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ARISTOTELIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM*

By Mark LeBar

I. Introduction

Constructivism about practical judgments, as I understand it, is the notion that our true normative judgments represent a normative reality, while denying that that reality is independent of our exercise of moral and practical judgment. John Rawls put constructivism on the map for political theory with his monumental work *A Theory of Justice,* which argued that criteria for the justice of basic social institutions were constituted (or *constructed*) through deliberation conducted under certain highly specified conditions. Rawls credited Immanuel Kant for the basic structure of the approach, and, more recently, Christine Korsgaard and others have followed Rawls in developing more general constructivist accounts of moral and practical truths.

Indeed, the Kantian strain of practical constructivism (through Rawls, Korsgaard, and others) has been so influential that it is tempting to *identify* the constructivist approach in practical domains with the Kantian development of the outlook.[1] In this essay, I will explore a somewhat different variety of practical constructivism, what I call "Aristotelian constructivism" (hereafter "AC"). My aim is to establish conceptual space for this form of constructivism by indicating in what ways AC agrees with its Kantian counterparts and in what ways it differs. I shall claim that AC is, in one sense, more faithful to the constructivist enterprise than the Kantian varieties, in that its understanding of both the establishment of practical truth *and* the vindication of the theory itself is constructivist.

The essay proceeds as follows. In Sections II and III, I survey the Kantian constructivist enterprise, considering both Kant's own view as constructivist (in Section II), and Korsgaard's contemporary developments of Kantian constructivism (in Section III). In Section IV, I sketch AC in light

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[1] There are other kinds of accounts, such as ideal observer theories, which may also plausibly be made out as "constructivist"; however, they typically do not lay claim to the label, and I shall have little to say about them. One which does self-identify as constructivist is the account in Ronald Milo's essay "Contractarian Constructivism," *Journal of Philosophy* 92 (1995): 181–204. Like Rawls, Milo is concerned only with "social norms," not with a comprehensive account of practical truth, and I shall not address his view.

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of the nature of constructivism discernable from the Kantian approach. But this sketch lays the groundwork for a challenge to AC that can be expressed as a dilemma: either AC is implicitly *not* ultimately constructivist, or, if it is, it can be so only by giving up any plausible claim to objectivity and opening itself to an objectionable relativism. Sections V and VI argue that AC is constructivist "all the way down," and Section VII contends that this does not eventuate in an objectionable relativism, but that AC can vindicate a claim to a plausible and attractive form of objectivity in ethical judgments.[2]

A preliminary note about terminology: Some theorists *identify* constructivism with a sort of proceduralism about practical rationality.[3] This, I believe, is a mistake. I follow what I take to be Rawls's conception of what is distinctive about constructivism: a commitment to the metaphysical posteriority of practical truths to our apprehensions of them, as I shall explain in Section II. In this light, identifying constructivism with proceduralism amounts to taking a species for a genus. Though no substantive issues hang on the terminology, I believe the understanding of constructivism I employ here makes it easier to see how an Aristotelian constructivism can address some of the concerns about constructivism in ethics.

II. Kant's Constructivism

I take Kant's view to be constructivist in at least the following sense: there are truths about what we have reason to do (or how we have reason to act), and those truths are themselves established by the exercise of practical reason. They do not, that is, exist as objects of moral cognition prior to the activity of practical rationality in us as agents. Kant himself

[2] The significance for constructivism of Rawls's work—both in political theory and in interpreting Kantian themes for the purposes of that work—cannot be overstated. Here, however, I will mostly set aside his deployment of constructivism for the defense of justice as fairness, for several reasons. The most important is that Rawls's positive view makes no claims to be a "comprehensive moral doctrine." Rawls sets out his theory of justice not only as more limited than a complete moral theory, but with a focus on the basic structure of society which falls short even of specifying a full social ideal; see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, 1999), sec. 2, esp. p. 9. Elsewhere, Rawls explicitly distinguishes the aims and content of that view from "comprehensive doctrines," including, specifically, Kant's "moral constructivism"; see Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12ff., 99ff., 125. My aim, by way of contrast, is to consider constructivism as a more comprehensive doctrine about the nature and content of normative practical truth.

[3] This identification is suggested by Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, in "Toward *Fin de Siècle* Ethics: Some Trends," in Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12–15. See also Sharon Street, "Constructivism about Reasons" (manuscript). This is also suggested by Christine Korsgaard's contrast between "substantive realism" and "procedural realism"; see Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35. However, Korsgaard drops this terminology in later work, and I believe her considered view is that it is most useful to understand constructivism as a thesis about ontological priority, as I suggest here.

makes just this priority claim for the nature of good and evil and their conceptual dependence on the moral law, which is the form of pure practical reason:

> [T]he concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law, to which, it would seem, the former would have to serve as foundation; rather the concept of good and evil must be defined after and by means of the law.[4]

The contrasting view would be one in which the order of explanation would be reversed. For Kant, this would mean that the moral law would be understood as undertaking the realization of good conceived as somehow prior to and independent of that law; as Rawls frames the contrast, it would involve an order of moral facts prior to and independent of our investigation of that order, which it is the aim of moral cognition to detect and represent accurately (a view he refers to as "rational intuitionism").[5] Berys Gaut calls this contrasting view the "recognitional model" of practical reason, and says that it construes practical reason as "the capacity to recognize and be motivated by what has objective value."[6]

Constructivism, as I understand it, may be seen as one form of non-skeptical negation of recognitionalism, as a competing theory about the ontological priority of practical truth and our recognition of it. "Practical philosophy," Korsgaard says, "is not a matter of finding knowledge to apply in practice. It is rather the use of reason to solve practical problems."[7] In speaking of "finding knowledge," she refers to the recognitionalist conception of the role of practical reason which constructivists reject. The model of the normative world and our relation to it is, on the recognitionalist conception, very like the model of the empirical world and our relation to it. We gain empirical knowledge when we are impinged upon by elements of that world which exist prior to our apprehension of them. In a similar way, the recognitionalist sees us as being impinged

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1956), Ak. pp. 62–63. ("Ak." refers to the pagination of the standard Prussian Academy edition.)

[5] John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," in *John Rawls: Collected Papers,* ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 343; see also Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," in ibid., 510.

[6] Berys Gaut, "The Structure of Practical Reason," in *Ethics and Practical Reason,* ed. Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 183.

[7] Christine Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy," in *Journal of Philosophical Research, APA Centenary Supplement* (Charlottesville, VA: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2003), 115. In this work, Korsgaard refers to what I am calling "recognitionalism" as "realism"; this is somewhat confusing because in *The Sources of Normativity* she refers to it as "substantive realism." However, my concern is the question of order of explanation between recognitionalists and constructivists, both of whom think practical judgments bear representational content, so I will not concern myself further with these taxonomic questions.

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upon in some fashion by elements of a moral or normative order—again, elements which exist prior to our apprehension of them. By way of contrast, on the constructivist conception our relation to those elements is essentially active, and in some fashion our activity explains the existence of the normative truths themselves.

Kant's primary motivation for constructivism, as I understand him, arises from his conviction that our *autonomy* as moral agents can be preserved only if we give to ourselves the laws governing our conduct. Autonomy, as Kant makes it out, is the capacity we have for the "determining grounds" of our wills to be self-imposed by the exercise of our reason, rather than imposed on us by natural law, as is the case with nonrational animals.[8] Such autonomous willing is necessary, he maintains, for the very possibility of value in the world. The only unconditional good—and the condition of all the good that there is—is good willing.[9] And good willing is just willing that is determined by reason—by the application of practical rationality to the principles upon which we choose to act.

From this framework follows the nature and extent of Kant's constructivism.[10] True claims about how we ought to conduct ourselves are *made true* in virtue of a certain property of the principles (or *maxims*) on which we act. That property is, in its most perspicuous formulation, the property of being suitable for willing as universal law. Kant's idea is, first, that to see ourselves as *acting*—as being the causes of the actions and outcomes we will to bring about in the world—our willings and our actions must be connected in a law-like (that is, uniform) way. We must, that is, act according to laws. For our willings to have moral worth, however, the laws upon which we act must be rational, not merely causal.[11] Moral worth depends on willing in ways that are determined by reason, and this means that the principles upon which we intend to act—our maxims—can be morally valuable only when they pass a certain test of reason. The test of reason Kant proposes is the most basic and indispensable of rational tests: the bare avoidance of contradiction. Kant says of this test that it is needed "in general for the possibility of any employment of reason. . . .

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. Allen Wood (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), Ak. pp. 440, 452.

[9] Ibid., Ak. p. 396.

[10] In addition to Korsgaard's well-known readings of Kant as constructivist, Andrews Reath offers a carefully-worked-out interpretation in Reath, "Legislating the Moral Law," *Noûs* 28 (1994): 435–64; and Thomas Hill offers a more limited constructivist conception in Hill, "Hypothetical Consent in Kantian Constructivism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18, no. 2 (2001): 300–329. It is certainly not beyond controversy that Kant should be read as constructivist. For an argument that he should not, see Patrick Kain, "Self-Legislation in Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004): 257–306. Barbara Herman also argues for limits on the extent of "creation" in Kant's constructivism: see Herman, "Justification and Objectivity: Comments on Rawls and Allison," in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions,* ed. E. Förster (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 131–41.

[11] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 412.

