What is the Human Being?  
Examining the Animal, Social, and Rational  

By J. I. Ziff  

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Danielle Macbeth, first reader  
Jerry Miller, second reader  

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Abstract

This essay seeks to explain the metaphysical nature of the human being. It does so on three levels: the animal, the social and the rational. To explain the animal nature of a human being I take from Michael Thompon's book Life and Action. Using his theory I motivate the existence of a category of life separate from mere matter. To explain the social nature I adapt Grice's theory of non-natural meaning. Using this I separate out actions that animals take whose meanings are not fixed by their animal nature. This together with an adaptation of Foucault's notion of the power-structure I hypothesize that between a mere animal and our rational selves there could exist a social animal that has not rational powers. Finally using John McDowell's understanding of the Sellersian space of reasons I motivate the nature of rationality as centered around self-consciousness. Self-consciousness I understand as being able to perceive the signs that one performs as objects in of themselves thereby placing them in the space of reasons. This together with theory from Danielle Macbeth will allow me to show how the space of reasons relies on having well-developed social practices. The world that one gets via John McDowell's notion of Bildung will be re-conceptualized as the world that is encompassed by our social practices.
1. Introduction

The goal of this essay will be to answer the question: What kinds of things are we, metaphysically speaking? Let me unpack this seemingly simple question:

What I mean when I refer to a 'thing' is something that can be denoted as a subject or object in a sentence, or to put another way, something I can ascribe a property to. For instance, since I can say 'Dave is a mammal' then 'Dave' is a thing. Not all things are the same, however; Certain things, for instance, I can denote are fictional, like a unicorn, and some things are not, like the cappuccino I had when I last visited Starbucks. As such we can separate things into different 'kinds' or 'orders' of things. The kind of a thing something is also determines what property it can take, or to put it another way which properties when applied to a thing result in a category error. The predicate 'happy' for instance cannot be applied to mauve, and if someone asks you why that is not the case then answer them by referencing their kind ("mauve cannot be happy since mauve is a color, and colors cannot have emotions, or to put it more precisely, mauve is the wrong kind of thing to even potentially have a color). This move of separate the things into separate kinds is to take all the things and sort them into separate boxes, as it were. Now, let us call that thing that makes it a separate kind and what determines what properties will result in a category error a 'nature'. We could imagine the nature as the underlying the principle that explains why certain properties can be applied. So the question I posed now roughly translates into 'what is the nature of a human being?'

Now a human being is clearly a physical thing, that is to say an extended body in the traditional sense, but this is not due to some nature a human being has in of itself. Instead, a human being owes its physical nature to the matter it is composed of, the various atomic particles
that together form a human being. In that sense a human is physical only in virtue of being composed of physical things. Whatever it is that makes a human being a thing, in and of itself—and not just a random collection of things—does not do so in virtue of prescribing a human being as physical. If we therefore accept that a human being has a unity that is not determined by its matter—that a human being is more than the sum of its parts—then human beings must have a corresponding nature that licenses it be a legitimate kind in and of itself. What this nature precisely is will be the focus of the essay.

The general strategy I will be using to approach this problem is derivative of my belief of natures' licensing properties. Given that a human being is made of physical matter and therefore can have properties such as mass, shape, velocity, etc; those predicates are explainable in reference to the nature of a human's composite particles. But I think there is good reason to believe there are predicates that human beings have which are not encompassed by the physical nature of its parts. Since these predicates do require explanation but are not explainable by its matter, then perhaps the nature of the human being itself must then serve as explanation.

Furthermore I see the nature of the human being as licensing powers. This falls within the scope of our project since the power to do \( x \) is a property in of itself, albeit a very special kind of property. As such any power that human being has must also be explainable in reference to its nature.

As I see it human nature is threefold: Firstly it is on the ground level an organic nature. To argue this point I will take the properties of being able to exhibit animal behaviors such as eating, sleeping, procreating, etc, and show that given a physical nature they cannot be explained. Instead I will, with the help of Michael Thompson, show how an animal nature—
which structures these actions as leading towards biological imperatives — allows us to explain them. What we then get through understanding the animal nature of a human being is a frame of reference from which the animal properties (and actions) we ascribe make sense. An animals' behavior will thus be understood from the locus of 'vital activity'. Secondly, on top of the animal nature a human being has an acquired social nature that further alters existing animal nature. Through this social nature, the biological actions that a human being have social significance, or as I refer to it as biological actions becoming 'signs'. An action has meaning of a sign because of a community that impresses said meaning onto it. This communal meaning then in turn cannot be understood by appeal to some physical nature or some animal nature, and instead has a meaning founded in the new social nature. Thirdly, a human being has rational powers that cannot be encompassed by the aforementioned other natures. A human being is able to hold beliefs and critique them. Using theory by Danielle Macbeth I will argue that a rational nature as I see it will be the ability to perceive the perceiving of signs. While a hypothetical non-rational social animal will be able to perceive signs (to respond to a communal sign you have to see it after all) it is not aware of it doing so. Given a significantly complex system of signs it will have practices for communicating all kinds of matters of fact of the physical world. Such a system is not perfectly created though and will have some flaws and as such it will inevitably misrepresent a matter of fact. I will theorize that there might have been a moment in time wherein a human being becomes aware of a systematic failure in its sign system which propels that person into rationality. This moment of critical reflectiveness I will understand as becoming aware of the signs themselves. From this theoretically simple ability I will infer how it enables various other properties to apply to the human being such as intentionality and the ability to make statements
with signs.

There is admittedly some difficulty in talking about the different natures a human has because the way they are stacked, as it were. While our ancestors were certainly at some point 'merely' animals we right now are not; we have acquired these new natures and while they have not completely supplanted our original ones they still have changed things quite significantly. Unfortunately page constraints will not allow me to deal with these problems properly but I will briefly comment about them in the last section of my essay.

2. The Animal

As I said in the introduction, I think it is a fair thing to say that we as humans are made of physical stuff. However, this is not all we are. Maybe back in the past whatever ancestral goop we sprang from was also just merely matter, but to make things less confusing though I will confine myself to merely explaining an organic nature of less borderline cases:

First, let us start actually motivating the idea of an animal requiring a nature to explain its properties. To start, let us examine the opposite, that is to say the idea that there could be a physical definition of an organic being that does not require a new over-arching nature. This has been tried out before, in fact, Michael Thompson directly deals with an example of this strategy in his book *Life and Action*:

A Professor Helena Curtis presents in a textbook the following definition (Thompson 2008, 34).

There turn out be seven [signs of life, according to Prof. Curtis]. “Living things,” she tells us, “are highly organized.” They are “homeostatic, which means simply ‘staying the same.’ They “grow and develop” and are “adapted.” They “take energy from the environment and change it from one form to another,” and they “respond to stimuli.” Finally, of course, “[l]iving things reproduce themselves.

The way Helena Curtis seems to think about life is in a mechanistic fashion. All the properties
she ascribes to life are properties that could be ascribed to any non-living thing in isolation; computers, for instance, in some sense respond to stimuli: you click the mouse button and in response it shows a certain behavior, or we could look at a nuclear reactor which takes energy from matter into electricity. Helena Curtis readily admits that these properties are not unique to human beings, in fact that is precisely her claim: “we recognize a system as being alive when it has certain properties that are more common among animate objects than inanimate ones”.

