

Book Symposium

Social Normativity is Mind-Dependent

Louise Antony

Charlotte Witt has written a provocative and original book, arguing that the norms that accompany social roles, and that shape the lives of those who occupy them, have their source in facts *external* to the minds of the social agents who occupy them. To identify what these facts are, and to explain how such facts generate normative obligations, Charlotte points to important similarities between social roles on the one hand, and crafts and arts (like carpentry and flute-playing) on the other. She writes:

Social roles are teachable methods or ways of doing something in a manner that encodes social knowledge (*techniques*), and that involve the acquisition of powers or abilities to engage skillfully with the world by employing those techniques (*expertise*). (Witt 2023, 6)

To explain how social normativity arises—that is, why the norms associated with social roles are *binding* on agents who occupy those roles—she appeals to Aristotle’s discussion of the connection between the function of a thing, and the norms that govern its production and use:

The normativity is grounded in the function or work to be performed, well or badly, by employing the relevant expertise and techniques. As Aristotle says, “the good and the well is thought to reside in the function (*ergon*)” (Witt 2023, 6)

10.25365/jso-2025-9654

Published online July 17, 2026

Louise Antony, Department of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Email: lantony@philos.umass.edu

Open Access. © 2025 Author(s) published by the Journal of Social Ontology. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Thus, she argues, “the source of social role normativity lies in the work or function performed by the social agent who occupies a given social position.” (Witt 2023, 7). Witt calls this whole package “The Artisanal Model” of social normativity.

Let me start by saying what I think is plausible and illuminating about the Artisanal Model. Then I’ll say what I think is wrong with it. Consider the social role of being a woman. Although some philosophers believe that being a woman is a biological kind—being an adult human female—most feminist philosophers believe that being a woman is a social kind. But even those who hold the biological view ought to concede that there is, to some extent, truth to Beauvoir’s aphorism that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir and Capisto-Borde, 1949/2011, 283)

Growing up a girl, entails, at least in all known human societies, learning the “proper” way to dress and to behave, as well as the “correct” attitudes and aspirations to adopt—the *rules*, in other words, that a female creature needs to follow in order to present herself as an acceptable girl, and later, woman. Part of what she will learn is that violations of these rules carry sanctions—from “punishments” as mild as a disapproving glance from an adult, to “corrections” as serious as physical beatings, imprisonment or even death, depending on the society and the time. So becoming a woman certainly involves becoming aware that one is the subject of certain expectations, and learning that one must either conform to those expectations or experience unpleasant consequences. And correlatively, learning what advantages can be gained by satisfying them.

For me, growing up in the 1950s and 60s, learning to be a girl involved things like learning how to comb my hair and affix a barrette, how to set a table, how to dust furniture, and later, how to walk in heels and how to apply make-up—this last was complicated because the norms of my teen-age milieu conflicted with those of my straightlaced mother. I received some explicit instruction about appropriate behavior for a “young lady”: “cross your legs only at the ankles, never the knees,” “don’t beat boys at checkers,” and “*don’t argue*.” (You see how well I learned *that* lesson.) Certainly there was a combination of imitation, habituation, and explicit instruction, just as there is, typically, in learning a craft or an art.

I am also, as it happens, a flute-player. I’m hardly a master flutist—I am merely a serious and enthusiastic amateur. But I’ve studied the flute with master flutists, and I have spent a lot of time and effort trying to improve or at least maintain a modicum of mastery. I have experienced the process of going from a rank beginner who could not produce a sound on the instrument, to a reasonably skilled musician capable of holding a seat in a university or community orchestra. I’ve recently taken up the piccolo, and I play Irish music for fun.

