

NON-NATURAL NATURAL LAW: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ARISTOTLE AND ROSS

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ABSTRACT

Aristotelianism is often considered to be a version of naturalism. As a result, non-naturalism is often considered to be incompatible with Aristotelianism. In this paper, I will show that the Aristotelian can actually accept much of what the non-naturalist wants to say. I will show that the Aristotelian can accept a non-natural account of the good, need not be concerned by G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument and that, as long as we carefully consider and define our terms, they can accept much of non-naturalism in abstract. This then paves the way for the possibility of a non-natural natural law and should go some way to challenging the prevailing orthodoxy that Aristotelianism is a version of naturalism. I do not go so far as to label Aristotelianism a form of non-naturalism as there are some important areas of disagreement. Instead, I think that Aristotelianism should count as its own label and that it will resist any attempts to label it a form of naturalism, non-naturalism or, indeed, supernaturalism.

Keywords: Aristotelianism; Naturalism; Non-Naturalism; The Open-Question Argument; Metaethics.

Introduction

In this paper, I am going to demonstrate that the gap between Aristotelianism and non-naturalism is not as great as it may at first seem. I will show three things. First, that the Aristotelian can accept a non-natural account of the good. Second, that the Open Question Argument need not concern the Aristotelian and finally I will show that, as long as we clearly define our terms, the Aristotelian can affirm much of non-naturalism in abstract. I will not be defending Aristotelianism or non-naturalism in this paper. Nor, due to limits on space, will I be able to dedicate enough time to fully articulate and explore either of them. All I am trying to do is to demonstrate that there are ways of understanding Aristotelianism whereby it is conceptually closer to non-naturalism than we might at first assume.

Before I outline an Aristotelian account of the good, I will first define non-naturalism. In its broadest sense, non-naturalism is the thesis that moral philosophy is autonomous from the natural sciences. There are a

number of further definitions for non-naturalism, but there are two (closely related) definitions that are useful for our purposes. First, non-naturalism is the view that moral properties, such as goodness, exist but that they are not reducible or identical to natural properties in any interesting sense of the word natural. Second, non-naturalism is the view that moral predicates and terms cannot be analyzed or explained in non-normative terms. We will mostly be interested in the first definition. However, it should be noted that the first definition, to some extent, implies the second definition because one explanation for why moral predicates/normative terms cannot be analysed in non-normative/natural terms is that normative terms denote non-natural properties.

An Aristotelian Account of the Good

I will now outline an Aristotelian account of the good. I do not claim that each and every Aristotelian will affirm this account, nor do I claim that Aristotle himself would affirm every aspect. However, I hope that, although this is my own take on Aristotle, most Aristotelians will recognise and affirm most of it, even if they disagree about some of the more minor details.

According to the Aristotelian things have a form,² and flowing from this form come one or more ends. As an example, a bee is directed towards living in a hive and making honey because this is part of what it means to be a bee. A bee then has the form of a bee and the end of living in a hive. Similarly, wolves are directed at living in packs, acorns are directed towards growing into oak trees, and so on. When a bee lives and works in a hive it is behaving in accordance with its ends and is more fully instantiating its form. We can reasonably say that it is behaving as it 'should'. If a beekeeper observed that one of his honey bees refused to live in a hive and produce honey he would wonder what was going wrong. He would think 'It shouldn't be doing that!' and he would look for an explanation as to why; perhaps the bee is sick or something. Thus, we can say that because of the form of the bees they 'should' behave in certain ways. This is part of what it means to have a form and ends. When a thing fulfils its ends it is behaving as it 'should' and is more perfectly instantiating its form, i.e. it is doing and being everything that it should do and be. This means that when a thing acts in accordance with its form and fulfils its ends it is being a better example of its kind. To use the language of Geach we can reasonably say that it is "a good K" (Geach, 1956).

