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NORMATIVITY, HUMAN NATURE AND PRACTICAL REASON: A NEW APPROACH TO AN OLD PROBLEM

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

To my dad, who taught me to love truth

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ABSTRACT

Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism (henceforth: *Aristotelian naturalism*) claims ethical goodness is a kind of human natural goodness, where natural goodness is a function of human nature. Call this the *core thesis*. The normativity objection claims the core thesis fails because ethical goodness is normative and natural goodness is not. In this study I aim to cast new light on this objection and propose a new strategy of response.

My argument divides into two main moves. In the first, I side with critics in arguing that Aristotelian naturalism has a serious problem that concerns the normativity of human nature, although standard formulations of the normativity objection do not quite capture it. The problem is that there is an explanatory gap in Aristotelian naturalism's account of ethical goodness. I argue that although facts about human nature and natural goodness are irreducibly normative in the evaluative sense, they are not necessarily normative in the practical sense. Hence, Aristotelians need to explain what *makes* such facts practically normative. They have not successfully done this. This explanatory gap threatens the viability of Aristotelian naturalism, for it leaves a central feature of ethical experience—viz. the practical normativity of ethical facts—unexplained. I call this the normativity problem.

In the second main move of my argument I propose a two-part solution to the normativity problem. The first part consists in a new metanormative account of the *source* of normativity I call *Aristotelian constructivism*. It yields an objectivist, species-relative and naturalistic account of practical normativity. The second part of the solution is an account of practical reason that connects human final ends with human nature. Aristotelian constructivism explains the practical normativity of those final ends, and thus of facts about human nature, without reference to the evaluative status of those facts. Aristotelian constructivism thereby enables Aristotelian naturalists to retain their core thesis.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

This study is about the ethical approach known as neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism.[1] Very roughly, Aristotelian naturalism is the view that ethical norms are based on human nature. What we ought to do is tied to what is good for us as rational animals. Although the view is strongly tied with the tradition of ethical reflection that arose from Aristotle's texts, and although Aristotelian naturalists often develop their views in close conversation with the Aristotelian corpus, I will have little to say about how closely Aristotelian naturalists approximate the views of Aristotle himself. I am interested in the contemporary manifestations of Aristotelian naturalism and in examining its prospects as a viable approach to ethics. In the following chapters my goal is to cast new light on one of its most persistent objections and to sketch a powerful yet overlooked strategy of response.

Some like to trace contemporary Aristotelian naturalism to G. E. M. Anscombe, and in particular to her well-known paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958). Although Aristotelian naturalism's core ideas can be found in Anscombe's writings (because she herself was Aristotelian in bent), and although Aristotelian naturalists often look to Anscombe as a source of inspiration, Philippa Foot was really the first contemporary

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[1] For purposes of linguistic economy, I will usually simplify the name to *Aristotelian naturalism*, leaving the 'neo' and 'ethical' implicit. Aristotelian naturalism should not be confused with what we might call *metaethical naturalism*, the view that moral properties are, or reduce to, natural properties. Aristotelian naturalism could be taken as naturalistic in that sense too, but that is not the primary reason for the label. Aristotelian naturalism is naturalistic in that it claims moral goodness and moral judgments are based in some way on human *nature*. As Rosalind Hursthouse (1999: 193) puts it, this kind of "[e]thical naturalism hopes to validate beliefs about which character traits are virtues by appeal to human nature…" See Rehg and Davis (2003) for a discussion on the way in which Aristotelian naturalist's use of the term 'nature' differs from other usages.

philosopher to articulate and defend Aristotelian naturalism in its current robust form.[2] Her contributions were further developed and extended in different ways by Michael Thompson, who studied under her, and by Rosalind Hursthouse, also well-known as an avid defender of Aristotelian virtue ethics.[3] In this study I will primarily take these three philosophers as my paradigm proponents of Aristotelian naturalism, although I will also examine in some detail the contributions of one of the view's younger defenders, Micah Lott.[4]

Aristotelian naturalism can be understood as consisting in two main movements or levels.[5] In the first, Aristotelian naturalists identify a particular form of evaluative judgment. It is the type we use when we assess the goodness or badness of an organism relative to its

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[2] Hints of the view appear in Foot's earlier writings, such as in her 1977 essays "Virtue and Vice" and "Euthanasia" (reprinted in Foot 2002k). But the view first appears in full form in her 1994 paper, "Rationality and Virtue" (see Foot 2002i) and her 1995 paper, "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?" (both reprinted in 2002f). Foot amplified and extended the same ideas in her monograph, *Natural Goodness* (2001). Her last published essay, "Rationality and Goodness" (2004), further clarifies the view.

[3] Michael Thompson's work on the subject first appeared in Thompson (1995). He defends and extends the same approach in Thompson (2004). Content from his 1995 paper appear in revised form as Chapters 1-4 of Thompson (2008). For Hursthouse's form of Aristotelian naturalism, see Hursthouse (1999; 2012).

[4] Although Philippa Foot, Michael Thompson and Rosalind Hursthouse are indisputably the most well-known defenders of Aristotelian naturalism, they are not its only defenders. Other defenders include Brown (2008), Hacker-Wright (2009; 2013), Jordan (2016; 2017), Lott (2012a; 2012b; 2014), whom I mentioned in the text above, and Teichmann (2011). Similar approaches to ethics include Annas (2005), Haldane (2009), Kraut (2009) and MacIntyre (1999). Judith Thomson's work (1996; 2008) bears some obvious similarities with the Aristotelian naturalists, but also differs in crucial respects. For example, she thinks animal types, such as *tiger* or *human being*, are not "function kinds," so "there is nothing tigers do about which it can be said that doing that is the function of a tiger" (Thomson 2008: 20). Aristotelian naturalists like Foot (2001) and Thompson (2008) would disagree. See Chapter 2 for an elaboration of view that all organisms have a function or characteristic activity.

[5] There are other ways of slicing up its main features. See Thompson (2003).

kind.[6] When we make judgments like this, we are evaluating an organism's natural goodness. Natural goodness, on this view, is a function of the way in which an organism is characteristically constituted and the way it characteristically lives. For example, we evaluate deep, thick roots as good in an oak tree because oaks need deep, thick roots to secure adequate nutrition and to remain upright in high winds. We evaluate sharp eyesight in a hawk as good because hawks need sharp eyes to catch their dinner. Facts about how organisms are characteristically constituted and how they characteristically live are facts about an organism's nature. So natural goodness is based on an organism's nature.

The second main movement in the Aristotelian naturalist approach is to claim that ethical goodness is simply a specific kind of human natural goodness. For example, Philippa Foot says:

> …I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms. I want to show moral evil as 'a kind of natural defect'. (Foot 2001: 5)

Similarly, Michael Thompson:

> The judgments in which I criticize the actions of individual persons as unjust or imprudent, or criticize the people themselves as unjust or imprudent people, will thus be *special forms* of what I called judgments of natural goodness or badness… (Thompson 2004: 59; emphasis in original)

Rosalind Hursthouse does not put the point quite so explicitly, but it follows directly from her view, for she connects the notion of morally right action with the notion of natural goodness. Right actions are actions that the virtuous person would characteristically do in similar circumstances (Hursthouse 1999: chapter 1), where virtue and vice are understood

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[6] See Foot (2001: chapters 2 and 3), Hursthouse (1999: chapters 9 and 10) and Thompson (2004: 47-56; 2008: chapters 1-4). I will explain this type of evaluation in detail in Chapter 2.

as natural excellences or defects (1999: chapter 9). I will refer to this idea that moral goodness is a kind of natural human goodness as the *core thesis*.

In the quotes above, we can distinguish two main ideas, both of which flow from the core idea thesis. One concerns the nature of moral virtue. Aristotelian naturalists hold that moral virtue should be understood as a kind of natural excellence, and moral vice as a type of natural defect. Natural excellences are those features an organism needs in order to live the life characteristic of its kind, where this is understood to include not only features that are instrumental to living the life characteristic of one's kind, but also features that constitute such a life. Aristotelian naturalists and other theorists of a broad Aristotelian bent have argued in a variety of ways that moral virtues play precisely these roles in human life. For example, Anscombe (1981b), Foot (2001) and Hursthouse (1999) have all argued in various ways that the moral virtues are instrumentally and constitutively necessary for humans to engage in a variety of activities, including forming intimate relationships, caring for the young, dividing labor, persisting through adversity, and so on. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) has argued that the virtues are necessary for achieving goods internal to a host of important human practices. In later work (MacIntyre 1999) he argued that, given the dependency of human beings on each other, especially in their early stages of life, many of the virtues are necessary, both on the side of parents, teachers and other caregivers, and on the side of the developing individual, for humans to develop into independent practical reasoners. Talbot Brewer (2009) argues that virtue is both necessary for and cultivated in friendship, a fundamentally important relationship in any good human life. All these strategies connect virtue with the notion of a characteristic human life or human nature, such that the normative significance of the latter is supposed to transfer to the former.

The other idea that arises from the quotes above from Foot and Thompson concerns the nature of ethical judgments and facts. Aristotelian naturalists hold that ethical judgments are a kind of natural goodness judgment, and ethical facts are facts about human natural goodness. On this view, what distinguishes specifically ethical judgments and facts from other judgments and facts about natural goodness is not some special normative structure or linguistic function but rather their objects. Ethical goodness is the natural goodness of our ethically relevant faculties, namely, our will, practical reason, their dispositions, and actions. So, ethical judgments are judgments of the natural goodness or badness of a person's ethically relevant aspects, and the same for moral facts.

For the Aristotelian naturalist, then, virtuous character traits, ethical judgments and ethical facts all lead back to the notion of natural human goodness, which is a function of human nature. For this reason, Aristotelian naturalism is sometimes understood as an attempt to ground ethical normativity in facts about human nature.

2. The Normativity Objection

Aristotelian naturalism has come in for heavy criticism on multiple fronts. Objections to the view fall into three main types. The first type takes aim at the notion of natural goodness. Critics argue that the Aristotelian naturalist's notion of natural goodness is based on an understanding of essentialism, natural teleology and function that has been discredited by evolutionary biology.[7] A second family of objections rejects the link between natural goodness and ethical goodness on the grounds that what is naturally good for us

[7] For versions of this objection see Adams (2006: 51), FitzPatrick (2000), Kitcher (1999), Lenman (2005), Lewens (2010), Millum (2006) and Williams (1985: 44). For Aristotelian responses, see Foot (2001: 32, n. 10), Hursthouse (2012), Lott (2012a), Thompson (2008: 76-82) and Hacker-Wright (2009).

does not align with what is ethical good. One version of this objection holds that what is naturally good for us is ethically bad.[8] Another version holds that human nature is too indeterminate to serve as a basis for substantive ethical norms.[9] Yet another holds that human natural goodness is incompatible with commonsense moral requirements, such as the requirements to treat all human beings with serious moral consideration.[10]

The third main type of objection to Aristotelian naturalism rejects the link between natural goodness and ethical goodness on very different grounds. This objection holds that ethical norms cannot be based on natural goodness or human nature because ethical norms are normative and human nature is not. This objection will be the primary focus of this dissertation.

The worry begins with the deeply plausible idea that some, even many, moral judgments bear on what we have reason to do. If one rightly judges some action to be ethically good in some set of circumstances, one would have reason, maybe strong reason, to do that action if one were in those circumstances. The problem, according to this objection, is that facts and judgments about human nature and about human natural

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[8] Elijah Millgram puts none too fine a point on it:

> when natural historians do take a close look at humanity, what they find is not necessarily justice: for instance it has been argued by those who work on such things that human females are fine-tuned by natural selection to murder their infants in a suitable range of circumstances…that human males are fine-tuned by natural selection to rape women in a suitable range of circumstances… that humans value occupying dominant positions in hierarchies to a degree not compatible with justice of any kind. (Millgram 2009: 561-2)

Others who have pressed versions of this criticism include Andreou (2006), Slote (2003) and Woodcock (2006).

[9] Copp & Sobel (2004: 540), Prinz (2009), Williams (1985: 153), Woodcock (2015). This worry is also voiced in Watson (1997).

[10] See Gowans (2008) for a powerful, though ultimately unsuccessful form of this objection. Weaker versions of the same worry appear in McPherson (2012; 2015).

goodness are not normative. We can question why facts about the human species, and facts about human natural goodness and defect, matter for how *I* ought to live or what *I* have reason to do. For example, John Broome writes:

> Foot hopes to derive the conclusion that each human being should be virtuous, where 'should' is truly normative. But this conclusion cannot be drawn. Her premise is that each human being should be virtuous, where this is a matter of natural normativity. This means simply that being virtuous is necessary to the good of human beings. No truly normative conclusion follows. (Broome 2013: 12)

Often, especially at conferences, the objection comes in the form of a rhetorical question. As David Copp and Sobel put it,

> Why should we accord any normative significance whatsoever to our membership in the species or to the fact that we have a particular form of life? (Copp & Sobel 2004: 543)

Perhaps the most memorable version of the objection comes from John McDowell, himself a friend of the Aristotelian ethical tradition, but a staunch critic of the Aristotelian naturalist idea that ethical norms can be grounded in human nature. He argues that reason enables us to step back from our impulses, inclinations and instincts and question their rational credentials:

> Reason does not just open our eyes to our nature, as members of the animal species we belong to; it also enables and even obliges us to step back from it, in a way that puts its bearing on our practical problems into question. (McDowell 1998: 172)

These are just a few samples of an objection that has appeared in various guises all over the place.[11] The conclusion is supposed to be that Aristotelian naturalism is a nonstarter—even

[11] In addition to the examples quoted in the text above, see Antony (2000), Finlay (2007: 837), Lenman (2005), Prinz (2009), and Watson (1997: 67).

that it is an *obvious* non-starter. The idea that natural goodness is a kind of ethical goodness is simply a dead end. I call this the normativity objection.[12]

In syllogistic form, we may represent the objection as follows:

N1 Some ethical facts and judgments are normative.

N2 Facts and judgments about natural goodness are not normative.

N3 So, ethical facts and judgments cannot be a kind of natural goodness fact or judgment.

Now some philosophers take it as obvious that *all* ethical facts and judgments are normative, and thus may think **N1** is too weak. For example, Michael Smith (1994: 5-7) claims that according to ordinary moral practice and discourse, "moral judgments seem to be, or imply, opinions about the reasons we have for behaving in certain ways," and that this understanding of moral judgments is manifested in "ordinary moral practice as it is engaged in by ordinary folk." But others may not find Smith's view so obvious, holding instead that there could be ethical judgments—say about what is or is not admirable—that imply nothing about what we have reason to do.[13] For my purposes, we need not decide this issue, since the problem arises even with the weaker idea that only *some* moral facts or judgments are normative.

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[12] This objection should not to be confused with Derek Parfit's (2011: 324-27) objection of the same name. His objection is against non-analytical naturalism, which holds that although normative *claims* and *concepts* cannot be reduced to non-normative *claims* and *concepts*, normative *facts* can be reduced to, or are identical with, non-normative facts. The argument I am calling the normativity objection does not take sides on this dispute. An Aristotelian naturalist could be a non-analytical naturalist, in Parfit's sense of that term (in fact, most probably are), and a fellow non-analytical naturalist of a non-Aristotelian bent could consistently press my version of the normativity objection against the Aristotelian.

[13] I thank Linda Zagzebski for stressing this point in conversation.

Aristotelians have not been silent. They have responded, predictably, by rejecting the second premise of the normativity objection—that natural goodness facts and judgments are not normative—arguing that they *are* normative, and thus that there is no conceptual or logical difficulty in moving from claims about what is naturally good for humans to claims about what we ought to do. For example, in her book *Natural Goodness* Foot considers two questions posed by Gary Watson:

1. Can an objective theory really establish that being a gangster is incompatible with being a good human being?
2. If it can, can it establish an intelligible connection between [this] appraisal and what we have reason to do as individuals?[14]

Foot takes herself to have answered both questions in the affirmative. She answers the first question by way of her account of natural human goodness, and the second by way of her novel account of practical rationality,[15] concluding that she has shown an "intrinsic link" or a "conceptual connection" between natural goodness and reasons (Foot 2001: 64-5). Similarly, Micah Lott, one of the "new cohort"[16] of Aristotelian naturalists, makes much the same point, claiming that

> any substantive account of human form—any conception we might step back *from*—will already *embody* some understanding of how we have reason to act and to live… With a conception of human form, *there can be no gap between what is normal and normative*. (Lott: 2014: 771; emphasis in original)

Both Foot and Lott lean heavily on the work of Michael Thompson (1995; 2004; 2008) who has labored long and hard on this issue, arguing that merely conceiving of an object as

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[14] The questions come from Watson (1997: 67). Foot quotes them in Foot (2001: 53).
[15] I explain Foot's account of practical rationality in Chapter 2, Section 4.
[16] This is Scott Woodcock's (2015: 21) label for the small group of philosophers following the path forged by Foot, Hursthouse and Thompson. In this "new cohort" Woodcock includes Stephen Brown, John Hacker-Wright, Roger Teichmann and Micah Lott.

a living thing puts in place the conceptual materials for normative evaluations.[17] The gist of the Aristotelian naturalist response, then, is that if one understands what Aristotelians mean by their key notions of *nature* or *life form* and *natural goodness*, one can see that facts and judgments about natural goodness are *essentially* normative, that normativity is built into the very conceptual structures that enable us to grasp something as a living thing. The conclusion is supposed to be that **N2** is false and the normativity objection fails.

I have long been intrigued by the normativity objection. I have deep sympathies with the Aristotelian naturalist approach, and yet I find the normativity objection compelling. In part, this study has been an attempt to diagnose my own sense that although Aristotelians have mounted powerful responses to the normativity objection, they have not managed to assuage the underlying concern that continues to motivate the objection and leaves critics apparently unmoved by the Aristotelian responses.

3. The Argument in Prospect

The argument of this study divides into two main moves. First, I will argue that there is indeed a problem in the Aristotelian naturalist approach that concerns the normativity of human nature, although the normativity objection as it is usually framed does not quite capture it, and Aristotelians have failed to see it. The problem is that there is an explanatory gap in the Aristotelian naturalist's account of ethical goodness. They attempt to ground the normativity of ethics in human nature (e.g., by explaining the normativity of virtue by linking it with what is naturally good for human beings). And they do this because they think facts about human nature are intrinsically normative. But I will argue human

[17] For similar Aristotelian responses, see Haldane (2009: 48-9) and Annas (2005: 15).

nature is not intrinsically normative. So, if Aristotelians want to claim that human nature is normative, they need to offer an account of what *makes* human nature normative. They have not successfully done this. I call this the *normativity problem*. It is a problem because it threatens the viability of Aristotelian naturalism in general. To see why, recall the core thesis, which holds that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness. Ethical goodness clearly is normative, however, so if Aristotelian naturalists cannot explain the normativity of that region of natural goodness, they will have left a central feature of ethical experience unexplained.

I use the term 'normativity problem' to distinguish this issue from the normativity objection. The normativity problem is not an argument against Aristotelian naturalism, so it does not amount to an objection. If one could argue that the problem has no solution, then one would have an objection. But I think the problem does have a solution, which brings me to the second main move of my overall argument.

If Aristotelians want to retain their core thesis that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness, they need to explain what makes natural goodness normative. I believe the most promising strategy is quite different from what Aristotelian naturalists have so far attempted. I will propose a solution that has two key parts. The first is a metanormative account of the *source* of normativity. I will suggest that the most promising such account is a new version of constructivism I call *Aristotelian constructivism*. The label is not original, and my view has been heavily influenced by a variety of authors, but, as far as I can tell, the structure of the view I will propose is distinctive in the literature. It thus stakes out new territory on the theoretical map—territory that contains one half of the resources needed for a new kind of response to the normativity problem. The other part of the solution consists in a certain account of practical reason, which is essentially an expanded version of

the account Foot developed in her last published works. The basic idea is that the account of practical reason connects human final ends with human nature, and then Aristotelian constructivism explains the normativity of those final ends, but without appealing to the intrinsic normativity of human nature. This provides Aristotelian naturalists a way of explaining the practical normativity of human nature and natural goodness, thereby saving their core thesis.

Here is how the argument will unfold. The first main move occupies Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2 I unpack the Aristotelian naturalist's understanding of the concepts *life form* and *natural goodness* in detail, showing how these concepts are both conceptually linked together and logically fundamental in our thinking about living things. Then I explain how Aristotelian naturalists have attempted to connect these concepts with normative reasons for action. Two complementary accounts have been offered, one by Micah Lott (leaning heavily on Thompson's work) and one by Philippa Foot, both of which rely on the idea that facts about human nature are intrinsically normative. My goal in this chapter is not only to explain the Aristotelian naturalist approach in detail but, as it were, to give Aristotelian naturalists their due by providing a sense of the depth of thought that underlies the approach. I do this because I think it is important to see that in a certain sense the Aristotelian naturalist response to the normativity objection *does* work. There *is* a normative structure embedded in our conception of living things. In this sense, the normativity objection, as it is sometimes framed, fails to stick. In Chapter 3, however, I argue that Aristotelian naturalism still does have an important problem.

I begin Chapter 3 by defending a distinction between two types of normative facts: *practical* facts, which are essentially linked with reasons, and *evaluative* facts, which are not, but are still irreducibly normative. Then I develop what I call the parity argument to show

that facts about natural goodness are evaluative but not practical. The reason is because facts about natural goodness are grounded in constitutive facts about a thing's life form, and constitutive facts are not intrinsically practical. Having the evaluative/practical distinction clearly in view will help us diagnose the problem in Lott and Foot's accounts. They fail because they assume, without argument, that human nature is intrinsically practical.

My conclusion will not be that human nature is not practically normative. I readily grant that evaluative facts can be, and often are, practically normative. But since evaluative facts are not *intrinsically* practical, when they are practical, there must be something that accounts for their practical normativity. The same goes for human nature. Because it is not intrinsically practical, if Aristotelian naturalists want to maintain that it is practically normative, they need to explain what *makes* it so. They have offered no adequate account. This is the normativity problem.

The second main movement of my argument spans Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4 I begin building my two-part solution to the normativity problem by showing what type of explanation Aristotelians need. Following Ruth Chang, I distinguish between the *bearers*, the *nature*, and the *source* of practical normativity. What Aristotelian naturalists need is a metanormative account of the *source* of practical normativity. Noting this is important because Aristotelian naturalists by and large have not engaged with mainstream accounts of normative source. I propose to change that.

Aristotelian constructivism is the metanormative theory that holds the most promise for helping to solve Aristotelian naturalism's normativity problem. I begin unpacking the view by situating it with respect to several well-known distinctions in the metanormative literature. I understand constructivism to be a form of *realism*, to be a *global*

rather than a *local* theory, and I frame it in terms of a *practical standpoint* rather than in *procedural* terms. I briefly explain the two main forms of constructivism on offer in the literature, the Kantian and Humean versions, and show how Aristotelian constructivism falls in between them in several respects. Having located Aristotelian constructivism on the theoretical map, I begin sketching its basic outlines. The view is constructivist in that practical normativity arises only from within the first-person perspective, as a product of agents' mental states. As a general thesis about the source of practical normativity, Aristotelian constructivism holds that facts are practically normative for some agent in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of that agent's life form. The core idea is that being an agent involves perceiving the world in a practical light—taking certain states of affairs as *to-be-done* or *to-be-avoided*—and that there are general facts about how agents of a particular life form normatively perceive the world. This practical standpoint grounds their reasons. Applied to humans, Aristotelian constructivism holds that facts are practically normative for humans in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of the human life form, where this is understood as the standpoint of properly functioning human practical reason.

Chapter 5 contains an account of human practical reason, the second part of my proposed solution to the normativity problem. The account connects our final ends to human nature. The way it does this is by invoking the Aristotelian naturalist's understanding of the concept of a life form, explained in Chapter 2. Our understanding of a life form just is our understanding of how an organism is characteristically constituted and how it characteristically lives. The view, then, is that humans characteristically take human nature to be practically normative in virtue of taking as final ends those general activities that characterize the human life form. I unpack the view by elaborating its core

theses: (1) Human practical reason, like any natural power, can malfunction. So there is such a thing as its proper functioning. (2) Some of the standards of proper functioning for human practical reason are species-relative. (3) When functioning properly, human practical reason takes certain substantive states of affairs as final ends. (4) These final ends include those general activities that are constitutive of the human life form. Then I propose four examples that plausibly qualify as both characteristic human activities and final ends.

I close in Chapter 6 by explaining exactly how Aristotelian constructivism, combined with my account of human practical reason, solves the normativity problem. The problem, again, is that Aristotelian naturalists have not adequately explained the practical normativity of human nature. The reason this is a problem is because it threatens the credibility of their core thesis, for it leaves a central feature of ethical experience unexplained. Aristotelian constructivism and my account of practical reason together solve the normativity problem because they offer a plausible account of the practical normativity of human nature and natural goodness, without attempting to ground that normativity in the evaluative-normative structure of human nature.

In the Chapters below I can do little more than sketch the basic outlines of both theories. The development of this project has involved following out many threads which I ended up cutting for the sake of keeping the big picture in view. Well aware that I have left many claims undefended and assumptions unexamined, my hope is that in sticking to the big picture and showing how Aristotelian constructivism and my account of practical reason fit together to address Aristotelian naturalism's normativity problem, I have made the case that both theories deserve further reflection, development and critical attention, especially from those interested in seeing the Aristotelian naturalist project succeed.

4. Preliminaries

Before I launch into the first main move of my argument, I need to make a few preliminary but important points. First, I need to ward off a concern which, unaddressed, might threaten to demotivate my whole project. Second, I need to clarify some of the terminology I will be using throughout this study.

The Heart of Aristotelian Naturalism

My solution to the normativity problem involves conceding the point critics have been hammering for a long time—that facts about human nature and natural goodness are not intrinsically normative in the practical sense. Why should Aristotelian naturalists be interested in my proposal if it means conceding that human nature is not normative after all? Isn't the normativity of human nature part of the very heart of Aristotelian naturalism? And if so, why not look for other possible responses—perhaps a deep reexamination of the very concept of normativity, or something else?

I am all for exploring multiple avenues of response, and would wholeheartedly endorse sustained reexamination of our thinking about normativity. But I also think the idea that human nature is the ground of practical normativity is not essential to the Aristotelian naturalist approach. The theoretical heart of Aristotelian naturalism is the claim I am calling the *core thesis*, the idea that moral goodness is a kind of natural goodness. It is the heart of Aristotelian naturalism, because it supports, in distinctive Aristotelian naturalist fashion, a variety of other important commitments that typify the Aristotelian naturalist approach.

The first is *cognitivism*, the idea that moral claims, and normative claims more generally, are truth apt. Cognitivism holds that the mental states normative claims express

are beliefs about the way the world is, rather than non-cognitive motivational states, as non-cognitivists claim.[18] Philippa Foot's early work is pervaded by various arguments meant to support cognitivism and show the implausibility of non-cognitivism, especially in its prescriptivist and emotivist forms.[19] The cognitivist/non-cognitivist debate no longer looms so large in Aristotelian naturalist writings, but it remains a key commitment. If moral goodness is a kind of natural goodness, then moral claims are claims about the natural goodness of something. For example, claims about the moral quality of a person, or character trait, or potential action, are claims about the natural goodness of the person, trait or action. Such claims express beliefs about facts, and thus are truth-apt. So, the core thesis supports Aristotelian naturalists' commitment to cognitivism.

The core thesis also supports *objectivism*. Moral objectivism, as I will understand it, holds that the truth of moral claims is not subject to the beliefs or desires of any individual agent, but is instead grounded in something more general, and thus more stable. Objectivism comes in degrees. One might hold that the truth of moral claims is grounded in facts about a given culture or linguistic community. On the other side of the spectrum, one might hold that the truth of moral claims is grounded in sui generous facts that are entirely metaphysically independent of the existence of individual agents—perhaps in God, or in some other type of non-natural fact. Aristotelian naturalists fall somewhere between these two views, holding that the truth value of moral claims depend on facts about our life form. The core thesis offers a way of defending this version of normative objectivism, for it entails that claims about what is ethically good or bad claims about human natural

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[18] See Miller (2003: Chapter 1) for a helpful overview of the different versions of cognitivism and non-cognitivism, and the traditional arguments used to support them.
[19] See, for example, Foot (2002d; 2002e).

goodness or badness, and what is naturally good or bad for humans, is determined by general facts about the human life form, not by facts about any particular individual's beliefs or desires.

Finally, the core thesis supports *metaethical naturalism*. Aristotelian naturalists characteristically reject approaches that ground practical normativity in something *non*-natural, whether that be irreducible and impersonal *non*-natural facts or *super*-natural facts, say, about God's nature or God's commands. Aristotelian naturalism is an attempt to see ethics as continuous with, and fully explainable in terms of, the natural world. The core thesis supports this commitment because it construes ethical facts as a type of fact that is fully explicable without reference to the non-natural or supernatural.

The core thesis makes possible a distinctly Aristotelian naturalist defense of these three core commitments. So, in giving up the idea that human nature is intrinsically practically normative, we do not lose much, so long as we can retain and defend the core thesis. A principal goal of this study is to do precisely that.

On Reasons

Since I will be talking a fair bit about reasons, I should note what type of reason I have in view. Reasons are often divided into the two main categories of *explanatory* and *normative*. Explanatory reasons illuminate phenomena or make it intelligible, whereas normative reasons support or justify acts, beliefs and emotions.[20] I will be concerned with normative reasons. Within the domain of normative reasons, it is also customary to distinguish two

[20] These are rough categorizations, and may not be entirely distinct. See, e.g., Raz (2013: 26-35) and Schroeder (2007: 10-15) for especially illuminating discussions on the relation between explanatory and normative reasons.

main types of reasons: *theoretical* or *epistemic* and *practical*. Theoretical reasons are normative reasons that determine how we should adjust our psychic states (beliefs and emotions) to "track how things are," whereas practical reasons determine what we should do, in light of how things are. I will be primarily concerned with practical reasons, and I shall understand 'action' in a broad sense to include not only intentional behaviors, but also intellectual actions, such as intentionally attending to an object, or trying to change one's mood.

One last terminological clarification: although Aristotelian naturalism is an approach to ethics, and although much of the debate is motivated by ethical concerns, I will usually speak of reasons in general, rather than specifically about moral or ethical reasons. In doing so I am following not only Philippa Foot, but also the general trajectory of metaethics in the last 40 years.[21] Whereas metaethics in the 1950s, '60s and '70s focused almost exclusively on morality, and moral claims about right and wrong, most writers since that time have broadened their focus to practical reasons in general, treating moral reasons as a special class of practical reasons.[22] This general emphasis fits well with the inclination, common in Aristotelian ethical approaches, to reject a rigid distinction between moral and non-moral action, focusing instead on what makes *any* action good or bad—where 'good' and 'bad' is taken not in some special moral sense but in a more general sense linked with human nature.[23]

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[21] Foot's scholarly focus has never been far from ethical concerns, but in her mature work she proposes an entirely general theory of reasons for action (Foot 2001; 2004). I explain the essentials of her theory in Chapter 3.

