Second Nature, Phronēsis, and Ethical Outlooks

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Abstract
The expression 'second nature' can be used in two different ways. The first allows phronēsis (practical wisdom) to count as the sort of thing a second nature is. The second speaks of second natures as distinct ethical outlooks. I argue that a failure to distinguish these ways of speaking of 'second nature' is philosophically significant, in that we are thereby prevented from seeing that phronēsis stands on a different logical footing from ethical outlooks. Recognising their distinctness allows the important question of the relation between them to be posed. Phronēsis, I argue, should be understood as the unity of the ethical virtues. It remains invariant as ethical outlooks vary. Seeing this allows us to pose the important question, otherwise obscured, how phronēsis is mediated through specific cultural contexts. I end with a concrete example of radical ethical upheaval to illustrate phronēsis as operative across ethical outlooks.

Introduction

This paper has a remit that may seem unusual. It makes use of texts by John McDowell, and specifically two different ways McDowell has of using the phrase 'second nature', in order to open up an issue about the relation between phronēsis (practical wisdom) and ethical outlooks. In executing this task, the paper is not interested in McDowell exegesis per se. While I will exploit the two different ways McDowell speaks of 'second nature', I am not interested in establishing whether or not McDowell is inconsistent and stands in need of correction. After all, the question whether McDowell's own formulations can be defended is of secondary interest compared with the philosophical interest of opening up the question in which I am interested – a question that remains hidden from view if the two usages are not distinguished. Whatever may be said about where this leaves McDowell, the result will be to get clearly into view the relation between phronēsis and ethical outlooks. Getting this clearly into view, as well as being philosophically significant in its own right, will be salutary for treatments of 'second nature' that take off from McDowell's influential uses of that idea.

McDowell's (1996, 1998a) invocation of the idea of 'second nature' gives rise (both in his own work and in subsequent discussion) to two distinct ideas. The first is that it can become second nature to us to be practically wise (i.e. to possess phronēsis). The second is that there are a range of distinct ethical outlooks that can become second nature to us. Both these ideas are important. I argue in this paper that part of this importance consists in their distinctness from each other. To be practically wise is one thing; to have formed some distinct ethical outlook is another. Another part of their importance lies in the way in which their distinctness allows us to pose the question of their relation to each other.

McDowell does not distinguish between these two ideas, and therefore the question of their interrelation does not explicitly come up in his work. This paper begins from an examination of the absence of the distinction in McDowell's treatment of 'second nature' in order to bring out a philosophical problematic: that of the relation between phronēsis, on the one hand, and ethical outlooks, on the other. It is important to preserve something that McDowell sees, namely that there is a close connection between the two, as manifested in his bringing them together under the heading of 'second nature'. But it is also important to avoid conflating them, so that the question how phronēsis relates to distinct ethical

outlooks can be posed. I will argue that phronēsis remains constant, even as ethical outlooks vary.

This paper proceeds in four sections. In section 1, I introduce two ways of speaking of 'second nature' as they feature in McDowell's writings and whose distinctness I will exploit in order to frame my discussion. In section 2, I specify one way McDowell speaks of 'second nature'. Here phronēsis counts as an instance of 'second nature'. I articulate the Aristotelian account of moral education on which this use of the idea draws. In section 3, I show that Aristotle's account of phronēsis requires that phronēsis be the unity of the ethical virtues. (This is true also of McDowell's reading of Aristotle on phronēsis. While this is not essential to the argument, since McDowell exegesis is not my aim, it is at least useful in that we can continue to move within the orbit of McDowell's texts.) Since, *qua* intellectual virtue that constitutes the unity of the ethical virtues, there is no such thing as a rival candidate to phronēsis for how the practical intellect might be shaped, phronēsis stands on a different logical footing from ethical outlooks (which are multiple and various). In section 4, I seek to understand, in light of the conclusion established in section 3, the relation between phronēsis and 'second natures' conceived as culturally distinct ethical formations. I illustrate the relation between phronēsis and ethical outlooks by means of a particularly dramatic example taken from the work of Jonathan Lear, in which phronēsis can be said to 'survive' an extreme case of ethical upheaval. This example can be described in terms of an ethical outlook being expunged so as to require replacement by another. In this way it can be said to test to the limits the claim endorsed in this paper that phronēsis persists even as ethical outlooks vary.

1. Two Ways of Speaking of 'Second Nature'

I begin from a consideration of the work of McDowell. This is useful in part because he has been responsible for giving wide currency in recent philosophy to the notion of 'second nature'. More importantly, McDowell has tended to speak in two ways of 'second nature' without clearly marking the distinction between these ways of speaking. Marking the distinction, as McDowell does not, opens up the topic of the relation between phronēsis and ethical outlooks. McDowell exegesis is not my aim. Nonetheless we may note here that McDowell's discussion has the merit of showing that both phronēsis and some distinct ethical outlook are the outcome of (successful) moral education, but the defect of conflating these in such a way as to obscure the important question of how phronēsis and ethical outlooks are related.