As Aristotle highlights, "Let us now turn back again to the good which is the object of our search, and ask what it can possibly be; because it appears to vary with the action or art. It is one thing in medicine and

another in strategy, and similarly in all the other sciences. What then, is the good of each particular one? Surely it is that for the sake of which everything else is done. In medicine this is health; in strategy, victory; in architecture, a building – different things in different arts, but in every action and pursuit it is the *end*, since it is for the sake of this that everything else is done. Consequently, if there is any one thing that is the end of all actions, this will be the practical good – or goods, if there are more than one” (Aristotle, NE. 1.7. 1097a15-25). Here Aristotle ties goodness to ends. In this passage he is obviously referring to the good of human activities, but in later passages (for example, NE. 1.7.1097b20-1098a20) he applies this same schema to the natural world at large pointing out that plants have different ends to animals and that animals have different ends to humans and so on. The point of these passages is that a subject’s good is the fulfilment of its end or ends.

As Veatch explains, using the example of an acorn, “the good of the acorn is simply the attainment of its natural end or perfection, the good of anything being that at which it naturally aims – or, since the word ‘aims’ in English usually connotes conscious purpose, we might paraphrase the Aristotelian dictum by saying that the good of anything is simply that towards which it naturally tends or to which it is naturally ordered in its development” (Veatch, 2003, p. 28).

This then is the basis of the Aristotelian account of goodness and ultimately all other forms of goodness will only be so by reference to the idea of a thing fulfilling its ends and being a good K (as per Geach). We now have an account of how things can be a good K, but there are other sorts of goodness such as intrinsic and instrumental goodness. How do we account for these?

Something will be intrinsically good because it fulfils a thing’s ends. Straightaway, many philosophers may feel that this flies in the face of the definition of an intrinsic good. Many philosophers believe that intrinsic goods are good simpliciter, i.e., in and of itself, without reference to anything else, and not because it so happens to do something in particular (such as fulfil a thing’s ends). As a result, something that is intrinsically good, such as pleasure,³ is good simpliciter.

However, when an Aristotelian talks about an intrinsic good they are talking about something that is intrinsically ‘good for’ a thing. They are intrinsically good for a thing because they fulfil its ends in and of themselves. Knowledge, for example, is intrinsically good for human beings. This is not because knowledge allows its possessors to do something or brings them pleasure (or whatever) although it may well do this too. Instead, it is simply good for humans. It makes us better examples of our

kind. A man with knowledge and friendship is in a better position (in at least these regards) than a man without knowledge or friendship.⁴ This, I think, is intuitively obvious. I know which I would rather be.

We can now see why certain things are going to be bad for another thing. Something will be bad for humans if they frustrate a human end for example lying to somebody is (at least pro tanto) going to be bad for them because it frustrates their end of knowledge. Killing them will be very bad because it frustrates all of their ends.

We can distinguish between two sorts of instrumental goods within the Aristotelian schema. These are similar to how we normally think of them. The first sort are simply 'good'/effective ways of getting us something that we want but they are not valuable in and of themselves. They are a 'good' means to an end whatever that end may be. Stock examples include things like money and material possessions. They are not in and of themselves valuable but potentially they can be used to help us achieve our goals. A ladder may be a good way of getting over a wall, but whether getting over the wall is a worthwhile activity is entirely another matter.

The second sort of instrumental goods are things that are a means to something that is intrinsically good for you. Stock examples include things like medicine. Medicine in and of itself is not good or bad, but it is a way of achieving the intrinsic good of health (as an example). The two sorts of instrumental goods will, of course, blend together and it may well be that some things are a mixture of the two. This then completes the Aristotelian account of the nature of goodness and the different ways that things can be good.

In order to arrive at a full ethical schema an Aristotelian would now need to identify the form of humanity. Once they had done this, they could identify what we need to have, and what we need to do, to be good humans. They could then formulate a list of (human) intrinsic goods and, using these concepts, they could then create a list of duties. It is not my intention to do this here and so I shall leave it to other Aristotelians to complete this task elsewhere.

Non-Natural Natural Law and Essential Reasons

In this section, I will show that the Aristotelian can actually accept much of the non-naturalist's definition of goodness, and thus that the conflict between the two positions may not be that great. As we shall see, where they do clash is over the existence of goodness simpliciter. Moore, Ross and other traditional non-naturalists believe in goodness simpliciter,

although whether they are committed to this because of their non-naturalism per se is another matter.

