Virtue Ethics as Social Science: How naturalistic can it get?

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Abstract:
Virtue ethics is, in many respects, uniquely posed to be a promising candidate for a fully naturalized normative theory. Its focus on the development of character and commitment to understanding the normative ideal in terms of this development and more generally in terms of features of human nature seem straightforward extensions of the naturalistic project. This focus positions virtue ethics squarely within the domain of moral psychology; as moral psychology has become increasingly informed by the social sciences, so to has virtue ethics. All of this begs the question: could virtue ethics itself be conceived as a social science, or are there limits to the naturalization project, at least when it comes to normative moral theories? In this paper, I'll explore the viability of a fully naturalized virtue ethics by critically considering two avenues with the potential to establish a naturalized account of normativity: one teleological, one by analogy with health.

Virtue ethics is, in many respects, uniquely posed to be a promising candidate for a fully naturalized normative theory. Its focus on the development of character and commitment to understanding the normative ideal in terms of this development and more generally in terms of features of human nature seem straightforward extensions of the naturalistic project. This focus positions virtue ethics squarely within the domain of moral psychology; as moral psychology has become increasingly informed by the social sciences, so to has virtue ethics.[1]

All of this begs the question: could virtue ethics itself be conceived as a social science, or are there limits to the naturalization project, at least when it comes to the naturalization of normative moral theories? The immediate barrier that ought to

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[1] See, for examples, Snow (2010) and Besser-Jones (2014).

come to mind here hovers around the tensions between a naturalistic project, which seeks to describe, and a normative project, which seeks to prescribe. In this paper, I'll explore the viability of a fully naturalized virtue ethics. I'll argue that the prospect for a fully naturalized virtue ethics is promising yet limited. This limitation, however, is one shared by many social sciences. The upshot is that it is certainly possible for virtue ethics to be conducted in the spirit of a social science.

Before getting started, it will help to be explicit about what this would entail. In order to be fully naturalized, virtue ethics would need to embrace both a substantive and a methodological naturalism.[2] Substantive naturalism holds, very roughly, that the conclusions of a philosophical theory must be interpretable on naturalistic grounds; as Railton notes, "in terms amenable to empirical inquiry" (1989, p. 156). Methodological naturalism holds that these conclusions ought to be reached through means consistent with, or as part of how, "empirical inquiry [is] carried on in the natural sciences" (Railton, 1989, p. 156). A commitment to one form of naturalism does not entail a commitment to the other, and there is no essential connection between the two. A theory might be substantively naturalistic without being methodologically, such as when philosophical conclusions are reached through a priori analysis yet nonetheless are such that they can be understood in naturalistic terms, through concepts that are amendable to empirical enquiry.[3] But to be fully naturalistic, it seems a theory ought to be naturalistic in both its method and its substance—or, at any rate, so it seems to me.

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[2] Here I follow Railton (1989).
[3] It is trickier to see how a theory could be methodologically yet not substantively naturalistic. Railton's example is an expressivist position that is reached through a

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Thinking about virtue ethics in this sense—as fully naturalistic and so committed to both methodological and substantive naturalism—might seem to many a non-starter simply in virtue of the fact that virtue ethics is a normative moral theory, which seeks not just to describe human nature but to describe the *best* form of human nature, one which we *ought* to strive for. Virtue, after all, describes a good or excellent state of character, and virtue ethics consists in the enterprise of defining and justifying a particular state of character as the excellent one, and thinking about what it takes to develop that state. It is thus both evaluatively and prescriptively normative. Many reasonably question whether or not this project can be sustained at the naturalistic level.[4] The problem is thus: can we, on naturalistic grounds, pick out the best form of human life?

This is a challenge from both the methodological and the substantive perspective. Methodologically, the question will be whether or not we have grounds, using the methods of science, to identify the evaluative dimensions of human nature. Substantively, the question will be whether or not we have grounds to understand the evaluative dimensions on scientific grounds.

Both Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse have taken up similar challenges in their elaborations of Aristotelian virtue ethics, and I'll start with consideration of their efforts to develop the kind of natural normativity we are seeking. I'll then move on to consider an alternative approach to developing natural

naturalistic method and particularly analysis of discourse; but that is not substantively naturalistic insofar as it concludes that value judgments lack cognitive meaning.

