CHAPTER I

Naturalism

Hobbes aspired to raze the teleological Aristotelian science of his day and to construct in its place a new scientific edifice on mechanistic, materialist metaphysical foundations.\(^1\) He went so far as to claim that the only real entities are bodies the properties of which can all be reductively analyzed and redescribed in terms of extension and motion,\(^2\) and was committed to a naturalist epistemology according to which all knowledge of the world originates in sensory perceptions caused by bodies in motion.\(^3\) Commentators seeking to honour Hobbes’s claim to be a systematic philosopher have therefore widely assumed that his mechanism rules out any distinct, irreducibly normative properties: they have invariably interpreted his ethics in ways that avoid positing normative properties above and beyond natural ones.

Hence on a widespread interpretation of Hobbes’s ethics, there is nothing of irreducibly normative, reason-implying value, there are only objects of desire; and there are no irreducibly normative practical reasons, only mental states that are the natural causes of action. Hobbes encouraged such an interpretation by depicting the study of ethics and morals as the study of the physical basis of human psychology: in *Leviathan* he characterized “ethiques” as a branch of “physiques,” and in *De Corpore* (1655) claimed that in the study of moralia we “consider the motions of the mind, namely, appetite, aversion, love, benevolence, hope, fear, anger, emulation, envy, &c.; what causes they have, and of what they be causes.”\(^4\)

There are at least three ways to flesh out this broadly naturalist interpretive approach to Hobbes’s ethics. First, one might hold that if there are veridical normative judgements and true normative propositions, then they must be reductively analyzable as judgements and propositions concerning non-normative naturalistic properties and facts. If Hobbes took

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\(^1\) On Hobbes’s mechanism and corpuscularianism, see Brandt (1927); Mintz (1969); Friedle (2012).

\(^2\) LL 9: 125.

\(^3\) L 1.2: 22.

normative judgements to be reducible in this way, and thought that normative vocabulary could be used to make normative claims reducible to naturalistic ones, then he would be committed to some version of ethical-naturalist reductionism.

It is undeniable that Hobbes articulated his sciences of ethics in seemingly normative terms. He characterized self-preservation as individuals’ greatest good, and consequently “Peace” and “the way, or means of Peace” as a universal “Good” for all. On the reductionist reading, however, Hobbes’s point was not that self-preservation and peace are good in the sense that humans have irreducibly normative reasons to desire them, but that as a matter of empirical fact humans strongly desire their own preservation and, consequently, peace – or at least would do so in moments of clear-minded, informed reflection. Similarly, Hobbes defined the law of nature as “a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden” to do what omits or is contrary to the requirements of his self-preservation. Natural laws comprise “dictates of Reason” and each “prescribeth” and “requireth” terms “by which we are obliged.” Yet on the reductionist reading, natural laws merely state natural causal facts about the means to self-preservation: the point is that when rational agents who desire self-preservation know and adequately hold in view such laws, they will, thanks to deliberation or reasoning, be caused to take the means to their desired ends. Natural laws are descriptive or predictive: they predict that, under appropriate circumstances, rational agents will take those means – where the appropriate circumstances can be spelled out in purely descriptive, non-normative terms.

Second, one might hold that normative judgements consist in beliefs about the existence of irreducibly normative properties or facts, and that normative vocabulary is used to assert propositions corresponding to such beliefs, but that such beliefs and claims are systematically erroneous. If this were Hobbes’s view, then he would be an error theorist of normativity. His ethics would consist in giving an empirical account of how, given the nature of mind and language, human beings are erroneously led to project irreducibly normative properties onto objects and to assent to and reason from irreducibly normative (but false) propositions. On the error-theoretical interpretation, although Hobbes’s own normative propositions concerning what is good or

9 See Mackie (1977).
prescribed by reason are strictly speaking false, his intention in advancing them would have been to produce the outcome he most desired – namely, peaceful coexistence – by persuading his fellow humans of his doctrine’s truth. He would do so by taking advantage of the fact, described in the psychological component of his ethics, that humans cannot help but to form normative commitments that shape their actions.

Finally, one might hold that normative judgements are not cognitive at all – that they do not represent things as having properties – and deny that normative language is used to make any claims concerning features of the world. Instead, one might hold that normative judgements are conative states – desires or resolutions to adopt some mental state or undertake some action or, more generally, to favour some state or event – and that normative discourse is used to prescribe favouring such states or events. If Hobbes thought that this is what normative judgements and discourse amount to, then his own normative language concerning what is good or dictated by reason would not commit his ethical doctrine to any properties and facts beyond non-normative, naturalistic ones. Such language would be used by Hobbes to prescribe favouring some states or events. Hobbes would be a noncognitivist prescriptivist.

The result of any of these three variants of the broadly naturalist approach is that for Hobbes seemingly normative judgements and propositions would be veridical only insofar as they reduce to natural ones; if they are meant to represent distinct normative properties or to express distinct normative claims, then they are erroneous, since there are no distinct, irreducibly normative properties or facts; and if normative judgements do not represent anything and normative utterances solely prescribe, then they are not truth apt at all and imply no positive commitment to normative properties and facts. The upshot would be that Hobbes subscribed to an essentially nihilist theory of irreducibly normative reasons. I take up each of these approaches in turn, beginning with the more radical, error-theoretical interpretation.

### 1.1 An Error Theory

On the error-theoretical interpretation, Hobbes’s science of ethics essentially consists in a descriptive account of the mind and its relation to the world – an account explaining why humans project normative properties onto objects, why such projections are erroneous, and why all positive normative propositions are false. This interpretation is primarily motivated
by Hobbes’s analogy between sensory qualities, such as colour and odour, and the evaluative property of goodness.\textsuperscript{10}

Hobbes developed his theory of colour perception partly in reaction to a late-Medieval scholastic theory according to which humans accurately apprehend external objects’ properties because objects produce, via the sensory organs, a likeness of themselves in the mind. They produce this likeness by generating phantasms or “sensible species” in which their properties are reproduced or copied. Some believed that green objects propagate green-coloured images through the air and into the eye, producing in the mind phantasms that, like the objects themselves, are green; others held that the objects produce sensible species that resemble or pictorially represent the objects’ properties. A distinct, higher intellectual faculty was in turn supposed to abstract from the objects’ contingent, material properties to conceive “intelligible species” sharing in the objects’ form. Thus, although the scholastics recognized a mediating entity between perception and physical objects, namely the phantasm or image, their epistemology had nevertheless taken the form of direct realism: we can directly perceive and grasp the (properties of) physical objects.\textsuperscript{11} This was the theory of colour perception against which Hobbes advanced his own account; similarly, he developed his account of the mental representation of value partly in reaction to a scholastic (and Cartesian) theory according to which humans represent to themselves the objective goodness of things thanks to a higher and purely rational faculty of understanding or judgement, distinct from the imagination.

Hobbes heaped scorn on both of these traditional theories as so much scholastic claptrap.\textsuperscript{12} Already in 1640, in his manuscript \textit{Elements of Law}, he had reduced the faculties of mind to “two sorts” of mental “Powers,” namely, the “Cognitive or Imaginative or Conceptive,” on the one hand, and the “motive” or conative power, on the other. The former consists in the mind’s ability to have “Images or Conceptions,” which comprise

\textsuperscript{10} The interpretation is suggested by Tuck (1989: 53–55; 1996: 180–181, 191) and most fully developed by Darwall (1998: 92–93; 2000: 330). Although in principle he leaves it open whether Hobbes’s projectivism entails an error theory or is compatible with noncognitivism, Darwall (2000: 338) in practice attributes the error theory: Hobbes provided “an account of our normative thought and judgment” as consisting in judgements about how “we ought to act,” namely, “as they [natural laws] dictate,” but did not provide “an account of the normativity of the laws of nature”; there “can be no [such] account, because… there really is no such thing” as normativity.


\textsuperscript{12} L 1.5: 24. Tuck (1988b); Pink (2004).
sensory perception and imagination, while the latter consists in the power to have “affections and Passions.” Hobbes thus treated all conceptions or purely cognitive mental states as products of a single faculty – namely, sense or the imagination – thereby rejecting the scholastic and Cartesian distinction between a lower, passive, sensory faculty, which gives rise to images, and a higher, active, rational or intellectual faculty, which gives rise to ideas. This in part reflects Hobbes’s nominalism: he took all conceptions to be of some particular object, and thus rejected the possibility of universal or abstract conceptions. The passions, in turn, are conative mental states in the sense that they in part comprise an urge or disposition to act: “appetite” or “desire” when they dispose us to favour some object, “aversion” when they dispose us to disfavour it. These “Passions of Man” are “the beginning of all his voluntary motions” or, equivalently, “the Indeavour, or internall beginning of animall motion.”

Conceptions and passions both arise thanks to imperceptible, internal motions in our body. Hobbes located the seat of these two types of mental state in distinct parts of the body, speculating in Elements that conceptions arise from internal motions in our brain, and passions from the continuation of motion “to the Hart.” According to Leviathan, sensory perception (“Sense”) arises when an “Externall Body, or Object” presently exerts pressure on one’s sensory organ, which produces internal motions carried by nerves “inwards to the Brain, and Heart,” which provokes a “counter-pressure” in the heart “Outward,” which in turn produces an outward motion carried by the nerves to the brain, giving rise to a mental “Representation or Apparence” of the object. Imagination, in the narrow sense, arises when such a counter-pressure is produced by internal motions persisting within one’s body despite there being no external pressure on one’s sensory organs from the object represented – as in memory, when “after the object is removed, or the eye shut, wee still retain an image of the thing seen,” or fiction, “as when from the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaure.” Passion, in turn, arises when this self-same counter-pressure of the heart produces an endeavour or motion either “toward something which causes it” (desire) or “fromward something” (aversion).