McDowell made use of the notion of second nature in the service of combatting the impression, which he took to be widespread among philosophers, that the sole claimant to the title 'naturalism' was (in McDowell's terminology) 'bald naturalism'. Such a bald naturalism assumes a conception of nature that identifies nature with the object of the natural sciences. But the identification of nature with the object of the natural sciences is optional, and represents a 'constriction' of the concept of nature that is expressive of a non-compulsory scientism. A way to see this, so McDowell's thought goes, is to be reminded of the notion of 'second nature', a perfectly familiar notion (and one to be found in Aristotle's account of moral education) that allows in more to the domain of the natural than the scientistic, constricted notion of nature permits. Once the reminder has done its work, we should see a space opened up for a 'relaxed naturalism', or 'naturalism of second nature', by contrast with the constricted version presented by bald naturalism.

Michael Thompson, in a critique of McDowell's 'naturalism of second nature', has written that 'McDowell's second natures are basically practices which individuals come to bear or acquire [. . .]; they are cultures, or Bildungen, as he says, or bits and pieces of them' (Thompson 2013, 702– 3). I do not want here to address the substance of Thompson's critique. For our purposes here, what his characterisation of 'McDowell's second natures' helpfully brings out is the following. McDowell sometimes speaks of 'second nature' as the kind of thing that phronēsis is; but he also speaks of a 'second nature' as a 'specific shaping of practical logos' to which there might be rival candidates. They are, as Thompson puts it, 'cultures, or Bildungen'. As I will go on to show, this is confusing. It is difficult to see how there might be *rival candidates* to phronēsis for the title of the second nature someone possesses. By contrast, the very idea of a culturally specific ethical outlook imports the notion of rival candidates. Furthermore, distinguishing the two will bring out the significance of a question that Thompson brings out but which McDowell's treatment does not allow to emerge: how might phronēsis be *mediated* through specific ethical outlooks? (Thompson himself raises this question (Thompson 2004, 73). See further section 4 below.)

I begin, in section 2, with an examination of the first way of speaking – that which allows phronēsis to count as a second nature. I will delay treatment of the second notion – that according to which ethical outlooks are second natures – until section 4.

2. Phronēsis as Second Nature

McDowell has (principally in McDowell 1996, 1998a) invoked the idea of second nature as part of an effort to loosen the hold of 'bald naturalism'. Here McDowell argues that bald naturalism can be seen to be non-compulsory if we are reminded of the notion of 'second nature'. McDowell means 'reminder' here in a specific Wittgensteinian sense: we are to renew our acquaintance with a perfectly ordinary feature of our lives, without the need to engage in philosophical theorising.[1] Namely, it is part and parcel of any ordinary human life that we become morally educated, a process that can be described as acquiring a 'second nature'. Such acquisition of a second nature is 'natural' in the sense that it is part of the ordinary maturation of a natural being, the human being. If that is so, then human beings can come by their spontaneous rational capacities through a natural process – without the need for the kind of reduction to what is contained in nature (conceived as the object of the natural sciences) that bald naturalism insists on.

I am not interested here in entering the well-worn debate over the precise status of the 'naturalism of second nature' that McDowell thinks this move secures. (Among other issues, I will not discuss whether this really amounts to no more than a 'reminder', as opposed to requiring substantive theory; nor will I address whether McDowell's invocation of second nature hinges on an equivocation on the word 'nature'.[2]) My interest, rather, is in taking McDowell's treatment of 'second nature' as he presents it, and exploiting an ambiguity in that treatment in order to show that recognition of this ambiguity opens up a philosophically significant issue that otherwise remains hidden.

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[1] See Wittgenstein 1953, §127. Cf. McDowell 1996, 95, where McDowell tells us that the 'ism' he advocates (at this point in the text given the label 'naturalized platonism', but earlier dubbed 'naturalism of second nature') 'is not a label for a bit of constructive philosophy. The phrase serves only as shorthand for a "reminder", an attempt to recall our thinking from running in grooves that make it look as if we need constructive philosophy.' See also (McDowell 2009c, 186), where he speaks explicitly of '[his] reminder about second nature'. It may be noted that neither in Aristotle nor in McDowell can a substantive philosophical 'theory' of second nature be found or an employment of a technical philosophical notion of 'second nature'.

[2] The latter issue is well explored in Bridges 2007.

The phrase 'second nature' is itself tricky to handle in English, and the ease with which it gets nominalised in philosophical discussion hides that its central usage in ordinary discourse is not as a noun expression. To speak of 'a second nature' involves a shift away from the central use of 'second nature' in English (namely, in expressions of the form, 'ξ is (or has become, etc.) second nature to σ'). In this central way of using the expression, 'second nature' may figure as a noun, adjective, or adverbial expression; but in each case it is linked back to a subject of whom it is said that something is (or is becoming, has become, etc.) second nature. This is by contrast with two further uses of 'second nature' which we may call 'standalone' uses (since such a subject is not involved, at least explicitly): (i) uses of 'second nature' as behaving roughly like a count noun ('the second nature of α', 'the second nature of β', etc.), where an article is admissible and where pluralisation is possible; (ii) uses of 'second nature' as behaving roughly like a mass noun ('second nature'), where an article is inadmissible and where pluralisation is not possible.[3] The observation that McDowell's reminder relies on construing 'second nature' in terms of the central usage is relevant to a correct understanding of how standalone uses of the term 'second nature' function in his writings: such standalone uses are, in his writings, to be understood as derivative from the central usage. This is philosophically salient, since it is important to what McDowell wants to do with talk of 'second nature' that he is relying on the ordinary notion of something's being (or becoming, having become, etc.) second nature to someone. It is on this that his use of the standalone expression 'second nature' rests. To see this, we need to turn to the original Aristotelian context from which McDowell retrieves the notion of second nature.