[4] See, for example Watson (1990), and Hursthouse (1999, Chapter 9).

normativity based upon a health model that, I argue, provides more promise towards meeting the challenge of developing a fully naturalized virtue ethics.

Naturalistic Teleology

Aristotle famously argues that we can come to understand a being's highest good through reflection on its natural end. Virtue, he argues, is simply that which renders a thing good and causes it to perform its function well. These two components, he argues, go hand in hand:

> For example, the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its function good, for good sight is due to the excellence of the eye. Likewise, the excellence of a horse makes it both good as a horse and good at running, at carrying its rider, and at facing the enemy. Now if this is true of all things, the virtue or excellence of man, too, will be a characteristic which makes him a good man, and which causes him to perform his own function well.(Aristotle, 1962, sec. 1106a17–24)

Virtues attain their normativity—such that they are characteristics we ought to develop—insofar as they allow us to perform our function. This analysis of virtue clearly depends upon our capacity to identify our function. Aristotle thinks we can do this by thinking about which of our ends is both final and most perfect. We determine this through reflection on the distinctive aspects of our nature, reflection Aristotle takes to lead to the conclusion that "the proper function of man, then, consists in an activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle or, at least, not without it" (1962, sec. 1098a7–8). The virtues aid us in engaging in this kind of rational activity (specifically, they turn out to be constitutive of this activity) and are normative insofar as they do so.

Taking inspiration from Aristotle, Foot and Hursthouse each develop a similar account of normativity in their defenses of virtue ethics. Foot's argument begins, like Aristotle's, with analogy to how it is that we evaluate other species. It is standard, Foot argues, to evaluate members of other living things by appeal to objective facts about its characteristics and operations. Evaluating humans, and deciphering the human good, by appeal to objective facts about its characteristics and operations is simply a natural extension of how it is we approach the evaluation of other living things. Any thoughts that there is a disparity between the process through which we evaluate humans and that by which we evaluate other living things, such that moral evaluations stand over and apart from objective facts regarding the human species, is misguided.

> "Nobody would", Foot writes, " take it as other than a plain matter of fact that there is something wrong with the hearing of a gull that cannot distinguish the cry of its own as with the sight of an owl that cannot see in the dark. Similarly, it is obvious that there are objective, factual evaluations of such things as human sight, hearing, memory, and concentration, based on the form of our own species. Why, then, does it seems to monstrous a suggestion that the evaluation of human will should be determined by facts about the nature of human beings and the life of our own species?" (2003, p. 24).

On Foot's analysis, the only obstacles towards embracing this mode of evaluation have to do with what she takes to be unwarranted concerns over the difference between facts and values—concerns she thinks are based in a failure to appreciate the role practical rationality plays in allowing us to recognize reasons for action (2003, pp. 22–23).[5]

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[5] This paper assumes a commitment to some form of naturalism and thus will not address the larger metaethical issues Foot discusses in this particular argument regarding the debate between non-cognitivists and naturalists.

Notice that there is nothing so far in Foot's argument that commits her to what, following Fitzpatrick (2000), I'll call natural teleology; that is, all that Foot has suggested is an analysis of what moral facts are (objective facts based upon the characteristics and operations of our species) and not thus far an analysis of how to determine or identify which facts regarding our species are ones which are good or worthy of developing. Her teleological commitments come into play later, in her defense of why moral facts are ones wrapped up with psychology and particularly one's capacity to exercise practical rationality.

Foot's teleological commitments run somewhat differently than how Aristotle's teleology is often interpreted. While Aristotle's teleology speaks of a final end (telos) to which we are all driven, Foot worries that this end-talk misleading gives rise to the impression that each living thing has some divinely ordained end and advocates moving away from this focus on ends and taking the telos in teleology to speak to one's life cycle, rather than, necessarily, one's *end.* According to Foot, for most living species, "the way an individual *should be* is determined by what is needed for development, self-maintenance, and reproduction" (2003, p. 33). Human beings are different, however, in that their distinctive psychological capacities elevate their functioning to that beyond the basic life cycle of reproduction; nonetheless, their goodness can be ascertained and evaluated based on the same conceptual structure we use to evaluate other living species.[6] Given the distinctive psychological capacities of human beings and in particular their capacity for

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[6] This appeal to the life cycle allows Foot to develop norms that are based in functional elements (that are teleological) rather than statistical—a point that sets natural teleology apart from the health model we consider in the following section.

practical reasoning and ability to control their will, norms arising from reflection on human being's life cycle are special—they are moral norms.