So my experience does make salient to me the similarities between coming to occupy a social role (girl/woman) and acquiring a skill (playing the flute). But I am not convinced that viewing social roles in general as arts or crafts illuminates the nature of the norms that they often carry with them. One issue is that I think the Aristotelian assumptions about function and normativity that Charlotte takes on board are not generally true. This leads to a larger and more important disagreement—I deeply disagree with Charlotte that the norms associated with social roles are genuinely *normative*—or, more precisely, that their normativity is independent of agents’ attitudes toward them. Although I am an “externalist” (in Charlotte’s parlance) about *some* norms—I think that fundamental ethical norms, such as a prohibition against harming others—do not depend for their normative force on the attitudes or interests of the agents who are bound by them. But I believe that whatever normative force is possessed by social role norms is conferred, in one way or another, by the attitudes, commitments, and actions of intentional agents. I think that social norms are, in essence, mind-dependent. This makes me, I suppose, an “internalist” in terms of Charlotte’s taxonomy, though only about social-role norms. I don’t take a stand on the ultimate sources of normativity, although I do think, as I said, that ethical truths are objectively true. They may only be binding on agents who are capable of grasping them, as are the norms of rationality.¹

So let me turn to what I think of as the problems with Charlotte’s appeal to Aristotle’s view of the relation between the goodness of a thing and its function. To beg the question right at the start: I don’t believe that things, whether natural or artifactual, have *functions* except insofar as the functions are assigned to them by beings with minds. I don’t think that, in general, it’s an objective, mind-independent fact about *anything* that it has a particular function. The assignment of a function to a thing is either a direct reflection of the intentions of the designer or maker of the thing, or else is determined by some agent’s interested selection from among the causal roles in which the thing participates. Consider the heart: it seems obvious to most people (almost everyone except me) that *the* function of the heart is to circulate blood. It is true that organisms with hearts generally depend upon their hearts’ pumping action in order to stay alive. That makes that particular causal power of the heart *really* important, and to those creatures able to recognize this importance, *really* salient. But in this day and age, there are other causal powers that the heart possesses that are also, *de facto*, involved in our staying alive. Since the invention of the stethoscope, physicians have been relying on the patterns and volume of heart-thumping to diagnose a variety

1 I have some wacky ideas about this, but only a little to say in defense of them. See Antony & Garcia, 2023.

of illnesses and impairments, often leading to life-saving treatments. Has the heart developed a new function: heart-thumping? Sure, why not?

Many philosophers have addressed the question of things' functions by appeal to evolution—the function of an organ is that causal power in virtue of which the organ conferred on its possessor an adaptive advantage in the ancestral environment. There are many problems with this approach—the most serious of which is that one does not know *a priori* what any particular structure was selected for, nor if it was selected at all. But set that aside. A deeper problem is that when we consider complex organs, like the brain, there simply is no privileged answer as to what *the* function is. Finally, it's clear that intuitive judgments about the functions of natural entities are, once we leave the stock examples, exceedingly interest-relative. What's the function of grass? From the point of view of a ruminant, it's to provide food. From the point of view of many insects, it's to provide shelter. From the point of view of a suburban homeowner, it's to cover land in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Even if I can't convince you on this point (i.e., that questions about function are not objective) with respect to *natural* things, it seems to me to be obvious in the case of artifacts. Artifacts typically acquire their functions via the intentions of their inventors or makers. There is nothing about the inherent nature of a tire iron that gives it the function of removing a tire from its wheel—it is shaped in the way it is, and crafted out of the materials it is, because of someone's intention to produce a tool for that purpose. But it can be used for other purposes: it can also be used, very effectively, as a weapon, and some people acquire the tool with *that* purpose in mind. Isn't it natural to say that the tool now has another function? (Compare the self-defense advice to thread your car keys through your fist when walking alone at night—a new function for car keys. Maybe, as more and more cars have keyless entry, this will become their only function.)

I think the point is even clearer with respect to productions and activities in the arts. What is the function of flute-playing? Aristotle seems to think that the purpose of flute-playing is to entertain. Well, many people do find flute-playing entertaining, especially when it's done well. But flute-playing can also be used for individual enjoyment, for therapy, or just as a personal challenge—a retirement project, for example, where any number of other new hobbies could have worked just as well. What's the function of cooking? To provide food, that's one possibility. But some people cook mainly because they enjoy it as a creative outlet, and do it even when there are easier and less expensive ways to put food on the table.