Although sensory perceptions and imaginations are purely cognitive states, and passions are conative states, both types of mental state are
intentional and hence cognitive states in the sense that they comprise mental representations of objects. Hobbes was an intentionalist: he took all mental states to be intentional states insofar as they are mental representations of objects as having some properties. Conceptions and passions are both directed on the intentional objects they are about and also represent these objects in a particular or aspectual way:21 mental states “are every one of them a Representation or Apparence, of some quality, or other Accident of . . . an Object.”22

We can therefore distinguish five components of Hobbes’s account of mental states: (1) the mental state itself, for which Hobbes’s most general names were “Representation or Apparence” and “seeming, or fancy” (“Apparitio” and “Phantasma” in Latin); (2) the intentional object of the mental state, that is, what the mental state is about or represents to the mind; (3) the content of the mental state, comprising, for example, the aspect under which the object is represented (what the object is represented as); (4) the material basis of the mental state, consisting in internal bodily motions; and (5) the causal mechanism by which these internal motions arise.23 In visual perception, for example, Hobbes named the mental state itself “Sense” and more specifically “Vision,” deemed the causal mechanism by which it arises to involve the pressure exerted on the eye by the represented object, and the content to consist “in a Light, or Colour figured,”24 i.e., in a representation of the object as having the properties of luminous colour and extension. And he speculated that the material basis of sensory perception consists in a motion in the brain.

Hobbes therefore agreed with the scholastics that our sensory perceptions represent external objects as having certain properties or “accidents,” including sensory qualities such as colour or sound. But already in Elements, he asserted that the perception that these sensory qualities inhere in external objects is a delusion. We are disposed erroneously to project the properties of our own intentional states onto their objects: “As Colour is not inherent in the object but an effect thereof upon us caused by such motion in the object . . . So neither is Sound in the thing we hear, but in ourselves.”25 More generally,
whosoever Accidents or qualities our Senses make us thinke there be in the world, they are not there, but are Seeminges and Apparitions only. The things that really are in the world without us are those motions by which these Seeminges are caused. And this is the great deception of Sense.  

_Leviathan_ reiterates the point: “All which qualities called _Sensible_, are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely.”  

The perception of an external object as luminous or green is not caused by a luminosity or greenness subsisting in and emanating from the object, but by imperceptible motions in the object’s constituent parts perpetuated outwards through a medium such as air. 

When we turn to evaluative properties, we find Hobbes once again agreeing with the scholastics that the mind can represent objects as good. But again, he denied that our mental representations of objects as good are subject to the judgement of some higher faculty. Moreover, he drew an explicit analogy between our perception of sensory qualities and our conception of goodness in objects. The analogy arises in the context of a structural parallel Hobbes drew between purely cognitive mental states such as sensory perception, in which objects are represented as having sensory qualities, and conative mental states or passions, in which objects are represented as having value or disvalue. 

Although Hobbes did not have a specific name for the internal bodily motions that constitute the material basis of sensory perceptions or imaginations, he did have a name for the motions giving rise to passions. When the internal bodily motions giving rise to a passion are towards its intentional object, the motions are called “desire” or “appetite”; when away from the object, “aversion.” Strictly speaking, therefore, ‘desire’ and ‘aversion’ are not names of the mental state itself, but of its material basis – although Hobbes in practice often used ‘desire’ and ‘aversion’ loosely to denote the mental state as well (and I follow him in this). As he made clear in _Leviathan_, the name of the mental state itself is delight or _pleasure_ in the former case, and trouble, molestation, or _displeasure_ in the latter: the motion, when towards an object, “is called Appetite,” but “for the appearance of it [is called] Delight, and Pleasure.”  

And the intentional content of conative mental states – i.e., the aspect under which the intentional object of pleasure or displeasure is represented – is as having the evaluative

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27 L 1.4: 22–24.  
28 MDO I.2.  
29 L 6.9–10: 82.
property of being good or evil. It is in making this final point that Hobbes
drew the parallel with the projection of sensory qualities:

As, in Sense, that which is really within us, is . . . onely Motion, caused by
the action of externall objects, but in apparence; to the Sight, Light and
Colour; to the Eare, Sound; to the Nostrill, Odour, &c: so, when the action
of the same object is continued from the Eyes, Eares, and other organs to the
Heart; the reall effect there is nothing but Motion, or Endeavour; which
consisteth in Appetite, or Aversion, to, or from the object moving. But the
apparence, or sense of that motion [i.e., the mental representation to which
the motion gives rise], is that wee either call delight, or trouble of
mind . . . Pleasure therefore, (or Delight,) is the apparence, or sense of
Good; and Molestation or Displeasure, the apparence, or sense of Evill.
And consequently all Appetite, Desire, and Love, is accompanied with
some Delight more or lesse; and all Hatted, and Aversion, with more or
lesse Displeasure and Offence.30

It is this parallel between the projection of sensory qualities onto objects
(in having sensory perceptions) and the projection of evaluative properties
(in having passions) that furnishes the textual basis for interpreting Hobbes
as an error theorist of normativity. The key elements of this interpretation
are as follows. First, Hobbes advanced a projectivist theory of sensory
qualities: in perceiving external objects we project sensory qualities onto
them, but in reality they possess no such properties. (The only properties
inhering in bodies are extension and motion.) Second, as a consequence,
Hobbes advanced an error theory of sensory qualities: all of our concep-
tions of objects as being green are erroneous, and any proposition via which
we assert that objects are green is false. Third, Hobbes advanced
a projectivist theory of the good: in desiring objects we project the distinct
property of goodness onto them, even though they do not possess such
a property. Fourth, as a consequence, Hobbes advanced an error theory of
value: all of our conceptions of objects as being good are erroneous, and
any proposition via which we assert that objects are good is false. Fifth, this
error theory of value is generalized to all alleged normative properties,
conceptions, and propositions. In short, there are no objective normative
properties, and any assertion that there is a normative reason to believe,
desire, or do something is false. The science of ethics consists in describing

30 L 6.9–11: 82. I read the ‘of’ in “of that motion” as possessive, and not an ‘of’ of intentionality. Hobbes
did not here mean that one’s internal motion is the intentional object represented to the mind, but
that the internal motion gives rise to a representation of some intentional object. It is of course
possible mentally to represent one’s own internal motion, but this is not the representational
content of all pleasure as such. (Holden’s (2016: 141, note 13) reading of this passage is mistaken.)
the psychological processes by which we are led erroneously to project objective normative properties onto objects and to assert their existence.

This reading confronts two major challenges. The first arises from the fact that Hobbes’s science of ethics does not seem restricted to mere descriptions of human psychology. It also comprises apparently evaluative claims about the good – most prominently, that self-preservation is the individual’s greatest good, and that “Peace” and “the way, or means of Peace” are universally “Good” for all. Moreover, Hobbes linked these evaluative propositions to a set of natural laws characterized as the core of “Moral Philosophy,” and which consist in “dictates of Reason” prescribing to agents the relevant social means of self-preservation and therefore of peace. These “Laws of Nature, are good” even if not everyone desires to comply with them. The error-theoretical reading implies that Hobbes ultimately viewed the central propositions of his own science of ethics as false: in reality, self-preservation and peace are not of any genuine normative value, and the laws of nature fail to articulate normative prescriptions linked to anything of value.

One should not easily concede any interpretation with such incredible implications, for it obliterates the gulf that Hobbes boasted separates his own ethical system from his hapless predecessors: previous moral philosophers are mired in absurdity and falsehood, while his own furnishes a true science on a par with geometry. Hobbes proclaimed in De Cive (1642, second edition 1647) that “If the Morall philosophers had as happily discharg’d their duty” as the geometers of old, and “the nature of humane Actions [were] as distinctly knowne, as the nature of Quantity in Geometricall Figures,” then humanity would presently “enjoy such an Immortall Peace, that . . . there would hardly be left any pretence for war. But now on the contrary” there is nothing but disagreement amongst “the severall factions of Philosophers,” which furnishes “so many signes . . . that what hath hitherto been written by Morall philosophers, hath not made any progress in the knowledge of the Truth.” What previous moral philosophers lacked is a rigorous, scientific method: the source of their “unluckines should seem to be this; That . . . there is not one that hath used an idoneous Principle of Tractation,” Hobbes himself, by contrast, had discerned the correct “Principle of Tractation” establishing ethics on solid and true foundations. Whereas the “hermaphrodite opinions of morall Philosophers, partly right and comely, partly brutall and wilde,” have been

the causes of all contentions, and blood-sheds,” his own moral philosophy would furnish the only veritable basis for peace.35 But the error-theoretical interpretation implies that, by his own lights, Hobbes’s own philosophy is no less ridden with falsehood and absurdity than the “Vain and false Philosophy” of Aristotle so acerbically mocked in *Leviathan*.36

One might concede all this, but argue that Hobbes articulated his sciences of ethics and politics as a purely strategic, rhetorical performance designed to secure the end he most desired: to live in peace.37 After all, Hobbes explicitly avowed his “hope, that one time or other, this writing of mine, may fall into the hands of a Soveraign, who will consider it himselfe . . . and by the exercise of entire Soveraignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice.”38 Hobbes may have believed that, despite their falsity, if his normative propositions were widely believed, his most cherished desire would be realized.