[22] See Scanlon (2014: 1-2).

[23] For example, Elizabeth Anscombe (2005b: 209) defends the thesis that "All human action is moral action." In so doing she was following the Thomistic understanding of action—see Aquinas (2008: *ST* I-II.1.3.*c*) and McInerny (1997: Chapter 1)—which arguably follows the Aristotelian understanding. See, e.g., Anscombe (2005a), who argues that the idea of a very special sort of reason or obligation we moderns call 'moral' cannot be found in Aristotle. Aristotle does speak of moral or ethical virtues (Aristotle 1984: *Nichomachean*

CHAPTER 2: NATURAL GOODNESS AND REASONS

In Chapter 1 I described Aristotelian naturalism as involving two main movements. The first identifies a certain sort of evaluative judgment about living things. The first task of this chapter (Sections 1-3) is to explain the central notions implicated in those evaluative judgments, namely, the concepts *life form* and *natural goodness*. One must have a firm grasp on these concepts in order to understand the second main movement, in which Aristotelian naturalists extend this system of evaluation to human beings and the ethical domain. This is because in order for Aristotelian naturalists to claim that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness, and retain the plausible idea that some ethical facts are normative, they must be able to show that some facts about natural goodness are normative. And one cannot fully understand the Aristotelian naturalist account of this without understanding the notion of a life form and the related notion of natural goodness. In the final part of this chapter (Section 4) I explain how Aristotelian naturalists have attempted to connect these two notions with practical reasons, thereby attempting to falsify the normativity objection's controversial premise.

1. 'Good'

The Aristotelian naturalist understanding of the concept *good* traces, as one might expect, to Aristotle. But Peter Geach, in his paper "Good and Evil" (1956), is usually credited with reviving the notion in contemporary Anglophone analytic philosophy. He argued that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective. Attributive adjectives cannot be severed from

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Ethics 1103a1-10), but the point of the descriptor is to distinguish that type of virtue from intellectual virtues—not, as most moderns might think, from prudential virtues.

their subject without losing their sense, for the content of the adjective is determined by the noun or noun phrase it modifies. Predicative adjectives, by contrast, stand on their own, and thus can be detached from their subject without losing their sense. For example, 'red' is a predicative adjective. So "*X* is a red apple'" can be split into "*X* is red" and "*X* is an apple," each resulting in a proposition the contents of which are independently understandable. 'Small', by contrast, is an attributive adjective, and thus although "X is a small elephant" can be split into two apparently sensible locutions—"*X* is small" and "*X* is an elephant"—we find on reflection that the contents of both statements are not independently understandable. For "*X* is small" tells us nothing about the actual size of *X* until we know what *X* is. Is *X* a mouse? A dog? An elephant? A blue whale? Without knowing what kind of thing *X* is, we can *say* "X is small," but we will not know whether, for example, we must look out lest we crush *X* or lest *X* crush us.

What holds for 'small' holds for 'good', since 'good', on the Aristotelian naturalist view, is also an attributive adjective. Hence, the bare statement "*X* is good" tells us almost nothing about how it is with *X* until we bring in some noun or noun phrase. This means that any statement of the form "X is good" must be understood as shorthand for "*X* is a good *F*," where 'F' stands for some noun or noun phrase. And note that what stands in for 'F' in some particular claim makes all the difference for how we assess both the claim and its object. I suspect we would think about Marjie rather differently if we are told she is a good mother than if we were told she is a good interrogator.

As the foregoing suggests, the 'F' variable can represent a wide variety of evaluative standards. An oleander bush might be a good hedge and a bad meal. A bull might be a good sire and a bad pet. All of these statements are perfectly legitimate uses of 'good', for 'good' is an evaluative term, and we can evaluate individual things relative to all sorts of

standards, including standards set by our purposes and desires. One particular sort of evaluative standard is of special interest to Aristotelian naturalists—and not only to them, but also to veterinarians, farmers, pet owners, zoologists, biologists, medical doctors, parents, and just about anyone who is interested in living things. To put it roughly, this is the standard we employ when we evaluate an organism as a member of its species. A good oleander bush is also a good hedge (in some contexts, at least[24]), but that is because good oleanders have the features we want in a hedge. What makes a particular oleander bush a good *oleander* is something else. Roughly, it is exemplifying those features that characterize its species. This is the type of evaluation of interest to Aristotelian naturalists—evaluating organisms as specimens of their species or life form. This is to say that an organism's life form—or rather facts about its life form—can serve as standards of evaluation. In order to see how this works, we need to consider the notion of a life form in more detail.

2. Organisms, Life and Activity

It will be helpful to begin with a few truisms.[25] Some things are alive. We call them *organisms*. Like other medium sized objects, organisms are composites of smaller things—

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[24] Oleanders are vigorous plants, tolerant of poor soil and low water conditions. The oleander is also poisonous, which is advantageous in some contexts (e.g. deer will not eat it). Of course, this makes it unfit as a hedge in other contexts where, e.g., domesticated animals are at risk of sampling its attractive leaves.

[25] This section is heavily informed by the Aristotelian account of goodness recently defended by Christine Korsgaard, known mostly for her extensive work in neo-Kantian ethics. In some recent publications she has emerged as an able defender of an Aristotelian conception of natural goodness. See Chapter 2 of her book *Self Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (2009a) and her recent papers "The Relational Nature of the Good" (2013) and "On Having a Good" (2014).

I should note that nothing in these paragraphs is meant to provide a definition of life or of what it is to be an organism. I am simply calling attention to phenomena that characterize organisms.

ultimately, things like electrons, protons and neutrons, and whatever *they* are made of. Since medium sized objects are all made of basically the same stuff, and since objects are different from each other, that difference must be explained by how that basic stuff is put together. Being composed of atoms that are internally configured in this particular way, and having its atoms put together in that particular way, makes this object a tree, as opposed to, say, a snowflake. Generally speaking, to be any particular object is to be structured or configured in a particular way. The traditional term for this is 'form', where this is understood to include not only shape but also internal structure. If the tree disintegrates into its component atoms, it is no longer a tree. Hence, to persist in being any particular thing is to persist in retaining one's form.

Things persist—they keep being what they are—in different ways, depending on the *type* of thing they are. Inanimate objects like chairs, snowflakes, or gold coins keep being what they are simply by not being destroyed. For an organism to remain in existence, however, it is not enough simply to avoid destruction, although obviously it must do that too. For an organism to remain in existence it must *do* things—or, more precisely, processes must be going on within it—processes that support and maintain its life. Some organisms also must *do* things in the ordinary sense in order to keep being what they are. They have to find food, for example, or mate, or run from a predator. They have to do these things in order for their internal vital processes to keep doing what *they* do. Living things, then, maintain their own existence not only through avoiding destruction by some external force but also by actively maintaining themselves. Living essentially involves activity.

Since living involves activity, and activity involves physical motion, and physical motion requires energy in order to keep going, one activity all organisms must do is acquire

and processes energy. This involves activities like taking in nutrients, metabolizing them and eliminating waste and toxins. Organisms do these things in many different ways. For some organisms, these activities and processes happen, as it were, automatically. Trees, for example, take in water and nutrients by *absorbing* them. Other organisms must do things in the stronger sense of 'do' in order to support their vital processes. For example, many organisms must *eat*, which usually involves more specific activity types such as *tearing* grass, *chewing*, *straining* out krill from sea water, and so on. Many organisms must also move about, sleep, sun themselves, breach, and so on, in order to acquire and process energy. Many organisms also need to do another sort of activity in order to stay alive: they need to keep their bodies from becoming nutrients for other organisms. That is, they must defend themselves from predators. This may involve *fleeing*, *flying*, *fighting*, *hiding*, *swimming*, *spraying* or *excreting* foul-smelling substances, *rolling into a ball*, *changing color* and so on. All of these activities can be classified as self-maintaining activities. In general, any organism, in order to remain an organism, must do its self-maintaining activities to keep its vital processes going. An organism cannot long remain what it is if it stops undergoing or doing these things. If it stops, it will soon become an inanimate object.

Given the way the world works as we know it, all organisms must die. If disease, injury, or predation do not take them, the stuff they are made of and the bonds that hold the stuff together begin to wear down and disintegrate. Also, given the way the world works as we know it, organisms do not simply spring into existence on their own. And, given these two facts, in order for there to be organisms around beyond the life-span of those that currently exist, at least some organisms must do an additional sort of activity. They must pass on their particular structure or configuration to more material. That is, they

must reproduce. So the activity of reproduction, like the activities involved in self-maintenance, is essential to the continuance of life.

To summarize, then, the first thing to notice is that an organism is a composite object that must *do* things in a certain sense in order to keep being what it is. The things it must do include self-maintaining activities and, for most organisms, reproduction. It is worth noting at this juncture that already we are very close to a certain notion of function. Organisms are things that are composed of smaller parts and systems organized such that they work together for a certain end or outcome, namely, the continued existence of the whole organism. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how we might conceive of living things other than as functional systems. If I am right, then there is room for a certain notion of function in our conception of organisms which is quite different from the notion of function employed within evolutionary biological explanations. Others have discussed this issue in detail, however, so having noted it, I will move on.[26]

Here is a second thing to notice about organisms. Although organisms self-maintain and reproduce in different ways, even radically different ways, it is not as though each individual organism has its own wholly unique way of maintain itself and reproducing. Rather, we find predictable patterns among groups of organisms. An organism's offspring will tend to self-maintain and reproduce in basically the same way as its parent does or did. There is enough similarity across the generations of organisms that it is possible to form general descriptions of how organisms go about their self-maintaining and reproductive activities. Birds *like this* migrate to such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time. Plants

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[26] See, for example, Adams (2006: 51), FitzPatrick (2000), Kitcher (1999), Lenman (2005), Lewens (2010), Millum (2006) and Williams (1985: 44). For Aristotelian responses, see Foot (2001: 32, n. 10), Hursthouse (2012), Lott (2012a), Thompson (2008: 76-82) and Hacker-Wright (2009).

like this bloom every year at such-and-such a time, and their blooms are of such-and-such color. Monkeys *like that* reproduce in such and such a way at such-and-such a time, and generate so many offspring. Living things, that is, have *characteristic* ways of living and reproducing—even dying. The judgments by which we express our understanding of these characteristic ways of living and reproducing turn out to be crucially important for the Aristotelian account of natural goodness, for what we are expressing in these judgments is our understanding of a particular form of life, or life form. To understand how a living thing is characteristically constituted and how it characteristically lives is to understand *what* it is, or its nature.

Aristotelian naturalists claim that we can evaluate organisms as good ones or bad ones, or somewhere in between, by reference to this generalized conception of the particular life form in question. Roughly, if an organism's parts and activities contribute in the characteristic way to its living the characteristic life of its species, it is a good one of its kind. If they don't, the organism is in that respect defective. Thus, we rightly evaluate a hawk as defective—lacking in goodness—if it shares the visual capacities of a mole. It is a defective, and the mole is not, because for the hawk form of life, good eyesight is crucial for helping it find and catch its next meal. We would not, however, evaluate a mole as defective if it shares the visual capacities of our myopic hawk. For moles have humbler means of securing their food.[27]

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[27] A full exposition of the notion of natural goodness would give special attention to the fact that good-making features of organisms do not always benefit the particular individual being evaluated, but rather benefit their offspring, or perhaps other species members. A bluebird that does not sit on its eggs may have more opportunities to nourish itself and perhaps maximize its chances of survival. Still, a bluebird that does not brood its eggs is in that respect defective. Honey bees are another commonly cited example. Honey bees die after stinging an attacker. So, in one obvious sense, stinging an attacker does not benefit

I have now identified three different pieces of the Aristotelian naturalist understanding of the basic evaluative framework. There is (1) the notion of a life form, (2) a certain type of generalized judgment by which we express our understanding of a life form, and (3) a different sort of judgment by which we evaluate particular organisms against facts about their life form. In the next section I will look at each of these notions in more detail, so that we can see the logical relations between them. I think it will be helpful to use a fictional example.

3. The Life Form System

Michael Thompson has done more than any other Aristotelian naturalist to theorize the notion of a life form and the associated notion of natural goodness.[28] In this section I lean heavily on his 2004 paper "Apprehending Human Form." He has shown that judgments about natural goodness are caught up in a web of logical connections with other distinct but related forms of judgment. Five forms of judgment in particular fit together in an interlinked system, such that forming a judgment of natural goodness (one of the five types) about some individual organism logically depends on, and implicitly commits one to, further judgments within what I will call the *life form system*. It is important to see the interconnected nature of this system, for that is what underlies the Aristotelian naturalist

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that particular bee. Still, a honey bee on guard duty who is not disposed to sting an attacker is defective in that respect.

[28] See his paper "The Representation of Life" (1995), later revised and amplified as Chapters 1-4 of his book *Life and Action* (2008). Many of the same ideas also appear in his paper "Apprehending Human Form" (2004). The significance of Thompson's contributions is not lost on Elijah Millgram, who, though no friend of Aristotelian naturalism, says in his review of *Life and Action*: "Thompson's book stands a decent chance of becoming the *Naming and Necessity* of the next round of moral philosophy, and if it does, the attention it receives will be entirely deserved" (Millgram 2009: 563).

thought that claims about human nature entail normative claims about what is good and bad for humans.

Type 1: Life form attributions. Suppose you are a conservationist happily poking around in the wood when you come across a new creature you have never seen before. It has dense, brown, coarse fur, a short, bony protrusion sticking straight out of its head, a thick, stubby tail, and a peculiar way of hobbling along through the underbrush. Since you have seen only one of these critters, there is much you do not know about it. You have not a clue whether, e.g., this is its normal mode of locomotion or whether it is injured; whether its short tail is typical of such creatures or whether it had an unfortunate encounter with a snapping turtle, and so on. As you follow it, however, suddenly you come upon a whole crowd of these things, all of them with the same horn, hobble, and tail.

Of course, the critical scientist in you knows that it may be too early to say with certainty whether the horn, hobble, and tail, *characterize* these critters as distinctive form of life. It is possible, e.g., that each one of these individuals had an unfortunate encounter with that aggressive snapping turtle, or that they all came down with the gout. Still, as you discover more and more groups of these creatures, all sharing the same horn, hobble, and tail, you become more confident that what you are seeing is not merely a large clan of gouty, horned creatures of some other known type, but rather a distinctive form of life. At this point you have come to recognize that the similarity between the individual creatures is no accident. They are similar because they are the same *type* of thing; they share the same life form. You can now give their type a name—"horned hobblers," you call them—and form a certain sort of judgment about each particular organism. Pointing to one of the brown, furry creatures you say, "That is a horned hobbler."

This judgment is a life form attribution. It classifies the subject of the judgment as falling under a newly acquired concept, the concept we are naming *horned hobbler*. The general form of these judgments is "*X* is an *S*," or "*X* is a bearer of life form *S*," or "*X* is a member of species *S*." In other circumstances, we might say. "Rufus is a hamster" or "Graham, is a human being," or "That brown critter over there is a member of the species *horned hobbler*."

Type 2: Natural-historical judgments. Above I said that when you have observed enough horned hobblers to be able confidently to make type 1 judgments about them, you will be in position to know that their peculiar gait and abbreviated tail are not merely accidental similarities but are how horned hobblers are characteristically constituted. Eventually we are able to move from discrete observations about the constitution and activities of particular organisms to an implicit grasp of the general type, which we name *horned hobbler*. This implicit grasp of the general type can be articulated and made explicit in a second form of judgment. "Horned hobblers have a bony horn atop their heads,"' one might say, or "the horned hobbler's tail is 5-8 inches long." The following example judgments share this same logical form:

[A] "The cottontail rabbit's gestation period is 29-31 days."

[B] "Wolves have a cooperative method of hunting."

[C] "The mayfly breeds in the springtime."

[D] "The cheetah has four long and powerful legs."

These sentences express a second and logically distinct form of judgment which Thompson calls *natural-historical judgments*, presumably after the literary genre in which they commonly appear—natural history. We can represent them schematically in the canonical

form: "The *S* is/has/does *F*", or "*S*'s are/do/have *F*," or "This is part of how *S*'s live: they are/do/have *F*."

Natural-historical judgments are the generalized descriptions I briefly discussed in Section 2 above. They are also the backbone of this whole account, so it will pay to linger on them to bring out five key features. First is the interdependent relationship I already mentioned above between life form concepts and natural-historical judgments. A life form concept is the mental item that mediates experience. To recognize this particular hairy thing *as* a horned hobbler is to apprehend it under the concept *horned hobbler*. We can make this concept explicit to ourselves and to others by articulating various aspects of that life form in natural-historical judgments. Although I will need to qualify this in a moment, we can get at the interrelation by saying that natural-historical judgments express the *content* of a life form concept.

Second, our understanding of particular life form concepts can be more or less complete, as reflected in the level of detail we could articulate in the associated natural-historical judgments. Above I gave four examples of natural-historical judgments. Each judgment was about a different life form. We could, however, form a whole array of natural-historical judgments about any one of these life forms, and indeed about any life form with which we have sufficient experience. We might, for example, add to the judgment about rabbit gestation more natural-historical judgments about cottontails, such as: "The cottontail has long ears and five toes on each front paw, the fifth called a 'dewclaw'." "Cottontails begin their breeding cycle in the early spring." "The doe is able to mate the same day she gives birth." And so on. If we keep adding true judgments to the list eventually we will have a whole catalogue of judgments that describe the cottontail rabbit life form. That is, we would have a complete set of judgments that describe how the

cottontail is constituted and how it maintains and reproduces itself. Following Thompson (2004: 50), we can call the complete class of such judgments the *natural history* of the cottontail rabbit. Similarly, we could also describe the horned hobbler in minute detail. We could describe not only how it mates and eats and defends itself; we could also describe how it digests, how its sensory systems work, and so on. The complete collection of such judgments would constitute the natural history of the horned hobbler. In general, a complete natural history makes fully explicit our understanding of what it is to be an organism of that type. Arguably our understanding of any particular life form is incomplete, however, and to that extent articulating a complete natural history is not possible. But no matter. We do know *some* things about *some* life forms—enough, e.g., for veterinarians to secure predictable results much of the time.

Our conception of a life form, then, can be more or less complete. Third, it can also be mistaken. Hence, we need to register an important qualification on my claim above that natural-historical judgments express the content of a life form concept. In the abstract, this is true. But when it comes to actual natural-historical judgments that you and I grasp in thought and speech, it is more correct to say that natural-historical judgments express *our understanding* of a life form concept, which can indeed be mistaken. If my only experience of cottontail rabbits is with those owned by my rabbit-lover neighbor, whose cottontails have all been dewclawed, I might form the judgment "The cottontail has four toes on each paw." I would be wrong. The cottontail rabbit actually has five toes, including the dewclaw. So I would be expressing a partially mistaken conception of the life form *cottontail*. So our conception of any particular life form can be erroneous. This suggests that the truth value of any particular natural-historical judgment is not determined by what I believe about the organism in question, nor is it determined by my desires or preferences. In this sense,

natural-historical judgments are objective. This is why Philippa Foot (1994: 163) describes these sorts of judgments as "autonomously species-dependent." They are autonomous in that their truth value is determined independently of human interest and desire. They are species-dependent in that they are formed by reference to our conception of the species or life form of the individual in question. While the possibility of being mistaken indicates the possibility of a certain kind of objectivity, it also suggests that to some extent we should keep an open mind about our current understanding of any particular organism, including humans.

Fourth, natural-historical judgments exhibit a distinctive sort of generality. Consider again the example judgments listed above, the judgments:

[A] "The cottontail rabbit's gestation period is 29-31 days."

[B] "Wolves have a cooperative method of hunting."

[C] "The mayfly breeds in the springtime."

[D] "The cheetah has four long and powerful legs."

Clearly, these are general descriptions. But what kind of generality do they exhibit? One might be tempted to read A-D as universally quantified claims, generalized from a set of observations of particular organisms. This would be a mistake. Universal generalizations are falsified by exceptional cases, for universal generalizations purport to be true of each individual in the domain over which the quantifier ranges. But natural-historical judgments are not falsified by exceptional cases. For example, the truth of B is not called into question by a free-riding wolf who idles through the hunt and then shares in the kill at the end; nor is D thrown into doubt by some particular cheetah who lost its leg in a poacher's trap—or even a whole group of them who lost their legs to the same poacher. Or, consider another statement that often appears in the literature on this topic: "Humans have thirty-two

teeth."[29] This expression apparently expresses something true about human beings. Yet the fact that I am a human and that I do not have thirty-two teeth does not falsify it.

If the kind of generality operative in natural-historical judgments is not universal quantification, should we then interpret such judgments as statistical generalizations? Perhaps such judgments are meant to express what is usually, or perhaps almost always, the case. *Most* cottontail rabbits gestate their young for 29-31 days; but not all do. *Most* cheetahs have four long and powerful legs; but not all do. Exceptional cases do not impugn the truth of statistical generalizations. So one might initially be inclined to assimilate natural-historical judgments to this familiar type of generalization.

But if we interpret natural-historical judgments as statistical generalizations, once again we will have erred, and we know this for at least two reasons. Consider that the natural-historical judgment "The Mayfly dies shortly after breeding" is true, even though many Mayflies, living most of their lives as nymphs in the water, succumb to hungry fish long before they have a chance to breed. In general, it is possible (though not usual) for the predicate of a natural-historical judgment to fail to apply to the majority of individual organisms of the relevant kind, without impugning the truth of the judgment.[30] The second reason is even more telling: natural-historical judgments exhibit inferential patterns that statistical generalizations do not. Even though natural-historical judgments are not universally generalized claims, they can be joined by inferences that are sound for universal generalizations but clearly invalid for statistical generalizations. For instance, the natural-historical judgments "The *S* is *F*" and "The *S* is *G*" together entail "The *S* is both *F* and

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[29] This example traces to G. E. M. Anscombe (1958), who used it to call attention to this very feature of such expressions.

[30] Thompson (2004: 50-1). Plantinga (1993: 200-1) makes a similar point about the notion of proper function not being reducible to statistical generalizations.

G." For example: "The cheetah has long and powerful legs" and "The cheetah has a long, flexible tail" together entail "The cheetah has long, powerful legs and a long, flexible tail." In this respect, natural-historical judgments are like universally quantified claims, for "All *A*'s are *F*" and "All *A*'s are *G*" together entail "All *A*'s are *F* and *G*." And yet, such an inference would be invalid for any statistical generalization.[31]

Now, if natural-historical judgments are not universal generalizations, then clearly their subject cannot be the collection of all organisms of that type. That is, if it is true that "The mayfly breeds in the springtime," the grammatical subject of that judgment cannot refer to the set of all mayflies. (Again, many of them encounter hungry fish long before they have a chance to breed.) Similarly, if natural-historical judgments are not statistical generalizations, then clearly their subject cannot be a subset of all organisms of that type either. The best way to make sense of these judgments, according to Thompson, is to hold the subject of such judgments is not any particular organism or a set of actual organisms but rather the representation of a life form. That is, the grammatical subject of such judgments is singular—it represents a single life form concept. So, for instance, where the grammatical subject of the statement "that *S* is hobbling along" refers to *that* particular portion of flesh and bone, the subject of "The *S* hobbles along" refers to no particular organism at all, but rather to our conception of the life form itself. The generality of such judgments is explained by the fact that there are multiple bearers of the same life form.

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[31] Thompson (2008: 69). Thompson also considers and rejects two other attempts at reducing the generality of natural-historical judgments to a more familiar form. One attempt is to interpret natural-historical judgments as universal propositions qualified against exceptions by a ceteris paribus clause. The other attempt interprets natural-historical judgments using the linguist's category of a generic sentence. I will not review the arguments here. For the argument details see Thompson (2008: 69-83). The upshot is that both attempts clearly fail. Kitcher (1999: 64-68) also discusses the problem with trying to understand an organism's essence or nature in terms of what is statistically normal.

The fifth and last feature of natural-historical judgments I shall discuss is their peculiar temporal qualities. Although natural-historical judgments can register temporal relations, such as before and after, they have a kind of atemporality about them.[32] Speaking of a particular organism, you might say, "That *S* is hobbling along." If your claim is true, there is some animal out there hobbling along. By contrast, when asserting a natural-historical judgment you would instead say, "The *S* hobbles along," or "*S*'s hobble along." From these claims we could not infer that any particular *S* is in fact hobbling along right now. To take another example, you might say of an individual youthful specimen, "*This* 2-year old hobbler is developing her horn." You would be describing how it is with that particular organism here and now. But if you expressed the similar natural-historical judgment, you might say, "the horned hobbler begins *developing* its horn in its second year," perhaps pointing to our 2-year old specimen, adding, "like so." This statement's truth value would not, however, be affected in the least if, say, a plague had wiped out the previous year's offspring, so that there are in fact no 2-year old specimens to serve as examples. Similarly, claim C above, "The mayfly breeds in the springtime," is true at any time of year, whereas "Those yonder mayflies are breeding," if true, could be said only during the springtime. Natural-historical judgments are, therefore, atemporal in a certain way. Of course, mayflies have to exist, or had to have existed, in order for natural-historical judgments about them to be true. But once they do exist, natural-historical judgments about them float free in a certain sense from the particular doings of particular mayflies at particular times. All this is perfectly consistent with significant change in a life form's natural history, for life forms can evolve. Using my fictional example, suppose horned

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[32] See Thompson (2004: 49).

hobblers evolved such that they began developing their horn in their first year of life. Then it would no longer be true to say "The horned hobbler develops its horn in its second year." Thus, although life forms and natural histories are cut loose in the way I mentioned from the actual individual organisms with which they are associated, they are not eternal realities in some platonic sense (Foot 2001: 29).

Type 3: Vital descriptions. Having a grip on a particular life form enables us to form a third type of judgment: vital description. These are like life form attributions in that their subject is always a particular organism. They describe what is going on here and now with a particular organism: "That horned hobbler is mating," we say, as we see it mounting another one in the group. We might come back later to find the same creature munching away on the grass. "Now it is eating," we might say. The schematic form of such judgments would be something like: "This *S* (or *X*) is/has/does *G*" (Thompson 2004: 51).

Notice though that although the grammatical subject of a vital description is always singular and particular—a discrete collection of flesh, blood and bones that occupies a definite position in space and time—vital descriptions always make implicit appeal to (one's understanding of) the subject's life form. Following Thompson, I will express this idea by saying vital descriptions are *life form dependent*. Take as examples the two activities I just mentioned: reproducing and eating. These two vital activities can be physically constituted very differently in different forms of life. And, conversely, different vital processes can, in different forms of life, be physically constituted by the same sequence of events. Consider, for example, the process of cell division. For "amoeba-kind," as Thompson puts it (2004: 64), this process constitutes reproduction. For a human, it does not. Cell division is of course *part* of the process of human reproduction, as it would be for horned hobbler reproduction. But when your cells divide, for instance, as some of them did while you were

reading the last sentence, we cannot say there are now more humans in the room, whereas when amoeba cells divide, we can say there are more amoebae in the room. Something similar holds for all vital processes. We cannot so much as recognize some sequence of events going on in some region of space-time *as* a vital process of a particular type without implicit appeal to some understanding of its host life form. Hence, if I were to judge, truly: "That horned hobbler is mating," or "That horned hobbler is eating," then I must already have some implicit grasp on how horned hobblers characteristically reproduce and eat. If these judgments are true, I would have to know, e.g., that when one horned hobbler mounts another, it is not merely (or not always) a display of dominance or a form of play but in fact part of their reproductive process. And when it is munching grass, I would have to know, e.g., that it is not simply storing away the grass in an extra stomach, to be regurgitated at a later time for its young.[33]

Type 4: Judgments of natural goodness or badness. Natural-historical judgments, together with vital descriptions, enable us to express a third distinctive form of judgment. Once we know something of how a certain *type* of organism characteristically operates, and the features it characteristically has, and once we have formed judgments about how it is with some *particular* organism of that type, we are in position to form a kind of evaluative judgment. Suppose we now know the natural-historical judgment that "The horned

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[33] See Thompson (2008: 49-62) for more extensive argument and examples on this point. Note that it is a small step to the stronger claim that in order to cognize some particular physical process as a vital process at all, one must possess the concept of a life form. This is why the Aristotelian notion of a life form is not identical to the biologist's concept of a species. The biologists notion of a species—or, I should say, the various competing notions, for there is no single agreed upon one—is logically posterior to her notion of an individual organism. If the biologist did not first identify a collection of living things, she would have no use for the notion of a species to begin with. Yet, we cannot so much as conceive something as alive, as undergoing certain vital processes, unless the Aristotelian notion of life form is already on the scene. See Thompson (2008: 66, n. 11).

hobbler's head horn grows straight, perpendicular to its skull." And suppose we notice that one individual's horn is growing in a circular fashion. So we judge: "That horned hobbler's horn is crooked." We can now express the relation between this vital description and the natural-historical judgment with a third distinctive form of judgment, namely, a judgment of natural goodness or badness. Putting the point abstractly, we could say that from the natural-historical judgment "The S is/has/does F" and the vital description "This S is/has/does not F," we can infer a new form of judgment: "The S is good/defective in that it is/has/does F" (Thompson 2008: 80). We can call this a judgment of natural goodness, or natural goodness judgment. We can see then that natural goodness judgments are like vital descriptions in being life form dependent. They reach beyond the particular organism, necessarily implicating the evaluator's understanding of the organism's natural history.

The inference from a natural-historical judgment and a vital description to a judgment of natural goodness or defect is licensed primarily by the content of the concept *defect*. For the Aristotelian naturalist, to be defective just is to diverge in a certain way from its natural history.[34] Natural goodness, for the Aristotelian naturalist, is essentially the

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[34] The qualification 'in a certain way' is important. As Thompson describes it, natural defect is simply divergence from an organism's natural history. But, as Foot (2001: 30) has pointed out, our concept of defect is more specific than that. In fact, we have a different concept that captures mere divergence from an organism's natural history. It is the concept *abnormality*. *Defect* is different in that it is connected to a certain notion of harm. For example, if the horned hobbler's crooked horn made no difference to its life as a horned hobbler, it would seem to be best classified as an abnormality. If, on the other hand, the crooked horn placed it at a disadvantage with respect to its ability to defend itself, or if the horn will eventually curve around and start growing back into its head, as can happen in some types of cows and sheep, then the divergence would count as a defect. Thus, an organism is defective if the particular way in which it diverges from its natural history implies some sort of harm. The notion of implying harm here is complex, however, since an organism might get lucky and never actually be harmed by what would intuitively count as a defect—e.g. if our crooked horned hobbler never actually had to defend itself in way that required use of its horn. See Foot (2001: 34-5) for discussion on this point.

absence of natural defect. Naturally good features are sometimes described as those that enable an organism to live its characteristic life *well*. But I think it is actually more helpful to think of naturally good features as those that enable an organism to live its characteristic life—full stop. Features that in some way hinder that life are natural defects. Hence, there is a conceptual link between natural-historical judgments (and thus the notion of a life form), vital descriptions, and judgments of natural goodness. This will prove important later in this chapter when we consider Aristotelian responses to the normativity objection.