The place in Aristotle's texts to which McDowell appeals is not, contrary to what one might assume, the passage in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1998; hereafter, *NE*) where Aristotle employs the expression τῇ φύσει ἔοικεν ('like nature', 1152a30–33) and goes on to quote the poet Evenus. This passage has traditionally been specifically tied to the topic of 'second nature' due to a tendency on the part of Latin translators to insert the phrase *altera natura* at this juncture. Sarah Broadie, for one, explicitly makes reference to this passage in her invocation of 'second nature' as an Aristotelian idea.[4] McDowell, instead, has in mind the treatment of moral education in Book 2 of *NE*, explicitly following closely Myles Burnyeat's reading of this passage (Burnyeat 1980).[5] The point of the passage is to outline the kind of shaping of the practical intellect that results in virtue.

When McDowell characterises this process in *Mind and World*, he employs the expression 'second nature' in conformity with its central usage (in which ξ *is second nature to* ψ): 'Since ethical character includes dispositions of the practical intellect, part of what happens when character is formed is that the practical intellect acquires a determinate shape. So practical wisdom *is second nature to* its possessors' (McDowell 1996, 84; emphasis added).[6] Elsewhere, McDowell uses 'second nature' as a standalone expression. This standalone expression is to be understood as derivative from the central usage (which captures the point of invoking second nature at all: that something should be seen to

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[3] I have spelled out the grammatical complexities involved further in Schuringa 2018.

[4] Broadie 1991, 91.

[5] McDowell indicates that it is specifically Burnyeat's treatment of Book 2 of *Nicomachean Ethics* that he is following (McDowell 1996, 84 n). The phrase 'second nature' turns up in the translation Burnyeat provides of a key passage for his argument, *NE* 1147a21–22: 'Those who have learned a subject for the first time connect together the propositions in an orderly way, but do not yet know them; for the propositions need to become second nature to them [δεῖ γὰρ συμφυῆναι], and that takes time.' (Burnyeat 1980, 74).

[6] See also the following similar formulation: 'possession of the *that*, the propensity to admire and delight in actions as noble, is second nature to those who have been properly habituated' (McDowell 2009a, 39).

become second nature to someone). For the standalone use of the expression 'second nature' McDowell provides the following gloss: 'the second nature acquired in moral education is a specific shaping of practical *logos*' (McDowell 1998a, 188).[7] Now the shaping of practical *logos* that has resulted from a subject's moral education *just is* what has become second nature to that subject.[8] And so the nominalised use and the central use are related in this way: the second nature I have is what has *become second nature to* me.

A second nature, then, is the outcome of a process of education (a process through which something has become second nature to someone). It is perfectly fine to call such a process the 'acquisition' of a second nature – so long as acquisition is not thought to involve the idea that something which was previously lacking has been supplied, as in the thought that what was previously a mere animal has been supplied with spontaneous capacities distinctive of human beings.[9] We are in need of such a process of education, because we are not born good, although we are susceptible to becoming good.[10] The account that Aristotle offers of this effectively responds to the three-way choice with which Meno opens proceedings in Plato's eponymous dialogue by denying the exclusivity of the choice and giving a place to all three options that Meno puts on the table: 'Can you tell me, Socrates – can virtue be taught [διδακτὸν], or is it rather to be acquired by practice [ἀσκητόν]? Or is it neither to be practised nor to be learned but something that comes to men by nature [φύσει] or in some other way?' (*Meno*, 70a)[11] The process will not unfold merely naturally, although it is the unlocking of a natural potential. And it will be not merely a kind of training (being made to do the good thing many times), but a practice through which the subject comes gradually to be able to supply the 'why' as well as the 'that', i.e. to be able to give reasons as to why her actions are good as well as to go for actions that are good. Thereby we come to want to do the good.[12]

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[7] Variants on this formulation occur in a number of places in McDowell's texts. Cf. the following two passages in 'Two Sorts of Naturalism'. 'We can let the question arise whether the space of reasons really is laid out as it seems to be from the viewpoint of a particular shaping of practical *logos*' (McDowell 1998a, 189). 'What it is for the practical intellect to be as it ought to be, and so equipped to get things right in its proper sphere, is a matter of its having a certain determinate non-formal shape. The practical intellect's coming to be as it ought to be is the acquisition of a second nature . . . ' (McDowell 1998a, 184–5).

