

# **Norms, Natures and God**

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## **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**

Marin Mersenne was a monk, philosopher, theologian and the 17th century equivalent of the arXiv preprint archive—he was a crucial line of communication between a broad variety of thinkers and scientists. He drew on his broad knowledge of the science of the



time to offer an argument that begins with many pages of questions, of which the following are representative:

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 ...<sup>1</sup>

These "Mersenne questions" go on and on, with a mind-numbing number of examples. And Mersenne has one answer to all these questions, posed in a rhetorical question: "Was it not God?"<sup>ref</sup>

The argument sounds similar to fine-tuning arguments for theism which became popular in the late 20th century. These arguments, too, list a variety of physical parameters and offer God as an explanation of them all.<sup>ref</sup> But there is a crucial ingredient that the fine-tuning arguments, namely that the parameters listed are needed for intelligent life as we know it, or for some other valuable trait of the universe, like its amenability to scientific investigation.<sup>ref</sup> The basic idea behind the fine-tuning argument is, very roughly, that nature is indifferent to value but God cares about value, so the fact that the parameters are valuable provides evidence for theism over naturalism.

It is, thus, natural to look in Mersenne for arguments that it is particularly valuable for the moon to be 56 earth-radii from the earth, but at least in this work, Mersenne does not supply them or even hint at them. Nor is there any argument that it is better that lions are stronger than ants, or that it is better for the moon to orbit the earth rather than the other way around. If Mersenne is giving a fine-tuning argument, the argument is oddly

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<sup>1</sup>The moon-earth distance is approximately correct. The earth-sun distance is an order of magnitude off.

incomplete. And Mersenne's penchant for adumbrating detail at great length makes it unlikely that he has simply omitted such a crucial part of the argument.

Rather, it appears that Mersenne is simply looking for an explanation of the scientific details he cites, sees no prospect of a scientific explanation, and offers theism as the alternative. And indeed it is only in the 20th century with computer models of solar system formation that we have much in the way of plausible answers to Mersenne's questions about the distances between solar system bodies. For instance, the leading theory of lunar formation involves the earth being hit by another body and a large chunk being pushed into orbit. Given assumptions about the impact, one can then explain the resulting distance between the earth and the moon. But notice that such an explanation only gives an answers to the Mersenne question about the earth-moon distance at the cost of raising similar Mersenne questions about the parameters of the impact such as the mass distribution of the pre-impact earth, the angle and location of impact, the mass distribution of the impacting body, etc.

Mersenne gives a dizzying number of examples, and he seems to relish the sheer arbitrariness of the numbers like "56" and "1182". While this has some rhetorical force, it also has argumentative force. The more arbitrary-looking parameters the parameters are, the less epistemically likely it is that they are what they of necessity or that good scientific theories will predict their exact values. And the greater the number of parameters, the less likely it is that science can provide an explanation of them all.

But Mersenne has a fatal argumentative flaw. Even if we grant that it is very unlikely that a future science will predict these exact numbers, there is always the possibility of a stochastic explanation, one that does not predict exact values, but supposes a random natural process that generates a set of values at random. Now, if Mersenne had an argument showing that the values of the parameters are suspiciously valuable—say, necessary for intelligent life—then a stochastic explanation might not be as good as a theistic one. From a Bayesian point of view, we might be able to argue that it is extremely unlikely that a random selection of parameters would have such value, but not nearly so unlikely that

God would choose such parameters and hence the data supports theism over randomness. But given that Mersenne makes no case that the parameters have anything to recommend them to God for creation, we have no reason to think that the probability of God choosing is these parameters is any higher than the probability of them arising randomly, and hence we have no support for theism.

Suppose, however, that we had a Mersenne-type case where randomness was not a satisfactory explanation. Then there would still be one more problem with the argument. If one is willing to deny the Principle of Sufficient Reason, one could simply say that the parameters are what they are and there is no reason why they are like this—that they are a *brute* fact. This, however, is less satisfying than the stochastic answer, for adverting to brute fact should be a last resort, to be chosen when no explanation is available. But here there is an option, namely theism.

In the rest of the book we will find that if we turn our attention away from science and towards philosophy, we will find a myriad of cases like Mersenne's where there are seemingly arbitrary parameters. But these will be cases where a randomness explanation is implausible and bruteness is not satisfactory. However, unlike in Mersenne's case, I won't be arguing for theism as providing the solution. Rather, the solution will be Aristotelian metaphysics of form.

## 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. Restributive justice.

#### 4. Explaining harmony theistically

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<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**