Type 5: Judgments of natural standard. We are now in position to see that in considering natural goodness judgments, a fifth form of judgment has already emerged, which we might call a judgment of natural standard. Its general form will be something like: "An *S* is defective/sound in a certain respect if it is/has/does *G*." In the previous section we saw how we could generate natural goodness judgments from natural-historical judgments combined with vital descriptions. This was possible because an organism's natural history can function as an ideal type or standard, against which we can compare particular individuals. Judgments of natural standard essentially make explicit this evaluative function of natural-historical judgments by employing an evaluative concept in the judgment itself. As Thompson puts it, "judgments of natural standard might be said simply to transpose our natural historical judgments into an evaluative key" (Thompson 2004: 55).

Judgments of natural standard employ an evaluative concept, and specify some condition under which the concept applies. They specify what we might call *natural norms*. For, in our language, the conceptual connections between *good*, *defect*, and *should*, allow us to say that if an *S* is good in that it is/has/does *G*, then *S*'s should be/have/do *G*. Thus we say that a hen should brood her eggs, a lioness should teach her cubs to hunt, and a wolf should cooperate in the hunt. These claims follow as a matter of conceptual necessity from

the corresponding judgments of natural standard (e.g., a mother hen is defective in respect of reproduction if she does not brood her eggs, and so on).

These five types of judgment, and the special concepts they employ, together constitute the life form system.

4. Natural Goodness and Reasons

I have suggested that Aristotelian naturalism can be understood in terms of two main claims or movements. The first identifies a certain mode of evaluation of living things. We have now considered this mode of evaluation in some detail, and noticed the way in which it is logically interconnected with related claims about an organism's nature or life form. The second main movement extends this mode of evaluation to human beings, including the ethical domain. Moral goodness is thus understood as the natural goodness associated with our ethically relevant powers, dispositions and action. Critics have been wary of this move, in part because humans are rational animals, and it seems the introduction of reason makes trouble for any attempt to understand moral goodness as a kind of natural goodness. When it comes to how human beings reproduce, raise and educate their offspring, build their dwellings, acquire nourishment, work together as a community, interact with the environment and other animal species, and so on, only very general descriptions will be possible. This has led some thinkers to doubt whether judgments that are general enough plausibly to capture the "characteristic way of life" of human beings are substantive enough to play any interesting role in ethical theory.[35]

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[35] See Conly (1988) and Copp & Sobel (2004). See also Gary Watson's comment: "An objective account of human nature would imply, perhaps, that a good human life must be social in character. This implication will disqualify the sociopath but not the Hell's Angel" (Watson 1997: 67). Hursthouse (1999: Chapter 9) interacts with this worry.

But Aristotelian naturalists argue that the same conceptual naturalistic structure still applies. It is true that when moving from plants and non-human animals to humans, our conception of the human way of life ends up much thinner than, say, our conception of the chimpanzee way of life. But a thinner conception is not no conception. Philosophers of a broadly Aristotelian bent disagree both on how thick this conception is and on the way in which it relates to ethical norms.[36] Aristotelian naturalism holds there are indeed substantive facts about how the human characteristically lives—substantive enough to support the idea that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness—and that these facts ground substantive ethical norms.[37]

The normativity objection takes aim at precisely this idea, that natural goodness judgments can have any normative bearing on action. In order to see how Aristotelian naturalists defend the second main movement of their approach against the normativity objection, we need to see how they attempt to connect natural goodness and reasons. Two main strategies have been offered. They are consistent with each other, but come at the issue from opposite ends. Micah Lott, one of the "new cohort" of Aristotelians naturalists, starts by clarifying the Aristotelian notion of the human life form and attempts to show a logical continuity between claims about it and claims about what we have reason to do. The other main strategy, developed by Foot, starts by developing an account of practical

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[36] Regarding the substantiality of general facts about human nature, see e.g. Mark LeBar (2013), who defends an Aristotelian account of practical reason, but holds a very thin account of human nature. I discuss LeBar in Chapter 4. Regarding the relation of human nature to ethical norms, see John McDowell (1998b), who, though also Aristotelian in approach, thinks it no part of Aristotelian ethics to ground ethical norms in human nature—at least, as neo-Aristotelians understand that nature.

[37] This is Foot's view about human nature (see Foot 2001; chapters 1-4), it seems to be Thompson's view (see his unpublished lecture), and it is certainly the way Aristotelian naturalism is interpreted by its critics. See also Hursthouse (1999: 222).

rationality and then showing how it is ultimately based in facts about natural goodness and human nature.[38]

Micah Lott's Account

Micah Lott develops his account of the relation between natural goodness and reasons in a 2014 paper titled "Why be a good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Human Nature." The paper is an explicit response to the normativity objection. He begins by pointing out that the plausibility of the normativity objection "depends on an apparent gap between what [is] naturally good for us *qua* human beings (=the normal) and what has a claim upon our reason (=the normative)" (Lott 2014: 770). The gap appears to open when we abstract away from our understanding of human nature in order to subject it to critical scrutiny. It is in this space, between our conception of human nature and the standpoint we achieve by stepping back from it, that the normativity objection finds a grip. As Lott (2014: 770) puts it, once we step back to a position of rational reflection, "what is naturally good confronts us as a fact to be evaluated, not as an authoritative voice to which our reason must submit…"[39]

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[38] Rosalind Hursthouse has written at some length both about natural goodness (see her 1999: Chapters 8-9) and on reasons for action (1999: esp. chapter 6). Although she is sometimes interpreted as having attempted to connect reasons with our natural ends as organisms (see Hooker 2002 and Gowans 2008), in fact she avoids offering any account of the relation between human nature or natural goodness and practical reasons. See Hursthouse (1999: 170, 180) and (2002: 51). Allen Thompson makes a similar point (2007: 253).

[39] The idea that we can step back from our own nature also appears clearly in John McDowell's "Two Sorts of Naturalism" when he says, "[r]eason does not just open our eyes to our nature, as members of the animal species we belong to; it also enables and even obliges us to step back from it, in a way that puts its bearing on our practical problems into question" (McDowell 1998: 172).

Against this thought, Lott claims that the objection misunderstands Aristotelian naturalism. On the Aristotelian naturalist account of human nature, there is no logical space between human nature and the critical standpoint. The stepping back metaphor seems plausible only because it employs a non-Aristotelian conception of human nature. Once we understand the Aristotelian conception, we will see that "while any substantive conception of human form might be *wrong*, it will never be normatively inert… Rather it must embody a *normatively significant* understanding of human life and action" (Lott 2014: 770; emphasis in original).

To see how this works, consider three key Aristotelian naturalist ideas. The first is the fact, familiar by now, that the Aristotelian conception of a life form is a conception of an ideal type.[40] Understanding the nature of, say, a mint plant involves some grasp of how a non-defective mint plant is characteristically constituted and of its characteristic life-cycle. Our conception of the mint life form is ideal in the sense that it is of a mint plant completely lacking in any defect. All natural goodness judgments of individual mint plants implicitly appeal to this idealized conception. Without it, we would not know, e.g., that yellowed leaves indicate natural defect in mint plants. The Aristotelian conception of our own life form, *human*, is idealized in exactly the same way. Understanding that this particular bit of flesh and bone is a human being—rather than, say, a grossly deformed, hairless ape—involves some grasp on how a non-defective human is characteristically constituted and on the human's characteristic life-cycle.[41]

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[40] See Fink (2006: 211-216) for a helpful discussion on the contrast between what he calls the "materialist" and the "idealist" conception of nature. Fink goes on to defend a third, broader conception of nature that includes both the materialist and the idealist conceptions.

[41] This first key idea should not be confused with the idea that our conception of the human life form is ideal in the sense that it is a reflection of our deepest values. For this

The second key idea is that the human organism possesses a certain natural power or capacity we call *practical reason*. This power enables us to conceptualize possible courses of action, to deliberate about their merits, and then use those conceptualizations to guide our behavior. Like any other natural faculty, practical reason can malfunction. This implies there are standards of proper operation for practical reason. Just as it is good for the human organism for its cardiovascular system and its digestive system to function in a certain describable way, it is also good for the human organism for its practical reasoning system to function in a certain way. And when these systems do function so, they are functioning properly.

The third key idea is that although practical reason is like any other natural human faculty in being standard natural equipment, so to speak, for the human organism, and in implying certain standards of proper operation, practical reason is also unlike other natural powers in its importance for shaping our lives. The way humans characteristically live is by deploying all their other powers to think and act in a way that is responsive to and guided by *reasons*. This means there is a very close connection between characteristic human activities—i.e. the activities of a non-defective human—and practical reasons. Having a grasp on one involves having a grasp on the other. If human action is characteristically rational action, guided by reasons as they appear to that individual, then to have a grasp on how humans characteristically act is also to have some grasp on the reasons on which those

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view, see Nussbaum (1992; 1993; 1995; 2000). That this is not the Aristotelian naturalist conception of human nature shows up in the fact that we can form very specific and accurate conceptions of the nature and natural goodness of organisms whose flourishing is incompatible with our own. On any ordinary construal of 'value', we do *not* value, say, anthrax bacteria that have colonized in someone's body. Yet this does not hinder our ability to form an accurate and detailed conception of the anthrax life form, and, based on that, an accurate conception of what is good and bad for such bacteria.

actions are done. Clearly, we do have some grasp on how human characteristically act. "Thus," says Lott,

> what is naturally good in humans is a life in which practical reason is functioning properly—i.e. a life that is practically rational, in the positive evaluative sense. Therefore any substantive account of human form—any conception we might step back from—will already embody some understanding of how we have reason to act and to live… With a conception of human form, there can be no gap between what is normal and normative. (Lott: 2014: 771; emphasis in original)

Of course, if there can be no such gap, there is no standpoint from which we can question the authority of human nature.

To illustrate the practical reason response, Lott describes a case that initially appears to make trouble for his view and then shows why it actually does not (Lott 2014: 771-2). The case involves students at a prestigious university who, in protest against the university's discriminatory policies, undertake a hunger strike. They refrain from eating so long that they become sick. Clearly, their striking is naturally bad for their digestive systems. Yet it is also clear that they act well in undertaking the strike. They are acting on good reasons, and in so acting they bring some aspects of themselves into a naturally worse condition. Does this show that natural goodness and normativity come apart?

No, says Lott, or at least not problematically. Practical reason is a kind of architectonic natural power for human beings. For humans, eating is not merely a biological process; it essentially involves an act of rational will. This is because of the particular way in which humans eat. Unlike some organisms, we cannot absorb nutrients through our skin. We find food, put it into our mouths, chew it and swallow it. If we cannot do this ourselves, someone else has to do these things (or some equivalent) for us. This means that, for humans, eating characteristically involves action—not mere movement, but intentional action, which is motivated and guided by reasons. And this in turn means that we cannot evaluate the natural goodness of particular instances of eating in

isolation from the reasons that motivate those instances of eating. The students acted on good reasons. In choosing to start striking and to continue striking, their power of practical reason was functioning properly, correctly determining what sort of response was appropriate for the situation. So in declining to eat they were being *good* humans. They were acting in the characteristic *human* way, given their circumstances.

Now of course humans also have powers other than practical reasoning. And in this case, the student's naturally good actions had bad effects on some of their subsystems. But there is nothing especially mysterious about this. It happens all the time. The most extreme type of case, which is also very common, occurs when an organism dies doing what is characteristic of that type of organism, as when a mother dies protecting her child from a kidnapper. The fact that the mother dies does not mean that she was behaving defectively in resisting the attacker. Quite the opposite, we might think. So the fact that, given actual circumstances, acting well *qua* human might not always conduce to the natural goodness of all our other systems, and might even sometimes bring out our own death, does not show that in such actions we act badly *qua* human. It simply means the world is such that it is not always possible fully to flourish in every respect, in everything we should do.

Lott concludes there is no gap in the striking student case between natural goodness and moral goodness or normative reasons. Given the role of practical reason in the human way of life, having a grasp on how humans characteristically live is to have a grasp on what humans have reason to do. In his words:

> Because we are practically rational animals, we cannot begin to say how 'the human' eats, copulates, relaxes, etc. without at the same time saying how we do these things in a way that is properly responsive to reasons. Thus by saying how 'the human' eats, copulates, relaxes, etc. we are already taking a stand on the sorts of reasons that we ought to recognize. (Lott 2014: 772)

To know something about our nature puts us in position to know something about what is *good* for us. And to know something about how good human practical reason operates is to know something about the reasons we ought to recognize as normatively significant. Thus, there is no logical gap between natural goodness and reasons. Facts about human natural goodness are in this sense intrinsically normative. For the idea is that we can move from claims about human nature and human natural goodness to claims about reasons, where the normativity of reasons is already built into, or comes from, our understanding of the human life form.

Philippa Foot's Account

Those familiar with Philippa Foot's work know she underwent a significant change in philosophical outlook during the late '80s, through the mid '90s, and which culminated in her 2001 book *Natural Goodness*.[42] The change, by her own account, involved a rejection of the Humean account of reasons on which she had long been relying,[43] and the development of a new account of practical reason which, she thought, finally linked natural goodness (and thus virtue) with reasons, thereby showing the rationality of morality.[44]

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[42] John Hacker-Wright has written extensively in clarification and defense of Foot's work. See Hacker-Wright (2009; 2013a; 2013b).

[43] See, for example, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" (Foot 1972). Actually, although she describes her early view as "more or less Humean," in that she took desires to be the basic source of reasons, in some papers she also allowed "considerations of self-interest an independent 'reason-giving' force" (2001: 10). For example, in "Moral Beliefs" (1958) Foot argued that just actions are rational because possession of the virtue of justice is overall in our best interest, and possession of the virtue disposes one to act justly, even in those rare cases where it comes at high personal cost. See also "Reasons for Action and Desires" (1972). These essays are reprinted in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (2002).

[44] From what I can make out, Foot began broaching her new views "Ethical Naturalism," given as the 1989 Romanell Lecture at the Pacific APA; in a series of three unpublished lectures she delivered at Princeton University, titled "Human Desires," "Miklukho-Maklay

Her account of practical rationality can be condensed into five theses. I list the first four here, and will introduce the fifth presently. The first four theses are:

Pluralism There are multiple, irreducibly distinct categories of facts that are reasons for action, including desire, self-interest, and moral considerations.

Constitutivism It is constitutive of human practical reason to recognize facts in each category *as* reasons.

Parity Some reasons in each category are deliberatively on par with some reasons in each other category.

Basicness Some reasons in each category are basic.

The first two theses articulate the basic structure of reasons and practical rationality, according to Foot. The third and fourth follow from the first and help further to clarify the relations between the different types of reasons. I will briefly unpack each one.

According to the first thesis,

Pluralism There are multiple, irreducibly distinct sources of reasons for action, including desire, self-interest, and moral considerations.[45]

Foot's theory therefore diverges from monistic theories that ground reasons in only one type of fact, such as facts about pleasure, or self-interest, or what would satisfy one's

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and His Servant," and the third untitled; and in two other unpublished papers titled "Virtue and Happiness" and "Happiness II." (The unpublished lectures are mentioned by name in Quinn (1992: 81).) Foot's new account of practical rationality first appeared in print in her papers "Rationality and Virtue" (1994) and "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?" (1995), and was then clarified and amplified in Chapter 4 of *Natural Goodness* (2001), and in her last published essay, "Rationality and Goodness" (2004).

[45] Foot (2001: 61) and (2004: 8). Although Foot focuses on these three categories of reasons, she also thinks there could be other distinct sources of reasons, such as family or friendship relations (Foot 2004: 9).

desires.[46] By 'moral considerations' she has in mind ordinary examples, such as the fact that I promised to pick you up from the airport at 10 P.M., or the fact that I notice my neighbor's child wandering into the street. Moral considerations like these are, on Foot's view, reason-giving independently of any connection to self-interest or desire.

Whereas **Pluralism** is about the sorts of facts that are reasons, the second core thesis is about practical reason itself. According to

Constitutivism It is constitutive of practical reason to recognize facts in each category *as* reasons.[47]

The idea here, familiar now from Lott's account, is that practical reason is a natural power that characterizes human beings, and thus, like any power possessed by any organism, is subject to standards of natural goodness and defect. Part of what it is for practical reason to operate well—i.e., for its possessor to be practically rational—is for it to take each category of fact *as* reason-giving. This is easy to see in the case of facts about desires and self-interest. Consider self-interest: there is something deeply wrong with someone who is utterly indifferent to her own well-being. We might even be inclined to think this a mark of insanity. Something similar holds with desire. There seems something deeply wrong with taking one's desires to have no bearing on what one should do. Imagine, for instance, an ultra-rigorous modern Manichean who convinces herself that all her desires are manifestations of evil and ought to be resisted and expunged where possible. Something seems radically wrong with such an attitude. The more plausible view, according to Foot, is

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[46] See Anderson (1993: chapter 6), Chappell (1998: 13-21) and Murphy (2001: chapter 2) for critiques of monistic theories of value. All these authors would agree with Foot's formal pluralism, but disagree with her substantive claims about what the basic sources of reasons are.

[47] See Foot (2001: 12-13, 62-63; 2004: 8).

that desires do in some way rationalize action, even if they must be overruled in some cases by, say, prudential or moral reasons. Foot's view is that what holds for self-interest and desire holds for moral considerations as well. That is, genuine failure to see certain moral considerations *as* reason to act would indicate the same sort of irrationality or psychic disorder as failing to see one's desires or self-interest as reasons to act. As Foot puts it, each category "provides a test of practical rationality" (2004: 8).

Pluralism and **Constitutivism** express the basic structure of Foot's account of practical reason and reasons. **Pluralism**, however, implies two further, and more specific theses about the relations between the different categories of reasons.

> In *Natural Goodness* Foot says that the different categories of reasons are "on a par":
>
> > As I see it, the rationality of, say, telling the truth, keeping promises, or helping a neighbor is on a par with the rationality of self-preserving action, and of the careful and cognizant pursuit of other innocent ends; each being a part or aspect of practical rationality. (2001: 11)

In "Rationality and Goodness" she expresses the same idea by describing the three types of reasons as "logically equal" (2004: 8). Foot does not mean that reasons of all three types are of equal *weight*. In fact, she takes pains to argue that neither category of reason has special trumping power over any other.[48] What she means is that all three categories of facts engage practical reason at the same level. I will put this as follows:

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[48] For example, in *Natural Goodness* Foot says:

> it is not always rational to give help where it is needed, to keep a promise, or even, I believe, always to speak the truth. If it is to be said that 'moral considerations' are always 'overriding', it cannot be these particular considerations that we refer to, but must rather be the overall judgment about what, all things considered, should be done. (2001: 11)

See also Foot (1977; 2004: 8).

Parity Some reasons in each category are deliberatively on par with some reasons in each other category.

That is to say, there are *some* reasons in each category that do not rely for their rational force on reasons in another category.

Pluralism also entails another subsidiary thesis. Not only are the various categories of reasons logically *equal* in the sense just described, they are also equally *basic*. So our fourth thesis is:

Basicness Some reasons in each category are basic.

This follows from **Pluralism**, because if there are multiple irreducibly distinct categories of reasons, then there are at least some reasons in each distinct category that cannot be reduced to any other category, in the sense that their practical significance or normative authority is not conferred by reasons in any of the other categories. Their normativity is basic. Once again, this is easiest to see in the case of desire- and interest-based reasons. And Foot's claim, given **Parity**, is that what goes for desire- and interest-based reasons also holds for moral reasons:

> Told that we should give up smoking we may ask 'why should I?' and be told that we should because smoking is bad for health, or that we could spend the money on something we really want. But we do not ask [1] 'Why should I do what is in my interest to do?' nor [2] 'Why should I do what will best satisfy my desires?' and what Quinn's argument implies is that we can no more make sense of the question [3] 'Why should I be moral?' than we can make sense of the question 'Why should I act self-interestedly?' Or 'Why should I do what will get me what I most desire?' (2004: 8; emphasis in original; brackets added for reference)

We cannot answer questions 1-3 because there is no deeper, more basic value by reference to which we could rationalize these three types of facts. Each sort of consideration enters into practical reason at the ground level.

Finally, we come the fifth and final thesis, the one that I have not yet articulated. It is the thesis that connects reasons and natural goodness. It is introduced most clearly in her

last published essay, "Rationality and Goodness."[49] After proposing her pluralistic view of the basic types of reason-giving facts, she considers the objection that so far her theory merely amounts to a "verbal package," for nothing has been said about *why* each of the three categories of facts happen to be reason-giving. Foot takes the objection seriously, feeling special pressure to respond because she suspects there could be other basic categories of reasons as well, such as a degree of partialism toward one's friends and family.[50] Unless she can explain what unifies the three categories already proposed, and thereby provide the criteria for including other basic sources of reasons into the account, the theory looks like a mere grab bag. What, then, unifies the basic categories of reasons? Foot thinks we can answer this question

> if we call in aid the idea of natural goodness as I defined those words in my *Natural Goodness*. It is, I think, by reference to facts about the way things of different species live their lives that we can see the unity of the three rationalizing categories that we set side by side for human beings. (2004: 9)

The proposal, then, is that all three categories of reasons are related in a certain way to natural goodness. Their unity as a set consists in their mutual link to natural goodness.

To support this proposal, Foot draws our attention to some features of the lives of the more sophisticated animals: "we can see in animal life analogues of at least our three

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[49] It also appears in *Natural Goodness*, where she credits Warren Quinn for helping her to see that she could employ her account of natural goodness and virtues as natural needs to explain the unity of her three basic categories of reasons (2001: 17).

[50] And, we might add, partialism toward oneself. Foot favorably references John Taurek's (1977) well-known argument about partialism toward oneself and one's friends and family. "In fact," says Foot,

> it is often reasonable for agents to give themselves (never mind their families) preference over others. As John Taurek point out some time ago in an excellent article, it is not at all generally believed that, for example, one should incur the certainty of losing a limb even to save another from injury more serious than that. (Foot 2001: 79).

types of rationalizing considerations in human life" (2004: 9-10). Here are the analogues, labeled for clarity.

[Desire analogue] Animals, like us, have appetites and other kinds of desires, which on the whole they do well to satisfy, either directly as when in the presence of food or water, or indirectly as when, being hungry, they go foraging for food. (2004: 10)

[Interest analogue] They also do, by instinct or as learned behavior, things that are necessary for their survival, or for reproduction, not immediately but even a whole season away. (2004: 10)

Then she draws a parallel between the way in which certain animals need social hierarchies and the way in which humans need certain normative practices:

[Moral analogue] some kinds of animals have social hierarchies that are as necessary to the flourishing of individuals, as are our own social conventions, codes of behavior and laws. Where animals have hierarchies and a kind of social order, humans have norms that include moralities…. The making of laws, and obedience to them, is as much part of human life as flying is of bird life or hunting in packs a part of the life of wolves. Good rules, including moral codes, are not *mere* conventions but things that are needed in human life. (2004: 10-11; see also 2001: 16)

What all three categories of reasons have in common is that we *need* to see each of them as reason-giving in order to live a good human life—i.e. we need to see them as reason-giving in order to be naturally good human beings. Natural goodness, then, is the unifying principle of the three categories of reasons. We can therefore frame the fifth thesis as:

Source The distinct categories of facts are reasons because it is naturally good for humans to see them as such.

So in order to add another basic category of reasons to the account, one must show that it would be naturally good for humans to take that type of fact as practically significant. And in showing this, one would thereby show that such facts are indeed normative. Foot thus takes herself to have illuminated the close connection between natural goodness and

reasons. There is, she thinks, a "conceptual connection" or "intrinsic link" between natural goodness and reasons (Foot 2001: 64-5).

Both of these accounts resist the normativity objection by attempting to undermine its second premise, that judgments and facts about natural goodness are not normative. They attempt to show a conceptual or logical connection between facts about human nature, natural goodness and reasons, thereby showing that natural goodness is normative after all. If these accounts succeed, then of course the normativity objection fails.

5. Conclusion

We should now have a grasp on the Aristotelian naturalist's understanding of the concepts *life form* and *natural goodness*. These concepts belong within an interconnected system of concepts and judgments—the life form system, as I am calling it—that are fundamental in our thinking about living things. The conceptual relations between them are such that facts about an individual organism together with facts about that organism's life form entail facts about the natural goodness or defect of particular organisms. I have also discussed two Aristotelian attempts to connect the notion of natural goodness with practical reasons. The basic idea underlying both is that when we apply the life form system to human beings, we can discern a conceptual connection between our understanding of the human life form and practical reasons. A proper understanding of human nature commits us to the normative authority of certain types of reasons.

Although there remains much work to be done in developing the Aristotelian naturalist account of natural goodness, I think the view is quite plausible in its account of the life form-relative evaluative judgments we make all the time in judging certain organisms to be good or defective in various respects. I also think the view quite plausible

in its claim that these evaluative claims are conceptually linked to our understanding of an organism's life form—an understanding that is logically prior to those claims. However, I also think that Lott and Foot's attempts to connect natural goodness with reasons do not work. In the next chapter I explain why.

Before I get there, however, I need to take a brief detour to flag a point that is deeply important for the Aristotelian naturalist project overall, but too complex to explore in depth in the present study. One might have been struck by the fact that, after a whole chapter on a neo-Aristotelian account of natures, life forms, and natural goodness, I have barely mentioned the one concept for which Aristotelian approaches to ethics are perhaps best known: the concept of *eudaimonia* or *flourishing*. My silence on this concept is not accidental. I believe Aristotelians need to put some careful thought into how they will understand this concept in light of their theoretical commitments. Here is why.

It is natural for an Aristotelian sympathizer to think human flourishing occurs when a human engages in its characteristic activities—that is, performs its function—excellently. What is the conceptual framework underlying this thought? First take an example of non-human functioning. Suppose I believe that my lawnmower is doing an excellent job cutting the grass. It is natural to understand the conceptual ingredients of this thought roughly as follows: first, I grasp the function of a lawnmower (to cut grass), and then add to this an understanding of what it is to do that function well as opposed to poorly (to cut it cleanly, evenly, etc). Moving beyond lawnmowers, the basic idea here, to put it crudely, is that we can start with our understanding of a function, then sharpen it up, improve it, make it do better whatever it does, and that is how we arrive at our understanding of the excellent exercise of that function.

It is natural to think of flourishing along the same lines. On this view, our understanding of human flourishing combines two distinct notions: first, our understanding of the human function, and second, our understanding of what it is to perform that function well. A passage from Aristotle's function argument might seem to suggest this view:

> …if we say a so-and-so and a good so-and-so have a function which is the same in kind, …eminence in respect of excellence being added to the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player to do so well: if this is the case…human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence (Aristotle 1984: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, 1098a7-1098a17)

It is easy to see how one might conclude from this passage that Aristotle understands the notion of a function to be logically distinct from the notion of the excellent exercise of that function. The thought here is not, as Aristotle points out, that there are two functions: the regular one and the excellent one. The thought, rather, is that an excellent function is a function with excellence added to it, so to speak.

Whether or not we should attribute this view to Aristotle, it seems clear that an Aristotelian naturalist of the Foot and Thompson variety cannot accept it. This is because the norms by which we evaluate an organism as being good, excellent or defective are constitutive standards of the life form itself. It is a mistake to think our grasp of the function or characteristic operation of a thing is logically prior to our grasp of what is involved in the excellent performance of that function. On the Aristotelian naturalist schema I have sketched in this chapter, things go the other way around. Our understanding of a thing's nature *is* the benchmark by which we evaluate individual organisms of that type as excellent or less than excellent specimens. So, it looks like the Aristotelian naturalist is committed to the view that human flourishing is simply the non-defective characteristic

activity of human beings. We should judge a human being to be flourishing when it perfectly aligns with our understanding of its life form.

Admittedly, this sounds odd. Isn't flourishing supposed to be more than that? Something higher, more excellent than merely non-defective activity? By my lights, the view of flourishing to which Aristotelian naturalists appear to be committed is more plausible than it might first appear, and it has important consequences for how we think of the moral life. I also think the natural way of understanding *excellent functioning* I described above faces serious challenges. So, I do not see this as a problem for Aristotelian naturalism. Still, given the historical centrality of the concept of flourishing in the Aristotelian ethical tradition, and the apparent conflict between the Aristotelian naturalist view and the natural way of understanding *excellent functioning* I described above, Aristotelian naturalists need to devote careful thought to how the concept of flourishing fits into their schema. This is not the place to undertake such an investigation, so having flagged this issue, I now lay it aside and return to the main thread of this study.

In the next chapter I argue that the normativity objection is not quite on target. Yet, there is indeed a problem in the neighborhood, and Lott and Foot's accounts do not solve it. Ultimately, then, critics are right that Aristotelian naturalism has a normativity problem, but it is not terminal, and I will argue in the following chapters that there is a solution.

CHAPTER 3: THE REAL PROBLEM WITH ARISTOTELIAN NATURALISM

1. Introduction

Like critics, I am dissatisfied with the Aristotelian naturalist attempts to connect reasons to natural goodness, and I will explain why below. At the same time, there seems something amiss with the normativity objection. Its second premise claims that facts and judgments about natural goodness are not normative, and yet most of the arguments for this claim in the literature hold little or no water. Some beg the question by relying on substantive theses Aristotelian naturalists can reject. Others misunderstand the Aristotelian conceptions of human nature and natural goodness, and thus fail to appreciate the power of the Aristotelian naturalists's case that natural goodness *is* normative, at least in a certain sense of 'normative'. Yet, as I said, I am not satisfied with the Aristotelian naturalists' attempts at connecting reasons to facts about human nature, and it has precisely to do with the sense in which facts about human nature and natural goodness are normative.

My diagnosis of Aristotelian naturalism's fundamental problem is quite simple. A few authors have gestured in its direction, but to my knowledge no one has developed the thought at length. I will argue that facts about human nature and natural goodness are indeed normative, but not in the relevant sense. This will require defending a distinction between two kinds of normative facts (Section 2): *practical* facts, which are reasons, or are essentially linked with reasons, and *evaluative* facts which have no necessary connection with reasons, but are still irreducibly normative. Then I develop what I call the parity argument to show that facts about human nature and natural goodness are evaluative, not practical (Section 3). It follows that such facts are not intrinsically normative.