Helena Curtis' definition explicitly makes humans only special in being really special systems, but systems nonetheless. What we then really are is just a very complex chemical process and it is this which then produces actions, which are simply very complicated stimulus-response sub-routines as it were. As such living things are just simply physical things; nothing more, nothing less.

Now Thompson thinks that definitions like Curtis' are wrong since they do a bad job at capturing the behavior and properties that we actually prescribe to living things. Importantly for Thompson there is for organic behavior the question of “what happens next” (41) question that you cannot ask for mere chemical processes. If, in fact, you do not ask that question then it seems unclear how you could see the behaviors and properties in the way we actually do have. What we have to do is shift our perspective from one with physical explanations to one with life explanations, that is to say an explanation in reference to the form of life of an organic being, or to put it in Thompson's manner in reference to the “vital operation” (43) of living things.

Let me explain this further: take the process of photo-synthesis: If you do not understand photo-synthesis in reference to vital activity then it simply is a series of following chemical processes. This however does disservice to what the process of photo-synthesis actually is,
namely something that happens as part of the life-cycle of a living thing, that is to say in
reference to its form. A plant gets energy from the sun via the process of photo-synthesis and this
what enables it to grow. In fact, if you do not have an understanding of the form of life then all
you see is just the chemical processes; they will never add up to the life-process 'photo-synthesis'
at all. It makes photo-synthesis as a process in of itself incoherent per se; how do you can you
distinguish the process 'photo-synthesis' from the various other system responses if you do not
know what the function is of photo-synthesis in relation to the organism? It just reduces photo-
synthesis to just some train of chemical processes, but “no such succession of goings-on will add
up to a single process”, As Thompson says: if you have to limit your scope to just the chemical
process then your view is so narrow that you cannot even tell whether the process only just
begun or is finishing. You need something from the outside to allow you to see that—some larger
context—and that thing is the “what happens next” question. We can distinguish the life-process
from the various chemical goings-on precisies because of the way it is directed at biological
imperatives.

But what then is it to understand a form of life in a way that can be considered a genuine
shift of frame of reference? To understand this let us take a certain type of judgment that we
make a lot and that (I would hope) most of us consider valid: the“natural-historical judgments”
(64). Natural-historical judgments are judgments like “mayflies breed before shortly before
dying”, “cats are carnivorous animals”, “birch trees have leaves during the summer”, e.t.c. These
judgments are relevant to our project because they precisely make claims about something that is
not physical at all, namely the form of lifes of organisms. To say that 'cats are carnivorous
animals' is not to make a judgment about any specific thing in the world but more to ascribe a
property (of eating meat) to a certain kind of thing (cat). One could imagine oneself engaged in
the project of trying to figure out which properties should go with which living kind of thing, or
as we normally call it the project of biology. Those that approach livings things like Helena
Curtis throw that project out of the window when they misconstrue chemical processes; it pretty
much eliminate from us the ability to make natural-historical judgments and therefore ascribe or
understand properties that living things can have. They think that they can get out of using
natural-historical judgments by using some kind of statistical chemical process to define organic
beings and their natural functions but this is not the case. Chemical processes can at most express
generality in terms of 'x usually happens', but natural-historical judgments work differently, as
Thompson says:

If someone then asks, “But what does 'what most of them do' have to do with what it
does?” the answer will have to be “not much, really.” But if, in the other case, someone
asks, “what bearing does 'what they do' have on what it does or is doing?” The answer
will have to be “Everything.” For again, every thought of an individual organism as alive
is mediated by thought of the life-form it bears. A true judgment of natural defect thus
supplies an 'immanent critique' of its subject. (81).

To explain this let me use an example from Thompson: the natural-historical judgment that “the
mayfly breeds shortly before dying” (68). Now if narrowed our scope, and looked at all the
individual processes of mayflies living we would come to to a different conclusion: it turns out
that actually most mayflies do not breed before dying and therefore we would never be able to
derive the natural-historical judgment we wanted. As such understanding the action of a mayfly
as 'succeeding' or 'failing' very much to do with the natural-historical fact of what the mayfly qua
the life-form of its species does. Figuring out the form of a certain kind involves not solely
involve some kind of statistical observation. Instead it involves getting a feel for the life story of
that living thing. In fact, to understand a specific organism as doing something, like 'growing' or
'pouncing' or what have you will require having an understanding of the form of life of that organic being. Similar to the photo-synthesis argument above we cannot understand a lion as 'pouncing' on a gazelle without understanding what successfully pouncing looks like. If all you have seen when it comes to lions is pouncing gazelles is them missing them then you might conclude that lions just 'play' with gazelle and that what you saw was not pouncing at all, but that would however be incorrect. We can recognize pouncing is pouncing because we know what the successful case is supposed to look like.

Once we have the 'what happens next' framework (our organic nature) for an object we can give it all kinds of properties, such as having legs, reproductive organs, etc, since all of these are only understood in relation to their function of the organism. In addition to that the framework enables various physical changes to become actions and to give organism the property of having the power to perform certain actions. As such a whole bunch of properties of humans can be explained in relation to an organic nature: human beings are are able to have parts, like legs, arms etc; they can be in various modes in relation to their animal goals, such as being alive, sick, bleeding out, etc; and they have the power to change the environment in accordance with their organic goals, such as eating food to gain sustenance, digesting food, etc. As such our organic nature can be seen as the first organizing principle of ourselves; It is what makes us a thing in of ourselves to begin with, and not just some composite of other things.

These properties however while interesting and important do not fully capture all that the properties that human has or can have. An organic nature does a lot of explanatory work but all it

1. There is a small distinction to be made between animals and organic beings but it is not one that, I think, really requires a fundamentally new nature. Plants 'photo-synthesize' just like a tiger pounces at a gazelle; it is just that plants do things so slowly and imperceptibly that we think of them as inert.
can explain is the end is things that are in direct reference to the harm or hurt of the organisms' biological directives. Clearly a human being has an organic nature to a certain degree in that most of us do consider starving to death not optimal at all, but unlike with other living things we seem to get a choice in how we view the matter. A mere animal cannot really answer no to the question of 'whether I should starve to death', in fact the whole issue does not even show up as a question to begin with. In addition, while mere animals do things in reference to biological imperatives we human beings seem to be able to do things for reasons wholly our own; a the chimpanzee will eat the banana because it needs the food to fulfill its form of life but the monk might decide that it will not eat the banana because he has sworn a vow to not eat food for a month. To frame it another way, we human beings have the kind of nature to 1. to be able to have beliefs and 2. be able do decide to do things, that is to say to have intentions. Right now in the argument we do not quite have the philosophical materials to explain these properties for human beings so I will move to a different nature with respective properties that still needs to be explained, namely a social nature:

3. The Social

Besides the aforementioned properties there are still some social properties which need to be accounted for. Human beings live in a social structure and part of that means that we can have social properties apply to us. These are properties like owning property, being a parental guardian, owing someone a favor, being a monk, e.t.c. What we need to explain is how a human being comes to have properties like these. I will do this by making distinctions between three different terms: simple organic behavior, signs and statements. As I see it any behavior we exhibit can function as a sign, and that signs can be appropriated by individuals to make
statements. After that I will cash out the notion of a social structure to help us become aware of a social nature.