Explicitly citing a debt to Foot, Hursthouse defends a similar naturalistic, teleological account of normativity. She assumes, with Foot, that the pertinent evaluation at stake is an evaluation that judges the individual in comparison with her species—that is, that while it is possible to judge individuals by appeal to all sorts of criteria, when it comes to deciding an individual's goodness, the standard ought to be how that individual stands with respect to other members of her species.[7] In making this evaluation, however, Hursthouse advocates a more structured approach than we find in Foot's rather loose appeal to life cycles. She suggests, as a baseline, that in evaluating *any* living thing, there are at least two ends at stake: one's survival as an individual, and the continuance of one's species (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 198). As we climb up the "ladder of nature" and consider the means of evaluating more sophisticated animals—culminating with social animals— more ends emerge: the characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/characteristic freedom from pain and the good functioning of the social group (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 200– 201). Each of these ends is associated with a particular aspect of the individual in question: its parts, operations/reactions, actions, and emotions/desires (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 200). Taking into account the interplay between these aspects of a species and its ends, we can conclude that, for social animals, what is essential is the good functioning of the group, where good functioning is enabling its members

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[7] Notice there is an alternative possibility neither Foot nor Hursthouse entertain: the individual might be judged based on her individual traits. This would lead to a form of what Haybron (2008) describes as internalism about well-being.

to live well: "to foster their characteristic individual survival, their characteristic contribution to the continuance of the species and their characteristic freedom from pain and enjoyment of such things as it is characteristic of their species to enjoy" (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 201). We do all this—and so enable members to live well--by fostering the individual's characteristic capacities.

When we apply this model of evaluation to human beings, who are not just social creatures but who are also rational creatures, we see, or so Hursthouse argues, that their rationality transforms how it is that they fulfill their function. Because of our rationality, we cannot just understand our characteristic actions and operations by appeal to what we *do*, instead, our rationality allows "room for the idea that we might be able to be and to live better" (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 221–222). Reason, Hursthouse argues, allow us to recognize good and better ways of living.

Hursthouse, like Foot, thus sees reason as opening up the space wherein our ethical evaluations can occur; this is why our evaluations of our actions and of others are moral evaluations, as opposed to simply biological evaluations. This gives us a form of ethical naturalism, grounded all the same in the same structure as we employ in our non-moral evaluations of other living things. It is teleological insofar as it rests upon an understanding of our ends (broadly interpreted) and normative insofar as it is teleological; yet this natural normativity is moral insofar as reason gives us the capacity to identify, evaluate and choose the *best* ways to reach our ends.

Is this approach of naturalistic teleology viable? Foot's and Hursthouse's approach has been criticized by several for failing to be consistent with a commitment to naturalism. Let's take a look.

The first line of criticism concerns how it is that Foot and Hursthouse reach their conclusion that reason ought to have a privileged status. While both try to advance stronger arguments than we find in Aristotle for *why* we ought to privilege reason and its associated ends as opposed to our other ends, we might still worry about whether doing so is really justified by their methodology. As we've seen each appeal to the special status reason plays in our life cycle (for Foot), or in our proper functioning (for Hursthouse). Yet we might reasonably question whether there are naturalistic reasons for this appeal. Copp and Sobel (2004), for instance, worry that Hursthouse and Foot spend so much time developing the analogy of evaluation with other living things that they overlook the fact that there are a variety of perspectives from which we can evaluate other life forms. An evolutionary biologist will have a different set of criteria than a descriptive biologist. Moreover, their evaluations, Copp and Sobel argue, likely conflict with each other: an evolutionary biologist is concerned with those capacities which enable individuals to reproduce their genes for future generations, while a descriptive biologist might be more concerned with those capacities that enable an individual to flourish within a particular habitat which may or may not be their current habitat (2004, p. 535).

