The Euthyphro Dilemma

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Socrates asks Euthyphro whether the gods value piety because it is good, or if piety is good because the gods value it. If we generalize Socrates's question, we come to a choice that has exercised tremendous influence in the history of metaphysics. Instead of asking about value, we can talk about any property. Instead of asking about valuing, we can ask about any attitude or activity. Instead of talking just about the gods, we can talk about any class of individuals. If we make all these generalizations we get the following pair of questions.

> Does something possess a property (e.g., is it valuable) because of the activities, attitudes, and willings of some class of individuals (e.g., their valuing it)? That is, is this property *Euthyphro Subjective*?

> Or does a thing possess that property independently of the activities, attitudes, and willings of any class of individuals? That is, is the property *Euthyphro Objective*?

It has long been supposed that this pair of questions is a true dilemma, that every property is either Euthyphro Subjective or Euthyphro Objective.[1] But when we train our sights on normative properties, we are apt to find this state of affairs vexed. For normative properties appear to be characterized by two crucial features whose marriage would be put in peril by such a dilemma.

The problem is clearest for moral properties. We think that morality must be humane, and that it must be aspirational. By "humane", I mean that we

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[1] There has recently been substantial work on the analysis of the "because" relationship in these questions. The candidates include modal relations (supervenience), epistemic relations (the *a priori* of an equivalence statement), and metaphysical relations (one thing *grounds* another). Because this issue is controversial, and I can make my argument without hitching my wagon to a particular analysis, I will leave "because" unanalyzed and proceed at an intuitive level.

want morality to be really ours: to be grounded in human nature and the human world, to be something within our practical and intellectual reach, to make some real difference in our lives. Because morality was made for man, not man for morality, we find it inconceivable that we might find the foundations of moral value floating in a distant corner of outer space or inhering in a rare earth metal. By "aspirational", I mean that we want morality to be more than merely ours: to be something greater than the prejudiced bickering of our parochial opinions, more than a self-satisfied coherence project, more than a chase after our own tails. We want morality to guide us in becoming better than we are.

The problem is that a Euthyphro Subjective account of normative properties appears capable of delivering a humane morality, but not an aspirational one, whereas Euthyphro Objectivism gives us just the reverse. If the Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma and each horn delivers one and only one desideratum, then a satisfactory account of normative properties is impossible. Many metanormative conundrums are rooted in this issue: conflicts between the motivational efficacy of moral judgment and its truth aptitude, the ability of epistemic norms to guide us and the worry that internalist norms will just recapitulate our prejudices, the affective dimensions of beauty and the thought that aesthetic judgments admit of genuine disagreement.

There are a few traditional strategies for reconciling our desiderata, which I mention here as foils.

The Decoupling Strategy. The most venerable approach involves decoupling our intuitive desiderata from the horns of the dilemma. Two horns of the dilemma means two possible decouplings. We can argue that Euthyphro Objective theories can be "humane" in every desirable sense, or that Euthyphro Subjective theories can be objective in every way that matters. For example, we can decouple humaneness from Euthyphro Subjectivism by advocating a form of moral realism that locates value in a biological conception of human nature and argue that this particular basis renders value appropriately humane.[2] On the other side, one could try to decouple the desiderata that surround our idea of "objectivity"—what I called the "aspirational" side of normativity—from the particular standard of Euthyphro Objectivity. For example, many sentimental theories include some device that pushes us toward interpersonal convergence, so while these accounts are strictly Euthyphro Subjective, their advocates claim that their conception of normative properties is nonetheless aspirational in all the ways we care

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[2]   This is part of Philippa Foot's project in *Natural Goodness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

about.[3] This seems to be Rawls's approach too. He accepts that political constructivism corresponds to a Euthyphro Subjective conception of justice. But he thinks it is a mistake to conflate this standard with the kind of objectivity we want in a political theory. In this spirit he offers three more precise objectivity desiderata and claims that political constructivism gives us all of them.[4]

The Divide and Conquer Strategy. Voluntarists have a long tradition of claiming to "reject" the Euthyphro dilemma. This claim is a little misleading though, since these accounts do not offer a third option so much as affirm *both* horns in different ways. Many natural law theorists held that evaluative qualities existed independently of any will, including that of God, but that *obligation* had to be created by some act of binding. It is more accurate, then, to say that these philosophers believed that one swathe of morality was Euthyphro Objective and another Euthyphro Subjective.[5]

The Defective Question Strategy. Another possibility is to claim that the choice offered by the Euthyphro Dilemma is senseless or otherwise defective. We can understand the questions when asked of particular precisifications of the key notions—"because" and "independent"—but the questions left unprecisified, those asked of bald becauseness and independence, have no answer because there is no definite state inquired after. This makes a form of Rawls's reply appealing: if the metaphysical, Euthyphronic notion of objectivity is an illusion, then we may be able to argue that political constructivism misses out on nothing at all.

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[3] See, e.g., the deployment of the "common point of view" in Hume, Smith, and, more recently, chapter 7 of Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[4] The first of these claims comes out most clearly in Rawls's contrast with rational intuitionism in "Kantian constructivism in moral theory", reprinted in S. Freeman (ed), *Collected Papers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 345-6. The notions of objectivity are explored in *Political Liberalism*, chapter III, §5, Expanded edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). For a rigorous account of how this project might go for constructivism in general see Aaron James, "Constructing Protagorean objectivity" in J. Lenman and Y. Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Simon Blackburn suggests that the kind of metaphysical hypotheticals that the Euthyphro Dilemma bids us imagine are not very useful in separating metaethical theories. See "Truth, beauty, and goodness", reprinted in his *Practical Tortoise Raising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[5] Analogies with secondary qualities, such as John McDowell's, "Values and secondary qualities" reprinted in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), engender a different conception of normative properties with a similar status: they are *both* subjective and objective, mind-given and world-given, not some third thing.

These are the strategies I know for dealing with the problem posed by the Euthyphro Dilemma. We can accept that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a genuine dilemma, but insist that this is perfectly fine, since we were mistaken in conflating our intuitive desiderata with the horns of the dilemma. Or we can be Euthyphro Objectivists about one region of the normative realm and Euthyphro Subjectivists about another. Or we can say that the Euthyphro questions are defective when asked in their broadest form.

In this paper I propose to plot a different course. All of these approaches can justly claim to be "rejecting" the dilemma in one way or another, but I aim to reject it in a different way. I do not try to decouple our intuitive desiderata from the horns of the dilemma, I do not accept Euthyphro Objectivism for some properties and Euthyphro Subjectivism for others, and I think we can make sense of the bald Euthyphro questions without further elaboration. My goal instead will be to accept the terms of the dilemma largely unchallenged and meet it head-on: to articulate a third way that normative properties may be that is neither Euthyphro Subjective nor Euthyphro Objective.

1. Constructivism

My proposal is a version of constructivism. The innovation that sets my view apart from its cousins is a strategy for making the construction procedure for a given normative property open-ended. I cannot explain what this means in advance of the argument, but I will eventually suggest that such a view places normative properties between Socrates's horns and unites our two desiderata.

