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**ABDUCTION, PREDICTION, AND MORAL JUSTIFICATION: A
 NATURALIZED APPROACH TO ETHICAL NORMS**

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Introduction:

Normative ethics, a branch of moral philosophy, establishes and explains standards distinguishing right and wrong actions. It involves formulating moral guidelines for individuals, groups, and societies. Normative ethics differs from applied ethics, which applies these principles to real-world issues, and metaethics, which examines the nature and assumptions of ethical theories. In everyday life, we face questions about how to live, behave, and develop our character, highlighting the relevance of normative ethics. In seeking answers to these queries, we often refer to various normative ethical theories, including Kantian Ethics, Millian Utilitarianism, and Aristotelian Virtue Ethics. These theoretical frameworks provide a structured approach to understanding and evaluating moral issues, thereby informing our decisions and actions. From the perspective of Kantian Ethics, one may argue that breaking promises is inherently wrong due to the maxim of that act being incompatible with a universal law of nature that governs all rational beings. Conversely, from the standpoint of Mill's Utilitarianism, one might contend that breaking promises is morally reprehensible because it fails to contribute to the overall happiness of individuals. Alternatively, if we apply the principles of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics to this question, we may conclude that breaking promises is morally wrong by asserting that a virtuous person would not act in such a manner. These explanations raise further questions: Do they reflect an objective moral reality existing independently of our frameworks, or do they merely reflect our attitudes towards breaking promises? A moral naturalist might argue that breaking promises is inherently wrong, and normative theories provide an explanatory analysis of this natural reality, grounded in specific metaphysical and semantic claims.

i. Moral properties, such as the wrongness of breaking promises, are an integral part of the natural world. (Metaphysical Claim)

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ii. Normative ethical theories genuinely refer to these moral properties, which constitute an inherent aspect of the natural world. (Semantic Claim)

This paper explores the metaphysical claim underlying moral reality, crucial for normative theories to accurately explain it. Metaphysical ethical naturalism posits that moral concepts, such as goodness and justice, are part of the natural world and can be defined in terms of natural elements, highlighting the intrinsic link between morality and the natural world.

The Normativity Objection: A fundamental objection to moral naturalism is the normativity objection. This objection posits that normative moral notions cannot be derived from moral facts, which are considered a subset of natural facts. To illustrate this objection, consider a scenario in which a hotel is on fire, and one of the only means of survival is to jump into a nearby pond. In this situation, it is intuitively clear that one ought to jump. However, the opponent argues that this normative fact—that one ought to jump—cannot be reduced to purely natural facts, such as the value placed on human life and the causal relationship between jumping into the pond and saving one's life.

The opponent argues that causal facts cannot justify normative moral facts, and naturalistic arguments fail to provide a compelling reason to follow moral rules. They claim these arguments can't establish a moral rule prohibiting moral depravity, as they can't satisfactorily explain why one ought to not engage in such behaviour. To establish moral naturalism, it's essential to address this concern and explain how normative moral notions can be derived from natural facts.

Consequentialism as Natural Ends: Consequentialism is a moral theory that can be comprehended through its two fundamental components: the theory of right action and the theory of moral goodness. The theory of right action, as posited by Consequentialism, refers to a set of principles or rules that yield optimal consequences, specifically better or more desirable outcomes, compared to alternative rules. In essence, this theory advocates for the selection of actions that maximize overall well-being. Consequentialism defines moral goodness as contributing to well-being, which involves satisfying moral needs. An action is right if it follows rules enhancing overall well-being, with moral goodness preceding moral rightness. From this perspective, keeping promises is morally right due to its beneficial outcomes, such as establishing trust. The theory of well-being is crucial in understanding

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moral goodness, linking it to human flourishing and providing a nuanced understanding of morally justified actions.

Theory of Well-being: A Consequentialist Perspective: According to Consequentialism, moral goodness can be comprehended in terms of well-being. This theoretical framework defines well-being as the satisfaction of needs. Consequentialism posits that an individual's life is going well if they satisfy certain essential needs. Conversely, if these needs are not met, life can be deemed unsatisfactory. A pertinent question arises: what does the notion of needs entail, according to this theory? David Wiggins, a prominent English moral philosopher, offers a suggestion regarding the concept of needs. Wiggins distinguishes between two distinct senses of the word "needs."¹ Two senses of needs are distinguished:

- i. Instrumental needs: requirements necessary for achieving specific goals or objectives.
- ii. Absolute or categorical needs: fundamental requirements essential for human well-being and flourishing, inherent to human nature regardless of specific goals.

