INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING EUDAEMONISM

That eudaemonism is an attractive structure for a moral theory is attested both by its adoption by many of the ancients[1] and by much of the contemporary interest in virtue ethics. There is a problem, however, in that the ancient theorists often tied their eudaemonism to a form of natural teleology which is certainly not acceptable in detail now, while modern work in the field is often subject, if not to guilt, then at least to suspicion, by association. Moreover, confirmation for the suspicion may readily be found in the work of contemporary eudaemonists who adhere to or seek to rehabilitate (perhaps in an improved form) the ancients' natural teleology.[2]

In the current project, I attempt to move beyond this and toward a version of

[1] Among the ancient eudaemonists are Aristotle, Epicurus and the Stoics. In fact, among the ancient Greeks, only the Cyrenaics were *not* eudaemonists of some stripe. (Annas 1993)

[2] E.g., Arnhart 1998, Irwin 1980, Rasmussen and Den Uyl 1991.

eudaemonism independent of its ancient moorings in natural teleology. More specifically, I seek to move toward a *constructivist eudaemonism*, which will bring together and rely upon theses within three areas of long-standing philosophical interest to me, *eudaemonism*, *constructivism* and *instrumental reason*. Together, these constitute the background against which what I am attempting should be understood. In the way of brief explanation, I offer the following.

First, by *eudaemonism*, I refer to the common structure of the family of theories in which the central moral conception is *eudaemonia*, understood as "living well" or "having a good life."[3] In the form I take to be best, and which I shall therefore highlight, the virtues are understood as constitutive means to achieving or having such a life.[4] Though I prefer "eudaemonism" as a label, the position has a close affinity, sometimes amounting to identity, with what is commonly called "virtue ethics" or "perfectionism."

Though the structure of eudaemonism is appealing, it needs to be separated and considered apart from the traditional grounding of eudaemonism in natural teleology – that is, in ends, purposes or goals that are supposed to somehow be given to us "by nature." In my view, for ethics, natural ends are a dead end. (Nor am I satisfied with Hurka's 'intuitive appeal is enough.'[5]) In part, the reason for disconnecting eudaemonism from theories of natural ends is to avoid the guilt or suspicion by association mentioned

[3] I think it misleading, without further explanation, to employ the traditional translation of "eudaemonia" as "happiness."

[4] This is still not sufficient to distinguish eudaemonism, or my favored version of it, from all other moral theories, but I will not attempt anything more complete here. A fuller characterization will occupy a substantial portion of Chapter Four, "The Structure of Eudaemonism."

[5] Hurka 1993, 28-33.

above. But also, it is important to see that there is an intelligible and attractive doctrine that *can* be separated from the natural teleology, that eudaemonism does not stand or fall with the fortunes of natural teleology.

Second, I find *constructivism* a plausible account of what we mean or should mean by ethical objectivity. The question to which constructivism provides one (kind of) answer is, "What is it for an ethical claim or judgment to be true or correct or justified?" Constructivism offers what might be called a *practical-reason-first* account of moral objectivity. This is best approached by contrasting it with two other possible answers. On one hand, there are substantive moral realists[6] who think that the correctness of moral claims depends upon the existence of moral facts somehow "out there." The moral facts pertain to the existence or instantiation of moral or value-properties, to what is right, good or valuable and to the relations between these facts. On a substantive realist's view, a correct moral claim is one that gets things right about the moral facts. In general, the substantive realist thinks both that there are such facts and that we have some kind of cognitive access to them.[7] At the other extreme are those who may be termed moral

[6] I borrow the term from Christine Korsgaard:

> There is a trivial sense in which everyone who thinks ethics isn't hopeless is a realist. I will call this *procedural* moral realism, and I will contrast it to what I will call *substantive* moral realism. Procedural moral realism is the view that there are answers to moral questions, that is, that there are right and wrong ways to answer them. Substantive moral realism is the view that there are answers to moral questions *because* there are moral facts or truths, which those questions ask *about*. (Korsgaard 1996b, 35. See also surrounding discussion, 34-37.)

Constructivists differ from substantive moral realists not in whether they accept that there are correct moral claims but in how they understand the correctness of moral claims.

