

# Should Constructivists be Particularists?

Comprehensive normative constructivism offers an alternative both to views which espouse “robust” normative facts, in some fashion “out there” in the world, waiting for us to recognize and acknowledge them, and to views which deny that there are any normative facts at all. By “comprehensive,” I mean here views that are constructivist about normativity *tout court* — about normative requirements wherever they occur in our lives, and in particular about the broad demands of *practical reasons*. The contrast here is to views that are constructivist in some particular domain; there is no better example of this than John Rawls’ constructivism about principles of distributive justice.<sup>1</sup> By “constructivist” I mean views about the ontology of normative facts characterized precisely as Rawls did: views that deny that such facts exist “prior to and independent of” our engagement with them.<sup>2</sup> While Rawls is the pioneer for this way of thinking about normativity, his intellectual heirs in the Kantian tradition have developed and extended the constructivist enterprise in important and exciting ways.

No one has done so more than Christine Korsgaard,<sup>3</sup> but in this paper I focus on the Kantian roots of her form of constructivism, and argue that the very motivations for constructivism she has so acutely brought to our attention point us *out* of the Kantian tradition. The first part of the paper is devoted to showing that our normative lives require *judgments* that require normative guidance of a sort the Kantian framework cannot provide. We need *particularistic* normative guidance of a certain sort — in a sense of “particularistic” I shall explain in due course — and the Kantian machinery of Korsgaard’s view cannot readily accommodate such guidance. The second part of the paper argues that some of Korsgaard’s most recent work recognizes these pressures in a way that compromises the Kantian machinery of her view. I conclude with a brief sketch as to where I think the commitment to comprehensive normative constructivism points. My conclusion is that the particularist tail is wagging the Kantian dog in Korsgaard’s constructivism. Comprehensive constructivists

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, 1999); *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993); “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory” and “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Often constructivism is understood as involving some sort of “proceduralism.” I think doing so is problematic, for reasons that cannot be laid out here. As I intend it, constructivism consists in this narrow commitment to the negation of a claim of ontological priority.

<sup>3</sup> Onora O’Neill and Barbara Herman have also done much to advance the Kantian constructivist enterprise for comprehensive norms of practical reason, and I believe the argument I advance for Korsgaard’s work applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to their approaches as well. I defend this claim in a longer treatment of the ideas in this paper.

should be particularists.<sup>4</sup>

### I. *The motives for Constructivism undermine the ultimate authority of rules*

Korsgaard's insight into the motives for constructivism has gained clarity and force with time. In her first major development of the ideas in *Sources of Normativity*, her emphasis was on responsiveness to the "normative question,"<sup>5</sup> which invites a focus on *motivation*, which I believe (for reasons Korsgaard has articulated as clearly as any) is ill-advised. As organisms, what we are motivated to do is a function of complex and messy biological systems, and things can go wrong motivationally for reasons that have nothing to do with normativity and everything to do with mundane causal interactions. What we care about is something like *rational* motivation, and something like the *authority* of moral (or more generally practical) truths to move us. What constructivism has to offer is found in our understanding of these normative notions.

The crucial issue, I believe, is brought out more forcefully in Korsgaard's later work. It is, in effect, a *rule-following* problem. The idea is that robust realists<sup>6</sup> who conceive of the task of practical reason as the epistemic one of grasping "prior and independent" normative facts face a problem. For, having grasped or learned or recognized such facts, we still have to *do something* with them. And, on pain of regress, it does no good to appeal to some further normative fact to be grasped or learned or recognized to supply us with normative guidance in doing what we do with them. The plain fact that our practical lives consist in *doing something* imposes not one but two constraints on the norms for practical rationality. Korsgaard recognizes only one of these constraints.

The first constraint is framed by Korsgaard herself in her 2003 paper, "Realism and Constructivism in 20th Century Ethics." Here she argues that the robust realist's way of thinking about practical norms reflects "a deep confusion between knowledge and action." She deploys an analogy with *maps* to make this point:

If to have knowledge is to have a map of the world, then to be able to act well is to be able to decide where to go and to follow the map in going there. The ability to act is something like the ability to use the map, and that ability cannot be given by *another map*.

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<sup>4</sup> The argument I will offer for particularism depends on the comprehensive nature of the constructivism in question. Thus, my argument does not touch on non-comprehensive, domain-specific constructivist views.

