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Review Article



Constructing a Good Life

Micah Lott

Boston College

micah.lott@bc.edu

Abstract

In *The Value of Living Well*, Mark LeBar develops a position that he calls “virtue eudaimonism” (VE). VE is both a eudaimonistic theory of practical reasoning and a constructivist account of the metaphysics of value. In this essay, I will explain the core of LeBar’s view and focus on two issues, one concerning VE’s eudaimonism and the other concerning VE’s constructivism. I will argue that, as it stands, VE does not adequately address the charge of egoism, once that charge has been formulated in the strongest way. I will also argue that a substantive constructivism like VE must have considerably less explanatory power than any (successful) constructivism that appeals to a *formal* characterization of agency. Although my remarks are largely critical, I offer them in a spirit of sympathetic engagement with LeBar’s impressive book.

Keywords

Virtue ethics – eudaimonism – egoism – constructivism – practical reason – value

Mark LeBar, *The Value of Living Well* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 384 pp. ISBN 0199931119 (hbk). \$74.00.

Micah Lott is an assistant professor of philosophy at Boston College. He works on issues in ethics and political philosophy. His articles have appeared in *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, and *Social Theory and Practice*, among other places.

In *The Value of Living Well*, Mark LeBar develops a position he labels “virtue eudaimonism” (VE). In part, VE is a theory of practical reasoning. VE holds that an agent’s eudaimonia, or living well, is her ultimate end in acting, giving structure and definition to all her other aims. A person can have final ends other than her own eudaimonia (e.g. her friends), but even when acting for the sake of such ends, she *also* acts for the sake of her own eudaimonia. This is a point not merely about psychology but justification. An agent’s eudaimonia supplies *normative force* to all her other ends, and it is the criterion for success in her practical judgments. A practical judgment, in LeBar’s view, is a judgment about what response is fitting to the conditions that an agent finds herself in. And whether a practical judgment is *correct* – whether the response is actually fitting – depends upon whether the response realizes the end of living well. Importantly, you can be wrong about what actually counts as living well for you. Getting this right requires practical wisdom, which is an agent’s “effective grasp of what a good human life will be for her” (p. 256).

In addition to being an account of practical reasoning, VE is also a theory about the nature and origin of values, reasons, and practical norms. Thus VE expands the eudaimonist framework beyond practical reasoning and normative theory, and into the metaphysics of value. And here VE is a *constructivist* position. As LeBar defines it, constructivism is distinguished by “a commitment to the metaphysical posteriority of normative truths to our apprehensions of them” (p. 117). Constructivism affirms that “our true normative practical judgments represent a normative reality, while denying that that reality exists independently of our exercise of practical judgment” (p. 114). LeBar contrasts constructivism with recognitionism, which is the view that “when we succeed in our normative judgments, we do so because our judgments accurately represent or more generally *recognize* standards for correct judgments that exist prior to and independently of our making those judgments” (p. 118)

According to LeBar, VE is a *realist* position, since VE holds that our normative judgments have representational content, and that there are normative facts. Thus VE’s constructivism should not be confused with expressivism or anti-realism. Nor should VE’s constructivism be confused with *proceduralism*, since on VE “there is no specifiable procedure of construction: truths about what we have reason to do are substantive, and there is no way to characterize the process by which we arrive at them except by way of reference to the truths they produce” (p. 117). Some prominent contemporary forms of constructivism, such as the Kantian constructivism of Christine Korsgaard or Onora O’Neill, are typically interpreted as proceduralist. But to equate constructivism with proceduralism is, for LeBar, to mistake a species for the

genus. Finally, VE is *particularist*, rather than generalist. VE denies that “normative facts consist primarily or exclusively in rules of a general and abstract (perhaps universal) form,” and instead maintains that “the normative facts to which correct judgments correspond are first and foremost concrete particulars” (p. 143)

As I understand LeBar’s position, the constructivism of VE includes (at least) the following claims: The goodness of good things such as health, beauty, or pleasure, is conditional upon their being well-chosen and well-used. Thus the value of such things is *constructed* by the (virtuous) activity of practical reason in relating to them properly. Their value is not “out there” waiting to be recognized by us. More generally, the value of anything depends on its place in a well-lived life. Eudaimonia is the unconditional good that is the condition for the goodness of all other things. Importantly, however, we live by acting, and living well consists in activity guided by practical wisdom. Thus while the value of living well is unconditional, that value is also *constructed*, insofar as the value comes through an agent’s rational activity, and living well does not possess its value prior to that activity. This last claim is crucial for LeBar, since he takes it to vindicate VE’s credentials to be constructivist “all the way down,” rather than resting on a recognitionalist foundation. Finally, VE is constructivist because it takes truths about reasons for action to be *constructed* by the judgments of wise agents. While we might describe wise agents as deliberating about what they have most reason to do, at the level of metaphysical explanation it is the agent’s judgment that explains the existence of practical reasons, rather than vice-versa.

