LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING ARGUMENTS AND THEISM:
HOW MORAL KNOWLEDGE POINTS TO THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

John Fraser

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ABSTRACT

Recent debates in the area of metaethics and moral epistemology have centered around evolutionary debunking arguments (EDAs). These arguments purport to show that the conclusions of Darwinian evolution pose a serious problem for moral knowledge. I argue that attempts to resolve the issues around debunking arguments from a non-theistic framework fail. I also agree with some atheists who argue that the evidence shows universal benevolence to be an attitude-independent moral truth. I then show that non-theistic approaches do not adequately account for this, whereas theism does. Theism not only explains the cosmic coincidence between our moral beliefs and moral facts, but it also explains the deeper cosmic coincidence between universal benevolence and human flourishing.

I examine several prominent EDAs, with particular attention given to those of Sharon Street, Richard Joyce, and Michael Ruse, as well as several other less well-known arguments. Some EDAs aim at undermining moral realism in general, while others target certain moral intuitions. I examine both types of EDA, along with some preliminary objections aimed at keeping EDAs from getting off the ground. Various counterarguments from moral realists are examined, including general objections that EDAs overreach into other domains besides morality, as well as extended discussion of third-factor arguments which attempt to neutralize the debunking challenge by arguing that evolution could select for some third factor which correlates with moral truths. I argue that all of these non-theistic responses by moral realists fail due to the fact that they are question-begging or illegitimate attempts to shift the burden of proof.

The solution proposed by debunkers to the challenge to moral realism is to adopt moral antirealism. Special attention is given to Street's Humean metaethical constructivism, which she thinks provides the only way to evade moral skepticism in the light of debunking arguments. I

argue that antirealism does not avoid skepticism because it is a form of skepticism. Non-theistic arguments between debunkers and moral realists result in a standoff in which both sides have to beg important questions.

Very little attention has been given in the literature to possible implications of EDAs for theistic views. This dissertation aims at providing a remedy for this.

On then! Value means survival-
    Value. If our progeny
Spreads and spawns and licks each rival,
    That will prove its deity
(Far from pleasant, by our present
    Standards, though it well may be).

        –C. S. Lewis, "Evolutionary Hymn"

And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

        –Jesus

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PREFACE

This is not the dissertation I set out to write. In fact, I did not even know about the controversy over evolutionary debunking arguments until I happened upon it in during the early stages of my research for a moral argument based on the doctrine of the Trinity. Part of that argument was to show that naturalism is unable to provide an adequate account of love. Toward that end, I began studying Darwinian accounts of altruism. One thing that struck me was that evolutionary accounts of altruism seemed unable to account for universal benevolence, instead only being able to account for altruism at most toward close kin or those within a community. This seemed like a promising angle on my topic.

While I was engaged in this research, I was also reading Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos*. There he refers to Sharon Street's Darwinian dilemma, which is the most often cited evolutionary debunking argument in the literature. This reference in Nagel was my introduction to EDAs. A passing remark in an article by Eric Wielenberg, in which he commented how little work has been done on evolutionary debunking arguments from a theistic standpoint, led me to start thinking about changing my dissertation topic. I was always told that the point of a dissertation was to make an original contribution to a field of study, so this seemed like a wide-open area. Meanwhile, I had shared some of my ideas with my advisor, David Baggett. He wrote a side comment that I could do a whole dissertation just on debunking arguments. That settled it for me, and I began to delve into the literature on EDAs.

One question I had was how many published articles there are on this topic. I still do not know the answer to that, except that it is more than I was able to include in this dissertation. There were many articles that I did not get to simply due to limitations of time and space. I covered all of the most important sources as thoroughly as possible, as well as the most

important responses to those. I found the material to be extremely challenging, but also more interesting that I expected. I was also pleasantly surprised in some ways when I discovered that de Lazari-Radek and Singer make an argument based on the inability of evolution to account for universal altruism. They obviously reach a different conclusion than I do; nevertheless, it was encouraging to me to see in published philosophical work the same argument that I hoped to develop. The fact that I am about as far removed from Peter Singer on the ideological spectrum as it is possible to be made his endorsement of this argument a more useful bridge for my own argument.