Perhaps you'll say that flute-playing can have *multiple* functions. Fine. But different functions are likely going to be connected to different *norms*. If the function is delighting audiences, then the standard of goodness is going to be dependent on the happiness of one's audience. By that measure, the avant-garde flutist Claire Chase

is not doing well. Although she is currently regarded by music critics and professional flutists as one of the world's greatest flutists, her compositions and performances have only a niche appeal.² Perhaps, you might say, there are different *types* of flute-playing, each with different inherent norms. That is a move, and one that I'll consider in connection with the idea that there are proprietary norms associated with *a* social role, like being a parent. But the move creates problems of its own—it requires there to be objective facts about the number and individuation of *types* in the world of art and craft.

The final thing I want to say about the alleged externality of norms for arts and crafts is this: whatever the function of flute-playing turns out to be, many of the norms that are *de facto* operative, and that inform flute instruction, are simply conventional, and have nothing inherently to do with any particular function you might posit. Take vibrato. Vibrato is a technique for regularly altering the pitch of a note above and below its fundamental. There are two dimensions to vibrato: width—the distance above and below the fundamental pitch, and speed—how many alternations per beat. In the early 1900's, the accepted style, both in Europe and in the US, was a very narrow, fast vibrato. (Think Joan Baez, or listen to this example,³ from John Wummer.) It was also the practice to keep your vibrato “on” all the time. Somewhere around 1940, however, the conventions around vibrato changed. The very famous (and crowd-pleasing) soloist Jean-Pierre Rampal, began to use a wider, slower vibrato, which became the standard. A decade or so later, American flutists, like Julius Baker, began to employ vibrato somewhat selectively⁴—as we see in many pop singers today. I could go on and on, but won't. The point is, that the conventions about vibrato are highly normative—if you were studying the flute you were told quite explicitly that this or that way was the way you absolutely *ought* to play—but evolved as a matter of *fashion*. Audiences adapted (or maybe drove the change—who knows?) If you aspired to become a professional flutist, it was clear that by 1971, you *should not* have a Wummer vibrato (now disparagingly called a “nanny-goat vibrato”). But if you simply played for your own enjoyment, do it the way you like it.

So far I have challenged the artisanal model as an account of the normativity of social roles. But it's not just that I think that arts and crafts do not offer a good explanation of social norms. I dispute the explanandum—unlike Charlotte, I do not think that social norms are genuinely *normative*—they do not bind anyone unless an agent binds themselves to them.

Let me distinguish different ways that an agent can fall under genuine obligation. I do believe, as I said earlier, that there are objective ethical imperatives, like the

2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL_BgACaV7k

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUd2ZIKT700>

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJIbXr2-PSE>

imperative not to commit battery. Certainly there are debates about exactly what these imperatives are, how to formulate them, whether they are consistent with each other (categorical imperative vs. principle of utility?) and I have nothing to contribute to those debates. But I do believe that a prohibition against battery and some kind of duty to promote wellbeing are, if binding at all, binding on all rational agents, regardless of the agents' attitude toward them.

These objective ethical norms can be either general or conditional; that is, they can apply to all agents in all circumstances, or they can have limited application. Some of the norms Charlotte characterizes as social norms, like norms of parenting and norms of being a professor, have limited application—they apply only to individuals who play a certain social role. There are also objective norms that apply only to individuals who have taken certain normatively loaded steps, like making a promise. One has no parental duties unless one is a parent; one has no duty to nurture students if one is not a teacher; one has no duty to keep a promise unless one has made one. To the extent that one has the freedom to put oneself into, or to avoid, the conditions in which these norms apply, one has control over one's ethical obligations. This does not mean, however, that the normativity in question is not objective—it means only that, as I put it above—the norms in question apply only to individuals who are in certain circumstances. (We could, if you prefer, say that all genuine ethical obligation is fully general; it's just that some of our obligations are conditional in form: "You ought, *if you are a parent*, prioritize the wellbeing of your child."). Another good example of objective, conditional obligation is *promising*—I am under no general ethical obligation to make any particular promise, but if I *do* make a promise, I have an ethical obligation to keep it.⁵