[8] I here avoid the complex question of how to understand the expression 'first nature'. Nothing becomes first nature to me; and it is of doubtful intelligibility to say that something is first nature to me. Perhaps I have a first nature, as well as a second nature. If so, my first nature might be conceived of as just a certain parcel of the realm of nature (perhaps the nature of which bald naturalists speak). A full reckoning of McDowell's engagement with Foot in (McDowell 1998a) (and in particular, getting straight how 'first nature' figures in the parable of the rational wolves in §3 of that paper), and of Thompson's engagement with McDowell in Thompson (2013), would exceed the scope of any single paper.

[9] A formulation of McDowell's in *Mind and World* has tended to encourage this impression. There McDowell wrote that human beings 'are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity' (McDowell 1996, 125). For a repudiation of this formulation see McDowell 2011.

[10] See Burnyeat 1980. For McDowell's endorsement of Burnyeat's reading, see esp. McDowell 1998c; see also McDowell 1996, 84 n; McDowell 2009a, 34.

[11] Burnyeat makes reference to the *Meno* passage, but does not note the way in which Aristotle makes a central feature of his account a fusion of all three of Meno's supposedly mutually exclusive options.

[12] A further feature of Burnyeat's reading with which McDowell's reading of Aristotle on moral education resonates is the emphasis on the integration of the desiderative with the rational. In the properly morally educated subject, the desiderative propensity to do the good and the rational motivation to do so are not only aligned but fused in such a way as to be inseparable.

Now, McDowell on a number of occasions tells us that the specific 'shaping' of practical logos that is to result from a moral education is phronēsis (practical wisdom).[13] This proposal, although it seems satisfactory in that it is easily seen to accord with Aristotle's texts, can start to seem puzzling in the light of other things that McDowell says about the outcome of moral education. One is that McDowell has a tendency to speak of phronēsis as a 'candidate' for being the outcome of a process of moral education.[14] But the notion of something's being a candidate brings with it the notion of alternative candidates. Could there be alternative outcomes to the process that were rivals to phronēsis (that is, not merely fuller or lesser realisations of phronēsis, but shapings of practical logos to be conceived as distinct from it)? Another is that McDowell sometimes says that the outcome of moral education is (in the optimum case) phronēsis, and at other times that it is 'virtue'.[15] This suggests that phronēsis and virtue are the same, and this is indeed an equation that McDowell explicitly states in places. But does not Aristotle explicitly have phronēsis be one of the intellectual virtues – virtues that are distinct from the ethical virtues? Is it then, after all, a confusion to equate phronēsis with virtue?

I will want to suggest that the way to resolve the second perplexity is to bring in an Aristotelian doctrine that McDowell himself prominently defends, that is, Aristotle's version of the doctrine of the 'unity of the virtues'. We will thereby be able to recognise phronēsis as the 'unity' of the ethical virtues (in a sense to be specified in the next section). That will in turn allow us to resolve the first perplexity, since recognising that phronēsis is the unity of the ethical virtues will allow us to see that McDowell's talk of phronēsis as if it could be a *candidate* second nature stands in need of revision.

3. Phronēsis as the Unity of the Virtues

The doctrine of the unity of the virtues can be read in many different ways.[16] I want to focus here on the version espoused by Aristotle at *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13. This version, as I will show, is endorsed by McDowell through a series of papers in which he defends an

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[13] In considering how to construe McDowell's talk of 'shaping', the previous footnote is relevant. It would not make sense for McDowell's motivation in speaking of 'shaping' to be that it is merely the appetitive part of the soul that gets shaped (as might be suggested by his talk of 'a certain determinate non- formal shape' (McDowell 1998a, 185)), given that it is rational and appetitive soul that get shaped *together*. Instead I propose that the way to make sense of the talk of determinate non-formal shaping is that the soul gets to manifest a set of (at once desiderative and rational) propensities that are not imposed by an external rule (and are in that sense non-formal, by contrast with the Kantian 'formal' conception of practical rationality that McDowell combats in 1998a).

[14] McDowell speaks, for example, of something's being 'an intelligible candidate for being the way second nature should be' (McDowell 1998a, 190). (Strictly speaking, McDowell ought to have spoken here of a way *a* second nature should be.) Again, McDowell says that 'any second nature of the relevant kind, not just virtue, will seem to its possessor to open his eyes to reasons for acting. What is distinctive about virtue, in the Aristotelian view, is that the reasons a virtuous person takes himself to discern really are reasons; a virtuous person gets this kind of thing right' (McDowell 1998a, 189). See, again, the propensity to speak of 'a specific second nature', with the implication that there might be others, at McDowell 2009a, 39.

[15] The two are closely connected, in that, as McDowell puts it, '[v]irtue of character embodies the relevant proper state of practical *logos*, what Aristotle calls "*phronēsis*"' (McDowell 1998a, 184). It is part of the remit of this paper to try to clarify the relation of *embodiment* in play here. One thing that is clear is that McDowell is here explicitly resisting the view of 'many modern commentators', as he says, who 'separate *phronēsis* from the formed character – second nature – that is Aristotle's concern in [book 2 of *NE*]: they take his view to be that *phronēsis* [an intellectual virtue] equips one's reason to issue the right orders to one's formed character, the point of character-formation being that it makes one's second nature willing in its obedience to reason's commands'. But McDowell takes it that for Aristotle 'the moulding of character *is* (in part) the shaping of reason' (McDowell 1998a, 184 n 33).