My academic career has mostly been in theological disciplines, but I have taken the opportunity to study philosophy as much as possible. While at Asbury Seminary, I took as many philosophy courses from Jerry Walls as I could fit in my schedule. After my wife, Tricia, and I graduated together from Asbury, we moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan. There I had the opportunity to do additional graduate studies in philosophy at Western Michigan University, including taking a class with Tim McGrew. My wife and I developed a friendship with Tim and his wife, Lydia, which continues to this day. We then served as missionaries in Hungary for several years before I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Liberty University. My classes with David Baggett at Liberty were a highlight of my Ph.D. coursework and opened up new areas of interest for me.

My philosophical background is thus a bit eclectic, which has its pros and cons. I think of myself more as a theologian with a philosophical bent than as a philosopher with a theological bent. That may color the work in some ways – whether for good or for ill I do not know. I have been privileged to study under many excellent Christian philosophers and theologians. In

INTRODUCTION

In his 1993 book, *Warrant and Proper Function*, Alvin Plantinga presents an evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN). In essence, Plantinga's argument is that unguided natural selection, because it favors adaptive behavior rather than true beliefs, presents an epistemic problem for naturalists; namely, when combined with naturalism, it provides an undefeated defeater for belief in naturalism. Plantinga's argument received quite a bit of attention for a time, but then gradually faded into the background in epistemological circles. Most responses from naturalists were skeptical that Plantinga's argument posed any real threat to belief in naturalism.

In the decades since Plantinga published his EAAN, a class of arguments has developed that utilizes the same basic premise as Plantinga's – that natural selection favors adaptive behavior rather than true beliefs – except that these arguments only target moral beliefs. These are referred to in the literature as evolutionary debunking arguments (EDAs). The main proponents of this view are Michael Ruse, Sharon Street, and Richard Joyce. Ruse's work on this issue in *Taking Darwin Seriously*, published in 1986, actually predates Plantinga's EAAN. Joyce's publication of *The Evolution of Morality* in 2005 was followed in 2006 with Street's "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." Wielenberg credits Street's article with triggering "an explosion of interest in arguments concerned specifically with normative beliefs or with some specific subset thereof."[1] Street's and Joyce's arguments have garnered by far the most attention of any published EDAs, and, of the two, Street's is the most discussed. One challenge facing evolutionary debunkers is explaining why the belief in objective moral truth is

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[1] Erik J. Wielenberg, "Ethics and Evolutionary Theory," *Analysis* 76, no. 4 (October 2016): 502.

so ubiquitous if in fact there is no such thing. This is where evolutionary theories about the development of the moral sense come into play.

Numerous articles responding to EDAs have been published as well, including many defenses of moral realism against the debunking challenge. Some of these are general critiques, including Shafer-Landau, Clarke-Doane, Schafer, and Crow among others. One particular category of realist responses is that of third factor arguments. These arguments attempt to show that, while natural selection does not select for true moral beliefs directly, it could do so indirectly by selecting for some third factor which provides an evolutionary advantage, and which is correlated in some way with moral truths. Enoch and Wielenberg are among the most prominent proponents of this view. Other third factor arguments have been given by Behrends, Skarsaune, Vavova, and Brosnan.

In terms of the overall structure of this dissertation, the first chapter deals with the empirical question of evolutionary theory as it pertains to the development of moral beliefs and moral behavior. This includes the puzzling phenomenon of altruism, and the various models that have been developed by theorists to explain it in Darwinian terms. One of the questions pressed against debunkers is if their use of evolutionary theory in support of their arguments is legitimate. Thus, chapter one includes not just evolutionary theories as presented by debunkers, but the models from evolutionary theorists themselves. The conclusion of this first chapter is that the debunkers are on solid ground as far as the evolutionary theories of morality are concerned.

The second chapter examines several of the leading EDAs. The arguments of Ruse, Joyce, and Street are given a special section in view of their importance to the overall debate. Other arguments that are examined include those of Bedke, Morton, Bogardus, and Fraser.[*]

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[*] No relation to this author.