I want to say that many social role norms *are* ethical norms of the conditional sort. Charlotte discusses and rejects one version of this view:

One way to think about social norms, like those governing a mother's maternal activity, is as an application of moral principles governing familial relationships to a particular relationship in a particular culture. The idea is of a general rule and its application in a context. The normativity attaches to the moral principle itself, and only derivatively to the realization or instantiation of it. Strictly speaking the normativity in question is ethical, and while there may be lots of questions about the source of ethical norms, there are no special questions

5 Yes, I can promise to do something unethical. Then I have conflicting ethical obligations. Meta-ethicists have a variety of ways of theorizing such situations and I don't know enough about the options to have an opinion. But the kinds of conflict I'll be discussing below that arise from social norms that one does not endorse are different. They are not conflicts among ethical duties, but rather, between doing something one does not want to do and suffering even more unpleasant consequences.

about the source of social norms because their normativity derives from the ethical normativity—wherever that comes from. (Witt 2023, 3–4)

But this is not exactly the view I'm promoting. I do think that, *if and when* the norms that attach to a social role are binding, that they are so because they express or follow from ethical principles. But I do not hold that all such norms *are* binding. Thus, it is no criticism of the view that I'm promoting to point out, as Charlotte does, that "some social norms are prima facie not in accordance with, much less applications of, ethical principles." (4) Indeed, I *quite* agree, which is one of the main reasons I deny that social norms are, in general, objectively normatively binding.

There is another kind of norm, however, where the normativity is not a matter of a standing ethical imperative, whether general or conditional. This is normativity that clearly derives from the attitudes of the persons who are bound by it. There are some noncontroversial examples. Consider playing a game. If you happen to possess a chess board and a set of chess pieces, you stand under no obligation of any sort to place the pieces on the board in any particular arrangement. Children who enjoy contriving their own games do nothing wrong if they put the pieces down in some idiosyncratic array. It's only *if you want to play chess*, that you fall under any norm at all. You need to *opt in* to the game of chess in order to be bound by its rules.

J. L. Austin makes this point in connection with the conventions involved in speech-acts, but with appeal to conventions in general. For a speech-act to have been successfully performed, it has to have been made against an "accepted procedure," and writes:

...[F]or a procedure to be *accepted* involves more than for it merely to be the case that it is *in fact generally used*...and it must remain in principle open for anyone to reject any procedure....One who does so is, of course, liable to sanctions....*Above all* all must not be put into flat factual circumstances; for this is subject to the old objection to deriving an 'ought' from an 'is.' (Being accepted is *not* a circumstance in the right sense.)(Austin 1962, 29) [emphases in original]

Religion is, I think, another example, although there are interesting complications here.⁶ Catholics are required to attend Mass once a week, Jews are required to keep kosher, Muslims are required to pray five times a day. In general, I want to

⁶ Theists generally hold that religious obligations stem from divine commandments, and thus are objectively binding. As an atheist, I deny that there are any divine commandments, but I do think that the variety of religions pose a problem for the theist who takes this line—which are the authoritative ones? Are members of false religions not actually under the obligations they think they are?

say, these duties are only duties for those who “are” Catholic, Jewish or Muslim. A protestant or an atheist is under no obligation to do any of these things. A convert to Catholicism, Judaism, or Islam willingly puts himself under these (and other) obligations.

But now come the complications. The first is that there is no consensus, within or outside of these religious communities, as to who is bound by these rules and who is not. I am a lapsed Catholic; at least some Catholics believe that because I was duly confirmed in the Church, I am still under the obligation to attend Mass. Among individuals who identify as Jews and as Muslims, there is enormous disagreement about how strictly, if at all, one is bound by the prescriptions and proscriptions of the Torah or the Qur’an. Orthodox Jews believe that all Jews are bound by the Torah whether they recognize that or not. And then there is disagreement about exactly what the rules are—some Muslim authorities insist that it is required for women to cover their hair; others say it is not.

