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NORMATIVITY FOR NATURALISTS

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NORMATIVITY FOR NATURALISTS

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By “naturalists” I mean philosophers who think that what there is and what we know are questions reliably answered by the methods of the empirical sciences; “speculative naturalists” (cf. Leiter 2015: 4-9), like Hume and Nietzsche, are philosophers who think that we can try to answer those questions by extending existing scientific explanatory paradigms to questions of philosophical interest that the sciences have not gotten around to addressing. Some professed naturalists, Quine most notoriously, are better in theory than practice: for Quine maintained allegiance to an ontology (physicalism) and a psychology (behaviorism) decades after both were discredited as a matter of actual scientific practice. (Quine, sadly, never got much past the science of the 1930s and 1940s.) Ironically, speculative naturalists like Hume and Nietzsche often do better: they extended their ontology to include the non-reducible mental states necessary to make causal sense of human phenomena long before the general cognitive revolution in psychology. And Nietzsche does better than Hume: first, because he extends psychological causes to the unconscious, and second, because he does not assume that the most plausible psychology will vindicate prevailing moral opinions.

“Normativity” picks out a number of philosophical problems, but I take the central one posed for naturalists to be this: what is a naturalist to say about ubiquitous normative claims

like, “You ought to believe in the theory of evolution given the evidence,” or “You ought not eat beef given the cruelty of factory farming of cows.” These normative claims are in the deontic mode, but they need not be: one can just as well ask what naturalists should say about normative claims like, “You’re a damn fool if you don’t believe in the theory of evolution,” and “You’re a moral reprobate if you still eat beef given all we know about factory farming.” How do we locate claims about *what you ought to believe* or *what you ought to do*, or about *which claims deserve credence* or about *what your moral worth is given your conduct* in a world conceived naturalistically? Following Finlay (2010: 334) among many others, we will say that the central problem is about understanding the property of *being a reason*, whether for action or belief (cf. Scanlon 2014: 1-2 for a similar view). It is important to emphasize at the start that the problem for naturalists is not simply about *moral* or *practical* normativity, but about normativity *tout court*. Reasons for belief are normative too, and it was the primary mistake of 20th-century naturalists and moral skeptics like A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson to ignore the epistemic case—a mistake that can be remediated, I will suggest, in what follows.

Why are these kinds of normativity a problem for the naturalist? The central worry, I take it, is that the explanatory modalities of the empirical sciences do not make any reference to deontic or normative properties related to *reasons*, as distinct from nomic or descriptive ones. Naturalistic explanations operate in the idiom of *causes*, not *norms*, and casual mention of norms in such explanations are always shorthand for causal explanations that are norm-free: e.g., “Oedipus gouged out his eyes when he discovered the wrongful things he had done,” is really shorthand for, “Oedipus gouged out his eyes when he *came to believe* he had married his mother and killed his father, because he *felt* these actions were shameful.” An adequate

naturalistic explanation does not depend on it being a fact (or true) that it was wrongful to murder one's father and marry one's mother; it does not depend on it being a fact (or true) that one has a reason not to murder one's father or marry one's mother (see Leiter 2001). An adequate naturalistic explanation depends only on facts about the psychological states in which Oedipus found himself and the facts about human behavior in the world; it might also depend on psycho-social or anthropological facts about the belief and attitudes of others in the relevant community in which Oedipus lived. But what it does not depend on is that it is *shameful*, independent of how Oedipus or his compatriots feel, to marry your mother and kill your father, or that it is wrongful, independent of how Oedipus and others feel, to marry your mother and kill your father.

Why then is normativity a puzzle for the naturalist? It seems the naturalist has a straightforward account of normativity: what we call normativity is simply an artifact of the psychological properties of certain biological organisms, i.e., what they *feel* or *believe* or *desire* (or are *disposed to feel, believe, or desire*). As long as the posited organisms are naturalistically respectable, and the mental states invoked are as well, then that is the end of the naturalist's story. What's all the fuss?