Now we already have the notion of organic behavior available to us: it is something that an organic being does based on biological pregroratives that drive it. For instance, if a dog eats meat off of a bone it does because of the form of it life it has prescribes it to do so. Essentially a life-form then is limited in the actions it can take by the ways it can further its biological pregroratives. Suppose now however that an animal somehow were to get the power to do an action that does not rely on an organic nature. It would have to be in reference to something to figure out if it is accidental or not, and, if we cannot figure out what the conditions are for an action to be accidental then it would seem hard to figure out whether action had taken place to begin with. To make a distinction, while plants have the power of photo-synthesis and thus 'photo-synthesize', so to speak, they do not have the power to 'have their leaves turn yellow' when fall arrives, or the power to catch a certain disease. The leaves of plants do turn yellow, but that they turn yellow, purple or pink matters little to the form of life of a plant. As long as they fall off in the winter so that it can hibernate. Similarly while a plant can catch a disease this is not something that is part of its normal life story; it is an abberation of the norm. The above mentioned behaviors are therefore 'accidental' in the purest sense and therefore are not powers. To put it another way, when we ask 'why did the plant's leaves turn yellow (and not some other color) in the fall?' we will have to give an answer in reference to what molecules compose the plant, not an answer in reference to the form of the plant itself.

So we have the above kinds of things that happen to organisms that are not in reference to a form of life, but this is not to say that there could not be things which are in reference to
something else. This could be the case if an organism had another nature besides its organic one. Let me therefore hypothesize a social nature which is able to endow our biological actions with new meanings that it previously did not have. These will be meanings which will be derivable from the communal agreement among a group of organisms. Before I explain this nature more thoroughly let me argue for why it is necessary to do some explanatory work to begin with. Let me do this by using Grice's paper *Meaning* wherein he diagnoses similar phenomenon to the one I am talking about:

As I see it social meaning is the sub-set of the broader umbrella term of what I call 'non-natural meaning'. Grice talks about a very similar notion:

Grice makes a distinction between natural meaning and non-natural meaning based on how we parse the verb 'mean' in two different kinds of sentences: "Those spots mean (meant) measles." (Grice 1957, 377) and "Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full." Though these sentences are grammatically similar they function quite differently, according to Grice. Grice delineates various ways they function differently: 1. With the first case if someone has 'those spots' on their face then inevitably they have measles. There is no way around it. 'mean' is something more akin to 'indicate' or 'predict' in that sentence. However, with the second case 'Those three rings' do not necessarily indicate or predict without a flaw that the bus is full. The meaning of those three bells is not as strongly tied to the consequences. 2. the second sentence can be rephrased (depending on circumstance) as "what was meant by the three rings was that the bus was full". Importantly we cannot do that with the first sentence. Spots are just a predictive factor for measles and as such only have meaning in relation to that fact. With the three rings it seems that this 'meaning' is something a-temporal, that is to say that at time $t$ and
place x the three rings 'meant' that the bus was full, and this fact is separate from any context we might be viewing it from. 3. Whereas spots are simply spots and were not meant by some actor to be measles this is not the case for the three rings of the bell, at least according to Grice. As he sees it one “can argue from [the second sentence] to the conclusion that somebody (viz. The conductor) meant, or at any rate should have meant, by the rings that the bus is full”. 4. We can restate the second sentence like this “Those three rings on the bell mean 'the bus is full'.”, that is to that the meaning of the three rings on the bell can be replaced with another un-interpreted phrase. This is not possible with the first sentence since to restate it as above “those spots mean 'measles'” would only raise the question as to what 'measles' are as opposed to simply measles, the disease. Measles are a physical fact and cannot be replaced with a phrase without ruining the meaning in some way. 5. We cannot rephrase the second sentence like follows: “the fact that the bell has been rung three times means that the bus is full”. This, just like the first point, makes the causal connection between the two phenomenon too strong. It is of course very possible for the first sentence.

Considering these 5 differences Grice concludes that we are speaking of two different kinds of use of the word meaning. He distinguishes it then used in two different senses, a "natural sense" (378) and a "nonnatural sense". Though the analysis for sentential meaning might be correct I would like to loosely correspond it to a difference in meaning namely that in things of the world. What Grice calls the natural sense of meaning is very much akin to a combination of physical and natural natures that we have already explained. “Those clouds mean rain” can also be seen as declaring that clouds have the property of resulting in rain. This property however is appealed to via a natural sense, more precisely the physicalist natural sense:
we know clouds mean rain because of scientific laws. Similarly “those spots mean measles” can
be seen as a fact about disease, something that only makes sense in reference to the violation of
the proper biological function of an organic being. On the other hand all kinds of things in our
world seem to have non-natural meaning, including but not limited to traffic lights, stop signs,
books, e.t.c., that is to say meaning which in a very literal sense that is not natural. If therefore
think that these sentences that Grice analyzes correctly diagnose a phenomenon then it seems
only reasonable I think that the corresponding analysis about the things these sentences represent
do something similar.

In any case given that we have the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning,
what exactly is non-natural meaning and why is it relevant to our discussion? What I propose is
that the term itself, non-natural meaning, also conflates two different kinds of meanings, just like
natural meaning did. There is communal meaning and intentional meaning, both which are
intimately related. To explain the difference let me take the example of body language:

Now body language is composed out a distinct number of hand/body motions, call these
motions signs. The meaning of the motions is not simply 'some random biological spasm of the
hands' or some such, as would be the case if we only could apply an organic nature. An organic
nature after all not only enables us to distinguish certain new physical objects as 'life-processes'
by understanding how they fit in the form of life of the animal but also excludes actions as
meaningless or accidental precisely by how they do not flow from the organisms nature. Body
language, however, is not random at all and though maybe accidental to a certain organism's
nature is certainly not accidental to the thing the organism is itself. We certainly think that
something is wrong if a human being does not have any body language at all, but we are not born
with body language (or most of it), nor do we acquire it through growing up in ourselves. In that sense body language qua our organic nature is meaningless.

But what makes a particular body language sign have a meaning? My answer is that the 'community' makes the sign have meaning. If you employ a body movement that no one can recognize, be it sub-consciously or self-consciously, then what you have not deployed a sign at all since you have not done anything meaningful. In its turn, what gives the sign its meaning is the communal recognition of its meaning. Note that this recognition again does not need to be a fully self-conscious agreement; we do a lot of body language completely un-consciously and presumably we have been using body language long before we discovered this fact of ourselves. However, this is not to say that such body language does not have any meaning and that we as organisms do not behave in a certain way around unconscious bodily language that is not evidence of some kind of recognition in a very real sense. The important part is not whether is not what level of awareness we have in our recognition. Instead, what is important is that we form a community in the way we recognize and deploy our body language signs because it is this communal recognition that precisely gives them their meaning; a body language sign is still a sign no matter what level of awareness we might have.