I think that the degree of variation in the way a given social role is conceived or elaborated is a problem for Charlotte, because different elaborations entail different packages of norms. What, objectively, are the norms that bind someone who identifies as a Jew? And if there is this degree of variation in a social role that is closely connected to explicit, codified rules, what are we supposed to say about social roles like being a parent or being a woman?

Now Charlotte says that the norms that bind one are those that derive from the objective *function* of the social role. Perhaps the problem I raise above for religious duties arises because being a Catholic or a Jew is not a *social role*, and neither is therefore definitively connected to any objective *function*. I would be willing to concede this, but then I want to know what makes being a *woman* a *social role*. Women are certainly expected to play certain social roles—to be caregivers of various sorts, to be housekeepers, etc.—but I don’t know what *function* is specifically connected to being a woman. I do think there are functional *explanations* for the existence of the social kind, ⟨woman⟩, namely the preservation of male privilege (which is why I and some other feminists are gender eliminativists), but does Charlotte want to say that bolstering male privilege is women’s *function*?

This brings up a question that I have for Charlotte: what is the relation between social *roles* and social *kinds*? I’m inclined to think that the kinds are more fundamental than the roles. Charlotte, if I’m reading her correctly, disagrees. As I think of them, social kinds are kinds for the same reason that “natural” kinds are kinds. I follow Richard Boyd in holding that kinds are homeostatic property clusters. The differences between various kinds of kinds have to do with the types of forces that keep the properties clustered together. So-called “natural” kinds are kept together by forces that do not involve mental or intentional states; so-called “social” kinds—what I prefer

to call “intentional” or “artifactual” kinds—are kept together by some assortment of mental states, primarily beliefs, but also associations, expectations, and second-order beliefs.⁷ Thus the social kind “race” is kept disciplined by, among other things, some people’s beliefs about skin color’s signifying a deep biological kind, and others’ recognition that some people hold that belief.

The properties that constitute a social kind can also be kept in phase by norms—hence the properties that compose gender in most times and places include a norm that women ought to be primarily responsible for care work. This norm can be expressed in terms of mild disapproval, restrictions of opportunity, or threats of violence. But I do not see the presence of norms as necessary for the existence of a social kind. I believe that race is a social kind, and I believe that I have a racialized identity as a white person. But I have not, in my life, experienced any *normative* pressure to behave in any particular way because of my whiteness. (I acknowledge white *privilege*—but this is not the same thing as being subject to a norm.) I understand that in some places and at some times, some white people have been subject to norms, *qua* white person. I am an American—again, privilege, but, at least in the milieux I have been part of, no norms. (Well, maybe a mild one—people sometimes give me dirty looks if I don’t stand up for the national anthem.) As an American, I feel a particular kind of responsibility for the terrible things that are being done, and have been done by various (all of) my governments, and I feel I have a duty to try to stop them. But that is not a duty that is internal to my citizenry—if it were, more of my compatriots would feel it.

Maybe partly because I do not experience my whiteness or my citizenry as carrying norms, I am not sure that either of these features of me constitutes a social *role* that I play. I certainly do not experience pressure to be or to act in a certain way *because* I am white. (I may, as was suggested at the conference, dress in a way that makes me a really good example of a white person, but this is not because I feel that I *ought* to dress this way. And anyway, don’t Black women also buy Eileen Fisher and carry Baggallini’s?) And again, I am not denying that there have been and are places and times where white people are subject to norms, *qua* white persons. I am only saying that I have never felt myself to be subject to any such norms. That this is so is, in fact, a feature of (my) white privilege.

Here there is, as my mention of white privilege suggests, an asymmetry that I think is puzzling on Charlotte’s view. Being Black *does* involve being subject to certain

7 Since I think that the sociality of human beings (as well as that of other species) is a feature of nature, I dislike the practice of distinguishing “social” kinds from “natural” kinds. More fundamentally, I think that intentionality is a feature of nature, so that *psychology*, whether it is focused on individuals or on groups, should be regarded as a “natural” science, and thus that its lawful regularities should be accorded the status of “natural laws.”

norms—these include both racist norms, like deference to white people, and self-protective norms, often taught to Black children, especially Black boys, by nurturing, protective adults. But if social norms derive from social roles, then being Black must be a social role.