[16] For discussion of the Aristotelian version of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, see especially Irwin 1988; Halper 1999; Gottlieb 2009; Russell 2009, 2014; Bonasio 2020.

Aristotelian account of virtuous activity – in his own voice, and as a reading of Aristotle (in particular in McDowell 1998b). How one thing could be 'the unity of' a set of other things might sound mysterious. But the reading in question makes this a straightforward matter, free of mysteries about how unity might be achieved. On this reading, what it means for phronēsis to be the unity of the virtues is for it to be the case that possession of phronēsis *is* possession of all the 'ethical virtues' (courage, generosity, and so on). This amounts to a dual thesis. Possession of each of the virtues requires possession of phronēsis; and possession of phronēsis entails possession of all the ethical virtues. (This two-directional character of the doctrine is common to standard readings of it.) We will see how this can be once we see (as I will explain) that (firstly) phronēsis is operative in all virtuous action and (secondly) the specification of individual ethical virtues is a matter of the specification of saliences in the ethical agent's environment. This dispenses with seeming difficulties about phronēsis having somehow to 'unify' the virtues.[17]

To get clear on Aristotle's version of the doctrine, we can begin with a passage in which he contrasts his view with that of Socrates:

> This is why some say that all the virtues are forms of practical wisdom [φρονήσεις], and why Socrates in one respect was on the right track while in another he went astray; in thinking that all the virtues were forms of practical wisdom [φρονήσεις] he was wrong, but in saying they implied practical wisdom [οὐκ ἄνευ φρονήσεως] he was right. This is confirmed by the fact that even now all men, when they define virtue, after naming the state of character and its objects add 'that (state) which is in accordance with the right rule' [κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον]; now the right rule is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. All men, then, seem somehow to divine that this kind of state is virtue, viz. that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. But we must go a little further. For it is not merely the state in accordance with the right rule, but the state that implies the *presence* of the right rule [ἡ μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου], that is virtue; and practical wisdom is a right rule about such matters. (*NE* 1144b17–28)

So possession of practical wisdom is necessary for possession of each of the virtues, since practical wisdom provides the right rule (*orthos logos*) that must be present in order to make virtuous activity not merely (to echo Kantian terminology) *in accordance* with the right rule, but *from* the right rule.

And, as Aristotle goes on to say,

> It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, or practically wise without ethical virtue. But in this way we may also refute the dialectical argument whereby it might be contended that the virtues exist in separation from each other; the same man, it might be said, is not best equipped by nature for all the virtues, so that he will have already acquired one when he has not yet acquired another. This is possible in

[17] Giulia Bonasio has recently defended a reading of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues in Aristotle which makes the unity encompass still more than what is considered here (Bonasio 2020). Placing the discussion of the 'common books' of *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* in the context of *EE*, Bonasio argues that according to Aristotle the best agent is the *kalos kagathos*. This agent possesses all the virtues, where this includes sophia (Aristotle's other leading intellectual virtue) as well as phronēsis.

> respect of the natural virtues, but not in respect of those in respect of which a man is called without qualification good; for with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues. (*NE* 1144b30– 1145a2; Ross's translation modified)

So possession of phronēsis entails possession of all of the (ethical) virtues. (This is sometimes called the 'reciprocity thesis'.[18])

The first claim (that possession of each of the virtues requires possession of phronēsis) is relatively straightforward to understand. A virtue is a *hexis* (a settled state or disposition). As Aristotle explains, such a *hexis*, being *meta tou orthou logou* ('from the right rule', with 'from' meaning what it means in Kant's expression 'from duty'), requires an *orthos logos* to be supplied, and phronēsis supplies this. Exercise of the virtues is dependent on the *orthos logos* being supplied, for exercise of the virtues is not merely *in accordance with* the *orthos logos* (as in Kant's 'in accordance with duty'), but *from* the *orthos logos*.[19]

The second claim (that possession of phronēsis brings with it possession of *all* of the virtues) may seem harder to substantiate. There is a helpful way to understand this provided by Susan Wolf (2007, 148–50) that allows us to make it plausible that the ethical virtues go together. Courage and generosity (for example) seem like very different things, and their distinctness is no illusion. But a consideration of what is involved in the exercise of each will help us to see why they go together in the virtuous agent.

Consider courage. Being courageous is being able to judge when a situation demands subjecting oneself to danger, and acting in a self- endangering manner inasmuch as this condition is met: it involves a capacity to 'read' a situation as demanding this. Candidate situations are ones in which there is significant danger to the subject. Launching headlong into danger is not courageous but rash when there is nothing important at stake; failing to do the self-endangering thing is cowardly when there is.