One kind of philosophical fuss pertains to the semantics, to how we are to understand the *meaning* of the normative talk in the naturalist's world. I do not plan to discuss that at length here, since I think it represents a wrong turn in philosophical discussion of normativity. Naturalists have usually (John Mackie is the most famous exception) opted for non-cognitivist interpretations of the semantics, and this has led them into the abyss of the Frege-Geach problem, the problem of how to explain the truth-preserving properties of inferences involving

moral propositions embedded in the antecedents of conditionals (e.g., “If stealing is wrong, then it is wrong to encourage John to steal”; but “stealing is wrong”; so “it is wrong to encourage John to steal”). My view is that we should not let our metaphysics—our most plausible account of what really exists—be driven by linguistic practices: why let the semantic tail wag the metaphysical dog? As Crispin Wright observed a quarter-century ago, if metaphysical anti-realism about moral facts conjoined with non-cognitivism about the semantics of moral judgments had “absolutely no prospect of a satisfactory construal of conditionals with moral antecedents that could hardly be decisive. Rather, whatever case there was for [this kind of anti-realist view] would become potentially revisionary of our ordinary and moral linguistic practice....” (Wright 1988: 31). But we don’t even have to “bite the bullet” on such “radical revisionism” (as Wright aptly calls it), when there remain other options on the semantic front: first, there are highly technical non-cognitivist solutions to the Frege-Geach challenge, like Gibbard’s; second, we can adopt a minimalist approach to truth, such that the propriety and intelligibility of certain asseroric idioms in evaluative language is enough to warrant cognitivism, with the issue between moral realists and anti-realists located elsewhere (for example, in the conception of objectivity [cf. Wright 1992]); and third, we can simply eschew the representationalist framework for understanding language, opting for inferential views which take seriously that “meaning is use,” and thus are quite compatible with a naturalistic metaphysics in which normativity does not exist.

Putting the semantics to one side, I want to focus on an interlocking set of metaphysical, epistemological, and, for want of a better word, practical or first-personal worries about normativity for naturalists. We may summarize them as follows. First, naturalism is self-

refuting, since the naturalistic outlook itself presupposes *epistemic* norms whose status is not naturalistically vindicated. Second, naturalism imposes domain-specific standards on domains of thought where they do not belong. Third, naturalism fails to do justice to the real, practical nature of normativity: it can explain what we *call* normativity, but it can not explain *real* normativity.¹ I shall take these up in turn.

Naturalism is self-refuting

The naturalist supposes that we should treat the methods and thus the results of the empirical sciences as arbiters of what is true and what is knowable. But why do so unless those methods and results are themselves *normatively sound*, that is, justified by epistemically relevant considerations? Yet we may then ask: are those “epistemically relevant considerations” themselves to be interpreted as results of the empirical sciences? Clearly not, on pain of circularity, but even apart from worries about circularity, it is not at all clear that these norms constitute scientific results as opposed to being presuppositions of scientific method. So that means the naturalist commends epistemic norms that are, themselves, not vindicated naturalistically: hence self-refutation.

This objection would be correct if the defense of naturalism were that epistemic norms favored it. *But this is not and can not be the defense of naturalism.* Quine, the leading Anglophone naturalist, was not ideally clear on this issue, sometimes being rather glib about the circularity problem, but I take it the right response to the worry is apparent in the famous closing observations in his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”:

¹I take it that “real normativity” means standards of what one ought to do or believe that are not dependent for their binding force on the attitudes, feelings, or beliefs of persons.

As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries -- not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience. (1951: 41)

The interest in predicting the future course of experience is, to put it mildly, a widely shared interest, one that facilitates crossing the street, eating a meal, and living a life. On this kind of view, we should be naturalists because *naturalism works*, not because it is “true” or “justified” in some sense either independent of or dependent upon naturalistic criteria. “Naturalism works” may sound like a slogan, but it is a slogan with real significance. Consider: thanks to the warranted beliefs of aerospace engineers (and, behind them, physicists and chemists), the plane that brought me here *actually brought me here*, that is, several tons of metal tubing and associated electronics rose tens of thousands of feet into the sky, with me strapped inside, and moved faster than any natural thing can on the ground, and deposited me in the place I was aiming to go—and not in the middle of the ocean or the middle of a desert—and did this without incinerating, mutilating, or otherwise killing me. Imagine telling a Homeric era farmer

that, “In the future, farmers like you will be able to travel through the clouds in special tubes to far away places you have heard of in stories, and do that in the time it takes you to ride a horse to the neighboring village.” To be sure, the ontology of Homeric gods licenses telling stories about such magic, but the ontology of aerospace engineers allows the farmers and the professors to actually experience it. That airplanes work is not an epistemic warrant, but that airplanes work gives us the pragmatic explanation why creatures like us are disposed to treat the epistemology that underlies aerospace engineering as the benchmark of the true and the knowable. The reasons for being a naturalist in the first place are not question-beggingly epistemic reasons; they are pragmatic ones, that almost everyone—including the anti-naturalists—actually accept in practice.² Naturalism thus makes its claim on us in virtue of its resonance with our attitudes, our practical interests in coping with the future course of our experience in the world.³