That said, I should say a word at the outset about what I understand constructivism to be, not least of all because there are several competing conceptions. My notion is basically Rawlsian. We deal with normative properties in the context of particular problems: how to divide the cake, whether I should help my wife or the stranger, what kind of long-term projects to pursue. Constructivists think that the structure of these problems suggest what kind of procedure might solve them. For example, Rawls thinks that the legitimacy of the Original Position procedure can be derived from the way the central problem of political philosophy is posed—how to organize the basic structure of a society so genuine, non-coerced consensus may be reached in spite of reasonable disagreement. Constructivism about a normative property is the view that that property just is the outcome of a procedure so connected to the particular problem we expect this property to solve. Constructivism about justice, then, is the view that justice *just is* the outcome of some procedure (like the Original Position procedure) whose

legitimacy is derived from the problem that the property is supposed to solve (how to organize the basic structure). This is the conception of constructivism I will employ here.[6]

Recently Sharon Street (among others) has argued against this characterization of constructivism. For her, constructivists maintain that "normative truth consists in what is entailed from within the practical point of view." By "practical point of view" she means the point of view of someone engaged in valuing and allied activities. "What is it for a thing to *be* valuable? It is for that thing's value to be entailed from within the point of view of a creature who is already valuing things."[7] So by Street's lights, *not* being a constructivist would require believing that there are normative truths that are not "entailed by the practical point of view". These presumably depend on something else, some other point of view, like the theoretical point of view.[8] My concern with Street's proposal is that it inappropriately hitches constructivism to the (alleged) dichotomy between theoretical and practical reason. She needs a robust division between theoretical and practical reason to articulate what sets constructivism apart from other views. But the existence of such a divide is controversial and, it seems to me, orthogonal to the kind of issue that constructivism has been understood to be taking a stand on.[9] For example, I don't see why someone who accepts an "entanglement thesis"—that practical and theoretical points of view cannot be completely prized apart—cannot be a constructivist.[10] I don't expect these remarks to be dispositive in any way, of course, they're meant only to explain what notion of constructivism I start with and why. In the

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[6]   *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), §14.

[7]   "What is constructivism in ethics and metaethics?" *Philosophy Compass* 5(5), 2010, p. 367. Street's view isn't the only alternative, of course. Aaron James also argues that a specification of a procedure is unnecessary, but for rather different reasons. See "Constructivism about practical reasons", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74(2), 2007, pp. 302-325.

[8]   cf. Korsgaard's use of the distinction: "The deliberating agent, employing reason practically, views the world as it were from a noumenal standpoint, as an expression of the wills of God and other rational agents. […] The theorizing spectator, on the other hand, views the world as phenomena, mechanistic and fully determined. The interests of morality demand a different conceptual organization of the world than those of theoretical explanation. Both interests are rational and legitimate. And it is important that neither standpoint is privileged over the other—each has its own territory. […] These two standpoints give us two very different views of the world," in "Morality as freedom" reprinted in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 173.

[9]   Rawls does, of course, make the use of practical reason a part of his constructivism, but he has a much thicker and more situated notion of practical reason than Street does, and so is less vulnerable to entanglement worries.

[10]   The kind of entanglement I have in mind is the one argued for by Hilary Putnam in *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

conclusion I will briefly return to the question of what makes constructivism a distinctive doctrine.

As long as we are talking about distinctions concerning constructivism, it may be worthwhile to bring up another one. *Restricted constructivism* holds for constructivism about particular normative properties, whereas *metaethical constructivism* is that claim about normative properties *tout court*. I am for the most part going to leave this distinction to the side. I try to show how, given a particular normative property, constructivism about that property might avoid a familiar problem. I will not say much of anything about whether constructivism can be a comprehensive metaethical doctrine.

2. Objectivity Desiderata

The best way to introduce my account is to begin with a familiar form of constructivism, introduce an objection to it that is related to the Euthyphro Dilemma, and then show how a modification of the view produces a conception of normativity that lies on neither side of the dilemma. In that spirit I say a little more about Rawls's political constructivism. As I suggested a moment ago, Rawls maintains that "political constructivism provides an appropriate basis of objectivity for its limited political aims" through its reliance on a "suitably constructed social point of view that is authoritative with respect to all individual and associational points of view."[11] This is fair enough: there are many desiderata that fall under the umbrella of "objectivity", and Rawls's constructivism certainly delivers on many of them. But adequacy demands that he capture them all. If there is some legitimate notion of objectivity that we rightly associate with normative properties that Rawls cannot deliver, then that is a mark against the adequacy of his analysis.[12]

The objection I consider puts forward such a notion. Our most basic acquaintance with concepts like justice, value, and justification reveals that when we aim to achieve these things, we are aiming at something beyond our own attitudes and activities, and so beyond anything that can be captured by a construction procedure. It is therefore part of our very idea of normative properties that they are not Euthyphro Subjective. These properties necessarily *transcend* us, our activities, and our attitudes. Indeed, they transcend even the collectivize aggregations of these things that sophisticated constructivists invariably turn to. That is the intuition, anyway.

My use of the word "transcend" echoes the language of Iris Murdoch and Robert Adams. "The image of the Good as a transcendent magnetic

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[11]   *Political Liberalism*, p. 110 and "Kantian constructivism", p. 340.

[12]   Rawls may demur on the grounds that he is not trying to give a *correct analysis*, but only a *practicable conception*, and these intuitive counterexamples do not affect that project.

center seems to me," Murdoch says, "the least corruptible and most realistic picture for us to use in our reflections on the moral life."[13] The Good is transcendent, she explains, insofar as it "lies always *beyond*, and it is from this beyond that it exercises its authority."[14] And for Adams, "the Good is transcendent in the sense that it vastly surpasses all other good things, and all our conceptions of the good. […] This is an aspect of the opposition of the transcendence thesis to antirealism about value. If the Good so surpasses all we understand, it has properties that go beyond anything that we have any way of conceiving or any basis for believing. There must therefore be a distinction, and not merely in principle, between what is true about it and what we conceive or believe or have reason to believe about it."[15] Adams's argument appears to work thus. It is a manifest feature of our dealings with that good, one recognizable by all parties to the debate, that the good "surpasses all we understand"; he then says that only a Euthyphro Objective account of the good can make sense of this fact.[16]

David Wiggins makes a similar point in terms of the operation of the will. "By the [anti-realist's] lights it must appear that whatever the will chooses to treat as a good reason to engage itself is, for the will, a good reason. But the *will itself*, taking the inner view, picks and chooses, deliberates, weighs, and tests its own concerns. It *craves objective reasons*; and often it could not go forward unless it thought it had them."[17] We could go even further than Wiggins does and say that even the collective will, the will constituted by masses of individuals, also "craves objective reasons" beyond its own operation, and so an account of normative properties that merely reflected these operations must fall short. Wiggins's argument works like Adams's. He points to some feature of our practical reasoning and suggests that only Euthyphro Objectivism can do justice to it.

Finally, Allen Wood offers another perspective on the problem by describing the effects of "transcendence" on the dynamics of inquiry. While

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13 *The Sovereignty of the Good* (New York: Routledge, 1971), p. 73.

14 p. 62.

15 *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 50.

16 I am less certain of what implications Murdoch sees for her transcendence thesis. But see Kieran Setiya, "Murdoch on the sovereignty of good", *Philosophers' Imprint* 13(9), 2013, pp. 1-21.

