basis of truthfulness—specifically, of what I shall identify as two “virtues of truth.” The sense in which it will offer the “primitive basis” of these values is something that the story itself, and the reasons for telling the story, will define. The State of Nature story will, later in the book, lead into some real history. However, before I come to the questions of how such fictional narratives work, and of how the real and the fictional elements are related to one other, I must explain what intellectual needs this whole genealogical enterprise is supposed to satisfy, and how it differs from some other inquiries that might be hoped to satisfy those needs.

2. **Naturalism**

Genealogy is intended to serve the aims of naturalism (and was understood to do so by Nietzsche, who first applied the term “genealogy” in this sense). Naturalism is a general outlook which, in relation to human beings, is traditionally, if very vaguely, expressed in the idea that they are “part of nature”—in particular, that they are so in respects, such as their ethical life, in which this is not obviously true. There is a well-known difficulty in stabilizing the idea of “nature” so that naturalism is not either trivially true or implausible to such an extent as to be uninteresting. It would be trivially true if “nature” contained whatever there is. Trying to find something that is not trivial, we may say that what naturalism recognizes are just those things recognized by the natural sciences. But then is biology a natural science? If biology is, is ethology? If ethology, what about the ethology of human beings, which includes culture? At this point, it may be that the screw is tightened, and naturalism is required to represent everything—plants, the behaviour of animals, human cultures—in terms of the universally applicable natural science, physics. So naturalism gets tied to the project of physicalistic reductionism. Physicalistic reductionism is an entirely implausible undertaking in itself; and it surely cannot be that the interests of a naturalistic approach to ethics, for instance, must be essentially tied to it.

We should get away from the preoccupation with reductionism. It cannot be that the concerns of those who have wanted to understand
human beings, in their ethical as in other aspects, as part of nature, are essentially bound up with the prospects for the Encyclopedia of Unified Science. In trying to do better than this, we may consider the case of life. Living things are, one might think, part of nature if anything is: the study of them is, or used to be, called “natural history.” So how could there possibly have been a question about naturalism in biology? However, this is to neglect a significant piece of history. Until the last century, vitalism was an option. It was agreed that there were living things, but there was great unclarity about what kind of property life was, in particular how it related to properties described by the other sciences. Hence there was a question whether life was part of nature, where that meant the rest of nature. That question has now been answered positively, and the characteristics of living things can now be clearly understood in a way that is continuous with biochemistry. Thus we can see in scientific terms how living things could have come to exist.

Questions about naturalism, like questions about individualism in the social sciences, are questions not about reduction but about explanation. Of course I recognize that this leaves almost everything open. But that is as it should be, because the questions that are substantial and interesting are open. The questions concern what we are prepared to regard, at each level, as an explanation. Moreover, we have no reason to think that what is to count as an explanation, from bits of nature describable only in terms of physics to human beings and their cultures, is at each level the same kind of thing. The question for naturalism is always: can we explain, by some appropriate and relevant criteria of explanation, the phenomenon in question in terms of the rest of nature? (We might call this the “creeping barrage” conception of naturalism.)

When we get to the peculiarities of human beings, a special set of problems emerges. The huge innovation represented by Homo sapiens is the significance of non-genetic learning, which, with regard to both its nature and its effects, marks an overwhelming ethological difference between human beings and other animals. Every species has an ethological description, and Homo sapiens is no exception; but in this case, uniquely, you cannot tell the ethological story without introducing culture (consider, for instance, what is immedi-
ately involved in answering the question “In what sorts of places do they sleep?”). Consequently, the story is likely to differ significantly between groups of human beings, and in ways that typically involve history; in many cases, the human beings who are being described will also be conscious, in varying degrees, of that history. All this follows from the peculiar ethological character of this species.

Individual members of the species must of course typically, standardly, or in the right proportion have the psychological characteristics that enable humans to have this ethology, to live under culture. We can then ask: what are those characteristics? What is the best, most revealing and explanatory, description of them? Granted such a description, how might those characteristics have come into existence? In the case of some of them, the answer may be in terms of transmitted social influences operating on general learning capacities, but others may demand an explanation in terms of special, modular, capacities, and then there will be a question (as there is with the general learning capacities themselves) of how they have genetically evolved.

The case that specially interests us is the capacity shown, in some form or other, by humans in all cultures to live under rules and values and to shape their behaviour in some degree to social expectations, in ways that are not under surveillance and not directly controlled by threats and rewards. Call this, begging many questions, (the minimal version of) living in an ethical system. Living in an ethical system demands a certain psychology. But, importantly, it does not follow that all ethical systems demand the same psychology—moral psychology may be opportunistic (an example would be the supposed difference between shame and guilt societies). Nor need it be the case that one and the same ethical system demands exactly the same psychology of each participant. At this level, variation might be not simply individual but, more interestingly, systematic: this would be the case with our prevailing ethical system, if Carol Gilligan’s hypothesis were true, that it involves different psychological formations from men and from women.

Granted that there must be a psychology or psychologies underlying any ethical system, we can ask: what do these psychologies have
to be like? What is involved in them? Our question here is: what is it for an answer to those questions to meet the demands of naturalism?