In order to see how much of the non-naturalist's account of goodness the Aristotelian can accept let's begin by giving a non-naturalistic definition of goodness. Philip Stratton-Lake in his introduction to W. D. Ross's *'The Right And The Good'* gives a non-naturalistic definition of (intrinsic) goodness. He says that "for *X* to be good is for *X* to have features that give us reason to adopt some pro-attitude towards it" (Ross, 2002, p. xxii). A pro-attitude is an agent's attitude toward an action or object and includes states such as desire and approval. So, if we accept this as a fairly standard non-naturalistic definition of goodness, how much of this definition can the Aristotelian accept?

As far as I can see the Aristotelian can accept all of the definition given earlier albeit with some qualifications. Recall that for the Aristotelian the sorts of things that will be good for an agent will be relative to the agent in question. This is because something is good for an agent if it fulfils that agent's ends. The agent's ends are then defined by the agent's form or essence/nature. Now whether or not something fulfils a thing's ends will, of course, depend upon its properties or features. As a result, the Aristotelian can accept the first part of Stratton-Lake's definition; 'for *X* to be good is for *X* to have **features**...'

The Aristotelian can also accept the second part of Stratton-Lake's definition; '... that give us reason to adopt some pro-attitude towards it'. Recall earlier that I argued that a thing 'should' act in accordance with its ends because everything is directed towards the fulfilment of its ends. I didn't define this 'should' in any particular way. Indeed, I am not sure how much more there is to say about this 'should', but it is fairly easy to imagine that this 'should' relates to the concept of a reason. If humans 'should' pursue knowledge, because this is in accordance with their form/nature, then surely it follows that they have a reason to pursue knowledge. Perhaps the 'should' and the reason are just two different ways of looking at the same thing or perhaps the reason follows from the 'should'. For our purposes, it doesn't matter, and it will depend upon one's definition of a reason. Personally, I suspect that reasons are fairly basic and so they may simply be two different ways of looking at the same thing. As a result, the Aristotelian can accept the second part of Stratton-Lake's definition.

This can be further illustrated with an example; suppose that one of the ends of humanity is knowledge and suppose that *X* is a source of knowledge. This means that one of the features of *X* is that it is a source of knowledge. Further, since one of the ends of humanity is to pursue knowledge this means that we 'should' pursue knowledge. Since *X* is a

source of knowledge it seems that we have, at least some pro tanto, reason to pursue (or to approve of, or to desire) X. Thus, it seems that the Aristotelian can affirm all of Stratton-Lake's definition.

Where the Aristotelian and the non-naturalist such as Stratton-Lake or Ross will come apart is over the idea of goodness simpliciter. Stratton-Lake and other contemporary non-naturalists believe that if X has a certain feature (call it feature A) then because X has feature A, and for that reason alone, all rational agents have reason to adopt some pro-attitude towards X. As a result, X is good simpliciter. Simply by merit of having feature A X is good without reference to anything else. If this is the case X would be good simpliciter.

The Aristotelian here will disagree with the non-naturalist. For the Aristotelian whether or not feature A gives us reason to adopt some pro-attitude towards X will depend ultimately on whether feature A is fulfilling of our ends as defined by our form or nature. As a result, the reasons that we have will always be relative to our form or nature. Thus, I think that the Aristotelian can only believe in agent relative reasons. This is because the reasons that an agent has will be determined by/relative to the agent's form or nature. This means that whether or not something is good (for that agent) will ultimately depend on the agent's form. Therefore, there will be no such thing as good simpliciter. Goodness will always be relative to an agent's form or nature.⁵

However, the non-naturalist such as Ross or Stratton-Lake may well believe that some features, such as A, provide all agents with a reason to adopt some pro-attitude toward X, regardless of the agent's form or nature. As a result, the non-naturalist may well postulate agent neutral reasons and thus good simpliciter (something that is good regardless of the agent in question).

To further clarify the distinction between the non-naturalist and the Aristotelian we can imagine that the agent neutral reasons, which the non-naturalist postulates, flow ultimately from the object (X) or feature (A) itself. However, the agent relative reasons, which the Aristotelian postulates, flow ultimately from the subject's nature or form (perhaps then via the object X or feature A in question). Call these sorts of reasons essential reasons because they flow ultimately from a thing's essence.