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[It is] the condition of having any reason at all."[12] Impermissible maxims, he tells us, are those that cannot be willed as universal because doing so involves the agent in a contradiction of one sort or another. Thus, the crucial property that establishes the truth of claims about how we ought to act is that of surviving a certain process of rational scrutiny—a process that it is incumbent upon us, as moral agents, to undertake in determining how to act. In this sense, the truth-makers for true normative judgments are *constructed* by a process we engage in as rational agents. The judgments are true *in virtue of* their surviving this process, and since the process is one in which our practical rationality is the effective agency, we can be said to have constructed that truth.[13]

The contrast to this sort of constructivism—an archetypical recognitional view—might be represented by a proposal we might take from Plato's *Republic.*[14] Suppose there is a Form of the Good—an idea that exists in a world of ideas, and which is the essence of what is common to all things good; their resemblance to (or "participation in") this Form is the reason we call all these divers things *good.* On this picture, when a practical judgment is true, what would *make* it true is X's standing in a certain relation with the Form of the Good.[15] Our task as rational agents would be to recognize and respond to that Form as best we could; this is just what rational agency would consist in.

Why does Kant reject recognitionalism and see moral truth as constructed instead? The best place to look for an answer to this question is Kant's response to the only viable alternatives he considers to the autonomy approach: theological voluntarism, and what he calls "the ontological concept of perfection."[16] The latter amounts to one way we might construe the Platonic proposal. Kant's objection is that the requisite concept of perfection is uselessly indeterminate:

> [The ontological concept of perfection] is, no doubt, empty and indefinite, and consequently useless for finding in the boundless

[12] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* Ak. p. 120.

[13] Some care is required here. The *content* of the moral law holds not only for all human beings, but for rational beings generally, and necessarily so (Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. pp. 389, 408, 411–12). So the sense in which we might see ourselves as *constructing* practical and moral truth can be only that we are "legislating" this universal law for ourselves: we are imposing it, making it authoritative, determining our wills by it, or (as Kant puts it) authoring not the law itself but its "obligation" (Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. Mary J. Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], Ak. p. 227). I owe this way of thinking about the limitations on autonomy to Patrick Kain.

[14] I make no claim that this proposal is Plato's own considered view; I offer reason for thinking otherwise in Section IV below.

[15] Cf. Plato, *Republic* 517c.

[16] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 443. Rawls offers a somewhat different account of Kant's reasons for rejecting "rational intuitionism" in Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," 520. "Theological voluntarism" makes value depend on divine will. Kant rejects that approach, and I will not attend to it.

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> field of possible reality the greatest amount suitable for us; moreover, in attempting to distinguish specifically the reality of which we are now speaking from every other, it inevitably tends to turn in a circle and cannot avoid tacitly presupposing the morality which it is to explain. . . .[17]

Clearly, Kant believes that a focus on a rationally intuited moral ideal must "turn in a circle"—it must inevitably lead back to the very process he has been engaged in, namely, attempting to identify what principle could govern an "absolutely good will." But why?

Kant might have in mind something like the following.[18] In earlier work, Kant considered how our representations come to "agree with" their objects.[19] He thinks there are only two ways this is possible: our intellect is either passive or active with respect to its objects, and we can construe the issue as taking the form of a dilemma. First, consider any representation we might have of this "ontological perfection." It makes no sense to suppose it could be the result of our being acted upon by this object (viz. that we are passively receptive to it). Kant sees no way to understand such receptivity outside the causal order. He *identifies* passivity with the "world of sense" and activity with the "intellectual world";[20] rationality *just is* a form of activity, so the proposal that we could passively experience a *rational* intuition of such an object is unintelligible.[21] And the involvement of our sensible natures would entail that the resulting principles of the will must be heteronomous and thus useless as a source of moral authority.

Suppose, then, that we take our intellect to be *active* in the apprehension of this object (the Good). What we would need to understand, then, would be the content of the representation such an active intellect could have, *as* an active intellect. But that is precisely the question Kant has been attempting to answer in the second section of the *Groundwork.* In other words, if we take the only promising branch of the dilemma, we end up just where Kant had brought us *before* considering the objection that there could be a recognitional alternative to his construal of the good will and autonomy. This, then, is the "circle" Kant is referring to. The alternative

[17] Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. p. 443.

[18] Here I am grateful to James Petrik for helpful discussion.

[19] See his letter to Marcus Herz, reprinted in Lewis White Beck, ed., *Kant: Selections* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 81–33 (Ak. X:130–31).

[20] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 451.

[21] Kant says that Plato "assumed a previous intuition of Divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding," which makes no sense: "the *deus ex machina* in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge is the greatest absurdity one could hit upon and has—besides its deceptive circle in the series of inferences from our human perceptions—also the additional disadvantage that it provokes all sorts of fancy ideas and every pious and speculative sort of brainstorm" (Kant, letter to Herz, 131). While Kant is referring here to theoretical rather than practical knowledge, I take the proposal that knowledge of the Good could give us reason to act to be an unholy synthesis of the two.

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is vacuous because it fails to supply the content of such a representation from an analysis of what the active, practical intelligence must be like. Since the activity of the intellect must somehow be essential to the content of the representation itself, constructivism is inescapable.

Now, if Kant's theory succeeds, it yields a constructivist understanding of normative, practical truths—truths about what we ought to do. In an important sense, however, Kant's constructivism does not go "all the way down": the overall justificatory structure of his account is foundational, resting on considerations that are not themselves constructed.[22] The argument for the authority of the moral law in the *Groundwork* is driven, first, by reflection on common-sense intuitions about moral value. Kant sees himself as developing the concept of the good will, "just as it dwells already in the naturally healthy understanding, which does not need to be taught but rather only to be enlightened."[23] Kant thus takes our recognition of the value of the good will as something like a datum, not itself an article of construction. Further, the reality of the instantiation of this concept in us—the fact that it is not merely a "chimera"—is shown by Kant's argument in Section III of the *Groundwork* that we must see ourselves as under the "idea of freedom," and hence as subject to the moral law.[24] In the *Critique of Practical Reason,* Kant famously reverses the direction of this argument and holds that, since we know that we are subject to the moral law, we know that we are free: "[T]he moral law is given, as an apodictically certain fact, as it were, of pure reason, a fact of which we are a priori conscious."[25] Thus, while Kant is a constructivist about normative truth, his argument for the account of that truth seems to depend on cognitions that do not seem to have as their objects constructions, but rather antecedent normative facts about our nature and the nature of value. As Rawls suggests,[26] this constructivism is built upon principles that are not themselves constructed. This structure, to which I shall develop a contrast below, is also characteristic of Kant's constructivist legacy, in Korsgaard's neo-Kantianism, to which I now turn.

[22] Larry Krasnoff is, so far as I know, the only person to have explicitly distinguished these structural features of Kant's theory. See Krasnoff, "How Kantian Is Constructivism?" *Kant-Studien* 90 (1999): 385–409. However, Hill also argues that Kant's constructivism is limited in ways similar to those I will suggest, in Hill, "Hypothetical Consent in Kantian Constructivism."

[23] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 397.

[24] Ibid., Ak. pp. 445, 448.

[25] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* Ak. p. 47.

[26] Rawls maintained that the facts pertaining to just basic social institutions and the persons that realize them were a subset of all the moral facts there are, and denied that the proposal that constructivism could go "all the way down" was even intelligible: "Thus, we don't say that the conceptions of persons and society are constructed. It is unclear what that could mean. . . . We should not say that the moral facts are constructed, since the idea of constructing the facts seems odd and may be incoherent. . . ." (Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," 514, 516; reiterated in *Political Liberalism,* 104, 121–22). See also *Political Liberalism,* 108: "The conceptions of society and person as ideas of reason are not, certainly, constructed any more than the [procedural] principles of practical reason are constructed."

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III. Korsgaard's Kantian Constructivism

In her early constructivist work in *The Sources of Normativity,* Korsgaard understood the essential activity of our practical reason in constructing moral truth as a function of the development of *practical identities.*[27] These identities are "descriptions under which you value yourself . . . find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking."[28] We see ourselves in certain ways (as child, teacher, lawyer, neighbor, Lutheran, and so on) that shape our conduct, and from these ways of seeing ourselves—from these "practical identities"—flow our obligations and reasons for action. But the fact that we are so constituted that we need reasons to act, and find such reasons in the various practical identities each of us acts from and is obligated by, gives us a *further* practical identity, to which reflection on the nature and source of obligation leads us. This is our identity as moral beings, our "moral identity" or "humanity," which Korsgaard understands as tantamount to seeing ourselves as citizens of the Kingdom of Ends on Kant's conception.[29] Only the recognition of this identity can afford us the sort of reflective success that, Korsgaard argues, our quest for the source of normativity demands.

As Korsgaard acknowledges, however, this argument alone does not deliver all of what morality involves; in particular, it does not deliver the right story about our obligations to others. For that, an additional bit of argument is required, one which denies that it is possible to have reasons only to value one's own humanity without similarly valuing the humanity of others. Korsgaard chides various forms of "neo-Hobbesian" and "neo-Kantian" theories for attempting to begin with "private" reasons and then argue to conclusions that we are committed, by some sort of rational inference, to recognize the humanity of others as a source of "public" reasons.[30] Instead, she argues—drawing a parallel to Ludwig Wittgenstein's argument that no private *meanings* are possible—that reasons must be shareable to be reasons.[31] Because they are shareable, if my humanity is to be reason-giving for me, it must be reason-giving for you as well, and of course, on the same grounds, your humanity must be reason-giving to me. Our most essential practical identity establishes something like the Categorical Imperative understood under Kant's Formula of Humanity.