Consider now generosity. Being generous is being able to judge when a situation demands that one give, and giving inasmuch as this condition is met. Giving extravagantly where this is inappropriate is not generosity, but profligacy; failing to give when it is appropriate is stinginess.

Now, courage and generosity concern different domains (knowing when acting dangerously is good; knowing when giving is good). But, as Wolf points out, 'the kind of knowledge that is required for the virtues [. . .] is knowledge of what's important' (150). So the kind of discernment that characterises virtuous activity as such is a discernment that transcends the remit of any particular virtue; it concerns, too, the question of which virtue it is apt to see a situation as calling into action. And this discernment is just what phronēsis is. So we can understand phronēsis as the unity of the virtues in the following way. There is a 'matrix' of virtue, in which different distinct virtues show up as making demands on us depending on the saliences of the situation (courage in dangerous situations, generosity in cases where the question of giving arises, and so on). But what is exercised in all such virtuous action goes under one name: phronēsis, which is the exercise of practical discernment called for in all virtuous action.

[18] See e.g. Irwin 1988; Deslauriers 2002; Russell 2014.
[19] Gottlieb 2009, chapter 5, emphasises the significance of phronēsis being *meta tou orthou logou*.

One place where the sort of picture I have been sketching can be prominently found is in the work of McDowell.[20] McDowell endorses Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues in the following terms:

> No one virtue can be fully possessed except by a possessor of all of them, that is, a possessor of virtue in general. Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity, which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements that situations impose on one's behaviour. (McDowell 1998b, 53)

The crucial phrase here is 'virtue, in general': there is just one 'sensitivity' (in McDowell's terminology) that is exercised in the exercise of any given, specified virtue. In other words, 'virtue, in general' stands in here for what we have been calling phronēsis.

The relation between phronēsis and the individual ethical virtues is, then, this: phronēsis is the unity of the ethical virtues. Wherever virtuous activity takes place, it is phronēsis that is at work. The only sense, then, in which the virtues are individual is that they are responsive to different saliences that bring phronēsis into action. Now we certainly speak of individual virtues such as courage and generosity. The choice to speak of one rather than the other is a matter of what aspects of the environment are most salient to the situation of the agent choosing how to act.

An objection frequently brought against Aristotle's list of the virtues is that it is highly specific and perhaps idiosyncratic. The list looks incomplete, seemingly making it implausible that it could represent the full range of virtues. But if we consider that Aristotle has room also for 'unnamed' virtues, we see that we may well instead argue in the opposite direction. In fact there seems to be a principled reason for Aristotle to name some virtues, and leave others unnamed (whether or not one might quibble with the items included on the list, and items left off). The virtues that he does name can be taken as bringing out those saliences that agents are reasonably likely to encounter. Courage is on the list, for instance, because dangerous situations are common. It is demanding exhaustiveness of a list of ethical virtues, not the failure to provide an exhaustive list, that starts to look problematic once we take into account that there is a potentially indefinite array of saliences that might count for how phronēsis is to be activated. Human life, after all, does not consist of some finite list of situations.

What I want to consider in the next section is how to make sense of McDowell's talk of 'ethical outlooks' in light of his endorsement of Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues. That discussion should throw light on just what McDowell can mean with the sentence that immediately follows the quotation given above: 'It is a single complex sensitivity of this sort that we are aiming to instil when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook' (McDowell 1998b, 53).

4. Ethical Outlooks

The language of 'ethical outlooks' (sometimes 'moral outlooks') is prominent in McDowell's texts (see especially McDowell 1996, 80–81, 1998a, 190, 194; 1998b, 50, 58; 2009a, 30, 37,

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[20] Russell (2014, 214) goes so far as to as to say that McDowell is 'the only modern supporter of the full-blown reciprocity thesis' known to him (and refers to McDowell 1998b). I'm not sure that Russell's supposition is correct, but he is right that McDowell fully endorses Aristotle's doctrine.

39; 2009b, 52–56).[21] Such an outlook, McDowell says, 'will present [a person] with certain apparent reasons for acting' (McDowell 1996, 80). McDowell does not make clear what the relation is between such an ethical outlook and the sort of thing phronēsis is. I will again be exploiting a feature of McDowell's texts in order to pursue a philosophical discussion that takes us beyond, and is not tethered to, McDowell exegesis.

McDowell's texts can leave us with the impression that phronēsis is to be considered one ethical outlook among others. Whatever we think about how to square McDowell's own views, this is instructive for us if we consider the contrast between this conception and the conception according to which our second nature is phronēsis. Consider, for instance, McDowell's way of responding to his own question as to how an ethical outlook can be criticised. In response he points out that the 'standing obligation to reflect about and criticise the standards by which, at any time, [ethical thinking] takes itself to be governed' is 'implicit in the very idea of a shaping of the intellect, and that is what "practical wisdom" is' (McDowell 1996, 81). The talk of a shaping suggests the idea of alternative shapings. Consequently, when McDowell tells us that 'a moral outlook is a specific determination of one's practical rationality' (McDowell 1998b, 58), this sounds equivalent to the kind of thing he characterises phronēsis as being. Again, the connection between the sort of thing phronēsis is and an ethical outlook is seems here to be taken to be at least intimate. McDowell writes: 'if something is to be an intelligible candidate for being the way second nature should be, it must at least be intelligible that the associated outlook could seem to survive this reflective scrutiny' (McDowell 1998a, 190). But we will find this puzzling if phronēsis is indeed the unity of the ethical virtues, as Aristotle maintains (a view in which McDowell ought to follow him insofar as he endorses the doctrine of the unity of the virtues). For then the question of whether phronēsis itself might survive such scrutiny would surely not so much as come up.