[7] Technically, these are distinct assumptions. In principle, one could be a moral realist in the sense of believing that there are moral truths, without being a cognitivist – that is, without believing that we have any way of knowing what the moral truths are. Tristram Engelhardt, if I understand him correctly, holds this view. But the realist claim, that there are moral truths, and the cognitivist claim, that we have some

skeptics or nihilists[8] who, in one way or another, deny that any moral claims are true or correct or, at least, that there can be any knowledge of their truth or correctness. Interestingly, the skeptics typically share the same model of moral truth or cognition as the substantive realists. Both think of moral claims as being correct or incorrect in virtue of their relation to independent moral facts.[9] The moral facts are truth-makers for correct moral judgments. The constructivist's approach is different. He agrees with the substantive moral realists that the skeptics are mistaken (there *are* correct or justified moral claims) and with the skeptics that the mysterious properties or entities to which the substantive realists appeal don't exist.[10] Instead, he holds that we can identify correct moral reasoning – or better, correct practical reasoning – at least to the extent of being able to recognize better and worse instances of such reasoning. In substantive realist theories, correct moral reasoning is reasoning that tracks or tends to track the moral facts; in constructivist theories, the order of dependence is reversed: what is morally correct is whatever is picked out by correct moral reasoning.[11]

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way of knowing what is morally right, are so regularly accepted or denied together, that it is for practical purposes sufficient, on one hand, to call someone a realist or a cognitivist or, on the other, to call her a non-realist or non-cognitivist, to indicate her position on both questions.

[8] Harman 1977; Harman, in Harman and Thomson 1996; Mackie 1977. Others with different terminological preferences may call such theorists subjectivists, relativists or non-cognitivists. Since the terminology is unsettled, not all who are described or self-described by one of these terms would fit within the parameters of my definition.

[9] More generally, I think the same line of thought is often behind relativism or subjectivism. The model remains the same: there is a comparison or matching between, on the one hand, behaviors or beliefs, and on the other, standards, but the only standards that seem (to the relativist or subjectivist) to be available for comparison are social or personal.

[10] Or, if they do exist, they are epistemically inaccessible to us and therefore useless for the guidance of our deliberation or action.

[11] Though I think that much can be said on behalf of the coherence and plausibility of constructivism as a way of understanding moral objectivity, I don't intend to devote much space to directly and abstractly defending it. That is why there are chapters addressing both eudaemonism and instrumental reasoning but not one on constructivism. The best argument that we can make progress in moral theory

Above, I indicated that it was better to think of the constructivist as focusing upon practical reasoning rather than just upon moral reasoning. This is because I take practical reasoning to be a broader classification than moral reasoning, and if correct practical reasoning is the constructivist's focus, then correct moral reasoning should be understood as a special case. Briefly, practical reasoning is, in the first instance, reasoning about what to do, with a range from the trivial to the momentous, from whether to scratch an itch to whether to fight in a war. Moral issues tend to be clustered toward the momentous end of the spectrum and often share further features.[12] If I am correct in thinking of moral reasoning as a special case of practical reasoning, there is no room for the suggestion that something might be practically correct but morally wrong or morally correct but practically wrong. I take the two, moral and non-moral practical reasoning, to be continuous and the distinction between them to be fuzzy (but not, for that reason, a non-distinction).[13]

Returning to the main line of discussion, if the constructivist's project is to be carried through, some account of correct practical reasoning will clearly be needed.

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along constructivist lines consists of progress made. That is what I hope to provide.

[12] Among these are the non-overridability of moral requirements by other, non-moral, considerations, the fact that we take ourselves and expect others to have reasons for holding moral positions, and that there is some kind of requirement of impartiality. Though these are characteristic, I think that, neither singly nor in combination, do they provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a moral issue. All seem subject to counter-examples such that either some issue that would normally be classified as moral fails to meet the conditions or some issue not normally so classified succeeds (or both).

[13] Note that if there is a distinction between moral and non-moral practical reasoning, it is at least in principle possible that correct practical reasoning can be identified, as the constructivist maintains, but that no correct practical reasoning leads to recognizably moral conclusions and therefore that, contrary to what I claimed above, moral reasoning would not be a special case of practical reasoning. In that case, I think we would do better to say that practical reasoning does not lead to anything that can properly be called a *moral* theory. Perhaps our practical reasoning will turn out to be too deeply infected by contingent differences in the starting points from which agents begin their reasoning.