The Value of Living Well is an impressive book. It is highly ambitious in scope and full of detailed arguments. In part I, LeBar sets out his Aristotelian-inspired account of agency, practical reasoning, and eudaimonia. In part II, LeBar addresses the metaphysics of value, explaining and defending VE’s constructivism. Part III includes a lengthy defense of a response-dependent theory of value, as well as extensive replies to possible objections to VE. The final chapter attempts to show how considerations of respect, understood as “second-personal reasons,” fit into VE.

In this essay, I will focus on two issues. The first issue concerns the eudaimonist structure of VE. Many philosophers have argued that eudaimonist accounts of practical justification are objectionably egoistic. I will argue that, as it stands, VE does not adequately answer the charge of egoism, once that charge has been formulated in the strongest way. The second issue concerns VE’s constructivism. LeBar insists that VE does not rest on a recognitionalist foundation. I will argue that once we understand *how* LeBar vindicates this claim, we also see that a substantive constructivism like VE must have

considerably less explanatory power than any (successful) constructivism that appeals to a *formal* characterization of agency or the “practical point of view.”¹ Although my remarks are largely critical, I offer them in a spirit of sympathetic engagement.

VE and the Charge of Egoism

Eudaimonism’s problem with egoism is not that a eudaimonist theory cannot recommend actions from direct regard for others. Rather the problem is that eudaimonism seems to give the wrong kind of *explanation* of the rightness of such actions, and it makes other-regarding reasons *conditional* upon the agent’s own good in an objectionable way.² Suppose you have fallen into a ditch and are struggling to get out. With little cost or risk, I can help you out of the ditch. Eudaimonists can hold that it would be right for me to help you, and that my reasons for doing so are other-regarding – they are a matter of what is good *for you*. For eudaimonism, however, the ultimate explanation of *why* my action is right is that the action furthers *my living well*. And if this were not so, then I would not have good reason to help you. Thus my reason to help is conditional upon the fact that my helping will serve the end of my own living well. This seems to place the ultimate explanation of why I should help you in the wrong place, making it something about me rather than you. And it makes my concern for you – even concern for you for your own sake – conditional on my eudaimonia. Yes, it is good for me to care about others for their own sakes, but only *insofar as* doing so furthers *my own* living well.

As Christopher Toner has argued, whether or not eudaimonism is in fact objectionably egoistic depends on how eudaimonists understand the idea of “living well” that they claim is an agent’s ultimate end.³ On one interpretation, living well is fundamentally a matter of *being good* or excellent. On another interpretation, living well is fundamentally a matter of the agent’s welfare, or what is *good for* her. Following Anne Baril, I will refer to the first interpretation as “excellence-prior eudaimonism” and the second as “welfare-prior

1 For the claim that metaethical constructivism is best defined by a particular appeal to the practical point of view, see Sharon Street, “What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?” *Philosophy Compass* 5/5 (2010) 363–384.

2 For a helpful recent discussion of these matters, see Anne Baril, “The Role of Welfare in Eudaimonism” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51.4 (Dec 2013) 511–535.

3 Christopher Toner, “Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism” *Journal of Philosophical Research* Vol 35 (2010) 275–303.

eudaimonism.”⁴ The difference between these two kinds of eudaimonism emerges when I reflect on why I ought to act for the sake of others, or to be the kind of person who cares about and respects others for their own sakes. The welfare-prior eudaimonist holds that there must come a point in my reflection where my own welfare is more explanatorily basic than the welfare or status of others. There comes a point when others have “dropped out” of my justification, but my own good remains to *explain* why I am right to care about and respect others. Thus welfare-prior eudaimonism has a structure that makes it vulnerable to the charge of egoism.

In contrast, an excellence-prior view can hold that other-regarding considerations are equally basic in the ultimate explanation of how I should act and live. There is no point in my reflection where others “drop out” of the picture and my own good is left to serve as the ultimate ground of my concern for others. What matters is that I live *well*, and in that sense living well is my final end. But other-regarding reasons stand on their own, alongside self-regarding ones, in determining what my living and acting well *consists in*.⁵ Thus for the excellence-prior eudaimonist, my helping you out of the ditch can figure into my *being good* and *living well*, but the ultimate explanation for this need not refer to the fact that helping you will *benefit me*. And thus, unlike welfare-prior eudaimonism, excellence-prior eudaimonism is not susceptible to the charge of egoism.