17 "Truth, invention, and the meaning of life" reprinted in his *Needs, Value, Truth*, Third edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 99. Arguments similar to Wiggins's have been discussed more recently by Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 25-6 and David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 70-4. Hector says something similar in Act II, scene 2 of *Troilus and Cressida*: "But value dwells not in particular will; it holds his estimate and dignity as well wherein 'tis precious of itself as in the prizer: 'tis mad idolatry to make the service greater than the god; and the will dotes that is attributive to what infectiously itself affects, without some image of the affected merit."

discussing Kant's metaphysics of value, he remarks that "Kant is a moral realist because realism is the only way of preserving the *critical* stance necessary to all moral thinking, the *open-endedness* of moral inquiry."[18] For Wood the "open-endedness" of moral inquiry is the epistemological symptom of normativity's transcendence. In the course of moral inquiry we may get the right answer about value, and we may even get it with a great deal of certainty. But even if we reach this happy state, our inquiries will go on because there is a metaphysical gap between our practice of valuing and the things that ground facts about value. This gap between our quarry and our selves, Wood assumes, is the only way to insure open-endedness.

These remarks gesture at very similar *explananda*. They are close to the bald thought that Euthyphro *anti*-Subjectivity is itself a datum that must be captured by any theory of normativity. Rawls's stratagems for capturing some notion of objectivity are of no use here. No matter how broadly we construe the subjective basis for some normative property, and no matter how ingenious our procedure design, it is still part of our understanding of that property that we are aspiring to something, as Murdoch puts it, *beyond* that basis—beyond our activities, attitudes, and willings.

Authors who push this line of attack usually proceed to assume that the only way to capture the "transcendence" and "open-endedness" associated with normative properties is with a Euthyphro Objective conception of those properties. Therefore we should accept Euthyphro Objectivism. This argument succeeds if (i) the Euthyphro Dilemma is a real dilemma and (ii) the "independence" or "open-endedness" these remarks gesture at are genuine features of normative properties. There has been a lot of work done in denying (ii): sometimes as part of a Decoupling Strategy (viz. that these features are not really necessary to normative properties) and sometimes as part of a Defective Question Strategy (viz. that these notions are defective). For all this, however, I find myself convinced of (ii) and so concerned to try to find a way to deny (i). To do this I need to develop a conception of normativity that captures these intuitions about transcendence and open-endedness without lapsing into Euthyphro Objectivism.

3. Strategies of Transcendence

Take Wood's formulation of the point. He says that realism about morality, Euthyphro Objectivism in my terms, is the only way to insure the open-endedness of moral inquiry. But why is he so sure that there is no way for a constructivist to achieve the same open-endedness?

On Wood's picture, open-endedness has its roots in the externality of normative properties from "us". Insofar as we do not constitute what is

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[18] *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 157.

good and right, there is an insuperable gap between our activities, attitudes, and willings, and these properties. But why can't we achieve the same open-endedness in a more internal way, by stipulating that the construction procedure for a given normative property must go on indefinitely? On such a view a normative property would be "transcendent" of our attitudes, activities, and willings, but not because it enjoyed some independent, Euthyphro Objective existence. Its transcendence would reflect the special nature of its associated construction procedure—that this procedure is somehow *designed* to be open-ended.

One way of spelling out this metaphor is obliquely suggested by Rawls. "The struggle for reflective equilibrium continues indefinitely," he says, and he often speaks as if the task of political constructivism cannot be fully completed.[19] I cannot say that this is what Rawls meant, but his remark does suggest the possibility of making sense of transcendence through the introduction of a temporal parameter. At t_1 we perform a construction like the one Rawls describes. Then we do it again at time t_2, and again at t_3. Of course, things change between t_1, t_2, and t_3, and this means we have good reason to expect different outcomes of our construction procedure at different moments. Next, we bring these time-indexed constructions into reflective equilibrium with each other with a higher-order construction procedure that takes our time-indexed constructions as inputs. Because time never stops, the higher-order construction extends in perpetuity. Even if we have gotten the same outcome for t_1 through t_{1000}, we must still be open to seeing something at t_{1001} that calls for a revision.

If we construe our construction procedure in these terms, then open-endedness is achieved temporally. For all times t, our construction procedure goes on beyond t. Does this approach provide our intuitive desiderata? At first blush, it does. We can say that normative properties are temporally transcendent, in the sense that their nature lies beyond what our inquiries tell us *now*. And it appears to allow us to answer "no" to both of the questions posed in the Euthyphro Dilemma. For no time t is it the case that our procedure at time t makes it the case that a thing x possesses a normative property n, and thus at no time is our procedure Euthyphro Subjective. But we are still constructivists, and we deny that our normative properties have some nature in themselves that our procedure is trying to detect. So we are not Euthyphro Objectivists either.

There is an obvious problem with this approach, though. If we believe in actual infinities—completed totalities of infinite size—then we can speak

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[19]   *Political Liberalism*, p. 97. Elsewhere Rawls acknowledges the possibility of change through time but doubts that new information alone (about, e.g., human nature) would transform the basic principles. See "Kantian constructivism", pp. 351-3.

quite sensibly of *time*, or *eternity*, as a single, infinitely large thing. This allows us to see our construction procedure as a very large, but nonetheless fixed and complete totality. If we believe in actual infinities, it makes more sense to think of temporally open-ended constructivism as involving an infinitely large but not essentially open-ended construction procedure. That our construction procedure can be understood as a completed totality means temporally open-ended constructivism entails Euthyphro Subjectivism after all. Something possesses a normative property just because this (infinitely large) construction procedure says it does. And that is true even though there is no particular moment when our construction procedure produces a final verdict. The crux of the problem is that temporally-extended constructivism embraces a procedure that is large, but still closed, in the way that the set of natural numbers understood as an actual infinity is large but closed. So we can think about this procedure as a single entity—a completed totality—that witnesses the truth of Euthyphro Subjectivism for a particular normative property.

This is a decisive blow to temporally open-ended constructivism, but it may offer a clue for how to design a sequel. The keystone of the case against temporally open-ended constructivism was the observation that even though our construction procedure is very large, we can still understand that procedure as a single totality, and so we can still characterize it in a way that allows us to say, "*this* thing, *this* construction procedure is a witness to the Euthyphro Subjectivity of the target property." This reply would appear to work against any liberalization of our construction procedure. If we try to answer the realist's challenges by moving from an individualistic construction procedure to one that encompasses, say, a whole community, the realist can just retrench and offer a version of the same challenge at that level—that the shared deliberation of a community also leads for something beyond itself, just as the individual's does. If we respond by introducing people outside the community, the realist can follow us and scale up the objection *mutatis mutandis*.

This means that if we can construe our construction procedure in a way that forestalls such a proclamation—viz. "*this* thing, *this* construction procedure is a witness to the Euthyphro Subjectivity of the target property"—then perhaps we can avoid Euthyphro Subjectivity. That would require denying the following principle:

> *All-in-one Principle*. It is always possible to think of the construction procedure associated with a normative property as a single totality.[20]

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[20]   This is adapted from a principle of the same name discussed by Richard Cartwright, "Speaking of everything", *Noûs* 28(1), 1994, pp. 1-20.

If the All-in-one Principle is true, then even if our construction procedure for a normative property is infinitely liberal in many dimensions (time, space, persons), we can still think of it as a totality. But if we can somehow escape the All-in-one Principle, then maybe we can describe a construction procedure that really is open-ended.