Apart from the asymmetry between whites and Blacks with respect to race-specific norms, I do not find it intuitive to think of being Black as a social role, especially if that way of thinking carries with it the idea that being Black has a *function*. Perhaps, as I suggested above in connection with gender, there is a *functional explanation* for the existence of Blackness as it exists in the United States and in many other parts of the world. This is the functional explanation for *race* in general (or so I contend), viz., to “naturalize” and “rationalize” systematic power differentials among groups of people. (That is, I agree with MacKinnon’s adage that “Difference follows dominance” at least in the case of racial difference. I disagree with her about gender.) And that this is the case may also explain why certain norms for Black persons exist—the whole racial system explains why there is, among racists, a norm that says Black persons should defer to white persons. And it also explains why it behooves young Black men to take certain kinds of care in the world when they interact with white people. But the latter norm does not follow from, what is on this suggestion, the *function* of Blackness.

Getting back to more general concerns about the idea that the normativity of social norms is an objective matter of function: if there is *a* function to being a woman, to playing the woman-role, this function must be very, very general, and cannot ground *all* of the various packages of norms that women are subject to throughout time and space, since these norms are inconsistent with each other. Moreover, there are different packages that can be in play at the same time and in the same place. It’s not just a question of conflicting norms. Charlotte mentions, early on, that there can be conflicts among norms in virtue of one’s occupying more than one social role: *qua* professor, she ought to privilege her students’ wellbeing, but *qua* mother, she ought to privilege her childrens’ wellbeing. But such conflicts are cases of ethical conflicts, and those are familiar. What I’m raising is a question about the norms that *bind* me in situations where there are different understandings of the nature of a given social role. There are, as you are all well aware, a variety of different conceptions of what it is to be a woman, or to be a good woman, that are all very much in play in contemporary U.S. society. Which are the ones that determine what it is to fulfill the social role of “woman”? Can I choose? It seems that I might well be “bound by” or at least “responsive to” several different ones.

The fundamental issue that all these cases raise is a very big one, I think, and one central to Charlotte’s project: what is it for a person to be “responsive to” a norm? There are at least two different things this expression could mean: a) that a person

accepts and regards themselves as bound by the norm, and b) that the person is subject to consequences if one violates the norm. Charlotte, I think, elides these two conditions.

Consider her critical discussion of the view (which I'm defending) that one is only *bound by* those social norm that one endorses. She believes that this sort of "individualistic" view cannot explain critical non-conformity, but that her externalist view can. She writes: "You cannot be a nonconforming agent in relation to norms that you do not stand under in the first place." (Witt 2023, 81)⁸ But I don't see why not. I contend that there is equivocation here between a sense of "stand under" that means "is normatively bound by" and "is vulnerable to sanctions for violations of." One can easily understand *what* the local practices *are*, and also how strong the *expectations* are that one conform to them, without endorsing them, or taking them to be normatively binding on oneself. More pertinently, one can be quite well aware of the *consequences* of violating the norms of the practices; these can be extremely costly, and that's why it is easy to see why, from an individualistic point of view, "nonconforming behavior often takes courage." (Witt 2023, 81)

But her argument against the view I'm defending, actually, I think, begs the normative question. She moves from the claim that nonconformity requires that the nonconformer "criticizes or rejects a norm that they are responsive to and evaluable under, which is at the heart of nonconforming behavior" (Witt 2023, 81) to the claim that this condition requires there to be something that "grounds the obligation." But insofar as I accept Charlotte's conditions on nonconformity, I interpret "responsive to" and "evaluable under" as flat, descriptive conditions, in Austin's sense. The nonconformer, to be properly so-called, must understand both what the local practices are, and how violation of the practices will be viewed by those who endorse the practices. But on this flat reading, those conditions in no way require that there be any genuine *obligation* on the nonconformer to follow the practice, and thus no need for anything to *ground* an obligation. Hence, it is no flaw in the view that I'm defending that it fails this condition. I think it actually does a better job explaining nonconformity than does Charlotte's.

