

Against Normal Function

Weekly Short Paper

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Ron Amundson's paper '*Against Normal Function*' is essentially a critique of normal function and how it should not be viewed as an objectively grounded criterion for defining normality. His core focus aims to examine the legitimacy of the concept on a biological level; whether or not biology implies a 'hard coded' normal function. Current biology, Amundson argues, does not distinguish between normal and abnormal function and so in turn the idea of normal functionality is weak (Amundson, 2000, p. 33)¹. Further into the paper Amundson discusses developmental plasticity and integration; the effect the environment has on organisms and the 'nurture' effect. He elaborates that there isn't a universal identical normal function, rather a functional diversity shaped by developmental plasticity (Amundson, 2000, p. 39). He goes on to give a few examples of how developmental plasticity/environment has nurtured otherwise 'abnormal' organisms into ones that exhibit functional normality on par with their 'normal' counterparts. In summary, Amundson seeks to show how outliers in the normal distributed bell curve outlined by Christopher Boorse (Boorse, 1977, p. 559)² can still exhibit normal function through developmental plasticity hence challenging the very notion of a normal function.

A criticism that arises is in regarding the concept of developmental plasticity Amundson introduces. Indeed, developmental plasticity may very well shape humans (and animals in the case of Slipjer's Goat) to normality but would it not be considered a 'disadvantage' to go through this process where a 'normal' human being may not have to? Extra resources must be 'spent' (ex. autistic children needing specialized classes) to get on par with 'naturally normal' humans. At times, particular environments or tools may be needed for developmental plasticity; they may very well not be accessible to humans that are of a certain area, of a certain age, of a certain sex. When developmental plasticity can not, for one reason or another, be applied to said humans, are they then ultimately at an innate handicap of normal function?

Works Cited

¹ Amundson, R. (2000) "*Against Normal Function*." <http://www.uhh.hawaii.edu/~ronald/pubs/2000-against-normal-function.pdf>. Accessed July 12, 2015.

² Boorse, C. (1977) "Health as a Theoretical Concept." <http://philpapers.org/rec/BOOHAA>. Accessed July 12, 2015