<sup>5</sup> Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> For present purposes, "robust realists" are those who believe there *are* normative facts "prior to and independent of" our engagement with them. They represent the non-skeptical contrast class to constructivism. Some constructivists (including, at times, Korsgaard herself) take constructivism to be a form of *irrealism*, so that the key opposition is to realism itself. Whether that is so obviously depends on what we take "realism" to consist in, and I believe it is not most useful to distinguish realism and constructivism in this way. However, there is not space here to take up that issue, and it is orthogonal to the question at hand, so my discussion simply ignores the matter.

(Nor can it be given by having little normative flags added to the map of nature which mark out certain spots or certain routes as good. You still have to know how to use the map before the little normative flags can be of any use to you.)<sup>7</sup>

Korsgaard carries this argument through in her recent work. In *Self-Constitution*, she observes that “what Philosophy wants is always some piece of knowledge,” but points out that the norms of practical rationality cannot do the work we need them to do if we take them to be bits of knowledge, or premises in arguments.<sup>8</sup> The reason is the death by regress that follows if we understand it that way. For rationality to be *practical* it must guide us in what we do, and even the soundest grasp of bits of knowledge fails to do that. Those bits must be applied, or interpreted, or acted upon, or ... And for that activity to be norm-guided, we need something more than further bits of knowledge or premises in arguments.

This is a problem that Lewis Carroll illumined in “What the Tortoise said to Achilles.”<sup>9</sup> As Carroll’s paper shows, we cannot treat inference rules (such as *modus ponens*) merely as premises in arguments, because we must *do something* with the premises (namely, *infer*), and inference rules are norms for that thing we must do. If we try to take those norms merely as premises — as objects of knowledge — we are left without the normative guidance in doing what we must do with them, namely engaging in the inference necessary to reach a conclusion.<sup>10</sup> Effectively, what robust realists do is offer a picture on which the norms governing our practical reasoning are made, as objects of knowledge, into premises. Carroll and Korsgaard make very clear this element of the problem with robust realism.

But there is a further aspect of the problem which Korsgaard does not acknowledge explicitly. It is explicitly recognized and acknowledged by Kant, and in fact Kant’s exposition of the problem is a model of lucidity (even if the context in which it occurs is not). Kant uses it to motivate and secure for “transcendental logic” the capacity to arrive at synthetic a priori judgments.<sup>11</sup> In characterizing “transcendental logic” — central to the project of the

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<sup>7</sup> Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth Century Moral Philosophy,” in *Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century* (Charlottesville, VA: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2003), p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford UP, 2009), pp. 66-7. The mistake arises, perhaps, because, as she observes elsewhere, “People tend to reify mental activities into mental states” (“The Activity of Reason,” ms., p. 32).

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles,” *Mind* 4 (1895), pp. 278-80.

<sup>10</sup> As Peter Railton puts this point, “Rules of inference differ essentially in *role* from premises, not in modality” (“On the Hypothetical and Non-Hypothetical,” in Cullity and Gaut (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford UP, 1997), p. 76).

<sup>11</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1787/1929), A135/B173. A more general form of the argument appears in the *Anthropology*, where Kant argues that judgment, which is the faculty of “distinguishing whether something is under the rule or not, cannot be taught, but only exercised” (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern

first *Critique* — Kant considers the capacity for “general logic,” construed as a body of rules. *Judgment*, he says, consists in the “faculty of subsuming under rules.”<sup>12</sup> He observes that judgment so construed cannot itself be rule-governed, since the application of any proffered rule could itself be undertaken only under the guidance of another rule, which itself could be undertaken only under the guidance of some further rule, etc. This regress leads Kant to claim that judgment “is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught.”<sup>13</sup>

Now, Kant thinks this problem can be solved for “transcendental logic,” which involves “the correcting and securing of judgment” in the “pure understanding.”<sup>14</sup> The solution in the first *Critique* rests with the “transcendental schemata,” which are mediating representations that are “homogeneous” with both the rule (the “category”) and the particular (the “appearance”).<sup>15</sup> I cannot claim to understand Kant’s proposal as to how the “schematism” actually solves the problem; indeed these elements of his *Transcendental Analytic* involve some of the most difficult of problems in Kantian interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is not clear how that strategy bears on our concern, which is practically normative, as a matter of norms for what we do. We need a solution to the problem in practical philosophy.