There is significant philosophical benefit to be derived from straightening out the relation between phronēsis and ethical outlooks, a relation we have found McDowell's way of speaking of 'second nature' leaves obscure. We will thereby be able to recognise this relation as figuring in what Thompson calls 'the very difficult problem of the mediation of a human's apprehension of fundamental practical truth by his induction into more local, specific, determinate so-called social practices, or shapes of *Bildung* or "second nature"' (Thompson 2004, 73). Our reading in this paper of phronēsis as the unity of the virtues allows us to see how unpacking the ambiguity in McDowell offers us a prospect for tackling Thompson's problem. If we read phronēsis as the unity of the virtues – and we have seen that McDowell, too, is committed to this – then we see also that there is no list of discrete ethical virtues, specifiable independently of each other. We can enumerate distinct virtues as and when appropriate, but this is a function of specifying saliences. That is, what gets to be on the list of distinct virtues is a matter of recognising prominent features of the environment. So, for example, we will speak of courage in environments where individuals may readily put themselves in danger. As I illustrated by means of Wolf's treatment, there is just one matrix of virtue. In this matrix courage and (say) generosity are not discrete and specifiable independently of each other. But not only are they interdependent and

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[21] A topic I will not broach here is the question whether McDowell's conception of ethical outlooks itself involves him in a kind of ethical relativism, although this is a question that is bound to come up given McDowell's insistence that ethical outlooks can only be scrutinised from within. An answer to this question will have a bearing on the issue under consideration here, of the relation between phronēsis and ethical outlooks; but I focus here only on the feature of ethical outlooks that they are *local*, leaving the question of relativity aside.

overlapping. There is nothing that can do the work of distinguishing virtues – the work of enumerating them in a list – other than saliences in the environment (in the broad sense of the situation in which the agent finds herself, which will include other agents and their past and projected actions, the agent's own past and projected actions, and so on). For there is nothing other than the situation in which the agent acts that can bring out what now counts as, e.g. generosity. And it is phronēsis that does the work of discernment here. All virtuous action is a matter of the exercise of phronēsis, and it is the discernment that phronēsis brings with it that determines whether it is courageously or generously that I am to act here and now.

What I will now propose is that shifts from ethical outlook to ethical outlook are shifts in terms of the saliences calling agents into virtuous action.

The notion of an 'ethical outlook' is one that is evidently difficult to pin down. First of all, ethical outlooks, while presumably culturally and historically local, do not seem easy to delineate. Which culturally specific outlook does my ethical deliberation manifest? It seems plausible that, for any agent, a multiplicity of overlapping 'outlooks' may be in play. It seems reasonable to speak of my sharing in some 'outlook' in some domain of my life that I do not participate in (or not as fully) in some other domain of my life. Furthermore, an 'ethical outlook' would seem to be subject to revision, and such revision may be very gradual. When can we say that one ethical outlook has given way, in history, to another? We tend to find such questions difficult to answer decisively. This is reflected, in McDowell's work, in his appeal to 'Neurathian reflection' (e.g. McDowell 2009a, 37). This picture constitutes a modification of Aristotle's view (since Aristotle is not bothered by the question whether there might be challenges to his ethical outlook), but without 'disrupt[ing] Aristotle's realism' (McDowell 2009a, 23), that is, his view that there are correct and incorrect answers to the question whether an action is worthwhile. I want now to try to clarify a way of thinking of what McDowell is after here: the idea that the revisability of ethical outlooks does not bring with it an ethical free for all. We can, I propose, attain clarity on this if we frame the issue in terms of the question how ethical outlooks relate to phronēsis as the unity of the virtues (as conceived in section 3).

To do so requires us to try to pin down what an 'ethical outlook' might be, which will seem difficult in light of what I have said about the difficulties of delineating one ethical outlook from another. I propose that the requisite focus can be attained by taking a concrete example of radical ethical upheaval, one that is so extreme that it is appropriate to say that an ethical outlook has been completely overturned. Such an example is provided by Jonathan Lear's philosophical reconstruction of what it might have been like for the Crow people to suffer the cultural devastation that came with their way of life having literally stopped making sense, in light of the encroachment of white people that deprived this way of life of the context in which it was previously meaningful (Lear 2006). Here, the ethical outlook of the Crow has been challenged to the point that it no longer makes sense, and must be supplanted by a new outlook in order for the life of the Crow to continue in any meaningful way.