Ideally, this account should itself be either uncontroversial or readily defensible, which brings us to the third area of philosophical interest mentioned above, for I wish to suggest that a promising place to begin is with the obvious power and normative force of *instrumental reasoning*. Many recent thinkers have been similarly inclined,[14] but, at least as often, proposals to begin developing a moral theory grounded in instrumental reasoning have been met with skepticism, generally centering around claims that a correct moral theory must have some bearing on the ends that we ought to pursue, not just address questions about the most effective or efficient ways to pursue given ends.[15] I agree with the critics that moral theory must bear on the correctness of ends, but find unconvincing the claim or argument that instrumental reasoning cannot do so. At one time, I thought (or hoped) that *everything* needed for moral theory could be done in terms of instrumental reasoning. I no longer think so: if we take instrumental reasoning seriously enough, we will be forced beyond it.[16] However, it remains interesting and, I think, fruitful to see how far we *can* go, starting from instrumental reasoning.[17]

The general shape of the view that I am trying to work towards is that, due to certain pervasive features of human life and action, especially features having to do with conflicts between or among goals, people have reasons to acquire systems of goals that

[14] E.g., Schmidtz 1995, Gauthier 1986.

[15] E.g., Piper 1986.

[16] In other words, in taking instrumental reasoning as a starting point, I do not mean it to be also a stopping point. However, if, as I believe, there are ways in which practical reasoning extends beyond the instrumental, I will not rely upon them.

[17] If instrumental reasoning pushes us beyond itself, does that provide us with a sense in which we can, after all, do everything needed for moral theory in terms of instrumental reasoning? Not necessarily. Dialectical pressures internal to our understanding of instrumental reasoning may lead us to recognize a place for non-instrumental practical reasoning without fully specifying the form or content of that non-instrumental reasoning.

have the kind of structure recommended by eudaemonism, that is, in which there is an over-arching goal of living well or having a good life and to which the virtues are constitutive means. The argument I shall present unfolds in several stages, and it may not always be obvious how the different pieces are meant to fit together. To make matters easier, what follows is a sketch of the main phases of the argument.

The first two chapters are aimed at ground-clearing. Each takes as its target a prominent theory and seeks to exhibit its inadequacy for the purposes of the current project. By implication, there is room for and need for alternatives.

In the first chapter, "The Insufficiency of Natural Ends," I focus upon natural teleology[18] – the idea that there are ends or norms somehow set for us by nature – with the objective of dissociating eudaemonism from these traditional moorings. The attempt is guided by two thoughts: First, on an acceptable account of what natural teleology consists in, it will turn out not to be satisfactory for the purposes of moral theory. We *can* make sense of natural teleology, but on the best understanding, it is unhelpful for ethics: On the face of it, it entails counter-intuitive consequences, and, even if those are avoided, appears to deliver inapplicable prescriptions. Moreover, however it is understood, it confuses explanation with justification and fails to address genuine moral perplexity.

For these reasons, eudaemonism should not, if we can avoid it, be identified or inseparably associated with natural teleology, for so associated it can be shown to be untenable. Naturally, showing eudaemonism to be untenable when tied to natural

[18] Not only eudaemonists but some contemporary explorers of what has come to be called "evolutionary ethics," are also inclined to think that some grounding of their theories in natural ends or functions is workable.

teleology is not equivalent to showing it to be tenable once that link is broken. Nonetheless, and this is the second point, it is an important preliminary. With natural teleology dismissed or set aside, we will be better placed to see what eudaemonism *itself* is and involves and to assess eudaemonism without being distracted by the various debates that appeals to natural teleology draw in their train.

In the second chapter, "Decision Theory and Instrumental Reasoning," I consider the nearly canonical treatment of instrumental reasoning provided by standard decision theory. My principal concern has to do with its use in a normative role, to explicate what agents have reason to do, given their preferences. I argue that decision theory is unsatisfactory in this role, in that it relies upon assumptions about preferences which finite agents are not in a position to satisfy, and ultimately, if taken as a general account of instrumental rationality, leaves us unable to make sense of the normative distinction between ends and means. It is better cast in a supporting role.

The remaining chapters are more constructive. In the third, "The Scope of Instrumental Reasoning," I present an account of ordinary instrumental reasoning, which is, in the first place, more modest in its ambitions than standard decision theory, in that it does not aspire to be fully formalizable. In the second, it makes more modest demands upon agents, only presupposing capacities for thought, deliberation and comparison of options that appear to be within our grasp. However, the account is not merely decision theory minus something: it has independent interest. In particular, beginning from the simplest case of instrumental reasoning, the selection of some means for the sake of its

causal contribution to bringing about some single objective, the account readily generalizes to cover cases in which multiple objectives or goals have a bearing upon action, to cover cases in which decision-making among some set of options can only be rationalized by appeal to some further combinatorial principle, and to cover constitutive reasoning in which the means adopted at least partially constitutes the objective for the sake of which the means is adopted. Finally, though it does not depend especially upon the account of instrumental reasoning offered here, I offer a partial explanation of the normative force of instrumental rationality that shows that it need not depend entirely upon some normative force or value attached to the ends from which the reasoning proceeds.

