the availability of false teeth?

Foot: I think there is a certain amount of play here. It isn't easy to draw the

line, for one occasion doesn't change what counts as a defect in a member of a species. Certainly, things change all the time. Now that foxes are becoming urban creatures, they need different things, speed being, for example, less important because food can be obtained without it.

But this doesn't mean that you can narrow down the reference situation for an attribution of natural goodness as much as you like. For example, the characteristics animals need in a zoo may actually be defects. For it might be useful for a predatory animal kept in a zoo to lack fierceness. So one must realize that the conditions one can use must not be too limited. And after all, it is only a very small proportion of the human race that has false teeth and a very small proportion of predatory animals that live in zoos, which are not their natural habitat.

HRP: Why should we only look at the way of life of a *species*? Why not of a group or troupe or herd, a society, a family, or an individual? What privileges the species in the account of natural normativity?

Foot: In the case of urban foxes, one might come up with different necessities than one would for their non-urban counterparts. But it doesn't really matter where precisely this kind of grammar begins to lose its grip, as long as it is recognized as a general category of judgements about goodness.

HRP: Still, focusing on the species for the derivation of natural norms seems particularly odd in the case of human beings. For you derive natural norms from the fact that certain things are necessary for a way of life. But in humans, the phrase "way of life" is often used not to refer to the species as a whole, but rather to refer to a society or group with a shared set of institutions, practices, and outlook.

Foot: Again, perhaps there are no strict boundaries here. This is not of very great importance. Some things are species-wide in our way of life. All human beings, for example, need courage to face danger, challenges, and loss. There are many things that all humans need, though some amount of relativity does emerge from different ways of life in different times and places and different social, economic, and cultural circumstances. I think it is one of the advantages of this approach that it doesn't have to claim that all moral norms are the same for all human beings. But we mustn't lose sight of the fact that there are many things that are absolutely basic human needs.

HRP: You mentioned moral norms. How is this kind of natural goodness related to *moral* goodness?

Foot: Starting again from plants and animals, we see that all kinds of things are necessary for them in their normal way of life, such as certain kinds of roots for certain kinds of trees or good night vision for an owl. Now, humans have a whole new range of activities and capacities that are part of their way of life. A corresponding new set of defects is possible, most obviously those

defects relating to specific human capacities such as language, imagination, and the will. Then we can say, "let us look more closely at these specific human defects." Human beings can know, for example, that certain things are bad for them. And while animals that liked alcohol as most of us do and who were supplied with enough of it would probably drink themselves to death, humans, on the other hand, can realize the effects of alcohol, and may control their urge for it. Thus, they need and can have the *virtue* of temperance as an animal cannot. But where have I moved on to something grammatically different in this progression? Why make *that* kind of distinction between the way temperance is needed by a human being and swiftness is needed by a deer?

HRP: So you would say that moral goodness and badness, the virtues and vices, are a subclass of the general class of ascriptions of natural goodness and badness?

Foot: Exactly. The move from plants to animals and the move from animals and human beings are similar. You have different possibilities, different ways of managing, different needs, and there is not the slightest ground for saying: "Oh *moral* goodness, now that must be something that we judge quite differently." It is very important, of course, that the subset of the class of ascriptions of natural goodness in human beings that we call "moral" has to do with the goodness of the will and with practical rationality, virtues being intelligent dispositions to take certain things as reasons for action. Correspondingly, I would call a vice a defect of the will. Note, however, that I am not too keen on the word "moral" to mark out this subclass, since it has a certain association with concern for others that separates out things that I should like to bring together. For example, the defect of not looking after oneself, which usually isn't thought of as a moral defect, is equally a defect of the will.

HRP: How does this way of thinking help us to determine what morality and justice require of us? The virtue of justice requires that we respect others' rights. But it is a disputed question just what these rights are.

Foot: I must admit that I have never thought as much as I should about issues in political philosophy. But I suppose that I would proceed in a way similar to Elisabeth Anscombe's in her work on promises, when she stresses how important a practice of keeping promises is for us to be able to bind one another's will. I don't see any reason why a right, which is a very strong claim—a stronger claim than "you should help me"—should not be argued for in the same way, that is, with reference to the good that hangs on it. I mean, society simply depends on certain requirements being strict requirements, like not killing someone and taking their tools. By contrast one couldn't say, "You don't have the right to annoy me!" and be taken seriously. Not being annoyed is simply not that important in human life.

HRP: So in determining which rights we have, you would appeal to the kinds of necessities that exist either for individuals or for society?

Foot: Exactly. I have no doubt that this is the basis of moral requirements.

HRP: Now, these necessities have changed throughout human history, and they are set to change even more as our ability to affect not only the environment but also our genetic makeup increases. What does this mean for the category of natural goodness?

