

From Human
Nature to God

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Pruss

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From Human Nature to God

Alexander R. Pruss

Department of Philosophy
Baylor University

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Review: Aristotelian metaphysics

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Conclusions

- Aristotle thinks we are composed of three types of components:
 - matter
 - form or nature
 - accidents.
- The form of x :
 - 1 unifies the matter into x
 - 2 specifies objective norms for x 's functioning as the kind of thing it is
 - 3 guides x characteristic activity towards the fulfillment of the norms.
- The norms do not reduce to statistical facts about actual functioning or about x 's or society's beliefs about norms.

Review: Mersenne questions

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Conclusions

- Marin Mersenne's questions (1624):

Who gave more strength to the lion than to the ant? Who made it be that earth is not in the moon's place, and that the planets aren't larger or smaller, closer or further? Who has ordered all the parts of the world as we see them? ... Why is the moon 56 earth-radii away from the earth? Why is the sun 1182 [earth-radii] away from us at its apogee? ... and why is its distance at perigee not other than 1101 [earth-radii]? ... I could equally ask you about Saturn, and Jupiter, and Mars ...

- His answer is a rhetorical question:

Was it not God?

Review: Overview

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Conclusions

- Argument that we have forms is like Lewis's argument in *Plurality of Worlds*.
- Forms are useful:
 - Specificity of apparently arbitrary parameters (**Mersenne questions**) in:
 - ethics
 - epistemology (including a solution to the problem of priors)
 - **semantics**
 - **metaphysics**
 - Foundations of ethics
 - **Philosophy of mind.**

Semantics: Vagueness

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Conclusions

- How many grains of sand does it need to have a heap?
- Logic pulls us to **epistemicism**, as we saw regarding ethical parameters:
 - There are facts about which claims with vague terminology are true, but we don't know these facts.
- Given epistemicism, each vague predicate raises a **Mersenne question** as to what makes its boundaries be where they are.
- Normally, symbolic items (things or actions) get their meaning from other symbolic items (e.g., dubbing by pointing).
- But this leads to a vicious regress.
- So there must be initial non-derivatively meaningful symbolic items.
- They could get their meaning from the norms of human nature, which would specify what they should be applied to.
- This meaning could be perfectly precise (or have perfectly precise vagueness profiles), answering Mersenne questions about the fundamental symbolic items.
- And the meaning of other things could be precisely determined by them.

Metaphysics

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Conclusions

- **Special composition problem:** Which pluralities of material objects form a whole?
 - **Answer:** Precisely those that have a form. (Christopher Tomaszewski)
 - **Alternatives:**
 - **nihilism:** highly counterintuitive—either we are simples or we don't exist
 - **universalism:** either shifts the bump to the question of which modal profiles correspond to a thing or else makes it be the case that there is an infinity actual material objects that beyond cardinality as there are that many modal profiles
 - **life** (van Inwagen): but the concept is nebulous apart from form
 - **irreducible causal powers** (Merricks): maybe, and compatible with form story
- **Beginning and end:** When does a material object come into and out of existence?
 - **Answer:** Precisely when a form shows up or exits.
- **Identity:** When are x and y the same material object?
 - **Answer:** Precisely when they have the numerically same form.

Mental state norms

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Conclusions

- A mental state is a belief in a proposition p only if it is a state that **ought not** be contained in the mind unless p is true.
- A mental action is an inference from p to q only if it is an action that **ought not** be performed unless q follows from p .
- These norms might even be a part of what constitutes beliefs and inferences.
- We need a source for these norms.

Functionalism (with Rob Koons)

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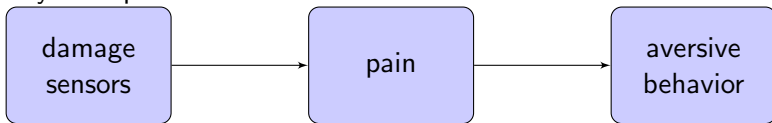
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Conclusions

- The best naturalistic account of mind is **functionalism**:
- What defines thought and consciousness are flowcharts of computational functioning.
- Toy example:



- Things can go wrong: in a particular individual on a particular occasion, a pain might cause pursuit of stimulus, or might be caused by a glitch elsewhere.
- **Better**: Pains are states **normally** caused by outputs of damage sensors that in turn **normally** cause aversive behavior.
- Functionalism needs a notion of **normal** or **proper** functioning.
- For computer software, this is provided by the maker's intentions.
- For us, what is the source of the norms?

Sources of norms: Statistics

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Conclusions

- **Statistical prevalence:** The normal is what is most common.
- In what?
 - In species:
 - **Extrinsicness:** Whether I am in pain should not depend on what similar states are doing in other people. It shouldn't be an effective painkiller to hook up everybody else's pain states to stimulus-pursuing behavior.
 - In individual:
 - **Time:** Whether I am in pain should not depend on my future states. So the relevant statistics must be only about the past and present. But then the statistical condition is trivial the first time around.
 - **Abnormalcy:** An individual can have a **life-long** flawed functional hookup, e.g., pursuing the sources of pain.

Sources of norms: DNA

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Conclusions

- **DNA normativity:** The normal is what is coded for in the DNA.
- **Objections:**
 - **Genetic abnormalities:** the person who pursues the sources of pain could be expressing their faulty DNA correctly.
 - **Circularity:** The dual notions of **coding** and **expressing** are normative themselves.
 - **Human nature:** We all have different DNA.