Two related implications follow from the evaluative/practical distinction and the parity argument. The first, which I develop in Section 4, is that the Aristotelian naturalist attempts to connect natural goodness with reasons fail, because they mistakenly assume that facts about human nature and natural goodness are intrinsically practical. The result is that they equivocate between evaluative and practical concepts, and I show how this equivocation manifests in Lott and Foot's accounts.

The second implication is that Aristotelian naturalism is left with a genuine problem, but it is not quite the problem expressed in the normativity objection. The parity argument is entirely consistent with Aristotelian naturalism's core thesis, that moral goodness is a kind of natural goodness. The conclusion of the parity argument is not that natural goodness is not or cannot be practically normative, but that it is not *intrinsically* normative. So if Aristotelian naturalists want to maintain that facts about natural goodness and human nature are normative, as they must in order to retain their core thesis, then they need to explain what *makes* such facts normative. This they have not done, so there is a serious explanatory gap in their account. This is the normativity problem.

2. The Evaluative/Practical Distinction

As I just said, a few authors have gestured in the direction of the strategy I will pursue. In a passage already quoted, John Broom criticizes Foot by saying:

> Foot hopes to derive the conclusion that each human being should be virtuous, where 'should' is truly normative. But this conclusion cannot be drawn. Her premise is that each human being should be virtuous, where this is a matter of natural normativity. This means simply that being virtuous is necessary to the good of human beings. No truly normative conclusion follows. (Broome 2013:12)

A few lines before that, he says: "An oak's having deep, sturdy roots could fairly be called 'a norm', and that is enough to justify the term 'normativity'. However, in the context of an

oak, natural normativity is not what I call true normativity" (2013: 12). There is the seed of an idea here that there might be two kinds of normativity. Broome ends up saying that Foot's natural goodness is not normative at all, because it is not what he calls "true normativity." But what he means by this is the sort of normativity associated with obligation and reasons. If we broaden our understanding of 'normative', as I will propose, we can make room for the idea that natural goodness might indeed be normative, although not in the sense of being conceptually linked with reasons. The same idea is briefly broached by Roger Teichmann, strongly Aristotelian in bent himself, but suspicious of identifying reason-related normativity with that found woven into Aristotelian naturalism's life form system. Commenting on Michael Thompson, He writes: "the normativity embodied in 'You are meant to keep your promises' and that embodied in 'A spider is meant to have eight legs' surely have quite different sources" (Teichmann 2011: xviii). Once again, we see the suggestion that there could be more than one kind of normativity, or sources of normativity. I think these hints are on the right track, but to my knowledge, no one has developed them in detail. I propose to develop them in this chapter.

I begin with a note on terminology. The literature contains at least two ways of characterizing the normative. According to what I will call the *reasons characterization*, normative facts are reasons, or are necessarily linked with reasons. This is essentially how Broome was using the term 'normative'.[51] Joseph Raz also understands normativity in this way when he says that "[t]he normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or

[51] Note, however, that Broome does not think normativity can be *analyzed* in terms of reasons. Rather, he treats the normative concept *ought* as basic, and explains reasons in terms of it. See Broome (2013: Chapter 4).

provides, or is otherwise related to reasons."[52] Indeed, this characterization of the normative dominates in the literature on reasons and rationality.

Outside of these debates, however, it is common to find the term 'normative' used to refer to a much broader class of facts and judgments—not only those that are or are linked with reasons but also any fact or judgment that employs concepts like *good*, *bad*, *should*, *ought*, *health*, *defect*, and so on. A particularly clear example of this *broad characterization* appears in Derek Parfit's *On What Matters* (2011b), when he attempts to describe the natural/normative distinction. He asks us to consider two lists of words:

> A: wrong, right, ought, duty, virtue, good, bad, excellent, mediocre, incorrect.
> B: kill, crimson, square, electric, cause, city, marble, alive, sister, tall, unexpected.
> (2011b, 265)

"Words in list A," he says, "are normative, as are the concepts, claims, and facts that we can use these words to express or state…Words in list B are naturalistic, and claims that use only such words, when they are true, state natural facts" (Parfit 2011b, 265). For Parfit, words in list A are normative even though some of them—e.g. 'excellent', 'mediocre', 'incorrect'—have no obvious conceptual or logical link with reasons. Peter Railton (1999: 320) employs the same broad characterization when he says

> 'Normativity' is, for better or worse, the chief term we philosophers seem to have settled upon for discussing some central but deeply puzzling phenomena of human life. We use it to mark a distinction, not between the good and the bad (or between the right and the wrong, the correct and the incorrect), but rather between the good-or-bad (or right-or-wrong…), on the one hand, and the actual, possible, or usual, on the other.[53]

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[52] See Raz (1999: 67). Other examples of this characterization are easy to find. For a small sample, see Scanlon (2014: 2), Korsgaard (1996: 8) and Wedgwood (2007: 23).

[53] Other examples abound. See, e.g., the opening paragraphs of Thomson (2008). This way of articulating the conceptual characterization is of course a bit too simple, since many of the example terms in Parft's list A can be used in non-normative senses. For example: "These raspberries ought to ripen in June." This sentence uses the term 'ought', which is typically thought to be a normative term. But in this case it is used in a non-normative

The non-normative covers what is, could, or would be the case. The normative covers would should or ought to be the case, or what is good, bad, right, wrong, correct, incorrect, and so on. On the broad characterization, then, the following statements, and the facts they express, are all normative:

1 It would be wrong to poison your mother.

2 Parents should watch out for their children's safety.

3 Sally's car has a good gasoline engine.

4 That suture was tied incorrectly.

They are normative because they employ normative concepts. Yet, as I will shortly suggest, only the first two are necessarily linked with reasons.

In this chapter I will use the broad characterization, for I think this presents the least risk for misunderstanding. I want to stress, however, that the argument I will give in this chapter could go through on either characterization, although it would require substantial reframing were I to use the reasons characterization.[54]

I turn, then, to the evaluative/practical distinction itself, a distinction I take to be *within* the normative domain. I will mostly avoid talking explicitly about natural goodness while explaining the distinction itself, for I want to show the soundness of the distinction

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sense, for it express a prediction or expectation, and could be restated in purely descriptive terms (see Broome 2013: 9-11). So when the broad characterization holds that facts and judgments are normative in virtue of employing concepts or terms like *good*, *bad*, *should*, *ought*, *health*, *defect*, it should be taken to exclude the non-normative concepts we sometimes express with these terms.

[54] For example, I could not frame the evaluative/practical distinction as a distinction *within* the normative domain. I would have to say that the category of the evaluative is not normative, since the evaluative, as we will soon see, is not essentially linked with reasons. This would be fine, however, for the important point is that evaluative facts are distinct from non-normative facts, and that is enough to make the point that the normativity objection is not quite on target in claiming that natural goodness is non-normative.

independently of any concern about Aristotelian naturalism (although I will use an example of health, which is a closely related concept).

Practical Facts

A fact is a practical fact just in case it either is a reason or is necessarily linked with reasons. Thus there are two classes of practical facts. Getting clear on the difference between them will be important for discussion downstream.

Consider, first, facts that *are* reasons. Reasons are facts that weigh in favor of, or support, some action.[55] For example, suppose Emad is looking to buy a car, in order to have a reliable means of transportation. The fact expressed in the proposition:

3 Sally's car has a good gasoline engine

might be a reason for Emad to buy her car. If so, it would be a practical fact for Emad. Consider also the fact expressed in the proposition:

4 That suture was tied incorrectly.

Suppose Jillian is a senior surgeon overseeing Brad, a younger doctor in his residency phase of training. While watching Brad complete a surgery, she notices something amiss and utters the statement in **4**. In most circumstances, the fact she expresses would be a reason for Brad to retie the suture. I will call practical facts, such as those expressed in **3** and **4**, *first-order practical facts*. First-order practical facts directly weigh in favor of some action.

Any fact can be a reason for someone to do something in some circumstances. This is because our reasons are often determined by the best means to our ends, and the particular means that turn out to be best are largely a function of our circumstances, which

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[55] This "weighing in favor of" characterization of reasons comes from Scanlon (1998: Chapter 1), but is now widely used.

of course are infinitely (or almost infinitely) variable. So any fact can be a first-order practical fact.

The second class of practical facts are those that are *necessarily* linked with reasons. There are two ways facts can be linked with reasons in this way. One is if there are first-order facts that are necessarily practical. Some philosophers think some states of affairs are intrinsically bad, in the practical sense of 'bad', such that their intrinsic properties give us reason to avoid them. Parfit, for example, believes states of affairs involving one's own agony are like this. Their intrinsic properties give everyone a reason to want to avoid such states of affairs.[56] If he is right, the fact that φ-ing would result in a period of agony whereas γ-ing would not is, all else being equal, a reason to γ. And this fact would not only be practical; it would be intrinsically practical, because the intrinsic properties of agony give us reason to avoid it. In this respect, certain facts about agony are necessarily linked with reasons.

Another way in which facts can be necessarily linked with reasons is by employing concepts that entail there is reason for someone to do something. Returning to our example of Emad looking to buy a car, suppose the goodness of the gasoline engine in Sally's car does indeed provide Emad a reason to buy her car. Then there is a further fact also, namely, the fact that

5 Emad has a reason to buy Sally's car.

And if the goodness of Sally's car's engine is a conclusive reason for Emad to buy the car, then there is also the further fact that

6 Emad ought to buy Sally's car.

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[56] See Parfit (2011a: 73-82, also 84).

Facts like **5** and **6** are *about* what we have reason to do. So I will call them *second-order practical facts*.[57] These facts are necessarily linked with reasons in virtue of the concepts they contain. For although "Emad has a reason" does not tell us what that reason is, it entails there is a reason out there. Likewise, "Emad ought to buy Sally's car" also does not tell us what reason Emad has, but it does entail there is a reason out there; and, given a natural reading of 'ought', entails the reason is conclusive.[58] So if **5** and **6** do indeed express facts, then it necessarily follows that there is some first-order practical fact out there which is a reason for Emad to buy Sally's car.

First-order facts, by contrast, are not always necessarily practical. Above I imagined a case in which the fact that

3 Sally's car has a good gasoline engine

is a reason for Emad to buy Sally's car. This was because I was supposing that Emad was looking to buy a car, that Sally was looking to sell her car, and that the reason why Emad wanted a car was for reliable transportation. But notice that the fact expressed in **3** is practical only if these other circumstances hold. If they do not, **3** may not be practical at all. For example, if Sally's car is not for sale, then **3** is not a reason for Emad or anyone else to buy the car. It could of course be a reason for someone to do something else—perhaps for Sally to drive it rather than the barely running pickup in her garage—but it need not be.

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[57] Above I said almost any fact could be a first-order practical fact given some set of circumstances. Even facts such as those expressed in **5** and **6** could be first-order facts *relative to different actions*. For instance, **6** might be a reason for Emad to drive to the bank and request a cashier's check. In general, then, the designation of practical facts as first-order or second-order is always relative to some action. This point does not affect the substance of my argument, so I leave it implicit.

[58] This understanding of 'ought' is shared by Raz (2011:24-5) and Foot (2001: Chapter 4), who hold that reasons are logically prior to 'should' and 'ought' claims. See Broome (2013: Chapter 4) for a different view.

The fact expressed in **3** could obtain without being a reason for anyone to do anything. So even when the fact expressed in **3** *is* practical, it is not *necessarily* so. I suspect that a great many of the facts that serve as reasons in every-day deliberations are not *necessarily* practical. This will be important later.

In what follows, when I refer to practical facts I will usually be referring to first-order practical facts, unless the context makes clear otherwise.

Evaluative Facts

I turn now to the other main category within the normative domain: the category of the *evaluative*. Evaluative facts are distinguished by two key features. First, they are irreducibly normative, in that their representation in thought or speech require concepts like *good*, *bad*, *should*, *ought*, *health*, *defect*, and so on—concepts which are widely recognized as normative. Evaluative facts cannot be reduced to purely descriptive facts without loss of conceptual content. Yet, second, they need not have any connection with reasons.[59] I will unpack each feature in turn.

That evaluative claims and facts cannot be reduced to the descriptive shows up both in cases involving artefacts and cases involving organisms. Consider first cases of artefacts. The claim that a gasoline engine is good cannot be reduced to purely descriptive

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[59] A cautionary note is in order here. Note that if one operates with the reasons characterization of the normative, as many philosophers do, the category of evaluative facts *as I have described it* is ruled out by definition. For on the reasons characterization, there cannot be facts that are both normative and not linked with reasons. But this is strictly a problem of terminology. If I wanted to use the reasons characterization of the normative, I would simply describe the category of evaluative differently—as being neither normative (because not linked with reasons) nor descriptive. The important point here is that, in addition to descriptive facts and reason-related facts, there is a third category of facts which are neither descriptive nor inherently reason-giving.

claims about the engine. For suppose I were to describe Sally's car engine in exhaustive detail: its cylinders are *q* diameter and can maintain *r* compression; its fuel injectors have *s* flow rate, and spray the fuel in a *u* pattern; it burns *v* percent of the fuel/air mixture, runs at *w* temperature, generates *x* horsepower, and so on. All these descriptions still do not add up to the claim that the engine is a good one. In order to make *that* claim I need to know what properties a non-defective gasoline engine has. That is, I need to have some conception of what a gasoline engine *is* and what it *does qua* gasoline engine. Only when I have some grasp on this am I in position to say that Sally's car engine is good, on the basis of it having properties *q*-*x*.

The very same point applies to proposition **3** above about the suture being tied incorrectly. One cannot determine this on the basis of facts about the configuration of that particular suture. One must also know how the suture, in that type of case, is *supposed* to be tied.

Consider now a case that involves an organism rather than an artefact, and the concept *health* rather than the concept *good*. Suppose you have a garden. Being a mojito connoisseur, you like to grow mint. And suppose I wander by one day, observe its strong but flexible stems and full, vibrantly green leaves, and pointing to it, say, "Wow, that is a healthy patch of mint." Notice that the only way I can judge your mint patch to be healthy is because I know something more than just the descriptive facts about your mint plant. For, once again, suppose I begin describing your patch of mint. It has stems of *a* thickness, *b* flexibility, and *c* color. Its leaves are colored *d*, with an *e* hue, textured *f*-ly, and measure *g* centimeters long and *h* centimeters wide. It is disposed to do *i* in such and such conditions, and *j* in thus and so conditions. I keep filling out the descriptions until I have listed every possible descriptive fact about your patch of mint. Still, on the basis of these facts alone I

cannot conclude that it is healthy. In order to infer that an individual is healthy, we need to know what a non-defective specimen of that *type* of organism is like. I know that stems of *a* thickness, *b* flexibility, and *c* color indicate health and not defect only because I have some prior grasp on the non-defective mint form of life. If I came upon your mint patch not knowing the first thing about mint, I could not infer that it was healthy.

I could, of course, take a guess, though, and if I was well acquainted with plant life, I might be able to guess accurately. This is because there are general patterns in nature. In general, strong green stems and vibrant green leaves indicate health in plants, and in general shriveled, yellow leaves indicate defect of some sort. But this is not universally true. For example, drying out and turning yellow is part of the seasonal cycle of the plant species *cynodon dactylonn*, also known as Bermuda grass. So if, knowing nothing about Bermuda grass, I came upon a patch of it during the winter when it was yellow and dried, and on that basis concluded that it was in some way defective, I would be mistaken. Thus, like the fact that the gasoline engine is a good one, the fact that the mint patch is healthy cannot be reduced to a set of descriptions.[60]

Notice that in all these examples, the evaluative concept applies only because there is a set of facts, in addition to those about the individual object in question, which serve as a kind of standard or benchmark for the individual object. It is in this respect that evaluative claims and the facts they express go beyond purely descriptive claims about the object's properties, configuration, or operation, and thus cannot be reduced to them. This is why it makes sense to think of facts such as that Sally's car has a good gasoline engine,

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[60] See Lenman (2005) for a different view of health, which he uses to criticize Aristotelian naturalism. I think there are good reasons to reject Lenman's view, but I cannot explore that issue here.

that the suture is tied incorrectly, and that your patch of mint is health, as normative—indeed, irreducibly normative.

The second feature of evaluative facts is that they need not be reasons. This means that nothing in their structure or content *entails* anyone has reason to do anything. So they are logically and conceptually independent of reasons. This feature is perhaps the more controversial of the two, but, I think, not hard to see with a bit of reflection. We can again begin with examples of artefacts, such as the examples I have been considering. Once again, consider the claim that

3 Sally's car has a good gasoline engine.

Above I used this fact as an example of a reason. But clearly **3** is not reason-giving in all cases. For, as we saw, if Sally's car is not for sale, then **3** is not a reason for anyone to buy it. And there could even be circumstances in which **3** is a reason, but that the goodness of the engine is a reason to respond negatively rather than positively. Suppose Sally discovers that a terrorist is planning to commandeer her car for a suicide mission and the only way she can stop the mission is by disabling the engine. It is clear that Sally should not promote or preserve the good of the engine! Similarly, for the other example:

4 That suture was tied incorrectly.

In most cases, this would be a reason to redo the suture. But, again, **4**'s practical significance derives entirely from other facts. If the suture was tied for practice purposes on a bit of rubber, **4** might not provide reason to retie the suture. In some cases it might provide reason to keep practicing, but then again, it might not.

A similar point holds in the mint case. The fact that your patch of mint is a healthy patch of mint might indeed give you reason to do something—perhaps to pick some leaves from it for your next mojito, or perhaps to protect it from weeds and other bugs that might

weaken its vigor. But then again, the same fact—that your patch of mint is healthy—might also not give you or anyone else reason to do anything. In fact, it seems that when it *is* reason-giving, that is only in virtue of its relation to other facts about someone's ends. For example, when the fact that your mint patch is healthy gives you a reason to pick some leaves from it, that is only because you need some leaves in the first place. So even though the fact that the mint patch is healthy can be a reason for someone to do something, it *need* not be. There is no necessary connection between that fact and what anyone has reason to do.

So far I have given examples to show that some normative facts have no necessary connection with reasons. We can go further than this, though, and see why there can be such examples in the first place. Evaluative concepts apply whenever there is a standard or benchmark against which individual items can be measured. Evaluative standards can arise where there is a functional or operational system, such as a gasoline engine, or a suture, or a biological organism. This is because functional systems have constitutive norms, and these can serve as evaluative standards for particular instances of that system.[61] Part of what it is to be a gasoline engine is to be a device that converts heat energy to mechanical energy. To the extent that an individual engine cannot do this, it is a defective engine. To the extent that it can, it is a good one. That is what explains the evaluative fact that Sally's car engine is a good one. But note that in general there is no *necessary* link between the constitutive norms of functional systems and what we have reason to do. Just because a thing must do x in order to be a good one of its kind does not mean we therefore have

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[61] The normativity of constitutive standards is garnering a fair bit of attention in the literature. See Korsgaard (2009a), Railton (1997) and Velleman (2000) for especially illuminating discussions on the normativity of constitutive standards.

reason to promote its doing *x*. Whether we have reason to do so depends on other facts. That is why there are evaluative facts—a whole lot of them, I suspect—that have no conceptual or logical link with reasons.

I conclude, then, that there are indeed evaluative facts, which are irreducibly normative and yet they have no necessary connection with reasons. If I am right, then there is indeed a distinction between two types of normative fact. I want to stress that in proposing such a distinction I do not take myself to be proposing anything novel. Quite the contrary, for the general idea of such a distinction is rather common in the literature.[62] What has been overlooked, however, is the relevance of this distinction for debate about the normativity objection. The evaluative/practical distinction opens up the possibility that the whole interconnected system of facts and judgments about life forms and natural goodness fall into the evaluative domain. In the next section I will develop what I call the parity argument to show that this is indeed the case. Then I will bring out two important implications of the parity argument for Aristotelian naturalism.

3. The Parity Argument

The parity argument goes like this:

P1 All facts about non-human natural goodness/badness are evaluative.

P2 Facts about non-human natural goodness are on par with facts about human natural goodness and badness.

P3 So all facts about human natural goodness are evaluative.

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[62] For example, one can see the evaluative/practical distinction, or something very close to it, in Barandalla and Ridge (2011: 377-378), Crisp (2012: 58), De Caro and Macarthur (2010: 1), Kolodny (2005: 549), Shakel (2014: 405), Thomson (2008: Chapter 1), Wiggins (1998: 95), Williams (1985: 135).

In elaborating this argument, I will assume that facts about natural goodness and badness are normative. I have already shown how the concept of health is irreducibly normative, and it is fairly clear how a parallel argument could be run to show that natural goodness is also irreducibly normative. But in this context we need not bother filling out that argument because I want to show that we can *grant* the Aristotelian naturalist claim that facts about natural goodness are normative, and still show that there is a problem having to do with the connection between natural goodness and reasons.

Consider, then **P1**, that all facts about non-human natural goodness are evaluative. We can make our way toward this premise in several smaller steps. The first step is that some facts about non-human natural goodness/badness are not practical. Consider the following case. Suppose I am out walking one day and I see an apple tree whose leaves on its outermost branches are dried, brown, and hanging downward from their branch. The tree has fire blight, a bacterial disease that starts at the branch tips and works inward. In this respect, the tree has a serious natural defect. The apple tree I am imagining is a wild tree, growing along a walking path which winds through a wooded area. I notice the apple tree, register the fact that it has fire blight, and then continue to walk along my way. Now although this is a fact about natural goodness, in itself it has no connection with reasons. My registering the fact about the tree's disease does not give me or anyone else reason to do anything. Of course, in a different case, the tree's fire blight *could* give me a reason to do something. If the tree is in my orchard, and I have reason to grow apples, then I might have reason to try to battle the blight. But in such a case the fact about the tree's natural defect becomes a reason only because it stands in some relation to other practical facts—such as the fact that I have reason to grow apples. But that is not the sort of case I have in

mind. In my case, the tree is a wild apple tree. This is an easily imaginable case of a normative fact that is not practical.

It turns out there are many such examples. Consider the facts expressed in the following sentences.

5 "The Spanish Bluebell under that tree over there is etiolated,"

said as you observe the long, weak stems and yellowed leaves;

6 "The cockroaches living in my woodpile are thriving,"

said as you watch them scramble for cover;

7 "The Canadian Goose flying overhead has an injured wing,"

said as you notice it struggling to keep its place in the formation;

8 "That wild boar has rabies,"

said as you observe it from a distance through binoculars;

10 "The wolf lying on that rock over there is infected with mange,"

said as you give it wide berth on your way up the Alaskan trail;

and I could go on. All these statements express facts about the natural goodness or badness of various kinds of non-human organisms. They are normative, but it is very easy to imagine cases in which these facts have no practical significance whatsoever.

Now, here is the next step closer to **P1**. If some facts about non-human natural goodness and badness have no practical significance, then of course they are not intrinsically practical, for they are not practical at all. But if they are not intrinsically practical, then no fact about non-human natural goodness and badness is intrinsically practical. This is because a fact is intrinsically practical when its practical significance is explained by reference to intrinsic features of that fact—such as its normative content, or perhaps its structure. But if some facts about non-human natural goodness and badness are

not intrinsically practical, then they have no intrinsic features that can ground practical significance. And thus, *any* fact about non-human natural goodness or badness, considered in itself, will lack intrinsic features that can ground practical significance. It follows, then, that all facts about non-human natural goodness and badness are evaluative, for they are normative, but have no necessary connection with reasons. This is not to say that facts about non-human natural goodness are not reason-giving. As we saw in the case of the tree with fire blight, sometimes non-human natural goodness or badness is reason-giving. My point is that when such facts are reason-giving, there must be something else that *makes* them so.

The second premise, **P2**, holds that facts about non-human natural goodness are on par with facts about human natural goodness and badness. Aristotelian naturalists maintain that facts about non-human natural goodness and human natural goodness are on par in two crucial respects. First, they both employ the same species-relative notion of *goodness*. According to Aristotelian naturalism, an organism is naturally good when it exemplifies those properties and operations that characterize its life form.[63] This holds for any organism, including humans. Second, facts about non-human natural goodness are structurally identical to facts about human natural goodness. To see this, first consider this idea as it relates to judgments rather than facts. In Chapter 1 we saw that judgments of natural goodness and defect about individual organisms presuppose, and follow from, two other types of judgments: vital descriptions and natural-historical judgments. Natural historical judgments provide the evaluative standard. Vital descriptions characterize the organism itself. A judgment of natural goodness or defect expresses how well or poorly an

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[63] See Foot (2001) and Thompson (2004), and Chapter 1.

organism measures up to that standard. A similar structure holds for facts about natural goodness and defect. Facts about natural goodness supervene on two other sets of facts: facts about how things are for a particular organism, which we might call *object-facts*, and generic facts about the nature of that organism's life form, or *type-facts*. Facts about non-human natural goodness and human natural goodness share this structure.

Philippa Foot clearly notes the parity between facts about the natural goodness of plants and of humans when she says: "The meaning of the words 'good' and 'bad' is not different when used of features of plants on the one hand and humans on the other, but is rather the same as applied, in judgments of natural goodness and defect, in the case of all living things."[64] Indeed, it is common for Aristotelian naturalists, when explaining the notion of *human* natural goodness, to begin with natural goodness judgments about plants and then show that the logical structure of such judgments does not change when we move to human goodness. This is because they want to show a continuity between moral evaluations and the natural goodness judgements we make all the time about non-human forms of life. Julia Annas, for example, endorses this kind of continuity when she says:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse to have stressed this point. (Annas 2005: 13)

I think Aristotelian naturalists are exactly right about this continuity. What the continuity shows, though, is that facts about the natural goodness of humans are normative in exactly the same sense as facts about the natural goodness of plants and non-human animals; i.e.,

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[64] Foot (2001: 47). See also Hursthouse (1999: 224).

both types of fact are *evaluative*. So even facts about human natural goodness are evaluative. Thus concludes the parity argument. Again, this is not to say that facts about human natural goodness and badness cannot serve as reasons. They can and often do. It is to say that when they do, that is only because they stand in some relation with other facts—a relation which somehow explains their practical significance.

One might object that this was too fast. **P2** claims that facts about non-human natural goodness are on par with facts about human natural goodness and badness. But one might think they are also *not* on par in important respects, the most obvious being that one type of fact is about humans and the other is not. We, the inquirers, are humans. And one might think this is precisely the difference that makes facts about human natural goodness intrinsically practical where facts about non-human natural goodness might not be.[65] Now, I cannot see how the *mere* fact that the subject of a natural goodness fact is human rather than non-human could make a fact intrinsically practical. What I can see, though, are a few closely related considerations that might lead one to think this.

First, one might think that facts about human natural goodness are motivating, and this is what makes them intrinsically practical—unlike, say, facts about the natural goodness of cockroaches or wild boars. But this cannot support the idea that facts about human natural goodness are intrinsically practical. Although reasons typically motivate, a fact can motivate without being a reason. Someone could be motivated to do an action *A* precisely because *A*-ing would inflict the maximum amount of pain on another creature. It does not follow that this fact—that *A*-ing would inflict the maximum amount of pain on

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[65] I thank Alex Gregory for pressing this objection in conversation.

another creature—is a reason for anyone to *A*. So a fact's being motivating does not make it intrinsically practical.

One might grant this, however, and modify the original thought to the idea that facts about human natural goodness are motivating *for rational humans*, and this is what makes them intrinsically practical.[66] A rational human would not, according to this suggestion, be motivated by such facts as that *A*-ing would inflict the maximum amount of pain on another creature. So we can rule out the types of cases I mentioned above. But this proposal does not work either, for it appeals to substantive considerations about human rationality, which are not intrinsic to the natural goodness facts in question. So while one might defend the proposal that facts about human natural goodness are practical in virtue of their power to motivate rational human agents, this proposal would at most show that facts about human natural goodness are always practical, not that they are *intrinsically* practical.[67] For similar reasons, it would be of no use to say that while the capacity to motivate does not *make* facts about human natural goodness intrinsically practical, it is at least a sign that they are. To the extent that the disposition to motivate is a sign of practicality, it is precisely that: a sign that a fact is practically significant, not that it is *intrinsically* practically significant.

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[66] See Korsgaard (1986) for a helpful discussion on the distinction between the plausible internalist requirement on reasons, that they be capable of motivating a rational agent, and the extension of this requirement to the implausible idea that reasons are necessarily motivating.

[67] This distinction is important. It could be the case that every fact about human natural goodness is practical for someone, and this would not show that facts about human natural goodness are intrinsically practical. For it is possible that the explanation of each fact's practical significance appeals not to the intrinsic properties of those facts but rather to something else. In the next chapter I will suggest that something like this is indeed the case.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Aristotelian naturalists should not be inclined toward these sorts of proposals in the first place. They belong most comfortably in the neo-Humean tradition, where motivational states are thought to be the ultimate ground of reasons.[68] Aristotelian naturalists characteristically reject this general approach to reasons. True, Philippa Foot thought facts about desire constitute one of several basic sources of reasons, but she ultimately tried to explain the practical significance of those facts by linking them to facts about natural goodness.[69]

Another reason one might think facts about human natural goodness are intrinsically practical, whereas facts about non-human natural goodness are not, is that we have a special interest in human natural goodness. For a start, facts about our own individual natural goodness and defect bear directly on how we experience our lives, by bearing on the types of physical and emotional pain or enjoyment we experience, on the sorts of activities and relationships we are capable of, and of course on how long we live in the first place. But if this is all the objector can say, then the result would be a form of egoism, where facts about the natural goodness of some individual are the only intrinsically practical facts for *that individual*. This would not be a happy result for the Aristotelian who wants to show that facts about human natural goodness in general are intrinsically practical.

A thoughtful Aristotelian might, however, appeal to the fact that we are social animals by nature, and thus the natural good of other human beings is partly *constitutive* of our own natural good. This seems right, but then this would not cover all the cases an Aristotelian would want to cover. For example, it could not explain how facts about, say,

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[68] See, e.g., Goldman (2005; 2006; 2009), Lenman (2010), Schroeder (2007) and Williams (1981).

[69] See Foot (2001: 61; 2004: 8), and Chapter 2, Section 4(ii) above. I will revisit Foot's account in Section 4 below.

the natural defect of a stranger (perhaps she is malnourished and needs food I could give her), whose life has no bearing on my own, could be practically relevant for me. Moreover, if the mark of a natural goodness fact being intrinsically practical is its constitutive role in one's own natural good, then this would apply to a great variety of non-human organisms as well. Many plants, for example, are crucial for oxygen production, and for converting the sun's energy and other elements into forms of food that we can metabolize.