Notice that the locution “reasons for being a naturalist” really means “what explains why creatures like us are affectively disposed to take naturalistic epistemic criteria seriously.” Someone could “reasonably” reject these reasons; but “reasonably” is, itself, a pro-attitude

²Other kinds of apparent self-refutation objections have appeared in the literature: Kim (1988), for example, argues that the notion of “belief” itself is normative, in the sense that a Quinean naturalized psychology of belief-formation must help itself to normative views to individuate those mental states that arise in response to sensory input as instances of “belief.” More recently, Wedgwood (2007) has argued that the “intentional” is an inherently normative notion, so to the extent naturalists help themselves to intentional explanations (as all the great naturalists from Hume to Nietzsche do) they necessarily presuppose normative standards for individuating intentions. The mistake of both Kim and Wedgwood is in thinking that a naturalist must eschew normative concepts; to the contrary, the naturalist can help himself to any normative concepts that do useful naturalistic work. What the naturalist denies is that any of these pick out real instances of normativity not dependent on their usefulness.

³Naturalism “works” in the sense described in the text might seem like too lax a criterion. Why not think, for example, fictionalist naturalism—act as if we believe, rather than actually believe, whatever best explains our experience—would be just as good as actual naturalism? The only colorable answer is that it would not be: maintaining a make-believe posture is much harder than believing, which is why make-believe occupies so little of our lives. Skepticism about “naturalism works” usually trades, I suspect, on understating how well a naturalistic view really works in both ordinary and theoretical life.

term of endorsement, meaning only that someone could feel indifferent to epistemic norms that, when applied, produce certain outcomes—outcomes like planes taking off and landing where they are supposed to. That epistemology bottoms out in practical interests should hardly be a surprising conclusion for a naturalist. Let us recall two important lessons from naturalistically-minded 20th-century philosophy. First, from the famous Duhem-Quine thesis (Duhem 1914, Quine 1975, 1990) about the under-determination of scientific theories by evidence, we know that there are not even any scientific hypotheses that are epistemically obligatory, in the sense of required by logic and evidence.⁴ This is because any recalcitrant evidence elicited in a test of an hypothesis is compatible with the hypothesis as long as we are willing to give up the background assumptions such a test requires. In choosing among competing hypotheses and background assumptions, we must always fall back on evaluative considerations that “nature” does not adjudicate among, considerations such as theoretical simplicity, methodological conservatism, and consilience (cf. Quine & Ullian 1978).⁵ Second, unless there were a plausible *substantive* conception of rationality (there does not appear to be one, alas), then rationality, including any internalist norm of epistemic warrant, is itself instrumental, imposing normative constraints only on the means chosen to realize our ends, whatever they may happen to be. Thus, even norms for belief are hostage to ultimate ends, and so particular beliefs are unwarranted (that is, irrational) only relative to the believer’s ends, a point Peter Railton pressed twenty years ago against those who thought there was a firm

⁴ I acknowledge that the inveterate dogmatic realist may think this is merely an *epistemic* point, not a metaphysical one: there could still be *real epistemic values*; after all, we just do not know what they are or how to apply them. That is a logically possible position, but I am with Quine in thinking that if the *actual successful sciences* do not disclose such epistemic values, then it is dubious that reality demands any particular set of them.

⁵Scientific theories are none the worse for the naturalist in depending on logic, evidence and non-epistemic evaluative considerations: if the resulting theories work well for creatures like us, what more is there to expect?

fact/value distinction (see Railton 1986). That conclusion would also hardly be surprising to a naturalist like Nietzsche, who clearly appreciated the extent to which theoretical questions were driven by practical ends and interests (BGE 3-9).

Naturalism is, then, not self-refuting, since what commends naturalistic norms is not their warrant but their resonance with our practical interests and attitudes.