Traditional Crow life was largely concerned with success in warfare against rival nations. An important part of what counted as courage in such warfare was constituted by the practice of 'counting coups'. A central practice of counting coups involved signalling courage, in the action of laying claim to enemy territory, having shown a readiness to die rather than cede that territory. As white people encroached on the Crow, traditional warfare no longer had the place it did. As a result the practice of counting coups ceased:

there was no longer anything that could answer to the description of counting coups, and so it no longer made any sense to think of counting coups as courageous.

Lear provides us with an account of what the chief of the Crow people, Plenty Coups, *may have* thought, in grappling with the breakdown of their way of life and its associated ethical outlook.[22] On Lear's account, Plenty Coups does not just recognise that Crow life has, fundamentally, broken down; he also has a vision of the future. That is, not only does he see that a way of life has ceased to make sense, and that thereby its way of realising the good no longer makes sense (the virtue of courage can no longer be exhibited through the practices of counting coups). Plenty Coups, as Lear envisages him, also sees a way out of this predicament. He sees that, despite the breakdown of traditional Crow life, there is a way forward that involves not mere survival but a way of living well again. He learns in a dream-vision that the way through to this – as yet, to him, unconceptualisable – future will involve becoming a chickadee, i.e. a listener of a special kind. A chickadee is someone whose courage takes the form of daring to listen to difficult messages. It is as a chickadee that Plenty Coups will be able to show his people a way out of their predicament. As Plenty Coups emerges from this transitional experience as a chickadee, he comes to recommend for the Crow people a way of life centred around education: an utterly different kind of life from traditional Crow life.[23]

While we may quibble over how precisely to delineate ethical outlooks, there is plausibility in saying that Plenty Coups has made a transition from one ethical outlook (the traditional Crow outlook), through a transitional phase (in which he acts as a chickadee), to a new ethical outlook (one which involves an accommodation to the white people's way of life). Plenty Coups, in Lear's account, has come just about as close as it is possible to get to losing his grip on an ethical outlook altogether. But what has not varied, throughout, is his phronēsis. Indeed, it is only in light of his phronēsis that his ability to make the transitions that he does can be understood. It is because of his grip on what it is to discern what is salient that he is able to effect the transition to being a chickadee, and likewise to emerge from his experience as a chickadee to lead his people into a new way of life in which education is central. And if it is right that phronēsis is the unity of the virtues, then the transition in ethical outlooks described here does not involve a change in the list of virtues. The ethical virtues were always, in any case, a matrix: how to rank or list them was a matter of what is salient. And that continues to be the case as the Crow people face cultural devastation and reinvent themselves. Their ethical life changes drastically, and that is because what is ethically salient has changed drastically. This is illustrated, for instance, by the transformation of what courage is for Plenty Coups (from something manifested in dangerous warfare to something manifested in dangerous listening), as one dimension of ethical virtue. The virtuous activity that Plenty Coups is called on to engage in has shifted, in line with a shift in saliences; but it is the same phronēsis that is called into action even as the field of virtue changes.

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[22] Lear emphasises that he is offering a *philosophical reconstruction* of what Plenty Coups *may* have thought. That Lear sensibly eschews historical claims about what Plenty Coups really did think reflects the complexity of discussion of thick ethical concepts and the cultural context that gives them meaning. This is relevant to the present discussion, by bringing out that determining the content and contour of an ethical outlook is never, and cannot be, a simple matter.

[23] I here consider only Lear's reconstruction of what Plenty Coups may have thought. I leave aside all consideration of the historical question whether Plenty Coups did in fact bring his people into a viable new ethical outlook (one which involved massive adjustment to the demands of white people), or whether the raging defiance of Sitting Bull, the Sioux chief, was not a superior manifestation of courage in the analogous predicament faced by the Sioux people.

The phronēsis on which Plenty Coups relies and which sees him through this ethical upheaval is not and cannot be, then, a candidate ethical outlook among others. Phronēsis stands on a different logical footing from ethical outlooks, in this way: phronēsis is one and invariant, while ethical outlooks are multiple and variant, and are to be understood as mediating phronēsis in light of the oneness of the phronēsis that they thus mediate. That we can have varying ethical outlooks presupposes phronēsis as underlying the variation. We can now, returning to the considerations about ways of speaking of 'second nature' from which we started, speak of 'second nature' in two senses. It is our second nature to become practically wise. And there are different second natures in which this practical wisdom is manifest. (Different ethical outlooks have it as their remit to respond to different sets of saliences.) This fits McDowell's interest in emphasising, on the one hand, a 'realism' about ethical truth and a sensitivity to the historical and cultural contexts in which we moral agents must act. Again, the question of how McDowell is best to be read has been left open. But we have found a way of making clear (largely using McDowellian materials, including his reading of Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues) a distinction that is indistinct in his texts: the difference between second nature as phronēsis and second nature as ethical outlook. Having done so, we have been enabled to illuminate the relation between the two, with an important philosophical upshot. Phronēsis does not vary, even as ethical outlooks do. To think otherwise is to commit oneself to a reading of McDowell's invocation of second nature that breeds confusion – one that has phronēsis figure as a candidate among rival ethical outlooks.

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