There are two things about this understanding of communal meaning that I will mention but that will not be used or fully explained immediately. They will come into play later however: Firstly, I would like to bring back the fact that not only bodily movements and sounds of ours that can hold movement but even features of the environment outside ourselves; We have red lights, letters on paper, etc. These can present themselves independently thereby having communal meaning and, given your ability to physically utilize the environment, can also have
intentional meaning too. All we have to do after all is communally recognize as such that they have meaning. The full implication of this statement and what it means for how a social animal understands the environment are at this moment with our conceptual resources unclear but will become less so as the argument develops. Secondly, what exactly makes a sign 'communal' as opposed to 'just a bunch of people knowing it' is also not precisely clear right now. The explanation will have to do with the social nature I want to prescribe to us, but at this stage I do not have the conceptual resources to exactly section what this social nature would be. For now I will therefore leave 'communal' undefined. I will say though that certainly it is not the case that 'My friend Bob and I' constitute a community. As the saying goes, "two is company, three's a crowd".

Let us return to the matter of communal meaning: I will define any particular feature of the environment \( x \) to have the communal meaning \( y \) if \( x \)'s meaning \( y \) is fixed by a community within a species of organism that is able to recognize \( x \) meaning \( y \), be it implicitly, explicitly or anything in between. This is what I understand as communal meaning, a meaning separate from any intentional meaning any particular thing in the environment might have. To compare, Grice himself gives an account for non-natural meaning that is more in line with this intentional kind of meaning:

A meant [non-naturally] something by \( x \)" is (roughly) equivalent to "A intended the utterance of \( x \) to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention"; \(<.>\) "\( x \) meant something" is (roughly) equivalent to "Some-body meant [non-naturally] something by \( x \)." \(<.>\) "\( x \) means [non-naturally] (timeless) that so-and-so" might as a first shot be equated with some statement or disjunction of statements about what "people" (vague) intend (with qualifications about "recognition") to effect by \( x \). (386).

Grice's account of non-natural meaning takes 'A meaning \( y \) by \( x \)' as the base case and from that
develops 'x means y'. My method, however, is the other way around: I say that x means y is the base case and will in the next section develop 'A means y by x'. First however though I will try to show that intention can in fact be separate from the communal meaning of a feature of the environment: Take the example of a human being putting on a tailcoat. Now the meaning of this action, just like body language, is not exactly in reference to any kind of organic nature a human being might have; one might argue that human beings potentially have the kind of form of life by which they make clothing to maintain their body temperature but that does not fully capture the richness of social context that tailcoats carry with them; we human beings seem to distinguish between wearing a tailcoat and, say, wearing a t-shirt even though qua our organic form of life they function about the same way. Instead, putting on a tailcoat has a certain meaning because it makes people respond to you in certain ways depending on certain contexts. If at a dinner party it will make people see you as more respected, if at a rock concert make you seem more stiff and strange, e.t.c. More to the point however, while I certainly do agree that human beings tend to wear tailcoats intentionally, be it to produce a certain social effect or in the Gricean sense to communicate something, this is not to say that the tailcoat qua being a sign in the social sphere has no meaning without intention. You can wear a tailcoat without any intent to communicate some belief: the sentence “If someone (A) wears it tailcoat at a rock concert it means that he is a snob” still functions even if A did not intend to communicate that. Moreover, even if both A, the person wielding the sign of wearing a tailcoat and B, the person who sees the person wearing the tailcoat, are both completely unaware of the sign itself it does not automatically entail that the sign will have no meaning. B could be sub-consciously influenced by the tailcoat, in that they might, for example, through their unconscious dismissive behavior act rude to person A. As such
the meaning of the signifier of putting on a tailcoat is not solely biological or intentional but
instead also based on some communal understanding; we, through our culture, have value-
associations of what it means to wear a tailcoat and these value-associations influence our beliefs
and our behavior.

It might be a bit unfair of me to critique Grice's notion of intentional meaning like this
especially when it certainly is not clear that he meant non-natural meaning to be taking so
literally. Contrasting my definition with Grice's model does however show something important;
while it works servicably if there is an intentional component to communicatory act this does not
mean that the social component cannot be derived from the intentional one, i.e. that the
intentions of a human being are all that matter when it comes to the non-natural meaning of an
action. Let me use what I call the sign vs. statement distinction. Signs are, as I already partly
explained, things that have social content to them due to a communal recognition, be that
recognition through changed behaviors (acting rude to people who wear tailcoats) or beliefs
(believing that Bob who wears a tailcoat is an upper-class snob). Statements are signs that are
wielded to communicate a belief in the Gricean sense (getting a person to recognize the intent to
communicate a belief through etc etc), for instance, wearing a tailcoat at a party to express how
you do not like the organizer of a party. I think it is reasonable to claim that to make a statement
of some sort one requires to use some sign or another; one cannot with a certain action
communicate whatever belief one feels like, that is to say a statement's meaning is not fully
determined by the actor.

To give an example, suppose I intend to communicate my hate of the dictator's regime to
some person. Since I cannot directly beam what I want to convey directly into people's heads I
will have to use some medium to communicate. The medium (action) I choose would have to be something that both me and the other understand, and the only thing that pretty much qualifies for that is signs; an action considered qua its natural qualities is just a rush of atoms and cannot tell anything about dictators, neither can an action qua its biological qualities since dictators do not fit within a biological nature. Signs however are especially rich in the way they are deployed and reacted to in various contexts. Part of communication is the creative use of these signs we have to get over complicated intentions, and in some sense each of these signs have almost unlimited potential for their meaning: the word 'save' can be used in the context of 'save me!', 'save the file', or perhaps some future hip slang where 'save' is some shortened version of 'savory'. Though prima facie it seems like Grice's view comes back into play here (since what it seems I just described is a disjunction of various intentional usages) this is incorrect since 1. these usages would not be possible if no one was aware of them 2. it would make any sign have a truly unlimited meaning which is absolutely not the case. If I want to use the act of scratching my palm to communicate my hate of the dictator's regime then there is no guarantee that will automatically succeed. While the act of scratching my palm could potentially have all sort of creative usages not one of them has to do with dictators. Certainly if told everyone to scratch their palm when they were angry at the dictator then in a year or two perhaps scratching my palm would mean that I hate the dictator. If I, however, do not have the time to do that and need to communicate my meaning right now to some person in front of me then scratching my palm is probably not a very good option. Instead, if I want to communicate my meaning in a novel way I will have to combine signs we already both understand (because we are part of the same community) to get my point across. Though I can alter the social meaning of an act through great
effort or some luck I am in many ways bound by the existing social contexts of my bodily actions.

What I am arguing for is that intentional meaning and social meaning are truly two different dimensions of meaning. The problem is that they are so closely linked. The very fact that we can have communal facts of the possible intentional ways a sign can be used pretty much shows the problem. Additionally, the whole point of hypothesizing a new nature for human beings was to find a way to account for various complicated social properties, that is to say for specific complicated social meanings that we can get. As long as these two dimensions are so tangled together it will be very hard to figure out what properties objects have in relation to what dimension of meaning. To separate these different kinds of meanings I will hypothesize an animal that according to the definition above has a social nature and figuring out what kind of properties it can have in relation to that. Then, if this hypothetical animal qua its social nature does not have intentions (or to put it another way, is not able to take intentions as properties), I will have done my job to show that something other nature is required to understand us human beings. The next step after that is to figure out what exactly is missing when we compare this hypothetical social animal with ourselves. If this succeeds we will be able to view a mere social animal as an intermediary stepz between ourselves and mere animals.