Naturalism imposes domain-specific standards where they do not belong

Someone who acknowledged the resonance of naturalistic epistemic norms with our practical attitudes might nonetheless object that such norms, while great for air travel and crossing the street, do not really help when it comes to coping with the prospect of death and suffering, or figuring out how to treat their neighbors. Why think naturalistic norms for belief should dominate the epistemic field, especially since, as we have just conceded, naturalism is not epistemically or, more broadly, rationally obligatory? Why think it should govern our talk and thought about norms outside the domain of phenomena for which we seek causal explanations? Maybe naturalistic norms “work” in certain domains, and that’s enough; but why treat them as binding in other domains? That is the objection I wish to consider now.

The late Ronald Dworkin posed an extreme version of this challenge in 1996, but since then it has been taken up by his friends, including Thomas Nagel (1997), Derek Parfit (2011), and T.M. Scanlon (2014) (cf. McGrath 2014). The core thought that animates the anti-naturalists is this: even if causal or explanatory power is the criterion of the real and the knowable in the domain of the natural sciences, there is no reason to treat it as the arbiter of the real and the knowable in other domains of thought and inquiry. Call this view *Domain Separatism*. Domain Separatists hold that metaphysical and epistemological criteria vary with

the subject-matter of cognitive domains and that it is an error to impose naturalistic criteria, appropriate, for example, in natural scientific inquiries, on to other domains. Domain Separatists thus endorse a version of the doctrine of “separate but equal”: separate metaphysical and epistemic criteria for each domain, but all the domains are equal in terms of cognitive status, that is, stating truths and generating knowledge.

The crucial question, obviously enough, is how we demarcate domains as the Domain Separatist would have us do? Dworkin says that while causal explanatory power “does seem appropriate to beliefs about the physical world” (1996: 119), it makes no sense for moral beliefs “[s]ince morality and the other evaluative domains make no causal claims” (1996: 120). But that is plainly false: the moral explanations literature from the 1980s onwards—recall Brink, Railton, Sayre-McCord, Sturgeon, and others—is replete with examples of the role of causal claims in ordinary normative discourse (e.g., “Of course he betrayed them, he’s an evil person”). It is perfectly reasonable then, even on the terms established by normative discourse itself, to inquire whether these explanations are *good* ones, let alone *best* explanations for the phenomena in question (see Leiter 2001b for a negative answer to this question).

Scanlon’s recent view is more nuanced than Dworkin’s (cf. 2014: 21-22). Scanlon allows that there are “mixed” normative claims, ones that involve or presuppose claims about natural facts (and presumably could involve or presuppose causal claims in particular). But at the same time he affirms the core of Domain Separatism, namely, that it “makes most sense” he says to “not privilege science” but instead to endorse a view that,

takes as basic a range of domains, including mathematics, science, and moral and practical reasoning. It holds that statements within all of these domains are capable of

truth and falsity, and that the truth values of statements about one domain, insofar as they do not conflict with statements of some other domain, are properly settled by the standards of the domain that they are about. (2014: 19)

I note in passing that Scanlon gives no real argument for demarcating domains other than saying he thinks it “makes most sense”⁶ to think of things his way. This betrays, I think, a deep peculiarity of much philosophy, including most Anglophone philosophy of the past half-century, namely, that it treats subjective reports of what “makes most sense” as data points with epistemic weight, as opposed to psycho-social artifacts that admit of explanation. But I will bracket that skeptical doubt here, even though a thorough-going naturalist should not: the psychology and sociology of inquirers, especially in a field as devoid of clear cognitive standards as philosophy, is an apt topic for systematic empirical investigation.

But back to Scanlon’s version of Domain Separatism. Prior to saying it “makes most sense” to demarcate domains, Scanlon does note one consideration that might favor Domain Separatism, namely, the difficulties naturalists like Quine have in accounting for certain abstract mathematical truths, ones that do not seem indispensable for our best scientific theories. The latter kinds of abstract mathematical truths are worrisome for precisely the reason that Domain Separatists like Dworkin and Scanlon hope to invoke against the naturalist in the moral or practical case: namely, that it seems there are *clear* truths in this domain, which we should be loathe to give up. If the Quinean naturalist can not capture all the abstract truths of mathematics with his causal/explanatory criterion for the real and the knowable, then so much the worse for the Quinean, so the Domain Separatist suggests.