So far as I can tell, LeBar does not recognize the distinction between welfare-prior and excellence-prior eudaimonism. However, a number of passages suggest that VE is a welfare-prior view (pp. 23–32, 87–96, 197–203), and thus VE is vulnerable to the charge of egoism. Now, LeBar makes several attempts to show that VE is not objectionably egoistic. But he never, I think, gets the deepest problem into view, and thus none of these attempts is fully satisfying. First, LeBar stresses that the virtuous agent can act for the sake of others as *final ends*, even as she also acts for the sake of her own living well. The key point is that a person “can act for the sake of many things in one action” (p. 302). This may be true, but it does not address the most serious charge – that welfare-prior eudaimonism gives the wrong *explanation* of why we ought to regard others as final ends and places an egoistic *condition* upon our regard for others. It might be that Socrates can act for the sake of his friend and for the sake of his own eudaimonia in a single act, but according to VE (understood as

4 Baril, “The Role of Welfare in Eudaimonism.”

5 For the idea of different kinds of considerations on a par with one another, see Philippa Foot, “Rationality and Goodness” in *Modern Moral Philosophy* ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 1–13.

welfare-prior), his ultimate justification for doing so is that regarding his friend this way is good *for Socrates*, and that is objectionably egoistic.

LeBar also stresses that VE's conception of welfare is "moral through and through" (p. 31). As a response to the charge of egoism, this claim can be interpreted in two ways. It might mean that what is *in fact* good for me is being a person who possesses substantive virtues that lead me to act from direct regard for others, virtues such as benevolence and justice. However, this leaves open the possibility that at the most basic level of explanation, my *grounds* for being a virtuous person are virtue's benefit *to me*, and my commitment to virtue is conditional on the fact that virtue is the best way to attain what is best *for me*. In this case, the charge of egoism has not been answered. On the other hand, the claim might mean that, at the most basic level, other-regarding considerations are equal to considerations about what benefits me in determining what counts as my living well. In this case, to say that eudaimonia is "moral through and through" is to say that in my reflections on how I ought to live, the significance of others goes "all the way down." However, to say this is to adopt excellence-prior rather than welfare-prior eudaimonism. And it requires giving up the ambition of appealing to what is good *for me* as a more basic explanation of the normative significance of other-regarding considerations. But it seems that LeBar does not want to give up this ambition and adopt an excellence-prior view, and hence his claim that eudaimonia is "moral through and through" does not rescue VE from the problem of egoism.

As LeBar recognizes, worries about egoism can be especially acute when we consider a eudaimonist account of respect for others, and our obligations to them. This area of morality can require that we do such things as repay a debt because it is owed, or speak honestly because the other has a right to the truth. In such cases, doing what is required because it is good for me seems to be very much a reason of the wrong sort. VE attempts to handle this, while retaining its eudaimonist structure, by distinguishing between two levels of justification. At the first level, we ask about the justification of particular and discrete actions done from respect for others, such as keeping a promise or refraining from murder and deception. At this level, "justification for respect consists in the fact that those we respect are Whoms with the properties of dignity, autonomy, and so on that warrant seeing them thus (even as we act for their sake, and not for the sake of those properties), and warrant seeing ourselves as accountable to them for our conduct" (p. 325). However, at a second level of justification, we ask about our reasons for choosing to be people who will see others as reason-giving in this way. And at this level the justification is a eudaimonist one: "in essence we have reasons of respect because it is good for us that we do" (p. 312).

At this point, the egoist objection is clear. Even if VE recommends that I respect others, its ultimate explanation of why I should do so makes my respect for others conditional upon the benefit *to me* that comes from doing so, and that is egoistic. Interestingly, however, LeBar *denies* that the answer to the second level of justification is an “all-the-way-down answer” to the first level of questioning. Rather, he insists that there are “two distinct questions relevant to the full story of why the virtuous person respects others” (p. 326). This claim is puzzling, since the second level of justification is naturally interpreted as asking *about* what is mentioned in the first level. This is especially clear in another of LeBar’s examples of justificatory levels: We can ask why we must do *this* dangerous thing, and the answer might be “because its courageous.” We can then ask further about why we should be courageous, and the answer is “because being courageous is partly constitutive of living well” (p. 326). Now, it seems that these are not simply distinct questions. The second question arises in response to the first, and the second answer aims to bring to a close a single line of rational questioning. Perhaps, however, LeBar’s point is that an answer at the first level can be adequate to justify us in most contexts. Thus appeals to dignity, autonomy, etc. should not be seen as defective. Rather they are perfectly good answers in the context for which they are appropriate. However, in other contexts, such as the philosophy seminar or the “cool hour” of reflection, the second level questions and answers are appropriate.