Since animals are not born social (because that would make it a function of an organic form of life) an animal must become social through some process after being born. Simply put that process is that of acculturation, i.e. the process whereby we get communal meanings for things (our actions, and the world around us). Before I can explain this process for purely social animals let me give something similar for humans. An example of how this process plays out for
humans can be found from Foucault. Foucault thinks of power structures, the various social spheres we travel in, as something that "traverses and produces things, <..<> induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 119). The power structures that exist shape us precisely by singling out biological actions into signs by limiting them in interesting ways. An example of this is, for instance, the biological action of masturbation. Masturbation in of itself is simply a natural function with no value association. According to Foucault it was apparently thought that masturbation was a function that had to be repressed in children, bringing up the then well-established that "bourgeois society repressed infantile sexuality" (120), or to give it another slant that the power wielded in power structures "never <does> anything but to say no" (119). Foucault however disagrees. The dominant culture in "all manuals for parents that were published in the eighteenth century" was that child sexuality was to be repressed. However, instead of repressing this behavior these manuals sectioned out new behaviors and created child sexuality itself:

Their effect was to din it into parents' heads that their children's sex constituted a fundamental problem in terms of their parental educational responsibilities, and to din it into their children's heads that their relationship with their own body and their own sex was to be a fundamental problem as far as they were concerned; and this had the consequence of sexually exciting the bodies of children while at the same time fixing the parental gaze and vigilance on the peril of infantile sexuality. The result was a sexualising of the infantile body, a sexualising of the bodily relationship between parent and child, a sexualising of the familial domain.

We could imagine how a child might be through the social structure, as wielded by the parents, be discouraged from masturbating, but this would only be detrimental to the very purpose. A child simply has no awareness of its natural functions; it masturbates unthinkingly. If however it is now discouraged from a certain behavior then that sections off from all the unthinking life-functioning of a child an action that becomes interesting in of itself. The child now realizes that
the act of masturbation effects its parents precisely because it makes them want to stop him, that is to say the child realizes the social implications of an action and makes it a sign. Once it knows it as a sign it can now wield it and make statements, such as, perhaps, express its anger at a parent about a certain thing they did by masturbating in defiance. As such social acculturation in this case results in the child becoming socially sexual and thereby being able to apply social properties to itself and the world. In general such social acculturation could be seen to allow all kinds of complex predicates such as ownership. We could imagine a similar kind of inculcation, for instance, when it comes to ownership, whereby a child is discouraged from taking its little sister's toy, thereby learning a concept of 'mine' and 'theirs'. Such acculturation could even be seen as responsible for creating different social roles, such as lawyer, banker, cop, child, grandmother, etc; they are essentially the nodes in the social structure; the various roles one inhabit which grant the various powers.

But this is, however, not quite what we were looking for: in the above example the child gains signs precisely through an awareness of their social implications, thus simultaneously making them usable as statements; the child becomes specifically aware of the potential intentional uses of the sign and the properties it is related to. But from this model we could develop something similar that would not require an awareness to learn the statement. There would still have to be some over-arching power structure in which the child animal is inculcated to but the way it would learn the signs would not have to require an awareness of the social implications. Instead, as long as the child animal employed signs in way that could in some sense be understood as communal we could still be talking about a true novel social kind and thereby simultaneously a social nature. To do that we will finally have to cash out the notion of the
Imagine an animal which just like human beings has the ability to imitate other members of its species just like we humans do. Through a process which Tomasello calls the “ratchet effect” wherein “individual and group inventions are mastered relatively faithfully by co-specifics, including youngsters, which enables them to remain in their new and improved form within the group until something better comes along.” (Tomasello 1999, 512). Through this process seemingly simple signs that an individual invents can be spread throughout the community and become a true social norm. But what kinds of things could a non-thinking animal possibly develop that would be significant enough to spread throughout a community of animals? Let us take an example from chimpanzees:

The infant initially grabs the mother’s back and pulls it down physically so as to climb on. Mom comes to anticipate on the basis of the first touch, and so lowers her back when just this initial part of the sequence is produced. The infant learns to anticipate this response, and so comes to use the gesture intentionally, touching mom’s back lightly and waiting for her to lower it in response as expected. (Tomasello 2008, 25)

What we see here is that both animals, the mother and offspring, have through happenstance managed to make (to a certain, somewhat limited, degree) signs out of a certain behavior. True, they do not understand themselves the true meaning of their signs, but this is not to say they have not gained significance. Before, the offspring did not have the power to request to be lifted up and now it does; this fact stands no matter whether the animal is aware of it or not. In this case the bodily action of touching the mom’s back is somewhat of a sign precisely because it cues a somewhat social, non-animal-based response. The use of the sign induces a response in the mother to carry the child, and while a mother ape is performing aptly to carry its child it does not

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1. Tomasello's work were not consulted directly. The quotes are those which Prof. Danielle Macbeth chose to use in her work “Realizing Reason” (manuscript unpublished).
do so on request qua its organic nature.

I have however qualified my description with 'somewhat' social because although I think the chimp example is a fine one as to how social signs start developing it is not an example of an actual social sign. One might be tempted to think that a sign of some sort might be possible to develop between two individuals and that thus a sign's meaning is just some mutual agreement or behavior. This would bring us back somewhat to Grice's model of meaning since the meaning of a statement really would be fixed by the two participants. However, this could not work since such a meaning will not be communal and therefore not constitute a new social form of life: to explain, take the property of owning something: imagine two intelligent apes were stranded on an island and by chance develop certain practices which closely mirror ownership. Each might have a certain plot of land on from which the other does not take any objects. An object being placed on that plot of land would then serve, perhaps, as a 'sign' of belonging to that ape. While this situation does very closely mirror ownership it would seem to be projection to say that ape 1. actually owns the stuff on his plot of land. The only way that ape 1. owns his stuff is in the sense that ape 2. does not have the inclination to take it. This is hardly a communal agreement enforced both apes. Instead, it is an implicit agreement that falls apart the moment one of them decides it will. As such to say that ape 1. 'owns' that piece of string is not very correct, nor that the sign of an object within the bounds of that plot of land per se means anything; instead it is more appropriate to say that ape 2. simply is not taking ape 1.'s piece of string away from him and that it just happens to coincide with a certain plot of land. Take now instead a group of hypothetically intelligent apes that throughout time have developed a tradition of passing on certain signs having to do with ownership. They have signs for claiming ownership of something, for
disputing a claim, and sign for resolving such disputes. Apes that are born are inculcated into this community through a similar process to the Foucault example which shapes them into these social animals. Because these apes have this tradition they can be said to have a community; as I understand it individuals form a community when they share something which not one single individual can completely alter or destroy, that in some sense the community stands outside of the individuals and impresses itself on them. When the mother ape is inculcating its child into this community it is doing this in virtue of the node of 'mother' which it holds in the social sphere. That ape's nature is then part material, part biological, and part mother qua its communal position in the social sphere. As such, when one is inculcated into a community you become an instance of a social kind, and that allows you various powers, namely signs.