This rejoinder has the merit of explaining why, despite Hobbes’s own pronouncements against the role of metaphors and other rhetorical and literary devices, he himself deployed them with frequency (and mastery).39 But if this was Hobbes’s agenda, then we face an obvious question: Why did he (allegedly) publicly articulate an error theory when doing so risks undermining the persuasiveness of his substantive normative claims?40 Note that the allegation does not merely obliterate the gulf Hobbes claimed separates his own ethics and politics from Aristotle’s “vain” philosophy. It also reduces Hobbes’s ethics to a mere description or expression of his own most cherished passion, which was precisely how Hobbes castigated the ancient Greeks for “Their Morall Philosophy,” which “is but a description of their own Passions.”41 The implication of the error-theoretical interpretation is that Hobbes covertly took this to be true of his own moral philosophy as well.

The second major challenge is that neither Hobbes’s account of colour perception nor his analogous account of conceiving value supports an error theory. It is true that Hobbes advanced a *projectivist* theory of colour: we are disposed erroneously to project the representational content of our mental states onto their intentional objects. But he was not thereby committed to an

35 DCv Preface.7. 36 Quoting L 46. 33: 1090, but referring to chapter 46 in general.
37 Tuck (1996: 197) suggests that for Hobbes rhetoric is “solely concerned with winning victory” in persuasion. For a reading of Hobbes’s works as rhetorical interventions, see Johnston (1986).
38 L 31.41: 574.
39 On Hobbes’s strictures against, and widespread use of, literary and rhetorical tropes and figures, see Kahn (1985); Skinner (1996).
40 For an attempt to address this challenge, see Darwall (2000).
41 L 46.11: 1058.
error theory of colour according to which all propositions such as ‘x is green’ are false. Hobbes was not claiming that sensory perceptions do not represent the properties of external objects; he was claiming they do so indirectly, in the sense that the properties they represent do not resemble the sensory content of mental states. Moreover, we are able to know this fact. Hobbes had made this point in his very first published work, the Objectiones (1641) to Descartes’s Meditationes: “When I think of a man, I am aware of an idea or image made up of a certain shape and colour; and I can doubt whether this image is the likeness of a man or not.” Thanks to science, we can know that properties inhering in external objects, and which cause us to perceive them as green, for example, consist in specific combinations of extension and motion. As the error-theoretical reading might acknowledge, one of the tasks of science, as Hobbes conceived it, is to demonstrate this fact.

What the error-theoretical reading does not acknowledge is that another task of Hobbesian science is to reform language, at least as used within science, in light of the requirements and findings of scientific inquiry. Part of the scientist’s task is to propose reforming definitions so that we can use language more scientifically. As Hobbes put it in De Corpore:

> whatsoever the common use of words be, yet philosophers, who were to deliver their knowledge to others, had always the ability [potestas], and sometimes they both had and will have a necessity, of taking to themselves such names as they please for the signifying of their meaning [sensus].

Hobbes had made the same point in Leviathan, arguing it is necessary for the scientist “to examine the Definitions of former Authors; and either to correct them, where they are negligently set down; or to make them himselfe.” His own practice conformed to these strictures: Hobbes regularly provided scientific, reforming definitions for the terminological building blocks of philosophy. Scientific reasoning requires “apt imposing of Names.”

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42 Tuck (1988a) makes the same substantial point, but (misleadingly) calls indirect representation “non-representation.”
43 O 5. We can visually perceive something as having some property, while believing or knowing that it does not. When we are aware that the image we see is an illusion created “by glasses,” then “we know the thing we see, is in one place; the apparence, in another.” L 1.1.4: 24.
44 Holden (2016: 131–132) is mistaken to think this distinguishes sensory properties from evaluative ones.
45 On reforming definitions, see Brandt (1979); Railton (1989).
46 DC 2.4; cf. 6.15.
47 L 4.13: 56. See L 34.1: 610.
Once science teaches us the difference between the sensory properties we project onto external objects and the properties actually inhering in them, we can reform language for scientific purposes. With the proper reforms in place, ‘x is green’ would not mean that x possesses a property resembling the content of a normal observer’s visual representation of it; rather, it would mean that normal observers see x as having a certain visual property, and that x possesses the dispositional property to cause normal observers to see it that way, i.e., it possesses a combination of extension and motion disposed to cause normal observers to perceive the object as “green” in the pre-scientific, phenomenological sense. Once we distinguish between the pre-scientific and scientific meanings of ‘green’, the proposition ‘x is green’ can be given two types of interpretation: one corresponding to pre-scientific or unscientific (scholastic) accounts of colour perception, another to Hobbes’s scientific theory. Whether the proposition ‘x is green’ is always false will thus depend on what we mean by it: if we use ‘green’ in the non-scientific sense, then it is always false; but if we use ‘green’ according to the reforming definition proposed by Hobbes’s science, then it is sometimes true that x is green. This is why Hobbes could treat, as he did in the sixth chapter of *Elements*, the proposition “It is Greene” as potentially true: despite his projectivist theory of colour perception, and contrary to what the error-theoretical reading supposes, Hobbes did not think that the proposition ‘It is Greene’ is always false. Its truth depends on whether it is an instance of “the proper use of names in Language.”

The mistake behind imputing to Hobbes an error theory of colour judgments and propositions is the false assumption that projectivism rules out veridical cognitive judgments and true propositions. Hobbes’s projectivism is a doctrine about the proclivity of sentient beings to perceive objects as having properties they do not have. His projectivism does not, however, entail that linguistic beings cannot reflect on and judge as erroneous their own projections, or that the propositions they use to articulate beliefs about external objects’ properties are systematically false. To the contrary, his theory of colour is premised on the possibility of reflecting on and of judging erroneous such projections. Rather than an error theory, Hobbes was proposing a reductionist theory of colour: he

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49 Extension and motion are necessary accidents (LL 9: 125). In observers, an accident is “the manner [modum] by which any body is conceived,” while in the object itself it is “that faculty of any body, by which it works in us a conception of itself.” DC 8.2.

50 EL 6.1. Hobbes was recounting the tale of the Duke of Gloucester who exposed as a liar a man claiming to have been blind since birth. See Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, part 2, act 2, scene 1.
sought reductively to analyze sensory qualities in terms of extended bodies in motion and to reform scientific language accordingly.

If Hobbes was not an error theorist of colour, then there is no textual basis on which to read him as an error theorist of normativity. The analogy he drew between sensory and evaluative qualities suggests instead two other potential views of normativity and normative discourse: reductionism or prescriptivism.

### 1.2 Descriptivist Reductionism

On the readings of Hobbes we are considering here, there are no distinct, irreducibly normative properties. We can conceive of agents as having irreducibly normative reasons, but all such conceptions are erroneous, and any corresponding propositions false. Yet on the reductionist reading, normative propositions can be used, thanks to Hobbes’s reforming vocabulary, to articulate facts that are reducible to non-normative naturalistic ones. This reductionist reading makes three central claims about Hobbes’s ethics: (a) all normative properties and facts are ultimately reducible to non-normative, naturalistic ones; (b) normative judgements are representational (they represent objects as having normative properties) and normative utterances are truth apt; and (c) with Hobbes’s reforming definitions in place, normative propositions can be used to describe objects’ normative properties and assert true facts. On this reading, Hobbes was a reductionist about normative properties and facts, a cognitivist about normative judgements and propositions, and a descriptivist about the meaning of normative language.

On a simple version of the reductionist interpretation, normative language is used to describe what agents actually believe, desire, or do. Such an interpretation is often defended especially on the strength of Hobbes’s famous declaration, in chapter 6 of *Leviathan*, that “whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill.”\(^5\) Those who find evidence here for a reductionist Hobbes often take him to have been claiming here that ‘good’ just means *desired* – that to say “x is good” is to say “I desire x.”\(^5\) This definitional or “analytical” reading of Hobbes’s famous declaration is supposed to support a reductionist interpretation

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\(^5\) L 6.7: 80.

because the reason why he declared ‘good’ to mean desired is supposed to be that there can be no further (irreducibly normative) property for the term to denote: being good just is the natural property of being desired, such that true normative propositions turn out, upon analysis, to describe a state of affairs. Although those advancing this definitional reading sometimes say they are attributing a kind of “subjectivism” to Hobbes, it is important to see that the reading attributes to him an account of meaning or word use, and not any substantive theory of normative value.