Foot: I think I would be very permissive here. Where human beings have changed their environment so that things that were once a defect are now useful, different standards might apply. Of course, a change in what counts as a virtue is only natural when people's way of life changes. It is a good thing to be relativistic on this point. But I stress that the approach taken as a whole is radically non-relativistic because there is so much that human beings quite generally need, like courage, temperance and wisdom.

Of course, there are great technological differences between tribal cultures of the world and the modern culture of the "developed" nations. Yet there is still so much in common between human beings in different cultures, and it is because of this that the idea that there is a universal need for certain character traits and certain rules of conduct is a strong one.

HRP: I'd like to turn to the topic of practical rationality…

Foot: Oh good! Can I tell you why I had to deal with the topic of rationality in *Natural Goodness*? It was part of my attack on the subjectivism that identified moral propositions as expressing some subjective state of mind. I, by contrast, argue that they are about the *natural goodness* of a human will. And I was open to attack on the ground that I couldn't give a proper account of why anyone should have reason to follow morality. Why? Because subjectivists had the idea that only if you had particular feelings or desires could you have reasons for acting. I myself used to have this view of reasons, and in a notorious article called "Is Morality a System of Hypothetical Imperatives?"[1] I was brash enough to say that reasons just were desire-dependent. So I had to explain how one could have reason to do good actions and avoid bad ones, whatever one's aims or desires.

So I needed a better account of what it is to have reasons, and at this point in time I was lucky enough to work with my friend, the late Warren Quinn. He made what I think was an absolutely brilliant suggestion, though perhaps neither he nor others at the time saw the force of it. His move was to ask: "What would be so *important* about practical rationality if it could be rational to do despicable actions?" Now, this thought was extraordinarily original. For it has been more or less taken for granted in modern moral philosophy that one must first develop a theory of practical rationality, in terms, say, of the maximum satisfaction of desires, and then somehow show that even the greatest self-sacrifice could be rational. And no one, not even

the cleverest, could do it. But Quinn's remark suggested that one shouldn't tackle it like that at all. One shouldn't think that morality must pass the test of rationality, but rather that rationality must pass the test of morality.

HRP: The answer to Quinn's question would seem to be that a more limited conception of rationality relating to the consistent pursuit of interests or things someone cares about can easily be shown to be important ***to that person*****, since it involves the pursuit of ends that are his or hers, or that are in his or her interest.**

Foot: Why would you think that the only way of justifying the claim that it would be rational for a person to do something should make reference to his or her own desires or interests? If you look closely at the theory of rationality as the maximum satisfaction of your most important desires, you immediately get into a whole series of problems. Is it only present desires that we are concerned with? What of something that you don't want now, but you know you will want in twenty years' time? Is it irrational to discount the future?

HRP: But all these things still have some connection to the interests or projects of the person concerned, whereas the pursuit of goodness may not. In your own earlier work, you mention the case of the "cool calculating man," who cares nothing for morality, neither now nor in the future. What good does it do to call this man irrational?

Foot: Now, you are right that "irrational" may not be exactly the word one would choose to describe him. Nevertheless, he *is* defective. For he is failing to recognize and act on something that is a reason. I am curious, though, about your own position. I wonder what *you* would say about the young person who says: "I don't care about the chance of getting lung cancer due to smoking in 20 years' time." First, do you call this contrary to practical rationality?

HRP: Well, I would have it depend on what this person's attitudes towards the future in general were, and whether his actions generally expressed this not-caring about his future.

Foot: What if this young person does care, for example, about being well-dressed at 40, but not about his health at 40?

HRP: I understand that although he is being consistent, I might want to say that he is not recognizing something that he should recognize.

Foot: Ah. And where do you get that "should" from?

HRP: (pause) Well, I guess from some idea of normalcy, that it would be normal to care about this...

Foot: Normalcy?

HRP: Perhaps you're right that normalcy isn't the right concept here, since it may be uncommon to want to live only if one can live stylishly, but still something someone can rationally pursue...

Foot: So I take it you are conflicted about whether such attitudes and behavior are indeed irrational?

HRP: Yes.

Foot: The problem is—and this is really crucial in this argument—that it is very difficult for someone to deny that it is contrary to rationality not to care about your future health to the degree that many people don't when they start to smoke. For it is difficult to deny that prudence is part of rationality. But then it is very hard to find a basis for our concept of practical rationality that makes prudence a part of rationality and doesn't make justice or charity a part of rationality. That is what someone in your position has got to do. You've either got to say: "It isn't contrary to rationality to ignore completely your future well-being," and then give up saying that this kind of imprudence is contrary to rationality, or accept some conception of practical rationality that makes reference to things other than that which someone cares about. And of the young smoker, I think one definitely wants to say that he is defective with regard to the standards of practical rationality. After all, he is being silly!

HRP: And "silly" is a word that points to a defect...

Foot: Absolutely. So this is my challenge: it is going to be difficult for you to find a ground for saying that imprudence is a vice, a defect, but that lack of charity or injustice isn't. Here I think there is something useful in *Natural Goodness*. Because if you treat a defect in the way that it is treated there, they come together. They are different parts of what human beings need.