Whether surprisingly or no, Kant’s first *Critique* strategy seems to play no role at all in his practical theory. Nor does he offer an analogous solution for the problem in practice. Yet the structure of the problematic in applying principles of pure practical reason to “anthropology” is isomorphic to the problem in general logic. “Pure” moral philosophy consists in laws which may be thought to direct a “pure will” whose obligation is grounded not in any elements of our natures or circumstances, but “in concepts of pure reason.”<sup>17</sup>

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Illinois Univ. Press, 1798/1978), 7:249). His argument is that the idea that there are “doctrines concerning judgment” (i.e. to be taught) engenders infinite regress, just as in the first *Critique*.

<sup>12</sup> Kant 1787/1929 A132/B171.

<sup>13</sup> Kant 1787/1929 A133/B172.

<sup>14</sup> Kant 1787/1929, A135/B174.

<sup>15</sup> Kant 1787/1929, A138/B177.

<sup>16</sup> David Bell says, “a considerable amount of charity is needed in interpreting the Schematism chapter: the number of obscurities, reversals, and straightforward contradictions in the text make it clear that, to put it mildly, Kant’s thought had not yet attained full clarity or stability” (“The Art of Judgment,” *Mind* 96 (1987), p. 228). Norman Kemp-Smith says: “Kant’s method of stating the problem of schematism is ... so completely misleading, that before we can profitably proceed, the various strands in his highly artificial argument must be further disentangled” (*Commentary to Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason’* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International), 1992, p. 334).

<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Gregor (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1785/1997), 4:389-90.

They must hold “not only for human beings but for all rational beings as such.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, Kant admits, they still

require a judgment sharpened by experience, partly to distinguish in what cases they are applicable and partly to provide them with access to the will of the human being and efficacy for his fulfillment of them...<sup>19</sup>

So by Kant’s own lights we have yet essential work to be done by judgment, and thus the question is open how the application of judgment to particular cases is to be normatively regulated.<sup>20</sup>

I believe that Korsgaard’s fundamental motivating point for constructivism — that norms for practical rationality must guide us in *what we do* all the way down — shows not only that robust realism cannot be complete in its normative guidance, but that no system consisting ultimately of rules or principles can be complete either, for precisely this reason. To put the point in terms of Korsgaard’s map analogy: that analogy shows not one but two things. First, as objects of knowledge maps do us no good unless *we* do something *with* them, and positing another map as to what to do won’t do the trick. But, second, the normative direction that we need in map reading also cannot take the form of a general rule. Kant’s point that rules cannot be self-interpreting entails that something more than rules are required as norms for successful practical rationality.

Korsgaard’s constructivism is motivated by the idea that reason is activity, and the norms for success in engaging in this activity cannot be simply objects of knowledge. But

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<sup>18</sup> Kant 1785/1997, 4:408.

<sup>19</sup> Kant 1785/1997, 4:389.

<sup>20</sup> Kant himself seems to acknowledge precisely the force of this problem, while both leaving it unaddressed and (apparently) discounting its significance for the practical guidance his account affords or can afford — an oversight that his students have taken up as well. Near the conclusion of the Doctrine of Virtue in *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant says:

Nevertheless, just as a passage from the metaphysics of nature to physics is needed — a transition having its own special rules — something similar is rightly required from the metaphysics of morals: a transition which, by applying the pure principles of duty to cases of experience, would *schematize* these principles, as it were, and present them as ready for morally practical use. ... Hence [such principles] cannot be presented as sections of ethics and members of the *division* of a system (which must proceed *a priori* from a rational concept), but can only be appended to the system. Yet even this application belongs to the complete presentation of the system. (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Gregor, 1785/1996, pp. 6:468-9)

Otfried Höffe recognizes the oddity that Kant’s work on judgment does not seem to be taken up where it is required in the practical works, but his interpretation (p. 60) does not seem to acknowledge Kant’s point in the first *Critique* that “general logic” cannot possibly provide rules for judgment, as would seemingly need to be the case in order for there to be standards of correctness in seeing *this particular concrete situation* as one in which a duty to aid is relevant (“Universalist Ethics and the Faculty of Judgment: An Aristotelian Look at Kant,” *Philosophical Forum* 25 (1993), pp. 55-71). To get that, we need *both* judgment “sharpened by experience” *and* norms for success in application of that judgment.

that same insight undercuts the proposal that we see those norms ultimately as principles, since principles do us no good without application. Since the application is, again, *activity* — something we do — the norms for success in that activity cannot consist in more rules. Thus, her motivation for constructivism is at odds with her focus on principles as the main story about norms of practical reason. This, I think, is something which Korsgaard's work acknowledges, albeit only implicitly. I now turn to showing how this is so in her latest work, before suggesting where I think the promise of solution lies.