4. Indefinite Extensibility

We need a more principled kind of open-endedness. To do this I will rely on a comparison with a structurally similar issue in the philosophy of set theory. This is not a novel move; constructivists have relied on analogies with mathematics to motivate their ideas for many years.[21] I should emphasize, however, that for my part the set theory is just an illustration. It allows us to more rigorously spell out certain ideas and concepts that can then be put to use in constructivism about normative properties. For this reason I do not propose any particularly strong analogy between mathematics and normativity, and can happily accept many disanalogies between the two.

The notion from the philosophy of set theory I will rely on is that of an *indefinitely extensible* concept. The idea is that normative thought and mathematical thought share a certain structural feature—open-endedness—and that we can use the relatively precise language that has been developed to describe the latter to make sense of the former. In this section I introduce the concept in its mathematical environment. In what follows I apply it to the problem at hand.

In 1899 Georg Cantor claimed to have discovered an antinomy in the very idea of certain totalities. "A multiplicity can be such," Cantor wrote, "that the assumption that all of its elements 'are together' leads to a contradiction, so that it is impossible to conceive of the multiplicity as a unity, as 'one finished thing' ". A few years later Russell produced a characterization of these multiplicities. "There are some properties such that, given any class of terms all having such a property, we can always define a new term also having the property in question." And this, Russell noted, implied that, "we can never collect all of the terms having the said property into a whole; because, whenever we hope we have them all, the collection which we have immediately proceeds to generate a new term also having the said property." Years later, Michael Dummett baptized this phenomenon. "An *indefinitely extensible* concept is one such that, if we can form a definite conception of a totality all of whose members fall under the concept, then we can, by reference to that totality, characterize a larger totality all of whose members fall under it." Thus it is part of the very nature of

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21   For example, see part I of Scanlon's "Utilitarianism and contractualism" in A. Sen and B. Williams (eds), *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 103–28.

indefinitely extensible concepts that their extensions cannot be understood as totalities, as set-like entities.[22]

Dummett thinks that the concept *set* is indefinitely extensible. I will summarize his argument here because I will make a similar argument for another concept later. The intuitive case for Dummett's claim is easy. If concepts had mottoes, then *set*'s would be *e pluribus unum*: a set collects disparate things together into a single totality. And this sort of process is not bounded. Suppose we take a mouse and Barbarossa and collect them into a set. This set is itself just as fit to be combined with other things into a new set as its elements are. And these further sets can, in turn, be collected together with other things to form yet another set. The general procedure here, *generation by collection*, seems to go on without bound: any set we think is the last or largest can be joined with other things, like its subsets or Ottoman sailors, to create an even larger set.

Now, one could respond that there really is a largest set, a set V of all sets, and all this joining takes place within its ambit. But this means that sets formed out of V and other items (e.g. the set $\{V, \text{Barbarossa}\}$ or the powerset of V) will be *inside* of V, and that strikes many as a desperate, unpromising move that chafes with basic concept of a set as something above and beyond its members.

Dummett tries to sharpen this intuitive case with a second argument relying on Russell's paradox. If we accept a comprehension axiom schema to the effect that for any set we can form a set of its members meeting some condition and agree that V is a set containing all sets, then we can form a set r that contains all sets that are not members of themselves. Since V contains all sets, it must contain r. But now, we wonder, is r itself a self-membered set? By definition, r is a member of r just in case r is not a member of r, and that is a contradiction. The natural remedy for such an antinomy, Dummett and company argue, is to dispense with the idea of a set of all sets.[23]

There are alternative detours around Russell's paradox of course, and I cannot do justice to all the arguments and counterarguments swirling about these questions. But my point here is quite limited. As Dummett suggests, there are reasons, both philosophical and mathematical, to explain the unique properties of sets by saying that the concept *set* is indefinitely

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[22]   Cantor's remarks are from a letter to Dedekind, reprinted in J. van Heijenoort (ed), *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). The other quotes are from, "On some difficulties concerning transfinite numbers and other types", reprinted in Russell's *Essays in Analysis* (London: G. Braziller, 1973) and "What is mathematics about?" reprinted in Dummett's *Seas of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 441.

[23]   The Burali-Forti paradox has the same structure. Dummett uses it to argue that *ordinal* is indefinitely extensible.

extensible. In the next section I suggest that something analogous is going on in our normative thought.

5. Perspectives and their Extension

My way around objections stemming from the All-in-one Principle involves a construction procedure whose inputs cannot be collected into a single totality because the concept they fall under is indefinitely extensible. This renders the procedure open-ended in the same way the hierarchy of sets is open-ended: we cannot conceive of the completion of such a procedure because it is contrary to its nature that it should be completed.

The inputs I propose are judgments made from a point of view, standpoint, or perspective. This is a natural way to think about the inputs of a construction procedure. No one occupies the Original Position, but we can speak of judgments made from that perspective. My university's cyclotron is not finished yet, but our epistemic construction procedure can still, imaginatively, take account how things might appear from the point of view of someone using such a machine. Indeed, even if they do not explicitly characterize their construction procedure thus, many authors find it quite natural to speak in terms of "points of view", "standpoints", and "perspectives".[24]

We can get a better idea of what a perspective is by pointing at paradigms and gesturing at how they might be generalized. Begin with the idea of a spatial perspective. It is something like a vector rooted at a point, pointing in one direction, with a magnitude that indicates its focus. Spatial perspectives are distinguished by three parameters: root, direction, and magnitude. Now think of all the other things that can distinguish the not-just-spatial perspective of a participant in a construction procedure: time, background beliefs and desires, ambitions, predilections, biases, cognitive capacities, commitments of conscience, religious dogma, culture, ideas of justice, sensitivities of sex, race, and class. Each of these parameters can take on different values. A perspective is a tuple of such values.

This characterization makes perspectives extremely fine-grained. Indeed it suggests that at a given moment a person can occupy several different perspectives at once, depending which parameters are relevant to a given representation. Some will find this counter-intuitive: we speak of my perspective, not of my many perspectives. This individuation scheme will make my argument easier to state my argument, but, as I explain below, I think it can be made with a coarser individuation.

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[24] For example, see Scanlon's discussion of impersonal values in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 218. For a discussion of the logic of perspectives, see A. W. Moore, *Points of View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

We can now state the plan to circumvent the All-in-one Principle. First, the concept *perspective* is indefinitely extensible in the same way that *set* is. Second, we stipulate that our construction procedure takes all perspectives as inputs. (It may discount some of them rather heavily, without ever outright excluding them; I will come to this point later.) This enables us to deny the All-in-one Principle, and, in turn, gives us the ingredients for a truly open-ended constructivism.

I shall return to the question of how to formulate this constructivism momentarily, but first I want to lay out the argument for the indefinite extensibility of *perspective*. Recall that we had two different arguments for the indefinite extensibility of *set*. One was an intuitive argument about how, given any totality of sets, we can always generate a larger one. The second aspired to greater rigor by attempting to derive a contradiction, based on Russell's paradox, from the hypothesis of a set of all sets. I offer analogous arguments for the indefinite extensibility of *perspective*.

First, the intuitive point. The concept *perspective* is indefinitely extensible for much the same reason that *set* is. To see the totality of all sets as a totality of sets is also to see the possibility of generating a larger totality by collecting the original totality together with some further things, like its own subsets. The same thing is true of perspectives. For any putative totality of perspectives, we can always imagine a further perspective *on* those perspectives, a perspective that looks over their collective shoulder and brings them into view as parts of the world.

