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## PRAGMATISM AND THE NORMATIVE IN NATURALISM

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**ABSTRACT:** Situating norms within nature has been a prominent feature of pragmatic naturalism. Like similarly liberal and non-reductive naturalisms, pragmatism easily accommodates normativity, such as values and purposes. Just as importantly, this pragmatic naturalism, as the work of John Ryder rightly emphasizes, accounts for the normativity of human sociality and rationality. The philosophical alternatives to normless naturalism consist of more than just supernatural theism or social idealism. Pragmatism's "norming naturalism" is the best alternative, capable of grounding philosophical inquiries into society and culture.

**Keywords:** normativity, naturalism, pragmatism, reductionism, society, idealism, theism

Naturalism can be craftily defined to exclude norms from nature, including norms set by humanity. This *normless naturalism* would not be advanced without a purpose in mind. That plan may be mainly about excluding God's design, more than human craft. Perhaps hospitality to norms offered by naturalism concedes too much to supernaturalism. Still, there is a different naturalism accommodating norms without any wariness towards genesis. Nature's energetic ways can include replicative and generative organizing that conforms materiality into vitality. When this *norming naturalism* perceives norms at work in the world, would it be gazing at illusions? Deadlock ensues, with each naturalism convinced of the other's scientific inadequacy and philosophical negligence.

Life sciences get caught in the middle between competing naturalisms, accused of either fabrication or reduction, for daring to be normative or normless. Social sciences are hence pulled in opposite directions, to either unify with normative biology, or disdain normless biology and ally with a non-natural worldview. Pragmatism offers a norming naturalism conjoining normative biology and social theory, in opposition to anti-naturalistic idealism and theism. This pragmatic naturalism is exemplified, just as John Ryder tells us, by "the

Columbia Naturalist tradition, primarily in its expression in Dewey, Randall and Buchler" (Ryder 2013, 6).

### Naturalism, Theism, Idealism

Various kinds of naturalism have sought dominance since the eighteenth century, competing among each other as much as they have contested supernaturalism (Shook 2011; Shook 2017). This spectacle offers perennial comfort to anti-naturalist worldviews. Theology, ever alert to tendencies toward atheism, has always opposed the notion of self-sufficient and self-organizing nature, but disorganized nature arouses theism's sterner censures. Before the coining of "naturalism" in the mid-1700s, atomism and materialism were theology's prime targets. Without God, humanity is left normless and lost in nature's heartless nihilism. Expecting humanity to invent their norms from chaos, conflict, and competition asks too much, so that norming responsibility is safely assigned to God.

No naturalism needs a god, but naturalism must account for norms. Pointing to human creativity is only the beginning of a story. Humans do establish new norms to better organize their bonds and behaviors, but those efforts presume prior norms pursued along the way. Normless naturalism is barred from crediting human mentality, since it denies that anything normatively regulative can exist there, either. To think of a practical rule for re-organizing inconstant matters is an accomplishment that presumes normative constancies to thought. Normless naturalism must view anything normative as entirely ideational, not natural. We talk about ideas, and act on them, but in the end, they are just our ideas lacking reference or truth about anything real. Talk about norms is strictly convenient fiction, no matter how habitual. For normless naturalism, natural regularities about how a brain *does* think and how a person *has* acted cannot imply anything in general about how a human being *should* behave: no amount of fact can validate any norm (Skorupski 2000; Paakkunainen 2018).

Normless naturalism can at best suggest that the human mind is solely responsible for forming thoughts

of normativity. *Idealistic constructivism* entirely agrees on this point. Idealism attributes all normativity to our ideas, as ideas forge norms from pure mentality, conceived as normative by definition. As an “unmoved mover,” mentality is taken to be inherently unnatural since it is utterly unlike materiality, and quite underdetermined by anything physical. Idealism repels both naturalisms, compelling them to settle their argument between themselves. No compromise seems in sight, however, because normless naturalism already sides with idealism’s view of normativity as ideational and unnatural while materiality stays mindless. That concession to idealism means that normless naturalism is unable to explain the normativities of humanity, including norms of conduct, morality, logic, and methodical science. Norming naturalism by contrast concedes nothing to idealism, by situating our normativity within the self-organizing biological realm and hence the organized social world as life’s human outgrowth.