Thus, the Aristotelian can actually accept much of what non-naturalists, such as Ross or Stratton-Lake, want to say about goodness. Potentially this may then lead to a version of non-natural natural law ethics! This seems like a contradiction at first, but I do not think that this is the case on closer inspection. The reason there is 'natural' in natural law ethics is because the good and the right for an agent will be determined ultimately

by the agent's essence or nature. However, this makes no claim at all about whether goodness or reasons themselves should be defined naturally, supernaturally or non-naturally. The Aristotelian is free to adopt any of these accounts and it is certainly open to him to adopt a non-natural account of goodness as I have outlined it.

Foot's Account

Before I proceed any further, I shall engage with Foot's account of goodness and reasons in her book *Natural Goodness*. Foot is a pre-eminent neo-Aristotelian. In *Natural Goodness* she attempts to explain the relationship between an Aristotelian account of goodness and practical rationality. Thus, she is interested in a similar question to the one which occupies this paper. As a result, it would be remiss of me not to engage with her. I will outline Foot's account of the relationship between goodness and practical rationality. I will then highlight a flaw in this account to which my account is not subject. I will then consider a potential response Foot might make and will show that this response fails. I will therefore conclude that my Aristotelian account of goodness is to be favoured over Foot's.

Foot grounds her account of goodness in what she calls 'Aristotelian categoricals' or 'natural norms'. Aristotelian categoricals "speak of the life cycle of individuals of a given species" (Foot, 2001, p. 29) and are "to do with the way that certain features appear or that certain things are done in organisms of a given species either by the whole organism or by their characteristics or parts" (Foot, 2001, p. 32). In essence an Aristotelian categorical is a statement about a feature of a species, such as its appearance or behaviour, which allows it to satisfy its needs and to live out its life cycle. Some examples of Aristotelian categoricals are: rabbits eat grass, deer have antlers and wolves hunt in packs. This is because each of the statements explains how the animal lives and satisfies its needs. Foot believes that this basic schema can be applied to human beings.

She suggests that it is possible, despite all the diversity in human life, to give a very general account of human life and necessities. She starts by listing certain physical attributes of human beings, for example "physical properties such as the kind of larynx that allows of the myriad of sounds that make up human language, as well as the kind for hearing that can distinguish them" (Foot, 2001, p. 43). She also lists certain mental properties such as imagination and the ability to learn. She says that we need these attributes in order to fulfil our natural norms and that, as a result of this, lacking them should be considered a deficiency.

Foot highlights that not all defects necessarily disadvantage the individual who possesses them. She writes "some defects have as we might say 'a reflexive role', in that the deprivations comes primarily to the defective individual; but that there are some that chiefly ... affect other people" (Foot, 2001, p. 43). Some examples here might include a parent who lacks parental instincts to care for their children. These sorts of deficiencies are still deficiencies even though they do not disadvantage their possessor because they break away from the natural norm.

She goes on to suggest that human beings need virtues because it is the virtues that allow them to fulfil their natural norms. A good example would be loyalty; human beings need to co-operate, live in groups and work together and thus a loyal human being is going to fulfil these natural norms with much greater ease than a disloyal human being. Further, Foot suggests that human beings need to be able to trust each other and to keep promises because it is only through doing this that we can bind another person's will, and this is an essential part of living together, trusting each other and relying on each other.

Foot distinguishes between voluntary actions which are naturally deficient and other natural deficiencies over which we have no control such as blindness or deafness. She correctly points out that moral evaluations are usually concerned with voluntary actions and thus the term 'immoral' would only apply to voluntary actions and not natural deficiencies over which we have no control. This is obviously an important observation because we do not want to accuse people of being immoral for things over which they have no control. Ultimately Foot grounds her account of goodness in these natural norms. A person is a good person when they fulfil their natural norms and possess the necessary virtues to do this. A person is bad when the act contrary to their natural norms. Similarly, an act is good when it is in accordance with our natural norms, and bad when it runs counter to them.

It should now be becoming clear that Foot's natural norms roughly correlate to standard Aristotelian ends and final causes. Foot has merely tried to find a way of holding on to Aristotle's teleological ethical schema without necessarily having to accept his full metaphysical schema (the distinction between act and potency, the four causes, and so on) and with this I have no quarrel. As a result, if the reader finds Foot's natural norms more intelligible than the concept of ends and final causes then they can simply insert natural norms in their place. In both cases there is a 'should' that applies to humans and my argument about the relationship between this and reasons, put forward in the previous section, can follow straightforwardly.