What does it mean to "stand back" and look "down upon" or "over the shoulder of" a perspective? Once again, the case of spatial perspectives is instructive. Take the spatial perspective with root (1, 1) and focus on the origin. We can think of a perspective with root (2, 2) and focus on (1, 1) as a perspective *on* our original perspective: our original perspective is the object at the focus of the second perspective.[25]

This process, *generation by reflection*, is a cousin of generation by collection. Just as the latter locates new sets by gathering the parts of an original set into a new set, generation by reflection brings us to a new perspective by looking down upon the perspective we began with. This process is ubiquitous. We hold up our attitudes, inclinations, and other opinions to scrutiny by understanding them as the product of a particular perspective on the world—"I only thought that because I grew up in New York"—but doing this means taking up a further perspective on these judgments, the perspective of our scrutinizing self. Social scientists commonly take the perspectives of their subjects as objects of study. Macaulay wonders what of the Glorious Revolution might be explained by inquiring into the

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[25]   Of course there will be more than just one perspective so oriented: there will be many perspectives *on* a perspective.

perspectives of King James and the Immortal Seven. We can iterate this procedure: just as Macaulay can ask about James's perspectives, an historiographer can ask what of Macaulay's perspective contributed to his Whiggishness. In this Macaulay's perspective becomes a facet of the world worthy of study.

An even more liberal kind of reflection drives philosophical arguments. Bernard Williams gives an excellent example. He imagines two parties, *A* and *B*:

> With respect to their supposed pieces of knowledge, *A*'s and *B*'s representations may well differ. If what they both have is knowledge, then it seems to follow that there must be some coherent way of understanding why these representations differ, and how they are related to one another. One very primitive example of this would be that *A* and *B* were in different places; another might be that they were both correctly predicting the movements of the planets, but by different, geometrically equivalent, systems. In either case, a story can be told which explains how *A*'s and B's can each be perspectives on the same reality. To understand this story, one needs to form a conception of the world which *contains A and B* and their representations; *A* and *B* are not debarred from taking this standpoint themselves, but it involves their standing back from their original ways of representing these aspects of the world. But this process, it seems, can be continued. For if *A* or *B* or some other party comes in this way to understand these representations and their relation to the world, this will be because he has given them a place in some more inclusive representation; but this will still itself be a representation, involving its own beliefs, conceptualizations, perceptual experiences and assumptions about the laws of nature. If this is knowledge, then we must be able to form the conception, once more, of how this would be related to some other representation which might, equally, claim to be knowledge; indeed we must be able to form that conception with regard to *every* other representation which might make that claim.[26]

Williams describes a process of standing back from a perspective, of taking up a perspective on some target perspective. He is interested in this process for a particular reason. He wants to understand how two different representations may be consistent views of the same world. But we can imagine many other reasons for this kind of reflection: in search of prejudice or bias, in asking Euthyphro questions.

Williams also notes two important features of this process. The first is that to see *A* and *B* as parts of the world, we must take up a standpoint that is neither *A* nor *B*: we must take up some further perspective. Second, this process can be iterated without any obvious limit. We take up *C* to survey

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[26]   *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, new edn (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 49-50.

A and *B*; then we take up *D* to survey *A*, *B*, and *C*; and so on. These two features give us our intuitive argument for the indefinite extensibility of *per-spective*. Any attempt to circumscribe the range perspectives is bound to fail because we can always take a further perspective, outside of the circle, *on* the circumscribed perspectives and our attempt to encompass them. There-fore, there can be no such circumscribed totality.

The second argument for the indefinite extensibility of *set* derives a con-tradiction from the idea of a totality of sets. It does this by first noting that a set of all sets must include self-membered sets, and then exploiting para-doxes that arise from this kind of self-reference. My second argument pro-ceeds in parallel. A perspective is a partial view on the world, not the world itself. But when occupying a perspective we do not see it as a perspective. We don't really see it at all. We see the world *from* it. Consequently, recog-nizing a perspective or collection of perspectives *as* perspectives requires us to take up some further perspective. Only from that perspective can we bring our original perspective into view as a part of the world; only then can we understand it *as* a view on the world. To represent something as a perspective, then, there must be another place, another perspective, from which this representation is possible.[27]

This point about the logic of perspectives positions us to give a Russell-ian argument. Suppose that *S* is the totality of all perspectives, and consider a representation of them as such: "all perspectives *p* are in *S*". If *S* contains all the perspectives, then we can only assert this from a perspective *r* in *S*. But that means that in saying "all perspectives *p* are in *S*" we are represent-ing our own perspective, which by hypothesis is a member of *S*, as a per-spective. But we have just seen that this is impossible: we can judge something as being a perspective only from a different perspective. So the supposition that there is a totality of all perspectives is self-defeating.[28]

My argument depends on the fine-grained individuation of perspectives. On my scheme it makes sense to say that reflection on a perspective involves taking up some *further* perspective because the individuation is so fine. But some may find it better to individuate perspectives more coarsely. They would then say that a person's perspective contains multiple perspectives-in-my-sense and that reflection on this perspective may be

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[27] I have compared this argument's structure to ones relying on Russell's paradox. Its clos-est relative, however, may be Dedekind's turn to the "realm of his thoughts" to prove the existence of an infinite set. See Theorem 66 of *Was sind und was sollen die Zahlen?*

[28] We can see now that this argument relies on very little in the way of specific analogies with set theory. It requires only that the inputs of our construction procedure have the structural features that enable Russell and Burali-Forti's paradoxes. What these features are is a matter of some controversy, though. For discussion see Stewart Shapiro and Crispin Wright, "All things indefinitely extensible" in A. Rayo and G. Uzquiano (eds), *Absolute Generality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

self-reflection. But my basic point holds in this framework by another route. The indefiniteness which we find in the extension of perspectives-in-my-sense will be reflected in an indefiniteness internal to the perspective: our perspective will be indefinitely reformable or articulable, or something like that. This is a hazier way of talking, which is why I formulate the argument as I do.

One consequence of this argument is that there cannot be any "absolute", "God's eye" or "*sub specie aeternitatis*" perspective on the world, a perspective that encompasses all others. For something to be a "view" or "perspective", it must be possible to transcend it in the ways I have described, and so no view or perspective can be absolute, maximally objective, or all-encompassing in the way a God's eye view purports to be. Instead of a distinction between subjective views of the world and "the" objective point of view, we have an indefinitely extensible sequence of increasingly broad collections of perspectives.[29]

A recapitulation is in order. *Perspective* is an indefinitely extensible concept for reasons similar to those underwriting the indefinite extensibility of *set*. For any putative totality of perspectives, we can imagine a further perspective on those perspectives, a perspective that looks over their collective shoulder and sees them as parts of the world. This process of generation by reflection is unbounded. Furthermore, to call something the totality of perspectives would be self-defeating because to do so would require occupying a perspective beyond that totality. Crucially, this is not a point about size *per se*. *Perspective* is indefinitely extensible not because there are lots and lots of perspectives in some vague sense, but because generation by reflection is unbounded, just as generation by collection is.