Making concessions to idealism prior to debates about nature or science would be unwise for either kind of naturalism, especially about necessity. Idealism has a long history of equating normativity with necessity, or at least defining norms in terms of their necessary modality along with other content. The variable, the contingent, the optional, the vague, the erratic, the chancy, the irrational – idealism is reluctant to ascribe true normativity to such matters, for they lack that insistent “must” expected by idealism. Where that “must” is missing among nature’s inconstant ways, a higher reality of the ideal and the rational is duly invoked. Many manifestations of idealism and rationalism stand at the ready where a “must” is at work (Hattiangadi 2007; Gert 2004; Gibbard 2013). One version enlivens ethics, attesting to rigid norms of morality such as duties and rights. Another complicates philosophy of language, where rule-following lies behind syntactics and semantics. Yet another version pervades philosophy of mind, where beliefs must answer to reasons. Still another burdens logic, as rationality and truth would seemingly dissolve without inferential necessity.

Asking naturalism to explain necessities just as idealism depicts them extends an invitation that both naturalisms should decline. Henceforth, the normativity sought in nature, if nature has norms, only needs to convey that pertinent “oughtness” to a norm, regardless of whether it conveys a “must” in some exceptionless and overriding sense (Finlay 2019). That stricture, while sensible as a minimal standard, will disappoint idealists as much as it dismays normless naturalists. Idealism refuses to find enough normativity in a merely optional “ought” to count as authentically normative. Normless naturalism refuses to even admit realistic “oughts” into its ontology in the first place. For example, the existence of values, which norming naturalism accommodates, is rejected by normless naturalism (for not counting as factual), and demoted by idealism (for not counting as necessary). Nevertheless, real “oughts” are forbidden by normless naturalism, so norming naturalism can reasonably begin its counter-argument there.

Norming naturalism can develop its alternative to idealism *after* sidelining normless naturalism. To do so, nothing essential should be initially conceded. Normless naturalism cannot beg the question about norms before an honest inquiry into all of nature has even begun. Idealism must not beg the question by demanding necessities where normalities suffice. In the next section, values will serve nicely to illustrate how norms really exist in nature right where they are at work. Normless naturalism does not have to bear any argumentative burden about first explaining how natural norms answer to the reductionism of normless naturalism or the rationalism of idealism.

We shall settle matters between the two naturalisms first. Normless naturalism offers a preemptive compromise over norms, such as values, by inviting reductionist strategies. Arranging some sort of second-class status for norms, such as claims that norms are emergent from, or supervenient upon, genuinely natural matters, are not what norming naturalism has in mind. Norming naturalism is not burdened with explaining supervenience or emergence since it already rejects the premised reductionism

(Brožek et al. 2017). No rationalist metaphysics is needed for a norming naturalism such as pragmatic naturalism, by attending first and foremost to empirical matters. Normless naturalism wants to pre-define “nature” as it likes, but this metaphysical maneuvering should be disallowed. Indeed, expecting philosophy to define “nature” first, and then sort out legitimate naturalisms while banishing idealisms, is a hopeless project. Surely nature itself should be consulted first, directly and empirically.

Why can't science be tasked with explaining what nature is, and consists of? Normless naturalism gains no high ground by making a great show of standing with science. Its claim that “genuine science discerns no norms” simply begs the whole question and ignores broad areas of the life sciences. The view that physics and chemistry outranks and overrules any other science about what ontologically exists is a controversial position premised upon a (dubious) normative claim about methodological preferentiality that exceeds science's factual knowledge. Pointing to one field's dramatic successes in one realm of nature only highlights that field's incompetence in other realms. The sciences grasp this well – that is why they proliferate into many distinct yet coordinated fields. A measure of theoretical reduction among neighboring subfields cannot license the false assumption that science as a whole endorses wholesale ontological reductivism for all nature. Molecules are made of atoms, but it takes hasty un-empirical metaphysics to claim that *only* atoms are “really” real. Pragmatism and norming naturalism prefers to let the separate sciences speak for themselves. Getting past scientism is not about simply ignoring science (De Caro 2011; Shook 2015).

The “natural” is a broad term that allows multiple meanings, depending upon the empirical perspective taken. That breadth of vision does not leave us sightless, without guides and markers towards the normative. On the definition of nature, Ryder writes, “We can contrast nature, in one sense, with the artificial, or in another we can contrast it with the statistically infrequent, unusual, or abnormal [...]” (Ryder 2013, 40). As Ryder notes well,

a norm can carry descriptive, explicative, and prescriptive meanings. A norm may involve a regularity, a preferentiality, or a conventionality, and sometimes two or all three meanings are invoked. Furthermore, they can go in different directions. A conventional rule within a subgroup might be highly irregular for the whole, as when one society's tradition of child marriage is an outlier across the globe. Tensions among those implications arouse philosophical as well as methodological issues, and they shall have to be disentangled as we proceed.

