

I. A Thesis

This dissertation defends the thesis that some evaluative judgments – such as that ‘virtues are beneficial for humans’ and that ‘wisdom is a virtue’ – true and can be known to be true by examining human nature, which is practical, rational animals.

If true, this thesis has a couple of significant consequences.

The first is that divine commands are not *necessary* for the discovery of and justification of at least these moral judgments. In one sense, it is possible to be morally good (read: virtuous and practically wise) whether or not one has correct beliefs about God.

The second significant consequence is that naturalism is correct. I construe ‘naturalism’ very broadly, as a set of doctrines and methods reflecting on what is natural including human nature.

Each of these consequences deserves comment. Each, in fact, deserves a chapter below.

The defense of my main thesis and its relation to these two consequences proceeds by way of overcoming objections. As paradoxical as it may seem, I anticipate that the objections will be from two quarters: first, that my view is too “naturalistic”, or not naturalistic enough for some readers; and second, that my view is too secular, or not secular enough.

The defense takes the form of the following Chapters.

Chapter 1 will provide an primary ethical argument that the virtues are necessary for man as such (using man of course in its gender inclusive sense). By ‘the virtues’ I mean at least justice, courage, moderation, and practical wisdom – but possibly more. And by ‘necessary’ I mean *necessary for* human flourishing. I shall define human flourishing more exactly in a later chapter; I mean to gesture at human well-being, true happiness, human success as such, etc. all of which I take to be virtually synonymous and all of which I will certainly treat here as synonymous. Put negatively, the thesis of this chapter is that vices necessarily contribute to misery, unhappiness, and human stultification and stagnation. Human nature is the starting point, flourishing is the goal, and the moral and intellectual virtues are the means by which we move from start to goal.

Chapter 2 defends one of the core assumptions of the case that virtues are necessary for man, that man has a nature that is discernible and that that nature is that of practical rational animals. Chapter 2 defense against objections from Darwinism from metaphysical skepticism of a certain

sort, that there is no human nature, or that if there is it's a mess, or that I even if there is we cannot know what it is. All of which if they were true would render impossible the kinds of moral judgments based on human nature. Chapter 2 also defends the form of naturalism that will be at stake here, namely one in which nature is normative. The specter of the naturalistic fallacy is thus exercised.

Chapter 3 defends a particular conception of happiness and human nature that depends on, and supports, teleological realism about biology. Happiness is our destination both in this world definitely and potentially beyond this world. But if there is no beyond, the happiness does not even change.

Chapter 4 argues that naturalism as it very often appears in our philosophical literature is virtually useless. It is fatally vague, admitting of no less than 16 substantive distinct and sometimes incompatible positions. So although my position will inevitably be characterized by some friends and foes as a form of naturalism, I reject the label in favor of a restatement of the core thesis. However, to say naturalism is correct is about as meaningful as to say that empires are Imperial. For many philosophers, naturalism is defined in tautologous terms. So unimportant task will be to shakedown one of our vaguest and most useless philosophical bagaboos. My form of naturalism is sometimes called neo-Aristotelian naturalism, but I am comfortable with the label neo-Stoic naturalism, simply naturalism, and I am comfortable throwing out the label altogether.

Chapter 5, finally addresses objections from theist philosophers who might worry that my thesis is an affirmative answer to the question can one be good without God. Now, divine commands maybe sufficient to make known and to justify these judgments, but they're not necessary. And there maybe other, perhaps more specific moral judgments, moral truths, for which thorough exploration of our human nature and reflection are not adequate and for which divine commands are necessary. So it is no counterexample to my thesis that say God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and that no earthly wisdom would have revealed to Abraham but that was the thing to do at that moment. It would be a counterexample to my thesis that say some cultures in history did not know that honesty was a virtue until divine command revealed this basic moral truth to them.