⁶Later, Scanlon says the idea of “domains” is just “common sense” (2014: 23), but that common sense embraces falsehoods is, from my philosophical standpoint, neither probative nor surprising.

That intuition is *prima facie* plausible in the mathematical case, but precisely for the reasons it is dubious in the moral case, a point that requires emphasis. Remember: the fact that there is massive cross-cultural and cross-temporal convergence on mathematical truths among inquirers, a kind of convergence that seems hard to explain away sociologically or psychologically, is precisely what makes it tempting to reject any metaphysical or epistemological criteria that made the convergence inexplicable on epistemic grounds, that is, as manifesting sensitivity to the mathematical truths in question. (In fact, convergence, like divergence, demands an explanation, and truth is not the only candidate even in cases of convergence, but we may bracket that here.) Importantly, nothing comparable is true in the moral case: we do not even have the requisite convergence in moral opinions that might create a defeasible presumption in favor of truth. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, drawing on Nietzsche, the most striking fact about inquirers in the moral domain is that they agree about almost nothing, not about the priority of the right versus the good, or about the criterion of right action, or the criterion of goodness, or about whether the right and the good are even the fundamental ethical categories (Leiter 2014). Massive failure of convergence in the ethical domain ought to worry the moral realist.⁷ Scanlon is certainly sensitive to this concern and so appeals to such purportedly uncontroversial truths about practical reason like, “The fact that a person’s child has died is a reason for that person to feel sad” (2014: 2), which is, unfortunately for Scanlon, almost precisely the thesis that the Stoics quite intelligibly denied.⁸ We should allow, however, that there might well be some odd practical claims that strike most creatures

⁷ It worries Parfit, of course, in *On What Matters*, and he tries to argue that, in fact, all major theories converge. For some doubts, see Blackburn (2011) and Sandis (2011).

⁸Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*. Book 3 ch. XIV. (Thanks to Martha Nussbaum for this reference.)

like us as correct—e.g., don't torture babies for fun—but such irrelevant outliers do not come close to the enormous cross-cultural convergence in the mathematical case.

So how, then, do we ultimately demarcate domains on Scanlon's view? Scanlon makes a variety of comments regarding how to think of "domains"—for example, that a domain should be "understood in terms of concepts that it deals with, such as number, set, physical object, reason, or morally right action" (2014: 19)—and he even purports to allow that "there can be meaningful 'external' questions about the adequacy of reasoning in a domain" (2014: 21). In the end, though, Scanlon echoes Dworkin in his own discussion of Gilbert Harman's "best explanation" argument for moral anti-realism (Harman 1977). Harman, recall, argued that since the best explanation of why we might judge it wrongful for a bunch of young hoodlums to douse a cat with lighter fluid and set it aflame need make no reference to it actually being wrong to do so, only to facts about our psychology and our socialization, that we, therefore, have no reason to think it is *really* or *objectively* wrongful. Against Harman's view, Scanlon writes:

[T]here is no reason to accept Harman's [best explanation] requirement as he formulated it—as a perfectly general requirement applying to all domains—since they do not all aim at the same kinds of understanding (e.g., at the best causal explanations of the world that impinges on our sensory surfaces). (2014: 27)

We may grant that moral talk and "understanding," assuming there is such a thing, does not aim primarily at causal explanation, even if, as we remarked earlier, moral talk sometimes helps itself to causal explanations—but Scanlon is more cautious than Dworkin, since he does not deny *outright* the relevance of causal explanation to moral thought, only that moral thought

has other primary aims. But does it follow from this concession that there really is, as Scanlon claims, *no reason* to accept causal explanatory power as a marker of the real and the knowable even in the moral domain? That strong claim seems to overstate the case. Causal explanatory power has exercised pressure on attempts to make sense of the world precisely because, since the scientific revolution, our understanding of the world was purged of non-material causes, and teleologies, and gods and ghosts, because such entities have no causal explanatory power. We seem to know and understand more, as a result of this epistemically motivated cleansing. Why not say, then, that *all* domains that aim at *understanding* have a reason to take seriously the most successful markers of actual understanding we have? Indeed, the history of human inquiry since the scientific revolution is the history of purportedly domain-specific reasoning being subjected to scrutiny from scientific domains whose concepts and ontologies seemed to warrant more epistemic credence. Perhaps there is only *one* domain, the domain of human attempts to make sense of the world in all its baroque complexities, and to do so in terms that warrant some degree of epistemic confidence?

