

# **Norms, Natures and God**

Alexander R. Pruss



## Contents

Acknowledgments	5
Acknowledgments	6
Chapter I. Introduction	7
1. Introductory Remarks	7
2. Aristotelian Natures	8
3. Mersenne Problems	8
Chapter II. Ethics	9
1. Normative ethics	9
2. Flourishing	9
3. Metaethics	9
4. Supererogation	9
5. The great chain of being	9
Chapter III. Applied ethics	10
1. Double Effect	10
2. Medical ethics	10
3. Environmental ethics	10
4. Marriage and other natural relationships	10
Chapter IV. Epistemology	11
1. Priors	11
2. Infinity, self-indication and other limitations of Bayesianism	11
Chapter V. Mind	12

CONTENTS	4
Chapter VI. Semantics	13
Chapter VII. Metaphysics	14
Chapter VIII. Laws of nature and causal powers	15
Chapter IX. Harmony, Evolution and God	16
1. Harmony	16
2. Explaining harmony by natures and evolution	16
2.1. Number of natures	16
2.2. Nomic coordination	16
2.3. Fit to DNA	16
2.4. Fit to niche	16
2.5. Nature zombies	16
3. Explanations of moral norms	16
3.1. Global aesthetic-like features	16
3.2. Family	16
3.3. Restitutive justice	16
4. Explaining harmony theistically	16
Chapter X. Eternal Life and Fulfillment	17
Chapter XI. Aristotelian Details	18

## **Acknowledgments**

Central ideas for this paper were developed as part of the Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion at Oxford University, Trinity Term, 2019.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like that thank ... Nicholas Breiner ....??

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### 1. Introductory Remarks

I have a human nature or human form that governs my voluntary and involuntary activity. Much as the government governs the activity of the people *both* by legislating norms and encouraging people to follow the norms, my nature's governance also has the dual role of setting norms for me and influencing my activity to follow these norms. This nature is something real and intrinsic to me, something that makes me be what I am, a human being.

When extended to other fundamental beings besides humans, the above is the center of Aristotle's metaphysics. I will show that this center is extremely fruitful, providing compelling solutions to problems in ethics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind, semantics, metaphysics and philosophy of science. Many of these are prominent problems that have been the subject of much discussion, such as the problem of priors in Bayesian epistemology or of vagueness in semantics, while others are problems that have not attracted much attention, such as the problem of seemingly arbitrary detail in moral rules. I shall discuss these solutions in Chapters II–VIII.

The ability to give unified solutions to an array of problems spread through many areas of philosophy gives one a very good reason to accept the central Aristotelian theses. However, in Chapter IX, I will also argue that this center cannot hold on its own, and the way to be an intellectually satisfied Aristotelian, especially after Darwin, is to be a theist as well.

There are several lines of thought readers attracted to the unified Aristotelian solutions may follow. Some may deny that the problems facing the central Aristotelian theses are as

serious as I contend. Some may agree that the problems are serious, and regretfully reject the Aristotelian apparatus, either because they take the cost of the theistic solution to be too great or are unconvinced that the theistic solution works on its own terms. Others may agree that the problems are serious but find some other solution than the theistic one. But some, I hope, will conclude that the Aristotelian solutions are so attractive, and the theistic solution to the problems is sufficiently plausible, that this book provides not only a good reason to accept the Aristotelian center but also to accept theism.

We will be elaborating the metaphysical apparatus of what I have been calling the “Aristotelian center” gradually?? as we move through the problems and details of their solutions. At the same time, not every detail of the solutions needs to be adopted by the reader to find the general Aristotelian strategy compelling. Finally, in Chapter XI we will collect together the needed aspects of the Aristotelian metaphysics and discuss in greater detail the metaphysics needed.

??paths through the book?

In the rest of this chapter, we will do two things. First, I will sketch the central Aristotelian metaphysics in slightly greater detail. Second, I will discuss a neglected science-based argument from the 17th century polymath Marin Mersenne for the existence of God. This argument does not work, I will argue. However, an important thread running through this book will be how “Mersenne problems” analogous to the problems in science raised by Mersenne arise in many areas of philosophy and provide a compelling case for the existence of Aristotelian natures or forms.

## **2. Aristotelian Natures**

## **3. Mersenne Problems**



## CHAPTER II

### **Ethics**

- 1. Normative ethics**
- 2. Flourishing**
- 3. Metaethics**
- 4. Supererogation**
- 5. The great chain of being**

## CHAPTER III

### **Applied ethics**

- 1. Double Effect**
- 2. Medical ethics**
- 3. Environmental ethics**
- 4. Marriage and other natural relationships**

## CHAPTER IV

# Epistemology

### 1. Priors

### 2. Infinity, self-indication and other limitations of Bayesianism

## CHAPTER V

### **Mind**

## CHAPTER VI

### **Semantics**

## CHAPTER VII

# **Metaphysics**

## CHAPTER VIII

### **Laws of nature and causal powers**

## CHAPTER IX

# Harmony, Evolution and God

### 1. Harmony

#### 2. Explaining harmony by natures and evolution

<sup>1</sup>

2.1. Number of natures.

2.2. Nomic coordination.

2.3. Fit to DNA.

2.4. Fit to niche.

2.5. Nature zombies.

#### 3. Explanations of moral norms

3.1. Global aesthetic-like features. <sup>2</sup>

3.2. Family.

3.3. Restitutive justice.

#### 4. Explaining harmony theistically

---

<sup>1</sup>This section owes much to discussion in my mid-sized objects seminar, and especially to Christopher Tomaszewski's suggestions on the explanatory powers of forms.

<sup>2</sup>I am grateful to Nicholas Breiner for drawing my attention, in the context of justice, to this form of explanation of moral features.



## CHAPTER X

### **Eternal Life and Fulfillment**

## CHAPTER XI

### **Aristotelian Details**