The artificial, the unusual, and the infrequent are candidates for abnormality and unnaturality. Strictly speaking of course, nothing unnatural really exists, according to the two rival naturalisms. Normless naturalism has particularly treated “unnaturality” and the normal/abnormal classification as something ideational, not real.

Normless naturalism unavoidably inspires interest in some sort of extra-natural category or reality, simply by refusing to admit that a “normality/abnormality” distinction has any basis in the natural realm. For normless naturalism, normality cannot exist, and anything about life or humanity that exemplifies “normality/abnormality” cannot be of this world. Idealism eagerly takes up the story of humanity from there, followed closely by theism. As for norming naturalism, it locates normativity within nature precisely where science examines it, without imposing metaphysical dichotomies dividing the normal or the mental apart from the natural.

### Normalities are Natural

How could normal values be all-natural, yet normalities are not? If no normality is natural, then there are no norms in nature, and the normalness of a value remains illusory. For example, if butterflies normally emerge from butterfly cocoons, but there are no normalities in nature, then another butterfly emerging today from its cocoon has to be accidental or miraculous.

Despite such obvious and scientific illustrations, objections to the naturality of normalities are sustained by those wanting to keep the focus on humans. “Butterflies

come out of cocoons because of nature's ways, not some normality about what butterflies should do." Shall we judge that no normalities pertain to human too? That cannot follow at all. The objection effectively admits what it tries to deny, that normalities operate in nature. If a moth comes out of a butterfly cocoon, the observer infers an abnormality. Where there can rightly be abnormalities, there must be normalities. Still, we will be told, "No matter that normalities are found in nature, humans aren't so natural too." Really? What metaphysical dualism got introduced and demonstrated already, to divide humans apart from their organic bodies? Again, such demonstrations fallaciously presuppose what must be proven, that normalities pertaining to humans are due to inner unnaturality, not naturality.

Normalities exist precisely where organic beings live: in nature. Norms are all-natural. Satisfactory accounts of the patterned and regular behaviors of lifeforms taken individually and collectively must appeal to norms. Norms exist where patterned habits to life persist. Persistence refers to continuities in existence across the past, present, and future: their actuality doesn't halt at the "now" and the "now" isn't when they start. However, norms are labeled – as natural "ways" or "regularities" – their nature lies in their generality. Generalities are about *genera*: matters inherent to the generation and perpetuation of organic life.

For a particular form of life, such as a bodily organ, a species, a symbiotic relationship, or an ecosystem, its generalities *are* its normalities. Life's normal generalities are where the "is" of fact and the "ought" of value are unified without distinction or tension. Form doesn't imply function; organic form *is* its function and its functioning lies *in* its formation and nowhere else. Only abstraction analyzes apart what nature keeps together. If something organic is examined without interest taken in its past or future, in its genesis or its maintenance, then its features can be statically taken for factual structures implying little about the functions it ought to be doing. Similarly, if something organic is envisioned only in terms of its capacity for prolonged persistence, then

its features can be dynamically taken for valuable functions that imply little about the structures it has to have. The dictums that form cannot imply function, or that function cannot imply form, are fallacies proceeding from a one-sided and incomplete inquiry. Starting from a general description about its form, an organism's specific activities cannot be derived, but details about structural formation renders its behavioral ways understandable. Similarly, starting from a general account about its activity, an organism's specific features cannot be derived, but details about its behavioral functioning make its physiological design comprehensible.

Physiology – the study of organic design above the level of organic chemistry – is the arena where form equals function, where performativity *is* normativity. Physiology's explanatory robustness depends on biology, and biology became a genuine science with the Darwinian theory for the evolution of speciation by reproduction and selection, through mechanisms of genetic alteration such as mutation, gene drift and flow, conspecific reproductive choice, artificial breeding, and so on. Nothing about scientific biology forbids design or purpose in nature. No providential designer is implied at all. There is no need of that hypothesis, because of scientific cosmology. The cosmological principle that greater complexity can emerge from simpler order, given ample entropic energies and enough time, means that the resulting design and design's functioning is entirely natural. Life applies its structured capabilities to pursue enviroing conditions needed for its own perpetuation. Cosmology (what is) and Orthology (what ought) are correlative not by chance but by intertwined fate where there is life. Cosmological complexity implies orthological propensity: the naturalities of organic life exhibit the normativities of organic living. Exceptions to normalities are expected and help confirm norming naturalism; it is rather normless naturalism which is unable to account for either the cases of normal valuation or the cases of abnormal valuation.

