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Introduction

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1 General Introduction

In contemporary discussions, ethics and inquiry into the natural world are often treated as two completely independent fields of study. By contrast, many ancient thinkers took them to be intimately connected. This volume aims to shed light on the various ways in which ancient thinkers drew connections between these two fields. We human beings are in some sense part of the natural world and we live our lives within a larger cosmos, but yet our actions are governed by norms whose relation to the natural world is up for debate. The chapters in this volume discuss how these facts about our relation to the world bear upon both ancient accounts of human goodness and also ancient accounts of the natural world itself. The chapters focus primarily on Plato and Aristotle. But we have also included some discussion of earlier and later thinkers, with a chapter on the Presocratics and a couple of chapters that in part point ahead to later Epicurean, Stoic, and Neoplatonist philosophers.

Prima facie, there are at least two ways in which we may think ethics and the study of nature (or physics) are related. First, while ethics is the study of what it is to be a good human being, human beings inhabit a region of the natural world. Arguably, one cannot understand a living thing, and hence have an account of that living thing's good, without understanding something about the workings of its environment. And one cannot understand the functioning of the natural world without understanding the functioning of its inhabitants (including those inhabitants that are human beings). Both of these thoughts suggest that the study of what it is to be a good human being will be importantly related to the study of the natural world.

Secondly, physics and ethics are both interested in the ways in which changing things are subject to laws and regularities. And so it is natural to ask whether the laws and regularities at work in both fields are of the same or a similar kind, and how ethical norms relate to physical laws. Whether

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ethical value judgements are also applicable to the natural world, or can in fact be reduced to naturalistic factual statements, depends on how the relationship between ethics and physics is understood.

If we do not simply assume that ethics and physics are two unrelated fields, then three principal models are possible to describe their relationship:

(1) The natural world is itself understood in ethical terms. On such a view, ethical norms are applied to the natural world itself (or to aspects of it), so that it can itself be seen as a good or bad place, or the natural world is anthropomorphised. Those philosophers who anthropomorphise aspects of the natural world might thus even be inclined to regard the study of the natural world as a part of ethics.

(2) Human beings are understood as, in some important sense, grounded in and a part of the natural world. This second view leaves open two alternatives. First, one might think that human beings and their actions are just an aspect of nature. On such an account, human actions, emotions, and pleasures are naturalised, in the sense that the rules or norms guiding them are no different, in principle, from those of other realms of nature. When, in the course of ethical inquiry, we ask what it is for a human being to be good, we are not asking a question that differs *in kind* from the questions a natural scientist asks when she enquires into what is involved in the well-functioning of an oak tree or a shark. Alternatively, one might think that the distinctive feature of human beings that makes them subject to ethical norms is itself something that develops out of their animal nature, but that this development cannot be understood simply in naturalistic terms. Human beings are by nature responsive to habituation; the resulting character state is like a kind of 'second nature'. On such an account, human beings, because they possess reason, are subject to norms that differ in principle from those that apply in other realms of nature, and human actions, emotions, and pleasures cannot be understood in wholly naturalistic terms.

(3) There is a structural similarity between the two realms, so that we find the same or similar regularities and values in both and have to ask similar questions about them, but these questions and this structure are not specific to either one of the two realms. Such an idea may arguably be seen in Aristotle's account of teleology, which claims that there is a teleological structure at work not only in human actions but

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also in the natural realm, without presupposing that a natural process must arise from an intention.

The choice between these three options raises questions about the distinctiveness of human beings, the origin of value, and the characteristics of the natural world. Is the development of a human being, like the development of a plant or an animal, something that occurs as it does 'by nature'? Should human actions and emotions be understood naturalistically? And if not, how should we understand their relation to the natural world within which they occur? How far are human emotions tied to something that is the exclusive preserve of human beings (namely, reason) and to what extent are they shared with other animals? (For some discussion of these questions, see the chapters in Part III.)