It is very important that they difference between the two apes and the community of apes is not one simply of number: Imagine you bring together twenty apes who also just happen to have the same coincidental habit of not stealing from certain plots of land which not in virtue of some tradition passed on through e.g. the ratchet effect. The problem is precisely the fact that is coincidental; how would one recognize these apes as 'violating' social codes if there are no historical social codes to go off of? If however have a community of apes that have a long tradition and elaborate sign system for dealing with something very similar to ownership then these apes can be said to be instances of a social kind. Ownership is after all not just some tacit agreement, in fact if that were we just go back to the two ape example, where it just 'happens to be the case' that these apes seem to mimic some kind of situation of ownership. Instead this community of apes to properly be able to deal with the property of ownership would have to have signs to settle disputes on claims of ownership. This is not to say that every ape will
perfectly be aware of the social rules, but this is very similar to the mayfly example from the previous section: the perfect example of an ape in that community does not exist, just like the perfect mayfly does not exist. Instead we can understand the ape's actions as functioning social by getting a feel for their function within the community, just like getting a feel for the form of life of a mayfly allows us to produce natural-historical judgments. As such, our hypothetically intelligent apes can be said to be social because they become a new kind of being separately from their original organic one. Understanding the signs of these apes as signs requires a radical shift in ones perspective very similar to the one required for natural animals.

4. The Rational

Given then a large enough group of animal-like actors with some kind of imitative practice we could imagine that over time they would develop simply by accident a fairly complicated social structure which might constitute a community of sorts. The social structure of this community could be significantly complex enough to produce quite a few social properties and perhaps have various sub-spheres of social structures.

Now, these animals participate in a social structure but does this automatically mean that just like in Foucault's account they must have some awareness of their participation. Let us try and contrast this awareness by comparing the way our hypothetical ape creatures and us human beings deal with disputes of matters of fact:

imagine if these hypothetical ape creatures of ours have the social practice that those who have feathers in their hair would be allowed to solve food disputes between members of the snake species. For instance, when two apes go out to kill a bison if both feel they put in equal effort in the kill then they would be indispute. Maybe if an ape thinks it is entitled to the meat of a kill
it would perform a certain sign e.g. pounding their chest. If more than one ape pounds their chest after a kill then the ape with the feather will choose a winner by touching the winning ape's shoulder. This example exhibits all the important features of a social structure: It has nothing to do with the ape with a feather in his hair per se; the power of the ape comes from the social structure which is reinforced generation through generation. The position of food arbiter entails with it social powers which are not to be understood in reference to their natural form. If you took these apes and raised them in isolation of a culture which contained this feather tradition they would not do it. Yet I do not think that any of these apes need to necessarily exhibit any intentionality in their statements. They are simply 'reacting' according to some piece of social programming, yet this simply reaction does not stop the social connotations and the over-arching social structure of the community from existing. The dispute is simply resolved through some sub-routine of their social structure.

We human beings also have various traditions around resolving disputes, but some of our disputes have to do with intentions and awareness of actions; Think about the various moments when we say things like “I didn't intend to do that”. Importantly, we mostly say these kinds of things when we want to disassociate ourselves from the consequences. For instance, if I knock a lamp over with my arm while making a dramatic gesture I might say 'I did not intend to do that' to make it seem that I do not want to suffer the consequences of maliciously knocking over the lamp. Another way to put this is “I did not know I was going to knock over the lamp. If I knew a consequence of dramatically swinging my arms to make my point I would not have done that. I was not aware of my actions.” Suddenly knowing comes into the picture, something that was completely absent in the ape's case: Imagine you know that 1. if I do x will make me lose
reputation with my peers and 2. that I do not want to lose reputation with my peers. If I then intentionally do x anyway that would make no sense at all. You would question me on one or both fronts: whether I really did x intentionally after all or whether I really knew the things I claimed to know. But our hypothetical socially advanced apes do not seem necessarily seem to need to 1. know what they are doing or 2. have intentions whatsoever. Whatever the hypothetical apes lacks therefore is probably related to knowledge itself.

A way to approach this problem is by critiquing how Foucault thought truth and power structures were related and to see what might be missing: According to Foucault "'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'régime' of truth." but that simultaneously "'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault 1980, 133). With the latter sentence Foucault seems to want to point out that all there is to 'Truth' is the practices and standards we have towards calling statements True or Not True, while the former sentence points out that these practices are arbitrary since they are circularly linked to the system of powers we are subjected to. As such the practices of truth are arbitrary to what power system we grew up in. Implicit however in the latter sentence is the assumption that any individual that can produce, regulate distribute, circulate and operate statements is an individual that engages in the system of truth. What is missing though is an awareness of doing this practice, that is to say something more than just a skillful but a self-conscious and reflective practice of production and regulation of statements.

Our hypothetically social animals produce, regulate, distribute, circulate and operate sd igns yet
seem to not engage in a system of truth at all. To engage in a system of truth in any kind of conscious fashion you need to be able to evaluate the reasons for statements being true or false, yet our hypothetical social apes were able to operate in a system just fine without needing the categories of true and false at all. All they did was react, not evaluate.

Let me bring this difference more to the forefront with some examples: imagine we have two human beings arguing about whether one is allowed to eat with one's hands in certain cases. For there to be an argument about the truth of the matter to begin with both sides will have to produce reasons which at least somewhat are causally related to the question at hand. To produce these reasons however will require an understanding of the social sphere which goes above and beyond mere skillful use. Imagine now two different actors debating about some question, say whether the earth goes around the sun. One of the actors has a fully conscious understanding of the issue but the other one only has a skillful intuitive power towards the issue. The first actor is able to examine statements as they are in of themselves and think about how they relate to other statements. The second actor however is just like our hypothetical intelligent primates: Instead of evaluating the statements and their reasons at all it instead has some kind of set of rules and appropriate responses which it learned through some ratchet-effect-like learning faculty. This animal will spit out some sign to appropriate to keep the other discussant maximally happy. Now for a while, depending on how good the memetic programming of participant 2. is, the discussion should go on without rousing too much suspicion of participant 1. This however will not last because those rules only encompasses a set amount of situations and questions and therefore will have to run out: whatever social practice this animal was that gave it these complicated social responses cannot give it an infinite amount of responses, but this is precisely what will be
required if it is to respond well enough to fool an actual rational actor. Given enough time such a rational actor will devise a question that the complicated social practice simply did not prepare for and it will unmask the second actor as simply 'parroting' appropriate statements as opposed to exhibiting any kind of faculty.

We could compare this to Turing tests for computer software. If such a software is programmed with direct rules for responses this computer program could only respond intelligently for a set amount of situations. Although we through social acculturation become aware of appropriateness of certain responses it does not seem right to say that when it comes to questions of matters of fact such a social acculturation will simply do. Instead we need a bona fide different and unique faculty to examine the rational linkages between signs, that is to say probe the relations of social structures themselves. This faculty is what separates us from mere social animals.