6. Open-ended Constructivism

We tried to avoid Euthyphro Subjectivism by extending our construction procedure in perpetuity. But this construction procedure was still Euthyphro Subjective because facts about normative properties were still constituted by a particular construction procedure encompassing the views of a particular set of people, even though that set was very large—infinite even. To succeed where this temporal proposal failed, we must reject the All-in-one Principle. We must insure that our critic's crucial assertion cannot be made, that there is no thing—no procedure, no group of arbiters, no class of privileged dispositions—to witness the truth of Euthyphro Subjectivism. To do

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[29] My conclusion therefore appears incompatible with the guiding distinction of Nagel's *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). It may also be incompatible with Williams's "absolute conception" of the world, but I am less sure of that.

this we need to make our construction not just infinitely long, but genuinely unbounded.

The claim that *perspective* is indefinitely extensible does that. Stipulate that our construction procedure for a normative property must incorporate judgments from all perspectives. (The claim that we need *all* perspectives is not actually necessary: all we need is an indefinitely extensible plurality, of which there will be more than one.) Such a construction would be absolutely open-ended because *perspective* is indefinitely extensible: we cannot form all perspectives into a single totality, and so we cannot understand our construction procedure as a single computation.

For any normative property connected to such a construction procedure, the answer to the question of Euthyphro Subjectivity will be "no". There is no class of attitudes, activities, or willings, or any construction procedure that takes such things as inputs for which we can say that something possesses a normative property because those things say it does. More briefly, it is false that things are valuable, just, or justified in virtue of features of *us* because there could be no *us* that makes this proposition true. But an open-ended constructivist can still answer "no" to the question of Euthyphro Objectivity. Whereas the realist explains the open-endedness of inquiry in terms of there being some external object that our inquiries are trying to latch onto, the open-ended constructivist can explain it entirely in terms internal to the construction procedure, and without reference to any such thing. For this reason she is not forced into a commitment to Euthyphro Objectivism.

7. The Intuitive Picture

So far I have offered open-ended constructivism as a solution to a particular problem. How can we capture these elusive ideas of "transcendence" and "open-endedness" without embracing Euthyphro Objectivism? My solution was based on a stipulation that the construction procedure for a normative property include all perspectives. I have suggested that this solves the problem, but why accept the stipulation? Ambitions of evading the Euthyphro Dilemma aside, why suppose that all perspectives matter to a normative question? I'll make two points here.

First, it is worth repeating that, strictly speaking, we need not include all perspectives to get the desired result. We could exclude lots and lots of perspectives, so long as what is left over has the structure that drove the indefinite extensibility argument, namely an unbounded process of generation by reflection. (Analogy: there are infinitely large sets that are proper subsets of other infinitely large sets—the evens and the natural numbers.) What this shows is that the open-endedness of our construction procedure is driven not so much by the insistence that we include *all*

perspectives, including those of aliens from far flung planets, but that the process of reflective scrutiny be unbounded. This means that there is room for open-ended constructivists to disagree about what the scope of the construction procedure ought to be. They will all maintain that the plurality of perspectives underwriting our construction procedure be associated with an indefinitely extensible concept, but they can disagree about which plurality should be employed. Those who insist that there is no way the denizens of Alpha Centauri could matter to our questions about justice can exclude these perspectives without necessarily sacrificing open-endedness.

All that said, I would resist this exclusion on grounds of holism. The opinions of Alpha Centaurians may not matter directly to our deliberations about justice, but they may matter to some question whose answer matters to some further question whose answer matters to questions of justice. Claims about justice are one part of a greater web of belief, so if we think that some remote perspective may matter to a question that is part of this web, holism should lead us to believe that it matters to justice too, albeit very indirectly. This is a point, however, on which one may disagree with me while still accepting the greater claim.

The second point is that open-ended constructivism is a way of making precise the more intuitive and more philosophical picture of normativity I sketched earlier. We can think of the transcendence of normative properties as a matter of our attitudes, activities, and inquiries being fundamentally separated from those properties. But we can also think of transcendence as following from an in-born urge to perpetuate a construction procedure indefinitely. What kind of "in-born urge"? Here opinions will differ, but perhaps we can clarify the idea by showing how this picture emerges from a handful of Kantian theses. The first thesis is that reason is a power of critical detachment and scrutiny. It is not a faculty for detecting new facts about the world, but a capacity that we have to hold up our attitudes, opinions, and activities to reflective scrutiny.[30] I may have an instinct to believe that the sun orbits the earth, but I can hold this proposed belief up to reflective scrutiny. I apply this scrutiny by comparing my instinct to how things seem from other perspectives. If there is a conflict, then I have work to do. This is the business of reason. Second, this critical power of reason is the source of normative thought. For creatures without the critical power of reason, like most non-human animals, there is no question of what they *should* do, only of what they *will* do given their instincts and other attitudes. Human beings have a special ability, the ability to reason, which allows us to become aware of our attitudes *qua* attitudes, detach ourselves from them,

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[30]   Onora O'Neill, "Four models of practical reasoning" reprinted in her *Bounds of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

and to scrutinize them. This reflective distance introduces the question of what we *should* do, above and beyond what we are inclined to do, and the same capacity generates answers to these questions.[31] Third, we can understand the scrutiny of reason as a consultation of other perspectives. Rational scrutiny of an attitude means looking on it from a further perspective and evaluating its compatibility with how things seem from that perspective, and reasoning is a process of reaching the best possible equilibrium amongst these perspectives. (Again, a given person will be capable of taking up multiple different perspectives.) Perspectives are the gamut of reason's scrutiny.[32]

These theses plus the claim that *perspective* is indefinitely extensible entail open-ended constructivism. If normative properties are "generated" by the activity of practical reason, if practical reason is a capacity for scrutiny, if this scrutiny consists in the attempted integration of further and further perspectives on a given question, and if the plurality of perspectives being so integrated is indefinitely extensible, then such a construction procedure will be open-ended.

This gives us an account of transcendence quite different from the one proffered by the Euthyphro Objectivist. Normative properties are transcendent because the scrutiny applied by reason to our ideas about these normative properties is unceasing. And because reason applies this scrutiny by holding up our attitudes to more and more perspectives, the unceasingness of reason's scrutiny and the indefinite extensibility of *perspective* are two sides of the same coin. On my view, then, there is an intimate connection between reason, normativity, and transcendence. Reason drives our construction procedures for normative items by demanding the input of more and more perspectives. But because *perspective* is indefinitely extensible, this procedure is open-ended. And because the procedure is open-ended in this principled way, the things that its activity constitutes—normative properties—are transcendent.

Metaphorically, Euthyphro Objective views understand transcendence as a matter of our activities being forever "pulled" toward an unreachable outer reality, whereas open-ended constructivism sees it as a matter of our being forever "pushed" by the scrutiny of reason. We can characterize this intuitive distinction with a little more clarity, but it requires a distinction. We can characterize a function *extensionally* by identifying it with the ordered pairs: $f(x) = x + 2$ is the set of ordered pairs $\{(1, 3), (2, 4), \ldots\}$. On this rendering, computing a function is like using a telephone directory. We look

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[31]   Christine M. Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996)*, p. 92.

[32]   Onora O'Neill, "Reason and politics in the Kantian enterprise", reprinted in her *Constructions of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

up the input in our set of ordered pairs and find our output. But we can also understand the function *intensionally*, as a black box that, in virtue of its inner workings, spits out $n+2$ whenever we hand it n.