Does ethics differ from natural science in that it studies the good and the bad (not only the true and the false), or should the natural scientist also be concerned with questions about goodness and badness? What is the relationship between nature and goodness? Is goodness to be found in the wider natural world, or is it only a feature of (certain) human beings? Are human beings good by nature? And if so, how should this fact inform our account of what it is to be a good human being? (On these questions, see the chapters in Part V.)

How do ethical norms relate to natural laws? Are the laws and regularities at work in the two fields the same? Do the rules we observe in the natural world also apply to the human world? How does human legislation relate to laws of nature? And how should the fact that human beings are located within a natural world over which they often have little control affect ethical reasoning about the human good? What kind of human reaction should natural occurrences evoke? (These questions are discussed in Part I.)

We should also bear in mind that in some discussions of their relationship, ethics and physics are not immediately connected. Rather, sometimes, their relationship is clarified by linking either or both to the realm of the divine. In this case, usually, either the human or the natural realm is identified with the divine, or seen as assimilable to the divine. We are then faced with questions such as: whether, and to what degree, human beings resemble gods, whether human beings can become more godlike, or whether gods can be cast in human terms. (We find some discussion of these kinds of connection between physics and ethics in Part II.)

One concept central for both realms is causation. Depending on how the relationship between ethics and physics is cast, the notion of a cause can

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look rather different. Should we follow the first model, so that causation in nature may be understood as some form of intentional action? Or rather the second model, and if we do so, can we give an account of the way in which human actions are related to natural causal chains that allows us to make sense of the fact that human beings are responsible for their actions? Or, following the third model, should human action and natural causation be seen as simply displaying a similar structure of relations of cause and effect? (We will see some discussion of causation in Part IV.)

Any attempt to address questions such as these must be grounded in an understanding of ancient discussions of ethics and of natural science. In recent years, no one has done more to illuminate these fields than Sarah Broadie. Her work has ranged over Aristotle's natural philosophy (*Nature, Change and Agency*, 1982; *Passage and Possibility*, 1982), Aristotle's ethics (*Ethics with Aristotle*, 1991; *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, with Christopher Rowe, 2002) as well as Plato's natural philosophy (*Nature and Divinity in Plato's* Timaeus, 2012) and his account of the good (*Plato's Sun-Like Good: Dialectic in the* Republic, 2021). She has written papers on Aristotle's accounts of causation, teleology, and fate, and on his distinctive view of the good. (See, for instance, the papers collected in *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics*, 2007.) In these writings, she has pursued questions about the relations between the natural and the human worlds and about the distinctive rational nature of human beings. For instance, in her book on Plato's *Timaeus*, she says:

> No doubt it is due to our common natural endowment that we can choose better and worse; but how we do choose on a given occasion is not just a working out of our common natural endowment. Plato is scientific about nature, and like any scientist he assumes that, barring external interferences, nature necessarily works in the same way. But ethically we do not necessarily work in the same way under the same natural circumstances. (Broadie, 2012, 105)

This raises precisely the questions about the relation between the natural and the ethical realms that we discuss in this volume. Broadie's most recent book approaches these questions in a new way, arguing that for Plato the very same principle of value is responsible for both the nature of the cosmos and a well-governed human life. Sarah Broadie's work thus sets the stage for our investigations here.

All the contributors to this volume have learnt a lot from Sarah Broadie's body of work. As importantly, we owe a debt to Sarah as her students, friends, collaborators, and colleagues. All of us have been inspired by

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Sarah's combination of imagination and rigour. Many of us have been spurred on by her penetrating questions and by her constructive criticisms of our work. Those of us who were her students are not the only ones to have benefitted from her kind encouragement, her enthusiasm, and her generosity with her time. This volume is dedicated to Sarah Broadie, as a mark of our profound gratitude and admiration.

2 Individual Parts and Chapters

Part I: Humans in Nature: Nature and Law, Humans and Natural Catastrophes

One central question for human comprehension of the natural world is what kinds of occurrences in nature are perceived as following regular patterns and how these regularities in nature relate to the regularities we can perceive in the human realm. We find frequent attempts from the very beginning of philosophy onwards to explain not only seeming irregularities of the heavenly bodies as following a regular pattern, but also natural catastrophes as being part of recurring repetitions.