We can compare this notion with that of John McDowell's of being in the space of reasons. McDowell takes the original notion from Sellars who explains it as the following:

“In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.” (McDowell 1996, 5)

To give an example take someone saying the claim 'Frogs are four-legged'. Now suppose you are not sure whether the claim is true; in that case you would be inclined to ask that person “why it is true?” trying to investigate perhaps why the claim itself is true (why do frogs have four legs?) or perhaps examining why they themselves hold it as true (why do you think that?). In so far we understand a person as rational we expect them to have a response for us, a response that we call a 'reason', or simply put, grounds for the claim they just made. In the case of the above claim a
good reason might be 'I read it in a reputable science book', but for our purposes of understanding the space of reasons we need not expect that every claim must be backed up by one and only one ultimate 'ground' for why it is true. Instead, we might think of a human being as being in the space of reasons as being able to consider rationally the grounds of claims and making claims based on grounds, thus being able to produce knowledge.

This notion of being in the space of reasons then very similar to our notion of being able to consider the connections between signs in social structures. The problem is that while McDowell's notion is about all of knowledge in general our speculated notion is one that only deals with disputes within power structures. What we then need is a way to get from 1. understanding the connections between signs in power-structures to 2. understanding the reasons of statements in the general field of knowledge itself.

McDowell has a notion of acculturation himself that supposedly getting from mere animal nature to a rational one. For McDowell what is required is the acquisition of a "second nature" (84). For McDowell we are born animals but are acculturated into this second nature through upbringing, or "Bildung" (125) as he calls it. McDowell shares with us the task of de-mystifying our transformation "into thinkers and intentional agents" and believes that what is required be "in our conception of the Bildung" for this to happen is that "we give pride of place to the learning of a language", for according to him "being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene." For McDowell "the feature of a language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository
of tradition, a store of historically wisdom about what is a reason for what.” (126). In fact, even more strongly this acculturation into the space of reasons is what “emancipate(s) [us human beings] <...> from a merely animal mode of living into being a full-fledged subject[s], open to the world.” (125)

Now this may well be true but it seems hard for us at this point to see why. If however McDowell is correct in saying that a fully developed natural language opens us up to the world itself then the task for us is to see how our hypothetical ape-like creatures would then go on to develop such a language. I think it is clear that these ape-like creatures as we last defined them do not have a language at all. The sign traditions they have might be very complicated but in so far they make one language seems unclear. As I mentioned before in the last section, part of grasping the meanings of our words seems to involve grasping the potential intentional content that they can be used to convey, that is to say part of understanding the word 'donut' involves grasping its use I pointing towards the object donuts, the shape itself (doing donuts with a car), and its socio-cultural association with cops (that 'donut-eating' could be meant pejoratively). Part of what makes a language a language then is the rich meaning of each and every word and sentence which allow them to be combined to almost any intentional meaning you could conceive of. How would a hypothetical ape creature of ours get from the simple though very elaborate sign tradition, which has a fixed amount of non-intentional meanings, to something of a radically different kind, and how would such a new practice constitute a true view of the world, as McDowell suggests it might?

Danielle Macbeth suggests that given a sufficiently developed verbal practices that it is possible to make a radical step by “synthesize[ing]” the verbal practices “into an integrated
whole" (Macbeth 2012, 40). Macbeth makes this idea more palpable and plausible by analogy of cognitive maps that animals develop in navigating a terrain:

It is a familiar fact that an animal can learn successfully and intelligently to navigate some portion of the landscape, its neighborhood, say. What the animal learns is various routes through the landscape guided by landmarks, and such knowledge is procedural. It is knowledge of how to go on at various points to get to somewhere in particular. What non-human animals seem not to acquire in the course of learning to navigate the terrain is a cognitive map of the whole, and thereby the capacity to navigate between two not previously traversed. We do precisely that. Like other animals, we come to know our way about in a new terrain by exploring it, taking various routes through it from one landmark to another. But we also achieve something more, a cognitive map of the whole that is not merely the sum of its parts. The various routes from landmark to landmark that we have learned are synthesized into a single, unified whole of all the landmarks in their relative locations. (39).

Macbeth then goes on to compare this achievement of a literal cognitive map to the achievement of a figurative cognitive map of our environment that we possess. In essence a sufficiently complicated verbal practice (or sign tradition, whatever you may want to call it) will have many signs for communicating the location of food, the hunting of prey, essentially natural features of the world that the animal perceives. In being integrated into a sufficiently complicated verbal practice what one learns is “verbal “routes” that involve both landmarks, that is proto-referential relations (one learns what things are called), and path from one landmark to another, proto-inferential relations (and implicitly thereby what is a reason for what)”(40). We could compare such a verbal practice to what is possible for the sufficiently advanced social animal. I do not however think though that a synthesis of this verbal practice into a whole need necessarily be a self-aware and intentional one, as Macbeth suggests. One could imagine through some wonderful neuronal process that instead of relying on some strenuous memetic list of behaviors an animal could develop an unconscious feel for these social practices. To use an example that might possibly conform to this idea, body language is highly sophisticated behavior that although some
small sense can be broken up memetic rules on a whole is so monolithic that it is impossible. The
only real way to learn body language is to get a feel for it, that is to say to synthesize body
language rules into a non-procedural knowledge so as to be able to generate new rules on the fly
based on certain complicated contexts. However, we can still perfectly do body language without
any knowledge of us doing so. Even more strongly, body language is not quite a language but
more of a sign tradition; it signals attitudes and thus can alter the social dynamic sub-consciously
but it does not communicate intentions only in the respect that it reinforces ones that we
consciously have already. I think an intuitive capacity for a verbal capacity need not necessarily
be self-aware and since it was self-awareness we were going after this will simply not do. Using
our Turing test metaphor I used before, we could imagine an intuitive verbal capacity as being
similar to some kind of heuristic statistical program which is capable of generating new
responses based on a set of rules and assumptions. While such a program could theoretically be
extremely complicated and able to handle a variety of situations it could not truly count as some
process of self-awareness precisely because it is simply but a statistical affair. Moreover, because
it relies on a set of rules and assumptions it, just like the previous Turing example, must run out
at some point, which is a claim that will become more clear as I explain my solution:

Take a sufficiently social animal species that not only has an imitative practice but also
has a sufficiently complicated social practice which it has managed to synthesize into a whole
that it to a certain degree can intuitively navigate and invent new practices. Now in so far this
social practice is sufficiently complicated it will contain within itself judgments about the
exterior world, that is to say it will get some normative constraint from the exterior world by
creating things that one should and should not do if one is interested in surviving. As a social
practice expands it becomes more and more encompassing of the world and the connections between the signs become more and more complex. It stands to reason that at some point this complexity will backfire. Especially when signs concern increasingly important survival facts there must come a point when an intuitive practice of regulating these statements will simply not do any more and the verbal practice will begin to spew out utter nonsense about the outer world. To give an example, imagine a very complex verbal practice whereby a community of animals orients itself to find food by figuring out where the river flows. This social practice has all kinds of signs for showing where the river is, how far downstream the grass starts, how many animals are by a certain inlet, etc. Even more strongly, this verbal practice has grown sufficiently strong enough to start generating new intuitive signs on the fly through some intuitive synthesizing process. What we now can imagine is a moment of crisis for this verbal practice that sufficiently makes its method of doing things useless. Perhaps a specific river's water became tainted with some disease. For the purposes of our example, let us say that this practice had the sign for river function just like the sign for life. Now this social practice is in quite a deal of trouble and is, in fact, actively endangering those that uphold it. As such there are two options: either the animals go extinct or the very foundations upon which the social practice rely on must be fundamentally altered. Imagine now that through the power of this crisis that one particular individual now suddenly perceives something it never had before namely one or more particular signs that are in contradiction with the rest of the system, in this case the sign for river. Once it does that however it immediately places itself in the rational sphere by now being able to single out signs from the whole and examine its linkages. The intuitive mass of sign connections is broken down into distinct bits; this social animal discovers the whole of its verbal practice by being confronted
with a part of it, namely the piece that does not seem to fit. What first was a sign tradition through which the animal could resolve practical problems of a certain sort now becomes a discourse of knowledge and a general method for understanding the world itself. The social animals now become rational by showing intentionality in determining whether a sign coheres with the rest of the language and becoming aware of it now sees the possibility of changing it. In doing so it shows awareness of the "putatively rational linkages between concepts" as exemplified by the signs themselves. In our example the individual that discovers the sign for that does not cohere—the sign for river—could decide to split it into two ones—a sign for river and a sign for life—thereby essentially cutting the rational linkage between the two concepts and making true advance in the way it understands the world.

A way to make this pure hypothesizing more plausible is to think of this action of considering one particular sign as pulling it into the space of reasons, something akin to what we do when we are frustrated in our daily routine of being in the world. Imagine you are opening the door to your house; this is an action that you have performed so many times that in reality you are not worrying anymore about 'doing it right'. Instead you simply turn the key and push in. In fact, given nothing about your door changes too radically you will be sub-consciously able to account for quite a few changes; your door might change color, your lock might shift a bit to the left, etc. If now however your door opens outward instead of in you will be shocked out of your normal routine and be forced to think about the mechanics of opening the door. Comparatively something similar happens with these social intuitive practices. An intuitive capacity can adjust to many small changes but a large one will have to be treated differently, namely enter the space of reasons to fix the flaw in the cognitive map. This ability to a view a specific sign of a social
practice is a true new power that constitutes a total new way of being in the world. It constitutes a self-conscious way of being in the world namely by enabling us to be aware of deploying signs and thus, given a sufficiently complex social practice aware of all our actions and of all the times we perceive. As such McDowell's claims that natural language (or transformed sign tradition) 1. serves as a repository of knowledge and 2. opens up the world to us make more sense; natural language is essentially the world we live in, the world we get to know.

Because of this new ability to perceive signs directly I suspect that the sign tradition can start its transformation into a true bona fide language: Before any sign's meaning was mainly fixed by what counted as acceptable and unacceptable responses as dictated by the community. Every sign's meaning really was fixed by what sign-responses it elicited. Now however signs can be perceived as things in of themselves separately from their appropriate responses; once you can wonder, e.g. if the sign for 'life' and 'river' should be split up, i.e. that the field of responses to the sign 'might' be incorrect, you have very much permanently decoupled the sign's meaning from its 'appropriate' responses precisely because you can consider the possibility of different responses. A sign's meaning now becomes related to the rational linkages it exhibits between the others and the possible rational linkages that could be drawn. As such the meaning of the sign becomes more indeterminate and more like a word in our language; it starts to hold the infinite potential of possibility of what thoughts could be expressed with it.²

This new faculty could also be potentially be used to explain how statements come into being: let us now think back to the original animal who realized the life river mistake and as a

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² There is a lot more to say on this subject of what exactly a language is, and how a sign tradition would become one. Unfortunately due to page constraints I will have to remain vague. This hole in my argument would have to be filled in on a later date, potentially even by someone else than me.
result has developed a new sign for river. Remember, he has intentionally changed the meaning of a sign to fix a problem. Imagine if he comes now in contact with another animal of his social kind who has not made that advance. Imagine now they get into an exchange about where there is some bison to be found, and the changed animal uses the original sign for life which for him does not include river. Now since that animal has intentional contact with the meaning of that sign when he uses it he makes statements instead of just unconsciously employing a sign. The reason why is because he has himself decided what the sign should mean and therefore any time he uses that sign it has intentional content because it has decided the sign to mean something different from the original social practice. The other animal now can pick up on this meaning if it recognizes what the animal is trying to do, which is very close to the Gricean sense of “A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect (I mean life, but not the river) in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention”. If the other animal picks up on that intention, that is to say if it realizes the difference in meaning of the sign, then suddenly what we have is a bona fide moment of communication. A sign's meaning can now start to be related to the intentional ways it has been used precisely because of the ways individuals have decided to use certain signs. We could imagine that over time the complicated distinction between sentence and word could come into being when the rational animals – in their new found creativity – start to string signs together to form novel new statements; It is after all more economical to use existing statements than to create new ones. As such through the very simple change of being able to perceive signs we have 1. intentionality 2. the ability to make statements and 3. the development of a bona fide language itself.
5. Reflections

Now that we a human being with three natures: 1. an organic nature cashed out in the notion of a form of an organic life, thereby able to have animal parts, animal functions, etc. 2. a social nature cashed out as having an elaborate communal social practices, thereby being able to have social properties such as property, 3. a rational nature cashed out as being in the space of reasons, able to break down the social structure by examining its signs, thereby gaining intentionality and self-conscious awareness. There is certainly quite a few questions that still remain unresolved, one of them which I already mentioned which is how exactly a language develops. The faculty of awareness of signs I propose might be enough to ensure the development of a language, but that is not entirely clear. Another question to as is how all these three natures fit together. Theorizing properly about this topic falls a bit out of the scope of this essay but as I see it there is no one easy answer to give. The main question is how much of our behavior can be put in the space of reasons: to give an example of this problem, we like to say these days that mental illnesses are illnesses of a biological kind. If that is the case does this entail that illnesses cannot be overcome through the space of reasons. To give an example, alcoholism is to be seen in our culture as arising from some biological defect which makes it impossible to stop at one drink. If this is the case though this would mean that the space of reasons, while extensive, could be locked out from altering the behavior of alcoholics in a certain way. This is essentially the old philosophical problem of incontinence, be it incontinence as impressed on us by a biological defect, something that is inherent and, barring certain scientific advance, presumably unchangable. What does this then say about those who suffer some kind of biological incontinence? Are they truly locked out of the full sense of the space of
reasons in that they cannot produce reasons of their own for certain behaviors? Or, should we take a more cynical approach therefore conclude that this biological incontinence is merely rational incontinence, and that therefore such human beings simply lack the necessary will-power and social training? Both options seem unpleasant, which seems to indicate that we probably made some mistake in our assumptions. I think that any answer that could pull ourselves out of this uncomfortable position would be one that properly explains the relationship between the biological, social, and rational, and what defects mean on each and every level.

As it stands though I think the main goals of this essay have been accomplished, given that my methodology and (most of) my assumptions are sound. A human being is a metaphysically distinct thing with three different natures: a rational nature, a social nature, and an organic nature. We human beings are therefore very unique and special objects; there is nothing else which unites all these natures together.
Works Cited

PDF file.