Thus, our activity as moral agents consists in the reflection upon and adoption of these identities, and in our acting on the reasons that emanate

[27] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity,* lectures 3, 4, and 9.
[28] Ibid., 101.
[29] Ibid., 115. Korsgaard also thinks her argument for the grounding work performed by the moral identity is "a fancy new model" of Kant's Formula of Humanity (which requires us to treat the "humanity" in ourselves and others always as an end, never merely as a means; ibid., 122). Since Kant thinks his formulations of the Categorical Imperative are equivalent, it is hardly surprising that Korsgaard sees elements of both in her conception.
[30] Ibid., 133.
[31] Ibid., 135.

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from them. However, we have these obligations *only* in virtue of the identities we endorse through reflection.[32] In considering an objection from G. A. Cohen, Korsgaard makes clear that it is our activity in *endorsing* that does the normative work. What, Cohen asks, is an "idealized Mafioso" obligated to do, given that he takes his identity to be that of a loyal soldier for the family, with a code of strength and honor? If he is asked to murder by his *paterfamilias*, is he thereby *obligated* to do so?[33] Korsgaard bites the bullet in her reply. The Mafioso's obligation is real, she says: "And this is because it is the endorsement, not the explanations and arguments that provide the material for the endorsement, that does the normative work."[34] This is an expression of Korsgaard's constructivism: if she were to hold that it is the "explanations and arguments" that do the work, she would be open to the suggestion that, at bottom, her picture is one of agents *discovering* through reflection normative facts that are there antecedent to their inquiry. And that is the model she rejects. It is only the constructive activity of moral agents that brings into existence normative truth.

But, surely, having to maintain that the Mafioso has any obligation to carry out his repugnant assignments is a high price to pay to maintain constructivism, and Korsgaard appears to have thought better of it. Her later constructivist work (in particular, her "Locke Lectures") makes little use of the notions of practical identity or endorsement. The emphasis instead is on self-constitution. Her argument (drawing on threads recognizable from *The Sources of Normativity*) is that our human predicament is such that we cannot help but act; however, action itself is constituted by certain rational norms. "Principles of practical reason," she argues, "are principles of the unification of agency."[35] The option for us is not whether to will badly or well, relative to Kantian imperatives; it is whether or not to constitute ourselves as *agents* at all.

Korsgaard argues here (as earlier) that particularistic willing—that is, willing that is intended to bind just in a particular case—is impossible.[36] Either we identify ourselves with the "principle of choice" in deciding to act, or we are not *agents* at all—we are merely theaters in which a conflict of causal impulses plays out. But particularistic willing, she argues, amounts to collapsing the distinction between these two alternatives. A particularistic will would be one that simply identified with whatever impulse was decisive in a particular case, and thus really ceased to be a *will* at all. So agency requires willing in ways that are not particularistic. On Korsgaard's view, that entails willing universally; and thus, to constitute ourselves as agents, we must govern ourselves by the Categorical Imperative.

[32] Ibid., 252.
[33] Ibid., 183.
[34] Ibid., 257.
[35] Christine Korsgaard, "Locke Lectures," 1.3.4 (http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaar/#Publications).
[36] Korsgaard, "Locke Lectures," 2.5.2.

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Like Kant, Korsgaard emphasizes that principles of practical rationality are principles governing *activity,* not bits of knowledge to be apprehended. In his essay "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," Lewis Carroll made the point that there is no reducing rules of inference to mere premises; rules of inference govern something we *do,* and cannot be taken without remainder as truths that themselves form only premises for further inferences.[37] Korsgaard deploys just this argument to hold that standards of practical rationality cannot obligate us to act. To think of standards in this way—as things that can be objects of knowledge, and carry with them obligations—is to make just the mistake poor Achilles made. We must instead see these principles as constituting agency; to be an agent *just is* to be governed by principles of practical rationality, in precisely the same way that to have a mind *just is* to be governed by rules of inference.[38] Construction, as activity, is what norms of practical rationality and morality are about. Practical truth is constructed, not discovered, because it is activity in accordance with the norms of practical rationality, which are themselves constitutive of agency.

In Korsgaard's work (both earlier and later), as in Kant's, we can see both constructivism and foundations for the enterprise of construction. In *The Sources of Normativity,* practical agency is characterized (at times, or when conflicts in motivation arise) by a reflective search for a "source of normativity"—an answer to the question of *why* I must do what I would rather not do. That search can be terminated only by recognizing that the fact that I am searching for such a reason reflects something important about the kind of creature I am, namely, a creature who craves and acts upon reasons. That recognition is a recognition of my "moral identity," and that is the source of normativity. As in Kant, the justificatory quest ends with the discovery of a more fundamental fact, though in this case a fact about the sort of creature that could seek justification in the first place. In Korsgaard's "Locke Lectures," the argument is more nearly Kant's own, though here the grounding argument rests on what is constitutive of agency—namely, governing how one acts by the Categorical Imperative. Once I recognize that I am an agent, and that I act, I recognize that doing so is impossible without doing so on principles, and indeed on principles that are (so it is claimed) universally binding. In both versions of the story, the truth-makers for normative practical claims are the objects of construction rather than recognition: they do not exist except through

[37] Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," *Mind* 4 (1895): 278–80. Achilles tries to persuade the Tortoise (in effect) that, given P and P → Q, he must conclude Q. Tortoise asks why, and Achilles responds that it is logically necessary that he do so. Tortoise then asks why a skeptic must accept the inference, and Achilles unwisely suggests that it is because of the truth of the proposition that P, P → Q, and (P & P → Q) → Q. When Tortoise asks why *that* inference must be accepted, Achilles even more unwisely suggests that that is due to the truth of a further proposition, and an infinite regress has begun. The moral: no number of premises can substitute for a rule of inference.

[38] Korsgaard, "Locke Lectures," 2.4.1ff.

our rational agency. As in Kant, however, the processes of construction involve rationally mandated procedures of deliberation that are successfully concluded only upon recognizing some fact that gives us reason to acknowledge the truths in question. With that framework as our background, I now turn to sketching a form of constructivism that is, by way of contrast, constructivist "all the way down."

IV. Aristotelian Constructivism

Aristotelian constructivism (AC), as I shall call it, shares with Kant's and Korsgaard's versions of constructivism a comprehensiveness of ambition: it claims to give a general account of the nature of what is true about what we have reason to do that sees such truth as constructed rather than recognized. It differs from its Kantian cousins in the nature and justification of the method of construction which constitutes the truth-makers for normative practical claims.

Kant's view is constructivist in holding that truths about what we ought to do are constructed through a procedure applied to the maxims or principles upon which we propose to act. Korsgaard amends this story to maintain that the procedure of maxim-testing constitutes us as agents, unifies the diverse parts of our "souls," and thus constructs the "forms" of our selves as the particular persons we are.

In contrast, on AC the enterprise of construction involves not merely procedures but substantive normative judgments. Truth about what we have reason to do is established in light of the aim of living well, where what counts as living well is an object of construction, though not the upshot of any formal procedure. Part of the Aristotelian legacy drawn upon here is the idea in Aristotle (as in Plato and later Hellenistic philosophies) that eudaimonia (happiness) is the ultimate end for us as human beings, both in the psychological sense that it is, in fact, what people want for themselves, and in the normative sense that it is what we have greatest reason to seek in living and acting. As in Kantian constructivism, the heart of AC is the denial that the truth about how to live and act is *out there* somehow, waiting for us to recognize and act on it, even in the substantive judgments that are incorporated as part of the enterprise of construction.

The role of such judgments has led some to see Aristotle as exemplifying a recognitionalist view. Gaut maintains that Aristotle begins with "an independent account of the conditions under which actions are good, and [derives] from this an account of practical rationality."[39] At some points, Aristotle's language does invite a recognitionalist reading—in particular,

[39] Gaut, "The Structure of Practical Reason," 13. See also Ralph Wedgwood, "Practical Reasoning as Figuring Out What Is Best: Against Constructivism," *Topoi* 21 (2002): 139–52.

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his description of practical wisdom as a kind of perception.[40] Aristotle's many claims that virtuous action aims at the fine or noble (*to kalon*) are also not incompatible with such a reading. Though I shall challenge these textual claims briefly in what follows, my main argument to the contrary draws on what I take to be the broader thrust of Aristotle's view.[41]

The constructivism of Kantian value theory is closely related to its emphasis on the conditional nature of the value of everything but the good will. Constructivism flows from this thesis about value, since the idea *just is* that value is established through acts of rational willing. Now, less well-known is the widespread endorsement of a similar but distinct conditionality thesis in ancient eudaimonism, and this is the place to begin grasping the constructivism in it. Plato says that in themselves "both 'good' and 'bad' things are valueless,"[42] and that all the things commonly called good are "possessions of great value to the just and pious, but . . . to the unjust they are a curse."[43] Aristotle also is explicit that their goodness is conditional upon their deployment in accord with virtue: "to the noble and good man things profitable are also noble; but to the many the profitable and the noble do not coincide, for things absolutely good are not good for them as they are for the good man."[44] Even starker is the Stoic doctrine that things besides virtue are themselves never good; they are at best "indifferents" that may be "preferred" as the objects of wise or virtuous "selection."[45] On all these accounts, value depends on virtuous agency, and this conditionality of value leads to constructivism in these accounts just as it does in Kant's.[46]

[40] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) VI.8.1142a25–32. Quotations are from the Ross/Urmson translation, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[41] Still, I do not claim to be offering an interpretation of Aristotle; instead, I believe the view is one naturally congruent with major themes in his ethics.