But granting this point still does not address the charge of egoism. For even if there are distinct answers for different contexts of justification, the key issue is the ultimate explanation that VE gives for my reasons for respecting others. And that explanation makes my reasons for respect conditional upon the benefit *to me* that comes from respecting others. At the most basic level of the explanation, others drop out of the picture, and my deepest concern is with what is good for me. And that is objectionably egoistic.

Of course, once we frame the charge of egoism as I have here, LeBar might accept that VE *is* egoistic in this sense, but then argue that such “egoism” at the level of ultimate explanation is unproblematic. That would require different arguments, I think, from those in *The Value of Living Well*. Alternatively, LeBar might be more amenable to excellence-prior eudaimonism that my remarks have suggested.⁶ In any case, an excellence-prior view can avoid egoism while accommodating the core insights of a eudaimonist framework, many of which LeBar rightly highlights. Excellence-prior eudaimonists can happily agree that actions belong to *lives* and that acting well depends in part on the relation between the action and one’s life as a whole. Excellence-prior eudaimonists can

6 Several passages seem sympathetic to an excellence-prior account – e.g. 286n1, 317.

also embrace the idea that “human welfare or well-being consists in living a life of practical wisdom” (p. 82). And excellence-prior eudaimonists can assert that eudaimonia benefits a person, since living and acting well benefits a person. In a slogan: being *good as a human being* is also *good for you*.⁷ Moreover, a *part of acting well* is giving due consideration to my own needs and interests.⁸ Thus in rejecting welfare-prior eudaimonism, we need not reject the thought that my acting well requires prudence, self-respect, and appropriate self-regard.

Finally, excellence-prior eudaimonism can retain the idea, important to VE, that I have a special *relation* to my own life that I do not have to the life of anyone else. As LeBar helpfully emphasizes, “One occupies a position with respect to one’s own good that one occupies with nobody’s else’s, and vice versa: nobody else is in position to realize your good” (p. 95). Because our good consists centrally in our activity, there is a sense in which each of us must “construct” our own lives, and no one can do this for us. One implication of this is that I am *accountable* for my living well in a way that no one else can be accountable for my living well. However, to spell out this special relation that each person has to his or her own living well, we need not posit any egoistic foundation of my welfare as the ultimate explanation of what I have reason to do and to be.

Constructivism without Constructing?

According to VE, the ultimate aim of an agent’s practical reasoning is her own good life. At the same time, a good life is one directed by practical wisdom. How, then, does VE understand the virtue of practical wisdom? At the center of VE’s account is the idea of *fittingness*: “norms for practical wisdom in deliberative judgment are established by fittingness – the fittingness of action (or more generally of response) to conditions of action, in the first place, and to the living of a good life, ultimately” (p. 208). The basic idea is that we encounter situations, and a practical judgment is the determination that some response is **TO BE DONE** in light of a) the “match” between the situation and the response, and b) how such a response fits into our own living well. And “we succeed in our practical judgment (we are practically wise) when we correctly apprehend what elements of our environment are relevant to our action in response, judge a response to be fitted to this conjunction of elements, and do so in a way

7 Even so, acting well might *result* in what is harmful to you – e.g. if telling the truth results in your languishing in jail as a political prisoner.

8 On this point, see Foot, “Rationality and Goodness.”

which is congruent with (that is, befitting) living a good human life” (p. 192). LeBar holds that the notion of “fitting” is primitive and incapable of further analysis except by employing related terms like “appropriate” and “suitable.” In this respect, the concept of fittingness is like the concept of “reason.” Both concepts are “fundamentally normative notions” and “parts of a circle of concepts which can be explicated only by way of deployment of other coeval normative concepts, such as ‘consideration counting in favor,’ or simply ‘should’ or ‘ought’” (p. 194).