Like the previous strategies, then, this line of thinking likewise fails to explain how facts about distinctly human natural goodness could be intrinsically practical. I can think of no good reason to believe facts about human natural goodness are relevantly different from facts about non-human natural goodness. Given the similarity in their conceptual content and structure, we should conclude that facts about human natural goodness are not intrinsically practical. And if they are not, then they are evaluative. Thus, the conclusion of the parity argument stands.

4. Revisiting Lott and Foot

Above I said that the evaluative/practical distinction has important consequences for debate about the normativity objection. One important consequence is that it opens up the possibility that facts about natural goodness—all such facts—are evaluative, and I just argued that this is indeed the case. We are now in position to see exactly how this bears on debate about the normativity objection. One important implication is that Micah Lott and Phillippa Foot's attempts to connect natural goodness with reasons fail.

Aristotelian naturalist attempts to connect natural goodness and reasons fail for the simple reason that they assume facts about human nature and natural goodness are intrinsically practical. Micah Lott, recall, argues that once one has a grasp on the

Aristotelian naturalist understanding of natural goodness, one will see that there is no logical gap between judgments about human nature and judgments about what we have reason to do (see Chapter 2, Section 4). Philippa Foot likewise takes herself to have shown an "intrinsic link" between reasons and natural goodness (see Chapter 2, Section 4, although I will raise some complications about Foot in a moment). If the evaluative/practical distinction and the parity argument are sound, both Foot and Lott's accounts are mistaken, for facts about natural goodness are evaluative, and evaluative facts have no necessary connection with reasons. Of course, Aristotelian naturalists deny precisely this, so it will be important to explain why Aristotelian naturalists are so strongly inclined to think that natural goodness is intrinsically practical. The evaluative/practical distinction can help us here.

It is common knowledge that some normative terms have a non-normative sense. For example, although 'ought' is typically thought to be a normative term, it has also a non-normative use. It can be used to express predictions or expectations, as when I tell my children, "Mommy ought to be back by supper time." I want to suggest that not only is there a normative and non-normative sense of some normative terms, there are at least two different *normative* senses of normative terms. For if the evaluative/practical distinction is sound, then there are at least two distinct categories of normative concepts: those implicated in evaluative facts and judgments and those implicated in practical facts and judgments. It turns out we use some of the same terms to refer to concepts in both categories. The terms 'ought' and 'good' are two important cases in point.

For example, in the evaluative sense, 'good' simply means lacking defect or dysfunction, and has no necessary connection with reasons. This is why we can talk about a good thief and a good specimen of anthrax bacteria just as easily as a good gasoline engine

or a good mother. Relative to what thieves characteristically do, there are thieves who are good at thievery and those that are not, and we can say this even though we have reason to discourage and prevent thievery. By contrast, 'good' in the practical sense refers to that which we have reason to pursue, or promote, or respect, or otherwise respond to positively. This sense of good is sometimes characterized as "the desirable,"[70] which makes it even clearer that this notion of goodness is distinct from the evaluative notion, for evaluative goodness has no intrinsic link with what is desirable.

Likewise for the term 'ought'. Philosophers often read 'ought' as a technical term having to do with reasons. Opinions differ on exactly how to understand the relation between ought and reasons, but on a natural reading, ought judgments report that there is reason to do something. For example, "Max ought to ensure his children are fed" implies that Max has reason to ensure his children are fed. This is the practical ought.[71] There is also an evaluative sense of 'ought'. Recall from Chapter 2 (Section 3) that judgments of natural standard can be transposed into an evaluative mode. Consider the judgment, "The eggplant ought to have a strong stalk." Like the practical ought, this ought also reports that certain other facts hold. But in this case, the facts implied by 'ought' are not, or not necessarily, reasons. What this judgment implies, on the Aristotelian naturalist schema, is that good eggplants have strong stalks, and thus that if an eggplant has a weak stalk, it is defective in that respect. Whether we have reason to promote strong stalks in eggplants is another matter entirely.

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[70] Thomas Aquinas associates goodness with the desirable. For example, in *Summa Theologica* Part I, Question 5, Article 1, he says "The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* i): 'Goodness is what all desire'" (Aquinas 2008). See also Stump (2005: 62).

[71] See Raz (2011: 24-5) and Foot (2001: Chapter 4) for this view of ought judgments.

With these two examples in view, I want to illustrate one way in which an Aristotelian might be tempted to think natural goodness is intrinsically natural, and then connect this with Micah Lott's account. First I do believe Aristotelians have a powerful case that facts about human nature and natural goodness are normative, in the evaluative sense. Moreover, as we just saw, there is a conceptual link between natural-historical judgments and certain sorts of ought judgments. Since in most contexts ought judgments are taken to imply reasons, and if one does not have the evaluative/practical distinction in view, we can see how an Aristotelian might be inclined to infer a conceptual connection between natural goodness and reasons. But of course this would be a mistake. If facts about human nature and natural goodness are evaluative, the only kind of ought judgments that follow from them are evaluative ought judgments, which have no necessary link with reasons.

Lott makes precisely this type of error. The core idea he proposes is that because there is no logical gap between facts about natural goodness and reasons, having a grasp on how humans characteristically function is already to recognize the normative authority of certain reasons. As he puts it, "by saying how 'the human' eats, copulates, relaxes, etc. we are already taking a stand on the sorts of reasons that we *ought* to recognize" (Lott 2014, 771; emphasis in original). We can see now the problem in this line of thinking. Lott equivocates on 'ought'. If we read the 'ought' as evaluative, then his claim is true. By saying how 'the human' eats, copulates, relaxes, etc., we *are* already taking a stand on what sorts of reasons 'the human' ought to recognize. And since we are humans, we are taking a stand on the sorts of reasons *we* ought to recognize. But all this means is that if we do not recognize the reasons we have identified as characteristically human, we are in that respect

defective. Nothing necessarily follows about what we actually have reason to do, since the notion of defect is an evaluative notion.

Lott makes the same mistake with respect to the notion of practical rationality. At one point he expresses the same general thought by saying that "what is naturally good in humans is a life in which practical reason is functioning properly—i.e. a life that is *practically rational*, in the positive evaluative sense" (2014: 771; emphasis in original). Here Lott uses the term 'evaluative' not in the sense I have been using it but in the reason-related sense, for he immediately fills out the thought by saying:

> Therefore any substantive account of human form—any conception we might step back from—will already embody some understanding of how we have reason to act and to live… With a conception of human form, there can be no gap between what is normal and normative. (2014: 771; emphasis in original)

Lott appears to suggest that the concept *properly functioning practical reason* is identical to or conceptually linked with the concept *practical rationality*. And once again, this works *if* we interpret 'practically rational' as 'properly functional'. But if we do, then the conception we have of the human form remains evaluative from beginning to end, with no necessary connection with reasons. If, on the other hand, we take 'practically rational' in the sense in which Lott means it, then it is a practical concept, and the link he is drawing between it and the notion of properly functioning practical reason does not hold. That is, it does not hold *if* the evaluative/practical distinction is sound. And Lott gives us no reason to doubt it.

Hence, the fundamental problem with Lott's attempt to connect natural goodness with reasons is that he equivocates on the evaluative and practical senses of key normative terms.

Philippa Foot's account of the connection between natural goodness and reasons is susceptible to the same criticism—or, I should say, is susceptible to the same criticism, on a certain interpretation of her view. For although she explicitly takes herself to have shown

what she calls a "conceptual connection" and "intrinsic link" between natural goodness and reasons, there are also reasons to think she did not have quite the same conceptual connection in view as Lott.

First, recall the five theses that constitute her account of practical rationality:

Pluralism	There are multiple, irreducibly distinct categories of facts that are reasons for action, including desire, self-interest, and moral considerations.
Constitutivism	It is constitutive of human practical reason to recognize facts in each category *as* reasons.
Parity	Some reasons in each category are deliberatively on par with some reasons in each other category.
Basicness	Some reasons in each category are basic.
Source	The distinct categories of facts are reasons because it is naturally good for humans to see them as such.

It is the last thesis that concerns the relation between natural goodness and reasons, and yet this thesis is ambiguous, since 'because' can be interpreted in more than one way. 'Because' could express a reason relation, as in the statement, "You shouldn't kick your cat because it will cause her unnecessary pain." This means the fact that kicking your cat would cause her unnecessary pain supports, or weighs in favor of, you not kicking her. On the *reasons interpretation* of **Source**, facts about human nature and natural goodness are practically significant in exactly the same way. Thus, the fact that we *need* to see moral considerations as reasons, which is a fact about what is naturally good for us, supports, or weighs in favor of, our taking these considerations as practically significant.

There is evidence that Foot understood **Source** in this way. For example, in the first chapter of *Natural Goodness*, Foot compares the way in which non-human animals do what is good for them versus the way in which humans do what is good for them:

> Animals are different…from us in that to do what they should do—what is needed and is within their capacity—they do not have to understand what is going on; whereas a human being can and should understand that, and why, there is reason for, say, keeping a promise or behaving fairly. This last may seem a tall order, but this human understanding is not anything hard to come by. We all know enough to say 'How could we get on without justice?', 'Where would we be if no one helped anyone else?', or 'How could we manage if there were no way of making decisions for us all?' Anyone who thinks about it can see that for human beings the teaching and following of morality is something necessary.[72]

By 'necessary' Foot means necessary for human goodness; i.e. natural human goodness. Foot, then, appears to be claiming that the fact that teaching and following morality is necessary for natural goodness is itself practically significant. Indeed, she presents it as "a reason for" following morality. Similarly, at the end of her chapter on practical rationality (chapter 4), she returns to a challenge from Gary Watson with which she began the chapter:

> When Gary Watson issued the challenge described on p. 53 above, he was asking a question that belongs here, since he was wanting to know whether on an objective theory of moral goodness and 'intrinsic link' could be established between moral goodness and *reasons for action*. My argument in the last few pages has been designed to show that there is such a link. (2001: 64; emphasis in original)

Two paragraphs later, she considers how she would answer a skeptic who asked her "why he should do that which the good person must do," where 'should' is clearly asking for a reason, and where 'that which the good person must do' refers to naturally good actions. Foot says "we must try to show him the conceptual connection between acting well and acting rationally" (2001: 65). Foot here apparently takes herself to have shown an "intrinsic

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[72] See Foot (2001: 16-17). She expressed the same thought in her earlier paper "Rationality and Virtue" (1994: 169).

link" or "conceptual connection" between acting well, which she understands as *naturally good*, and acting rationally, i.e., action supported by reasons, such that a skeptic, so long as he is rational, would have to grant the practical significance of natural goodness.

If this is how we read **Source**, then she is subject to the same criticism as Lott. For to the extent that she takes 'practical rationality' simply to mean properly functioning human practical reason, then the whole picture remains evaluative from beginning to end. It may be true that properly functioning human practical reason registers certain general moral considerations as practically significant. But this is an evaluative fact on the same order as the fact that the properly functioning human auditory system detects sounds between 20 and 20,000 hertz. Nothing necessarily follows about what we have reason to do. So *if* Foot understands the relation between natural goodness and reasons along the lines of the reasons interpretation of **Source**, then she too illicitly moves between evaluative and normative concepts.

On the other hand, there is some reason to think this is not quite what Foot had in mind in claiming a "conceptual connection" between natural goodness and reasons. For example, there is a tension between the reasons interpretation of **Source** and **Basicness**, which claims that some reasons in each of Foot's three categories are deliberatively basic. If Foot endorses this claim, as she certainly seems to, it would be odd for her to say that facts in each of the three categories derive their practical significance from facts about natural goodness, for this would make facts about natural goodness, so to speak, even more basic—in which case facts about desire, self-interest, etc., would not really be basic in the first place. So there is reason to look for a different interpretation of **Source** that would be consistent with **Basicness**.

Source claims that the distinct categories of facts are reasons *because* it is naturally good for humans to see them as such. To see how else we might interpret 'because', consider the claim, "Composites exist because simples exist." In this case 'because' does not express a reasons relation, but rather a metaphysical relation which has been called "ground."[73] On the *ground interpretation* of **Source**, facts about natural goodness are not themselves practical reasons but rather somehow make it the case that facts in each of Foot's three basic categories (facts about desire, facts about self-interest, and moral considerations) are reasons.

At times Foot suggests something like this sort of connection between natural goodness and reasons. For example, in her 2004 paper "Rationality and Goodness," she discusses the case of a young man—referred to as "the Farm Boy from the Sudentenland"—condemned to death for refusing to serve in Hitler's SS. Prior to his execution, he wrote to his parents that he and his friend "would rather die than stain our consciences with such deeds of horror."[74] This is a classic case of the problem of the rationality of virtue: clearly the Farm Boy did what was virtuous, but how can we explain the rationality of his choice given that it ran so contrary to his self-interest? Foot's solution is her account of practical rationality. On Foot's view, the Farm Boy's action is rationalized by appeal to moral considerations, which on her view are a basic category of reasons. At

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[73] Actually, there is a sense of 'reason' according to which the phrase following 'because' does express a reason. For example, we might say "the reason composites exist is because simples exist." But in in this case 'reason' is being used in a purely explanatory sense, not a practical sense. For a discussion on rounding and reasons see Chang (2009; 2013; 2014). According to Chang, the notion of ground was introduced into the contemporary metaphysics literature by Kit Fine (1991). It has since received quite a lot of attention. See Bliss & Trogdon (2014) for an overview.

[74] Foot quotes the young man's letter at (2004: 2). She takes the quote from a book of letters penned by Nazis-resisters facing execution titled, *Dying We Live*.

the end of her paper, after she has explained the way in which all three of her categories of reasons connect in some way to natural goodness, she returns to the Farm Boy example. "In the end," she says,

> it is the need for moral action—the part that justice and other virtues place in human life—that makes it possible for actions such as those of the Farm Boy from the Sudentenland to be rational actions in spite of the terrible consequences that he faced. (2004: 12)

The language here is intriguing. The fact that humans need to be virtuous, which is an evaluative fact about human nature, "makes it possible" for moral considerations to be genuine reasons. This suggests that facts about natural goodness might connect with reasons in a different way—as being somehow the metaphysical condition of their practical significance.

I do not know if this is how Foot understood the relation between natural goodness and reasons. In my view, her texts are sufficiently ambiguous on this matter that it may not be possible to attribute any definitive interpretation. For example, if Foot understood the relation between natural goodness and reasons according to the grounding interpretation, then it is puzzling why she took such pains to claim that she had shown a conceptual connection between natural goodness and reasons. For *A* can ground *B* without *A* conceptually or logically entailing *B*. (The fact that simples exist does not conceptually or logically entail that composites exist.) So I must end this discussion with a conditional conclusion. *If* Foot understood the relation between natural goodness and reasons according to the grounding interpretation, then she may not be susceptible to the same equivocation criticism as Lott. But in this case, her view is woefully underdeveloped, for she provides little detail on how this grounding relation is supposed to be understood. So even in this case, her view is not a sufficient account of the relation between natural goodness and reasons.

5. Conclusion: The Real Problem

Above I said that the evaluative/practical distinction and the parity argument have two important implications for the debate about the normativity objection. The first was that Lott and Foot's accounts of the normativity of human nature and natural goodness fail. I conclude this chapter by discussing the second implication, which is that Aristotelian naturalism is left with a serious problem on its hands, but it is not the problem expressed in standard formulations of the normativity objection.

To see this, it will help to zoom out and survey the general arc of the argument so far. Aristotelian naturalists claim that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness. That is, moral virtues are natural excellences, where a natural excellence is a function of how humans are characteristically constituted and how they characteristically live, which is to say, a function of (facts about) the human life form. We ought to act virtuously because humans need to be virtuous to live a characteristic human life. The problem, I have argued, is that norms such as "humans should be virtuous" are constitutive norms grounded in facts about the human life form, and constitutive norms have no conceptual or logical connection with practical reasons. Thus, the human life form is not intrinsically practically normative.

Critics would be wrong, however, to conclude that Aristotelian naturalism is a lost cause. The parity argument does not in itself undermine Aristotelian naturalism's core thesis. What follows from the evaluative nature of natural goodness is not that facts about human natural goodness and the human life form are never practical, but that when they are, there must be something else that *makes* them so. Aristotelian naturalists can accept this conclusion and still maintain their conception of ethical goodness as natural goodness,

if they can explain how the human life form is *extrinsically* practically normative in a distinctively Aristotelian way.

What the parity argument ultimately shows, then, is that *if* Aristotelian naturalism is to maintain its core thesis, it has some explaining to do. It needs to explain what it is in virtue of which facts about human nature and natural goodness are practical. The reason this is a problem is because Aristotelian naturalists have offered no adequate explanation. We can understand why. The need for such an explanation is obscured by the thought that natural goodness is intrinsically practical, and this thought in turn is buttressed by overlooking the evaluative/practical distinction. The result, however, is an explanatory gap in the Aristotelian naturalist approach—and, we should note, a gap of great import. Failure to explain how facts about human nature and natural goodness become practical would be a failure to explain one of the most widely accepted features of moral facts and judgments, namely, their practical significance. Such a failure would indeed threaten the credibility of the approach. This is the normativity problem.

Happily, however, the problem of an explanatory gap is a problem that can be remedied by proffering a plausible explanation. That is what I propose to do—or rather begin doing—in the next chapter, where I enter the second main movement of my overall argument.

CHAPTER 4: ARISTOTELIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM

1. Introduction

I believe Aristotelian naturalism's normativity problem can be solved. The solution I will propose has two main parts. In this chapter I lay out the structure of the first part of that solution.

I closed Chapter 3 by noting that Aristotelian naturalism stands in need of a plausible account of what makes facts about human nature practically normative. I start in Section 2 by explaining what type of account this must be. It is what has come to be called a metanormative account of the *source* of normativity. It is *meta*normative in that it is not a theory about which particular facts or principles are normative, but rather a theory about features of practical normativity in general. (That is why the metanormative theory I will propose constitutes only one part of the solution to the normativity objection. A metanormative theory all by itself cannot get us to the conclusion that facts about human nature are normative.) And it is an account of the *source* of normativity in that it is concerned to explain what makes practically normative things normative. This is to explain the ground of normativity, as opposed to its nature, or the types of facts that can be normative. I will unpack this distinction in more detail below. Interestingly, the main figureheads of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism have remained largely silent in the metanormative literature on normative source. This means there is much work to be done on this score, but it also means there are grounds for hope that if a plausible Aristotelian theory can be developed, Aristotelian naturalism will have resources to respond to address the normativity problem in a new and powerful way.

In Sections 3 and 4 I begin developing what I believe is the most promising metanormative theory for Aristotelian naturalists. It is a new version of constructivism I call *Aristotelian constructivism*. As I mentioned above, the label itself is not new. Mark LeBar (2004) was the first to use the label for a view he was developing, although he later began calling his view *Virtue Eudaimonism* (LeBar 2013). He is also the only other author active in the literature who has attempted to combine a general Aristotelian ethical outlook with a constructivist account of practical normativity.[75] I will not be engaging with his view in detail, however, since Aristotelian naturalists like Foot, Thompson, and Hursthouse would not be inclined to embrace it. My version of Aristotelian constructivism is structurally different from LeBar's Virtue Eudaimonism in ways that, I hope, will make it attractive to Aristotelian naturalists.[76] As far as I can tell, no one else has put forward the sort of view I will propose. If I am right, this chapter breaks new theoretical ground. Setting out the view in a single chapter, however, requires me to leave many important issues unremarked and undeveloped. I will have space only to sketch the barest outlines of the view. So this chapter is perhaps best read as the outline of a long-term research project, along with enough support to show that such a research program is worth undertaking.

2. Aristotelian Naturalism and Metanormative Theory

I have already suggested that critics should not deny that facts about human nature and natural goodness are practically normative. It is obvious that some such facts are reason-

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[75] Christine Korsgaard's recent work (2009; 2011; 2013; 2014) is similar in bent, in that it undertakes to bring together an Aristotelian account of goodness with a Kantian constructivist account of normativity.

[76] Henceforth I will use the term 'Aristotelian constructivism' to refer to my specific version of it, and use LeBar's term 'Virtue Eudaimonism' to refer to his version of constructivism.

giving. If I am holding a glass of straw-colored liquid, and you shout, "Wait! That's not whisky, it's hemlock!" and if you speak truly, no one doubts you have pointed out a reason why I should not drink the liquid. And no one doubts that the reason I should not drink the liquid is because it would end my life, and also that ending my life would be naturally bad for this organism that I am. So, facts about natural goodness and badness can be practically normative. This much is clear. What is in unclear is precisely why or how they can be, given that such facts are not intrinsically practical, as I argued in the previous chapter. The challenge for the Aristotelian naturalist, then, is to explain what it is *in virtue of which* facts involving natural goodness/badness are practical, when they are practical. Now this sort of explanation falls in the purview of what has come to be called metanormative theory. Metanormative theories are not about the reasons agents actually have, but rather purport to explain the nature of reasons in general. Ruth Chang (2009; 2013; 2014) has pointed out in a series of recent papers that there are three distinct types of questions we can ask in metanormative theorizing. Getting clear on this three-fold distinction will help us understand exactly what sort of explanation the Aristotelian naturalist needs.[77]

Chang's three-fold distinction

The first question we could ask in metanormative theorizing is about what sorts of facts are normative. This, Chang suggests, is a question about the *bearers* of normativity. Now as Chang points out, all sorts of facts can be normative. But some are dependent for their normative force on others, and the question here is what sort of facts are *fundamentally*

[77] In the rest of this section I will follow the practice of Chang and most other metanormative theorists in using the reasons characterization of the normative. So in this section, 'normativity' will refer to practical normativity.

normative? There are three main views: value theories, on which normativity is grounded in facts about values; desire theories, on which normativity is grounded in facts about agents' desires; and hybrid theories, which basically combine the prior two accounts.[78] Second, we could ask what normativity is. This is a question about the *nature* of normativity. Again, there are basically three answers to this question: first, that normativity is a *sui generis* justificatory relation; second, that normativity is motivational force; and third, that normativity is a kind of volitional commitment that is both motivating and justificatory.[79]

The third type of question we could ask is: what makes normative facts normative? That is, what is it in virtue of which normative facts are normative? This is a question about the *source* of normativity.[80] There are two main views about normative source.[81] Source externalism holds that normativity is grounded in facts external to agents.[82]

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[78] Among the defenders of value theories, Chang includes Parfit (2011), Raz (1997), and Scanlon (1998). See also Nagel (1970), Shafer-Landau (2003), Wallace (2006), and Wedgewood (2007). Among the defenders of desire theories Chang references Williams (1981). See also the early Foot (1978), Railton (1989; 2003), Smith (1994), Schroeder (2007). A similar family of views I did not mention in the text are buck-passing accounts, on which normative facts are not values themselves, but the underlying facts on which values supervene. See Scanlon (1998). The hybrid view is not widely represented among philosophers. Ruth Chang (2004) has been its primary defender.

[79] For defenders of the view that normativity is a sui generis justificatory relation, see Dancy (2000), Parfit (2011), Raz (1999a), Scanlon (1998) and Shafer-Landau (2003). See Williams (1981) and Lenman (2010) for the view that normativity is motivational force, and Korsgaard (1996c; 2008c) for the view that normativity is a volitional force that is both motivating and justificatory.

[80] See Chang (2009: 243), Chang (2013: 164-5), and especially Chang (2014: 477-82) for extensive discussion on the question of normative source.

[81] Chang carves up the positions a bit differently. She says there are *three* main views: *externalism*, *internalism* and *voluntarism*. But I find it simpler to classify voluntarism as a species of internalism.

[82] Defenders of source externalism include Scanlon (2014), Parfit (2011) and Raz (1999a). Note the similarity between the list of those who defend value accounts of normative bearers and the list of those who defend source externalism. There are natural affinities between these views. As Chang (2014) points out, however, keeping these questions

Versions of source externalism disagree about what sorts of facts these are—for example, whether they are natural or non-natural or supernatural, whether they are irreducibly normative, or whether they are reducible to non-normative facts. Source internalism, the other view on normative source, holds that normativity is sourced in facts that are internal to agents. Again, different versions of internalism hold different views on what sorts of facts about agents ground normativity. One common type of source internalist holds that normativity is grounded in facts about agents' non-cognitive motivational states.[83] Another kind of source internalist holds that normativity is grounded in volitional commitment.[84] Yet another kind of source internalist holds that normativity is grounded in some *sui generis* type of evaluative attitude which is different from both desire and volitional commitment.[85]

Above I said that the question to be pressed on the Aristotelian naturalist is: what is it in virtue of which facts about natural goodness are normative? With Chang's three-fold distinction in hand, we can see this is a question about the *source* of normativity. Remarkably, however, Aristotelian naturalists have engaged very little in mainstream metanormative debates about normative source.[86] This is surprising because any position one takes on the question whether human nature and natural goodness are normative

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distinct is important because failure to do so can hide certain options from view. For example, one might hold that the bearers of normativity are facts about values, and also that normativity is conferred upon those facts by agents. Korsgaard's "Two Distinctions in Goodness" (1983) made roughly the same point.

[83] Defenders of this brand of source internalism include, among others, Goldman (2005; 2006; 2009), Lenman (2010), Schroeder (2007) and Williams (1981).

[84] Defenders of this view include Korsgaard (2009) and Chang (2009).

[85] This view is defended by Sharon Street (2008).

[86] There are several philosophers broadly Aristotelian in bent who have engaged in questions of normative source—for example, Mark LeBar (2004; 2013) and John McDowell (1998: essays 4-10). But neither of these would, I think, qualify as an Aristotelian naturalist in the full sense represented by Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse and Michael Thompson.

presupposes a prior view about what makes *anything* normative. One might have thought, therefore, that the controversy between Aristotelian naturalists and their critics would have quickly led to a discussion about the basic source of practical normativity, for this, one might think, is where the disagreement between Aristotelian naturalists and their critics ultimately bottoms out. But when one looks at the writings of the paradigm Aristotelian naturalists, one finds almost no engagement with mainstream theories of normative source. If the arguments in Chapter 3 are on the right track, this lack of engagement in metanormative theory has been a strategic error. I believe the only viable way forward for the Aristotelian naturalist is to begin formulating a metanormative theory about the source of (practical) normativity, a task I begin in the next section.

The Attractions of Constructivism

When we survey the mainstream accounts of normative source, one stands out as especially well-suited to take on the Aristotelian naturalist's theoretical task: constructivism. Constructivism can be characterized as the view that valu*ing* is prior to, and the source of, value. The core idea, metaphysically, is that practical normativity is mind-dependent, grounded in agents' first-personal conscious engagement with the world. So constructivism is an internalist theory of normative source. The prospect of marrying Aristotelian naturalism with constructivism might be a bit startling. But in fact, the two views fit together remarkably well.[87]

For a start, constructivism purports to offer impressive theoretical payoffs with minimal metaphysical commitment. To see this, consider first a different mainstream

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[87] Christine Korsgaard (1996c; 2008c; 2013; 2014) has done excellent trail-blazing work on this score. My view is deeply inspired by her brand of neo-Kantianism.

metanormative account, *substantive realism*.[88] On this view, practical normativity is ultimately grounded in normative entities or facts that exist independently of the thoughts and desires of agents.[89] A central motivation for this view is that it easily explains an important feature many people think characterizes ethical discourse—namely, objectivity. According to substantive realism, ethical claims are objective in virtue of the fact that they describe or refer to fundamental normative entities that are metaphysically independent of the thoughts, concerns and desires of agents. The explanatory power of this view comes at a cost. The view is plagued by well-known epistemological worries about how we could come to know such entities, and metaphysical worries about their nature and whether they are compatible with the natural sciences. Moreover, some theorists have argued that substantive realism fails to explain a second key feature of ethical claims, namely, their close connection with motivation. These objectors claim that it is difficult to see how normative entities that are wholly external to agents could engage their motivation in the way ethical norms are thought to do—from the inside, so to speak, binding our reason, rather than from the outside, like a carrot or stick.[90]

Constructivist theories claim to be able to explain both features of ethical discourse without the metaphysical cost. How they do this depends in part on the particular version in question. I will have more to say about the details of constructivism below, but the basic idea is this. Constructivist theories hold that normativity is grounded in the familiar attitude of *taking* something to be, or seeing something *as*, valuable or calling for some kind of

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[88] I borrow this label from Korsgaard (1996c).
[89] Shafer-Landau (2003), Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014) hold versions of this view. In so describing normative realism I am painting with a broad brush. Below I will note that the label 'realism' is used in more than one way.
[90] See Sayre-McCord (2017) for an overview of these challenges. See Korsgaard (1996c) and LeBar (2013) for a clear version of the latter sort of criticism.

response. Valuing attitudes are tightly linked with motivation, which explains the second feature of ethical norms. All versions of constructivism also hold that there are constraints, grounded either in the very attitude of valuing, or in other features of rationality, that determine on which of our valuing attitudes are normatively authoritative for us. So constructivism also purports to offer a way of securing objectivity. And it does this without reference to the strange sorts of facts postulated by the substantive realist.

These are some general reasons why an Aristotelian naturalist might be drawn to constructivism over competing metanormative accounts. Another feature that should make constructivism especially attractive to Aristotelian naturalists is how it is able to employ a pair of distinctions elucidated over three decades ago by Christine Korsgaard in her paper, "Two Distinctions in Goodness."[91] One of the most interesting moves of that paper was to differentiate the final/instrumental distinction from the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction. The first distinction concerns the status of goals or ends in the rational structure of action and deliberation. Final ends are pursued for their own sake, whereas instrumental ends are pursued for the sake of some other end. The intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, as Korsgaard understands it, concerns the metaphysical locus of value. Some unpacking is needed to show exactly how constructivism puts this pair of distinctions to work, but we can already see how the general idea connects with the Aristotelian naturalist's problem. Distinguishing these two distinctions opens up the possibility of an activity or state of affairs being a final end (an ultimate *bearer* of practical normativity) but not the basic *source* or *ground* of that normativity. That is, it makes possible the idea that some facts are practically significant, in a basic, non-instrumental way (i.e. final ends), while holding that

[91] The paper was reprinted in her 1996 collection, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*.

their practical normativity is grounded in something extrinsic to those facts, such as attitudes of the agent. Hence, by adopting a constructivist account of practical normativity, the Aristotelian naturalist can claim that facts about the human life form are non-instrumentally practically normative, without relying on the false idea that practical normativity is grounded in intrinsic features of those facts, such as their evaluative-normative nature.