[42] Plato, *Euthydemus* 281d.

[43] Plato, *Laws* II.661b; see also *Gorgias* 470e. It is not easy to reconcile the metaethical outlook expressed in these passages with the sort of robust realism that the theory of the Forms in, e.g., the *Republic* is taken to exhibit. But the fact that these passages are drawn from both what are taken to be some of Plato's earliest dialogues, and what is without a doubt his last, suggests that it is an outlook from which he likely never departed.

[44] Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* VII.15.1249a10–12. Should a constructivist worry about the notion of "absolute good" here? No. Elsewhere (*EN* V.1.1129b2–7), Aristotle holds that the goodness of such goods is conditional, and (*EN* III.4.1113a32) that the good man is the "norm and measure" of good.

[45] Cf. Cicero, *De Finibus* III.53–55. The Stoic value theory on which nothing but virtue can properly be called "good" is the clearest case of an account of conditional value in the ancient world. However, as the text indicates, I think different versions of the notion that value is conditional (and thus that it is not some nonrelational property of things, waiting for us to recognize it) are found in Plato and Aristotle as well; and, in fact, Aristotle's view offers the best overall understanding of the tacit value theory at work in the other accounts. I thank Fred Miller for pressing this point.

[46] In this way, the ancient accounts are vulnerable to the objections Gaut offers against Kant's conditionality thesis just as Kant's account is (Gaut, "The Structure of Practical Reason," 165–170). I do not believe these arguments are telling against conditionality in either case, but I do not have space to address these questions here.

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According to AC, value or goodness is constructed in the following sense: the reasons we have for undertaking particular actions, realizing particular aims, etc., are not a matter of recognizing or responding to any sorts of normative properties to be found in the objects of our actions. In outline, the idea is that the goodness of such things is conditional upon their contribution to a good human life. The goodness of (say) a cold beer is not anything one recognizes and responds to. Instead, one recognizes and responds to the beer's natural properties (these, of course, are not constructed), and to the extent that, in virtue of its natural properties, it contributes to one's living well, only in that way does it have value—only in that sense is it good. In turn, the goodness of a good life is crucially dependent on the exercise of practical rationality in the right way (that is, on practical wisdom, or *phronêsis*). This is true both because good lives require the direction of practical wisdom and because only successful practical rationality can determine which lives are genuinely good. Conversely, the criterion for success in practical rationality—practical wisdom—just is the construction of a good life. Neither eudaimonia nor practical wisdom can be specified without essential reference to the other.

Now this story is patently circular, so there is at least a threat of vacuity here. But that threat is empty, for two reasons. First, the circularity at issue is not conceptual, but metaphysical. The claim is not that our *concepts* of either living well or practical wisdom are mutually dependent. Instead, the claims of AC are substantive claims about what in the world these concepts should rightly be seen as picking out. In each case, what is picked out makes essential reference to the other.

Second, what is picked out is something about which we can learn in other ways. For example, the considerable work in recent years on theories of well-being can contribute to our understanding of what makes human lives good ones, as can common-sense judgments about successes and failures in living.[47] The eudaimonist insight into that work is that such lives cannot be successful except when they recognize the appropriate place for practical wisdom. And as for practical wisdom, there has been no shortage in human history of reflection on what courses of human conduct are wise. Here eudaimonism gives point and focus to that reflection, and can add what we learn about thinking about virtue more generally. These examples are hardly exhaustive, but I trust their point is clear. While we can fully understand neither what a good life is nor what practical wisdom consists in independently, the way they are interdependent does not leave us with a vacuous circularity. This is not to say that there isn't work to be done in expanding the interdependence between

[47] The history of Greek ethics is itself a lively debate over exactly what lives are good lives, and why. I think it is useful to see the enterprise of answering these questions as one of establishing reflective equilibrium between judgments about particular cases and abstract principles attempting to unify and harmonize those judgments.

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eudaimonia and practical wisdom, but there is no reason to assume at the outset that that task is impossible.

In contrast to the structure of Kantian constructivism, the constructivism in AC goes "all the way down," in that the fundamental normative elements at work in the account are themselves products of construction. Now this does not mean that *everything* is constructed; as Rawls points out, every construction needs materials.[48] For AC, those materials are the natural facts that bear on normative judgments and properties. These facts are not themselves constructed, but are straightforwardly objects of recognition. Thus, the sense in which AC's constructivism goes "all the way down" refers to the nature and content of its fundamental *normative* elements—eudaimonia and practical wisdom—and indicates that AC has no normative "primitive" or base notion on which the normative structure of the account is founded.[49] I will explore this picture by explaining how AC addresses a problem any constructivist view must face. The problem takes the form of a dilemma.[50] One horn of the dilemma is a concern that the construction cannot succeed without appeal to some normative standard that is not itself constructed (so that constructivism is really just window-dressing on recognitionalism). The other horn is the charge that, in avoiding the first horn, constructivism becomes arbitrary or unacceptably relativistic: in repudiating any independent standard of evaluation, it loses the footing necessary to establish the kinds of normative judgments we want to make against noxious practices and beliefs.[51] I contend with this second horn in Section VII of this essay; in the next two sections, I undertake a two-part explanation of how AC avoids the first horn, and in doing so try to explain further how its fundamental normative elements are objects of construction. I take up the construction of eudaimonia in Section V, and of practical wisdom in Section VI, with the aim of showing that both elements are constructed, not recognized.

V. Eudaimonia

The ancients agreed that a good human life must be the life of a good specimen of our kind, and that what is distinctive of our kind is the

[48] Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," 514; see also Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 103–4.

[49] I thank David Wong for pressing for clarity on this point.

[50] Various *Euthyphro*-style dilemmas have been posed as problems for constructivism; for two recent examples, see Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 42; and Mark Timmons, "The Limits of Moral Constructivism," *Ratio* 16 (2003): 400ff. The version I set out here differs somewhat from both these formulations, but I think it is the natural concern given the species of constructivism I offer.

[51] We might understand Cohen's Mafioso objection to Korsgaard to take this form: Korsgaard's practical-identities account is impaled on this second horn in virtue of its "content-neutral" emphasis on reflective endorsement. Cohen presses his objection in these terms in Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity,* 184.

capacity for reflective practical rationality. Our practical reasoning can take as its object any number of things, including its own operation: we can reason not only about what actions to perform, but about how we should reason. Aristotle, like Kant and others, is struck by the fact that we have this capacity; and it is distinctive of us that we characteristically live via its exercise. One implication of this fact is that *because* we live this way, doing so *well* establishes normative standards for action for us. That is the basic point of Aristotle's notorious *ergon* argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7: while we share nutritive, perceptual, and motor capacities with other living beings, what is distinctive about us is that we reason about how to think and act. So living well as the kind of things we are involves reasoning well, and that is why *successful* practical rationality—practical wisdom—plays such a crucial role in living well as a human being.

Nonetheless, while the attention to practical rationality is something Aristotle shares with Kant, Aristotelian constructivism departs from the Kantian variety in attending to the deep and complex connection between this rational capacity and our animal natures, and in maintaining in light of this complexity that there is no hope for a merely formal or procedural account of success in practical rationality. I return to the latter point in the next section; at present, I want to attend to the significance of this connection for living well. AC couples the attention to reflective rationality with the recognition that we are organisms and share a biological nature with other animals and plants. We are ourselves animals, with the full suite of nutritive, perceptual, appetitive, and affective systems which suffice for life in simpler organisms. However, in addition we have reflective rationality, as the *ergon* argument observes, and it is no overstatement to say that this changes everything.

One important effect of this change is captured nicely by Kant, who says:

> Freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim*. . . .[52]

Kant's point, with which the ancients agree, is that our capacity for reflective rationality opens up a critical distance between the conative states we experience as animals and our eventual response in action.[53] This effects an important transformation in these conative states: they call into play

[52] Immanuel Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason," in *Religion and Rational Theology,* trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ak. p. 24; emphasis in original. Henry Allison calls this Kant's "Incorporation Thesis," and claims that it "underlies virtually everything that Kant has to say about rational agency." See Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 40.

[53] Cf. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity,* 93, 223; Korsgaard, "Locke Lectures," 4.2.4.

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practical rationality, and can for the first time become reasons for action. John McDowell indicates how this critical distance is manifest in the Aristotelian picture in writing of our need to be trained in the deployment of practical reason:

> Moral education does not merely rechannel one's natural motivational impulses, with the acquisition of reason making no difference except that one becomes self-consciously aware of the operation of these impulses. In imparting *logos,* moral education enables one to step back from any motivational impulse one finds oneself subject to, and question its rational credentials.[54]

It is not simply that what would otherwise be merely sources of motivation now have simply become *reasons*; it is that *action* has become possible, as an alternative to our being just another link in the extended causal order—patients of prior causes, channeling them to whatever effect natural law dictates. By our nature, then, we are committed to the necessity of some determination of what sorts of lives we will choose to lead by the deployment of our capacities of reflective rationality: how we live and act becomes a matter of choice in a way it is not for other creatures.