For LeBar, our most basic practical judgments are substantive and particular – “every judgment of fit consists in the substantive determination that *this* is the appropriate response to *these* conditions” (p. 209). At the same time, LeBar holds that our substantive judgments are subject to critical assessment according to formal criteria, and he discusses two of these criteria: supervenience and publicity. Supervenience is the idea that there cannot be a difference in normative properties without a difference in non-normative properties, and hence “if we are to respond with *different* normative or evaluative judgments to conditions like others in which we have judged, we must be responding to some subvenient nonnormative difference in the conditions to which respond, and of course that difference must be normatively relevant” (p. 215). Supervenience, LeBar claims, imposes a kind of universality test on our substantive judgments about what is fitting, since it requires that what is correctly judged fitting in one context must also be fitting in other relevantly similar contexts. The second formal criterion, publicity, requires that reasons be intelligible, in the sense of having a place in a hierarchy of ends that makes sense to human beings. To illustrate a failure of publicity, LeBar imagines someone who judges it fitting that he have a saucer of mud (adapting an example from Anscombe).

While supervenience and publicity constrain what can count as a successful practical judgment, neither tells us directly what we have reason to do. Rather, substantive normative guidance comes from our judgments of fit. And this feature of VE raises the worry that VE’s account of practical wisdom is covertly recognitionalist. For it is natural to interpret judgments of fit in terms of recognizing the *reasons* to respond in a certain way. As LeBar himself says, practical judgment involves “a certain apprehension that there is a reason for a response of some particular sort, constituted by a judgment of fit between conditions and response, of the sort to which practical agency responds by nature. Call this act of apprehension...the *moment* of judgment” (p. 197). It might seem, then, that truths about what we have reason to do are, after all, *prior* to our activity of reasoning, insofar as that activity must be explained in terms of *apprehending* the reasons that “there are.”

Part of LeBar's reply to this worry is to say that judgments of fit are measured by their fit with a good human life, and good human life is itself *constructed* through the activity of practical wisdom. But this doesn't assuage the worry about recognitionalism, since living well is explained in terms of practical wisdom, and it is in *spelling out* what practical wisdom involves that we arrive at the seemingly recognitionalist notion of "apprehending" the reasons that there are. The problem is not simply that there is a circularity in appealing to living well to explain practical wisdom, while also appealing to practical wisdom to explain living well (pp. 286–288). Rather the problem is that in spelling out the picture that includes *both* of these ideas, we need an account of practical judgment, and the account of fitting judgment that VE offers seems to be ultimately recognitionalist about reasons.

LeBar, however, has a deeper reply to the charge of covert recognitionalism: judgments of fit only appear to be recognizing good reasons, but in fact (wise) judgments themselves *construct*, or constitute, the reasons. The notion of "apprehending" reasons is thus ultimately misleading in terms of the metaphysics of value. Although we recognize the world as making "demands" upon us, this is a matter of the phenomenology of judgment, not the ultimate explanation of normative truths. As LeBar says, "The wise agent is confronted, as it were, with the fittingness of particular responses to particular concrete sets of conditions of action. But phenomenology and ontology pull apart at this point. In fact it is the judgment of the agent himself that constructs, or constitutes, the normative truth in question" (p. 220).

To some, this will seem to get the explanation of reasons the wrong way around. If you need help getting out of a ditch, isn't it your needing help that is, or explains, my reason to help you, rather than any judgment of mine? And suppose I judge incorrectly and leave you in the ditch. Surely it makes sense to say that I failed to do what I had reason to do. But if judgments themselves determine what reasons there are, it seems we cannot say that.

LeBar is aware of these worries, and his response centers on a distinction between two different senses of "reason." In one sense, a reason is a "mental item," something *created* by the agent's act of judgment. In another sense, a reason is an "extra-mental item" that the judgment is *about* – e.g. your needing help out of the ditch. Thus LeBar says, "Judgments in one way *create* (or construct) reasons and in one way *respond* to them" (pp. 223–224). Important for VE's constructivism, however, is the idea that reasons in the extra-mental sense are *not* normative facts. Here, LeBar appeals to a distinction from Derek Parfit, between facts with normative significance (e.g. the fact that my hotel is on fire), and facts that are themselves normative (e.g. the fact that I have reason to jump in virtue of my hotel being on fire). Reasons in the extra-mental sense are

nonnormative facts with normative significance, and such facts *become* normative through the judgments of wise agents: “The virtuous agent does what she does *in virtue of* those very subvening facts,” but “those facts do not make the response right until and unless they are taken by the practically wise person to demand that response...The supervenience relation that holds between subvening nonnormative facts and supervening normative facts doesn’t actually ‘make’ anything true...the making itself, as a metaphysical matter, is done by the judgment of the virtuous agent” (p. 217).