These arguments aim to target moral realism in general, and to show that if moral realism is true, then evolutionary theory implies that we can have no moral knowledge. There is also another class of EDAs that are more limited in scope, targeting some moral beliefs. These include arguments by Singer, Greene, and Huemer; they are addressed in a separate section. The main purpose of the chapter is to try to understand and articulate the debunking challenge as clearly as possible before examining counterarguments.

Chapter three focuses on the responses by moral realists to EDAs. One argument that receives special attention is what I call the argument from overreach – namely, that the logic of debunking arguments goes beyond moral beliefs into areas such as mathematics, which would threaten to result in a debunking of science itself, and hence the debunker's own argument. In addition, the third factor arguments mentioned above are examined in detail. Other realist responses which are aimed at grasping one of the other of the horns of Street's dilemma are also considered. Two questions which are frequently raised in these arguments have to do with who has the burden of proof, and whether certain kinds of responses are question-begging (notably third factor arguments). These issues merit a special section of their own. Chapter three ends on a somewhat ambivalent note. It isn't clear one way or the other if debunking arguments can be kept from undermining themselves, but at the same time there does seem to be a problem for moral realists which is not clearly resolved by any of the solutions which have been offered.

One solution to the debunking challenge is that offered by Street herself, and that is to give up normative realism and become a normative antirealist. This move is based on the supposition that antirealism is the only way to avoid moral skepticism in the face of the debunking challenge. Street's version of antirealism is Humean metaethical constructivism. Chapter four gives attention to Street's argument, particular in light of Dworkin's defense of

moral objectivism to which Street has responded. While Dworkin's argument is not directly aimed at EDAs for the most part, nevertheless the interaction between Street and Dworkin is very illuminating with respect to several key issues. In particular, Street's framing of the debate in terms of normativity rather than morality is shown to be a way of stacking the deck in favor of antirealism, since it includes non-moral normative truths as well as moral ones. Dworkin offers his own dilemma argument – written before Street's – which aims to show that both sides are begging the question. This brings the issue between moral realists and antirealists to a stalemate. In addition to this, the last part of chapter four aims to show that, rather than being an escape from skepticism, antirealism just *is* a form of skepticism. As such, it is not an acceptable solution to the debunking challenge, either.

Chapter five attempts to build an argument for a solution which neither side in this debate, for the most part, has any interest in even discussing, and that is theism. The argument that is developed here is based on the inability of EDAs to account for belief in universal altruism. This argument actually receives support from de Lazari-Radek and Singer, who argue that belief in universal altruism escapes EDAs, and should be considered an established moral truth. In addition, Huemer argues for realism based on the worldwide convergence on liberal values. These thinkers all endorse a version of consequentialism. Chapter five seeks to show that their moral theories undermine their own arguments, and that the evidence actually points to theism rather than non-theistic realism as they hold. Finally, attention is given to the views of Dworkin and Nagel. Both are atheists, but both also reject the approaches typified by the realist arguments presented in chapter three. The arguments of Dworkin and Nagel also come up short, but help to demonstrate why a theistic argument can be successful where non-theistic approaches fail.

CHAPTER 1

EVOLUTION AND THE MORAL SENSE

Evolutionary Debunking Arguments (EDAs) hold that the genealogy of our moral beliefs

under Darwinian theory raises serious questions about their status and/or justification. As a

preliminary rough sketch, EDAs posit that if our moral beliefs and/or belief-forming faculties are

products of Darwinian evolution through natural selection, then those beliefs are the result of a

process which is indifferent to whether or not they are true. As a consequence, we should have

no confidence in those beliefs. The details of this rough sketch will be filled in over the course of

these first two chapters. EDAs are generally taken to have an empirical (causal) premise, along

with an epistemic premise, roughly like the following[2]:

(1) Darwinian forces have had a pervasive influence on our moral beliefs [empirical premise].

(2) If (1) then our moral beliefs are the result of a process indifferent to their truth and have greatly diminished epistemic status or are completely debunked [epistemic premise].

(3) Our moral beliefs have greatly diminished epistemic status or are completely debunked.