Sources of norms: Evolution

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Conclusions

- Correct functioning is (roughly) the ancestral functioning which evolutionarily explains why beings with this feature are here. (Millikan and others.)
- **Objections:**
 - **Start:** The first organism having the pain-like function wasn't actually conscious.
 - **Circularity:** Notion of ancestry depends on notion of reproduction, and reproduction is a functional notion. (Koons)
 - **Radical Extrinsicness:** Suppose Sam and Lucy are genetically abnormal individuals whose pain leads to pursuit of the stimulus. Aliens are interested in Sam and Lucy's abnormality and kidnap them. Sam and Lucy have a child. The child also has the same gene. Whether Sam and Lucy's child feels pain should not depend on whether the rest of the human race happened to go extinct after the kidnapping and before the child was conceived!
 - If earlier ancestral functioning trumps later (Millikan), then modify story so super-powerful aliens kidnap animals that are about to die out, and make them live forever in a far off corner of the galaxy, so being adaptive does not help explain why a feature is exemplified.

Sources of norms: God (directly)

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Conclusions

- Maybe God is like an engineer setting parameters of normal functioning by fiat.
- But an extrinsic fiat cannot make us conscious.

Sources of norms: Forms (e.g., of humanity)

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Conclusions

- Forms are intrinsic features of the entities that have them.
- Forms specify what is normal or characteristic in the entity.
- Support multiple realizability: In us the computational functioning may be electrochemical and in Martians it might be hydraulic (cf. Lewis), as the forms are different.
- Can yield a naturalistic theory of mind in the sense that our metaphysical constituents—form, matter and accidents—are basically those of all material substances.
- If one prefers a more dualist theory, where mental states are irreducible states of a non-material component, the Aristotelian can accommodate that, too.

Aristotle and God

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Conclusions

- Aristotle's gods did not create the world, though they had a role in making it go around.
- Aristotle's world was eternal and unchanging at the level of kinds: weasels had forever come from weasels and would forever have weasel babies.
- It is more difficult to be a seriously Aristotelian non-theist now. (Non-serious: e.g., Koslicki)
- We have two parallel sequences. E.g.:
 - Particles arranged apewise → particles arranged humanwise.
 - Ape form → human form.
- The form story does not reduce to the particle story.
- So, what explains the transitions of forms?

DNA, evolution and forms

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Conclusions

- It was not normal for our distant ancestors to walk upright but it is normal for us to do so.
- What changed?
- We saw that we cannot reduce the normal to statistics or evolution without losing the applications.
- DNA in modern biology plays some of the organizational and developmental role form plays for Aristotle.
- Yet we saw that DNA cannot play the normative role of form.
- But could transitions in DNA **cause** transitions of forms?
- Yet we all have human nature, but different DNA.
- **Mersenne question:** Why do some transitions in DNA lead to transitions of forms but others do not?

Puzzling explananda

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Conclusions

- Forms are typically only found in the matter that is apt for them.
- Things typically behave normally and are usually found in their natural environment.
- The ecosystem is normatively coherent.
- Characteristic behavior typically aids the persistence of the thing that exhibits it. (Cf. Aquinas' Fifth Way.)
- Norms tend to hang together in a unified way: we don't find many entities with madly conflicting ends.
- There is a small number of types of forms compared to the number of individuals. (Especially if fundamental particles are substances with forms: 17 fundamental particle types vs. 10^{80} individuals.)
- Humans do not have "evil" teleology (cruelty, etc.).

Evolution, again

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Conclusions

- If forms reduced to DNA or evolutionary history, it would be easy to explain much of this in terms of selection and survival.
- But the reduction would have insuperable Mersenne questions: which DNA sequences give rise to which norms?
- Without such a reduction, our serious Aristotelian metaphysics cannot make use of selection and survival to explain things.
- We have a certain harmony between the evolutionary material order and the order of forms.
- We need an explanation of this order.

Laws of nature

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Conclusions

- Maybe there are laws of nature specifying when forms arise.
- Aristotelians tend to think laws of nature are grounded in the forms, but that's not a problem: Forms could specify the circumstances under which new forms arise.
- But we would have immense numbers of Mersenne questions—lots of fine-tuning in the laws.

Theism

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Conclusions

- Theism provides a two-fold explanation of the order:
 - There are no crazy or terrible forms as the forms are all images of God.
 - The forms are mutually well-arranged due to divine providential creation.

How does God do it?

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Conclusions

■ Three theistic options:

- **Particularist form occasionalism:** God makes wise particular prudential decisions as to which forms should go with which arrangements of matter.
- **Rule-based form occasionalism:** God wisely chooses rules for the harmony of form and matter, and then creates forms as needed to go with the rule.
- **Rich forms:** God chooses forms that include rich causal powers for generating things with **other** forms. Cf. Aristotle on worms and compost.

Why does God choose *these* parameters?

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Conclusions

- In fine-tuning argument: for life.
- Mersenne gives no answer in his science cases.
- **Answer 1:** Reasonless free choice. (Cf. Clarke against Leibniz)
 - Just moves the bump.
- **Answer 2:** Complex utilitarian-style optimization procedure.
 - Some, but maybe not all, of the problems of the rule utilitarian solution.
- **Answer 3:** God freely chooses on the basis of incommensurable reasons which he necessarily has and which (I now hope) have no arbitrary parameters. (Cf. Pruss, “Divine Creative Freedom”, *OSPR* 2017.)

Difficulties

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Conclusions

- Like all such arguments, the problem of evil is relevant.
 - Perhaps the fact that the coordination of a variety of forms of life is going to be difficult helps with the problem of evil?
- Mersenne questions about divine preferences.
 - Logical consequence of perfection
 - God is very free, within the scope of necessary truths about the good
 - Combination of the above two

Conclusions

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Conclusions

- Aristotelian forms explain many normative features of reality, and may even be needed to save naturalistic philosophy of mind.
- But one cannot be an intellectually fulfilled believer in evolution and Aristotelian forms unless one believes in God—or has some other deeply non-naturalistic view (e.g., Rescher's Optimalism—which leads to theism anyway).