My "internalist" view—that social norms are only binding on an agent if an agent accepts them as binding—makes better *psychological* sense of many cases of non-conformity than does Charlotte's. It is certainly true that nonconformity often involves complex and conflicting feelings. Severing connections with practices one has grown up with, particularly if these were presented as having normative value, can and often does entail compromising or even severing familial and social connections

8 See also Witt 2023, p. x: "[E]ven my rejection of a gendered social norm presupposed in some way that I ought to follow the norm."

that are deeply important. It's also true that values and practices that one has been attached to can be hard to fully shake off—many Jews who are otherwise completely secular report that they simply cannot eat pork. As a lapsed Catholic, I have to resist the urge to genuflect when I enter a Catholic church. But in many other cases, particularly in cases where the social practices and norms are clearly harmful and unjust, nonconformers have no *internal conflicts* about violations. Practitioners of civil disobedience are often apprehensive—quite rationally so—about the consequences of breaking the law, but in cases where the law they are breaking is unjust, have no ambivalence about the justice of their actions. Civil rights activists did not feel *morally* bound by the discriminatory regulations they were violating.

There is a well-known problem for Aristotle's view about the connection between function and the good. I know that some scholars think that the "problem" is an artifact of a misreading of Aristotle, but whether or not it is genuinely a problem for Aristotle, I think it is a problem for Charlotte, and one that encapsulates the points that I've been urging against her. This is the problem of the "good bomb." The function of a bomb is to blow things up; if what it is to be a good bomb is for the thing to perform the function of a bomb, then a good bomb is one that really does a good job blowing things up. But it is not good, in general, to blow things up, and so, arguably, a good bomb is not *good*.

One might say that there are some kinds of artifacts that, objectively speaking, are *not good* and should not exist. (Maybe there are morally permissible bombs—if there are just wars, then there are just uses for the weapons of war, or at least some of them.) But consider implements of torture. Although there are devices, like the rack, that perform their function exceedingly well, they are, as a categorical matter, simply bad.

I think this problem is acute for Charlotte. She readily acknowledges, in several different places, that many social norms are unjust. For example, in discussing the ways in which skill acquisition can proceed, she writes, "consider a...young Afghan girl learning to align with oppressive, gendered comportment and attire." (Witt 2023, 98) It appears that this girl is acquiring "expertise" in being an Afghani girl, and on her way to becoming a "good" Afghani woman. She certainly "stands under" or "is subject to" a set of norms that Charlotte readily acknowledges are "oppressive". So there are social roles—too many of them, unfortunately—that are, like the Iron Maiden, simply bad. They ought not to exist. Being a slave, presumably, is such a role. But if those who occupy the slave role are, in some normatively serious way, bound by the norms of slavehood, it seems that that they *ought*—in *some* sense—to do what those norms prescribe. I'd like to know what that sense is, if it's not the normatively flat sense of "this is what you're expected to do, and there will be hell to pay if you don't do it."

I want to make clear, if I have not done so already, that I do *not* hold that *all* normativity is determined by the attitudes of intentional agents. I do not, in other words, want to commit myself either to Humeanism or Kantianism (as Charlotte characterizes them) about normativity in general. I just don't know. I think that normativity may be a fundamental dimension of reality that it takes minds to *recognize*. But I am grateful to Charlotte for forcing me to think hard about the nature of *social* normativity. I recognize its power; I just disagree with her about its source.

REFERENCES

- Antony, Louise and Ernesto Garcia (2023). "Ethical Naturalism: Problems and Prospects." In *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Realism*, edited by Paul Bloomfield and David Copp (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things With Words*, Second Edition, edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Paperback).
- Beauvoir, Simone de, and Constance Capisto-Borde (2011). *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books).
- Witt, Charlotte (2023). *Social Goodness: The Ontology of Social Norms*, (New York: Oxford University Press).