Whether the stronger conclusion (complete debunking) or the weaker one (diminished status)

obtains depends upon the specific details of the particular arguments as we will see in chapter

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[2] For examples of slightly different formulations of a general EDA, see Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Noûs* 45, no. 1 (March 2011): 106, accessed May 23, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2010.00770.x; David Copp, "How to Avoid Begging the Question Against Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Ratio* 32, no. 4 (December 2019): 232, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/rati.12222; Kevin Brosnan, "Do the Evolutionary Origins of Our Moral Beliefs Undermine Moral Knowledge?" *Biology and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (January 2011): 52, accessed July 22, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10539-010-9235-1; Daniel Z. Korman, "Debunking arguments," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 12 (December 2019): 1, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12638; Justin Morton, "A New Evolutionary Debunking Argument Against Moral Realism," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 234, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/apa.2016.14; and Russ Shafer-Landau, "Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge," *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (December 2012): 4, accessed June 29, 2020, EBSCO.

two.

This chapter will focus on the evolutionary backstory that underwrites our moral beliefs/belief-forming faculties if the picture given by Darwinian evolution is true, or at least roughly true.[3] This will serve as support for the empirical premise of EDAs. Some preliminary challenges to the empirical premise will be addressed toward the end of the chapter.

Darwin on the Evolution of Morality

Questions about the status of moral beliefs under Darwinism go back to Darwin himself. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin addressed the implications of his theory of evolution for our understanding of human nature. Among the topics covered are the phenomena of religion and morality. Regarding religion, Darwin's view was that belief in God was not universal among early human beings but that belief in spirits was. He speculated that the belief in spirits first arose through the dreams of "savages," who "do not readily distinguish between subjective and objective impressions."[4] Later, when faculties such as imagination, curiosity, and reason had been sufficiently developed, the belief in spirits arose.[5] This subsequently gave rise to the belief in the existence of one or more gods,[6] and finally to monotheism.[7]

Based on a dubious genealogical explanation like this, one might think that belief in God would be extremely suspect in Darwin's mind, as the belief in spirits evidently was to him. This, however, does not appear to be the case, at least in *Descent*. On the contrary, Darwin wrote that

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[3] Part of that story involves the claim that everything about human nature can be described as the result of a long process of natural cause-and-effect through the operation of the physical laws of nature. The Darwinian picture thus described is, then, thoroughly naturalistic.

[4] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: J. Murray, 1871), 1:66, Adobe PDF eBook.

[5] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:66.

[6] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:67.

[7] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:68.

the question of the existence of God "has been answered in the affirmative by the highest intellects that have ever lived."[8] Darwin does not explain this odd set of circumstances, namely that a series of false beliefs springing from the overwrought imagination of the primitive ancestors of modern humans ultimately landed on a true belief in the existence of God, which was subsequently affirmed by intellectual giants. Many of Darwin's ideological descendants would accept something like Darwin's genealogical account of the belief in God but reject the affirmation that God nevertheless exists.

A parallel is found in Darwin's thinking about morality. Darwin speculated that any animal with social instincts would develop a moral sense, which he equated with conscience, when its other intellectual powers became as well developed as in humans.[9] At the same time, he also expressly denied that other creatures would develop the *same* moral sense as humans. In one passage that is occasionally cited in contemporary debunking literature,[10] Darwin gives the following hypothetical: "If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering."[11] The implication is that behavior which we would call murder could be perfectly acceptable and even mandatory in different conditions, which would seem to call into question the status of prohibitions against murder – along with potentially any other moral prohibition.

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[8] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:65.

[9] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:71-72.

[10] See for example William J. FitzPatrick, "Why Darwinism Does Not Debunk Objective Morality," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 190, Adobe PDF eBook.

[11] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:73.

Darwin believed the origins of the moral sense began with social instincts that were favored by natural selection through familial relations which tended toward certain behaviors in lower animals, but also toward love and emotions of sympathy in higher animals, while noting that "These instincts are not extended to all the individuals of the species, but only to those of the same community."[12] Darwin is referring here to the theories of kin selection and group selection, which will be examined in more detail below. These theories are prominent in discussion surrounding the problem of the evolution of altruism. Darwin himself makes the connection between the problem of altruism (which he refers to at one point in *Origin of Species* as having been potentially fatal to his entire theory)[13] and the development of the moral sense.