A second implication of our having this capacity, emphasized far more by the ancients than in the Kantian tradition, is the transformative effect of this capacity on the rest of our animal natures—on our passions and desires in particular. McDowell calls this rational transformation a sort of "second naturalism," and it is a theme running throughout the ancients.[55] Aristotle insists that "habituation"—in large part, a training and education of the passions—is essential for virtue. Less well-known, perhaps, are Plato's ways of making the same point. In the *Laws,* Plato emphasizes what we might call the "plasticity" of the objects of our pleasure and pain—the great degree to which we can *learn* to experience pleasure or pain in consequence of achieving certain aims:

> I maintain that the earliest sensations that a child feels in infancy are of pleasure and pain, and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul. . . . I call "education" the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses

[54] John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons,* ed. Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 170.

[55] This form of "naturalism" differs from that developed by some Aristotelian "naturalists"—such as Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and, to a lesser degree, Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 9—in recognizing that our rationality makes an essential contribution to the normative properties of anything that is good. Cf. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 166ff.

> before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits. Virtue is this general concord of reason and emotion.[56]

Just *because* our experiences of pleasure and pain are plastic in this way, moral education is critical for us. Before our capacity to reflect upon and recognize reasons, we need the benefit of wise guidance to "channel" our affective and conative responses to the right sorts of things. But it is the task of practical rationality to determine what these right sorts of things are, and to establish the canons for moral education. The point is not extirpation of the motivating effects of these other aspects of our animality, nor indeed to bend them to the service of an idealized rationality. Instead, the point is (as so nicely illustrated by the central analogy of the *Republic*) the thriving of the integrated whole—the good life of a creature that is both essentially animal and essentially rational.

This emphasis marks the significant difference between Aristotelian and Kantian forms of constructivism. Whereas, in the latter view, the focus is the nature and exercise of pure practical reason, "fully cleansed of everything that might be in any way empirical and belong to anthropology,"[57] the focus in the former view is a *life*: a process (or, better, *activity*) played out over a span of history, with a concrete beginning, a concrete ending, and an unfolding of successive stages of life in between. We not only *have* these lives but we *live* and shape them, and the goal of living well is both informed by the fact that we have the capacity for reflective rationality and the object of practical rationality as we exercise it. Indeed, Aristotle goes so far as to suggest that our *selves* are constructed through the activity of living our lives deliberatively:

> We exist by virtue of activity (i.e. by living and acting), and . . . the handiwork [*ergon*] *is* in a sense, the producer in activity; he loves his handiwork, therefore, because he loves existence. And this is rooted in the nature of things, for what he is in potentiality, his handiwork manifests in activity.[58]

A good human life is the life of one of a certain kind of animal, in which practical reason molds and shapes the natural drives, motives, and passions, and in so doing creates a self. This is what renders Aristotle's use of the locution of "perception" (*aesthesis*) for wise judgment congruent with the constructivist view I am proposing here: he says the perception

[56] Plato, *Laws* II.653a–b (Saunders translation), in *Complete Works of Plato,* ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).
[57] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 389.
[58] Aristotle, *EN* IX.7.

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in practical judgment is of "another sort" (*allos eidos*) than perception of objects.[59] He may be suggesting that *this* capacity for perception is something we are active in shaping; the reflective work of practical wisdom in habituation is a way of coming to see the patterns that are constitutive of living well. Once shaped, the capacities thus formed are capable of detecting, of responding to, the descriptive features of conditions and circumstances that warrant action, and in this sense the capacities engage in perception. What responds is not merely an intellect but a self—the self that is itself the product of construction, through habituation guided by practical wisdom.[60] The result is a life that such a creature can judge to be good in light of the criteria we can best identify for evaluating the kinds of lives of which we are capable. The normative success of that life, its *goodness,* is a construction of the effective exercise of that very capacity for practical rationality. Both what *counts* as a good life and the goodness of such a life depend on the exercise of our practical rationality. There are no facts about living well as a human being apart from the wise judgments of human agents about living so.

The constructivist credentials of AC's notion of eudaimonia thus come to rest on its notion of practical wisdom. But the canons for success in practical rationality are themselves objects of construction on AC. Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), in Aristotle's own view and in AC, just is practical rationality, exercised in such a way as to live well:

> Now it is thought to be a mark of the man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect . . . but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general.[61]

Thus, the standard of success in practical rationality just is eudaimonia—a substantive, not merely procedural, standard.

This is a curious picture, in more ways than one. How exactly is eudaimonia supposed to afford this standard? The challenge for AC is to resist the idea that the norms for success in either living or practical reasoning can be understood in recognitional terms, as normative facts that hold independently of the very processes by which we come to know them. Gaut, for example, maintains that only by understanding effective practical rationality without "ineliminable reference to evaluative content" can a constructivist account avoid collapse into recognitionalism.[62] But the eudaimonist account of success in practical rationality manifestly

[59] Aristotle, *EN* VI.8.1142a30.

[60] For more on the idea of construction of self in this way, see my "Eudaimonist Autonomy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (2005): 171–84.

[61] Aristotle, *EN* VI.5.

[62] Gaut, "The Structure of Practical Reason," 177–78.

refers to such content (viz. eudaimonia). If Gaut is right, then, the threat of the first horn of the dilemma described above (at the end of Section IV) is especially acute just when we turn to practical wisdom to explicate the notion of eudaimonia. In the next section, I hope to show how that horn may be averted, and, in Section VII, I hope to show that we are not thereby plunged into relativism.

VI. The Structure of Practical Rationality

The challenge Gaut poses is the worry that, in its account of successful practical rationality, so-called Aristotelian constructivism is just a novel face put on an ultimately recognitionalist view. Many (like Gaut, and perhaps Kant) assume that the only way to avoid this objection is to deploy a purely formal or procedural conception of successful practical rationality. In other words, the canons for successful exercise of practical rationality apply purely to its form or procedure. Constructivism, then, would as a procedural approach be contrasted with recognitionalist approaches that take practical reason to be aimed at some substantive goal, such as the good, and to be assessable in light of that goal.[63]

This contrast is useful enough when it is Kantian constructivism that is under scrutiny. However, this reflects more on the idiosyncrasies of the Kantian conception of practical rationality than on its constructivism. The hallmark of the Kantian conception of practical rationality is that substantive constraints on practical rationality *can be derived from* correctly specified formal requirements. From the bare idea of a categorical imperative—which Kant construes as the demand to avoid various types of contradiction in willing—Kant thinks we can derive the substantive rational requirements which constitute the moral law. This twist to the Kantian conception of practical rationality is much of its genius, but it is the real target of Gaut's charge. If the Kantian account fails (as Hegel and others have argued) in its attempt to extract substance from form, then, just as Gaut suggests, it must covertly rely on principles that are not constructed.

Moreover, even if it does not rely on such principles, its structure (as we have seen) situates the justification for the procedure (and the method of construction of practical truth) in substantive (and nonconstructed) *a priori* concepts of the understanding. This is just to say, again, that on the Kantian approach neither the proceduralism nor the constructivism goes all the way down. Korsgaard argues that Kant's philosophy generally (that is, both his practical and his theoretical philosophy) should be understood as a search for the "unconditioned"—the stopper of a justificatory regress that itself stands in need of no justification:

[63] Cf. ibid., 163; Wedgwood, "Practical Reasoning," 139–41; and Street, "Constructivism about Reasons."

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> The claim that reason seeks the unconditioned is not based on an analysis of the abstract concept of reason. It is more a claim about the plight of self-conscious beings who because we are self-conscious need reasons to believe and to act. When we go looking for those reasons we find ourselves—via a form of regress argument that is perfectly natural to any rational being—on a road that leads to the unconditioned, a road that threatens to have no satisfactory stopping point.[64]

The threat is empty, on the Kantian conception, because we *can* arrive at the unconditioned. In Kant, it is the value of the good will and our freedom or subjection to the moral law. In Korsgaard, it is the nature of agency, or the experience of valuing, itself. These are each in their own way regress-stoppers, and they afford the justificatory foundation for the enterprises of construction of normative truths that are the projects of these various Kantian theories. The foundation provides the warrant for accepting the output of procedures which, when appropriately executed, produce the normative results we seek, and in that way makes the world safe for constructivism. The foundations themselves are not the objects of construction, and it is this foundational structure which invites Gaut's challenge. Insofar as such a foundation is necessary, the worry that there is an incipient recognitionalism at work gains traction.

By way of contrast, the overall justificatory structure of AC is not foundational but coherentist. There is no normative foundation on which the warrant for other normative claims rests; instead, the normative claims of AC draw their justification from their membership in an overall structure that both fits with and explains our substantive normative and theoretical judgments.[65] The normative crux of the view rests on judgments about

[64] Christine Korsgaard, "Motivation, Metaphysics, and the Value of Self," *Ethics* 109 (1998): 61.

[65] On Scott MacDonald's reading of Aquinas (in his essay "Foundations in Aquinas's Ethics," elsewhere in this volume), Thomistic eudaimonism takes a "thin foundationalist" form. As I understand MacDonald's reading, Aquinas is committed to the view that we have happiness (or eudaimonia) given to us as an ultimate end by nature (in virtue of our desire for it), but in only a formal and indeterminate form; and it is the task of practical reasoning (deliberation) to arrive at determinate content for that end. As I read the ancients, they agree that in general we have such a desire, but they offer no claim that it is not, at least in principle, capable of being rejected as reason-giving, just as any other desire is. That is to say, we can step back even from the desire for happiness and ask whether or not we have reason to try to satisfy it (as well as to make it determinate). Because of the reflexive nature of our rational capacities, there is *no* brute motivational state that can escape this sort of justificatory scrutiny. In this sense, even Aquinas's "thin" foundations are too thick for the sort of coherentism I am envisioning here.