Foot then tries to explain the relationship between her account of goodness/natural norms and practical rationality i.e., reasons. It is here that we begin to come apart. Ultimately, I think that, whilst Foot's analysis and account is insightful, it fails in one key respect. I hope that my suggestions then correct this error.

Foot says that "acting morally is part of practical rationality" (Foot, 2001, p. 9) and that we should see "goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of the thing itself" (Foot, 2001, p. 63). She argues for this claim, using Quinn (1993), by first highlighting that we usually see practical rationality as extremely important. However, if practical rationality is entirely unconnected to morality then why do we consider it to be so important? If it has no connection to rationality then an agent could be entirely practically rational whilst pursuing evil and despicable desires, but it then becomes unclear why practical rationality is so important. Foot explains "And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of the article, what then would be so important about practical rationality? In effect he is pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it [i.e., an account which separates it from goodness entirely, and which ties it solely to desires and preferences etc.] is true" (Foot, 2001, p. 62).

I have no quarrel with Foot's criticism of the Humean account of practical rationality. However, I think her account of the relationship between practical rationality and goodness is insufficient. Foot does not explain her view in considerably greater detail than I have outlined here. However, she seems to be saying that because something is good that gives us at least some reason to pursue (or desire, promote, and so on) that thing and, conversely, that because something is bad that gives us at least some reason to do the opposite. This would explain why goodness sets "a necessary condition of practical rationality" and is therefore "at least a part-determinant of the thing itself" (Foot, 2001, p. 63). It seems to me that the problem with this account is that it is back to front. This is best illustrated using an example.

To borrow a well-used example, let's imagine that a child is drowning in a pond. We can save the child with limited or no risk to ourselves and with minimal inconvenience (perhaps by throwing them a lifebuoy or something). Let's grant that under circumstances like this we are morally obliged to save them. According to Foot's analysis we have reason to save the child because it is the right thing to do. After all, it is good or right to save the child and, according to Foot, because goodness sets a necessary

constraint on practical rationality, we presumably then have reason to save the child because it is the right thing to do. However, this analysis seems to be fundamentally wrong. The reason we ought to throw the lifebuoy to the child (for example) is because it will save the child's life! If we do not, they will die! The fact that it is then good or right to throw the lifebuoy to the child then follows from the fact that we have reason to do it. If we deny this analysis, and adopt Foot's account, then we are obliged to say that the fact that the child is drowning provides us with no reason for action. It is only because it so happens that saving children is good or right that we then have reason to do it. The child's drowning, in and of itself, provides us with no reasons for action either way, and this would seem to be a strange conclusion. As a result, Foot's analysis seems to have put the cart before the horse. It is not the case that goodness provides us with reason for action, instead it is because we have reasons (of at least a certain sort) to do certain acts that they become good. This analysis allows us to have a necessary link between an objective account of goodness and practical rationality without us having to say that children drowning (for example) provides us with no reason for action. Thus, this analysis has all the advantages of Foot's analysis without some of the counterintuitive results that follow from her analysis.

Foot could try to avoid this criticism by acknowledging that the fact that the child is drowning does provide us with some reason for action, but then insist that the fact that it is right or good to save the child provides us with another additional reason. This response would have some strength because it would avoid the counterintuitive result that a child drowning (for example) provides us with no reason for action.

However, this response still seems fundamentally flawed because it multiplies the number of reasons we have beyond necessity, and as a result it falls afoul of Ockham's Razor, and because it provides us with no clear explanation of how those reasons relate to each other. If we adopt this analysis of practical rationality and goodness, then the goodness or rightness of the act provides us with a reason for acting, and the circumstances themselves (e.g., the fact that a child is drowning) provides us with an additional reason for acting.

However, this is one set of reasons too many. We only need one justification for acting, not two. Further, if we have two sets of reasons then it now seems unclear what the relationship is between these two sets of reasons. It seems possible that they might come apart whereby the circumstances provide us with reason to act in one way, but the goodness of a different course of action provides us with reason to act in that different way. It then seems extremely unclear whether there is then a necessary

link between practical rationality and goodness because we might have lots of different reasons to act in mutually exclusive ways. Practical rationality might not then necessarily require us to do that which is good.