Moreover, the version of constructivism I will propose—Aristotelian constructivism—is not subject to the standard objections an Aristotelian might launch against other mainstream constructivist theories. For example, one reason Aristotelian naturalists might be suspicious of constructivism is that the two main versions on offer in the literature give little or no place to the notion of human nature. Aristotelians also might doubt whether constructivism can support the sort of substantive ethical norms associated with virtues Aristotelian naturalists have long attempted to defend (say, in favor of keeping one's agreements, or acting contrary to one's self-interest for the good of others). This is because of the two main versions of constructivism on offer, only the Kantian version purports to justify the kind of objective norms Aristotelians want. But the Kantian version attempts to show that substantive norms can be derived from purely formal principles that are constitutive of rational agency, and Aristotelians, along with many other theorists, think such a project cannot be done. So Aristotelian naturalists might understandably doubt the prospects of constructivism as an Aristotelian-friendly metanormative theory. Aristotelian constructivism, however, when suitably developed, is not subject to these worries. So not only does it offer a powerful solution to the normativity problem, there is little theoretical cost in Aristotelian naturalism wedding itself to the form of constructivism I will propose.

In the next section I locate Aristotelian constructivism on the theoretical map, first by offering a characterization of constructivism in general, and then by distinguishing Aristotelian constructivism from the two mainstream versions of it currently in the literature. It will be helpful to begin approaching my characterization of constructivism by showing where constructivism falls along several key distinctions.

3. Constructivism

Metaphysics: Realism vs. Antirealism

One of the major divisions among normative theorists is the division between realists and antirealists. Sometimes this division is characterized as a disagreement over whether there are practically normative facts—realists claiming there are, antirealist claiming there are no normative facts, only normative *claims* or *judgments*. This characterization of the realist/antirealist divide is ambiguous, however, and that ambiguity manifests in disagreements among constructivists themselves on which side of the realist/antirealist divide constructivism falls. Above I contrasted constructivism with substantive realism. But realism is construed in the literature in different ways. On one of these construals, constructivism counts as a form of realism. On another construal, it does not.

One could understand realism in a thin way, as consisting in the following thesis:

Cognitivism There are true practically normative claims.

David Copp (2013), Mark LeBar (2013) and Peter Railton (1986) self-identify as realists in virtue of endorsing this cognitivist thesis.[92] Other philosophers understand realism as involving not only **Cognitivism**, but also the metaphysical thesis:

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[92] See also Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (1988: 5), who says: "Wherever it is found, I'll argue, realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally

Independence Practically normative claims are true in virtue of representing practical normative facts that exist independently of agents.

I have been calling this view *substantive realism*. Christine Korsgaard (2008b), Sharon Street (2008; 2010), Russ Shafer-Landau (2003) and Karl Schafer (2015) characterize realism in this thick way as involving both **Cognitivism** *and* **Independence**. Since the heart of constructivism is the idea that practical normativity is mind-dependent, it is no surprise that these philosophers classify constructivism as a form of antirealism.

It is important to see, though, that endorsing **Cognitivism** does not commit one to endorsing **Independence**. One might think that there are true practically normative claims, and even that their truth consists in their expressing practically normative facts, but hold that those facts are mind-dependent. If one thinks this, as Copp, Railton and Lebar do, and if one understands realism in the thin sense, as consisting only of **Cognitivism**—with some *species* of realism going on to endorse **Independence** and some not—then one can classify constructivism as a form of (thin) realism. Indeed, LeBar (2013: 115-7) argues explicitly for this classification.[93]

In this study I find it convenient to follow LeBar in treating constructivism as a form of thin realism, for this will enable me to speak freely of normative facts. Antirealists

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construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literally true. Nothing more." Finlay (2007) contains a helpful overview of the different understandings of realism.

[93] Constructivism's endorsement of **Cognitivism** is what principally sets it apart from expressivism. This notwithstanding, James Lenman (2010; 2012) has developed an expressivist version of constructivism. He does this by trimming the last clause off **Cognitivism**, so one is left with the thesis: "There are normative truths," and he then inserts an account of truth that lets one *say* everything the cognitivist *says*, but mean by it what the expressivist means.

typically deny the existence of practical normative facts, framing their views instead in terms of practical normative *claims* and *judgments*. Although I could frame Aristotelian constructivism solely in these terms, I have found it to be more easily and economically expressed in terms of facts, keeping in mind that practically normative facts are, on any constructivist view, mind-dependent.

Scope: Local vs. Global

Versions of constructivism vary by scope. *Local* constructivism[94] aims only to explain a limited or local domain of practical-normative facts, doing so by appealing to other more basic, or at least less controversial, practically normative facts. John Rawls' (1980) and Thomas Scanlon's (1998) views are often cited as representatives of local constructivist theories. Rawls, for example, explains practically normative facts about political justice by reference to a decision procedure, illustrated by the image of rational agents standing in the "original position," agreeing to a set of principles while behind a veil of ignorance about their place and prospects in society. This view is a form of restricted constructivism because Rawls uses practical-normative concepts in his description of the decision procedure itself. One example is that the agents in the original position are characterized as "rational" (Rawls 1971: 142), where this is understood not only in the purely descriptive sense of someone who takes the most efficient means to promoting her own self-interest, but also at least partly in the practical-normative sense of what is reasonable for agents to do. Scanlon's constructivism has a slightly different target; he is interested in explaining

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[94] I follow Lenman and Shemmer (2012: 3) and Enoch (2009: 323) in using the *local vs. global* terminology. The same distinction has been called: *restricted vs. metaethical* (see Street 2010: 367-369), and *domain-specific vs. comprehensive* (see LeBar 2013: 118).

normative facts about morally right and wrong action. On his contractualist view, an action is right in virtue of the fact that it can be justified to others on grounds those others cannot reasonably reject (Scanlon 1998: esp. chap. 5). As with Rawls, Scanlon explicitly appeals to more basic practically normative notions—e.g. *justification* and *reasonable rejection*—in order to explain his target concepts.

Global theories, by contrast, attempt to explain what makes *any* practically normative claim or fact practically normative. This aim is generally thought to imply a theoretical constraint, namely, that such theories cannot appeal to practically normative concepts in their explanation. Do do so would be circular.[95] Constructivist theories of normative source are attempts to explain what it is in virtue of which *any* normative reason is practically normative, so they are global theories. From now on, when I refer to constructivism, I mean the global type, unless otherwise indicated. Aristotelian constructivism is a type of global constructivism.

Characterization: Procedure vs. Standpoint

So, what exactly makes practically normative facts practically normative? Constructivists agree that normativity is a construct of the mental states or activities of agents, a phenomenon that arises in some way from the relation between agents and the world, and in particular from agents' first-person engagement with the world. Constructivists also agree that normativity does not arise *directly* from an agent's mental states. As Schafer puts it, constructivism does not merely take these mental state 'materials' as it finds them, but

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[95] Mark LeBar (2013) denies this. His view is explicitly circular in a certain respect, which I will explain briefly below. He claims that the circularity is not vicious, however, since it fruitfully explains many other otherwise confusing aspects of normative experience and practice.

rather "transforms them via some 'procedure of construction', thereby arriving at what we might call the 'metaethically authoritative' normative points of view" (Schafer 2015: 691).

Constructivists disagree, though, not only about what this "procedure of construction" is, but also on whether that intermediary step between raw attitudes and practically normative facts is best understood as a procedure at all. It used to be common to define constructivism in terms of the idea that practical normativity is the result of some actual or hypothetical deliberative procedure.[96] Perhaps this is because Rawls (1980) framed his own version of constructivism in procedural terms, and his version is widely read as one of the spearheads of constructivism in the modern literature. The term 'procedure', however, suggests a linear, temporally extended deliberative process. Even when theorists are careful to represent the constructivist procedure as hypothetical, the procedural characterization does not well capture the way in which some prominent constructivists today think practical normativity arises from agents' first-personal engagement with the world.

An alternative approach, vigorously defended by Sharon Street (2010), holds that normativity arises not out of an actual or hypothetical procedure but out of a practical standpoint. To understand what a practical standpoint is, it is helpful to begin reflecting on what is involved in being an agent. Agents are things that act. To act is not merely to move, nor merely to move by internal motivation. Wind-up toy cars can do that. To be an agent

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[96] Following in these footsteps, Darwall, Gibbard and Railton write in their widely cited article "Toward Fin de siècle Ethics: Some Trends" (1992: 13) that "the constructivist is a hypothetical proceduralist. He endorses some hypothetical procedure as determining which principles constitute valud standards of morality." It is still common to include the notion of a procedure in characterizing constructivism while remaining more ecumenical. Thus, Lenman (2012: 215) describes constructivism as involving "some procedure we can in principle follow or some criterion we can in principle apply." The second disjunct makes room for views like Street's, as I explain below.

one must at least be able to sense the world, to represent it as being a certain way, and then to use those representations to direct one's movements. For human agents, at least, and perhaps for all agents, the way in which our representations of the world help guide our behavior is by having a certain evaluative cast or valence or significance, which we register as calling for some sort of response. To perceive the world in this normatively loaded way is to occupy a practical standpoint. As Street puts it, a practical standpoint is "the point of view occupied by any creature who takes at least some things in the world to be good or bad, better or worse, required or optional, worthy or worthless, and so on…"[97] To experience the world in this way is to hold a set of a certain type of intentional attitudes toward certain states of affairs. For convenience, I will call them value attitudes.[98] To occupy a practical standpoint is, roughly, to hold a set of value attitudes.

According to Street, the notion of a practical standpoint is more basic than that of a procedure. She suggests that

> the most sympathetic reading of paradigmatic constructivists such as Rawls and Korsgaard shows that the notion of a procedure is ultimately a heuristic device, whereas the philosophical heart of the position is the notion of the practical point of view and what does or doesn't follow from within it. (Street 2010: 366)

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[97] Street (2010: 366). In earlier writings, Street (2008: 208) characterized both constructivism in general and her own favored version of it in procedural terms. She rejects this characterization in her (2010: 364-66), and several pages later goes on to show how both Rawls' and Scanlon's view can be redescribed in practical standpoint rather than proceduralist terms.

[98] An unresolved issue within constructivist theories concerns the nature of this attitude. Some constructivist think it is desire (Lenman 2010; 2013). Others think it is a volitional commitment (Korsgaard 1996c; 2009a). Still others think it is a sui generis type of motivational state that cannot be reduced to any other type (Street 2008; 2012). Michael Ridge (2012) has persuasively argued that constructivists need to say more about the type of attitude they have in mind, given the significant theoretical role it plays. I agree, although I do not have the space to do so here. I use the term 'value attitude' as a neutral placeholder.

The idea here is that what ultimately makes a deliberative procedure produce outputs of the desired sort is a matter of two things: first, the facts that are allowed in; second, how those facts are interpreted, assessed, or evaluated in light of certain goals. To interpret, assess, or evaluate those facts in light of certain goals, to see only *those* facts as salient and thus worth assessing in the first place, and to have certain goals one sees as worth going for, and worth assessing facts in light of, is to grasp those facts from within a certain practical standpoint. Thus, for example, to be a Rawlsian agent, instrumentally rational and self-interested, is to take facts about what would benefit oneself as being practically salient in a way that facts about what would benefit someone else are not. In general, then, one cannot even undertake the sort of Rawlsian *procedure* that could generate principles of justice unless one already occupies a practical standpoint. And it is really the nature of that standpoint, combined with the content of the inputs, that determines the outcome of the procedure. What the notion of a *procedure* adds to the notion of a practical standpoint is simply a helpful way of envisioning what implications follow from that practical perspective. I think Street is right that the notion of the practical standpoint lies closer to the heart of practical normativity than the notion of a deliberative procedure, and I will follow her in employing the practical standpoint characterization of constructivism.

I began this section by noting that constructivists agree that practically normative facts do not arise *directly* from an agents' value attitudes, but are generated by some "procedure of construction" (Schafer 2015: 691). And I have suggested that this procedure of construction is best understood in terms of a practical standpoint. I still need to explain how this notion of a practical standpoint can move constructivism beyond pure subjectivism. Before I do that, however, it will be helpful to have in hand a general characterization of constructivism itself.

A Preliminary Characterization of Constructivism

Constructivism can be understood as a thesis about what makes practically normative facts normative or as a thesis about what makes normative judgments true. As a thesis about facts, I will say constructivism holds that

C_F Facts are practically normative in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint,

where the practical standpoint is given a *formal* characterization, for reasons I will explain shortly.[99] As a thesis about judgments, constructivism holds that

C_J Practically normative judgments are true in virtue of expressing practically normative facts.[100]

Constructivism, then, holds that a fact is practically normative, or a practical judgment is true, in virtue of some other facts holding, where these include facts about how agents perceive and interpret the world. This idea clearly sets constructivism apart from the sort of realist view that understands our practical cognitive engagement with the world in terms

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[99] Not all constructivists would endorse this generic characterization, precisely because I am using the practical standpoint rather than the procedural characterization. In 2010 Sharon Street (2010: 364) wrote that there is no uncontroversial way of describing constructivism "at the present time," and I think little has changed since the time of that publication. No matter. It is not my purpose to offer a neutral characterization, but rather to offer a *general* characterization that will help me situate Aristotelian constructivism with respect to other mainstream views.

[100] This formulation is inspired by Sharon Street's (2010: 367), but it differs in that Street thinks constructivism is a form of antirealism, and thus characterizes constructivism in terms of the truth conditions of normative *judgments* rather than in terms of facts. On her view, normative judgments are true in virtue of being entailed from within the practical standpoint. Apparently, however, she is open to framing constructivism in terms of facts, for in one place she says "one way to present metaethical constructivism is as claiming that normative facts are constituted by facts about what is entailed by the 'rules of practical reason' in combination with the non-normative facts" (2010: 373).

of *recognizing* mind-independent normative properties—a theory Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut have aptly called the "recognitional view," and has since been known as *recognitionalism*.[101] According to constructivism, there are no mind-independent practically normative properties there to recognize. There are just the mind-independent, non-normative facts (such as that one's neighbor needs help), and the agents' registering them a certain way, or *taking* them to have a certain significance that bears on her actions.

Two key features of this characterization of constructivism need clarification. First, why must the practical standpoint be characterized in formal terms? The answer is that global constructivism purports to explain what makes *any* practically normative fact normative. If the thesis is that practical normativity *in general* arises from within, and follows from, a practical standpoint, then we must characterize the practical standpoint in a way that could apply to any possible occupant of that standpoint. Street explains it thus:

> To give the practical point of view a formal characterization is to give an account of the standpoint of valuing or normative judgment as such, where this involves giving an account of the attitude of valuing that does not itself presuppose any substantive values but rather merely explicates what is involved in valuing anything at all. Unlike their restricted counterparts, metaethical constructivist views, if successful, do not take the truth of any given substantive normative claim for granted. Instead, they explain what a creature must be doing to count as a valuer at all, and explain how standards of correctness in the normative domain get generated by this attitude. (Street 2010: 369)

This notwithstanding, some versions of constructivism hold that no *substantive* practical judgments follow from a purely formal description of the practical standpoint—that in order to get substantive conclusions about what some particular agent (such as you or me) have reason to do, we must appeal to a substantive description of the practical standpoint. I will return to this shortly.

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[101] Cullity and Gaut (1997: 4).

The second feature in need of clarification is the central notion of "following from within the practical standpoint." Suppose I have some end *E*. Having an end involves holding a value attitude toward the state of affairs expressed in *E*. Thus, *E* is part of my practical standpoint. There is always a specific way (or range of ways) in which I can pursue an end. Call this a means. The necessary means to my ends are determined by facts about my particular circumstances. Let us suppose that the necessary means to my end *E* will be some activity *A*. So then *E* and facts about my circumstances ground the fact that

7 *A*-ing is a necessary means of pursuing *E*.

Now it is partly *constitutive* of holding a value attitude toward *E* that I take myself to have reason to undertake the necessary means to *E*.[102] So if I become aware of the fact expressed in **7**, then, so long as I hold *E* as my end, i.e. so long as *E* is part of my practical standpoint, I must take **7** to be practically normative. I *must* do so because that is partly constitutive of taking *E* as my end.[103] This, then, is how a practical fact can follow from within the practical standpoint. Notice that what follows from my practical standpoint is not the content of the practical fact expressed in **7**. That is already fixed by the content of my final end and the facts about my circumstances. Rather, what follows from within my practical standpoint is **7**'s practical significance. The basic idea here is that an agent's

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[102] Kant (1996: 70 [4:418]) endorsed a version of this principle which he called the *hypothetical imperative*. Today it is usually called the *instrumental principle*. Arguments in support of this principle appear in Street (2008: Section 7) and Korsgaard (2009: 68-70). There is disagreement on how the instrumental principle should be formulated, in part because while some version of the principle seems a crucially important part of rationality, there is a danger of bootstrapping if it is not formulated with care. Take, for example, a version of the principle that says "If I have some end *E*, then I have reason to take the necessary means to *E*." But this is clearly false, because I do not have reason to take actions in pursuit of evil ends. Merely having an end cannot give me a reason to pursue it. There is much disagreement on how exactly the principle should be formulated. For a selection of the discussion, see Korsgaard (2008d), Raz (2011), Schroeder (2005) and Wallace (2001).

[103] See Street (2008: 227-229) for an extended discussion of this idea.

reasons are a function of her ends and her circumstances. And the status of practical facts *as* reasons is grounded in constitutive facts about what it is to hold a value attitude.

Let us see how all this works in a concrete example. Suppose that one of my ends is protecting the well-being of my children, and suppose that my family lives in an old house whose ventilation system is full of mold, which triggers life-threatening allergic reactions in my children. I discover this and also learn that there is no effective way to clean the system, and thus that moving to a cleaner dwelling is the only way in my power to remove the allergen threat. So long as I hold the end of protecting the well-being of my children, then I must take myself to have reason to undertake the necessary means. So I must take myself to have reason to move to a cleaner house. I *must* do so, because, given the empirical facts, that is a constitutive part of holding the end of promoting the well-being of my children. Another way of putting this is that failure to take myself to have reason to move to a cleaner house would not display insensitivity to the reasons I have. Rather, it would indicate that promoting the well-being of my children is not really my end after all.

In this scenario, two practical-normative facts are entailed from within my practical standpoint. First, there is the second-order fact that I have reason to move to a cleaner house. This fact entails there is a reason to do something, but it does not express the reason itself. The actual reason on which I would act, in this case, is the fact that moving to a cleaner house would remove the allergen threat. This is a first-order practical fact. Its content, of course, is not intrinsically practical. It is simply a fact about what is and is not possible in the world, given the circumstances. But it becomes practically normative for me in virtue of its standing in a means-end relation to my end. That is, its practical significance follows from within my practical standpoint.

Now given what I have said so far, constructivism might seem to yield complete subjectivism.[104] The above characterization of constructivism references "the" practical standpoint, but there are many possible practical standpoints, in the sense of many different sets of value attitudes an agent could hold. And it seems that, for all that has been said so far, one could generate reasons simply by adopting certain ends. Although on this view it is true that an agent's reasons are a function of her ends combined with her circumstances, and although it is also true that agents do have some choice over their ends, most constructivists believe there are some constraints on which ends actually generate reasons. We are now in position to explain how this can happen. This brings us to the fourth and final distinction I will discuss.

Generality: Kantian vs. Humean

Recall Schafer's point above about how constructivism avoids subjectivism. He said that constructivism does not merely take our attitudes as it finds them, but rather "transforms them via some 'procedure of construction', thereby arriving at what we might call the 'metaethically authoritative' normative points of view" (Schafer 2015: 691). According to Schafer, it is the constructive *procedure* that ensures constructivism is not subjectivism. But the practical standpoint characterization avoids using the notion of a procedure, so it needs some other way of blocking the slide into subjectivism. It does so by specifying the

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[104] I am understanding subjectivism along the lines of Elizabeth Anderson's definition:

> Subjectivism is the view that the mere existence of a favorable subjective state taking *x* as its object (thinking that *x* is valuable, wanting x, identifying with an ideal that endorses *x*) makes *x* valuable to the person in that state. If this were so there would be no room for error or genuine disagreement in value judgments when people know their subjective states. (1993: 91)

practical standpoint in further detail, thereby restricting the value attitudes that count for determining which facts are practically normative, and thus opening up the possibility of divergence between the value attitudes that constitute *the* practically normative standpoint and the value attitudes an agent happens to hold at any given moment. The two main types of constructivism result from specifying the practical standpoint in different ways.[105]

Kantian forms of constructivism hold that the relevant practical standpoint—the standpoint that grounds practically normative facts—is the standpoint of rational agency itself.[106] As the most generic specification of the practical standpoint, we can call this the *rational-agential standpoint*. The general Kantian constructivist schema, then, is:

KC$_F$ Facts are practically normative in virtue of following from within the rational-agential standpoint.

The general schema for normative judgments remains the same.[107] The rational-agential standpoint consists in a set of value attitudes the objects of which are purely formal properties. Chief among these will be the properties of universalizability, and of being the necessary means to a valued end, both of which correspond to the well-known Kantian principles, the categorical imperative and the hypothetical imperative. Suppose, for example, that my end is to achieve relational harmony with my family, and a necessary

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[105] See Schafer (2012: Section 2) for a different way of specifying the practical standpoint. He considers three ways of characterizing the perspective on which normative truth depends. The truth-value of normative judgments about an individual agent *A* could be grounded in (1) *A*'s normative perspective, (2) the normative perspective of the judger, or (3) the normative perspective of the one assessing the judgment. Street (2008: 224) considers options (1) and (2) and selects, without much discussion, option (1). I follow Street on this point.

[106] Defenders of global Kantian constructivism include Bagnoli (2002; 2013a), Korsgaard (1996; 2008b, 2009), and O'Neill (1989). See also Schafer (2015) for a sympathetic discussion of the nature and merits of Kantian constructivism.

[107] Again, anti-realists can avoid reference to normative facts by transposing **KC$_F$** into a thesis about judgments.

means to this end is to forgive a wrong done to me by a family member. What we have here is a maxim, an act-end package.[108] This maxim is universalizable in Kant's sense that I could consistently will that everyone act on this maxim in similar circumstances.[109] So insofar as I am a rational agent, I will take this end as having *pro tanto* practical normative significance. And since the means of forgiving the wrong is necessary to the end of achieving relational harmony, then so long as I will this end, I commit myself to the means. As Kant says, "[w]hoever wills the end also wills…the indispensably necessary means to it that are within his power" (1996: 70 [4:418]). Thus, when possible actions exemplify these formal features, the rational agent will see or register those possible actions as practically normative precisely in virtue of exemplifying those formal features. This is what it is to occupy the rational-agential standpoint.

Kantian constructivists think that taking these formal features as practically significant generates certain constraints on the sorts of substantive facts one can take as practically significant. So although Kantian constructivism specifies the practical standpoint in purely formal terms, it also holds that certain substantive reasons arise from within it. For example, Kantians hold that occupying the rational-agential standpoint commits an agent to valuing both herself and her own ends and other rational agents and their ends.[110] Thus, the power of the Kantian version of constructivism is that, at the level of metanormative theory, it need only defend a very thin, formal conception of the practical

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[108] Here I am following Korsgaard's (2008a: 216-219) interpretation of Kant's view about the nature of a maxim. She says that a maxim describes an action, where the description includes both the discrete act and the end for which it is done. The general structure of a maxim is "do-this-act-for-the-sake-of-this-end" (p. 218).

[109] As Kant puts it, "*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law"* (Kant 1996: 57 [4:402]).

[110] See Korsgaard (1996; 2008). See Street (2012) for a response.

standpoint, yet it is supposed to turn out that the rational-agential standpoint entails a substantive practical standpoint, which yields substantive facts about what we have reason to do.

The other main version of constructivism has come to be called Humean constructivism. Its most energetic and prolific defender has been Sharon Street.[111] According to Street, Humean constructivism is defined negatively as a rejection of the Kantian view that "substantive moral conclusions are entailed from within the standpoint of valuing as such" (Street 2012: 41). Instead, Humean constructivism holds that substantive reasons arise only from within the practical standpoint of particular agents. We can therefore sketch the view as follows:

HC_F Facts are practically normative for some agent *S* in virtue of being entailed from within *S*'s practical standpoint.

Like the Kantian version, the general schema for normative judgments remains the same. On the Humean view, the value attitudes that constitute my practical standpoint may or may not align with those that make up *your* standpoint, and that is okay. Thus, Humean constructivism supports a version of relativism. In theory at least, one might have reason to do anything.

But Street's view is not a full-blown, unrestricted subjectivism. Even though what *I* have reason to do is a function of *my* value attitudes, just because I happen to take

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[111] See Street (2008; 2010; 2012), although more recently Street has started exploring the prospects of a more objectivist approach (see Street 2016). An expressivist version of Humean constructivism is defended by James Lenman (2010; 2012). Bagnoli (2011: section 4) classifies David Velleman (2009) as a Humean constructivist and Lenman and Shermer (2012: 4) classify Harry Frankfurt as a Humean constructivist.

There are other views in the literature too. David Copp (1995; 2005) e.g., argues, roughly, that the relevant standpoint is neither the individual nor the generic agent's standpoint but the standpoint of society.

something as valuable does not *ipso facto* make it practically normative for me. I can be mistaken about the reasons I have, in at least two ways. First, many of the practically normative facts that follow from a practical standpoint are a function not only of what the individual takes to be valuable, but also of the empirical facts, for the empirical facts determine the necessary means to my ends. Thus, one sort of normative mistake can occur when I get the empirical facts wrong. If my children are displaying allergy symptoms, and I think they are suffering from a food allergy when their symptoms are actually caused by, say, mold spores in the ventilation system, I might falsely judge that I have reason to change their daily diet. Another sort of normative mistake occurs when I have conflicting v-attitudes. For example, in a cool moment I might judge that praise and blame is unwarranted in cases where someone had no control over their behavior. This might be a deep and settled judgment. Now suppose at 2 a.m. my child comes down with the flu the night before my dissertation defense. Two hours later, in a foul mood from staying up with my child, I blame my child for catching the flu. That is, I take her to be blameworthy. In so doing I am making a normative mistake, judged by the lights of my own practical standpoint.[112] Thus, even though Humean constructivism is relativistic in the sense that the reasons an agent has are a function of that agent's value attitudes, the view is not a simplistic affirmation that something is valuable for an agent simply because the agent takes it to be.

Aristotelian naturalists would not be inclined to embrace either the Kantian or the Humean version of constructivism. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the fact that Kantian constructivism concerns itself with generic rational agency rather than

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[112] This example is based on an example from Street (2008: 230, n. 38).

specifically *human* agency is already a count against it, for Aristotelian naturalists characteristically take ethics to be closely tied not only to the generic features of agency, but also to the substantive needs and capacities of the human animal.[113] In addition, there are well-known concerns (and not only from Aristotelians) about whether the Kantian project of pulling substantive norms out of a purely formal hat can really succeed at all. Humean versions of constructivism also leave little theoretical significance for the notion of human nature, but for the opposite reason: they place all the theoretical weight on features of individual agents. The result is a kind of restricted relativism that Aristotelian naturalists would like to avoid.

Aristotelian constructivism shares the same basic structure as both Kantian and Humean versions, but differs from them in ways that, I hope to show, will make it attractive to Aristotelian naturalists. Before I explain the view, though, I need briefly to

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[113] Michael Thompson points the point starkly when, contrasting a Kantian approach to ethics with an Aristotelian approach, he writes:

> One mark of Aristotelianism is the special position it gives to the concept *human* in practical philosophy, in particular the preference it gives to this concept over the abstract concepts *person* and *rational being*. It is an essential characteristic of the Kantian approach that it makes these latter concepts central. I do not think we are practicing anything that merit the title of Kantianism except where we are led into the project of articulating a conception of how to live, and how to orient oneself in life, and how to reason practically, that would apply as much to the Martians or Venusians carefully described in Kant's "Universal Natural History" as it does to us. If my action is properly linked to a thought or consideration—that is, if my will is 'morally' determined—then a 'law' is operating in me that can also operate among the imagined Martians, just as a single law of gravitation operates in me and them considered simply as bodies… On an Aristotelian view, the closest one could come to such a thing—somehow to be found "in" many agents and in some sense potentially linking consideration and action in them—is the specifically human life form itself, which is *ex hypothesi* not found in the imagined Martians. If I hazard a few general remarks under the heading "how to live", supposing them to have application in my own case, then, for the Aristotelian, the life form I bear provides the measure of widest generality I can intelligibly aspire to attach to them. (Thompson 2008: 7-8)

explain why my version is worth exploring, given that Mark LeBar (2008; 2012; 2013) has already developed an Aristotelian form of constructivism he calls *Virtue Eudaimonism*. LeBar's view is complex and I cannot do it justice in a few paragraphs. I will only offer a general sketch and explain why I think Aristotelians will not find his view appealing.

LeBar's Virtue Eudaimonism

Lebar (2013: Chapter 1) begins by defending a certain conception of practical rationality. On his view, which he bases on Aristotle, practical rationality consists in a framework of hierarchically ordered ends, organized under an ultimate end. An ultimate end is one that derives none of its normative force from some further end, and which contributes normative force to all other ends we seek (p. 16). Following Aristotle, LeBar argues that any particular individual can have only one ultimate end, and that there is only one ultimate end shared by all human practical reasoners, namely, the end of living well. With ends come reasons: "we have reasons to act for the sake of, and only for the sake of, our ends" (p. 14). So reasons are normative in virtue of their relation to our ends. The normativity of our ultimate end comes not from some other end, but from our *wisely* judging it to be normative (p. 111), where the measure of wise judgment is how well that judgment contributes to our *living well*. Thus, *practical wisdom* and *living well* are the key concepts on which the entire theory hangs.

The relation between these two notions is complex. LeBar holds that although each of the two *concepts* can be characterized independently of the other, "what each concept picks out in the world cannot be characterized without essential reference to the other" (p.

286).[114] Here is how the interdependence works. First, LeBar holds that we cannot make any substantive claims about what living well amounts to without appealing to the concept of practical wisdom. For LeBar, a well-lived life is a life of virtue, and we cannot properly characterize or identify a life of virtue without reference to practical wisdom (p. 81). This is because, first, all the virtues have a cognitive component, so they cannot be exercised without practical wisdom (pp. 81, 83). Thus, we cannot even describe a virtuous life without bringing in the notion of practical wisdom. Second, LeBar thinks there are no truths about living well that are both general and substantive enough to be useful for ethical purposes (p. 100). Thus, any substantive claim about the content of living well must be a claim about the life of some particular individual, and in such cases, it takes practical wisdom to determine what living well amounts to for that individual. So making any substantive claims about what living well consists in requires practical wisdom. The same holds the other way around: we cannot identify instances of practical wisdom without employing the notion of living well. For, on LeBar's view, practical wisdom is simply practical reason exercised wisely or successfully, where success is measured by how well those exercises of reason contribute to a good life.