The way in which such regularities are explained differs in important respects from modern accounts, however: what we today call 'laws of nature' were originally not necessarily seen as behaving according to a mathematical understanding of laws, but closer to what we may think of as social laws, which leaves open the possibility of overstepping them. The relationship between these two kinds of regularities is also a central part of what is discussed in the so-called *nomos-phusis* debate of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE,[1] where *nomos* refers to the regulations human beings give to themselves, while *phusis* is what is given to human beings in some way.

In 'Legislating in Accordance with Nature in Plato's *Laws*', Alex Long looks at Plato's particular take on the *nomos-phusis* antithesis in his *Laws*. Long argues that the goal of the *Laws*, of legislating in accordance with nature, should be distinguished from the much-studied idea of 'natural law' in two ways. First, the focus of the *Laws* is primarily the right way to conduct an activity, legislation, rather than its product (laws or law). It is this activity of legislating that is said to be natural, not the law. Secondly, the discussion in the *Laws* draws a comparison with other specialised or technical activities that can be performed well or badly, such as medicine or

[1] Cf. Heinimann 1945 and McKirahan 2011, ch. 19.

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building: we can learn how to legislate 'in accordance with nature' by considering analogous activities in these other fields. Legislation is natural, among other things, when it is undertaken in a certain 'natural' order, from the starting point of life to death. This order ensures that no stage of life is ignored during the legislative process and thus guarantees the comprehensiveness of legislation. Plato's comparison of the legislator with other craftsmen presents a view of natural procedure within an art or profession: the craftsman is not subjected to constraints that are external to his domain and he is able to give his full attention to the objectives and questions that belong to his craft. Finally, this account of legislation provides the basis for a political proposal that is not underpinned by theology.

Barbara Sattler's 'Astronomy and Moral History in Plato's *Timaeus*' addresses the puzzling question of why, in his *Timaeus*, Plato combines two very different topics: a cosmogony and account of the universe on the one hand, and a story about the moral actions of ancient Athens, Atlantis, and Egypt on the other. She argues that the key to understanding the relation between these two parts is the recognition that, in Plato's view, they confront us with a structurally similar problem: how we are to account for the intelligibility of processes in the phenomenal world. She shows that Plato no longer chooses to solve this problem by tying intelligibility to complete uniformity, as he did in the *Republic*, but by tying intelligibility to a rule – to norms and laws for actions in the human cultural realm; and to ratios and descriptive rules for the motions of the heavenly bodies in the natural realm. While Plato also accounts for the concerns specific to ethics and physics, the attempt to understand processes raises similar problems for him in both realms. Recurring natural catastrophes, such as floods and fires, appear as one kind of natural regularity in this Platonic account.

In his chapter 'Natural Catastrophe in Greek and Roman Philosophy', Anthony Long shows that theories of natural catastrophes in Greek and Roman literature in general presuppose the repetition of devastating events rather than their singularity, but that the ancient evaluations of natural catastrophes differ widely. Long shows that Plato and Aristotle tend to be detached and dispassionate in their accounts of such natural catastrophes by treating them simply as inevitable phases in the natural world's cyclical history. By contrast, the Epicurean Lucretius and the Stoic Seneca clearly acknowledge human fragility in the face of catastrophes. Both Roman philosophers register the dangers of presuming mastery over the natural environment and are sensitive to the human toll that nature can extort from exceeding such limits.

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Part II: Humans as Godlike, Gods as Humanlike: Presocratics and Platonists

Part II of the volume looks at accounts in which the relationship between ethics and physics is established via some connection to the divine. We find cases of understanding the natural world as itself being divine or as being made up of divinities. If these divinities are understood as behaving in a human way, then this raises the question of whether human ethics should not also be applicable to them. On the other hand, we find the idea that human beings, while by nature different from gods, in their highest form should become similar to divinities, so that our common idea of human virtues does not seem to be the right way to think about ethics in these cases.