The general worry emerging here is that, even when working from a scientific perspective, and even when focusing on non-human life forms, there are a variety of perspectives from which we can evaluate living things. This variety

transfers to our evaluation of human beings; the simple analogy underwriting Foot's and Hursthouse's naturalistic teleology is, as Copp and Sobel argue, "more controversial" than they take it to be such that if the story each wants to tell regarding our evaluation of human beings is to "be defensible it will have to explain better how the normative evaluations of nonhuman animals that Hursthouse makes can be vindicated as uniquely authoritative"(2004, p. 536).[8]

Might we address this particular concern by specifying and limiting the evaluation to a particular perspective? The natural perspective invoked by the language of functioning that we see in Aristotle through Foot and Hursthouse seems to be an evolutionary one. Hursthouse, remember, explicitly identifies continuance of the species of as one of the two ends common to all living things. Consider as well Foot: "The way an individual *should be* is determined by what is needed for development, self-maintenance, and reproduction: in most species involving defence, and in some the rearing of the young" (2003, p. 33). While, in a footnote, she tries to distance herself from the perspective of evolutionary biology (Foot, 2003, p. 32 n10), the evolutionary tones of her analysis of difficult to set aside.

Yet even if we were to find a way to justify prioritizing the evolutionary perspective in our evaluation of human beings, it isn't at all clear that this perspective leads us to the conclusions Foot and Hursthouse advance. The problem is that the evolutionary focus will lead us to support those capacities that are conducive towards gene replication, which very well may not be the same capacities that are conducive to well-functioning at either the individual or species level.

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[8] Cobb and Sobel focus on Hursthouse here, although acknowledge Hursthouse's debt to Foot and treat them as methodologically on par.

Fitzpatrick (2000) makes this argument in detail against Foot's argument that takes proper functioning to be equivalent to the welfare of an individual; Copp and Sobel (2004) make a similar argument against Hursthouse's similarly structured claim. Fitzpatrick argues that those traits that have been naturally selected for have no general connection to welfare, and that there are no grounds for taking an organism's welfare to represent the ultimate end of this biological process. An organism's welfare may be important insofar as it is connected to reproductive success, but the ultimate end nonetheless is gene replication. "One cannot", he argues, "just stop with the welfare promotion and ignore the further effects without which it would never have been relevant in the first place" (FitzPatrick, 2000, p. 115). If this line of criticism stands—and it seems plausible that it does—naturalistic teleology seems doomed as an anchor for virtue ethics, and especially for the eudaimonistic virtue ethics of Foot and Hursthouse. If we are fully committed to a teleological evaluation, it seems we ought to derive norms based on their conduciveness to the ultimate end of our teleology; if, as evolutionary science suggests, our telos is gene replication, then, from a scientific perspective, it seems arbitrary to base norms on what is, at best, an intermediate step towards this end. Efforts to limit the teleological evaluation to welfare thereby must be coming from somewhere else—and in this move, it looks like naturalistic teleology breaks with naturalism, both methodologically, insofar as it departs from the methods of science in its identification of flourishing, and—perhaps—substantively, insofar as its ability to understand flourishing on scientific grounds is compromised.

There is a further and related reason to question the normative status of conclusions drawn via teleology. The discussion thus far has presupposed, like Aristotle, that normativity can be established by showing a particular characteristic to be essentially connected to our final ends. But why think this provides us with normativity? The challenge is not just that, as human beings, we are capable of transcending the ends given to us by nature; the challenge is to explain why it is we should care about our final ends and see reflection on them as generating evaluations that are prescriptive for us. That is, we can recognize that reflection on our final ends provides us with *a standard of evaluation* and still question the prescriptive normativity of those evaluations.[9] As Prinz worries, virtue ethics justified in this manner seems to depend on "an unwarranted conflation of the natural and the good." And of course, as he reminds us, "natural certainly does not seem to entail [morally] good" (Prinz, 2009, p. 133). This gives us further reason for thinking that natural teleology necessarily breaks from methodological naturalism insofar as, at some point, a departure from the scientific analysis is required in order to establish the prescriptive components of the otherwise scientific evaluation of our functioning.

Health

An alternative approach is to ground the normative content of virtue ethics within a conception of health. This approach shares the spirit of naturalistic

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[9] Hursthouse, we should note, does not deny this possibility, and reminds us that her arguments are not intended to convince those not already compelled by recognition of the normative import of the exercise of reason, but is rather to provide an argument that justifies the presumption that virtues are already normative.

teleology insofar as it embraces a mode of evaluation that is analogous to how it is that we evaluate other life forms yet departs from a teleological analysis insofar as its focus is on how healthy an individual is qua individual, rather than how it is that an individual fulfills her teleological function. On the health model, normativity derives from the thesis that health is valuable and that, as a result, we ought to do that which is conducive towards our health.