In case this demonstration of the natural reality of valuing norms fails to impress normless naturalism, perhaps to its proximity to mere perception instead of

higher cognitive achievements, we can proceed to build our case. Tasting is one thing while cooking meals is another, we can imagine a critic pointing out. Norming naturalism can easily account for complex human practices, once the naturality of our values has been established.

Observing the normativity to human activity is impossible if observation is taken to be merely a descriptive or explanatory matter. To say, "People are normally eating cooked food," has described a statistical pattern to current conduct, but the genuine normativity has gone missing. Why should they cook food? To instead say, "People generally follow rules about cooking food because they respect a norm," has captured goal-directed conduct, but only arouses the next question, "But why should people respect that norm about cooking?" Indeed, people could simply respect cooking rules without also having to think about respecting an additional norm in the process. But that is precisely the stance towards norms recommended here: the way that people believe that they *should* cook their food *is* the normativity to watch out for. People not only value their cooked food – they value how they prepare their food through their cooking practice. In other words, the steps of food preparation get conducted so that the entire production of cooked food serves the meal's overall purposes.

To normatively cook food is not merely to happen to render up cooked food on the occasion of one meal. Rather, any obstacles to fully cooking all of the meal (perhaps due to low fire fuel) are overcome by modifying the stages of food processing (less meat, finer-chopped vegetables, grilling rather than boiling, and so on) so that a differently cooked meal still serves its nutritional ends. We can observe a two-level co-adaptive process to normative activity: the components internal to meal-preparation (recipes, etc.) are adaptable to better serve the goal of the whole practice of meal-serving for its consumers. That accomplishment is the demonstration of the normativities to cooking: again, the performativity *is* the normativity. People are following norms in their persistent adaptable practices – they are not persisting in their activities for the

sake of following norms. Looking for norms outside of our creative relations must be a fruitless search for meaning prior to experiencing our human worlds. That relationality has priority, in Ryder's view:

The worlds we inhabit, so to speak – or better, the worlds of our experience—are suffused with meaning, and they are worlds of our making. There is nothing mysterious or incongruous about this. The creative construction of meaning is a moment, admittedly a critical moment for human life, of the creative dimension of a relational, ordinal nature. From the point of view of a relational ontology, both objectivity and creativity have a central role to play in nature, and in our understanding of human interaction with other complexes of nature (Ryder 2013, 118–119).

Norms are already inherent to human practices, or else they are nowhere at all. Norming naturalism takes the first option. Normless naturalism picks the second option: there cannot be anything actually normative to the practices of people. Any sufficiently accurate descriptions of patterns to human behaviors can let the "normative" drop out entirely without losing any truthful accuracy or explanatory power. For normless naturalism, talk about norms to conduct is either embellished narration for our emotional life, or shorthand fiction when the full materialistic description is too clumsy.

### Humanity and Naturalism

The claim is oft-heard that society transcends biology, so anything distinctively human is a free variable to be decided by mental choice rather than determined from material compulsion. Norms from the biological realm have nothing to do, we are told, with what should be normal for humans to be doing. Natural norms are properly for unfree and sub-rational animals, not freely rational humans. What good is naturalism if it eliminates what is most precious, our genuine humanity?

The proper target for this worry is normless naturalism, which made its peace with physicalist determinism and illusory free will. However, this challenge can also be thrown at norming naturalism: "If there are natural norms, human liberty should instead follow non-natural norms." Motivating this challenge is an appreciation for

culture so that humanity no longer is valuing what used to be valuable for our more animal-like distant ancestors. However, the lesson from that long course of cultural development cannot be that *unnaturalness* is essential to humanity. The consequences to ignoring the natural sociality to humanity are grave, undermining the philosophical opportunity for understanding human normativity. If any naturalness to humanity has to be subsumed under, and submerged into, the normal naturalness of nature, few dialectical options seem evident.

Consider the prime argumentative schema that appears to reduce humanity to nature's ways:

- A. Everything in nature has norms.
- B. Humanity is entirely natural.
- So, C. Humanity entirely relies on nature's norms.

This argument threatens the reduction of humanity to animality, and the next two forms do so as well:

- A. Everything in nature has norms.
  - C. Humanity relies on norms.
  - So, B. Humanity is entirely natural.
- 
- B. Humanity is entirely natural.
  - C. Humanity relies on norms.
  - So, A. There are norms in nature.