In 'Anthropomorphism and Epistemic *Anthropo-Philautia*: The Early Critiques by Xenophanes and Heraclitus', Alexander Mourelatos investigates the critique of anthropomorphism that we find in Xenophanes of Colophon and Heraclitus of Ephesus. Hesiod's *Theogony* is assumed as background and as paradigm for the tendency to treat the world's components or gods generally as humanlike. With Xenophanes of Colophon we have the first and one of the fiercest attacks on this kind of anthropomorphism, inasmuch as Xenophanes not only challenges anthropomorphism in traditional religion and myth but also intimates that at the root of religious beliefs and practices, among his fellow Greeks as well as among foreigners, is a motive of *philautia*, of self-love. Another strong early critique of anthropomorphism is found in Heraclitus of Ephesus, who curtly dismisses the idea of world-making by a god and stridently attacks certain traditional forms of religious worship. And yet neither thinker can avoid sliding into a particular kind of anthropomorphism, namely into what Mourelatos calls 'epistemic *anthropo-philautia*' – *philautia* understood not as the 'self-love' or 'vanity' an individual may show, but rather as the *species-philautia* we indulge in when we project upon the cosmos structures and forms that cognitively afford special intuitive appeal to us human beings.

Li Fan, in his chapter 'Nature and Divinity in the Notion of Godlikeness', investigates the apparent tension arising from the fact that Plato presents two seemingly rather different things – both fulfilling human nature and godlikeness – as the human *telos*. Fan argues that these two accounts are in fact compatible, if we understand the fulfilment of human nature as making the divine part in us flourish. If virtue is understood as a disposition to cope with evils that exist in the human

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condition but are absent in the divine life, it is hard to see how our becoming virtuous fits with our becoming godlike. In the *Theaetetus*, however, Plato understands becoming virtuous as a flight from the world. This has traditionally been understood as engaging in theory as opposed to praxis. However, such an understanding faces the problem that in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Republic*, justice, and thus the virtue concerned with treating other people appropriately, is presented as a central virtue. This speaks against understanding the flight idea merely in theoretical terms. Fan argues that instead of identifying the idea of fleeing from the world with withdrawing from practical affairs and engaging in theoretical activity, we should understand it as a kind of self-transformation, in such a way that as a result we are no longer rooted in the natural world, but in divine, transcendent reality.

Part III: Emotions, Reason, and the Natural World (Aristotle)

The chapters in Part III consider Aristotle's views on the emotions and on their place in the natural world. They discuss how human and animal emotions differ from each other, what they have in common, and what is distinctive about human emotions. Human emotions are distinctive in that they are reason-responsive, that is, they are such that they can be guided by reason (which is not, of course, to say that they are always so guided). Ethical virtue is defined in relation to human emotion: to be virtuous is to have emotions that are guided by right reason. Thus, we can shed light on Aristotle's ethics by coming to understand precisely how, on his view, human emotions are such as to be guided by reason. These chapters discuss the ways in which human emotions differ both from the activities of the strictly rational part of the human soul and also from the non-reason-responsive emotions that can be experienced by other animals.

In 'Human and Animal Emotions in Aristotle', Jamie Dow argues that, for Aristotle, human emotions are both different from, and also importantly continuous with, the emotions experienced by non-human animals. On the one hand, the repertoire of emotions experienced by human beings differs significantly from that experienced by non-human animals. The difference stems from the fact that only human beings have reason. Some human emotions (for example, shame) require the possession of reason and hence cannot be experienced by non-human animals. Other human emotions have counterparts in non-human animals, but they differ from these counterparts because, when functioning correctly, they are guided by reason. For instance, the disposition to feel fear is reason-governed in

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a human being but not in an animal. On the other hand, in spite of these striking differences between human and animal emotions, Dow argues that the emotions also reveal an important continuity between human beings and other animals: both human and animal emotions are fundamentally capacities to respond with pleasure or pain to situations that are apparently good or harmful to the subject. In this sense, emotion plays a similar role in the lives of humans and in the lives of non-human animals.