One feature of LeBar's view that would give Aristotelian naturalists pause is his stance on the kind of knowledge we can have of human nature. While LeBar readily grants the Aristotelian point that, in general, "what constitutes a good life for us is determined by our being the kind of creatures we are" (p. 100), he also thinks we can say little in the way of general claims about our nature that could support general, ethically useful claims about what is good for individual human beings. It is not that we can make *no* general and

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[114] In this sense, LeBar's view is circular. He discusses this circularity and why he thinks it is not problematic in Lebar (2013: Chapter 11).

substantive claims about human nature. LeBar says, for example, that we are social beings, and that "social relations with other people is an element of the good life of paramount importance to [Virtue Eudaimonism]" (p. 89). But for LeBar, this general claim is of little ethical use, because the way in which social relations contribute to our living well depends so much on the particular circumstances of one's life. This view contrasts starkly with the way in which general claims about human nature figure in, say, Rosalind Hursthouse and Philippa Foot's defense of certain ethical norms.[115] On their view, we can come to know facts about human nature that are both general and sufficiently substantive to support substantive ethical norms. For this reason, I think Aristotelian naturalists would not find LeBar's Virtue Eudaimonism an attractive option. Hence, there is a need for other approaches such as my own to follow LeBar in harnessing the advantages of constructivism for Aristotelian-inspired ends, but to do it in a way more congenial to the Aristotelian naturalist project.

Having sketched a theoretical map by marking four key distinctions, and indicating where Aristotelian constructivism falls with respect to those distinctions, I am now ready to unpack the view itself.

4. Aristotelian Constructivism

Aristotelian constructivism can be conceived as lying in between Kantian and Humean constructivism. Like Kantian versions, and unlike Humean ones, Aristotelian constructivism specifies the practical standpoint in more general terms than the standpoint

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[115] See Hursthouse (1999: 209), Foot (2001: 44-45) and Anscombe (1981b: 18-21). At one point in her discussion, Foot asks, "Why then should there be surprise at the suggestion that the status of certain dispositions as virtues should be determined by quite general facts about human beings" (2001: 45)?

of any particular agent. But like Humean versions, and unlike Kantian versions, Aristotelian constructivism maintains that substantive normative conclusions cannot be derived from a purely formal characterization of the practical standpoint, and that an agent's reasons are tied with facts about the agent herself. But whereas Humean constructivism holds that an agent's reasons are tied with facts about her *individual* practical standpoint, Aristotelian constructivism holds that an agent's reasons are tied with facts about the agent's life form or nature.

Aristotelian constructivism has two levels. Level 1, the most generic level, purports to offer an entirely general, global account of the source of practical normativity. Level 2 takes the generic schema of level 1 and applies it to a specific life form.

In its most generic form, then, and as a first approximation, Aristotelian constructivism is the thesis that facts are practically normative for some agent in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of that agent's life form. The basic idea here is that there are facts about how a particular type of organism characteristically "sees" the world, practically speaking, and it is this species-level description of the practical standpoint that fixes the boundaries of an individual agent's reasons.

This idea can be made a bit sharper by tying it to the notion of practical reason. I am understanding practical reason as the complex cluster of cognitive, affective and motivational capacities that enable agents to conceptualize possible courses of action, evaluate them, and form intentions on the basis of those deliberations.[116] Thus, practical reason is what enables agents to register and evaluate the world practically, to represent

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[116] See McDowell (1998: 171-2) and Thompson (2004: 4) for this conception of practical reason.

phenomena under practical concepts. So we can frame level 1 Aristotelian constructivism more precisely by employing the notion of practical reason:

AC_F Facts are practically normative for an agent *S* of some life form *L* in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of *L* practical reason.

Three brief observations are worth noting. First, it seems plausible to suppose that practical reason wherever it is found will exhibit certain formal features, such as conformance to the hypothetical imperative. Because of this, the Aristotelian can turn to the Kantian approach for insight and take on board whatever principles the Kantian correctly identifies as constitutive of rational agency. These principles will characterize the practical standpoint of any rational life form.

Second, however, Aristotelian constructivism also holds that practical reason as instantiated in actual organisms has a substantive form or configuration, and that this configuration can differ among different life forms. Practical reason is, after all, a natural power, so it should be no surprise that it might manifest differently in different types of creatures, just as the power of sight manifests differently across different types of creatures (I will return to this point in more detail below). I do not know whether any non-human organisms actually possess practical reason. It seems to me likely that some dolphin species and some primate species do, but I need not insist on this. The point is that it is clearly *possible* for other forms of life to possess practical reason, and if they do, it is also possible that it is configured somewhat differently in them than in us. This is important because it suggests the determinate shape of practical reason as it is found in the human organism is partly a contingent feature of our developmental history, and thus partly an empirical—perhaps to some extent, an empirically open—question. I will return to this issue below.

Third, as a completely general theory that could apply to any rational form of life, Aristotelian constructivism resonates with the spirit of Aristotelian naturalism, which aims to situate human agents and their reasons within the larger natural world of living things.[117]

Now, the way we move from level 1 Aristotelian constructivism to level 2 is simply by indexing the level 1 thesis to a particular life form. We are seeking an account of *human* reasons. Thus we get:

> **AC_{HF}** Facts are practically normative for a human agent *S* in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of the human life form, understood as the standpoint of human practical reason.

The idea, then, is that there are general truths about how human beings are practically oriented toward the world. Together, these truths specify a practical standpoint. And the facts that are practically normative for us are those that follow from within that standpoint. Notice that the view affords an objectivist, but species-relative account of human reasons. If the reasons we have is ultimately a function of the human practical standpoint, and if there are objective facts about the content of that standpoint, then there are objective facts about what reasons we have.

Notice that when we move from level 1 to level 2, we move from a global theory that purports to explain practical normativity in general to a theory that is more restricted in scope. One might think that level 2 Aristotelian constructivism should therefore be classified with what above I called local theories, such as Rawls' and Scanlon's views. Recall that their basic strategy was to explain a certain set of normative facts in terms of more

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[117] See, again, Annas (2005: 16) and Foot (2001: 16).

fundamental and logically prior normative facts. But this is not Aristotelian constructivism's strategy, and it is important to see why.

At the heart of Aristotelian constructivism is the idea that practical normativity is indexed to particular life forms. This follows from the core constructivist notion that practical normativity is metaphysically grounded in the practical standpoint of agents, and on the idea that practical standpoints are always indexed to some life form. Practical facts are never practical full stop; they are always practical *for some type of agent*. It is not as though level 1 posits certain basic normative facts, which are then appealed to at level 2. Level 1 explains what it is to be a reason in the first place, and secures the idea that what it is to be a reason is the same for humans as it is for dolphins or any other type of rational agent. Still, the facts that actually count as reasons for any particular organism will be different depending on what type of organism is in question. So unlike local versions of constructivism, Aristotelian constructivism does not attempt to explain some subset of practically normative facts (e.g. facts that are practical for humans) in terms of more general and more basic normative facts. On Aristotelian constructivism, there is no such set of more general and more basic facts.[118] So even though level 2 Aristotelian constructivism is more restricted in scope than the fully global level 1 version, it should not be considered a local form of constructivism either.

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[118] It could well be the case that there is a set of facts that are practical for both humans and dolphins. It could also be the case that there is some set of facts that are practical for rational agents of *any* type. But if so, this is because those facts are entailed from within the standpoint of each type of rational agent. So if there is such a common set of facts, it would be explained by the Aristotelian constructivist thesis as applied to each life form. That is, our identification of such a set would be logically posterior to the Aristotelian constructivist thesis, and thus not something the thesis could itself appeal to in an attempt to explain practical normativity.

5. Conclusion

At the close of the last chapter I identified the real problem with Aristotelian naturalism as an explanatory gap. Aristotelian naturalists need to explain what makes human nature normative, and no such explanation has been offered. They claim that moral goodness is a kind of natural goodness, but have no explanation of the normativity of natural goodness. This is the normativity problem. I claimed that the normativity problem can be solved. The solution comes in two parts. In this chapter I unpacked the first part.

I began by asking what kind of explanation is needed to fill the explanatory gap in Aristotelian naturalism. It became clear that Aristotelian naturalists stand in need of an account of the *source* of practical normativity. I outlined several reasons why constructivism is the most promising theory of normative source for Aristotelian naturalists, and why Aristotelian constructivism is the most promising version of constructivism. The core idea of Aristotelian constructivism is that what makes facts normative for human beings is that their practical significance follows from within the human practical standpoint. To see how Aristotelian constructivism connects to facts about human nature and natural goodness we need to have some account of what the human practical standpoint consists in. Since practical reason is the power that enables us to occupy a practical standpoint to begin with, I glossed the notion of "following from within the human practical standpoint" in terms of following from within the standpoint of human practical reason. Developing an account of the human practical standpoint then becomes a matter of developing an account of human practical reason. This brings us to the second part of the answer to the normativity problem. In the next chapter I unpack this second part.

CHAPTER 5. HUMAN PRACTICAL REASON

1. Introduction

So far described, Aristotelian constructivism has no practically normative implications. This is as it should be. A metanormative account of the source of practical normativity is not meant to produce substantive conclusions about what we have reason to do. Take, for example, Humean constructivism, which holds that facts are normative for some agent in virtue of following from within that agent's standpoint. This tells us nothing about the reasons that agent has. To begin to see our way toward actual reasons, we need to bring in an account of that agent's practical standpoint. Likewise, to see our way toward actual reasons in the Aristotelian naturalist framework, and to see how natural goodness connects with reasons, we need to bring in an account of the human practical standpoint. When we do this, however, we move beyond our metanormative account of the source of practical normativity. Noting this is important because it means endorsing Aristotelian constructivism does not, on its face, commit one to any particular account of the structure and content of human practical reason. For example, Aristotelian constructivism is neutral with respect to well-known debates about whether all human ends terminate in a single end (an ultimate end), whether there is one single ultimate end for all humans, and if so, whether that ultimate end consists in some single specifiable substantive activity (such as contemplation), or whether it consists in multiple distinct activities. Aristotelian constructivism does not settle any of these questions.

At the same time, however, level 2 Aristotelian constructivism and a substantive account of human practical reason are dialectically interdependent in the following respect. Without a substantive account of the content of human practical reason, Aristotelian

constructivism would be explanatorily impotent for the purposes I am presenting it. I am offering it as part of a strategy to explain the practical normativity of human nature. But Aristotelian constructivism itself does not imply that human nature is practically normative. So I need, as I mentioned at the close of the previous chapter, to connect the Aristotelian constructivist thesis with the Aristotelian naturalist's notion of human nature. That is the task of my account of human practical reason. On the other hand, without the Aristotelian constructivist thesis about the source of practical normativity, the account of human practical reason I will propose would do nothing to address the normativity problem. For we would still be left with the question of what *makes* practically normative facts practically normative. Answering that question is of course the job of Aristotelian constructivism.

Keeping in mind, then, the logical independence of Aristotelian constructivism from any particular account of human practical reason, I will now propose the account I think most plausible. I want to emphasize that the account is limited in two important ways. First, given that the nature and structure of human practical reason is a vast topic exceeding the reach even of book-length treatments, the brief sketch I will offer in the next section should not be considered a defense of an account, and may not even qualify as an account. It is perhaps best conceived as a sketch of a research program which, if explored in more detail, would yield a full-blown account of human practical reason. The second limitation concerns the substantive conclusions I will propose. They are offered tentatively, and I want to flag in advance that this is not merely caution born from the difficulty of defending substantive conclusions. It will turn out that the general claims I advance about human practical reason place certain limitations on how far philosophy can take us when it comes to substantive conclusions about how "the human" normatively sees the world.

2. Overview of the Account

The account I propose can be summed up in the thesis that human practical reason sees the human life form as non-instrumentally practically normative. This is concise, but obscure. What does it mean to see the human life form as practically normative?

In Chapter 2 we saw that to be an organism is to be active. Life is constituted, supported and perpetuated by activity. Different forms of life constitute, support and perpetuate themselves in different ways. Both dogs and frogs take in water to stay hydrated, but dogs do it through their mouths and frogs do it through their skin. We humans are organisms, and like any other organism, we actively constitute, support and perpetuate ourselves in characteristic ways. These activities are not merely instrumental means of supporting our existence as human organisms; they *constitute* our existence as human organisms. So, to see the human life form as non-instrumentally practically normative is to see those activities that collectively constitute human living as non-instrumentally practically normative, as worth going for.

What activities are these? A full answer to this question would need to rely on a comprehensive account of human nature. I will not defend such an account, since this would distract from my central task of sketching the structure of the type of account of practical reason that can help solve the normativity problem. Grasping that structure will be facilitated, though, by reflecting on some example human characteristic activities. So I will discuss four example generic activities that are plausibly both characteristic of the human life form and seen by human practical reason as non-instrumentally worth engaging. They are:

Living: constituting, maintaining, protecting and developing one's existence as an individual organism, through one's characteristic life-cycle;

Affiliating: participating in, maintaining, protecting and developing one's social attachments;

Pursuing Understanding: Maintaining, protecting and developing one's grasp on the relations between things;

Justice: Maintaining, enforcing and restoring basic relations of fairness and reciprocity, and the norms that define these relations;

To say that human practical reason sees these activities as non-instrumentally practically normative is to say that when human practical reason is functioning properly, when it is non-defective, it takes each of these activity types as worth pursuing, as final ends that render intelligible actions undertaken in their pursuit. This is not to say one is defective if, in individual cases, one does not pursue one or more of these ends. It is to say that any properly functioning human being will see these ends as the *sort* of thing worth pursuing—so, for example, when others pursue these ends, one will see their behavior as intelligible, even if one thinks the behavior misguided or bad. What would indicate defect is if one ceased seeing one of these items as a final end at all—if one just could not see any point in pursuing them.[119] To see the human life form as non-instrumentally practically normative, then, is to see these activities as non-instrumentally practically normative.

I select the four generic activities above not because they are the only plausible or the most important examples (although each of them are very important for human life),

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[119] The view bears obvious similarities to Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse's accounts of human natural goodness (Foot 2001: Chapter 2; Hursthouse 1999: Chapter 9). Those familiar with contemporary natural law theory might notice some resemblance there too, especially with Rhonheimer (2011). My view has indeed been heavily influenced by these sources, along with Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (Nussbaum 1988; 1992; 2000; 2006) and, as I mentioned above, Christine Korsgaard's neo-Kantian constructivism (especially Korsgaard 1996c and 2008c).

but because I find them among the most obvious examples. As I elaborate each one, my hope is that their status as human characteristic activities and final ends will be made plausible. To this extent I will be defending a partial account of human nature. But I want to stress that my primary purpose in discussing these four items is illustrative, to put enough flesh on this skeletal account of human practical reason to show how it can complete the theoretical labors I set for it.

It is now time to dissect my proposed account of human practical reason into its key claims. There are four:

1. Human practical reason, like any natural power, can malfunction. So there is such thing as its proper functioning.
2. Some of the standards of proper functioning for human practical reason are species-relative.
3. When functioning properly according to species-relative standards, human practical reason takes certain substantive states of affairs as final ends.
4. Among these final ends are the characteristic activities of the human life form.

In the next sections I will briefly explain and defend each one.

3. Core Theses

Proper Functioning

Human practical reason, like any natural power, can malfunction. So there is such thing as its proper functioning. It will help to begin with some simple facts about human beings. Humans are rational agents. Not only do they get around on their own steam, so to speak, the way they characteristically get around is by conceptualizing certain possible actions or action plans, evaluating those possibilities, judging which one is best,

and then forming an intention based on that judgment. Even when action is more automatic and less reflective, it is still aimed at, and guided by, practical ends. For example, slamming one's foot on the brakes to avoid hitting a child who ran into the street still manifests agency—in a way that pulling one's hand from a hot stove does not.[120] So humans are rational agents. But that is not all they are. Humans are a specific type of physical organism, characterized by certain natural powers and needs. What enables humans to be rational agents is itself a natural power, or a cluster of natural powers, which we call practical reason.

Natural powers in general are susceptible to injury, disease, and other forms of dysfunction. We can go blind or deaf, or we can lose sensation in our fingers or feet, or large portions of our body. These are forms of defect in our sensory powers. In the same way, practical reason, too, as one of our natural powers, can operate well or poorly, and can malfunction in various ways. A rather obvious type of deficiency in practical reason occurs when an agent overlooks an efficient means to her ends in favor of a less efficient means. Clowns often specialize in doing this. A clown might pull a chair up to a table and sit down. Finding the chair positioned too far from the table, she might fix the problem by exerting great effort to move the entire table closer to the chair rather than the other way around! Now if the human power of practical reason can operate well or poorly and can malfunction, then there is such thing as its *proper* functioning. If we can characterize some of its operations as lapses, deficiencies and dysfunctions, that is only because we have some

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[120] See Russell (2009: 11) for discussion on the distinction between deliberation, which takes time, and the deliberative structure of rational action which need not have been preceded by deliberation.

implicit grasp on how human practical reason operates when it is functioning *properly* or non-defectively.

Species Relativity

B. Some of the standards of proper functioning for human practical reason are species-relative. This follows from the idea that human practical reason is a natural power. First note the quantifier "some." As with any natural power, there are certain constitutive features of the power and the experiences it generates that will be common to any kind of organism in possession of it. For example, any organism that counts as possessing the power of sight must be sensitive to variations in light within a range of wavelengths. We might say this is constitutive of having the power of sight. The same applies to practical reason. There are constitutive features of the power that will be manifest in any type of practically rational creature. The hypothetical imperative is perhaps one example. So there are also standards of proper functioning that will apply to any practically rational creature.

At the same time, most natural powers manifest somewhat differently in different kinds of organisms. For example, different types of life forms can see different wavelengths of light. The wavelengths of light a creature can see is determined by the kind of light-sensitive molecules or photopigments in their eyes. Humans, unlike most mammals, have trichromatic vision, meaning we have three basic types of photopigments in the cone cells of our retina. This makes our retinas sensitive to three different wavelengths of light, which, in combination allow us to see a wide variety of colors. Dogs, however, have dichromatic vision, since the cone cells in their retina have only two types of photopigments. The result is that they are unable to distinguish green, yellow or red objects

based on their color. Butterflies, on the other hand, have more than three photopigments, enabling them to see colors we cannot.

If a dog looks at a red Frisbee lying on green grass and cannot differentiate it based on color alone, nothing is the matter with the dog. It belongs to the dog's life form to have only dichromatic vision. But if *I* cannot differentiate the Frisbee from the grass based on color alone, something is the matter with my visual system. This is a simple but extremely important point. Suppose I am standing next to the dog, the same distance from the Frisbee, in the same lighting conditions. The same object is reflecting the same wavelengths of light to the dog's eyes and to mine. If both of our visual systems are operating properly, our color experience will be different—even though it was generated by the same external physical conditions. What this means is that the phenomenological quality of experience generated by our sensory organs is subject to species-level evaluative standards. The color experience generated by the dog's properly operating visual system is different than the color experience generated by the human's properly operating visual system. Thus, what constitutes proper functioning in a dog's visual system counts as abnormal, and possibly defective, in a human's.

Now, since for the Aristotelian naturalist practical reason is a natural power, I am proposing that we understand and evaluate it along the same lines as our power of sight (and any other natural power associated with conscious experience), in two important respects. First, just as our sensory organs generate color experience, the cognitive and affective capacities I am calling "practical reason" generate what we might call *practical-normative experience*. Just as grass appears to us as green, certain states of affairs, and even possible states of affairs, "appear" to us as *good* or *bad* in the practical sense. Of course, we cannot literally *see* possible states of affairs, but we can conceptualize and imagine them,

and then register those conceptualized possibilities as *worthwhile* or *to-be-promoted/protected/respected*, or *to-be-avoided*, and so on. Second, just as there are species-level standards for determining the particular quality of color experience a given wavelength of light should generate in a particular type of organism, in the same way, there are species-level standards for determining the particular quality of the practical-normative experience a given type of state of affairs should generate in a particular type of practically rational organism. That is, the particular states of affairs an organism registers as practically good or bad may well vary according to the type of organism in question. So practical reason is just like other natural powers in that there are species-level standards that determine when it is operating well or poorly.[121]

This is important because it means we cannot develop an adequate account of human practical reason solely by reflecting on its general features. If we want to know what human practical reason is like, we need to focus our theorizing on distinctly human experience, and be concerned about the possibility of other types of creatures (such as the rational Martian of philosophical lore) not sharing that experience, or our intuitions about that experience. Taking this now as our heuristic, we move to the next thesis.

Substantive, not Procedural

When functioning properly, human practical reason takes certain substantive states of affairs as final ends. An end, of course, is an intelligible goal of action. Something we pursue or strive to promote or bring about. To call a state of affairs a *final* end is to say

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[121] Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI might have been something like this, although this is controversial. See Thompson (ms) for an argument that this is indeed Aristotle's view.

something about how it figures in deliberation. Final ends are non-instrumental. Their intelligibility as ends does not depend on their serving some other goal. Rather, their intelligibility *as* ends is basic. Final ends are also the basic source of practical reasons. This is because when we act on reasons, we act for the sake of ends.[122] So the normative significance of those ends is conferred upon more proximate reasons. Recall the moldy house example above. The reason I decide to move is because my current house's ventilation system is infected with mold. This fact is a reason in virtue of the circumstances—that the mold is causing life-threatening allergies in my children—combined with an end, namely, the end of promoting the health of my children. This could well be a final end, but if not, then its status as an end is explained by its serving some further end.

Now, this third claim says that it is constitutive of properly functioning human practical reason to take certain *substantive* states of affairs as final ends. The contrast here is with final ends that are formal. For example, the putative final end of pursuing maximal desire satisfaction is a formal final end, because it does not refer to any particular desires. I can count as pursuing this end no matter which desires I am satisfying. By contrast, the final end of satisfying my desire for pleasure is a substantive final end. I cannot count as pursuing this end unless the desires I am satisfying have a particular object. Now, ends can be described at multiple levels of generality. In some cases the contrast between formal and substantive ends is not entirely sharp, and where we draw the line will depend on our

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[122] See LeBar (2013) and Russell (2009) for detailed defenses of this view on how reasons derive from final ends. I should also note that intentional actions are not always done for reasons, and thus not always in pursuit of ends. See Hursthouse (1991) for a discussion about a certain class of actions that are neither performed for reasons nor irrational. Hursthouse calls them *arational* actions.

theoretical purposes. But I hope the contrast is sufficiently clear to make my present point, which is simply this. When human practical reason is operating properly it cannot take just any state of affairs as a final end. Rather, there are constraints on the sorts of things a properly functioning human being can take as non-instrumentally practically normative, the constraints being determined of course by species-relative standards.

The account therefore counts as a substantive account of practical reason rather than a formal, or what is more often called a *procedural*, one.[123] Procedural accounts hold that rationality is a matter of having one's thoughts and motivations be capable of surviving a certain formally specified cognitive process, regardless of the content of those thoughts and motivations. For procedural accounts, the only kind of *rational* mistake we can make is in failing to conform to a formal principle of practical reason—for example, failing to do what we believe we have most reason to do through *akrasia* or weakness of will.[124] A substantive account of practical reason, by contrast, holds that in addition to making this kind of mistake, one can also make rational mistakes by failing to take certain substantive states of affairs as practically significant (as *to-be-done* or *to-be-avoided*). A classic example of this sort of mistake is not caring about what happens to oneself in the future—perhaps a teenager not caring what happens to her after 30.[125] The converse sort of mistake is also possible—taking states of affairs as fundamentally practically significant when one should not. Classic examples of the latter sort include a man wanting a saucer of mud, not for some further purpose, but just to have it; or someone wanting to turn on radios, not in

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[123] See Hooker and Streumer (2004) for an overview on substantive versus formal, or what they call *procedural*, accounts of practical rationality.
[124] We can of course make other sorts of mistakes while reasoning. For example, we can be mistaken about the empirical facts, and thereby draw mistaken conclusions. But the error here would not be a rational error.
[125] See Foot (1972), Hooker and Streumer (2004: 69), and Parfit (2011a: 76).

order to serve some other end, but just to do it.[126] According to most substantive accounts of practical reason, the attitudes displayed in such examples are not merely potentially harmful (as in the teenager case) or bizarre (as in the saucer of mud case); they also manifest *rational* error, a lapse in the agent's power of practical reason. For instance, it belongs to human practical to care to some extent about one's future; and it does not belong to human practical reason to strive for a saucer of mud as a final end.

What we have so far, then, is an account of practical reason according to which practical reason is subject to standards of proper operation, that what counts as proper functioning is species-specific, and that it is constitutive of properly functioning *human* practical reason to take certain substantively described states of affairs as final ends. This brings us, finally, to the last claim.

Characteristic Activities

Among the human final ends are the characteristic activities of the human life form. That is, what properly functioning human practical reason sees as non-instrumentally worth going for includes those activities that constitute living a human life. An implication of this thesis is that human final ends are what I will call *constitutive ends* as opposed to *product* ends. This well-known distinction comes from Aristotle's discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.1) between two sorts of ends. "[S]ome are activities," he says, and "others are products apart from the activities that produce them" (Aristotle 1980: *NE* I.1, 1094a3-4). The distinction here is between activities done for the sake of producing something external to the activity itself (what I am calling product ends), and activities

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[126] See Anscombe (2000: 70) and Quinn (1995: 189).

done for the sake of the activity itself (what I am calling constitutive ends). If human final ends are themselves activities, then they are constitutive ends.

This last thesis is difficult to assess without an account of what the human final ends/characteristic activities are. In the next section I will fill out the thesis by proposing some examples. Although I am confident the examples I mention are indeed both characteristic human activities and final ends, the very nature of my account requires that I offer them as defeasible proposals. I believe there are important limitations in how far philosophy can take us in identifying human characteristic activities—limitations which arise from the very theses I have just proposed. Here is why.

Aristotelian constructivism says that facts are practically normative for agents of the human life form in virtue of following from within the standpoint of human practical reason. So the reasons we have ultimately depend on the shape or configuration of human practical reason. I have just sketched an account of human practical reason according to which practical reason is a natural human capacity, subject to species-relative standards of evaluations, just like any other natural human capacity. This means the question of how it is configured is in part an empirical question—in the same sense in which the configuration of the human visual system is an empirical question. To know the characteristic operations of the human visual system, I cannot merely reflect on my own experience and infer general claims about how "the human" visually experiences the world. I might be color blind, after all, or have dark spots in my visual field. To conclude that my color experience is characteristic of the human visual system, I need to know about other people's color

experience as well, and acquiring this knowledge is an empirical matter.[127] Likewise with the natural power of practical reason. To draw conclusions about the shape of human practical reason, I cannot merely reflect on my own normative experience and infer general claims about how "the human" normatively experiences the world. I need to know something about how other humans normatively experience the world, and this is partly an empirical matter. In this sense, claims about the substantive shape of human practical reason extend beyond the reach of philosophy proper.

This is not to say that philosophical reflection cannot help identify human characteristic activities. Indeed, it can, and it is just as important to see why. Suppose we determine eventually that orcas are indeed equipped with practical reason—a simpler form than human practical reason, perhaps, but practical reason nonetheless. And suppose I am convinced that their practical reason, like ours, is configured with certain substantive final ends. Given that I cannot communicate with them, the only way I can figure out what those final ends are is by observing how they act in a variety of situations. So the data that informs my understanding of their practical reason is exclusively empirical data. Theorizing about human practical reason is different, because we as theorists have an inside view of human practical reason. Assuming we are non-defective human beings, we have direct access to the whole collection of human final ends, and philosophical reflection can help identify and clarify them.[128] Still, we are in position to draw conclusions about what is and

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[127] For this reason, I think Michael Thompson (2004) is too quick in concluding that the ethical aspects of the human life form can be known from within, and thus in a sense are self-validating.

[128] This point is what led Michael Thompson, expositing Foot, to remark:

> The human form of life is one in which considerations of justice, for example, characterize a sound practical reason. But this is not something we properly discover from a close study of human life. It must be given to us from inside, so to speak. (2003: 7)

is not characteristic of human practical reason only on the assumption that our own practically rational faculties are operating correctly. And this assumption is verifiable only by intersubjective confirmation, which, from the first-person perspective of each individual theorist, amounts to empirical experience (observing others' actions, listening to others' self-reports, listening to others' observations of other humans, etc.).

For these reasons, I believe that an Aristotelian constructivist can continue the project of identifying and clarifying human final ends through philosophical reflection, ultimately one should take as broad an approach as possible, looking across disciplinary boundaries for clues about what human beings see as fundamentally worth pursuing or worth avoiding.[129] Undertaking this sort of project in a systematic and comprehensive manner is clearly beyond the scope of this study. What I will do instead is briefly describe several activities that plausibly qualify both as human final ends and characteristic human activities. I choose them not because they are the only ones, but because they are, I hope, the least controversial (which is not to say they will be uncontroversial!), and because they will be enough to show how Aristotelian constructivism solves Aristotelian naturalism's normativity problem.

4. Human Final Ends

The task of arguing that an end is a final end faces inherent difficulties. Precisely because a final end is final, there is no deeper value or goal to be identified that confers normative status on the item in question. So defending a particular end as final must proceed

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Thompson overestimates the extent to which knowledge of the human life form is free from a reliance on empirical data, for reasons explained in the text above.

[129] Allan Gibbard (1990: 27) advocates a similar broad approach when he proposes his account of the human psychology that underlies normative judgment.

indirectly. One method, which I will employ, is to reflect on what would constitute dysfunction in human practical reason as a means of illuminating the practical orientation of a human practical reason when it is functioning properly. Such a project must also take care to characterize final ends with sufficient generality to avoid mistaking a generic human final end from culturally variant specifications of it. With these preliminaries in mind, I propose that the following four items are both characteristic human activities and human final ends.

> **Living**: constituting, maintaining, protecting and developing one's existence as an individual organism, through one's characteristic life-cycle;
>
> **Affiliating**: participating in, maintaining, protecting and developing one's social attachments;
>
> **Pursuing Understanding**: Maintaining, protecting and developing one's grasp on the relations between things;
>
> **Justice**: Maintaining, enforcing and restoring basic relations of fairness and reciprocity, and the norms that define these relations;

Before elaborating each one, a few brief clarifications are in order. In proposing that these are final ends, I am not suggesting we act for the sake of them in everything we do. There are almost certainly other final ends for the sake of which we act. Even when we act for the sake of the final ends I propose, it need not be under the exact descriptions I am using. Generic activity types can be specified in a variety of ways. For example, there are multiple types of human attachments, friendship being one of them. Suppose I choose to pick up my friend from the airport, where the ultimate reason for my action is because that's what friends do. *Doing what friends do* is a way of engaging in the social attachment of friendship, and in so doing I am engaging in the activity I am calling 'attachment'. Cultural practices

often serve to specify final ends and fix norms that govern how humans can pursue those ends. Thus, for example, although friendship can arguably be found in every culture, the norms surrounding it and thus the way in which participants engage in is likely to vary across cultures. It is also possible for there to be ways of pursuing a final end in one culture that are impossible in another culture, for example, because a culture's linguistic community does not have the requisite concepts. I mention all of this to stress that the account I am proposing is consistent with a great deal of cross-cultural variation.