Norming naturalism might appear to reduce humanity to animality, except for its hospitality to the normativity of humanity's sociality. Humanity remains entirely natural (B) because human sociality never departs from naturalness (A) in its normativity (C). This position explains why norming naturalism does not have to depict humanity as either normless or unnatural, along the lines of this argument form:

- A. Everything in nature has norms.
- not-C. Humanity does not rely on norms.
- So, not-B. Humanity is not entirely natural.

Norming naturalism can reject this argument because humanity's rationally social norms are all-natural. How does normless naturalism fare? Its basic schema starts from a denial of norms in nature:

- not-A. There are no norms in nature.
- B. Humanity is entirely natural.
- So, not-C. Humanity does not rely on any norms.

This dim conclusion encounters the paradox presented by normless naturalism: either it finds that humans only

have the natural and sub-rational mentality of animals, or it invites an unnatural basis to human normativity. The express admission of that unnatural dimension of humanity takes this form:

- not-A. There are no norms in nature.
- C. Humanity relies on norms.
- So, not-B. Humanity is not entirely natural.

This argument opens the door to idealism with a dualistic admission about humanity's nature. If normless naturalism re-asserts the naturalness of humanity, it must deny norms to humanity in order to ensure that nature is normless. That denial takes this form:

- B. Humanity is entirely natural.
- not-C. Humanity does not rely on norms.
- So, not-A. There are no norms in nature.

Again, normless naturalism must find that human mentality nowhere exceeds the level of sub-rational animality, falling short of normativity. If normless naturalism dares to suggest that humans and their activities somehow attain a degree of normativity while remaining just animals, it only confesses its ontological inadequacy. That inadequacy in turn suggests alternative ontologies. Norming naturalism is the obvious alternative, but other worldviews await.

The ontology taking up a diametrically opposed stance to normless naturalism is the worldview of transcendental idealism. Proceeding from dualism and human normativity, all normativity gets credited to humanity alone:

- not-B. Humanity is not entirely natural.
- C. Humanity relies on norms.
- So, not-A. There are no norms in nature.

On this view, anything that might seem to be rational and normative to the non-human world has to be actually due to humanity's mentality, since the world apart from humanity must be inchoate and formless. A milder mode of dualism attributes human normativity to just humanity:

- A. Everything in nature has norms.
- not-B. Humanity is not entirely natural.
- So, not-C. Humanity does not rely entirely on natural norms.

This position is not far from norming naturalism, but it credits idealistic constructivism for much human norma-

tivity. This idealism claims the advantage over both naturalisms once again, promising the rescue of free rational mentality and depicting it as the explanation for all normativity.

However, this freedom to mentality may be indistinguishable from anarchy or totalitarianism. If individual minds freely set all norms, norms needn't coincide and anarchy would reign, unless norms are marshalled into order by something beyond individual minds, such as the normativity of our common natural needs (*we ought* to form social contracts, for example) or the normativity of a powerful society (that *must* impose its norms on members). Appealing to natural needs obviates the point of idealism and concedes everything to norming naturalism. As for totalitarianism, idealism defends itself by responding that only *reasonable* norms should be socially imposed. This is a poor defense, since this view of mental freedom allows any society to determine what shall count as reasonable in the first place. Idealism cannot appeal to some sort of society-transcendent standard of reasonableness without advancing to metaphysical Absolutism or supernatural theism (so God is the totalitarian), or else idealism has to concede the whole debate to norming naturalism.

### Sociality and Nature

Idealism cannot be entrusted with reasonableness. All the same, norming naturalism's vindication still appears to be a surrender of humanity to natural necessity and mere animality. Our design by a providential deity might be less fatalistic. A deity could at least install free will, or so the story goes. What good is freedom, supposing that free will fits with norming naturalism, if nature's norms dictate human normality? A re-match with normless naturalism might defeat norming naturalism on the grounds that human sociality and social pluralism make far more sense in the absence of biological norms.

This split decision, awarding one round to each contestant, was a feature of the Enlightenment, a time when feudal tradition was challenged by human naturality at the

same time that individual freedom was upheld over that same naturality. The resolution, to view liberty as grounded in natural reason, made tradition look unreasonable while at same time making free reason seem natural (Gay 1969; Israel 2006). This third round breaks the tie. Normless naturalism cannot accommodate any natural norms of reasonableness, but norming naturalism can, including the normativity of rationality itself.