Dorothea Frede, in her 'Reasonable and Unreasonable Affections and Human Nature', also focusses on the gap between human beings and the rest of nature. While other natural things develop as they do 'necessarily or for the most part', human beings are distinctive in that their development depends on their own efforts. Human emotions or affections (*pathē*) play an important role in their development. Frede argues that, for Aristotle, human affections have an interesting 'passive-cum-active' character. They differ importantly from actions, in that they do not result from decisions. However, for a human being, experiencing an affection is not simply a matter of being passively affected. Human beings experience affections in response to understanding their situation in a certain way. Because of this, reasoning is in a way involved in the formation of human affections. The process of habituation alters not only how human beings act, but also how they feel. The affective part of the soul, though non-rational, is capable of 'listening' to reason more or less well. Thus, in a human being, affections can be reasonable or unreasonable: a human being who has been well habituated will have reasonable affections, which will cause desires of the right kind; a human being who has not been well habituated will have unreasonable affections, which will cause desires of the wrong kind. Because human affections require habituation, they are not (like animal desires) simply a gift of nature. Thus, the distinctive reason-responsiveness of human affections helps to explain why successful human development cannot simply be attributed to nature.

Part IV: Action and the Natural World (Aristotle)

The chapters in Part IV discuss Aristotle's views on the way in which human purposive activity is related to the world of nature. Are there any constraints that are placed on our general account of causation by the need to make sense of the possibility of human intentional action? Does Aristotle hold that moral responsibility is compatible with causal determinism? And how should we understand the analogy Aristotle draws

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between human intentional (deliberation-based) agency and more general natural purposive agency?

In 'Chains That Do Not Bind: Causation and Necessity in Aristotle', Thomas Tuozzo discusses the relation between causation and moral responsibility. We generally hold adult human beings morally responsible for their actions; yet those actions are also events in the natural world, enmeshed in causal chains that extend backwards in time long before the agent's birth. If the causes in those chains necessitate their effects, it would appear that we must either give up the view that humans are morally responsible for their actions or embrace the paradoxical view that humans are morally responsible for actions necessitated by events over which they have no control. Tuozzo argues that Aristotle's causal theory avoids this dilemma by recognising two distinct types of causal chain or nexus. In one of these, the links between cause and effect are indeed necessary, from beginning to end. But chains of this sort are necessarily finite, with a definite beginning and end. Each of these necessary, finite causal chains is also enmeshed in a different sort of causal nexus, one that does extend indefinitely into the past. But this sort of indefinite causal chain is possible only because it contains links that are not necessitated. This enables Aristotle to account for moral responsibility by locating the necessitating cause of a human action in the agent herself. Nonetheless, Tuozzo concludes, Aristotle's theory does have the paradoxical implication that, although the state of the world at a given time does not necessitate all subsequent events, a complete description of it would, in principle, allow all subsequent events – including human actions – to be predicted.

Ursula Coope's 'Aristotle on Nature, Deliberation, and Purposiveness' discusses Aristotle's puzzling claim that 'craft does not deliberate' (*Physics* II.8). Aristotle makes this claim in response to an imagined objection to the analogy he has drawn between purposiveness in nature and purposiveness in craft. The objection is that craft and nature are not analogous in this way because craft production involves deliberation. Aristotle's response is puzzling in two ways. First, there is the puzzle of what Aristotle means and how the claim that 'craft does not deliberate' can be compatible with the manifest fact that the practitioners of certain crafts (e.g. medicine) do need to deliberate if they are to do their job well. In response to this puzzle, Coope argues (following Sedley) that Aristotle is not denying that particular craftsmen deliberate. His point is rather that the craft itself (which is the primary cause of the production) does not deliberate. However, this leaves us with a second puzzle: how is this claim (that the craft itself does not deliberate) relevant to defending Aristotle's analogy between craft and

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