## II. Korsgaard's constructivism points the way to particularism

In Korsgaard's most recent major work, she grapples with exactly this problem, without (in my view) recognizing that its solution lies in abandoning hope that the norms we need for practical rationality can or should ultimately take the form of principles. Ironically, the crucial moves occur as she attempts to rebut the proposal that there could be "particularistic willing." What she wants to show is that reasons must be "universal" — that is, exceptionless, and not merely general — and that it makes no sense to suppose that you could have a reason that "applies only to the case before you, and has no implications for any other case."<sup>21</sup> There is a bit of modal trickiness to this claim, to which I shall return. But my main point is, first, that the way she defends her view points to the priority of a certain form of particularism over rules or principles that are "universal," and, second, that there is nothing about her claims about universal application (literally interpreted) that this form of particularism must deny. Let's take these in order.

The key move is her admission that the kind of universality she has in mind is "provisional": "We treat a principle as *provisionally universal* when we think it applies to every case of a certain sort, unless there is some good reason why not."<sup>22</sup> Korsgaard believes this is only "marginally" different from treating principles as universal *tout court*, but "essentially" different from treating them as *merely general*, in a way which is manifest when we encounter exceptions:

If we think of a principle as merely general, and we encounter an exception, nothing happens. The principle was only general, and we expected there to be some exceptions. But if a principle is provisionally universal, and we encounter an exceptional case, we must now go back and revise it, bringing it a little closer to the absolute universality to which provisional universality essentially as-

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<sup>21</sup> Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>22</sup> Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, p. 73.

pires.<sup>23</sup>

Why do we need the provisionality? Why this departure from a commitment to “absolute universality”? Her explanation is both realistic and telling:

There’s no reason to suppose we can think of everything in advance. When we adopt a maxim as universal law, we know that there might be cases, cases we hadn’t thought of, which would show us that it is not universal after all. In that sense we can allow for exceptions. But so long as the commitment to revise in the face of exceptions is in place, the maxim is not merely general. It is provisionally universal.<sup>24</sup>

This admission is realistic because it squarely faces the fact of the human condition that life is a matter of constant change, sometimes in directions that are not only unforeseen but practically unimaginable. The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 was, for practical purposes, unimaginable only a short time before, but it manifestly introduced new morally relevant conditions into people’s lives. If we are uncomfortable with the idea that there really could be “new” moral conditions, perhaps we could say that the resulting political change recombined morally-relevant conditions of people’s lives in ways no one had encountered before. That is a gross example, but there are incessant smaller novelties forcing us to adapt and respond as mundane features of human life. Korsgaard here acknowledges that life puts us into a position in which we must make moral judgments we could not have anticipated making, and in doing so compels us to reconsider the soundness of the decisions we’ve made before. Even in cases in which we don’t do anything so drastic as revision, Korsgaard’s observation points to the need for judgment that no such revision is necessary. The point is that judgment about application of principles is *always* required by the novelty of human life. Anything less would be simply unresponsive to the conditions in which we exercise our practical rationality.

But now it is plain that the universal principles which are ostensibly the centerpiece of her account are really not load-bearing at all. The load-bearing work is being done by *judgment* about particular conditions and what we have reason to do when we are in them. The normative priority of such judgments to the principles is demonstrated by the requirement that we either revisit or revise such principles in the face of new particular judgments, or determine that no such revision is necessary. Given the fact of changing conditions in which we need to act, the aspiration that “provisionally” universal principles have for absolute universality is shown to be a chimera. Our need for normative guidance

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<sup>23</sup> Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>24</sup> Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, pp. 74-5.