One might imagine an even thinner foundationalism, in which, rather than a *desire* for happiness, one had a sort of *intuition* as to its reason-giving nature—an intuition that was nevertheless corrigible and defeasible, as I have insisted, but which carried a sort of prima facie justificatory force nonetheless—which then features (alone or with other intuitions) in a justificatory system for normative practical judgments. Such a foundationalism is getting

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concrete, particular good human lives and about the effective exercise of practical rationality. In a fashion similar to the way Rawls claims we build a conception of political justice from the "materials" of antecedent conceptions of citizen and society, on AC truth about how to act is built on the materials afforded by normative conceptions of a good human life and effective practical rationality. However, unlike the Rawlsian picture, on this picture these conceptions are themselves part of the objects of construction, and (unlike the Kantian picture) there is no fundamental normative notion to stop a justificatory regress. In no case do we begin with normative facts that await our recognition, prior to and independent of our cognition of them. True claims about eudaimonia and practical wisdom are not established prior to the judgments of wise human agents that they *are* true.[66] In this sense, on AC, there is no normative truth that is *not* the product of construction.[67]

This approach requires that AC not invoke a merely formal or procedural conception of practical rationality, but a substantive one. AC maintains that practical rationality is effective when it not only satisfies the procedural requirements commonly applied to practical reasoning, but also delivers substantively correct judgments about how to live well. The judgment that I ought to X is true just insofar as it shapes my activity into living a good life. But we have already seen that the content of eudaimonia is itself constructed. Thus, the short response to Gaut's challenge is the observation that, while on AC practical reason does have a substantive standard, that standard—what we take the good life to be—is itself an object of construction.

vanishingly less distant from the coherentism I espouse, and I am unsure what rests on insisting on categorizing either view one way or another. The key point, in my view, is the in-principle defeasibility and corrigibility of *any* motivational state or apprehension that some course of conduct is right, or of any judgment that something is good. I am uncertain what concerns (apart from epistemological ones) might lie beyond that point. I thank Mike Huemer for discussion of this issue.

[66] In this sense, though it is true that multiple agents, equipped with the same knowledge and equally wise, would all arrive at the same judgments for particular cases, the explanation for this is not that they are each discovering an antecedent fact about what practical rationality requires. Instead, that fact just *consists in* the fact that practically wise agents would see that course of action as the thing to do. There would be no such fact except through the deliberations of practically wise agents. I thank Christopher Gowans for pressing this point.

[67] Tom Hill has suggested (in private conversation) that the regress-stoppers in Kant's account, anyway, might well be seen as the objects of construction. Perhaps a similar case might be made for Rawls's and Korsgaard's accounts too. It is striking, however, that in none of these theories is there any account of that constructive process. Certainly it cannot be the same sort of constructive procedure that yields normative truth on those accounts. However, my aim here is less to attack the various Kantian positions than to show how one inviting reading of their structure lays their constructivism open to Gaut's objection. If their structure is, implicitly, more like the structure of the Aristotelian picture I give here, all the better for them. The point remains: the coherentist structure is the sort of structure that enables this particular recognitionalist objection to be avoided, and it is central to the Aristotelian picture.

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By way of a somewhat fuller sketch: on AC, successful practical rationality involves both successful reasoning (in the sense of marking the proper inferential relations among beliefs and other attitudes) and making substantively right choices about how best to live. First, AC can endorse the procedural requirements on practical reasoning accepted not only by Kant but (for example) by formal theories of rational choice. Any formal or procedural constraint on practical reasoning which we take, on reflection, to be a genuine canon of effective rationality is one that will count as such a canon on AC. So AC can embrace canons not only of deductive inference (e.g., consistency) but also of less formal inferential patterns: coherence more broadly construed, canons of successful explanation, and the like. The warrant for accepting these canons is itself the product of the very faculties to which the canons apply (what else could do the warranting?). In this sense, AC requires that practical wisdom "bear its own survey" (to put the point in David Hume's way).[68]

The sticky part of the story, obviously, is what it says about the substantive requirements on practical wisdom. These may not be identified merely as the results of the operation of some purely procedural test. It may be helpful to begin by thinking of AC as endorsing something like an Objective List of things that normally belong in a good human life. It is important to note both the ways in which this picture is accurate, and the ways in which it differs from a recognitionalist way of conceiving such a list.

The picture is accurate in according at least prima facie warrant to just those judgments we make about people who do not take the items typically on such a list (e.g., their own health) to be reason-giving; we take such people to be irrational or at least open to rational criticism. Such judgments are part of everyday life and the common-sense exercise of wisdom, and AC endorses such judgments, at least as a starting-point. It is difficult to avoid judgments that health, friendship, knowledge, and so on—the items usually found on an Objective List—typically have such a place in good human lives, and AC embraces them.[69] But it differs from recognitionalism in its account of how things come to be on that list. Gaut maintains that the proper way to understand such a list is on the recognitional model: the contents of the list itself are there to be recog-

[68] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 620.

[69] This way of putting things breezes past a considerable complication for eudaimonism, taking as it does a "formally egoistic" form: Can the view give the right account of the way that *other persons* afford us reasons for acting? There are, I believe, two distinct sub-questions here, one pertaining to (roughly) the welfare or well-being of others (perhaps: the demands of beneficence), and the other pertaining to something like their rights and the corresponding obligations of respect we owe them. Both are important issues, but I cannot take them up here. I address the latter question explicitly in "Virtue Ethics and Deontic Constraints" (manuscript). On the former question, see Julia Annas, "The Good Life and the Good Lives of Others," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 133–48. I thank Tibor Machan for pressing this point.

nized, prior to our conception of practical rationality, and thus can afford us a canon for assessing which actions are rational and which are not.[70] On AC, however, membership on that list is itself the upshot of effective practical rationality. We can, and do, reflect on putative judgments about the constituents of a good life, and it is success in such reflection that warrants our substantive judgments about living well. In this sense, full (as opposed to prima facie) warrant for something's being on that list is delivered only by broad reflection on living well. A claim that something belongs on that list is established by vindicating to the judgment of practical wisdom that it is an element in a good human life; hence, something is on that list just because it is judged to be. This is the reverse of the order of explanation the recognitionalist offers.

Aristotle himself holds that virtuous action (or wise judgment) always aims at the "fine" or "noble"—*to kalon*.[71] The Greek idea here includes both the ethical force of "noble" and the aesthetic element of being "fine" (or "beautiful"). As Aristotle deploys the idea, both of these elements, as predicates of ethical action, track the degree to which right action is *fitting* or appropriate (*to prepon*).[72] We make judgments of fittingness concerning both our own lives (How do I strike a balance between time spent on work and time spent with my family?) and the lives of others (Does this episode of plagiarism deserve failure of the course, or a report to University Judiciaries?). We make these judgments on large-grained questions (Am I a good fit for this job?) and on more finely-grained issues (Should I wear a tie to this party?). We make them in theorizing ("This is the better explanation") and in practice ("That was uncalled for"). Since judgments of fittingness must be highly contextually dependent, they cannot be codified, and consequently cannot be seen as produced or warranted by any purely procedural rationality. They are substantive—this *just is* fitting or appropriate, and that *just is not*—but they are not tasks of recognition of some property of appropriateness in their objects. Instead, they are products of the constructive task of piecing together the right contributory elements to living a good life. That is the major work of practical wisdom on the Aristotelian conception.

This proposal is quite sketchy, but I hope it suggests the picture I have in mind. It is an outline of a different conception of practical rationality than the procedural accounts often on offer. Whereas on the Kantian story, substantive practical and moral truth is supposed to emerge from a pure procedure, the Aristotelian story countenances and embraces substantive judgments and commitments to ends we must have to be practically rational. This is the reply to the concern that AC has shoved recognitional-

[70] Gaut, "The Structure of Practical Reason," 183.

[71] See, e.g., Aristotle, *EN* III.7.1115b12–13; III.8.1117a8; III.11.1119b15–16; and many others. This is a dominant theme in Aristotle's account of virtue and virtuous action.

[72] See Kelly Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of *To Kalon*," *Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1993): 355–71.

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ism out the front door only to usher it in at the back. I have explained that this is not the case, that even the normative foundations (such as they are) of Aristotelian constructivism are themselves products of construction. But that invites just the opposite form of concern: that constructivism allows, or perhaps even just is, a noxious form of relativism. To that concern I now turn.

VII. Objectivity, Subjectivity, and Relativism

Suppose AC is, in fact, constructivist "all the way down." That runs the account straight into the objection that it has so little structure that it can be used to justify any number of sets of moral principles, each grounded in some agent- or culture-relative set of assumptions and judgments, with no basis for critical engagement among such constructed sets.[73] The challenge is to show that AC can vindicate a claim to sufficient objectivity to lay these concerns aside.