Norming naturalism accommodates normativity reasonableness in its human forms of social mentality and individual preferentiality. Averting animalism, anarchism, and totalitarianism follows from that three-fold balancing among naturality, sociality, and individuality. Explaining how sociality, rationality, and individuality arose from nature was extremely difficult until the biological theory of evolution and the anthropological theory of bio-cultural co-evolution (Heinrich 2016; Shook 2022).

Norming naturalism has no need for hypothesizing that humanity does, or should, transcend natural animality and physiology. All we do depends on bodies with brains, and our evolved brains provided for humanity's specialties with social mentality and individual rationality (Davies 2003; Okrent 2017; De Caro and Macarthur 2010). Social conventionality treats values endowed from co-evolved human nature more like variables than fixed constants. However, not everything about humans is a variable. In order to inculcate conventional values, other endowed values are taken for granted. The operant conditioning needed for youth training, for example, has to take advantage of endowed values to motivate behavior modification and skill acquisition.

Could all endowed values be targeted by a society for conventional overrides? Presumably not – one convention could not be instilled through specific values while another convention is busily devaluing those same values. A society has to maintain compromises, treating some set of endowed values inherent to humans as privileged and protected so that numerous conventions can be established upon them. For example, virtues of childhood such as compliance, obedience, cooperativeness, curiosity, persistence, ambition, practice, and

praise-seeking must not be repressed. Societies naturally and normally respect and protect these privileged values. Any other endowed values conflicting with these useful values are deemed inappropriate and wrong for childhood (and probably adulthood too).

Social conventionality cannot accept an automatic inference from “original naturalness” to “social normality”. The “Originality Fallacy” mistakenly infers that something should be normal simply by being naturally endowed. A paired fallacy, the “Conventionality Fallacy,” mistakenly assumes that social conventions can override anything originally natural. Idealistic Constructivism commits this conventionality fallacy while treating natural matters as powerless to resist the formative capabilities of intellect. There is no fallacy for any society that regards its own conventionalities as normal for its internal members. Social normalities are supposed to be regarded as binding norms by members due to their internalization. That is why much of normativity is not regarded as arbitrary or conventional by those already socialized. However, outside of that society, its normalities do not follow. The Originality Fallacy and the Conventionality Fallacy make it easier to commit a third fallacy: the “Ideological Fallacy” is the mistaken inference by one society that other societies can be just as “normal” by following its conventions.

Individual preferentiality can also treat endowed values as variables, although with less flexibility than social conventionality. One’s society inculcates conventionalities so thoroughly that an adult takes them for originalities, or practically as fixed as anything original. Nevertheless, individual rationality may be able to regard a convention as somewhat contingent and optional when different values beckon. Opposition to social conventionalities would not be undertaken lightly, since they enjoy a presumptive reasonableness within society. Are conventions worthy of an unchallengeable status? The “Tradition Fallacy” mistakenly regards a long-standing convention as finally and infallibly justified, immune from criticism and adjustment. Nevertheless, deviations cannot be grounded in naturalness alone, for that commits the Originality Fallacy.

Rejecting a social norm for mere personal preference amounts to selfishness, prejudice, or rebelliousness. Reasonable grounds for modifying or abandoning a convention should be based upon the opportunities presented by other conventions. Has one convention proven to be less protective of privileged values, obstructing other important conventions? Have wider social conditions or challenges diminished one convention’s merits in comparison with other worthy conventions? Further questions proliferate. Asking and answering such questions enters the arenas of morality, social ethics, and politics (Copp 2001).

Whatever the salient considerations, there is no question that whether a society is overriding an original value, or an individual is repressing a typical valuation, only our norms are involved, and nothing is transcending human capacities for social mentality and individual rationality. Those capabilities for comparing and reevaluating values do deem certain values as “abnormal” while promoting others as normal, but only rhetorical flourishes or logical fallacies ensue by labelling any values as intrinsically “natural” or “unnatural”. Normative values exist here in this world with us, or nowhere.

The claim that “Humans create and depend on their own norms, so those norms are not natural” is a grand fallacy. Its unstated second premise is “What gets created in the world after nature already exists cannot be natural” but that premise cannot be right. More clearly stated, the missing premise would be “What humans create is artificial, rather than natural.” However, the “artificial vs. natural” meaning in that second premise is different from the “unnatural vs natural” meaning to the first premise, and the conclusion cannot follow. What we freely cognize, create, and craft remains in and of this natural world, since nothing humans accomplish could be ontologically unnatural.

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