— for standards of success and failure in practical rationality — cannot be thought to run out with the principles whose universality can be at best provisional. If we aspire to amend them, we care (presumably) that we do so *rightly*. If there are to be exceptions, we care that they are, genuinely, exceptions, not merely the expressions of our cavils at the moral law that Kant cites as underlying so much moral evil.<sup>25</sup> We cannot do without norms for success in such judgments. What our earlier argument and Korsgaard’s own view of universal principles reveal is that, if there are to be such norms, they must come to something beyond universal principles.

### III. *The way forward*

A more satisfactory account of these norms, consistent with the motives for constructivism found in Korsgaard’s work, is one I can no more than suggest here. I propose, as the title of the paper intimates, what I take to be a form of particularism, but one I believe Korsgaard herself has good reason to endorse.<sup>26</sup> It is, by way of comparison with some particularisms anyway, narrow and conservative, and it begins with the negative conclusion that I have argued for thus far: the norms for successful practical rationality are not (cannot be) exhausted by general or universal principles or rules.<sup>27</sup> Its structure is provided by two familiar ideas.

The first idea provides much of the solution to the problem we have been considering. It is the proposal, familiar from Aristotle and other ancient Greek ethical theorists, that norms of success in practical reason are provided by a *substantive aim* for practical reason, namely the eudaimonistic end of living well. It goes without saying that explaining both what is meant by such an end, and how it can provide a normative standard for practical reason, are significant philosophical challenges. But Aristotle asserts that the good life is precisely the ultimate canon for the exercise of practical rationality:

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing

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<sup>25</sup> I speak, of course, of Kant’s remarks on our propensity to make exceptions of ourselves to laws we will otherwise to be universally binding (Kant 1785/1997, 4:424).

<sup>26</sup> Aspects of this proposal appear in “Eudaimonist Autonomy,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (2005): 171-84, and “Aristotelian Constructivism,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25 (2008): 182-213; a fuller treatment is in *The Value of Living Well*, manuscript.

<sup>27</sup> In this sense the form of particularism I defend here is weaker even than the weakest form surveyed by McKeever and Ridge in *Principled Ethics* (Oxford UP, 2006), viz. “Anti-Transcendental Particularism” (p. 19). Rather than asserting, as that view does, that “The possibility of moral thought and judgment do not depend on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles,” the version at hand asserts only that *no* supply of moral principles can suffice to establish the norms of success in moral (or more broadly *practical*) thought and judgment. As I indicate below, the view I propose construes practical principles of the sort Kant and Kantians are interested in as an important component in moral and practical reflective life.



conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general.<sup>28</sup>

Two points about this approach deserve remark in this context.

First, it makes good sense of the particularism to which, I have argued, constructivism points. Practical wisdom, with the other virtues, directs us to apprehend or perceive the normative demand for action in particular cases — under particular conditions. It is, as again Aristotle puts it, “concerned with the ultimate particular fact, since the thing to be done is of this nature.”<sup>29</sup> On this approach, the ultimate task of practical rationality is to direct us to specific particular actions, and the canon of success in doing so is what so acting — both in changing the world and in changing ourselves — contributes to the project of living a good human life. Practical reason is successful when it directs a human life across time and the vicissitudes of change such lives consist in, in ways we endorse.

Second, this approach is deeply constructivist in the sense given, in that there is no norm either for success in practical reasoning nor in living well prior to and independent of the project of rational reflection on ourselves, our natures (individually and as members of a species which lives, as Aristotle puts it, by “rational principle”<sup>30</sup>), and our environment. The denial of any such metaphysical priority is what differentiates this approach from its “robust realist” competitors. The project of understanding what reason we have to act upon in particular circumstances of time, place, and condition is part of a comprehensive project of human rationality, practical and theoretical, which establishes the norms of success in living and reasoning. Without this understanding there *are* no normative facts. So the the constructivism of this “particularist” conception of the norms of practical rationality is thoroughgoing.<sup>31</sup>

But Aristotle’s own aversion to “rational principle” recalls us to the second main idea in this proposal, which is precisely the role of principles, of the sort that Kant, Korsgaard, and other Kantians are rightly concerned with. The approach I have in mind is *not* particularist in excluding principles from a significant role in practical life and reflection.<sup>32</sup> Instead, such principles figure essentially in that life, in virtue of the shared or “public” nature of reasons for action. One way to see this feature is in the demands for *justification* for

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<sup>28</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) VI.5: 1140a25-29 (Ross/Urmson translation).

