

Naturalism

5.4-5.6

By: Ryan Fouzdar, Andrew Toreja, Rooshni Dash, Scott Wu, Arthur Gan

Virtue Theory

Ideal that focuses on “thick” moral concepts such as bravery or generosity rather than “thin” concepts such as good, bad, or evil



3 main attractions:

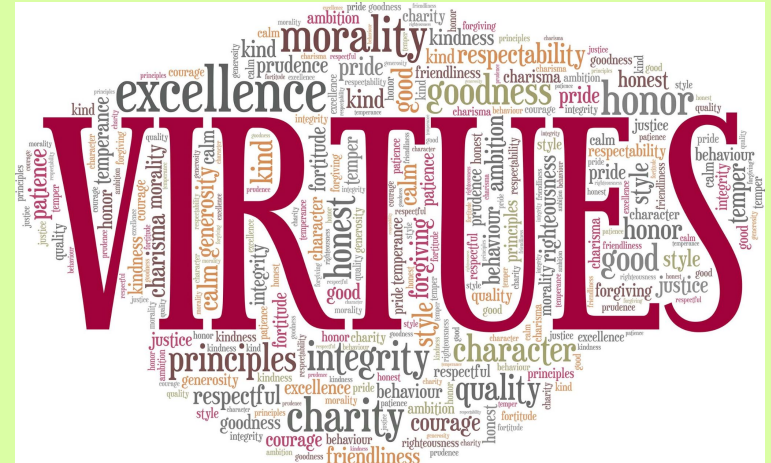
- Naturalistic Foundation: Suggests that qualities like healthy or lazy is the real characteristics of people in contrast of just moral judgements (e.g good or evil)
- Objective Descriptions: Virtue descriptions are not based on preferences but on facts of people's actions.
 - Ex: Bravery is determined by a person facing danger not by how much I like or dislike them
- Normative Element: Virtue words have a normative (acceptable) aspect
 - Ex: Calling someone dishonest describes their behavior and suggest that it is morally undesirable/wrong

Virtue Theory - Human Flourishing

Human Flourishing: what constitutes a good life for someone (needs intensive investigation)

Has to take into account a person's social, biological, ethological, and cultural influences to answer

Virtue Theory says human flourishing is living a life that fully realizes our potential as human beings by enhancing virtuous traits like courage, generosity, wisdom, and kindness



What is Considered Natural?

- All species have a purpose (telos) and natural is whatever allows a species to flourish
 - i.e. a lion's purpose is to hunt and a natural environment for a lion would be a savanna.
- Natural also means what a species is instinctively drawn towards
 - If left to their own devices, what action would an individual choose

Natural in terms of Human

- “Human Beings can and do think about what they should eat and drink. They are neither driven by natural instinct alone, nor, in adult life, does it drive them very much.”
- What is considered natural for humans? Is this action of thinking a natural human action?
 - Imagine a person is stranded on a deserted island and starving. They suddenly find lots of food. Would the natural action be to eat it immediately in order to cure their starvation or ration it over time to survive longer, but be in a state of malnourished?

Is What is Natural always what is Good?

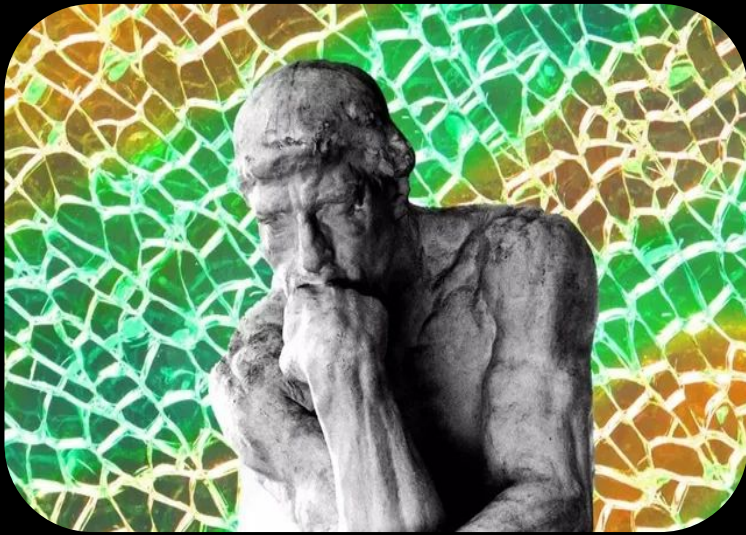
Should Human nature be the basis for Moral standards?

- If certain behaviors are “natural” for humans, should we automatically consider them morally or acceptable?
- Should moral standards sometimes oppose what comes naturally to us?
- How do we determine whether which one is morally right and wrong?

Examples:

- Natural instincts like favoritism towards one's group can lead to racism or xenophobia
- Natural enjoyment of dominance or violence can lead to cruelty or injustice
- Traits like empathy and cooperation also come naturally





Is the Good for Man Good?

The Natural Vs Good Problem

The author questions whether what is “natural” for humans is necessarily morally good.

“Natural” here means instinctive dispositions suited to our genetic makeup [.textbook]

Core Question: Should we accept Aristotle's conception that the good is what's good for the species?

Limitations of Naturalistic Ethics

Modern biology can not single out one lifestyle as naturally good. Even if a trait is natural, it's naturalness is only one consideration among others.

Critique: Perhaps we have reason to resist some natural tendencies



Examples:

Hunting/Bloodlust: Cruelty to animals may be natural and evolutionarily advantageous but from animals' perspective or a broader moral view, this impulse isn't commendable

Racism/Xenophobia: May be deeply entrenched in unself-conscious behavior and even if natural and explainable through evolution but not morally applaudable

"What is the good life?"
(*descriptive/anthropological*)

"What is good?"
(*normative/ethical*)

Q/A: Territorial behavior appears throughout human history and across cultures. If territorialism is 'natural', does this mean aggressive border defense is morally good?

Virtue Facts

“Such descriptions are determined not by our liking or disliking, but by the facts of their actions” (Graham, 53)

Is the CEO of a company who is skilled at increasing profits greedy? Capable? Is it a virtue or not? Can their behavior be factually described by virtues?



Artificial Connections

A common belief is that primarily online socializing is not “natural”, or that such interactions are “artificial” (as opposed to interactions made in physical space)

Can this distinction between “natural” vs “artificial” be upheld?

Can the “natural” choice be shown to be preferable?