As a source of normativity, this process is relatively clear cut and tracks a mode of evaluation and prescriptivity common to us all: we know that it is good for us to eat vegetables and to exercise; and we know that we ought to do this. Moreover, we know these things are good for *all* of us, and can stipulate them as such independently of knowing other contingent features of any particular individual's situation. This kind of normativity captures an important aspect of virtue ethics, which is that traditionally, at least, it seeks to develop an account of the virtues as things that are good for us and important for us to develop, regardless of the particular features of our situation.

The health model has been developed, in different contexts, both by Kraut (2007) and myself (Besser-Jones, 2014). While in contrast to my approach, Kraut does not develop the health model with the explicit purpose of using it to anchor a naturalistic virtue ethics, it is clear that he uses the health model to develop a normative theory of well-being so strives to draw from the health model the distinctive kind of natural normativity that is our current focus.[10]

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[10] Kraut describes his theory as an ethics of well-being, and that as such it requires "all practical justification to proceed by way of what is good because this is the point of all that we do" (2007, p. 21).

Kraut argues that the most natural way of understanding flourishing is by appeal to the development of a being's capacities, and suggests the intuitive appeal of thinking about what is good (and bad) for us in terms of our development. Like Foot and Hursthouse, Kraut believes a significant aspect of this intuitive appeal comes from the ease with which we make these kind of analyses with respect to non-human living things. There is, he argues, "always a tight connection between a living being's use of its powers, its flourishing, and its doing well—whether that living thing is human or not" (Kraut, 2007, p. 133).

In an effort to both recognize and appreciate the distinctive aspects of human develop and human flourishing, Kraut prioritizes the development of human beings' psychological capacities over their physical capacities. While in the best of all worlds we are psychologically and physically healthy, Kraut argues that it is nonetheless possible for someone to be flourishing insofar as he is "in full possession of his *psychological* powers", yet who is also "*physically* sick, weak, muted, injured, stunted" (2007, p. 133, original emphasis). This focus on psychological health over physical health reflects the basic assumption, found in Hursthouse (1999) and Foot (2003) and echoed in my own work (2014), that the good for humans ought to reflect their capacity to move beyond their biological life cycle and experience goods that are not circumscribed to their physicality. These thoughts certainly line up with Kraut's conclusion that "a flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops, and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (no less than physical powers)" (2007, p. 137).

At this point we might reasonably wonder whether the health model indeed gives us an alternative account to naturalistic teleology. After all, is it really so different to think about flourishing in terms of the development of one's capacities, rather than thinking about flourishing in terms of fulfilling one's telos? I think there are important differences, and we can begin to see them through reflection on what happens when a given individual fails. When an individual falls short of reaching her telos, this does not necessitate any harmful effects on that individual, considered as an individual. Because so much of the teleological account of flourishing relies on specifying the ends of a species, there is the potential for a gap between the individual's welfare and the individual's fulfillment of her ends to emerge, leading one thereby to question the normativity of those ends. Indeed, this was the central thrust of Fitzpatrick's objection to natural teleology. In contrast, with the health model this potentiality becomes less of a threat.[11] We can more easily see how an individual is benefitted or harmed by the fulfillment of her capacities or lack thereof. Consider the words Kraut picks up on to describe the scenario in which an agent's physical capacities fail to develop: "unhealthy, weak, damaged, and stunted"(2007, p. 133). These are powerful words and powerful precisely because they track a state that is recognizably bad for the agent. Kraut's developmentalism and the health model more generally, thus seems to track a very different kind of thing than does the naturalistic teleology.

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[11] The health model cannot eliminate this threat entirely, as it is invariably dependent on some method for tracking health. As we will see, Kraut isn't entirely clear on how this is supposed to happen; my approach appeals to scientific research, which I think improves on Kraut's use of the health model, but still presents a view of health/well-being that is dependent upon statistical claims.

We can see these departures from naturalistic teleology clearly in my use of the health model, which integrates psychological research to substantiate claims about health and well-functioning and its importance to the individual agent. My aims in this project are explicitly normative: they are to describe a particular form of well-being (eudaimonic well-being) and then to deduce a virtue ethics through reflection on it. The health model functions here to establish the normativity of acting in ways that are conducive towards one's eudaimonic well-being. In many ways, this project is structurally similar to Kraut's developmentalism; however, instead of appealing the development of particular capacities to depict the desired state of health, I appeal to the satisfaction of innate psychological needs.