HRP: Still, one would say different kinds of things to someone who is not acting on reasons for action that they themselves accept than to someone who isn't recognizing something as a reason that you believe she should recognize as such. In the first case we are concerned with a defect in the way she pursues means to her given ends, while in the second case we are concerned with her ends themselves. What is the conception of practical rationality that brings together these disparate notions?

Foot: I argue that thinking in terms of *natural goodness*, as I define it, provides this unity. Both the taking of means to ends in an efficient way and the recognition of relevant reasons are things needed in human life, and a defect in either of these is a defect in practical rationality.

HRP: In *Virtues and Vices* you write that "wise men know the means to ends and know what these ends are worth."[2] Are practical rationality and wisdom the same?

Foot: Yes. They are absolutely the same. Take someone who says, "the most important thing in life is to be fashionable." If you think of the way someone would spend his or her life believing this, of the sort of friends they'd have and the celebrities they'd try to emulate, well…one would look into that. I haven't been able to go into this very far, but I think that the question of what is deep and superficial has to come in here. I certainly don't claim to have dealt adequately with this notion of depth of happiness, but it does seem to me that one understands when someone on his deathbed says, "I've wasted so much of my life on things that didn't matter!" And the idea of being defective in recognizing the weight of reasons seems appropriate here.

HRP: The resistance I feel to this way of thinking about practical rationality is that it seems so like preaching, saying to people "such and such is really important, and if you don't see this then you are defective."

Foot: It *is* preaching! There is good preaching and there is bad preaching. I think a preacher who is worth his salt would be right to say to a fashionable congregation that they are living a very superficial life (though he'd better not say it in an offensive way and he'd probably better not *say* it at all!) But he might think of them that they were old enough to know better, being grownups, not teenagers.

HRP: Still, before you can preach, you must have an idea of the good life for human beings. Aquinas and Aristotle had their own fully developed accounts of what a complete and fulfilled human life was like, and could derive from these accounts the reason for human beings to live in a certain way and cultivate the virtues. In Aristotle's and Aquinas's accounts, the virtues would be conducive to a person's well-being, even if he did not see it this way. But we generally do not share their views of the one correct goal in life. Do you have a similar account of how a person should live?

Foot: The idea of the "good" for humans is indeed a difficult one. Though I think that we can get some handle on the problem by looking at human deprivation. One serious challenge to my view lies, I think, in the idea that happiness is man's good, and that happiness may be achieved in the pursuit of evil. Now, happiness is a protean concept. But what I want to suggest is that we have *a* conception of happiness (among different possible conceptions) in which it is *the enjoyment of good things,* with "good things" defined as objects of a good (an innocent) will; and that we have to understand it in that way when we say that "happiness is Man's good." I think we can approach this concept of happiness indirectly via our idea of what it is to benefit someone. Consider the murderous child abusers Frederick and Rosemary West, and

ask what we should say of someone who had made it possible for them to go on for longer getting their horrible pleasures. Should we say that this person had *benefited* the Wests? Surely not!

HRP: How can you use the notion of benefit as a way into an idea of happiness?

Foot: Benefiting someone means doing something that is for their good. And if I'm right, the concept of benefiting someone reveals a way of thinking about "human good" that excludes the pursuit of evil things, as is shown by my observation of what we should say about prolonging the pleasures of the Wests. But then the concept of happiness that one finds in the expression, "happiness is Man's good" must also exclude the pursuit of evil. So considering the notion of benefiting someone offers us a glimpse of a way that we have of thinking about happiness—thinking of happiness as Man's good—that involves goodness.

HRP: On the final page of *Natural Goodness*, you consider what your arguments mean for moral philosophy. Echoing Wittgenstein, you conclude that your philosophy "leaves everything as it is." Wittgenstein, however, was referring to philosophical analysis leaving our everyday activities as they are and wouldn't have thought that our philosophizing could go on as before. So as an answer to the question where your approach leaves moral philosophy, this seems a bit disingenuous.

Foot: I was only talking about certain parts of moral philosophy, such as medical ethics, when I said that I would not expect disturbance. Perhaps rashly, I do hope that my approach might—just might—affect the way moral philosophy is done. For my approach is different from that of most contemporary moral philosophers. I do not start with moral judgement, asking directly "What is morality?" or "What is moral goodness?" Rather, drawing on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe and Michael Thompson, I make a general "grammatical" point about the evaluation of living things and their parts and features in terms of what I call "natural goodness and defect," and then suggest that moral judgment is *just one case of this kind of evaluation*. This is what I think is new, at least to contemporary moral philosophy, and I hope that thinking about moral goodness and badness in this way offers the potential for a change in moral philosophy. φ

Notes

[1] *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 3, July 1972. Later reprinted in *Virtues and Vices*, 1978, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 157-173.
[2] *Virtues and Vices*, 1978, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 5.