Beginning with this primitive social instinct, Darwin thought it probable that a moral sense would progress in stages. First, social instincts would lead to pleasure in the company of others, producing feelings of sympathy, and prompting a creature to perform services for others. Second, developed mental faculties would lead to past actions and motives passing through the brain incessantly, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction caused by giving in to stronger instincts than the social instinct. Third, acquiring language would lead to public opinion forming a guide to action for all for the good of the community. Finally, social instincts and impulses would be strengthened by habit.[14]

We will return to other ideas of Darwin's with respect to morality later. What is important to notice at this stage is the nature of Darwin's explanation. First, there is the idea that the social instincts which form the basis of the moral sense are attributed to natural selection

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[12] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 2:391

[13] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: A Facsimile of the First Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 236, Adobe PDF eBook.

[14] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:72-73.

because "they are highly beneficial to the species."[15] In other words, these instincts allow for propagation of the species by increasing fitness for survival and reproduction. This is a key component of the debunking argument, namely that the underlying traits of our moral belief-forming faculties are a result of selection for evolutionary fitness rather than for correspondence with objective moral truths. That idea goes back all the way to Darwin himself, and as we will see it has continued in subsequent theorizing by his intellectual heirs.

Another important feature of Darwin's argument is the nature of it as a just so story, both in his explanation of belief in God and in his ideas about the development of the moral sense. There is no actual empirical evidence that, for example, the progenitors of modern humans came to believe in spirits because they lacked the discernment to distinguish between dreams and reality or that their moral sense developed in the way that Darwin hypothesizes. Moreover, there is no way to test these hypotheses. This might cause one to question whether they should really be considered scientific, which will also become important in discussion about the status of EDAs. While this is an oft-noted weakness of virtually any theory in the field of evolutionary psychology, discussion here will be limited to its impact on EDAs.

The Problem of Altruism

All accounts of the evolutionary origins of morality begin with the problem of altruism. On the surface at least, evolution seems to predict selfish behavior, with life seen as a battle for the "survival of the fittest." As mentioned above, Darwin recognized the problem of explaining altruistic behavior in terms of natural selection as early as *Origin*. An organism which sacrifices itself for another will not continue to propagate, and thus such altruistic behavior should be

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[15] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 2:391.

eliminated by natural selection. Even behavior which does not result in the death of the altruist but still decreases its relative fitness in evolutionary terms should be selected against. Bekoff and Pierce acknowledge the problem in that "Cooperative behavior . . . doesn't fit the predictions of Darwinian theory, which has sent us looking instead for competition and unfettered aggression."[16] Nowak agrees, writing that, "The question of how natural selection can lead to cooperative behavior has fascinated evolutionary biologists for several decades."[17] Finally, Sussman and Cloninger have this to say: "The traits of altruism and cooperation often are assumed to be among humanity's essential and defining characteristics. However, it has been difficult to account for the origins and evolution of altruistic behavior."[18]

The difficulty of explaining altruism from an evolutionary standpoint has given rise to a substantial body of literature devoted to this very question, with an intersection of biologists, philosophers, and social scientists among others chiming in – and occasionally even theologians.[19] For the purposes of this dissertation, it will suffice to compare the rough sketch of evolutionary explanations of altruism and the moral sense with the arguments put forward by EDA proponents. Many of the disputes surrounding academic discussions of the evolution of altruism and morality have to do with specific details and mechanisms more so than with general principles. One important question that will need to be kept in mind is how close the arguments

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[16] Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 58, Adobe PDF eBook.

[17] Martin A. Nowak, "Five Rules for the Evolution of Cooperation," *Science* 314, no. 5805 (December 8, 2006): 1560, accessed April 28, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1133755.

[18] Robert W. Sussman and C. Robert Cloninger *Origins of Altruism and Cooperation* (New York: Springer, 2011), vii, Adobe PDF eBook.

[19] See Leonard Katz, ed., *Evolutionary Origins of Morality: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic, 2000); Stephen G. Post et al., *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), accessed February 6, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195143584.003.0003; Sussman and Cloninger.

of debunkers must be to what is determined to be the best scientific theory in order for the argument to go through. Some opposition to EDAs is based on the proposition that the controversial nature of the details surrounding the evolution of our moral faculties renders the entire argument suspect.[20] That objection will be considered in more detail below.