Innate psychological needs (of autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are drives we have to seek out certain kinds of experiences. We all, for instance, have a need for relatedness; this need leads us to strive to engage in positive interactions with others and to develop relationships based on mutual caring and respect. When we engage in these kinds of experiences we satisfy our need and enjoy a state of psychological health and well-functioning; yet when we fail to engage in these experiences are needs are frustrated: we are continually striving for these experiences yet our strivings are thwarted, as such we experience negative effects that inhibit our health and functioning.[12]

So how is this appeal to innate psychological needs different than an appeal to capacities? The first point of differentiation has to do with the distinction

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[12] The most psychological work on innate psychological needs has been done by Deci and Ryan (e.g., 2000). For a more detailed overview, see Besser-Jones (2014, Chapter 2).

between a need and a capacity. A capacity refers to an ability; a potential. A need, however, refers to something that is requisite to an individual's health or well-being. Evidence for this requisite status comes through psychological research establishing the ill-effects associated with needs that go unfulfilled.[13] As we will see, this difference plays out in important ways. For now, though, let's look to the similarities between the approaches.

Both Kraut's approach and mine strive to give an analysis of health as being something that is objectively valuable to the agent. Just as we can reflect on physical health to deduce prescriptions that are objectively ascribable, we can reflect on psychological health to deduce prescriptions that are objectively ascribable. This move is important to the health model, at least insofar as the health model is meant to serve in conjunction with a normative ethical theory. In order to establish the kind of prescriptivity we associate with a virtue ethics, within which we make claims about what an individual ought to strive to do, be it virtues she should develop, or capacities she should strive to develop, or needs she should strive to fulfill, it is important to be able to establish the prescriptivity of these claims without making resource to contingent desires. Applying this need to the health model, it follows that we need to be able to establish the particular vision of health (be it developmentalism or eudaimonic well-being) as something valuable and good for the agent, whether or not she embraces it as such. Of course, it is precisely this aspect of the naturalistic virtue ethics project that makes it vulnerable to criticisms questioning the normativity of its prescriptions.

[13] These ill-effects include, amongst many more, a lack of motivation, impairment of cognitive skills, and various physical ailments (Besser-Jones, 2014).

Because the health model describes a form of well-being that is not contingent to desires, some question whether or not it delivers a kind of well-being that is, in the end valuable. Targeting eudaimonic well-being explicitly, Tiberius and Plakias worry about whether or not there is any value inherent in needs satisfaction that is independent of its conduciveness to generating positive attitudes, and so worry about whether "eudaimonism can have a legitimate claim to be action-guiding in general (and not just for people who already identify with it)" (2010, p. 410). Raibley (2013) presses a similar concern, pointing to the difficulties involved in establishing notions of harm and benefit (of what is good-for-the agent) without making recourse to desires as a mediating role. He thus questions whether there is any independent value to forms of well-being derived from the health model.

The apparent problem is that the health model presents a theory of what is good-for-an-agent that allows for the possibility that the agent does not value or otherwise embrace it *as* good-for-her. The health model is vulnerable to this line of criticism insofar as it seeks to give an alternative standard of goodness that does not boil down to a conative state; the question defenders of the health model must answer, then, is what this standard is: *Why* should we accept the idea that health is good for us?

It is not clear that Kraut has an answer to this question, nor that he thinks he needs an answer to this question. Kraut seems to take it as a given, a matter of common sense, both that it is "always good to flourish" (2007, p. 133), and that we "normally make [a connection] between flourishing and the healthy development and exercise of a thing's faculties and powers" (2007, p. 135). He thus seems

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implicitly to deny from the start either that there are those who might not, as Tiberius and Plakias suggest, already identify with the goodness of flourishing or that it is an important part of an ethics of well-being to take this perspective seriously. This, I think, is a serious shortcoming, and weakens the normative import of Kraut's developmentalism. Yet, as I will now argue, this shortcoming within Kraut's work ought not to be seen as a reason to question or reject the viability of the health model. Rather, what seems to have happened is that Kraut has failed to make the best use of the health model.