At other times, commentators – sometimes the very same ones – who call Hobbes a subjectivist seem to attribute to him a substantive, desire-fulfilment theory of value, according to which what makes something normatively valuable for agents is the fact they desire it. On this substantive theory, being desired and being good are distinct properties – the former is natural and non-normative while the latter is genuinely normative and reason-implicating – and what makes something good for people is that they desire it. Whereas the former, merely “analytical” form of the desire theory of an agent’s good is compatible with the simple reductionist reading, the latter, substantive desire-fulfilment theory is not, because on the substantive theory, the fact that something is desired confers to it a further, genuinely normative property: precisely in virtue of being desired, it becomes desirable, and the agent acquires normative reasons to favour it. That an agent has a motivational reason makes it the case that he also has a normative reason, but this further normative fact is not reducible to the natural fact of having that motivational reason.

To evaluate the merits of these rival readings we must therefore keep apart two questions: What is the meaning of the word ‘good’? And: What makes something good (or: in virtue of what is it good)? Those who find in Hobbes’s famous declaration evidence of his reductionism often read it purely as a response to the first, semantic question, while those who read it in a substantively subjective way take him to have been answering the second, metaphysical question as well.

When his famous declaration is read in isolation, it is not immediately clear which questions Hobbes took himself to be answering. But once the passage is read in context, it becomes clear that these two questions could not have been the only ones. Whatever else he was doing here, he was at the very least answering a third, psychological question, namely: What causes people to think that something is good and/or to call it good? We know

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this thanks to the role the passage plays in setting up Hobbes’s explanation of war.

War, the central character of Hobbes’s tale of the human condition, is not explicitly introduced in *Leviathan* until the thirteenth chapter, after the reader has already been treated, in the first twelve chapters, to Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature and artifice. The final three chapters of Part 1, “Of Man,” end with an account of the considerations in favour of seeking peace (survival and contentment) and the available means for doing so (contract and authorization). But even prior to Part 1’s pivotal thirteenth chapter, Hobbes had already foreshadowed the outbreak of war: after having encountered, in the five opening chapters, expositions on sensory perception, imagination, thinking, language, and reasoning, the reader finally stumbles upon the roots of war in precisely the passage from chapter 6 we are examining. Hobbes exposed the problem by first observing that, because people have different and mutating bodily constitutions, there could hardly be any single “Object” of which everyone would, at any given point in time, “consent, in the Desire.”54 It is immediately after this that he declared, in the sentence with which we are concerned, that people call the objects of their desire “Good.”

Hobbes did not here spell out the dangerous social and political implications, but he would do so clearly later, at the end of chapter 15, where he summarized the whole problem to which his political philosophy would furnish the answer: (1) people have different and changing objects of desire and aversion and (2) are moved to call the objects of their desire “good” and aversion “evil”; therefore, (3) at any given point, they will disagree about what to call good and evil, “From whence arise Disputes, Controversies, and at last War.”55 Hence part of the point of Hobbes’s famous declaration is to articulate the second premise of this central argument in his disagreement theory of war – a premise, not about the meaning of ‘good’, nor about the property in virtue of which things are good, but about what moves people to call things good.56

To argue that Hobbes was here describing what moves or causes people to call things good is not to imply that the passage tells us nothing about what ‘good’ means or what makes things good. But the analytical reading does not cohere with the central role Hobbes’s declaration plays in his explanation of war: if calling things good is just to report on one’s desires, then when one calls something good and another calls it evil there is no

54 L 6.6: 80.
56 On Hobbes’s disagreement theory of war, see Abizadeh (2011).
genuine disagreement and so no genuine *disputational* basis for conflict.\(^{57}\)
If when I say “Monarchy is good” I mean I desire it, and if when you say “Monarchy is evil” you mean you are averse to it, then in reporting our respective passions there is no dispute between us.

There could be a disputational basis for conflict if interlocutors used normative terms such as ‘good’ to make claims concerning putative properties not indexed to the speaker.\(^{58}\) But this supposes that in practice the interlocutors use ‘good’ to name something other than their own passions, so that the definition of ‘good’ Hobbes was ostensibly providing would have to be a *reforming* definition departing from customary usage.\(^{59}\) Now, there is no doubt Hobbes took ‘good’ to be a term for which moral philosophy must provide a scientific definition: “Morall Philosophy is nothing else but the Science of what is *Good*, and *Evill.*”\(^{60}\) But he explicitly argued that terms that, beyond signifying “what we imagine” of the “nature” of the object we conceive, also signify the “nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker” himself, “can never be true grounds of any ratiocination” if, as a result of this dual function, they “are in the common discourses of men, of *inconstant* signification” and thereby cause protracted disputation and controversy.\(^{61}\) In other words, if Hobbes was clarifying the meaning of ‘good’ in his famous declaration of chapter 6, he was characterizing how ‘good’ is customarily used, not providing his reforming, scientific definition of the term. The characterization of ‘good’ in chapter 6 is straightforwardly meant to be of a usage that *is* the basis of protracted disputation and controversy. His own scientific definition of ‘good’, by contrast, must serve as the basis for scientific consensus (even if the term continues to signify something about the speaker). The analytical reading according to which Hobbes was reducing the true meaning of ‘good’ to actually desired is therefore unviable and provides no support for Hobbes’s alleged reductionism about the good.

There is, moreover, decisive positive evidence against the reductionist interpretation. When Hobbes made normative claims, he clearly did not take himself to be describing or predicting what intentional agents will actually desire or do. He was perfectly aware that sometimes – indeed, often – we fail to be motivated to take the relevant means to our long-term good or most desired ends. There are, to be sure, *explanatory* reasons for why we fail to do so; for example, we may sometimes lack a decisive

\(^{57}\) For this objection against descriptivism, see Moore (1922), and against such readings of Hobbes, Darwall (2000).

\(^{58}\) Tuck (1996: 181).

\(^{59}\) Miller (2003: 185).

\(^{60}\) L 15.40: 242.

\(^{61}\) L 4.24: 62.
motivational reason to do so. But since Hobbes nevertheless maintained that it is a “dictate of reason” to do so, he could not have used that expression to describe what individuals actually desire or do. Even if some are disposed to violate the seventh law of nature against cruelty, it remains a precept of reason “by which we are obliged,” such that when we glory “in the hurt of another, tending to no end,” we do so “contrary to reason.”

This discrepancy with what people actually desire, do, or are disposed to do is directly mirrored in what Hobbes said about the good – in particular in his distinction between an agent’s “Apparent or Seeming Good” and his bonum verum. An agent’s seeming good is whatever seems to him to produce the best consequences for him; and perhaps agents actually (are disposed to) desire or do whatever seems good to them. But if what is truly good for agents is distinct from their seeming good, then the former cannot consist in what they actually desire. Thus when Hobbes claimed that natural laws are “dictates of Reason” articulating the “Science of what is Good, and Evill,” and that “Reason ... dictateth to every man his own good,” he could not have meant that reason or natural law dictates to agents their seeming good.

Further evidence against the reductionist interpretation: Hobbes used ‘reason’ not just as a mass noun (in expressions such as ‘dictates of reason’ or ‘against reason’), but also as a count noun, in contexts in which he asserted agents have reasons to have certain attitudes or to undertake certain actions. To be sure, if Hobbes had used ‘reason’ as a count noun solely to mean explanatory or motivational reasons, no particular difficulty would arise for the reductionist reading. And in many instances when Hobbes used the term as a count noun, he simply meant an explanatory reason, as when, having asked how the Jews could “fall into” believing in the phenomenon of possession, he answered that “I can imagine no reason” other than “the want of curiosity to search naturall causes; and their placing Felicity, in the acquisition of the grosse pleasures of the Senses.”

He similarly deployed ‘reason’ to mean an explanatory reason when explaining the diversity of Jews’ responses to St. Paul’s efforts to prove, based on passages from “the Old Testament,” that “Jesus was the Christ”: “What was the reason, when they all beleved the Scripture, that they did not all beleve alike; but that some approved, others disapproved the

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63 L 15.4: 222; 15.40: 242; 6.7: 94; AW 30.25; DH 11.5; 12.1. Cf. EL 17.14; DCv 3.31–32.
64 L 8.25: 118.
Interpretation of St. Paul that cited them . . . ?

Nor was his use of the term in this sense restricted to explaining human attitudes or actions: “when a thing lies still, unlesse somewhat els stirre it, it will lye still for ever . . . when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat els stay it . . . the reason be the same, (namely, that nothing can change it selfe.).” Hobbes of course also frequently used ‘cause’ to mean an explanatory reason, as when he wrote of the “cause of Sense,” the “causes of warre,” or the “cause of Absurd assertions.”

Sometimes Hobbes also deployed ‘reason’ as a count noun in an explanatory sense to mean specifically motivational reasons, as when he wrote that “It belongeth therefore to the Office of a Legislator . . . to make the reason Perspicuous, why the Law was made.”

Describing how sovereigns reduced aristocratic offices to merely honorific titles, Hobbes wrote that “In processe of time these offices of Honour, by occasion of trouble, and for reasons of good and peaceable government, were turned into meer Titles” with “neither possession, nor command.” Sovereigns have legislated and have weakened the aristocracy because, in each case, they took some considerations to be (normative) reasons to undertake those actions. Hobbes also invoked the notion of motivational reasons for belief: “some are moved to beleve” that the scriptures are the word of God “for one, and others for other reasons.”

Unsurprisingly, he used ‘cause’ as a synonym for ‘reason’ in the motivational sense as well, as when he wrote of “the Causes, and Motives, for which it [a law] was made,” or asserted that “The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men” in joining a commonwealth “is the foresight of their own preservation.”