Darwin's thinking about the evolution of altruism touched on two distinct mechanisms: kin selection and group selection. In kin selection, natural selection favors behavior that is directed toward close relatives, whereas with group selection, altruistic behavior toward other members of the creature's close community is favored regardless of whether or not they are closely related. These ideas have been in competition among biologists since Darwin's time. While group selection initially had the upper hand, kin selection became the dominant view after W.D. Hamilton developed a mathematical formula for selection of kin which is known as Hamilton's Rule.[21]

Kin selection, very briefly, is the idea that natural selection will favor altruistic behavior toward close relatives – but only up to a certain point. The closer the blood relation, the more natural selection will favor it. For example, a mother who has an altruistic tendency to sacrifice herself for her children will be more likely to have her descendants survive and reproduce, thus passing on the altruistic tendency (given the plausible assumption that something like a predisposition toward altruistic behavior is genetically inheritable). However, this same selection effect does not work for non-kin, since an altruistic act toward someone who is unrelated will not have the effect of increasing the odds of the survival of one's own offspring. This is, of course, a

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[20] See for example Arnon Levy and Yair Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 100, no. 3 (May 2020): 491-509, accessed June 3, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12554.

[21] W. D. Hamilton, "The Evolution of Altruistic Behavior," *The American Naturalist* 97, no. 896 (1963): 354-56. Accessed May 20, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2458473.

greatly oversimplified picture of kin selection, but enough of a start for the purposes of this dissertation.[22]

Hamilton himself felt that his theory of kin selection explained a great deal of not only evolutionary theory, but also human behavior – so much so that it caused him some discomfort. He writes of his dislike for the idea that his and his friends' behavior was explicable in terms of kin selection. He says, "I like always to imagine that I and we are above all that, subject to far more mysterious laws. In this prejudice, however, I seem, rather sadly, to have been losing more ground than I gain. The theory that I outline in the paper has turned out very successful."[23] (One might well ask the question why the thought of reducing morality to biological laws would cause emotional discomfort. Can that discomfort itself be explained as the operation of a biological law, or does it point to something else?)

This is not to say that the problem of altruism was solved by Hamilton. Hamilton's Rule at best only provides a very limited explanation of how self-sacrificial behavior could still be favored by natural selection, contrary to conventional wisdom, under certain conditions. However, altruistic behavior is observed in nature to a greater extent than what Hamilton's Rule alone would predict, and so biologists have developed other ideas to help explain this. Ruse, for example, gives in addition to kin selection the principle of reciprocity as the two primary mechanisms for producing help and cooperation.[24] Nowak further refines this, with three different forms of reciprocity in addition to kin selection (direct, indirect, and what he calls

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[22] For a more detailed introductory treatment of Hamilton's Rule, see Lee Alan Dugatkin, *The Altruism Equation: Seven Scientists Search for the Origins of Goodness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 86-106, Adobe PDF eBook.

[23] W. D. Hamilton, *Narrow Roads of Gene Land: The Collected Papers of W. D. Hamilton*, vol. 1, *Evolution of Social Behaviour* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1996), 2.

[24] Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 219, accessed June 4, 2020, Internet Archive.

network reciprocity).[25] Nowak includes group selection in his set of altruistic-promoting principles[26] even though many other biologists reject it.[27] Wilson and Sober, on the other hand, express confidence that group selection is still viable.[28]

The limitations of these explanations cannot be overstated. For example, kin selection can only explain behavior that is directed toward others who are closely related, such as immediate family members, not extending much further than first cousins. Explanations involving reciprocity are often derived from game theory, in particular a game known as the Prisoner's Dilemma. Different strategies have been suggested as a means to solving the Prisoner's Dilemma, including iterated versions of it. However, it is questionable just how well these scenarios actually model real-world interactions between different organisms.[29] Even the controversial idea of group selection, which appears to still be rejected by most contemporary biologists, is quite limited in that "it promotes both within-group niceness and between-group nastiness."[30] For the purposes of EDAs, however, the important idea is that the roots of morality are in theory traceable to our evolutionary ancestry, regardless of controversies over specific details of how it came about. At the same time, it should be noted that there does not appear to be

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[25] Nowak, 1560-61.