We may put the challenge to the Domain Separatist more precisely. Domain Separatists maintain that metaphysical and epistemological criteria vary with the subject-matter of purportedly “cognitive” domains and that it is an error to impose naturalistic criteria, appropriate, for example, in natural scientific inquiries, on to other domains. But in what domain do we locate the Domain Separatist thesis itself? What domain determines that a particular domain is, in fact, “cognitive”? By what domain’s criteria is it supposed to be an error to ask whether practical reasoning satisfies naturalistic criteria? I suppose it will be tempting to say at this point that these claims are located in the domain of philosophy, that it falls to

something called “philosophical reasoning” to adjudicate overreaching by one domain against another. But naturalists deny that there is something called “philosophical reasoning” that stands apart from the kinds of reasoning that work in the various sciences, so that response either begs the question against the naturalist *or* amounts to an admission that there is a meta-domain of reasoning, something the naturalist accepts, and which is precisely what the naturalist relies on in adjudicating the metaphysical and epistemological *bona fides* of all other domains. Either way, it seems, the Domain Separatist loses.

Or does she? Even if the Domain Separatist eschews the question-begging response of invoking the non-naturalist philosophical domain as the one that adjudicates the boundaries between domains, she can still ask the naturalist: why think the meta-domain of reasoning about which domains are cognitive should be governed by naturalistic standards of reasoning? That question is especially pressing because naturalistic standards of reasoning are, as I have already conceded, not rationally obligatory, but commended, instead, by our practical attitudes and interests.

Here I think there is no better answer to the Domain Separatist than the fact that the deliverances of naturalistic norms generally work well for creatures like us. No one finds it surprising, after all, that if we relax naturalistic constraints, we will get a promiscuous ontology, replete with moral facts, spirit facts, gustatory facts, aesthetic facts, theological facts, and so on. Someone might, of course, prefer more moral, spirit, and gustatory facts, and the like, in their ontology, but that is not, by itself, an argument against naturalism, unless one thinks the epistemic norms that license belief in such facts answer to equally or more important practical attitudes of creatures like us. The naturalist, to be sure, noting the extent to which *all of us* are

invested in naturalistic norms because they work so well in coping with the future course of experience, might then point out the pressures created by consistency--though that, too, is an epistemic attitude that is also not epistemically obligatory. And consistency in application of epistemic norms across domains might well yield in the face of the practical need for certain kinds of facts, such as facts about reasons. This brings us to what, I take it, has to be the real objection to the naturalist about normativity: namely, that he has not explained real normativity—that is, the bindingness of standards independent of our attitudes— and that explaining the real normativity of reasons is indispensable for creatures like us when we are trying to figure out what to do (or believe).

The naturalist has not explained “real” normativity

Perhaps the naturalist can explain our normative talk and judgments in terms of certain psychological states of inclination and aversion, and complicated variations on those, but that does not explain *normativity*, since it does not explain why it is actually wrong to do X or why there is an overriding reason to do Y. Explaining the existence of normative talk in terms of normative attitudes is not the same as explaining normativity, and the former is all my naturalist has offered.

On this issue, I want to begin by noting my agreement with the anti-naturalists and my disagreement with certain kinds of contemporary Humean naturalists. For many contemporary Humean naturalists think they can give a naturalistic account of “real” normativity in terms of psychological states like desire and thus deflect the anti-naturalist’s worry about the status of real normativity. But here I think an arch anti-naturalist like Scanlon gets it exactly right: there is, he says, an “evident lack of intrinsic normative significance of facts about desires” (2014: 6):

the significance of desire is, as Scanlon says, merely causal. Here is how Scanlon puts it at greater length:

The question [for the Humean]...would be whether identifying facts about reason with non-normative facts would explain reasons or eliminate their normativity. The 'action guiding' force of reasons, on such a theory, would seem to be purely causal and explanatory. If the fact that one has a strong reason to do *a* (and no countervailing reason to do *a*) is just a natural fact about what will satisfy one's desires, then this fact might explain one's failure to do *a*. But it does not explain why believing that one has such a reason (believing that this natural fact obtains) can make it irrational for one to do *a*. (2014: 6)