In simple cases it is not worth attending to this distinction, but sometimes the extensional characterization of a function gives out. Suppose we are interested in the identity function, $f(x) = x$, but we are interested in this function with respect to an unrestricted domain—as it ranges over absolutely everything. Since sets are things and there is no set of all sets, there can be no set of all things. This means we cannot give an extensional characterization of our function. But we still have some primitive understanding of how it works. If we are given 3, we return 3. If we are given Barbarossa, we return Barbarossa. Since this function cannot be characterized extensionally, this understanding must be intensional.[33] Quantification admits of the same distinction. On an extensional rendering, "$(x) \, F(x)$" is understood as predicating F of every member of a particular set-like domain. Whereas on an intensional understanding, when I say "include all sets in our hierarchy" I do not mean "include all x in S where S is the set of all sets", but rather "include the sets", where this latter formulation functions as its own freestanding rule.[34]

This distinction matters because our intuitions about transcendence and open-endedness are quantificational. We say that the nature of normative properties "goes beyond" any and all attitudes and activities, but the cash value of this claim is that for all classes of perspectives p, the attitudes and activities native to p are inadequate to fix the nature of a given normative property. On an extensional notion of quantification, this judgment is about the subsets of the set of all perspectives. On an intensional reading it says nothing about a set of all perspectives; instead, it relies on a rule telling us to add further perspectives without prejudice. The distinction between these readings is immense. The extensional rendering of transcendence, suggested by Euthyphro Objectivism, imagines there to be a certain extension of human thought, the class of all possible perspectives, and understands transcendence as the fact that normative properties are fixed by something "beyond" this extension. By contrast, the intensional reading suggested by open-ended constructivism denies that there is such an extension, and it understands transcendence as precisely the impossibility of such a thing: normative properties are transcendent just because we cannot conceive of completing the task of collecting perspectives. Normative properties are transcendent of normative thought, but this transcendence is in-born; it is

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[33]   That our grasp of rules must be grounded in an intensional capacity for rule-following is arguably a moral of Wittgenstein's rule-following arguments.

[34]   Compare Vann McGee on "open-ended schemata", "How we learn mathematical language", *Philosophical Review*, 106(1), 1997, pp. 59-63.

rooted in the unceasing scrutiny of our reason and our intensional understanding of the dictates of reason, and so it is plausibly humane.

The path of my attempt at Euthyphro circumvention should now be clearer. In one sense, the nature of normative properties depends on "us", but only "us" read intensionally. This makes Euthyphro Objectivism false. But at the same time there is no particular "us", no extension of constructors, on which they depend. And this makes Euthyphro Subjectivism false too.

8. Nihilism

A large, angry elephant has been lurking in the corner for some time now. The absolute open-endedness of a construction procedure makes it very hard to see how anything comes to possess a normative property at all. This fact threatens to render my view a baroque form of nihilism. For how can we make sense of a society being just, a loved one valuable, or an experimental method justified, if facts about justice, value, and justification never get fixed? And how might our thoughts about the same guide our actions and activities?

I think there are actually three questions in this challenge. One asks after the implications of open-ended constructivism for the semantics of normative claims, another about epistemology, and a third is about the "authority" of normativity. I'll take these in sequence.

The Semantic Question

Let's take the semantic question first. We want to know whether we can make sense of workaday normative statements like "apartheid is unjust." The worry is that these statements will be defective—neither true nor false, correct nor incorrect—because of how open-ended constructivism sees the property of justice being constituted.

My reply is that "apartheid is just" is apt to be true. To explain, I need to borrow a notion from Crispin Wright:

> A statement *superassertible* if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information.[35]

The "arbitrary" in this statement is a quantifier. If I am right about the indefinite extensibility of *perspective,* it may be difficult to understand this quantifier extensionally (in the sense offered above). But if the quantifier is

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[35]   *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 48.

read intensionally, then normative statements are capable of being superassertible. A statement is superassertible if it can withstand arbitrarily close scrutiny and enlargement of information; both of these criteria can be plausibly understood in terms of the integration of further perspectives—scrutinizing perspectives and well-informed perspectives. The two notions line up rather nicely, actually. The idea of open-constructivism is that a normative property is constituted by a construction procedure that is open-ended, in part, because of the unbounded nature of scrutiny and the availability of new information. The idea of superassertibility is that some statements can survive this kind of scrutiny and enlargement of information resources.

All this matters because superassertibility is put forward as a theory of truth. This is plausible because, as Wright shows, superassertibility captures the familiar platitudes about truth.[36] So if normative statements can be superassertible on my theory, then we have a case for saying that they can be true. The thesis that truth is superassertibility is controversial, of course, but it is clear what it offers to open-ended constructivists. It gives us a conception of truth that satisfies the distinctive functional role of the truth predicate, while also making it possible for there to be truth-apt sentences about normative properties understood in the way open-ended constructivists suggest. And this suggests open-ended constructivism carries no special semantic liabilities.

Nonetheless, one might worry that while there can be normative truths, there will be rather few of them because so few statements will withstand this kind of procedure. This thought, while plausible, is misleading. Perhaps there will be very few sentences of the form "*a* is just *tout court*" that turn out true, but what about relativized statements like "*a* is just for community *c*"? The specification of *c* may involve the usual sorts of things: an historical situation, a conception of reasonableness, a conception of the problem that justice is supposed to solve, a shared conception of the self, perhaps even certain social conventions and common ideology. There is reason to suppose that a greater number of statements like these will come out as true than the *tout court* ones. It is the same reason that it may be undecidable whether all sets have some property *p*, but it is provable that some *particular* sets have property *p*. The construction procedure we use to determine whether "*a* is just for community *c*" will no doubt integrate a proper subplurality of those employed by the construction we use for "*a* is just *tout court*", but, as we observed above, this does not mean that the former will be closed: indefinitely extensible pluralities can have proper subpluralities that are also indefinitely extensible. So the construction procedure for "*a* is just for community *c*" can enjoy the benefits of open-endedness.

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[36]   pp. 57ff.

The Epistemological Question

The epistemological question is how we might be expected to know anything about justice and goodness if they are constituted by an open-ended construction procedure and, concomitantly, how this knowledge might guide our projects. Before answering this question, I want to suggest that there only seems to be a problem here if we slip into a particular way of thinking about knowledge and justification. We cannot understand an agent's justification in holding something about justice or goodness on the model of that agent standing in a particular kind of relationship with some part of the external world. But this is a problematic account of justification anyway, since (i) it poses problems for so many apparent facets of the world—universals, mathematicalia, unobservables—and (ii) in offering a criterion that focuses on the pedigree of individual beliefs, it seems incompatible with the holistic structure of our epistemic projects. So it is actually a virtue of the present account that we can offer a normative epistemology that need not hoe this rocky row.