This is not a novel objection to neo-Aristotelian theories, and the basis for concern is not entirely the constructivism offered in the present account. The view that the judgment of the wise and virtuous agent—the *phronimos*—is even *epistemically* indispensable in picking out virtuous attitudes and actions is itself sufficient to raise many of the same questions about the objective credentials of the virtue approach. Much of the virtue ethics literature on (for example) the impossibility of codification of moral judgments, the impossibility of moral rules, and the like, is aimed at meeting this challenge.[74] AC goes beyond the epistemic claims to make such judgments *constitutive* of what is required by successful practical

[73] What this horn of the dilemma looks like in the formulations of Shafer-Landau and Timmons is not clear. Both think the dilemma is between characterizing the constraints on construction in moral terms and eschewing the use of such terms. On the latter horn (what Timmons calls "thin" characterizations), Timmons takes the problem to be indeterminacy among the principles constructed, while Shafer-Landau is concerned that the resulting construction may not even be recognizable *as* a set of moral principles. On the former horn (what Timmons calls "thick" characterizations), Shafer-Landau holds that the approach is no longer constructivist, since there are moral principles at work prior to the construction, while Timmons worries about "conceptual chauvinism" and "relativism," in that different sets of moral assumptions will yield different constructed outputs. Both of these formulations seem to me to assume a foundationalist structure to the enterprise of construction, so neither quite fits the structure of the account I have set out here. I hope I have met Shafer-Landau's argument that the approach has the problems of the "thick" characterization; this leaves the concern that the result is no longer recognizable as moral. As I observe in the text, this is a problem for any ancient ethical account, and fully meeting this charge is possible only in a successful defense of a normative, eudaimonist, virtue ethic. Yet the success of such a broad normative theory would set Timmons's charge of indeterminacy to rest, only to run into his worry about relativism; a similar concern is formulated by Cullity and Gaut ("Introduction," in Cullity and Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason,* 16). My argument here is directed at the concerns about relativism, though I hope it speaks to Shafer-Landau's worries as well.

[74] In particular, Rosalind Hursthouse considers these points at length in *On Virtue Ethics*; see esp. chaps. 1, 8–11.

rationality, so in some respects its problem is more grave.[75] My strategy will be to consider what forms of objectivity we might want, to suggest that the desire for some of these forms is unwarranted, and to argue that AC provides a form of objectivity worth having.

Bernard Williams has argued that questions about objectivity in ethical discourse boil down to what we will say about ethical disagreement—in particular, the possibility or necessity of at least one party being in error.[76] One way to understand the present concern is in this light. For example, there are contrasting beliefs about the moral permissibility of female genital mutilation ("female circumcision"); part of what we want by way of objectivity is a basis for claiming that those who think this practice is permissible have *wrong* or *wicked* attitudes, not just *different* ones, and for defending the thought that such a claim is not merely "chauvinistic,"[77] so that when we disagree with proponents of such a practice we are not merely talking past them. Given the patent objective purport of claims about both morality and practical rationality more generally, Williams is surely right that providing such a basis is a *necessary* condition for a plausible moral theory. It might be, of course, that no such objective standard can be vindicated, but it will certainly count as an indictment against the objectivity of an approach that it cannot even propose such a standard.

Here, Kantian constructivism has a card to play that AC does not. Consider Kant's aspiration to provide a moral philosophy applicable to all rational beings, considered purely as such. If successful, this aspiration arguably could establish an objectivity drawn from rational necessity. Moral laws, Kant says, "should be taken from pure reason": we are required, "since moral laws are to be valid for every rational being in general, to derive them from the universal concept of a rational being in general. . . ."[78] If he is right, moral and (in general) practically rational requirements could lay claim to an objectivity which anything known to be true *a priori*—because necessarily true—must have. Kant virtually equates the objective with what remains after abstraction of everything empirical,[79] and at the same time holds that this amounts to the *universal validity* of practical laws.

[75] Nevertheless, it is Aristotle's problem as well: "Excellence, then, is a state concerned with choice . . . this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (*EN* II.6.1107a1–2).

[76] Bernard Williams, "Saint-Just's Illusion," in Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145. This passage is central to Rosalind Hursthouse's discussion of objectivity in virtue theory (*On Virtue Ethics,* chap. 11), to which I am deeply indebted.

[77] Timmons calls "chauvinistic" those versions of relativism which maintain that moral concepts are such that "where two individuals or groups really do seem to be thinking or uttering contradictory judgments employing those terms and concepts, the judgments in question are not really contradictory at all" (Timmons, "The Limits of Moral Constructivism," 406).

[78] Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. pp. 411–12.

[79] Ibid., Ak. p. 427.

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If we think ethical objectivity requires necessity, then Kant's approach may be the only game in town, whether it succeeds or not. However, surely it is odd to think that the most basic truths about how we ought to live our lives must be norms shared with creatures as different from us as other rational beings—considered purely as such—could be. Could it really be that our practical requirements are the same as those would be for creatures that were not mortal? That the principles governing our interactions with others are the same as those that would govern creatures who did not live in characteristic scarcity? Who were not vulnerable to each other? Who reproduced asexually or not viviparously? Though contingent, it is hard to see how the facts about how we differ from such creatures could not be deeply significant for the content of our practical principles.[80] As McDowell says, the thought that such contingencies need not be significant is a "consoling myth" in coming to grips with our need for objectivity,[81] and there is a history of worries that *a priori* principles cannot generate the necessary traction for contingent circumstances.

In contrast, if the contingency of our natures and circumstances need not preclude the objectivity of prescriptions for action, then we are in position to seek objectivity in something about our natures, contingent though they may be. Like its Kantian cousins, the Aristotelian approach focuses on our natures, not as conative subjects, but as rational agents; however, unlike the Kantian approach, it focuses on that rationality, not as abstracted from, but rather as immanent in, our animal natures.[82] We can look to find objectivity in what is called the "publicity of reasons"—the notion that reasons are open to a public discipline, that they are not constrained merely by private and individual attitudes about them.[83] Our susceptibility to reasons, and (in turn) their publicity, grounds the hope of identifying a standard of correctness in the exercise of practical rationality, and thus a plausible form of objectivity in AC.

This way of establishing a standard has its roots deep in Aristotle. The "mark to which the man who possesses reason looks," he says, is right reason (*orthos logos*).[84] Unlike Kantian constructivism, AC does not main-

[80] An excellent exploration of some of these contingencies, and their bearing on our ethical life and practice, may be found in Rosalind Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 247–59.

[81] John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *Monist* 62 (1979): 339. See also his "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," in Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich, eds., *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 155, where he criticizes the thought that, if rationality is present, it should be recognizable from an "external standpoint."

[82] The fact that we have reflective practical rationality, and characteristically live by deploying it, is a natural fact about us, and thus is unobjectionable as one of the "materials" to be used in a constructivism that goes "all the way down," as I claim. I thank Dan Layman for raising this issue.

[83] Korsgaard has explored this idea at great length in a number of places, including *The Sources of Normativity,* lecture 4. I shall indicate the ways in which I understand this "publicity" differently than she does.

[84] Aristotle, *EN* VI.1.1138b25.

tain that this mark can be purely procedural: practical reason must satisfy substantive constraints as well. But because those constraints are subject to the discipline of reason, the standards in question are objective. The normative nature of the enterprise of giving and exchanging reasons for taking a given action or way of living as being conducive to living well both assumes and establishes the standard of correctness for such claims.

On AC, these reasons will depend on truths about living good human lives; reasons for engaging in conduct of one sort or another will come down to claims about the conduciveness of doing so to living well—claims which are subject to an interpersonal discipline. This discipline will be *partly* procedural: as I have said, AC accepts just those canons for inferences that will be endorsed by any plausible view of rationality. But the justification for particular claims about reasons will depend in addition on substantive judgments as to which putative reasons *really are* reasons, and which are not. In a crucial sense, these candidate claims are subject to a form of *public* vindication.

Now, Korsgaard offers a conception of the publicity of reasons in her development of Kantian constructivism, but the picture of the publicity of reasons on the Aristotelian approach differs from Korsgaard's. Her aim in establishing her Kantian account of publicity is to argue that there are no "private reasons"—reasons of the sort that would provide a toehold for rational egoism and, in consequence, a basis for asking for a justification for claims about reasons to respect others. Korsgaard maintains that this approach to reasons is wrongheaded. Because reasons are public by their very nature, she claims, they must be *shareable.*[85] Since this feature of reasons is supposed to show that rational egoism is impossible, the pertinent sense in which reasons are shareable—hence public—must require that they are *in fact shared.*[86]

The sense in which reasons are shareable and thus public (and thus suitable to ground claims to objectivity) on AC differs from Korsgaard's sense in two ways. First, AC distinguishes between reason-*tokens* and reason-*types.* Our reasons fall into indefinitely many types: reasons for prudence, reasons for concern, reasons to come in out of the rain, and so on. Reason-tokens are the particular reasons that fall into these types. One type of reason, for example, may be the reason not to drink to excess. But each of us has a different reason-token in that type. Your reason for not drinking to excess is that it is bad for *your* health, whereas mine is that doing so is bad for *my* health. In a recognizable sense, our reasons are similar, though their bases are distinct, and they are reasons for different

[85] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity,* 135.

[86] However, at some points, Korsgaard indicates that by saying that reasons are shareable she means merely to deny the claim that they *cannot* be shared (e.g., *The Sources of Normativity,* 135, 141). I argue that this ambiguity is fatal to her account of reasons for respecting others in my essay "Korsgaard, Wittgenstein, and the Mafioso," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 261–71.