According to Wiggins, the instrumental sense of needs can be defined as follows:

*A subject X has an instrumental need for Y if and only if X has a goal or objective Z, and Y is a necessary condition for achieving Z.*²

This explanation provides a basic structural framework for understanding instrumental needs. However, this account does not provide a comprehensive explanation of needs that are essential for well-being. Therefore, a more fundamental understanding of the notion of needs is necessary. According to David Wiggins, this is where the Absolute or Categorical sense of needs becomes pertinent. Wiggins defines the Absolute or Categorical sense of needs as follows:

*X absolutely needs Y if and only if X will suffer serious harm or deprivation without Y.*³

¹ Wiggins, D. 1991. *Needs, Values and Truth*: Second edition Oxford Blackwell.

² Wiggins, D. 1991. *Needs, Values and Truth*: Second edition Oxford Blackwell. P-7-9

³ Wiggins, D. 1991. *Needs, Values and Truth*: Second edition Oxford Blackwell. P-14

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The concept of "seriously harmed" refers to the absence of a need that obstructs fulfilling one's well-being, termed vital needs. Examples include access to nutrition, suitable clothing, and a minimum degree of freedom of choice. The absence of these needs can cause significant harm to physical and mental well-being. Thus, well-being is constituted by the satisfaction of vital needs, a perspective shared by American philosopher Richard Boyd. This perspective is shared by Richard Boyd, an American philosopher, who has written on the subject:

*"There are a number of important human goods, things which satisfy important human needs. Some of these needs are physical or medical. Others are psychological or social: these (probably) include the need for love and friendship, the need to engage in cooperative efforts, the need to exercise control over one's own life, the need for intellectual and artistic appreciation and expression, the need for physical reaction, etc. The question of just which important human needs there are is a potentially difficult and complex empirical question."*⁴

The concept of "vital needs" can be understood in relation to Richard Boyd's notion of "important needs." Through acquiring knowledge in a specific area, one can gain a deeper understanding of the nature of vital needs. For instance, it is well-established in medical science that children require vaccination to prevent certain diseases. This example illustrates the connection between vital needs and moral betterment. From a moral perspective, satisfying vital needs takes precedence over non-vital needs. Consequentialism prioritizes the satisfaction of vital needs, considering it a moral obligation. Neglecting vital needs can harm well-being, making moral goodness contingent upon well-being, which is achieved through satisfying vital needs. This framework enables discerning morally good actions, such as keeping promises, which foster mutual trust and enhance well-being

The Satisfaction of Vital Needs as a Foundation for Well-being: Access to suitable clothing and a minimum degree of freedom of choice are vital needs, as their absence can harm physical and mental well-being. Well-being is constituted by satisfying these vital needs. Philosopher Richard Boyd agrees, identifying essential human goods that satisfy

⁴ Boyd, R. 1988. How to Be a Moral Realist In: Sayre-McCord, G. ed. Essays on moral realism Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press p-203

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physical, medical, psychological, and social needs, including love, autonomy, and artistic expression. Identifying these needs is a complex empirical question. The concept of "vital needs" can be understood in relation to Richard Boyd's notion of "important needs." Acquiring knowledge in a specific area can provide a deeper understanding of the nature of vital needs. For instance, medical science has established that children require vaccination to prevent certain diseases, illustrating the connection between vital needs and moral betterment. From a moral perspective, satisfying vital needs takes precedence over non-vital needs. Consequentialism prioritizes vital needs as a moral obligation, as their satisfaction is essential for flourishing well-being. Moral goodness is characterized by well-being, achieved through satisfying vital needs. This framework evaluates actions like keeping promises, food distribution, and prohibiting animal hunting as morally good because they enhance well-being. Ultimately, realizing vital needs is inherently valuable, making such moral acts justifiable due to their positive relation to well-being.⁵

Empirical Reliability of Consequentialism: This section examines the empirical reliability of moral consequentialist theory. To facilitate this analysis, three key aspects will be considered:

1. Predictions regarding human well-being: This involves assessing the theory's ability to accurately forecast the impact of various actions on individuals' overall well-being.
2. Subjective measures of happiness: This aspect entails evaluating the theory's reliance on self-reported measures of happiness and satisfaction, which can provide insight into individuals' subjective experiences.
3. Objective measures of happiness: This component involves examining the theory's use of objective indicators, such as economic data, health statistics, and social metrics, to assess happiness and well-being.