If we try to avoid this possibility by insisting that the circumstances will never provide us with reason to take an alternative course of action to the good or right one, then the question now becomes: why is that the case? If they are different reasons, then why should they always agree? Mightn't it be because the very reasons for action that the circumstances provide us with are the same reasons that make that same course of action good or right? In which case, haven't we simply counted them twice? To say that we ought to save the child because the child is drowning and additionally because it is the right thing to do seems to have counted our reasons twice. Aren't there really only one set of reasons which both recommend a particular course of action and which make that course of action right or good? If this is the case, then my Aristotelian analysis of goodness and reasons follows straightforwardly.

As a result, it seems that Foot's account of goodness and rationality is fundamentally flawed because it seems to get the relationship between goodness and reasons back to front. The best way to correct this flaw is by adopting my account, and any hybrid account, whereby the circumstances provide us with one set of reasons for action and the rightness of a course of action provide us with another separate set of reasons for action, seems to multiply our reasons beyond necessity and risk undermining the very relationship between practical rationality and goodness that Foot is so keen to explain. Therefore, my Aristotelian account of the relationship between goodness and reasons should be favoured over Foot's. I shall now turn to G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument and will show that, using my Aristotelian account of goodness, the Aristotelian need not be concerned by it as a criticism.

The Open Question Argument

Twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy has been heavily influenced by G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument put forward in chapter one of his *'Principia Ethica'* (1903). The Open Question Argument is interested in the nature of intrinsic goodness. After engaging with, and rejecting, the possibility that intrinsic goodness is a nonsense/not a property it concludes that intrinsic goodness is a property. It then attempts to show that the property of intrinsic goodness cannot be identified with or reduced to any natural or supernatural property. Hence it is an attack upon naturalism and supernaturalism, and this led Moore to adopt a form of non-naturalism.

Many Aristotelians are concerned by G.E. Moore's Open Question Argument against ethical naturalism.⁶ Natural law theorists attempt to explain morality in terms of human nature, part of the natural world, and they believe that this is precisely what Moore's argument aims to show cannot be done. However, these Aristotelians are mistaken in this belief. Indeed, Moore himself attempted to explain why some things are intrinsically good and others are not by appealing to facts about the natural world. All Moore was claiming was that moral properties, although they may be explained or grounded in natural properties, cannot be reduced to, or equated with, natural properties. As a result, Moore's argument is aimed at accounts of ethical naturalism that postulate goodness simpliciter and which then attempt to equate or reduce the property of goodness simpliciter to a purely natural property (such as pleasure). Therefore, Moore is simply not interested in the Aristotelian account of goodness.

To illustrate this more clearly, I will briefly explain the Open Question Argument and how it works. In doing so it should become clear that, although this poses problems for versions of naturalism (and supernaturalism) which postulate goodness simpliciter, it poses no problems for the Aristotelian.

Stratton-Lake summarizes Moore's argument as follows:

- (1) If goodness could be defined naturalistically- that is, wholly in terms of natural properties – then the question of whether something that has those natural properties is good would not be an open question.
 - (2) The question of whether something that has some natural property is good is always open.
- So
- (3) Goodness cannot be defined wholly in terms of natural properties (Stratton-Lake, 2013, p. 7)⁷.

An open question is a substantive question, i.e., a question about which there could be serious disagreement between people who understand all of the terms that occur in the question. A closed question is simply a question that is not open. Some stock examples of closed questions include questions such as, one cannot seriously debate the marital status or gender of a bachelor because a bachelor is an unmarried man. If you understand what a bachelor is then you already know his gender and marital status. Similarly, one cannot debate whether someone's sister is female and so on.

Premise two seems to be true. It seems that we could know that something is pleasant (or that it faithfully resembles God and so on) and yet still reasonably ask whether it is in fact good. It would still be an open

question! Stratton-Lake explains “It is always an open question whether something that is pleasant, or which we desire to desire, or which causes the most happiness, is good or right” (Stratton-Lake, 2013, p. 7-8). As a result, premise two seems to be true.