We can get to this question by recalling the shape of the naturalist’s question in other examples. A naturalist will claim that what is involved in the case of human beings living in ethical systems can be coherently related to the rest of nature. But what exactly is, now, the rest of nature? In the case of vitalism, it meant nature up to living things; in the case of consciousness (which I have not so far mentioned), it will mean all of that, together with living things up to conscious living things. So what does “the rest of nature” mean in the present case? Does it mean: everything, including conscious living things, up to human beings? If this is what is meant, the focus of the naturalistic question will be: is the human capacity to live in ethical systems closely related to characteristics of other, non-human, species? Can it, and its emergence, be explained in basically the same terms as we use in understanding other species?

The naturalistic question about ethics has often been put in this way. Some of those who have discussed it in these terms have answered it in the negative. In particular, there have been those who have been very keen on characterizing human ethical capacities by contrast to other animals (“the brutes,” as they were sometimes called in such traditions). Others have understood the naturalistic question in this same way but have given a positive answer to it. These are typically people who are impressed by what used to be called “sociobiology,” and see the capacity needed for living under ethical systems as (for instance) “altruism” in some sense in which a character called by that name can be selected for in other species. But “altruism” cannot be brought across from other species to human beings without our taking into account the differences between the two, which form a major part of the problem.

The crudity of both these approaches, the negative and the positive, suggests that their shared form of the naturalistic question—the way in which they interpret “the rest of nature”—is misguided. Before getting to the psychologies that are distinctively presupposed by ethical systems, we need first to allow for the fact that culture affects almost all of human psychology. We cannot consider the
most basic instinctual drives of human beings, those that in some sense they manifestly share with other species, without allowing for the influence of the cultural on them and on their expression. This in itself is simply an application, admittedly a far-reaching one, of an ethological platitude, that the way in which a given instinct or drive displays itself in a given species depends on that species' way of life. It is hardly surprising that the reproductive behaviour of the red deer differs spectacularly from that of the hedgehog or the stickleback, since their ways of life are notably different. If we are going to think in naturalistic terms, or the contrary, about the psychology of human beings as it is most immediately related to their living in ethical systems, we should think in the first place about the relations of that psychology to other aspects of human psychology.

There is of course a kind of false abstraction involved in this. I have already said that human beings live under culture, something that follows from the central significance of their capacity for non-genetic learning. I have also said that living under culture involves, roughly speaking, living in an ethical system. If so, we cannot ultimately separate the business of living under culture, together with all the effects that this has on other aspects of human psychology, from whatever it is that enables humans to live in an ethical system. Ultimately, it is true, we cannot. Perhaps, however, we can fruitfully postpone considering all these things together. The relation of at least some basic instinctual drives in human beings, even as they are necessarily modified by language and by culture, to functionally similar drives in other species may be rather more transparent than the psychologies that support ethical systems are. Given these ideas, the naturalist question about ethics will emerge as the question of how closely the motivations and practices of the ethical are related to other aspects of human psychology. With regard to this particular aspect of the very peculiar ethology of this species, this is the special form taken by the recurrent naturalist question which we have identified as arising elsewhere, for instance in the case of life: how does the phenomenon in question intelligibly relate to the rest of nature, and how, in particular, might it have come about? As one might put it, we are asking about human ethical life in relation to the rest of human nature. If we can make sense of this undertaking, of ex-
plaining the ethical in terms of an account of human beings which is to the greatest possible extent prior to ideas of the ethical, then there is a project of ethical naturalism which is intelligible, non-vacuous, and not committed to a general physicalistic reductionism that is (to put it mildly) dubious and anyway ought to be a separate issue.

3. *The State of Nature Is Not the Pleistocene*

Questions of the relations between culture and psychology, and between both of these and biology, have given rise to a good deal of tiresome and unnecessary controversy between evolutionary theorists and social scientists. Some writers in evolutionary theory have supposed that assumptions made by cultural anthropologists, in particular—the idea has been applied also to other social scientists—are inconsistent with the findings of evolutionary psychology or biology, when it has merely been the case that the anthropologists have, rightly or wrongly, regarded those findings as irrelevant to their interests. Anthropologists have referred, reasonably enough, to “the human capacity to acquire cultural norms,” a capacity that enables any human being to acquire the culture of whatever the society may be in which he or she is brought up; the capacity, consequently, is neutral in itself between very different cultural contents. Since the interest of anthropologists is primarily in describing and explaining the differences between cultural systems, some of them have supposed that they will not get much help from a psychology that equally underlies all cultural systems. On the strength of this, some writers about evolution have taken the anthropologists to have a *particular theory* about the nature of the underlying psychological capacity, that it can be no more than a content-free all-purpose learning system, the “blank slate” of traditional empiricism. This theory is certainly incompatible with current psychological understanding and with evolutionary ideas (why should a tabula rasa, of all things, suddenly emerge at this stage of primate evolution?).

Maybe some anthropologists have believed this theory, but their interests in no way imply that they must. You can accept that the psychological mechanisms underlying cultural learning are highly