But Hobbes also frequently deployed ‘reason’ as a count noun in a third way. This third usage is markedly distinct from the contexts in which he asserted that there exists a motivational or other explanatory reason for why agents believe, desire, or act as they do. Consider first the case of epistemic reasons to believe and affective reasons to have some passion. Writing of clerical claims to have transubstantiated a piece of bread into “a God, or a man, or both” – even though the object “looketh still as like bread as ever it did” – Hobbes insisted “there is no reason for any man to think it really

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65 L 42.32: 808.
66 L 2.1: 26. For further examples of ‘reason’ qua explanatory, see L 6.53: 92; 12.11: 170.
67 L 1.4: 22; 11.4: 152; 5.10: 70.
69 L 33.2: 604.
70 L 30.22: 542.
done; nor consequently to fear” the cleric.\textsuperscript{72} The implication is that even if some do “think it really done” or do fear the cleric, they have “no reason” to do so – in some sense of ‘reason’ distinct from the reasons explaining their having done so. Elsewhere Hobbes warned “there is no more reason to expect good Advice from the rich, or noble, in matter of State, than in delineating the dimensions of a fortresse,” and wrote more generally of “the truth, or probability of his [a counsellor’s] reasons, and of the grounds of the advise he gives.”\textsuperscript{73} He also disparaged beliefs unsupported by epistemic reasons, such as beliefs supposedly supported by supernatural inspiration: for a person to “say he speaks by supernaturall Inspiration, is to say he finds an ardent desire to speak, or some strong opinion of himself, for which hee can allledge no naturall and sufficient reason.”\textsuperscript{74}

Next, consider practical reasons to act. Hobbes’s second law of nature prescribes to individuals that they lay down, if others also will, their “right to all things.” Hobbes qualified the precept by saying, “But if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as he; then there is no Reason for any one, to devest himselfe of his: For that were to expose himselfe to Prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himselfe to Peace.”\textsuperscript{75} Hobbes was not here predicting that no one will actually expose himself to prey. The same holds for his eighteenth law of nature, which prescribes unbiased arbitrators: Hobbes was perfectly aware that sometimes those who select arbitrators might lack sufficient motivational reasons to reject biased arbitrators; yet he claimed that under the right circumstances they nevertheless have a reason to do so: “For the same reason no man in any Cause ought to be received for Arbitrator, to whom greater profit, or honour, or pleasure apparently ariseth out of the victory of one party, than of the other.”\textsuperscript{76}

Hobbes even deployed ‘cause’ as a synonym for this third, distinct sense of ‘reason’ as a count noun. While the use of ‘cause’ in an explanatory sense is familiar to readers today, its use in the justificatory sense is perhaps less so. But it is not entirely alien: our word ‘because’, which can be used in both explanatory and justificatory senses, reminds us of this older sense. When Hobbes wrote “there is no cause to doubt, but that the seed of Religion, is also onely in Man,” he did not mean that no one has been caused to doubt it; he meant that there is no epistemic reason to doubt that the genesis of religion lies in human nature.\textsuperscript{77} Similarly, when he

\textsuperscript{72} L 37.13: 694. \textsuperscript{73} L 30.25: 546; 25.15: 410.
\textsuperscript{74} L 32.6: 580. For epistemic reasons, see DCv 14.13. For affective reasons, see L 30.11: 528.
\textsuperscript{75} L 14.5: 200. \textsuperscript{76} L 15.32: 238; see 25.2–3: 398; 25.10: 404.
\textsuperscript{77} L 12.1: 164. For another example, see R&C.11: 1137.
contemplated the deposition of King Chilperic III by Pope Zachary “for no cause,” he was contemplating an action the pope lacked a sufficient reason to undertake. When he wrote that “Leagues of Subjects . . . are in a Common-wealth . . . for the most part unnecessary, and savour of unlawfull designe; and are for that cause Unlawfull,” he meant that commonwealths have a decisive reason to outlaw such leagues. And when he wrote that subjects who actually follow the example of idol worshippers “had no cause to follow such example,” he meant that, while there evidently exists an explanatory reason for their action, subjects lack a sufficient reason to parrot idolaters. Again, to write of “causelesse fears” is not to write of fears whose genesis has no causal explanation, but of fears that agents lack any sufficient reason to have – in some sense distinct from the motivational or other explanatory senses of the term.

The use of ‘reason’ as a count noun in this distinct, third sense is mirrored by Hobbes’s use of the term ‘ought’. The way Hobbes linked the two terms strongly suggests he did not use either to describe what people actually or even tend to believe, desire, or do. Hobbes wrote, for example: “nor by the same reason ought they to believe, that the Government is of one kind, when they like it, and another, when they dislike it, or are oppressed by the Governours.” This parallels his linkage of ‘reason’ and ‘ought’ in the affective and practical context of the eighteenth law of nature, where Hobbes claimed that “For the same reason no man” with a vested interest “in any Cause ought to be received for Arbitrator.” Hobbes’s use of ‘ought’ is central to his articulation of the laws of nature, which all derive from the “precept, or generall rule of Reason, That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it.” He explicitly distinguished utterances deploying ‘ought’ from descriptive and explanatory propositions, insisting that “though in all places of the world, men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand, it could not thence be inferred, that so it ought to be.” Although fear frequently explains people’s actions, “not every Fear justifies the Action it produceth.” Describing or explaining what is actually the case differs from justifying what ought to be the case.

78 L 12.32: 186. 79 L 22.29: 370. 80 L 45.27: 1038.
85 L 20.19: 320–322. This speaks against Darwall’s (1992: 163) claim that ought is equivalent to a decisive motive for Hobbes.
86 L 27.20: 464.
1.3 Reasoning-Based Descriptivist Reductionism

Hobbes’s naturalism therefore cannot take the form of reducing normative judgements and propositions to representations or assertions concerning what agents actually believe, desire, or do. The challenge for the reductionist reading is to analyze and explain Hobbes’s (a) distinction between apparent and true good, (b) use of ‘reason’ as a mass noun in expressions such as ‘dictates of reason’, and (c) third use of ‘reason’ as a count noun and of ‘ought’ – without reducing these to a simple description or prediction of what agents will actually (or tend to) believe, desire, or do.

A potential response to this challenge stems from Hobbes’s observation that we often desire what would bring short-run pleasures, but upon reasoning properly would most desire what conduces to ongoing pleasure in the long run. Consider the following passage from *Elements*:

> Every man by naturall passion, calleth that good which pleaseth him for the present, or so farre forth as he can foresee . . . And therefore he that foreseeth the whole way to his preservation, which is the end that every one by nature aimeth at) must also call it good, and the Contrary, Evill. And this is that good, and evill, which not every man in passion calleth soe, but all men by reason. And therefore the fulfilling of all these Lawes is good in reason . . . And from hence cometh that distinction of *Malum pænæ*, and *malum Culpæ*, for *Malum pænæ* is any paine or molestation of minde whatsoever. But *Malum culpæ* is that action which is contrary to reason and the law of nature.  

On a more sophisticated reductionist interpretation, Hobbes was here claiming that, while not all rational agents will in fact desire the means to self-preservation or fulfil the laws of nature, all *would* do so if (and because) they engaged in proper reasoning: “not every man in passion” calls the means to his preservation good, but “all men by reason,” that is, those who *have properly reasoned*, do. Similarly, while *malum pænæ* comprises actions that agents actually do not desire or undertake because they perceive them and their consequences to be unpleasant, *malum culpæ* comprises actions that agents would not desire or undertake upon reasoning properly – because they would come to perceive their consequences as, on balance, unpleasant in the long run.

This reasoning-based reductionist reading suggests that Hobbes used normative-sounding vocabulary to articulate a prediction about what rational agents would desire or do under descriptively specifiable

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circumstances. Thus if ‘apparent good’ means whatever one actually desires, such as what yields short-run pleasure, then ‘true good’ would mean what one would desire (or pursue) upon proper reasoning or deliberation, i.e., one’s long-run balance of pleasure. As Hobbes put it in *De Homine* (1658), “although the true Good is to be sought in the foreseeable long term, which is the work of Reasoning, Appetite seizes a present Good,” and the passions often “impede right reasoning by militating against the true Good in favour of an Apparent and immediately Present good, which frequently ends up (weighing carefully everything adjoined to it) being Evil.” So when Hobbes wrote in *De Cive* that “They therefore who could not agree concerning a present, doe agree concerning a future Good [namely peace], which indeed is a work of Reason; for *things present* are obvious to the sense, *things future* to our Reason only,” he was not claiming humans have an irreducibly normative reason to agree that peace is good. He was claiming that upon reasoning properly they would agree that peace is good, because it is via reasoning that humans come to see long-term consequences.

The question is whether the concepts of a “dictate of reason,” of what is “against” or “contrary to reason,” and of what one has a reason or ought to do could similarly be reductively analyzed. Take Hobbes’s use of ‘reason’ as a mass noun in expressions such as “dictate of reason.” One way to interpret ‘reason’ here is in irreducibly normative terms, taking it to mean the *collection* or articulation of the ensemble of normative precepts, i.e., of the normative *reasons* agents have overall. A dictate of reason would be one of the normative precepts composing this collection – a normative reason agents have. And to write of “what is conformable, or disagreeable to Reason” or what is “consonant to” and “against Reason” would be to write of what conforms to or goes against the balance of these normative reasons overall.