If premise one is true, then it follows that goodness cannot be defined wholly in naturalistic terms. We can then modify the argument to attack supernaturalism by simply replacing the term the term ‘natural’ with ‘supernatural’ in Stratton-Lake’s formulation. This argument then counts against naturalism and supernaturalism. There may be potential responses that the naturalist and supernaturalist can make and these usually involve attacking premise one⁸. Whether or not these responses are successful is another matter⁹ and I will leave the defence of naturalism and supernaturalism to their proponents.

The Open Question Argument, however, says nothing at all about an Aristotelian conception of goodness. This is because the argument is only interested in goodness simpliciter. Premise one, indeed the whole argument, assumes that the naturalist will be saying that goodness simpliciter is a property that is identical to or reducible to a natural property or relation. However, the Aristotelian does not think that there is any single property of goodness instead it will always be, to quote Thomson (1994), ‘goodness-in-a-way’ and relative to the type of thing in question. The Aristotelian simply does not postulate goodness simpliciter which is what the Open Question Argument is interested in. This means that the Open Question Argument simply says nothing at all about an Aristotelian account of goodness and thus it need not concern us further. However, it should be noted that the Open Question Argument does count against both natural and supernatural accounts that postulate goodness simpliciter and thus this may give us reason to favour an Aristotelian account of goodness in their place.

Somebody could attempt to reformulate the Open Question Argument so that it was aimed at an Aristotelian account goodness.¹⁰ They could reformulate it something like this:

- (1) If a good X could be defined naturalistically - that is, wholly in terms of natural properties - then the question of whether something that has those natural properties is a good X would not be an open question.
 - (2) The question of whether something that has some natural property is a good X is always open.
- So
- (3) Good Xs cannot be defined wholly in terms of natural properties.

This new version of the argument attacks ‘good Xs’ i.e., good instances of a kind. The Aristotelian would be vulnerable to this version of

the Open Question Argument because the Aristotelian does believe in good instances of a kind, at least for things having a form. Is this reformulated version of the Open Question Argument a threat to Aristotelianism?

No, it is not. This reformulated argument fails because premise two is false when it comes to the Aristotelian account of the good and, more specifically, good instances of a kind. This can be illustrated with an example. Imagine that the X in question is a toaster. If we know that a particular toaster is energy efficient, reliable, it toasts bread well and looks good in your kitchen then we would know that it is a good toaster. The question of whether it is a good toaster would then be closed. This is because, as Thomson points out, being a toaster “sets the standards that a K has to meet if it is to be good qua K. Thus, being a toaster is being an artefact manufactured to toast, and that itself sets the following standard for being good qua toaster: toasting well” (Thomson, 2008, p. 21). This shows that in the case of the Aristotelian account of the good premise two is false. As a result, this reformulated Open Question Argument fails as a criticism of an Aristotelian account of the good.

Conclusion

To return to the first definition of non-naturalism (offered at the start of this paper), it was stated that non-naturalism is the view that moral properties, such as goodness, exist but that they are not reducible or identical to natural properties in any interesting sense of the word natural. Can the Aristotelian affirm this? In some sense they can, however, we will need to be very clear about what we mean by the word ‘natural’.

In contemporary metaethics and metaphysics it is often held that ‘natural’ properties are those properties accessible to and measurable by the sciences. The role of the scientist is to describe the natural world rather than to make any claim about how it (normatively) ‘ought’ to be, that remains the role of the ethicist or philosopher. As a result, the natural thought may be to conclude that these ‘natural’ properties, by their very nature, are fundamentally ‘descriptive’ rather than ‘prescriptive’ or ‘normative’. After all the discipline that measures them is fundamentally ‘descriptive’ rather than ‘prescriptive’ in nature. If we sever the ‘natural’ from the ‘normative’ then (excluding supernaturalism) we are left with non-naturalism.

Whether or not the Aristotelian can then affirm non-naturalism will depend upon how the Aristotelian conceptualises science. If the Aristotelian affirms this account of science and of the ‘natural’ then non-naturalism is readily available to him. This is because ends, being necessarily tied to the

normative and prescriptive, will automatically be outside the descriptive remit of science, and thus outside of the 'natural' realm.