Predictions about People's Well-being: The Moral Consequentialism Theory posits a close relationship between the attainment of a morally desirable situation and the realization of human well-being. Consequently, it can be argued that Consequentialism can provide

⁵ Korsgaard, C. M. 1983. Two Distinctions in Goodness the Philosophical Review 92(2), pp. 169-195

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accurate predictions regarding people's well-being. According to Consequentialist moral principles, individuals may achieve a certain level of well-being.

The Consequentialist moral approach enables the formulation of empirical generalizations. To illustrate this, consider the following example. Suppose the distribution of food to impoverished individuals is deemed morally justifiable. We can now examine how the Consequentialist moral theory, in conjunction with auxiliary moral propositions, facilitates the generation of moral predictions.

i. An act is morally good if and only if it enhances overall well-being (theory of moral goodness)

ii. Distribution of food to the poor and needy is morally right (moral principle)

Two propositions combine to form a moral prediction: a value statement describing a situation and a moral principle regarding needy individuals. This yields the prediction that proper food distribution enhances impoverished individuals' well-being. Applying Moral Consequentialism, additional predictions emerge, such as keeping promises, sharing knowledge, and prohibiting slavery being morally justifiable due to their positive impact on well-being. This raises questions about empirically observing and quantitatively measuring well-being, leading to the concept of measuring happiness. Researchers have developed methodologies to quantify happiness, providing a nuanced understanding of the relationships between human actions, moral principles, and well-being.

Objective Measures of Happiness: Objective measures, such as life expectancy and suicide rates, can assess human well-being beyond subjective self-reports. High life expectancy indicates long-term happiness and flourishing well-being, while elevated suicide rates suggest unmet vital needs, hindering psychological, physical, and social well-being. Utilizing empirical methods, Consequentialism's principles can be verified, predicting that satisfied vital needs will reflect in both subjective and objective happiness measures. This makes Consequentialism an empirically verifiable moral theory.

Application of Abductive Arguments: In addition to deductive and inductive arguments, another form of reasoning, known as abductive reasoning, is employed in ethics and various social sciences. Abductive arguments involve the extraction of the best possible predictions from incomplete observations. In contrast to deductive arguments, which

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guarantee the truth of the conclusion if the premises are true, abductive arguments do not provide absolute certainty. Instead, they offer a plausible explanation based on the available data. For instance, when examining a moral state such as guilt or shame, an abductive argument would involve analysing the relevant empirical data and attempting to provide the most satisfactory explanation for the observed phenomena. Abductive reasoning is also utilized in various fields, including medicine, where diagnoses are made based on a set of specific symptoms, and law, where judges render verdicts in particular cases based on the evidence presented. Abductive arguments can be characterized as a form of reasoning that enables the prediction of a conclusion based on available information, which may be incomplete or partial.

Consider an example: A doctor observes symptoms like cold, cough, and fever lasting 3-4 days. Based on this, they predict the patient likely has influenza. Abductive arguments enable predictions from available observations. Unlike deductive (specific to general) and inductive (general to specific) reasoning, abductive reasoning generates the best possible prediction from available information. Abductive arguments are inherently probabilistic, and their conclusions may not always be true. While they can provide plausible explanations, they can also lead to false conclusions. In the field of ethics, abductive arguments are employed to provide empirical justification for moral judgments. This involves using available data and observations to make informed predictions about the moral implications of a particular action or decision.

For instance:

1. First-order ethical theory is empirically reliable.
2. First-order ethical theory is not free from theoretical presuppositions

Both (1) and (2) are empirical phenomena, characterized by natural properties.

From these premises, it can be inferred that natural moral properties can be considered the best explanation for the phenomena we experience. American moral philosopher Richard Boyd employs an abductive argument to advocate for consequentialism. The following argument, presented by Boyd, illustrates this approach:

- i. An act is right if it enhances ethically human goods.

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- ii. Ethically human goods are needed for satisfaction of important human needs.
- iii. Some important human needs can be love, friendship, knowledge, cooperative efforts, etc.
- iv. Those important human needs are investigated and accepted in relevant sciences such as psychology, biology, and medicine.⁶

Thus, moral judgments can be empirically justified through Consequentialism, which uses abductive arguments to make predictions about human well-being. This theory posits that goodness can be investigated and tested empirically, making it an a posteriori concept. A natural law theory suggests that human beings have dispositional qualities that strive for actualization and realization of their natural telos, with well-being as the goal. Obstructing natural development and flourishing hinders well-being, making it the paramount goal of human existence.

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