The fourth chapter, "The Structure of Eudaemonism," has two principal aims. One is to secure the plausibility of the claim that eudaemonism is an appealing structure for a moral theory. Unfortunately, I have no idea how to prove appealingness.[19] In the end, the answer to the question whether a theory is appealing must be left to those considering it, and whether it is appealing depends on whether they find it so. Still, something may be done to clear away obstacles and to disentangle the theory from accretions or misunderstandings that may stand in the way of a fair assessment of its appeal. If we want to consider whether a theory is appealing, we need to make sure that we are considering *that* theory rather than something else or some amalgam of that theory with something

[19] I do not of course mean that intuitive appeal is decisive for the correctness of a moral theory or that the correct theory cannot be counter-intuitive in various ways. But that does not mean it has no evidential value whatever. If, to pursue a legal metaphor, intuitive appeal does not settle the case in favor of a moral theory, it still may be relevant, first, to getting the theory a hearing in the first place, and second, to establishing a (rebuttable) presumption in its favor.

else.

Accordingly, my second concern is to more directly characterize the principal features of eudaemonist theories. Now, what is common to all eudaemonist theories, the normative centrality of living well or having a good life, can, with only a bit of ingenuity, be construed to apply to virtually any other moral theory as well.[20] But adding conditions to rule out non-eudaemonist theories does not help, for the plausible candidates for additional conditions would also exclude theories, such as Epicureanism, that clearly belong within the eudaemonist camp. Naturally, this makes it difficult or impossible to produce a characterization of eudaemonism in the form of some illuminating set of necessary and sufficient conditions. What I shall try to do instead, after brief attention to some further possible misunderstandings, is to develop further an account of the structural features of eudaemonism at its best, where eudaemonia is understood as an inclusive ultimate end of living well to which the moral virtues are constitutive means. This will also require further elaboration of the ways that ends may be classified and related to one another as well as some account of the way that the virtues fit into the eudaemonist framework.

In the final chapter, "Reasoning About Ends," I try to bring together what has been developed in earlier chapters to show the bearing of instrumental reason upon the selection of ends, including ultimate ends. Some decision theorists and partisans of instrumental reasoning can be expected to object that instrumental reasoning takes ends as

[20] Other theorists may not, however, think that the most natural or illuminating way to describe their positions.

given and can only address questions about the relative efficacy of means to given ends, but can have no bearing on the correctness of the ends themselves.[21] I believe this is a mistake. Abstractly, the relevant point can be put like this: Instrumental reasoning can bear on the correctness of ends if the selection or adoption of some end can itself be a better or worse means to some other end or ends. More concretely, this can be illustrated by the kind of motivational change that an agent may undergo in breaking a bad habit. The agent may conclude, on the basis of his existing corpus of ends, that giving up the habit (where that involves actually changing the set of ends that he seeks) will better serve his existing corpus of ends and that whatever costs are attendant upon making the change are less than the benefits to be expected. Once he has successfully made the change, he will have a somewhat different corpus of ends.

I think examples like that are sufficient to show that instrumental reasoning *can* bear upon the selection of ends, but it is plain that much more needs to be done, especially if I am to defend the claim that it bears upon the selection of final and ultimate ends. How instrumental reasoning could bear upon selecting ends which are not themselves means to anything further might still reasonably be thought to be problematic, even when it is granted that such reasoning can bear upon the selection of *some* ends. I argue, however, that that rather tricky passage can be negotiated and further, that we end up not only with some structure or other including ultimate ends and others related as means or constituents, but that the structure is plausibly that of eudaemonism – i.e., that there will

[21] For example, Bertrand Russell writes, "'Reason' has a perfectly clear and precise meaning. It signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends." (1955, vi)

be an ultimate end, which can be characterized as one of living well, and that the virtues will figure as constitutive means.

Though I intend to limit myself to making a case for the plausibility of this thesis about the bearing of instrumental reason upon ultimate ends, a number of issues invite further exploration, and, at the end of the chapter, I briefly discuss some. Of special interest to me are questions about the scope of the audience addressed by the kinds of considerations I offer and what that implies or suggests about moral education, about non-instrumental practical reason and the possibilities for a eudaemonist or virtue-ethical approach to politics.