So it is true *both* that normative truths are created by judgments of fit by wise agents, *and* that there is a sense in which I can be said to have a “reason” to help you out of the ditch, even before I have judged that I should do so, and even if I fail to make that judgment. If I were to judge rightly, then there would be not only an extra-mental, nonnormative reason but also a genuinely normative reason for me to help you. Moreover, LeBar insists that the supervenience criteria enables interpersonal criticism and justification, allowing us to say that someone *failed* to form a reason that he should have formed (pp. 217–223, 230–236).

Even so, it is still the case that the formal requirements of supervenience and publicity do not generate any substantive reasons or values. All the normative content comes from judgments of fit, and at bottom these are particularist judgments. The result, I think, is that while VE avoids the charge of covert recognitionalism, VE has a notable lack of explanatory ambition, especially when compared with other types of constructivism. Consider, for example, the Kantian constructivism of Christine Korsgaard. In the introduction to *Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard frames her view as an answer to the question of how value can “find its way into the world.”⁹ Like Korsgaard, VE insists that value and normativity come into the world *with us*. And LeBar claims that this answer gives VE an advantage over recognitionalist views, since recognitionalism raises a puzzle that constructivism does not:

how there could be facts of sort the recognitionalist insists upon in a world otherwise governed by causality, *apart* from the undertakings of normatively responsive beings like us. It appears to the recognitionalist to be a mere happy accident that such a world has us as inhabitants, to make use of the normative facts it came stocked with, and that we are so fortunate as to exist in a world equipped with just the normative facts we need (p. 216).

9 Christine Korsgaard *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 5.

But granting *that* normativity enters the world with us, we want to understand *how* this happens. What is it about our nature, or the structure of our volitional and rational capacities, that gives rise to normativity?

At this point, a constructivist like Korsgaard will try to show how the *form* of our reasoning explains both the origins of normativity and at least some of the substance of practical norms (e.g. the categorical imperative). Drawing on a different interpretation of Kant, a constructivist such as Stephen Engstrom will attempt to demonstrate how our faculty of practical judgment – understood as the capacity for practical knowledge – has constitutive norms that govern its operation, and thus the *form* of practical judgment establishes norms for particular exercises of judgment.¹⁰ As different as they are, constructivists like Korsgaard and Engstrom share the goal of showing how normativity is rooted in formal aspects of our volitional and rational capacities. These formal aspects do not presuppose substantive values and they are *constitutive* of our self-conception, or point of view, as agents. Thus, if an account like either Korsgaard's or Engstrom's could succeed, then the form of our agency would shed light on *how* normativity comes into the world “with us.”

In contrast, VE eschews any attempt to show how formal features of our agency explain what is normative and why. Rather, LeBar holds that *how* normativity arises with our nature remains a puzzle. In effect, we can say that normativity arises with us, but that simply moves the *location* of the mystery – from the world to us. And since VE's account of practical rationality bottoms out in particular judgments of fit by wise agents, there is a sense in which VE is in the same boat as realism when it comes to explaining what reasons there are and why. As LeBar acknowledges, “the fact that some particular supervening properties attach in the relevant way to the properties that subvene them may not be capable of further explanation. We can say the response is fitting to the given conditions to which it responds, and that's about it” (p. 216).

Thus VE turns out to be constructivist about reasons, but without any account of the *constructing*. VE intends to be “sketching a picture of how normativity fits into the natural world of which we are a part” (p. 111). But once this picture has been sketched, the “how” is simply that normativity comes from us and our judgments. This does not show that VE is wrong, but it does seem to remove much of what is most interesting about constructivism as a position on the metaphysics of value. This leads me to think that it is unhelpful

10 Stephen Engstrom *The Form of Practical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also Engstrom's essay “Constructivism and practical knowledge” in *Constructivism in Ethics* ed. Carla Bagnoli (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 133–152.

to characterize constructivism, as LeBar does, simply in terms of the “metaphysical posteriority of normative truths to our apprehension of them.” For we can grant that metaphysical priority without getting very far in understanding *how* reasons and normative truths are constructed, or constituted, by our capacities and their exercise. Whether any version of constructivism can succeed, constructivism seems a more ambitious and interesting project if we think of it as Sharon Street suggests, as the attempt to show how “the truth of a normative claim consists in that claim’s being entailed from within the practical point of view, where the practical point of view is given a *formal* characterization.”¹¹

11 Street, “What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?” 369. Italics in original.