As I suggested in the beginning of the section, one compelling feature of the health model lies in its potential to make use of the mode of evaluation and prescriptivity found within discussions of physical health. While Kraut frames his developmentalism as analogous to physical health (strictly, flourishing for Kraut includes physical health), he fails to embrace the methodology used in analyses of physical health to both evaluate and prescribe. The reason why it is good for us to eat vegetables is not because we already recognize a connection between eating veggies and experiencing good health, even if we do recognize this connection. The reason that *justifies* this prescription draws on scientific evidence and explanation of this connection. The existence of this research and scientific backing explains the special kind of normativity we associate with physical health, and particularly its status as an objectively ascribable value to all. Because Kraut does not try to find deeper evidence of explanation of the connection of the value of flourishing and of the connection between flourishing and developmentalism, his theory fails to instantiate fully the health model and lacks the kind of normative weight to anchor a

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normative ethical theory (be it an ethics of well-being or a virtue ethics). And, interestingly, this failure results from a breach with methodological naturalism.

To tackle this kind of concern, and in an effort to build normativity in a manner consistent with the methodological naturalism, in my work I piggy-back on the value we naturally ascribe to physical health (Besser-Jones, 2014, pp. 23–25), and I think this is our best recourse. Physical health is valuable largely insofar as it enables individuals to function well throughout their lives. It is always valuable to the individual, even if eh does not herself desire or value her health. Why can we make this claim? The reason is that there exists a body of research establishing the connection between physical health and well-functioning, as well as of the harmful effects associated with a lack of physical health. This research provides us with the standard for evaluating and prescribing that we found lacking in Kraut's developmentalism. Given, for example, the well-documented research regarding the negative effects of cigarette smoking, we are confidant in asserting that cigarette smoking is bad for *any* individual, and that we all ought not to smoke, even if someone really wants to do so.

A similar body of research exists concerning the effects of the satisfaction of our innate psychological needs, enabling us to make the same kinds of evaluative and prescriptive claims regarding the importance of need satisfaction with the same normative force as claims derived from analyses of physical health. This research allows us to meet the challenge of explaining why need satisfaction is valuable independently of conative states, even to those who do not already identify with its value. Notably, it does so by maintaining a commitment to methodological

naturalism, using the methods of science explicitly to establish the normativity of needs satisfaction and of eudaimonic well-being.

It thus looks like if we see the health model through to its full development, we are able to come a long way towards establishing a fully naturalized virtue ethics. Appealing to psychological research allows us to identify with the evaluative dimensions essential to virtue ethics using scientific means; this helps to ensure the resultant theory is naturalistic both in method and in substance. There is, however, a problem still lurking with the health model that, we will see, prevents it from being fully naturalized. We'll start with evaluation of how this problem shows itself in Kraut's developmentalism and then explore how it does so in my work on eudaimonic well-being.

Kraut's approach, remember, connects flourishing with the development of one's capacities; flourishing just is, Kraut argues, the healthy development and use of our capacities. Despite the intuitive appeal of understanding flourishing in terms of the development of one's capacities, there remains the problem—familiar to one we saw with respect to naturalistic teleology—of specifying which of our many and varied capacities are conducive towards flourishing, for some of our capacities— aggression, for instance, seem to, if developed, threaten our ability to flourish. Raibley (2013) criticizes Kraut's theory along these lines, arguing that in order to adjudicate between those capacities that ought to count towards flourishing and those that don't, Kraut must first appeal to a normatively laden conception of the best kind of flourishing. This appeal, however, threatens circularity insofar as it leaves Kraut unable to appeal to the fact that we have capacities as a means to

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ground the normativity of their development. In Raibley's words, "it seems that Kraut is covertly appealing to the concept of well-being in order to analyze the concept of well-being" (2013, p. 479). Now, to be fair (and Raibley suggests this as well), this challenge may not pose problems for Kraut's own project of exploring well-being, insofar as Kraut's developmentalism might be best described as an effort to illuminate well-being, rather than to *justify* the normativity of well-being. We've seen hints of this already in discussion of the previous objection. Kraut describes his methodology along these lines, suggesting that his approach is one of generalizing from concrete cases where what is good for us is obvious. We find, through analysis of these cases, that "the best explanation for their goodness consists in the way they involve the enjoyable use of our bodies, senses, emotions, and intellect"(Kraut, 2007, p. 190). Through this analysis, "we find that our well-being consists precisely in the full flowering of these powers, just as the good of any living thing consists in its flourishing" (Kraut, 2007, p. 190).[14] We see here Kraut's aim is to uncover and extrapolate what we already take to be good for us, rather than to justify a particular vision of well-being as that which is good for us. Nonetheless, because, even on Kraut's account, well-being is an essentially normative notion and because our current focus is on determining whether or not the health model can be used to provide a naturalized account of normativity that would allow for the development of a fully naturalized virtue ethics, we must take this threat of circularity seriously. Can the health model be employed in a way that avoids this circularity?