The reductionist reading must provide an alternative analysis. One way to drain the normative significance out of these notions and expressions would be to take up John Broome’s suggestion. Broome suggests that when early-modern philosophers wrote that something is “against reason,” they were using ‘reason’ as a mass noun to mean not (the balance of) normative reasons, but a *source* of precepts – in the same way contemporary

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91 DH 12.1.
92 DCv 3.31.
philosophers use ‘rationality’. It is then a further question whether this source and its precepts are genuinely normative. Broome’s example is David Hume’s famous statement that “‘Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.”

Broome argues that Hume was not saying that there are no normative reasons against having such a preference, but merely that having the preference would not violate any precept of rationality. He suggests that the use of ‘reason’ as a mass noun to mean (decisive) normative reasons – as when philosophers write that an agent “has reason to” or “has most reason to” – is a twentieth-century innovation.

If Broome is right, then when Hobbes wrote of “what is conformable, or disagreeable to Reason,” or what is “consonant to” and “against Reason,” and when he called the laws of nature “precepts” or “dictates of Reason,” he would have been using ‘reason’ to mean rationality – or, as Hobbes himself would have put it, “the Method of Reasoning” or rules of logic – as an independent source of precepts. If so, in these contexts the mass noun ‘reason’ would remain compatible with a reductionist analysis: the term would not itself be reason-implying in an irreducibly normative sense.

Broome’s suggestion about the early-modern period is mistaken, however. Hobbes, at least, did not use ‘reason’ in “dictate of reason” to mean a source of normative precepts (consisting in, for example, rules of logic). Hobbes’s word choices furnish sufficient textual evidence against theBroomean interpretation. Consider Hobbes’s debate with the Foole who says “there is no such thing as Justice” and thus naysays the third law of nature prescribing fidelity to covenants. When Hobbes had the Foole say that in some circumstances violating covenants is “not against Reason,” he was simply rephrasing the latter’s contention that in such circumstances “there could be no reason, why every man might not do” such a thing.

Even if the former use of ‘reason’ is ambiguous, in the latter case he was clearly using the term as a count noun – to mean agents’ reasons to act.

Consider also Hobbes’s use of expressions such as ‘dictate of reason’. When Hobbes elaborated on what makes something a civil or prophetic law, he pointed to the precept’s source, such as the authoritative will of the sovereign or of God. But when he elaborated on what warrants calling a precept a precept of reason, he pointed not to its source, but to the activity of discovering via reasoning: a precept is “of reason” in virtue of the fact that it is discoverable only via the exercise of one’s faculty of reasoning.

Thus to say the law of nature is a “precept, or generall rule of Reason” is to say it “is a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason.” There is no suggestion that natural laws are “dictates of Reason” in virtue of being precepts whose source is “rationality” (or, as Hobbes might have put it, the rules of logic): to say they are dictates of reason is just to say that “there is no other way to know” them than “by naturall Reason” and that they are the “Conclusions” or discoveries of reasoning rightly.

There remains, however, another interpretive possibility compatible with a reductionist analysis. The Broomean reading is not viable because for Hobbes something is correctly called a dictat of reason insofar as it is the outcome of right reasoning. But there are two potential interpretations of such an outcome. On the irreducibly normative interpretation, the outcome of right reasoning is the discovery of genuinely normative reasons. But a partisan of the reasoning-based reductionist interpretation might claim the outcome is not ultimately anything normative: it is just some particular attitude or action of the reasoner. To say that reason dictates some desire or action here is just to say that upon right reasoning one would acquire the desire or undertake the action in question. To dictate something here means to cause it. Normative propositions are used to describe non-normative, naturalistic features of the world.

The same analysis can even be applied to ‘reason’ used as a count noun in the third, distinctive way and to ‘ought’: for Hobbes to say that all rational creatures have a decisive reason or “ought to endeavour Peace” is to say they would do so upon reasoning rightly (even though they might not actually do so); it is not to say they have a decisive reason or ought to do so in an irreducibly normative sense. Similarly, for him to write “there could be no reason, why every man might not do” something is just for him to say that no agents would do it upon reasoning rightly. The descriptivist reasoning-based reading proposes reductively to analyze all of Hobbes’s apparently normative uses of ‘reason’ (whether as a mass or count noun) and ‘ought’ in terms of the more fundamental notion of right reasoning. It reduces all his normative-sounding talk to causal predictions.

The reasoning-based interpretation can also provide an account of how the use of such normative expressions gives rise to genuine disagreements. On this analysis, when I call some object good, in the sense that it is good for me, I assert that I would desire it upon right reasoning. But if I claim something is good in the sense that it is a common good for you and me — which is what I implicitly do when I call some set of actions virtuous —
then I am asserting that both you and I would desire it upon right reasoning. By contrast, if you claim the same object is a common evil, then you are asserting that both you and I would be averse to it upon reasoning rightly. This yields a genuine disagreement: we are making conflicting predictions about each other. Similarly, if I claim that your undertaking some potential action is against reason, and you claim it is dictated by reason, then I am saying you would not, and you are saying you would, undertake the action upon reasoning rightly. This again is a genuine disagreement. Finally, such an account of what ‘good’ and ‘dictate of reason’ mean can serve as the basis for philosophical consensus precisely because and insofar as each rational agent could discover via right reasoning what each would in fact desire or do upon reasoning rightly.

It might be objected that insofar as this reading appeals to the notion of right reasoning, it covertly relies on, and implies that Hobbes’s normative-sounding claims presuppose, a genuinely normative property that cannot be reductively analyzed in purely non-normative, naturalistic terms. Such an objection can be readily met, however. As I show in Chapter 2, for Hobbes, reasoning in its paradigmatic, linguistic form consists in the cognitive activity of drawing inferences from premises in accordance with and guided by rules or precepts of logic that constitute linguistic reasoning as a specific activity. One engages in linguistic reasoning insofar as one intends to follow what one takes to be these rules and so is guided by them. One reasons erroneously insofar as one misinterprets or misapplies the constitutive rules; one reasons rightly insofar as one correctly interprets and applies those rules. Hence right reasoning, in its linguistic form, certainly is “normative” in the descriptive sense that, as a matter of fact, it is constituted by rules. But a further question remains whether it is normative in the genuine sense that one has a normative reason to reason properly, and whether the prescriptive rules that constitute right reasoning are genuinely normative. (The question of whether one ought to engage in reasoning or be guided by logical rules was intelligible to Hobbes and his contemporaries: puritan enthusiasts claimed that, because we could not know God’s will via reasoning, we should rely on inspiration instead.) The reductionist can appeal to the descriptive sense of right reasoning and distinguish on that basis what agents actually desire or do from what they would desire or do upon reasoning rightly. It is in terms of this descriptive notion of right reasoning that the reasoning-based interpretation reductively analyzes the apparently normative uses of ‘reason’.
We should therefore be perfectly clear about what this reasoning-based interpretation presupposes: that there is nothing genuinely and irreducibly normative about reasoning and even right reasoning. There is no irreducible normative reason to engage in right reasoning, and the fact that one would believe, desire, or do something upon properly reasoning is not an irreducible normative reason to do so. Such alleged facts are reducible to purely non-normative and natural ones: they constitute a prediction about what one would do under some descriptively specified circumstances. When agents engage in reasoning or deliberation, they might take themselves to have irreducibly normative reasons to assent to some proposition, desire something, or undertake some action, and they may use normative vocabulary in a pre-scientific way to assert they have such reasons, but in reality they do not, and Hobbes was proposing to reform normative vocabulary to reflect this. If agents understand what they are doing when they reason, they will know that they are simply trying to cause the beliefs, desires, or actions that would result from reasoning rightly.

1.4 Noncognitivist Prescriptivism

The reasoning-based reading shares three features with the simpler reductionist reading. First, it is reductively naturalist: it reduces all normative properties and facts to non-normative, naturalistic ones. Second, it is cognitivist: it takes normative judgements to be representational (insofar as they represent things as having certain properties) and normative utterances to be truth apt. Third, it is descriptivist: it reduces potentially true normative propositions to purely descriptive propositions.

The problem is that no descriptivist analysis of normative language can do justice to Hobbes. On any purely descriptivist interpretation, when Hobbes claimed that something is “good” or a “precept of reason,” or that one has a “reason” or “ought” to do something, he not only failed to say anything irreducibly normative, he also did not commend or prescribe anything to anyone. To say that others would do something upon reasoning rightly is merely to make a prediction; one does not thereby commend (praise, or laud) them for reasoning rightly or for actually doing what they would have done if they had reasoned rightly; nor does one thereby tell them to reason rightly or to do what they would have done if they had reasoned rightly. Yet Hobbes clearly thought an essential function of normative language is to commend and prescribe, and he used normative language with laudatory and prescriptive illocutionary force. Purely descriptivist readings cannot explain how, according to Hobbes, normative
terms are used in subjective discourse to *guide* deliberation and reasoning and in intersubjective discourse to *commend* and *advise*.