With these preliminaries in place, I can now elaborate each of the four examples.

Living

I label this item 'living' rather than 'life' to emphasize that the item in question is an activity. It could more accurately but awkwardly be described as *living humanly* or *living out the characteristic human life-cycle*. My suggestion is that this is both a characteristic human activity and a final end. That living is a characteristic human activity is obvious. Humans are organisms. We saw in Chapter 2 that organisms are things that must continue striving to be what they are in order to continue being what they are. Life essentially involves activity. So living out the characteristic human life-cycle is clearly a characteristic human activity.

It also belongs to the human life form to register the continuance of one's own life as a final end.[130] It is easiest to see this by reflecting on cases in which someone no longer

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[130] All natural law theorists I am aware of include life among their lists of "basic goods," where basic goods are understood as distinct aspects of human flourishing or fulfillment and basic sources of reasons. For a sample, see Chappell (1998: 39), Finnis (2011: 86-87), Gomez-Lobo (2002: 10), Grisez (1983: 124), Grisez, Boyle & Finnis (1987: 107), (Murphy (2001: 101-105) and Oderberg (2000: 138-143). But natural law theorists are not the only ones to claim that life is a final end. Thomas Hurka (1993: 39) can plausibly be interpreted as endorsing this view, as can Larry Arnhart (1998: 31). Martha Nussbaum's view (2000: 78) comes very close to this view as well, insofar as she treats her list of capabilities both as

takes this state of affairs as their final end. Consider cases of suicide that take the person's family and friends by complete surprise. Not all suicides are this way, of course. Some suicides are preceded by catastrophic financial failure, or by deep depression, or by diagnosis of a debilitating disease that will slowly and inevitably destroy one's mental and physical capacities. When someone commits suicide in these difficult circumstances, we may or may not think they are justified, but we can at least understand why they did it. We can understand how one's life might feel like it is going so badly that cutting it short appears to be the best way forward—'best' not meaning optimal or good, but as the least bad of all the bad options. But there are also cases where someone commits suicide and it is not preceded by any of these difficult circumstances. The person seems to be living a healthy, happy, stable life, and then they take their own life. Such behavior is deeply troubling, and not only because of the tragedy. The event is in a certain sense opaque; we find it baffling. We resist simply accepting it as something someone would just do, believing instead that there *must* have been something amiss in the person's life. And so we might search for a note, or talk with people who were closest to the deceased, looking for clues. We do this because we cannot see any point in their self-destruction. It seems to have served no end.

Notice that this thought—that such suicides are baffling because they appear to have no point or serve no end—presupposes certain facts about what sorts of activities are and are not ends for human beings. We are baffled by such suicides because killing oneself is not the sort of thing that is intelligible as a final end. So if someone really did up and kill themselves for no further reason at all, just to do it, it is hard to resist the conclusion that

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essential for any life recognizable as human (see e.g. Nussbaum 1992: 222) and as basic values.

this would manifest a lapse in practical reason, and one of a very deep sort. In uncovering this sort of possible lapse or dysfunction in human practical, we have at the same time gained insight into the proper functioning of human practical reason. Part of what it is to be a properly functioning human practical reasoner is to see the continuance of one's own life as fundamentally worth pursuing, i.e., a human final end. Here, then, is one example of a substantive state of affairs that partly constitutes the human life form, and which it is constitutive of properly functioning human practical reason to take as a final end.

Above I said that staying alive is naturally good for any organism, *at least within the parameters of its natural life-cycle*. This qualification is important, because an Aristotelian naturalist need not be committed to the idea that the striving to keep oneself alive life is always and everywhere inherently worthwhile. For example, human practical reason could be configured such that a psychically healthy human, upon reaching the end of her life-cycle, no longer sees the continuance of her own life as a final end. I am not claiming this is the case, but it certainly could be. Nor is the Aristotelian constructivist committed to the idea that intentionally destroying life, even one's own life, is always and everywhere wrong. That is a question about practical reasoni*ng*, or how reasons should be *weighed*, and no simple answer to this question can be derived from what I have said so far.[131] Whether there are reasons that can outweigh the practical significance of continuing one's own life is another question, which I will not address here.

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[131] This is one way in which Aristotelian constructivism differs from contemporary natural law theory, with which it shares a similar structure. Contemporary natural law theory holds that it is always and everywhere wrong intentionally to impede, damage or destroy a basic human good, and that this principle of practical reason follows from natural goods being a basic source of reasons. See Finnis (2011: 118-125) and Murphy (2001: 204-207).

Above I said that the final end of one's own continued life was an obvious but non-trivial example. Here is why it is not trivial. Although on first glance it is not at all surprising that an organism should have evolved to take its own life as fundamentally worth preserving, I see no reason to think this end is essential to practical reason itself, such that any possessor of practical reason must also hold the continuance of their life as a final end. It seems coherent to imagine a species whose members possess practical reason, but are intensely social, like bees or ants, and who see only the preservation of their community as having fundamental practical significance. These creatures view the value of their own lives as purely instrumental, as worth protecting only insofar as, and because, it contributes to the protection and thriving of the community.[132] There seems to me no inconsistency in such a possibility. If I am right, then this reinforces a point made earlier, that the account of practical reason elaborated here is a substantive account, and that even a final end as apparently obvious as the continuance of one's life is a substantive end that cannot be inferred from a purely formal or procedural account of practical reason.

Affiliating

By 'affiliating' I mean the activity of forming, participating in, promoting and protecting social attachments with other people. This general activity, I suggest, is both a characteristic human activity and a human final end. Paradigm cases of social attachment include friendship and the parent/child relationship. Social attachments often involve a common core of shared experience, such as shared life in the workplace, or shared interest, or shared traumatic experience such as in active combat—along with mutual trust and affection.

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[132] Philippa Foot (2004) describes a similar sort of case.

Sometimes our bond with others is consciously experienced as a sense of security or tranquility or delight when in the presence of the other. The experience of being attached is often more consciously felt in cases of prolonged separation, which can cause mild feelings of loneliness or even full-blown terror, as sometimes happens when children are separated from their caregivers.

Almost no one denies that affiliation is characteristic and ubiquitous in human life. Humans are intensely social animals. From infancy, humans need relationships of trust and nurture with other human beings to develop into mature, properly functioning, rational adults. The bonds between infant and caregiver are crucial in a variety of ways, from giving the infant a secure base from which to venture out and explore, to enabling the caregiver to "scaffold" or structure the infants' learning through processes like joint attention, turn taking and coordinating bodily movements.[133] As humans develop, the need for social attachment evolves, but does not dry up. A substantial body of empirical evidence shows that the social attachments in mature human relationships are correlated with and in some cases causally linked with positive outcomes related to health, mortality, psychological development, happiness, and character development, and the absence of them linked with negative outcomes, such as depression, greater risk of illness, impaired immune system, suicide and premature death.[134] Aristotle was not exaggerating when he remarked that "without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods" (Aristotle 1984: Nicomachean Ethics VIII.1, 1155a5), where the translated term 'friendship' here

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[133] See Fowers (2015: chapter 3; esp. page 75-76) and Narvaez (2013).
[134] See, Almquist (2011), Brewer (2009: 252-265), Fowers (2015: Chapter 3), Healy (2011), Hoyos-Valdes (2016), Mullis (2010), Parker & Asher (1987; 1993). After a careful and extensive review of the empirical research on adult attachments, Fowers (2015: 85) concludes: "Overwhelming evidence indicates that close relationships are central to living well as a human being... Adult attachment is clearly related to flourishing and languishing."

refers to a more general category of social attachments that involve reciprocated goodwill.[135] Although it is sometimes difficult to register the importance of social attachments while we are firmly embedded within them, everyone can feel the pain of their sudden severance and the isolation and loneliness that arise in their sustained absence.

Affiliating is also a human final end; it is constitutive of human practical reason to see it as fundamentally worth going for. This is not to say a human will see all possible attachments as worth going for, or worth preserving if already formed. It is to say that she will see affiliation as one among other ends non-instrumentally worth pursuing. Once again, it is easiest to see the status of affiliation as a final end by reflecting on what it would be like for someone to cease seeing affiliation in this way. I will focus on friendship.[136]

Suppose Thomas and Siddhartha are long-time friends. Over the years, through the shared experience of helping each other out when the other is in a scrape, confiding in each other about their ambitions, their fears, their marital challenges, and just spending time together hiking, camping and other recreation activities, they have developed a full-blown friendship. They both know the other "has their back." They would trust each other with their lives. Then one day, unexpectedly, Thomas tells Siddhartha they will no longer be friends. Completely surprised, confused, and hurt, Siddhartha asks why. Has he unintentionally offended Thomas? Did Thomas learn something new about Siddhartha that broke his trust? Was he starting to find Siddhartha annoying or irritating, or otherwise

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[135] See Brewer (2009: 240-244) for helpful discussion on Aristotle's understanding of friendship.

[136] Much has been written on the philosophy of friendship. See Badhwar (1993) for a helpful compilation of well-known papers on friendship. This collection, however, lacks substantive engagement with non-Western traditions. For engagements with friendship in the Confucian tradition, see Yuanguo (2007) and Mullis (2010). For an insightful discussion on affection and its role in friendship, see Lewis (1988: Chapter 3).

bothersome? Was he feeling constrained by the relationships, and wanting to form friendships with new people? If Thomas were to answer *yes* to any of these questions, his action would at least be intelligible, even if we think it would not be justifiable. But suppose Thomas answers *no* to all these questions. Nothing bad happened, he insists. The reason the friendship will end, says Thomas, is not because he is intentionally terminating it, but because he no longer sees any point in friendships anymore, and friendship obviously cannot survive in those conditions.

Now it seems to me that this situation, if vividly imagined, induces the same sort of bafflement as cases of unexplained suicide. Thomas's termination of the friendship seems to demand explanation, and yet he maintains there is no explanation. And, again, as in the case of unexplained suicide, it is difficult to resist drawing either one of two possible conclusions. One is that there is in fact a reason why Thomas is terminating the relationships, and either he is not being forthright or he is somehow deceiving himself. The other possible conclusion is that something has gone wrong with Thomas's psychic faculties, that his practical reason is malfunctioning in some way. He is failing to attribute practical significance to an activity properly functioning humans see as practically significant. Now if Siddhartha could rule out the first conclusion, he would be forced to the second. And this suggests that it belongs to properly functioning practical reason to register friendship as inherently worthwhile.[137]

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[137] This claim has been defended by a variety of theorists who are friendly to the Aristotelian tradition. As with the basic good of life, all the contemporary natural law theorists classify friendship as a basic human good. Both of Martin Seligman's well-known accounts of human well-being—his authentic happiness theory (Seligman 2002) and his later theory on flourishing (Seligman 2011)—posit "positive relationships" as a human final end, although he uses different terminology. In his phraseology, positive relationships are one of several things people will choose to pursue for their own sake, when uncoerced.

The final end of friendship differs from the final end of life in an important way. Suppose that instead of losing his grip on the practical salience of friendship, Thomas lost his sense of the basic practical significance of his own continued life. Because life is a final end, there is no more fundamental value we could cite that would persuade Thomas of the value of his continuing to live. However, we could, perhaps, show him some other activity or state of affairs that he does see as valuable, and the pursuit of which necessarily requires his continued living.[138] If we were successful, Thomas might continue to eat, drink, sleep, and engage in other life-sustaining processes for the purpose of staying alive, where staying alive would be purely instrumental for some other purpose. The same could not happen, however, in the case of friendship. Friendship often brings benefits that can be recognized as independently valuable, such as enjoyment, growth in knowledge, and improved conversational skills. If Thomas valued these results, he might be persuaded not to sever his relationship with Siddhartha, in the same way that we earlier imagined him choosing to continue living. But although we could imagine Thomas in this way continuing his relationship with Siddhartha, it would no longer count as engaging in friendship. Friendship is not the sort of social attachment that can be cultivated in a purely instrumental way, for by its nature it requires mutual and *non-instrumental* goodwill.[139] People do of course form social bonds for instrumental purposes, and we do sometimes call this

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Blaine Fowers (2015: Chapter 3) develops evolutionary argument, rooted in attachment theory, for the same idea.

[138] I recall as a child hearing a woman recount a time earlier in her life when her husband was dissuaded from committing suicide by a friend who simply asked him, "Who will care for your wife when you are gone?"

[139] I am referring here to the sort of friendship Aristotle described as friendship for its own sake, rather than for the sake of pleasure or utility (1984: *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.4), and what is now often called "character friendship." See Brewer (2009: 241), who attributes the term to John Cooper

'friendship', as when I become friends with people who regularly show up for a pickup game of basketball or Ultimate Frisbee, but who would rapidly fall out of my life if they lost interest in the game. But this is not the sort of relationship in which Thomas and Siddhartha were engaged, and not the sort of friendship we most value. In that deeper kind of friendship, one's interest and desired good for the other cannot be instrumental. It must therefore operate as a final end in one's practical reasoning.

Pursuing Understanding

My third suggested final end and characteristic activity is the pursuit of understanding. Non-defective human beings will see the pursuit of understanding as non-instrumentally worth pursuing, and engaging in this pursuit is characteristic of human life.

Writers who defend similarly structured accounts of practical reason, such as natural law theorists, typically include knowledge rather than understanding in their catalogue of final ends.[140] I think the plausibility of this depends on one's conception of knowledge. On the conception operative in most contemporary epistemology, knowledge is propositional and consists roughly in true belief plus warrant. On this conception, I think knowledge is probably not a final end. Explaining why will help me elaborate what I mean by the epistemic state that is a final human end, namely, *understanding*.[141]

I begin by considering a bad but instructive objection to the view that knowledge is a final end. One could object that knowledge is not a final end because the intelligibility of pursuing it depends on the value of the object of knowledge. Taking action to learn about

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[140] See, for example, Chappell (1998: 39-40), Finnis (2011: 64-80), Gomez-Lobo (2002: 20), Grisez, Boyle & Finnis (1987: 107) and (Murphy (2001: 106-108).

[141] I do not assume that understanding is the only epistemic state that is a final end for human practical reason, but it is the only one I will discuss.

the origins of the universe is inherently worthwhile; taking action to learn how many blades of grass fill the university quad, not for some other end, but simply to know, is not.[142] So knowledge in itself cannot be a final end. I think this objection fails. While we might think it a colossal waste of time to count grass blades for the sole purpose of determining how many of them fill the quad, it is nevertheless an intelligible activity. We can understand someone taking an interest in it, even if that interest seems bizarre.[143]

There is a different argument against the view that knowledge is a final end, and it comes into view by considering the grass counter again. Notice, first, that the intelligibility of her actions depends entirely on her being *interested* in learning how many grass blades fill the quad. If she were to lose interest in this fact, the intelligibility of her grass blade counting would indeed fade from view (assuming, as I am, that the knowledge is not being sought for some instrumental purpose). This is easiest to see for trivial bits of knowledge, like how many grass blades fill the quad, but I think the point generalizes. It seems intelligible for someone to take steps to know some fact only if they find that fact interesting. Continuing to take steps toward knowing some fact when one has no interest whatsoever in that fact (and no instrumental reason to pursue that knowledge), would be unintelligible, pointless.[144] The intelligibility of pursuing knowledge depends, it seems, on the knowledge (or the facts that are the object of that knowledge) being of interest to the

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[142] My grass counting example is inspired by Rawls's similar case (1971: 432).
[143] I agree with Mark Murphy's (2011: 108) response to this objection. He argues that our aversion to the grass blade counter's activities stems from our judgment that there are better things to do with one's time, not from the fact that the activity itself is unintelligible.
[144] I think this holds even in the case of knowledge of facts most of us would find very important, such as how the universe began. Imagine someone pursing knowledge of how the universe began as an end in itself, not for some other end, and yet had utterly no interest in how the universe began. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that such a person would be rationally defective.

seeker. That is the first premise. The second is that in finding something interesting, we have not yet struck practical bedrock. Granted, in most contexts, if one asks, "why are you learning about that?" it is sufficient to reply, "I find it interesting." Yet, it is always reasonable and coherent to ask *why* one finds something interesting, or what it is about the fact in question that one finds interesting. We may not always be able to explain immediately (or explain at all) why we find something interesting, but there always is a reason. Facts can be interesting for practical reasons. I am focusing, though, on the epistemic domain. I suggest that facts are interesting chiefly when they improve our understanding.

Understanding, as I use the term, involves more than merely knowing facts, and may not require propositional knowledge at all (see Zagzebski 2009: 142-145).[145] It involves grasping connections between things, seeing how something relates to something else.[146] The types of things that can be related, and the ways in which they can be related is vast. For example, understanding a machine involves knowing how and why its various components cause changes in its other components. Understanding a theory involves grasping its necessary concepts and theses and knowing the logical and conceptual relations between them. Grasping connections is enlightening because connections make phenomena intelligible; they explain phenomena. I suggest, then, that it is the role that facts

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[145] Zagzebski (1994: 49) writes, "Understanding is not a state directed toward a single propositional object at all." Instead, understanding involves grasping propositions "as part of and because of one's understanding of a system or network of truths…"

[146] In so characterizing understanding I follow Lynch (2004: 53-54), Riggs (2003: 217), Roberts and Wood (2007: 45), and Zagzebski (1994: 49-50; 2009: 141-149).

play in understanding that usually explains why they are interesting to us. And it is understanding, not knowledge alone, that humans find inherently worth pursuing.[147]

Having explained what I mean by understanding, and having clarified it by contrast with (a certain conception of) knowledge, I hope the pursuit of understanding can plausibly be recognized as a human final end. Understanding is so integral to the way in which we cognitively engage the world that I find it difficult to imagine what it would be like for someone *not* to see the pursuit of understanding as non-instrumentally worth pursuing. We can imagine someone who takes the pursuit of understanding to be non-instrumentally worthwhile only in limited domains. But the creature who utterly fails to see understanding as worth attaining, any domain, seems something other than human.

Pursuing understanding is also a characteristic human activity. This, too, seems clear. The only way I can imagine that this claim would appear implausible is if one has a rather esoteric conception of understanding. For example, if one thinks of the pursuit of understanding is what philosophers do, or mystics, or sages, then one might rightly doubt that pursuing understanding is a characteristic human activity. But it should be clear now

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[147] I am fully aware that this line of thought makes sense only on a what Zagzebski (1994: 47) calls an "atomistic approach" to knowledge, on which knowledge is conceived as true belief (plus warrant) of discrete, true propositions. More holistic conceptions of knowledge have been around for a long time. Arguably, both Plato and Aristotle's conception of knowledge included what I am calling understanding (see REFS). This does not detract from my point, however, for my purpose is not to defend any particular conception of knowledge but to distinguish between two epistemic states. I have no qualm with those who think the atomistic state I am calling 'knowledge' is not really knowledge. In this connection, it is worth noting that Roberts and Wood (2007), though they defend a more holistic conception of knowledge, come very close to agreeing with my main conclusion when they claim that

> propositional knowledge, as it is understood by many contemporary epistemologists, is something of an abstraction from knowledge. *It is seldom by itself the kind of knowledge that fully functioning human beings (including, we believe, most epistemologists) seek*" (p. 42; emphasis added).

this is not what I mean by understanding. I have in mind the more basic intellectual activity of grasping connections between things. Conceived in this basic way, the pursuit of understanding is woven into almost every aspect of human life and culture. Myths, histories, religions—these are largely motivated by the pursuit of understanding: the desire to grasp how humans relate to God, or to each other, or to non-human animals; how life now relates to death, and the hereafter; how emotions relate to actions; how one fits into one's family narrative; and a host of other relations. In fact, anytime I ask why I should do something, where I am asking not to challenge the answer but simply to grasp the reason, I am seeking understanding as a final end, for I am attempting to grasp the rational connection between some fact and a possible action.

Pursuing Justice

Pursuing justice, I suggest, is a human final end and a characteristic human activity. I have in mind here a very basic conception of justice as a kind of reciprocity or fairness in exchange. This would include keeping one's agreements, as that secures the possibility of temporally extended exchanges. In proposing justice as a final end and characteristic human activity I am following Philippa Foot (2001; 2004), who claimed that it belongs to human practical reason to take the protection of certain basic relations of justice as both non-instrumentally worth pursuing, and that it is characteristic of the human life form to engage in practices, such as the practice of promising, that support or constitute these relations (see Chapter 2, Section 4 (ii)). I offer this suggestion more tentatively than the others, as it seems to me more controversial and needs more elaboration and defense than I can give it here. Still, I can note a few brief considerations in its defense.

It seems to me that humans do see certain basic norms of justice as non-instrumentally worth following. Humans seem to have a basic sense of standing with respect to others, and a keen awareness when that relation of balance or proportionality has been violated. Formulating, following and enforcing basic norms that govern that relation do indeed seem to be characteristic of human life.

One might resist this suggestion by appeal to our evolutionary heritage. One might be skeptical of the idea that evolution could have produced organisms who not only conform to basic norms of justice, but see doing so as non-instrumentally worthwhile. Psychologist Blaine Fowers has recently argued, however, that our best evolutionary science to date supports the idea that basic norms of justice are evolutionarily adaptive in large social groups, and thus, from an evolutionary perspective, a natural human good (Fowers 2015: Chapter 6). This is because cooperation is highly adaptive, and successful cooperation in large groups requires social norms that are recognized and sanctioned by others in the community. If basic norms of justice are adaptive, it seems plausible to suppose that environmental pressures would favor individuals who took these norms as non-instrumentally worth following over those who viewed fair cooperation purely as an instrumental means to promote self-interest. For it would be very costly to try to calculate in each case whether a given instance of cooperation would serve one's interests. If this is right, we might expect that humans would have evolved to see the norms of fair cooperation as inherently worth pursuing (rather than, say, strictly instrumental means used to promote self-interest).

Another possibility is that what was favored by evolutionary pressures was not the disposition to recognize and promote certain basic relations of fairness and proportionality but rather (the traits in) individuals, or groups of individuals, who developed social

practices that inculcated those justice-oriented dispositions into young developing humans. I have in mind here parenting and education practices such as telling certain types of stories, patterns of praise and blame, disciplinary practices, etc., that would result in the development of a justice-oriented practical standpoint.[148] In this scenario, the way in which human practical reason comes to grasp justice as a final end would be through habituation into a set of social practices, but would for that be no less a part of the human life form.

Like all final ends, our grasp of justice is filtered through the cultural practices in which our practical standpoints were formed. The types of social relations and exchanges human beings see as just vary to some extent across cultures. Although there are some constraints (evolutionary, if not also conceptual) on what human beings could come to see as just, it might be the case that there is very little substantive content in the conception of justice that is part of human practical reason. Thus, for example, it seems to me possible that two different cultural communities could develop practices and norms that the other would reject as unjust, and yet both of them be compatible with the rather spare conception of justice I have in mind.

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[148] John McDowell (1998b: especially Section 10) refers to this as the development of a "second nature." He thinks, though, that the perception of something as a final end is inculcated into someone's practical standpoint, that means it is not part of the person's nature proper. But just because an outlook or disposition or ability is acquired by education does not mean it is not part of the thing's life form. Male zebra finches, for example, learn how to sing properly from other males, often their father. Finches who are not taught still develop a song, but are put at a severe reproductive disadvantage. But no one would conclude that singing properly is not part of the zebra finch life form. In this case, we would say the male zebra finch develops its song *by* learning from other males. Whether a given disposition or activity belongs to a life form is not determined by whether it is learned as opposed to "hard-wired," but by the role of that disposition or activity in the characteristic life of that type of organism. See Thompson (ms) for a detailed critique of McDowell on this point.

With these qualifications in mind, I hope the suggestion that justice is a human final end and characteristic human activity seems plausible. As with my other suggestions, however, it is defeasible and subject to refutation from further reflection and evidence.

5. Conclusion

As I already stressed, I offer the four activities of *living*, *affiliating*, *pursuing understanding and pursuing justice* primarily to illustrate the structure of my proposed account of human practical reason. Almost certainly there are other examples that qualify both as characteristic human activities and final ends. In my view, plausible candidates include, among others, the activities constitutively involved in *health*, *integrity*, *autonomy* and *achievement*. But as I said above, to defend a comprehensive catalogue of human characteristic activities would be to defend a full-blown account of human nature. This would be a huge task, one that I have argued needs to be carried out across disciplines, and would in any case detract from the main purpose of this study. I have said enough to illustrate the structure of the general theory of human practical reason I am proposing, and to see how it fits with the Aristotelian constructivist thesis.

In summary, the view I have developed so far can be summed up in the following theses.

(I) **[Level 1 Aristotelian constructivism**] Facts are practically normative for an agent *S* of some life form *L* in virtue of following from within the practical standpoint of the *L* life form.

(II) **[Level 2 Aristotelian constructivism, applied to humans]** Facts are practically normative for a human agent *S* in virtue of following from within

the practical standpoint of the human life form, understood as the standpoint of human practical reason.

(III) **[Account of human practical reason]** Properly functioning human practical takes the characteristic activities that constitute the human life form as final ends.

In the next chapter I will explain exactly what Aristotelian constructivism does for the Aristotelian naturalist, and how it solves the normativity problem.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion I will review the ground I have covered. Aristotelian naturalism's core thesis is that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness, and thus that ethical norms are a rooted in natural norms. Moral virtues are natural excellences, and the reason we should be virtuous is because possessing and expressing the virtues is necessary to live in the way characteristic of the human life form. The normativity objection claims this approach cannot be right because ethical norms are normative, whereas natural norms are not. There might indeed be facts about how it is best for humans to live relative to facts about human nature. But facts about human nature are not normative.

I argued that this objection is not quite on target, because on a widely held conception of normativity, facts about human nature *are* normative. Still, this conclusion is no boon for the Aristotelian naturalist, since facts about human nature (and facts about human natural goodness which arise from them), do not possess the right type of normativity. I distinguished between two types of normative facts, evaluative and practical, and argued that evaluative facts have no necessary connection with what we have reason to do. Normative facts about human nature and natural goodness are evaluative. So, arguments that show virtue to be necessary to live a characteristically human life still do not show why we have reason to be virtuous. So, Aristotelian naturalists have not explained the practical relevance of facts about human nature and natural goodness. This does not mean facts about human nature and natural goodness are not practically normative. Rather, it means when such facts are practically normative, they are not intrinsically so, and thus their practical normativity cannot be explained by reference to their evaluative-normative nature.

The upshot is that Aristotelians have some explaining to do. If they want to retain their core thesis, that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness, they need to be able to

explain the practical significance of natural goodness. And they need to be able to do this without claiming that natural goodness is intrinsically practically normative. No such explanation has been offered. This explains why the normativity objection continues to haunt Aristotelian naturalism. It also means Aristotelian naturalism does indeed have a normativity problem.

I have argued, however, that the problem has a solution, which comes in two parts. The first is, for my purposes, the most important, for it is the key theoretical component Aristotelian naturalist's lack. The problem is to explain what makes human nature practically normative. This is a task that falls in the domain of metanormative theory, and specifically theories of the *source* of practical normativity. Constructivism, I argued, is an attractive account of the source of practical normativity for the Aristotelian naturalist, for it opens up the possibility that the states of affairs and activities—we might say, the *values* or *goods*—that we take to provide final justification for action are the ultimate bearers of practical normativity, but not its ultimate source. Aristotelian constructivism, I argued, is, for the Aristotelian naturalist, the most promising account of constructivism, for it avoids the worries associated with the mainstream Kantian and Humean versions.

The second part of the solution is a generic account of practical reason. On this view, practical reason is conceived as a natural power, capable of dysfunction, and thus subject to norms of proper function or proper operation. These norms are, like the norms governing other natural human powers, species-relative, which means there is a distinctly human form or configuration of practical reason. It is constitutive of properly functioning human practical reason to grasp certain substantive final ends, and these include the characteristic activities of the human life form. Since the Aristotelian naturalist understanding of human nature just is an understanding of how humans are

characteristically constituted and how they characteristically live, to take the characteristic activities of the human life form as final ends just is to take human nature (or a key aspect of it) as practically normative.

Aristotelian constructivism, when wedded to this account of practical reason, solves the normativity problem, because it explains the practical normativity of human nature, and by extension, facts about what is naturally good or bad for human organisms. Hence, to the extent that the virtues can be shown to be natural excellences—thus constitutive of any non-defective human life—the accounts I have provided explain why we have reason to be virtuous. It is because we have reason to engage in the characteristic activities of the human life form, and because being virtuous is constitutive of the human life form. To put it a bit differently, lacking virtue constitutes natural defect in the human organism, and we have reason to avoid defect because we have reason to engage in those activities that characterize the non-defective human life form. What makes the pursuit of human nature practically normative for us is that its practical significance follows from within the human practical standpoint, and what it is to be practically normative for human beings just is to follow from within that standpoint.

The upshot, then, is that Aristotelian naturalism no longer has a normativity problem. The explanatory gap has been filled. Aristotelian naturalists can retain their core thesis, because now they can explain what makes facts about human nature and natural goodness practically normative. And they can do this without appealing to the evaluative-normative nature of those facts as somehow grounding practical normativity.

With my proposed solution in hand, I suggest Aristotelian naturalists should deal with the normativity challenge by forcing the critic to unpack it further to uncover the motivations behind the objection. Does the critic sincerely doubt that facts about natural

human goodness are practically significant—e.g., that life, affiliation, friendship and understanding are worth pursuing? Does she wholly fail to see these characteristic human activities as practically significant? If so, she occupies a radically different practical standpoint, and philosophical argument will be powerless to persuade her otherwise. Our imagined critic does not fully occupy the *human* practical standpoint and is in that respect defective qua human. What such a critic needs is not philosophical argument but therapy.

But almost no critic presses the normativity objection from that radical direction. If the critic instead accepts the practically normative significance of such activities and is instead questioning whether the Aristotelian naturalist has an adequate account of that normative significance, then the critic should be challenged to pause and reassess. Aristotelian constructivism suitably developed, along with my proposed account of human practical reason, offers a robust account of the normative significance of human nature. For this reason, I believe the adoption and development of Aristotelian constructivism to be the most promising way of moving Aristotelian naturalism past the normativity objection. In taking on Aristotelian constructivism, Aristotelian naturalists would of course be taking on not only the strengths but also some of the general challenges to constructivism as a metanormative theory. But in facing these challenges, Aristotelian naturalists would be standing shoulder to shoulder with their Kantian and Humean constructivist friends. That, I think, would be a happy result.

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