From Form to Norm

Official Constitutive Principles

Forms as Principles of Privilege

❖ We earlier encountered a heuristic dilemma. Now we encounter it again:

(1) If properties, forms are either (a) shape-properties or (b) privileging properties.

(2) If (1a), then we arrive at a kind of hylomorphic version of universal mereological aggregation (snowdiscalls and the like—and so we are all too catholic).

(3) If (1b), then forms have, mysteriously, the power to privilege.

(4) So, if forms are properties, then either we accept some hylomorphic version of universal mereogical aggregation or we are saddled with a mystery (an unhappy, unwanted mystery —in effect, without further explication—a version of the brutishness we have decried).

(5) So, if forms are properties, either we are altogether too catholic or we are brutes.

Two Aspects of Privilege

❖ One axis of privilege: forms are meant to account for which collections of aggregates count as 'objects' or, as we prefer, basic beings, and which do not

❖ Another access of privilege: forms are meant to account for the internal unity of various aggregates, such that they all qualify as aggregates of a single unified being.

❖ Note that these two aspects of privilege tend to travel together, but in principle needn't:

    ❖ Traveling apart: If we think of a form as a *mere boundary* or as a *fiat boundary*, then they need say nothing about how the items within the boundary are related to one another, beyond being co-bounded.

        ❖ So, e.g., the rocks in a heap of rocks.

    ❖ Traveling together: If we think of a form as an ordering principle, then we think that they specify the relations of the parts to one another so as to settle boundary questions.

        ❖ So, e.g., the parts of a locomotive like the Shinkansen 'bullet' trains of Japan.

When They Come Together

❖ Forms as ordering principles most readily unify relative to a *function* or an *end*.

❖ Recall our account of offices, and especially of artefactual offices:

  ❖ Offices have *requirements* (features one must discharge if one is its occupant) and *requisites* (features something must satisfy in order to qualify as an occupant)

  ❖ Artefactual offices

    ❖ C is an artefactual material hylomorphic compound $=_{df}$ (i) there is some matter m and some office o; and (ii) m occupies o, where that office is such that (a) its essence is ϕ; (b) there exists some ψ which partially constitutes ϕ, where ψ partly constitutes ϕ only if an essence-specifying account of ϕ makes ineliminable reference to ψ; and (c) ψ is an affective/intentional/responsive property (an AIR property).

❖ Here the essence ϕ is typically some function, e.g. *moving people from Tokyo to Kyoto* (the Shikansen) or *removing dog hair and other detritus from the carpe*t (a vacuum cleaner), and so forth.

  ❖ This sets a clear, non-negotiable of requirement for kind membership.

    ❖ It also ushers in a unifying end and so a norm. Indeed, the end *is* the unifier.

Forms as Principles of Unity

- The requirements of an office set *constitutive norms* for their occupants. Such norms tells us, at once:

    - what it is for an occupant to be an occupant in the first instance, e.g. what it is for this plastic to occupy the office of train or for this to occupy the office of computer;

    - what qualifies as a component part of this occupant and what doesn't, and how those parts must be ordered, as requisites, for something to qualify as an occupant; and

    - when something is discharging the requirements of the office well vs. poorly, and also when something is performing discharging the requirements of an office poorly vs. not at all.

- N.b. that every such determination is predicate-relative, since one quantity of plastic can occupy more than one office at a time. — Furtzwängler might be discharging the requirements of the office *symphonic conductor* very well, even while discharging the requirements of the office of *moral agent* rather poorly.

    - Notice, too, in this connection, that we enter into some offices volitionally and others, it seems, without any prospect of not doing so.

        - So, some forms are accidental and some are necessary.

Constitutive Norms and Constitutive Principles

❖ 'An especially important instance of the constitutive standard is what I will call the constitutive *principle*, a constitutive standard applying to an activity. In these cases what we say is that if you are not guided by the principle, you are not performing the activity at all. In the case of essentially goal–directed activities, constitutive principles arise from the constitutive standards of the goals to which they are directed.' —Korsgaard (2009, 28)

❖ So, again, from this angle, using this (useful) vocabulary:

  ❖ Being a φ (*scil*. occupying the office φ), presents constitutive standard for φ-entities, as unified by their ends.

  ❖ Performing an activity falling under that standard answers to a constitutive principle, namely acting by φ-ing, such that:

    ❖ One might φ well or poorly.

      ❖ Or, indeed, one might fail to φ altogether, in which case one is not performing a requirement of the office φ, rather than φ-ing poorly.

Forms Set Norms

- ❖ . . .so long as the offices in question are reasonably regarded as end-directed.

- ❖ If not, then forms seem not to import norms at all, because they do not import any notion of unity or privilege.

- ❖ We may find this easy and agreeable where artefacts are concerned; but we may find it harder to fathom where non-artefactual kinds are in view.

Revisiting and Revising

❖ Our original dilemma:

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(4) So, if forms are properties, then either we accept some hylomorphic version of universal mereogical aggregation or we are saddled with a mystery (an unhappy, unwanted mystery —in effect, without further explication—a version of the brutishness we have decried).

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The Problematic Premise

❖ As applied to *our* hylomorphism, we see that (3) is false, since the properties in question are those defined by the office which the matter occupies.

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Artefacts to Organisms

❖ We move forward to non-artefacts by focussing first (and maybe last) on living systems and their activities.

❖ We look first at two passages from Aristotle, one surprising in its sweep and the other arresting in its contention.