Consider purely descriptive utterances first. Normally when one asserts a proposition in a descriptive way, one *signifies* one’s belief that the proposition is true. To signify something in Hobbes’s technical sense is just to indicate or provide grounds for inferring its presence. Hobbes’s examples: thick clouds signify rain for regular observers; names signify conceptions for language users.\(^{101}\) Thus the word ‘rain’ uttered in a grammatical sentence signifies the presence in the speaker’s mind of a conception of rain. When Hobbes wrote, “The source of every Crime, is some defect of the Understanding,”\(^{102}\) he was (according to his own philosophy of language) signifying his belief to that effect. But while signifying one’s beliefs is a feature of uttering propositions, it does not constitute such utterances’ inherent function or illocutionary force: the function of Hobbes’s utterance is to assert that the source of every crime is some defect of the understanding, not to describe his own mental states. Its function is to assert the belief’s propositional content, not to report that he has the belief. Of course, one can utter propositions that, in addition to signifying one’s beliefs, also serve to describe or report on them, such as when in *Anti-White* (1642/43) Hobbes reported that “I incline to the opinion that there can be no true proposition about the nature of God except this one: God is.”\(^{103}\) But asserting that one has such-and-such beliefs is a special case uncharacteristic of assertoric speech in general.

Hobbes clearly thought that normative speech acts signify speakers’ *passions*. Whatever else they do, “Good, and *Evill*, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions.”\(^{104}\) This distinguishes normative from non-normative speech, because the latter can exclusively signify purely cognitive mental states (such as opinions). The question is whether there is also anything distinct about the function or illocutionary force of normative speech acts or whether, as descriptivists maintain, normative utterances are used purely descriptively to assert the truth of a proposition and hence have the same underlying illocutionary force as non-normative utterances.

Consider evaluative speech. To value something, conceive it as good, or judge that it is good is what Hobbes called *honouring*: “Honour consisteth in the inward thought, and opinion of the Power, and Goodnesse of another,” and “To Value a man at a high rate, is to *Honour* him.” Since

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\(^{101}\) EL 4.9; L 3.8: 44; DC 2.2. On conventional signs, see DCv 15.16; L 2.10: 36; DC 2.2. Cf. Abizadeh (2015).

\(^{102}\) L 27.4: 454.

\(^{103}\) AW 35.16.

\(^{104}\) L 15.40: 242.
the “manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is . . . commonly called Honouring” as well, the term may also be used loosely to name the mental states’ external signs. But strictly speaking, Hobbes called speech acts that outwardly express honour ‘praise’: “The forme of Speech whereby men signifie their opinion of the Goodnesse of any thing, is praise.”

Thus for Hobbes, although evaluative speech acts signify a cognitive mental state (namely, an opinion about an object’s goodness), their function cannot – as descriptivists assume – merely consist in describing objects in asserting that they possess some evaluative property. Their illocutionary force must consist in commending or praising.

Partisans of the reasoning-based reading may respond by applying to ‘praise’ the same reductive analysis they apply to ‘good’, ‘against reason’, and ‘ought’. They might insist that for Hobbes to “praise” is not actually to praise anything: it is solely to make a truth-apt, descriptive claim, namely, the prediction that others would favour the object of “praise” upon proper reasoning. The problem with this response is that Hobbes explicitly contrasted the laudatory illocutionary force of praising to the assertoric illocutionary force of asserting the truth of a proposition. Although in praising things one will invariably assert it has certain properties, the essential function or illocutionary force of praising cannot be reduced to assertoric force: “In Orations of Prayse, and in Invectives, . . . the designe is not truth, but to Honour or Dishonour.”

When we express honour we are not merely asserting something is the case. This distinction between asserting and praising is crucial to Hobbes’s theology, because Hobbes proposed reductively to analyze all theological utterances that apparently attribute properties to God into speech acts whose sole function is to express honour or praise: “For in the Attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of Philosophicall Truth; but the signification of Pious Intention, to do him the greatest Honour we are able.” Hobbes had made the same point in Anti-White by distinguishing between uttering propositions, which proclaim our conception that such-and-such is the case, and uttering oblations, which express our desire to honour something. Only the former are truth apt, but the meaning of apparently assertoric theological utterances is wholly determined by their expressive or oblative character.

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106 L 8.6: 106.
108 AW 35.16.
Hobbes suggested, moreover, that praising something in evaluative terms is implicitly also to prescribe favouring it. Since normative utterances invariably signify speakers’ passions, when praising actions as good, or saying one has a reason for action, speakers do not merely signify their opinion that it is good. They also signify their favourable conative attitude towards it, namely, their desire that it be favoured in some way. But according to Hobbes, one may express or signify one’s passions in two different moods. Speech acts in the indicative mood are used by speakers to assert that something *is* the case, i.e., to assert a proposition.\(^{109}\) By contrast, speech acts in the imperative mood are used to prescribe that something *be* the case, i.e., that the content of a proposition be realized.\(^{110}\) Thus Hobbes distinguished between speech acts with assertoric illocutionary force (whose essential function is to assert the truth of a proposition) and those with prescriptive force (whose essential function is to tell someone what to do). He drew on this distinction in *Leviathan* to differentiate between speech acts that signify or express one’s passions in the indicative mood in order to describe or *report* on them, and speech acts that signify or express one’s passions in the imperative mood in order to *prescribe*:

> The formes of Speech by which the Passions are expressed, are partly the same, and partly different from those, by which wee expressse our Thoughts. And first, generally all Passions may be expressed *Indicatively*; as, *I love, I feare, I joy* . . . but some of them have particular expressions by themselves, which nevertheless are not affirmations, unless it be when they serve to make other inferences, besides that of the Passion they proceed from . . . The language of Desire, and Aversion, is *Imperative*; as, *Do this, Forbear that*; which when the party is obliged to do, or forbear, is *Command*; otherwise *Prayer*; or els *Counsell*.\(^{111}\)

True, one does not prescribe anything to anyone if one signifies one’s opinion of an object’s goodness, and one’s desire to favour it, in a purely indicative mood. Perhaps Hobbes thought this is the mood in which confessions of faith, in which one reports one’s religious attitudes to others, are uttered (such as the Apostle’s Creed “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,” etc.).\(^{112}\) But as we have seen, the “analytical” or definitional interpretation of Hobbes’s evaluative speech, according to which calling something “good” reduces to reporting on one’s desire that it be favoured, is not viable. Simply to report one’s beliefs and passions does not amount to praising; for Hobbes, to praise is always evaluatively to express one’s

\(^{109}\) L 2.10: 36; 4.11: 54; DC 3.6: 5.1. \(^{110}\) L 6.55: 94; 25.1: 398. \(^{111}\) L 6.55: 94. See DC 3.1. \(^{112}\) HNH 7/392, emphasis removed.
passions, at least implicitly, in the imperative mood. This is all the more true of directive normative speech: in saying that some attitude or action is a precept of reason, Hobbes was not merely making a prediction; he was prescribing the attitude or action.

We can see this more clearly by considering the role of normative speech in “counsel.” As the quoted passage indicates, to counsel others to assent to some proposition, hold some attitude, or undertake some action is to utter speech in an imperative mood and hence to prescribe. To be sure, to counsel others is also (1) indicatively to assert and argue that certain descriptive facts obtain and (2) to assert and argue that such facts provide a sufficient reason for some attitude or action. This is why “one may examine (when there is need) the truth, or probability of his [the counselor’s] reasons, and of the grounds of the advise he gives.”113 But to counsel others by telling them they have a reason is also, Hobbes asserted, (3) to express one’s desire that they assent to a proposition, hold an attitude, or undertake an action in telling them to do so in the imperative mood. In counselling others against being disposed to pride, one does not only (1) assert and argue that pride promotes war, and (2) assert and argue that this fact furnishes a reason for them to avoid pride; one also, on the basis of such assertions, (3) expresses one’s desire that they do so in telling them to avoid pride. Hobbes claimed “these words, Sell all thou hast; give it to the poore; and follow me, are Counsell; because the reason for which we are to do so, is drawn from our own benefit.”114 That we gain from following Christ is the fact (1), which constitutes a reason to follow Christ (2), which is the basis for the imperative to follow him (3).

Reasoning-based reductionism accounts for the first two elements of Hobbesian counsel: it takes the first element at face value and reductively analyzes the assertion that those counselled have a decisive reason to avoid pride as the assertion that they would avoid pride upon reasoning rightly. But it has no account of the third element: Hobbes recognized that expressing one’s desire in the imperative mood cannot be reduced to an utterance in the indicative mood (such as that involved in reporting one’s desires). To be sure, descripтивists need not deny language can be used in the imperative mood to prescribe: they can acknowledge that one can command another to “Do this!” But they deny, against Hobbes, that prescriptivity is an essential feature of normative judgement and language. For descripтивists, telling people that φ-ing is good, or that they have a reason to φ, or that φ-ing is a dictate of reason

does not inherently imply “Do φ!” It is merely to say they would φ upon reasoning properly. By contrast, Hobbes took his own normative propositions to have been uttered in the imperative mood of a counsellor: when anyone (himself included) “shall offer unto us any other Rules, which the Soveraign Ruler hath not prescribed, they are but Counsell, and Advice.”115 Thus when Hobbes asserted that natural law “prescribeth Equity,” he understood himself to be prescribing equity to his readers.116 Hobbes was not commanding his readers to be equitable, but neither was he merely predicting they would be equitable upon reasoning properly.