<sup>29</sup> NE VI.8: 1142a24-25.

<sup>30</sup> NE I.7: 109a7ff.

<sup>31</sup> This helps to explain why what is at stake is *metaphysical*, not merely *epistemic*, priority.

<sup>32</sup> In this respect, what I propose is much like what Richard Holton calls “principled particularism” (in “Principles and Particularisms,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplemental vol. 76 (2002), pp. 191-209. However, Holton is merely bruited the possibility of such a theory without advocating it; my interest is advocacy. Carla Bagnoli advocates a very similar view, ascribing it to Iris Murdoch, in “The Exploration of Moral Life,” in J. Brookes (ed.), *Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford UP, forthcoming).

what we do. We impose such demands on others and ourselves, and respond to such demands. In justifying what we do in particular conditions and on particular occasions, we cite abstract *features* of those conditions and occasions which, we believe, justify us in what we do. For example, we cite the rule of *modus ponens* as a justification for *this* inference in light of the features of the propositions in question which warrant its use.

I believe that the general story of what we are doing, when we do so, is responding to the constraint of the *supervenience* of normative properties (including something like a “to be done” property) on non-normative (“natural” or “descriptive”) properties. Something like susceptibility to demands for public justification is built into the very idea of a reason for action,<sup>33</sup> and though the details require far more exploration than it is possible to explore here, the idea itself is an homage to the point Korsgaard is making with the idea of “provisionally universal” principles. What I do *here and now* can be justified in virtue of some set of non-normative properties only if that same set also justifies the same response on other occasions and with other agents, when there are not additional relevant non-normative properties to be considered. This is so whether occasions of just that sort ever occur or not; this is just the modal ambiguity in Korsgaard’s claim that reasons cannot be such as to apply to “no other case.”<sup>34</sup>

On the approach I suggest, norms for success in practical reason cannot be exhausted by principles taking the form of these supervenience relations or functions, simply because in any particular situation successful practical reasoning may recognize that there are new or additional non-normative facts which contribute to a judgment as to what is appropriate to do. However, such judgments are subject to demands for justification in virtue of their commitment to a further principle capturing the new supervenience relation or function. The resulting picture of the norms of practical rationality includes two things: (i) substantive particular judgments as to what response, by me, under these conditions, here and now,<sup>35</sup> is most congruent with living well as the kind of creature I am, namely a social

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<sup>33</sup> The public nature of reasons is a steady theme in Korsgaard’s own work. I argue that her conception of the publicity constraint cannot be quite right in “Korsgaard, Wittgenstein, and the Mafioso,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 261-71.

<sup>34</sup> My recourse to the Carroll example invites the question whether the constructivist/particularist story I sketch here applies to the norms of logical inference as well, and the justificatory role I acknowledge for principles — such as *modus ponens* as a rule of valid inference — helps to explain why I think it does. However, I cannot undertake to defend that extension of my basic claim here. For a view of logic as “default reasoning” that is quite compatible with the form of particularism I advocate here, see Thomas Hofweber, “Validity, Paradox, and the Ideal of Deductive Logic,” in Beall (ed.), *Revenge of the Liar* (Oxford UP, 2007). For a more general constructivist view of the norms of logic, see Robert Hanna, *Rationality and Logic* (MIT Press, 2006), esp. ch. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Compare Aristotle’s characterization of the demands of finding the “mean” in action, which virtue requires, at *NE* II.9: a110927-29.

animal who lives by the exercise of practical reason;<sup>36</sup> and (ii) a demand such creatures must satisfy, to be able to justify (to themselves and to others) what they do, in light of principled relations of conditions of action and normatively-guided response.

The resulting picture of practical reason and its norms is quite similar to Korsgaard's picture of "provisional universal" principles. The difference is the direction of focus for the norms of success in practical reason on the two views. Korsgaard's Kantianism directs us to think about the principles that are, and must be, the *consequences* of practical reasoning the success of which is taken for granted. The particularist constructivism I sketch here directs us instead in the first instance to the canons of success in practical judgment found in the project of living well. If we are moved to constructivism by Korsgaard's compelling picture, we should be particularists of this sort as well.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Compare Aristotle's famous *ergon* ("function") argument at *NE* I.7.

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Carla Bagnoli, David Enoch, Uri Leibowicz, and Dan Russell for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.