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[14] Consider also Kraut's own introduction to his developmentalism: "A good theory of well-being should be built on a root idea that is obvious, easily recognized, and rich in implications. Clearly, flourishing is a good thing—good for what is flourishing" (2007, p. 131).

Let's consider how my work fares on this point. I appeal to needs satisfaction as the central evaluative structure for virtue ethics. As we've seen, this move is anchored in psychological research regarding the effects of need satisfaction, or lack thereof. The existence of this research helps to explain why it is the satisfaction of innate psychological needs (as opposed to other drives within human nature) that ought to inform our account of flourishing. This allows my work to avoid the kind of circularity of which Kraut's theory is vulnerable, for at least it gives us a justificatory framework for adjudicating between the various drives of human nature. Nonetheless, though, the threat of circularity ends up cropping up at a different level, and this lies within the specification of the innate psychological needs themselves.

Recall that psychologists posit the existence of innate psychological needs upon observation of the effects certain kinds of experiences tend to have upon an individual's functioning on the physical, cognitive, and psychological levels. When an individual is ostracized, for instance, her capacity for executive functioning and self-regulation tends to be diminished to the extent that she finds herself in a vicious cycle whereby she cannot find the motivation to rise above the threat of rejection (Besser-Jones, 2014, p. 139). But when she is included by others and experiences a sense of belongness, her cognitive performance is enhanced, she lives longer, and so forth.[15] Given the existence of these well-documented correlations, psychologists explain them by appeal to an innate psychological need for relatedness. There is, indeed, a circularity that occurs at the level of need specification. We find that innate

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[15] For overview, see Besser-Jones (2014, Chapter 3).

psychological needs are specified only in conjunction with a pre-established understanding of what it means for an individual to function well. It is only through this stipulation that psychologists are able to derive the existence of innate psychological needs.

This is the same problem we have seen throughout this discussion. Any effort to derive evaluations from a conception of flourishing, it seems, inevitably starts from a pre-conceived notion of flourishing and of the importance of flourishing and is circular insofar as it does so. Now, my own position is that this circularity is less threatening to the normative justification of those evaluations when it occurs at the psychological level than the philosophical level, but it also seems that the circularity presents an inevitable block to the prospect of a fully naturalized virtue ethics. A fully naturalized virtue ethics, recall, is one which is naturalistic both in substance (insofar as its conclusions are made in terms amenable to scientific inquiry) and in method (insofar as its conclusions are reached through means consistent with empirical enquiry in the natural sciences). While it seems quite possible to develop a virtue ethics that is substantively naturalistic, I worry that the above described circularity prevents virtue ethics from being methodologically naturalistic in that we seem unable to avoid, at some level, an appeal to some evaluative conception of in what flourishing consists.

But our discussion has also shown that this vulnerability is not one to which philosophers alone are subject. Rather, as we've seen, it is one to which social scientists are subject to as well. Indeed, it behooves us to recognize that any discussion of health (be it physical or psychological) must rely on a normative

conception of what health is, in order to deduce an analysis of what sickness is, and

of what is conducive to our health.[16] So while it may not be possible for virtue ethics

to be fully naturalized, for the same reasons it may not be possible for a social

science to be fully naturalized either.

Conclusion

This discussion has shown that while virtue ethics may not be capable of

being fully naturalized this shouldn't prevent us from thinking about it in terms of a

social science, and even *as* a social science, as the health model does. Doing so allows

us to overcome many of the hurdles other approaches to virtue ethics face regarding

justifying the normativity of its prescriptions (and to explain better the content of

those prescriptions), placing virtue ethics in a stronger position to mark out its own

position as a normative ethical theory.

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[16] See Boorse (1977) for helpful discussion of this problem. Boorse points out the circularity invoked in discussions of health is one that can only be broken by a "substantive analyses of either health or disease" (1977, p. 542). Boorse suggests this can be done in a value-free way, by appealing to statistical normality; as my discussion suggests, I still worry about whether or not this just pushes back the circle, making it less vicious, but a circle nonetheless.

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