Our beliefs about justice amount to predictions about how the relevant construction procedure will go. These beliefs and their justification will be grounded in a handful of things, of which I will mention three. (1) Our experience with relevant computable approximations of an open-ended procedure will provide a weak kind of warrant. If a large but finite approximation of an indefinitely extensible construction procedure produces a certain result, then that gives us some defeasible *pro tanto* evidence that the indefinitely extensible procedure will have a similar result. This evidence is akin to the evidence we get for Goldbach's conjecture—every even integer greater than two can be expressed as the sum of two primes—from the fact that it has been confirmed for integers up to $4*10^{18}$: we should have greater credence that the conjecture is true than we would in absence of this information, but we should recognize its limitations and not confuse it with any kind of proof. (2) Our grasp of the general structure of the construction procedure can provide a kind of heuristic justification. Compare the case of Goldbach's conjecture again. In general, the greater an integer, the more pairs of numbers that can sum to that integer. So as even integers get larger, it becomes "more likely", given a uniform distribution of primes, that at least one of these pairs will contain only primes. In other words, if Goldbach's conjecture were to fail, we should expect it to fail for *small* numbers. This is far from a proof, but it too provides some corroboration of the conjecture. The same kind of reasoning seems available in our construction procedures: by understanding the general dynamics of a construction we can make rational predictions about which perspectives might make a difference. For example, suppose that there are classes of individuals r and s, who differ only in that those in r clip their fingernails and those in s file

their fingernails, and our construction procedure for justice has already integrated the perspectives of those in r. We have good reason to think that the inclusion of s will make little difference to the procedure, since filing your fingernails isn't the kind of thing that matters to questions of justice. (3) In particular, we may think that the perspectives of some creatures while in principle relevant are very unlikely to make a difference. I argued earlier against the exclusion of any perspectives, even rather distant ones (while noting that one could disagree with me while still concurring on the crucial point). I believe this, but also think I have very good reason to be skeptical that, say, the perspectives of blind Alpha Centaurians will make a tangible difference in the construction of terrestrial sublimity.

These are some grounds we might have for putting forward reasonable hypotheses about how an open-ended construction procedure might go. I should emphasize, however, that none of these are likely to warrant very robust confidence. But that is as it should be. Open-endedness offers not just a nominal fallibilism—"technically, we could be wrong, but we are pretty sure we aren't"—but a deeper humility about what our methods can accomplish. The history of science is a cautionary tale. We can understand scientific revolutions as reactions to the inability of a prevailing research paradigm to successfully accommodate judgments from a particular set of perspectives. But this inability is usually a surprise. No one thought that Max Planck's inquiries into minor questions about black body radiation would usher in the radical changes that we associate with quantum theory. By the same token, we may very well find ourselves surprised by which perspectives prompt radical revisions to ideas about justice. While we have some grounds for rational belief about how an open-ended construction procedure will go, we also have a kind of pessimistic induction. I don't have anything insightful to say about how to balance these considerations. My point is merely that open-ended constructivism does not seem to involve any special epistemological disadvantage.

The Authority Question

Properties like rightness and justice are supposed to be normative for us, to have authority over the will: if something is right, I ought to do it. Constructivists have an especially elegant theory of the origins of normative authority.[37] For constructivists the correctness of a normative principle is constituted by its connection to the structure of the problem it is supposed to solve, and the authority of this principle is grounded in the asking of the question it is supposed to answer. Anyone who asks this question and

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[37] Other stories are compatible with constructivism too. The constitutivism I describe here is just an especially natural one given the commitments of constructivism.

denies the authority of the candidate principle is guilty of a pragmatic contradiction. At its broadest, this is the thought that certain normative principles, like the Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives, owe their normative authority to their status as conditions of practical reason itself.[38]

I want to avail myself of this same strategy. In the spirit of the Kantian account I sketched before, I want to say that the authority of open-ended constructivist principles lies in their being conditions of practical reason itself. One might worry that even if this strategy is generally successful, it will not work for open-ended constructivism. For how can a property be a condition of practical reason or agency if its constitution is the result of an open-ended procedure? It can be such in the usual way. Instead of saying that a definite state or property is a condition of practical reason, I say that what Kant would call a "regulative ideal" has this status. This means that we can never instantiate this condition—for principled reasons—but only do our best to approximate it. There is no special problem for open-ended constructivism though, as this is where this style of argument naturally leads. It is Kant's view, for one: the Kingdom of Ends has normative authority because it is a condition on agency, but it is also an "idea" of reason. Korsgaard finds herself headed in the same direction. Recognizing the need for many different tiers of increasingly perfect agency, lest its agency be too easy or too hard, she comes to talk about agency as an "ideal" that may be rather far off from even our best human exemplars.[39]

Granted, there will be tricky problems about how to implement this kind of requirement—about which sorts of behavior can be legitimately called an attempt to live up to the ideal and which cannot. Open-ended constructivism is not alone in facing this kind of problem, though: the utilitarian's "cluelessness" is a cousin. My reply here is the same as it was for the semantic and epistemological issues: there are difficult questions, but no reason to suppose that open-ended constructivism has any distinctive problems.[40]

9. Taxonomy

I should briefly respond to a common reaction to open-ended constructivism: "When we get past all the logical prestidigitation and down to brass tacks, your view is *really* or *in spirit* a form of Euthyphro Subjectivism since it does not offer a theory on which normative properties are 'just there anyway'." This complaint is not without merit, and it may suggest a

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[38]   For example see chapter 5 of Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[39]   *Self-Constitution*, pp. 89-90 and fn. 13 on p. 99.

[40]   This section has benefitted considerably from the objections and suggestions of an anonymous referee.

different way of organizing the menu of objective and subjective views. But not much hangs on how we keep our books, and even if we grant the point, there is still something of worth in the demonstration. I have shown that we can deny the kind of dependence thesis codified in the basic statement of Euthyphro Subjectivism without being forced to concede that normative properties are "just there anyway".

Moreover, if we redraw the Euthyphro line in such a way that open-ended constructivism is, after all, a form of Subjectivism, then my remarks become intramural advice: subjectivists should try to incorporate some manner of open-endedness into their accounts because that will enable them to better capture some features of practical reasoning that we hitherto thought were only possible for realists—the ones offered by Adams, Murdoch, Wiggins, and Wood. Open-ended constructivism offers one way to do that, though probably not the only one.

My proposal may also figure in a different debate. As I mentioned at the beginning of the paper, some writers, like Street and James, have criticized the procedural conception of constructivism. One objection to this conception is that it does not yield a distinctive metaethical view.[41] The procedure constructivists rely on is just a roundabout specification of a normative property, and so constructivism a roundabout realism. This concern is one motivation for taking on a conception like Street's, since it seems clear about how constructivism is distinctive. But the view I have outlined here may offer something of a middle ground. Constructivism should be understood in the procedural terms that Rawls prefers, but the appropriate procedure is indeterminate, and cannot be made determinate. It subjects itself to on-going, unceasing self-critique of revision that makes it false to say that any *particular* procedure is the right one. This offers another way to rebut the charge that constructivists are realists in disguise. Incorrigible indeterminacy, not the practical point of view, makes constructivism distinctive.

10. Conclusion

To close, I return to Plato. Robert Adams says that we should be moved to Euthyphro Objectivism by reflection on the transcendence of the Good. He characterizes this view as Platonic. But Adams's notion of "transcendence" seems narrower than Plato's. Plato says, for example, that "the Good is not being, but is beyond being, and superior to it in both dignity and power."[42] Plato's point, as I understand him, is that what is so "dignified" and

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41 This objection is made by Nadeem Hussain and Nishi Shah, "Misunderstanding metaethics: Korsgaard's objections to realism", in R. Shafer-Landau (ed), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

42 *Republic* VI, 508b.

"powerful" about the Good cannot be captured by saying that it lives in a different county. The Good must be *beyond what is*. This thesis is a head-scratcher no doubt, but it is obvious that Euthyphro Objectivism is not the way to make sense of it. Euthyphro Objectivism is very much a thesis about *what is*. On the other hand, open-ended constructivism does offer one way to articulate the thought. The Good is beyond being insofar as it is an asymptotic ideal prescribed by an uncompletable process of rational reflection.[43]