Text One: Functional Determination

❖ All things are defined by their function: for in those cases where things are able to perform their function, each thing truly is <φ> e.g. an eye, when it can see. But when something cannot perform that function, it is homonymously <φ>, like a dead eye or one made of stone, just as a wooden saw is no more a saw than one in a picture. The same, then, holds true of flesh (*Meteor*. 390a10-15; cf. *GA* 734b24-31, *Pol*. 1253a19-25).

   ❖ This asserts:

❖ (FD): An individual *x* will belong to a class or kind φ iff: *x* can perform the function of that class or kind.

Essence and Life

❖ The soul is the cause (*aition*) and source (*archê*) of the living body. But these [cause and source] are spoken of in many ways. Similarly, soul is a cause according to the ways delineated, which are three: it is a cause <as> the principle of motion, <as> that for the sake of which, and as the substance of ensouled bodies. That it is a cause as substance is clear, for substance is the cause of being for all things, and for living things being is life, and the soul is also the cause and principle of life (*DA* 415b8-14; cf. *PA* 467b12-25; *Phys*. 255a6-10).

❖ One especially striking claim: 'for living things being is life' (τὸ δὲ ζῆν τοῖς ζῶσι τό εἶναί ἐστιν).

  ❖ This offers us a bridge: living is an activity, an end-directed activity, such that life and the activities it comprises have constitutive principles.

  ❖ They thus answer to (FD) and find their unity in their directionality.

  ❖ Call this activity, then, the constitutive principle of rational life (CPRL)

Suárez, Bridge Builder

❖ Directionality:

❖ Furthermore, the efficient cause, unless it is to act blindly, must act for the sake of something. Therefore the very effect of the efficient cause also intrinsically requires [an end] so that it becomes for the sake of something, so that the effect can *per se* become by the cause. Such an effect, therefore, depends *per se* on the efficient [cause], as that by which it becomes, just as it *per se* depends in its genus on something for whose sake it becomes. That [something], moreover, is an end. Therefore, it depends *per se* on an end. Therefore, contrariwise, an end is a true cause of that thing which becomes for the sake of the end.

❖ *Praeterea causa efficiens, nisi temere agat, alicuius gratia agere debet; ergo et ipse effectus causae efficientis, ut per se ab illa fieri possit, intrinsece postulat ut alicuius gratia fiat; ergo talis effectus sicut per se pendet ab efficiente, ut a quo fit, ita in suo genere per se pendet ab aliquo cuius gratia fit; ille autem est finis; ergo per se pendet a fine; ergo e con- trario finis est vera causa eius rei quae propter finem fit.* (DM XXIII 1.7)

The Crucial Claim

- A final cause causes only as cognized:

    - It follows, then, that Suárez gives a rich but constrained role to final causation, effectively restricting it to intentional action, with the result that, as he insists, the efficient cause in action would not obtain were it not for the prior grasping of a final cause.

        - 'I say first: in order for an end to cause, it is altogether necessary that it be cognized in advance' (*DM* XXIV 4 and esp. 7.2 *Dico ergo primo: ut finis causet, necessarium omnino est ut praecognitus sit*).

    - Here he may be usefully contrasted with Leibniz.

Leibnizean Catholicism

❖ 'I usually say that there are, so to speak, two kingdoms even in corporeal nature, which interpenetrate without confusing or interfering with each other—the realm of power, according to which everything can be explained mechanically by efficient causes, when we have sufficiently penetrated into its interior, and the realm of wisdom, according to which everything can be explained architectonically, so to speak, or by final causes when we have understood its ways sufficiently.' (*TA* 273/*L* 479)

Some Considerations

❖ Suárez supposes almost unreflectively (and justifiably in my view) that questions about final causation are not monolithic.

❖ Suárez (implausibly, in my view) restricts the range of final causation to intentional action; he thus parts company with a contentious form of natural teleology.

❖ In the intentional realm, he also (plausibly in my view) advances a counterfactual account of efficient causation in its relation to the final cause; he thus implicitly challenges eliminativists about final causation to offer an account of intentional action given solely in terms of efficient causation, such that: (i) human action is described in fully intentional terms; and (ii) the relevant counterfactual conditions are defeated.

Focussing First on Thinking

❖ Thought, an essential feature of rational life, is ineliminably intentional.

❖ It follows that thinking has a constitutive principle, in terms of which it proceeds well or poorly or not at all.

❖ It also follows that thinking will be scalar in two ways:

    ❖ Evaluatively

    ❖ Taxonomically

The Activity of Life

❖ Given (CPRL), then, one kind of living system, exhibits unity as an intrinsic teleonomic system.

❖ Since for every kind of living system CPRL obtains, we may generalize:

    ❖ x is alive $=_{df}$ x is an intrinsic teleonomic system

❖ It follows, too, then, that living systems are scalar, again:

    ❖ Evaulatively

    ❖ Taxonomically

A Closing Argument

(1) Living systems are hylomorphic compounds.

(2) Given the thesis of (HO), living beings are requisite-meeting plastic ('matter') occupying requirement-bequeathing offices ('form').

(3) If (2), then living systems engage of necessity in activities (or, if you like, *are* activities) specified by constitutive normative principles.

(4) So, living systems engage of necessity in activities (or, if you like, *are* activities) specified by constitutive normative principles.

(5) Constitutive normative principles provide both taxonomically and evaluatively scalar unity to those activities specified by them.

(6) So, living systems are (i) unified, and (ii) unified in a way that is both taxonomically and evaluatively scalar.