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conduct by different people. The similarity captures the *type,* while the differences are reflected in the *tokens.*

Korsgaard does not draw this distinction, and her claims are about reason-tokens; but for AC the publicity of reasons means they are shareable in the sense that their *types* are *in fact shared.* On a eudaimonist view, each of us has most reason to make our own life go well. These reason-tokens—reasons for making a particular, contingently-situated human life go well—are not *necessarily* shared, and thus are not shareable in the sense Korsgaard requires. It is not a requirement on your having reason to make your life go well that I must see myself too as having reason to make your life go well, as Korsgaard maintains. Your reasons are, indeed, share*able* in the ordinary and unremarkable sense that I can, in various ways, come to have reason to make your life go well (and thus to take your reasons to be mine as well), and you may well have reason to reciprocate. AC maintains, then, that reason-tokens *can* be shared, but what *makes them reasons* is their membership in reason-types that *are* shared; most fundamentally, the relevant type is reasons to live well, but there are indefinitely many other reason-types as well.[87]

What makes a putative reason-token a token of a shared reason-type? The second difference from Korsgaard's view is AC's requirement on such types that they be *intelligible.*[88] It is difficult to get a precise grip on just what this standard comes to, but that it is a condition on reasons cannot be doubted. Failure of intelligibility is a reason to reject putative reasons.[89] Elizabeth Anscombe cites the unintelligibility of the reply "To get my camera" to the question "Why are you going upstairs?"—*in the face of* the explicit acknowledgment that the camera is in the basement—as an example of this sort of failure.[90] Anscombe's diagnosis is that such a case represents a failure correctly to pick out an *intention* as a reason for action, and the conclusion she draws as a result is that "[a] man's intention in

[87] Access to shared reason-types and processes of reasoning is the counterpart in this view, I believe, to the way that Kant thinks we can grasp the nature of practical rationality in a completely abstract way, so as to arrive at a "universal concept of a rational being in general" (Kant, *Groundwork,* Ak. p. 412). On what I am calling the Aristotelian approach, we have no confidence that we can apprehend what such rationality might consist in. The only rationality we know is embodied and shaped by a variety of contingencies. We can distinguish it in kind from our experience of the causal order, but we have no grasp on it independently of our cognition within that order. I thank Tom Hill for pressing this point.

[88] Cf. McDowell: "[I]t is our common human nature that limits what we can find intelligible in the way of theses about how human beings should conduct their lives. . . ." John McDowell, "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics,* ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 371.

[89] Intelligibility cannot plausibly be thought of as a *sufficient* condition on reasons. We can make perfect sense of a wide range of things people (including ourselves) do out of errors in judging what they have reason to do, or even in the absence of reasons at all. Rosalind Hursthouse characterizes actions of the latter sort in her essay, "Arational Actions," *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (1991): 57–68. The point I would make here is that it is in virtue of the intelligibility of such actions that we classify them as actions (as the expression of intentions of agents like ourselves) at all.

[90] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 36.

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acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is—as he has absolute authority in saying *what* he dreamt."[91] While our dreams are private, the reasons to which our intentions respond are not. These two elements of AC's picture of the publicity of reasons are connected. Part of what makes intelligible the reason-tokens that we each derive from our interest in living well is the fact that the type *is* shared. It is just *because* I can so readily grasp the reason-giving force of my own eudaimonia that I can appreciate the reason-giving force for *you* of yours.

AC agrees with Korsgaard that the notion that reasons are public is essential to the claim that there are standards of correctness for practical reason and thus to the case that judgments about what one has reason to do (or not to do) may claim a form of objectivity.[92] AC disagrees with Korsgaard in holding that no purely procedural set of canons for such judgments will suffice, and that substantive judgments—in particular, judgments about what we have reason to do and seek in living a good life as a human being—are necessarily part of those standards.

This is not to deny that there are deep disagreements on such judgments. Mark Timmons argues that a serious problem for moral constructivist views is presented by cases of "moral symmetry." An example is a case, offered by Hilary Putnam, of deep evaluative disagreement with his colleague Robert Nozick. Here is Putnam's account of the disagreement:

> One of my colleagues is a well-known advocate of the view that all government spending on "welfare" is morally impermissible. On his view, even the public school system is morally wrong. If the public school system were abolished, along with the compulsory education law (which, I believe, he also regards as an impermissible government interference with individual liberty), then the poorer families could not afford to send their children to school and would opt for letting the children grow up illiterate; but this, on his view, is a problem to be solved by private charity. If people would not be charitable enough to prevent mass illiteracy (or mass starvation of old people, etc.) that is very bad, but it does not legitimize government action.
>
> In *my* view, *his* fundamental premises—the absoluteness of the right to property, for example—are counterintuitive and not sup-

[91] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

[92] From the standpoint of any individual agent, the publicity of reasons entails that he or she may be *mistaken* about considerations taken to be reasons. That, in turn, opens the possibility that the acquisition of wisdom can be a procedure of *discovery* for particular agents. The constructive enterprise establishes norms governing eudaimonia and practical wisdom, as a matter of a shared and public enterprise of the exercise of reflective practical rationality. But from the first-person standpoint of a particular deliberating agent, this enterprise of construction and the discovery of reasons are indistinguishable. I thank Eric Mack for pressing this point.

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> ported by sufficient argument. On *his* view I am in the grip of a "paternalistic" philosophy which he regards as insensitive to individual rights.[93]

Such disagreements are, of course, not unfamiliar. Putnam uses this example to remark on what sorts of attitudes toward one's interlocutor occur in such disagreements. In this case, he says, the disagreement results in an attitude of contempt: neither for Nozick's mind nor for his character nor for him as a person, but for a "certain complex of emotions and judgments" in him.[94] This contempt (which Putnam takes to be reciprocal) involves a judgment that the other is, in a certain way, failing to be sensitive to reasons—not just any reasons, apparently, but reasons to which it is a kind of moral failing to be insensitive.

The point Timmons draws from the case is quite different: it is a textbook example of the problem of moral symmetry for constructivism. The features he takes the case to exemplify, which make it problematic, are the following:

> (1) [T]wo individuals or groups are engaged in a moral disagreement over some issue or case, (2) because they are placed in circumstances that are as similar as possible, their disagreement is not explicable owing to [differences in application of universal principles], (3) the individuals or groups are plausibly interpreted as making no factual errors in relation to their moral judgment about the case at hand, (4) their respective moral outlooks enjoy wide reflective equilibrium, and hence (5) their respective moral views on the topic in question are stable.[95]

The stability of these views under this sort of wide equilibrium, Timmons believes, compels constructivists either to see the interlocutors as simply talking past each other (in only apparent disagreement) or to construe both views as true for the respective sensibilities involved; either way, constructivism is committed to an objectionable relativism.

However, I think AC makes perfect sense of disagreements of this sort, and accounts for just the attitudes Putnam cites as flowing from them. If AC is right, there is no reason to accept that the Putnam-Nozick case exemplifies Timmons's features (3), (4), or (5). Cast in a eudaimonist light, part of the disagreement is due to the differences between Putnam's and Nozick's conceptions of what human well-being involves, and in particular their conceptions of the roles of governmental as opposed to other

[93] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 164 (emphasis in original).
[94] Ibid., 165.
[95] Timmons, "The Limits of Moral Constructivism," 412–13.

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social institutions for the provision of education.[96] But the facts—both the purely empirical facts, and the way these facts *fit* with other facts in constituting good lives and good relations between persons as parts of those lives—are exceedingly complex. These facts involve substantive judgments about what we have reason to do, and AC need not accept that either party has gotten these judgments right.

Furthermore, the way in which AC takes reasons to be public means that the mere fact of this sort of disagreement must result in a degree of disequilibrium. Neither Nozick nor Putnam would be justified in seeing his own position as beyond reasonable doubt; by hypothesis, each is perfectly aware that there is reasonable doubt about his position. That does not mean that Nozick and Putnam may hold their positions only tentatively; given their best assessments of things, they see the conclusions they have reached as irresistible. Still, a considerable degree of epistemic humility is appropriate. Just as Anscombe suggested, claims about what one has most reason to do are always corrigible. If AC is true, then in the dispute between Putnam and Nozick, at most one of them is right; perhaps both are wrong and there is some third position that represents the facts about how human beings may best organize themselves so that they educate their young in a way most conducive to human flourishing. The present point is that both Putnam and Nozick see those facts as objective, and the contempt they feel for the pattern of responses in the other is a reflection of that presumption of objectivity. Those attitudes are perfectly consistent with the claims of AC. Moreover, AC can explain why the disagreement is so deep: it is just because each sees the reasons for his own view as so deeply tied to what is necessary for human welfare that each has the attitude he does toward the other's insensitivity. But since on AC there is no reason to think that *either* Putnam or Nozick is in possession of the facts as practical wisdom would see them, AC is not committed to the pernicious relativism that Timmons deplores. AC neither sees them as talking past each other, nor maintains that each may be fully vindicated by his own lights. Instead, it holds that there *is* a standard of correctness to be applied—the truth about what conduces to good human lives—and that that standard can be vindicated only by the best exercise of reason and judgment of which we are capable.

VIII. Conclusion

The promise of constructivism about practical rationality is the hope it holds of avoiding both the metaphysical and epistemological problems of recognitionalism and the lack of fidelity to the experience of responding to reasons which is characteristic of views that doubt that there is practical truth, or that our practical judgments aspire to track a

[96] Presumably, they do not disagree over the role of education in a good human life.

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normative reality. The Kantian version of the constructivist enterprise lives or dies on its ability to precipitate substantive reasons for action from a conception of rationality as procedural and suitable for rational beings considered purely as such. The viability of Aristotelian constructivism, in contrast, depends on there being truth about how to live well, and on that truth's being something that is constructed by human judgments about what a good life is. Such truth (if it exists) would be the most hard-won of human intellectual and moral accomplishments, and my aim here has not been to set it out. Instead, in the framework of practical truth constructed from a substantive conception of successful practical rationality, directed at the goal of living good human lives, I hope to have sketched an approach appropriate for understanding objectively wise practical rationality and objectively good human lives.

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