The problem is that the claim that it is "irrational for one to do *a*" means, for the naturalist, nothing more than some people or even all people might *feel* that you should not do *a*. The failed NeoHumean response to the problem of normativity underlines what it means to *really* be a naturalist about normativity. Of course, the NeoHumean naturalist has not explained *real* normativity, as Scanlon complains, because real normativity does not exist: *that is the entire upshot of the naturalist view*. There are no *reasons* whose existence and character is independent of human attitudes; there are only human attitudes which lead us to "talk the talk" of reasons. And if *real* normativity does not exist, if only *feelings* of inclination and aversion, compulsion and avoidance, actually exist, then that means that all purportedly normative disputes bottom out not in reasons but in the clash of will or affect. That is why, as A.J. Ayer correctly observed some eighty years ago, "when we come to deal with pure questions of value, as distinct from questions of fact...we finally resort to mere abuse" (1936:

147). Rhetorically, abuse has many uses, but its predominant role in moral discourse, including among philosophers,⁹ should be a red flag that we are far removed from the fabled “space of reasons” in this arena.

Now what about the person deciding what she ought to do? If the naturalist is right, how does it help her? The answer has to be that that it does not. The naturalist about normativity gives us a third-person account of what normativity is, namely, certain kinds of psychological states that grip certain kinds of biological organisms, and move them to action or inaction. From the standpoint of the person thinking about what she ought to do, all this is irrelevant. She will act on the feelings of inclination and aversion she has, subject to the constraints they impose upon her beliefs about what is the case. In thinking about whether she should act upon any particular inclination or aversion, she will be influenced by her other inclinations and aversions, including the inclinations and aversions common in her community. The only so-called “normative guidance” that could follow from these facts would be the guidance that follows from a plausible psycho-social account of the relevant attitudes—which

⁹ Anscombe is notorious in this regard. See her two-sentence paper in *Analysis*: “The nerve of Mr. Bennett’s argument is that if A results from your not doing B, then A results from whatever you do instead of B. While there may be much to be said for this view, still it does not seem right on the face of it.” (Anscombe 1966) Anscombe does not always treat her interlocutors as generously as she does Bennett: “But if someone really thinks, *in advance*, that it is open to question such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration—I do not want to argue with him; he shows a corrupt mind.” (Anscombe 1958: 17). Among consequentialists too, rhetorical abuse sometimes presents itself as an offer to self-approbation. Consider Smart: “Or would you, as a humane and sympathetic person, give a preference to the second universe? I myself cannot help feeling a preference for the second universe. But if someone feels the other way I do not know how to argue with him.” (1973: 28) Consider also Wolf’s use of “scare-adjectives” (remarked upon by Sommers 2007: 327): “A world in which human relationships are restricted to those that can be formed and supported in the absence of the reactive attitudes is a world of human isolation so cold and dreary that any but the most cynical must shudder at the idea of it.” (Wolf 1981: 391) Della Rocca’s epigraph to “The Taming of Philosophy,” is here apt: “Don’t mistake the fact that you don’t like my view for an argument against it.” (Della Rocca 2013: 178).

itself she might, of course, repudiate, unless she has, like most people, a strong inclination not to deviate too far from approved behavior in her locale.

Those who think practical philosophy is a cognitive subject—as opposed to what it actually is, namely, a kind of armchair sociology of the moral etiquette of bourgeois philosophy professors—typically object to the naturalist at this point by noting that an agent faces comparable questions of *theoretical normativity*, questions about what she ought to believe.¹⁰ Here I differ from 20th-century naturalists and moral skeptics like Ayer and Stevenson, who ignored this problem, and agree with naturalists and moral skeptics like Nietzsche, who did not: I think the issue is the same (cf. Leiter 2013). Even in the theoretical domain, there is no real normativity, that is, no norms of belief or epistemic value the agent *must* adhere to, as I argued earlier. If epistemology proper, the systematic account of what one “ought” to believe, gives the appearance of a more robust discipline it is only because its primary data points—namely, the claims of the successful empirical sciences—are clearer and more widely accepted, precisely because of their resonance with our practical interests. But that also means that epistemology proper is also a kind of armchair sociology, though one that can be discharged more responsibly from the armchair since its data points—the epistemic norms manifest in the practices of the successful sciences—are ones that can be studied in illuminating ways by reading books and journals.