At the same time, from a metaphysical perspective all of Aristotle's four causes are linked together. As a result, creating a conceptual gap between a thing's ends and its other (potentially descriptive) properties and features is going to be difficult. Therefore, given that a thing's normative properties and status is linked to its ends, severing 'descriptive' properties from 'normative' properties will also be difficult. This may make it more difficult for the Aristotelian to separate natural properties from normative properties if a broader conception of the 'natural' is held.¹¹

Ultimately, if we equate the 'natural' with the 'scientific' and we hold that the scientific is fundamentally 'descriptive' then non-naturalism is readily available to the Aristotelian. This is because ends, being necessarily tied to the normative and prescriptive, will automatically be outside the descriptive remit of science, and thus outside of the 'natural' realm. If, however, we allow for a broader conception of the 'natural' then non-naturalism may be less readily available to the Aristotelian. This question requires further study.

To return to the second definition of non-naturalism (offered at the start of this paper), it was stated that non-naturalism is the view that moral predicates and terms cannot be analyzed or explained in non-normative terms. The Aristotelian can readily affirm this. As Oderberg points out, when discussing Hume's Guillotine,¹² for the Aristotelian "it is value 'all the way down'" (Oderberg, 2000, p. 15). Metaphysically, a thing's ends are written into its very nature. As such, there are 'oughts' and 'values' in our metaphysics, and thus metaethics, right from the beginning and at every level of analysis. As a result, for the Aristotelian there is no way to analyse a normative claim entirely in non-normative terms. This is because there will be normative terms at every level of explanation.

To summarize, a number of conclusions follow from this paper. The first is that the Aristotelian can affirm a non-natural account of the good. The second is that the Aristotelian is unaffected by, and thus can affirm, the Open Question Argument. Finally, depending upon how we define our terms, the Aristotelian can affirm non-naturalism in abstract. That being said, I do not go so far as to conclude that Aristotelianism should be labelled a form of non-naturalism. There are some important areas of disagreement, for example around the existence of good simpliciter. However, I do affirm, and ultimately conclude, that the gap between the Aristotelian and the non-naturalist is not as great as it might at first appear.

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank Professor Philip Stratton-Lake for his encouragement and comments on an early version of this paper.

Notes

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² In this paper, I won't weigh in on the distinction between substantial and accidental form within the Aristotelian metaphysical schema. For our purposes, all we need to accept is that for at least some things 'what they are' (i.e., their form) tells us something about what they 'ought to do' (i.e., their ends). The reader can then insert any real-world example with which they are happy.

³ Many will dispute whether pleasure is intrinsically good, however, I merely offer it as an example and nothing of any weight rests on this.

⁴ Again, some may dispute these as examples of intrinsic goods in which case, for the purposes of this paper, they can insert any example with which they are satisfied. Nothing of weight rests on these as examples.

⁵ I shall label this account of goodness the Aristotelian account of goodness to distinguish it from goodness simpliciter. It can also be labelled an 'attributive account of goodness' or something to this effect, although it should be noted that strictly this would refer to the word *good* as an attributive adjective (as opposed to a predicative adjective) rather than the nature of goodness itself. That being said the language and nature of goodness are, of course, closely linked. See Geach (1956) for a lengthier discussion of this topic.

⁶ For example, see Veatch (2003).

⁷ We can then modify the argument to attack supernaturalism by simply replacing the term the term 'natural' with 'supernatural.'

⁸ See Boyd (1988) for a defence of naturalism, and Adams (1999) for a defence of supernaturalism.

⁹ For a potential counter response to Boyd and Adams see Alexander (2012).

¹⁰ My thanks go to David Oderberg for pointing this out.

¹¹ Perhaps one in which the descriptive/non-normative is equated with the natural.

¹² Hume's Guillotine, whilst being in a similar vein, is a different argument to Moore's Open Question Argument (although how one answers one may well influence how one answers the other). As a result, I don't claim to have adequately addressed Hume's Guillotine here. I am merely borrowing Oderberg's words since they make the point I want to make. For a lengthier discussion of Hume's Guillotine see Oderberg (2000).

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Received/Recebido: 21/01/21
Approved/Aprovado: 06/04/21