Pure descriptivism, and hence the reasoning-based interpretation, is therefore incompatible with Hobbes’s ethics. Any adequate interpretation must account for the irreducibly laudatory and prescriptive illocutionary force of normative speech117 – including Hobbes’s own.

This is precisely what motivates the noncognitivist, prescriptivist interpretation. On this reading, normative utterances are not truth apt: their essential function is to prescribe, not to describe or assert. The essentially prescriptive function of normative language reflects the essentially noncognitive nature of normative judgements. They are neither erroneous nor veridical: they are not cognitive states that represent states of affairs or events as having certain properties, but are purely conative states that dispose agents to favour or disfavour states or events.118 Although this abandons descriptivism, it remains a broadly naturalist interpretation. And it is still committed to the view that there are no irreducibly normative properties for normative judgements to represent or for normative speech to describe.119

This prescriptivist reading faces three decisive problems of its own, however. First, noncognitivism is belied by Hobbes’s intentionalism. As we have seen, even conative states such as desire are, for Hobbes, partly cognitive: they represent objects as having the property of goodness. It might be thought that noncognitivism could be salvaged by joining it to projectivism. The initial thought here is that scientific analysis would expose the projection, so that on reflection we may understand that a “good” object is no more than something disposing us to desire it and hence to see it as good. Our scientifically informed normative “judgement” that something is good would consist in the purely conative aspect of our

115 L 42.43: 822. 116 L 15.26: 236. 117 This is Hare’s (1952) central objection to descriptivism.
118 Holden (2016).
119 Emotivists and prescriptivists often characterize their metaethical position as a rival to “ethical naturalism,” but they are specifically rejecting descriptivism. For the argument that expressivism can take the form of ethical naturalism, see Harman (1977).
desire – the urge to favour the object – plus our reflective cognitive awareness that the goodness we see is mere projection (rather than our unreflective representation of the object itself as good). Even this modified noncognitivist reading, however, is not viable. Hobbes insisted that evaluative language such as praise signifies normative judgements that do partly consist in representing the object as good: “Honour consisteth in the inward thought, and opinion of the Power, and Goodnesse of another,” and praise is “The forme of Speech whereby men signifie their opinion of the Goodnesse of any thing.”

Second, pure prescriptivism is belied by Hobbes’s characterization of normative propositions as truth apt: people commit crimes “from defect in Reasoning,” sometimes because they presume “False Principles of Right and Wrong,” and sometimes because they draw “Erroneous Inferences from True Principles . . . in concluding, and resolving what to do.”

Third, pure prescriptivism is belied by Hobbes’s characterization of natural laws as not only prescriptive, but natural. To be sure, because both descriptivists and prescriptivists can acknowledge imperatival thought and language, they can also acknowledge prescriptive facts (not reducible to mere descriptions or predictions). In particular, they can both acknowledge the existence of artificial rules – such as the rules of chess or of the Roman Catholic church – that constitute or regulate some human practice and prescribe to individuals what to do. Artificial rules are by definition mind-dependent: they exist just insofar as intentional agents are reflectively guided by them in representing them, from within their own internal, participant perspective, as rules. The prescriptivity of artificial rules is ultimately wholly a property of mental states and the speech acts expressing those rules. The rules of chess, for example, prescribe in the sense that the mental states in which participants represent them and the speech acts in which participants express them from an internal perspective are themselves prescriptive. (Their content includes: “Do this!”) Descriptivists and prescriptivists can therefore both give a perfectly naturalistic explanation of the genesis and nature of artificial rules and their prescriptivity, without reducing them to descriptions or predictions. The prescriptivity of the rules derives from and is constituted by the prescriptive character of the mental states and speech acts that constitute the practice. (One can also describe such rules from an external, observer perspective, but what one is describing is in part the prescriptive character,

120 L 31.8: 560; 6.59: 96. 121 L 27.10–12: 458–460.
from the participant perspective, of the intentions and speech acts constituting the rules.)

If the prescriptivity of rules must be explained by the imperatival character of the mental states or speech acts in which they are represented or expressed, however, then one cannot provide an account of any natural, mind-independent, epistemically objective prescriptive facts. Pure descriptivists seize the first horn of this dilemma: insofar as they take the natural, mind-independent character of natural law for granted, they deem its apparently prescriptive character to be illusory. Despite the apparently prescriptive surface grammar, when Hobbes articulated the laws of nature in speech he was just making predictions: natural laws are mind-independent, purely descriptive facts whose truth does not depend on being represented by anyone as true. Pure prescriptivists, by contrast, seize the second horn of the dilemma: insofar as they take the law of nature to be prescriptive, they must deny it is natural. It is artificial: its prescriptivity must derive from and be constituted by the imperatival character of the mental states or speech acts in which it is represented or expressed. The problem is that in calling natural laws natural, Hobbes was denying that they depend on mental representation or linguistic convention in this way. He explicitly rejected the view that natural laws are prescriptive only insofar as they are acknowledged by “the Consent of all Nations, or the wisest, and most Civill Nations,” or even “the Consent of all mankinde.” A conventionalist “definition [of the law of nature] cannot be allowed,” because such laws are dictates of reason for all rational creatures, whether they acknowledge them or not.122 A rule can be normative for those who can represent and follow it, even if they do not actually do so.

1.5 A Hybrid Theory: Reasoning-Based and Prescriptivist

Pure descriptivism fails as an interpretation of Hobbes because it misses the inherently laudatory and prescriptive illocutionary force of normative speech. By contrast, pure prescriptivism fails because it misses the truth-aptness of normative speech and its inherently assertoric illocutionary force. And neither interpretation accounts for naturally prescriptive facts. These problems might therefore be resolved by a hybrid reading that combines a reasoning-based, descriptive component with a prescriptivist

122 EL 15.1. Natural law is not in itself law in the proper, juridically obligatory sense; when Hobbes rejected as “absurd” Bramhall’s view that “the Law of Nature is a Law without our assent” (Q: 137/180), he was specifying what would make it properly law.
one. The hybrid reading claims that normative judgements are partly cognitive — insofar as they represent some object as having a certain naturalistic property, namely, that it would be desired upon reasoning rightly — and partly conative, insofar as they comprise a desire for the object. Concomitantly, it claims that normative propositions are always used both descriptively, to assert that upon proper reasoning some object would be desired or some action undertaken, and prescriptively: they signify a desire in an implicitly imperative mood and hence prescribe desiring the object or undertaking the action.

On the hybrid interpretation, to say that others have a reason to do something is not only to say they would do it upon reasoning rightly, but also to tell them to do it. More generally, to offer counsel is to (1) assert some proposition (as true), (2) predict the outcome of right reasoning in light of that truth, and (3) tell someone to assent to some proposition, adopt some attitude, or undertake some action. Thus to argue that “there is no Reason for any one, to devest himselfe of his” right of nature under insecure circumstances is to assert that divesting himself under such circumstances would court death, predict that people would not so expose themselves were they to reason properly, and tell everyone not to so expose themselves. The first two elements are descriptive, but the third is irreducibly prescriptive. However, on this reading, when Hobbes used ‘reason’ as a count noun in the third, distinct sense to say that we have a reason to believe, desire, or do something, he did not mean we have an irreducibly normative reason to do so: he meant to predict that we would do so upon reasoning rightly and to tell us to do so.

The hybrid reading is therefore able to explain how natural laws can be both natural and prescriptive. They are natural insofar as the predictive fact they are used to assert is true independent of being acknowledged or asserted by anyone. And they are prescriptive in virtue of being used by intentional agents to prescribe dispositions or actions.

The hybrid interpretation is also able to explain Hobbes’s use of ‘reason’ as a mass noun in expressions such as ‘dictate of reason’. For Hobbes to say there is a dictate of reason against expressing “Hatred, or Contempt of another” is to predict that one would, upon reasoning rightly, be disposed to avoid doing so and to prescribe that one be so disposed. By incorporating these two components, the hybrid account can explain

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123 Not having a reason to φ does not entail having a reason not to φ, but the context makes it clear Hobbes meant the latter as well.
124 L. 15.20: 234, italics removed.
why saying some action is against reason (mass noun) is equivalent to saying one has a reason (count noun) not to do it: in both cases, one is predicting and prescribing.

I conclude that the hybrid interpretation yields the most plausible interpretation of Hobbes as a naturalist who rejects irreducibly normative properties and facts. Yet even if this hybrid reading can explain Hobbes’s use of ‘reason’ both as a count noun and as a mass noun, I shall argue in the next chapter that it ultimately fails because it is belied by Hobbes’s use of ‘reason’ as a verb, i.e., by his account of reasoning. The hybrid interpretation fails properly to integrate the reasoning-based and prescriptivist elements that compose it: it fails to show how the prescriptivity of a reason is intrinsically linked to its status as the purported outcome of right reasoning. Furthermore, I shall argue in Part III that it also fails to account for Hobbes’s use of ‘obligation’ in the juridical sense to denote reasons of the right. The only way to account for Hobbes’s normative philosophy is to take him to have recognized the existence of reasons in the irreducibly normative sense. If Hobbes is a founder of modern naturalistic ethics, he founded a version that acknowledges irreducibly normative reasons.