¹⁰ See, for example, Korsgaard’s (2012) 3AM interview: “there is no more reason to doubt that reason plays a role in guiding human actions than there is to doubt that reason plays a role in forming human beliefs. In fact there is less, since people believe much crazier things than they do. And all of [Rosenberg, Pat Churchland, and Leiter] are dedicated to the project of working out what we have good reason to believe. If they came to the conclusion that reason doesn’t play much of a role in forming most people’s beliefs most of the time, they wouldn’t give up that project themselves. They are interested in the kinds of questions that arise when we are trying to use reason to figure out what to believe. As a moral philosopher, I’m interested in questions that arise when we are trying to use reason to figure out what to do.”

For my kind of naturalist, there is no metaphysical difference *in kind* between moral and epistemic values—both are artifacts of attitudes common among creatures like us—but that latter point is still compatible with a radical difference in *degree* between them. Let us call a “Global Humean” about epistemic values someone who notices that creatures like us generally converge in our epistemic attitudes because the norms those attitudes endorse do so well at meeting widely shared human needs and interests, such as predicting the future course of experience, as I argued earlier. Consider epistemic norms like the following: treat normal perceptual experience as *prima facie* veridical, honor logical inferences, and employ the inductive method in empirical inquiry. These epistemic norms do, indeed, seem to facilitate successful navigation of the world and prediction of the future course of experience. Something like this, I suspect (or hope), was Hume’s own view, though unlike Hume, the other great modern naturalist Nietzsche does not think natural dispositions converge as well in the ethical case. That would explain why the great insight Nietzsche attributes to the Sophists concerns “the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments [*Moralischen Werthurtheile*]” (*The Will to Power*, sec 428), not *all* value judgments, in other words, but the distinctively moral ones. The key difference in the case of theoretical normativity is that creatures like us share enough attitudes and interests to allow meaningful debates about warrant and justification. Global Humeanism in the domain of theoretical norms gives the appearance of “real” normativity; if the same were true in the practical domain, we would not get *real normativity* there, just Global Humeanism about the practical. But, *contra* Humean optimism, that is not what we find.

If we have no *real* reason to believe the same or act the same, and thus we may not believe the same or act the same, given that our underlying psychological states (our attitudes) vary, what follows? What follows is basically what Ayer and Stevenson correctly diagnosed not quite a century ago: where people share attitudes, reasoning about what one ought to do and what one ought to believe is possible; where people do not share attitudes, reasoning is not possible and only force prevails in a dispute, whether that is the rhetorical force of producing a change in attitudes by whatever means are effective or the physical or lawful force of suppressing contrary attitudes.¹¹ An agent deciding what to do or what to believe is in the grips of particular normative attitudes, some practical and some theoretical, and has no reason to discount them since after all *they are her attitudes*--although, as Nietzsche noticed, she might discount them if she were in the grips of a non-naturalistic view of what had to be true of her attitudes for them to move her, that is, if she thought they had to be something more than *her attitudes*. But that I like Japanese food better than Thai food is a fact about my gustatory attitudes, yet it seems none the worse for that: why wouldn't I eat Japanese food if *that's my gustatory attitude*? My moral and epistemic attitudes are more ambitious in their scope—for example, they are not indifferent to *your* attitudes on similar questions—but they are not, on the naturalistic view, different from the gustatory attitudes in their metaphysical or epistemological status. We can easily imagine a world—since such worlds have existed—in which perceptual evidence is not treated as even defeasibly veridical, in which the so-called “scientific method” is dismissed, and in which the dominant epistemic values are what the holy book says or what the holy leader declares. Worlds governed by such epistemic norms tend to

¹¹If philosophers were more attuned to reality, they would investigate the differing kinds of *force* operative in human affairs.

have features we modern, post-Enlightenment folk find unpleasant, but that is, itself, another attitudinal response. If enough of our fellows share our attitudes, then darkness recedes, and Enlightenment triumphs. But those are facts about people's attitudes, as influenced by their pleasures and pains, their inclinations and aversions, their loves and hatreds, and not about real normativity. For naturalists, there is no real normativity, but normative judgment, and its role in the lives of creatures like us, is easy enough to explain.¹²

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