[26] Nowak, 1562.

[27] Ruse, for example, says that "Any 'group selection' analysis of behaviour, including human behaviour, falls before strong counter-evidence." Ruse, 218.

[28] See Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 34. Cf. David Sloan Wilson and Elliott Sober, "The Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise of Altruism in Evolutionary Biology," in Post et al., 182-91.

[29] See Philip Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 168, accessed June 14, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195147790.003.0007. For discussion of the Prisoner's Dilemma in connection with altruism, see Elliot Sober, "The ABCs of Altruism," in Post et al., 20-23.

[30] Sober and Wilson, 326. As Kellogg points out, this very idea was utilized by German biologists in Nazi Germany as a justification for the Nazi program. Vernon Kellogg, *Headquarters Nights* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1917), 29.

a full and satisfactory explanation of altruism from a purely evolutionary perspective, and the attempts to explain it appeal to a number of different mechanisms, starting at the very least with kin selection and reciprocity.

It also must be kept in mind that what we think of as altruism in a morally significant sense is different from, say, a honeybee sacrificing itself for the sake of the hive by stinging an intruder and dying in the process. Sober distinguishes evolutionary altruism from psychological altruism. Evolutionary altruism is behavior that enhances the fitness of the recipient (defined in evolutionary terms as ability to survive and reproduce) while decreasing the fitness of the donor.[31] Psychological altruism, on the other hand, has to do with motives or intentions and only applies to beings with minds.[32] Cloninger and Kedia argue in favor of limiting the word altruism to creatures with "the capacity for self-transcendence, which requires identification with what is beyond the existence of the individual."[33] They hold that "Altruism depends on brain structures that are only present in human beings and not in nonhuman primates."[34]

Thus, as Sussman and Cloninger write, "many would argue that only humans can be altruistic, even though the biological preconditions might be seen in nonhuman animals. The discrepancy between these positions can be constructively resolved by recognizing that there are many precursor functions that underlie the conscious expression of intentional altruistic behavior in human beings."[35] One part of the question with regard to EDAs is the extent to which

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[31] Sober, "ABCs of Altruism," 17. One complicating factor is that fitness can also be defined in relative terms, so that an altruistic act might increase the overall fitness of the donor while decreasing the relative fitness compared to other organisms. For the purposes of the present argument, this distinction is not important.

[32] Sober, "ABCs of Altruism," 18.

[33] C. Robert Cloninger and Sita Kedia, "The Phylogenesis of Human Personality: Identifying the Precursors of Cooperation, Altruism, and Well-Being," in Sussman and Cloninger, 97.

[34] Cloninger and Kedia, 97.

[35] Sussman and Cloninger, 2.

evolutionary altruism can explain psychological altruism, particularly since all sides acknowledge that there are other factors that influence human behavior besides evolutionary instincts. Thus, it is necessary to refine this picture in order to get a fuller grasp of the argument.

According to the general Darwinian view, then, altruistic behavior arose among social animals through natural selection by way of kin selection, various reciprocity relations, and possibly group selection. This was followed by the development of creatures with larger brains, ending in humans, in which these forces resulted in a cluster of dispositions toward certain kinds of behavior which are held to have binding authority over us in the form of a moral sense or moral intuitions. The theory thus implies that animals which are more closely related to humans in the evolutionary tree of life will exhibit behavior that bears a closer resemblance to human moral behavior.

The Moral Sense

Because of the gradualistic nature of his theory of evolution, Darwin's understanding of the development of the moral sense included two related ideas: first, that some humans (whom he called "savages," presumably in reference to indigenous tribal peoples) did not have the same capacity for morality as, say, a Victorian British gentleman, and also that some nonhuman species demonstrated capacities for behavior that, while not moral in the fullest sense of the term, at least showed the rudimentary precursors of a moral sense. For example, after speculating that an old dog might have a kind of self-consciousness, Darwin writes, "On the other hand, as Büchner has remarked, how little can the hard-worked wife of a degraded Australian savage, who uses hardly any abstract words and cannot count above four, exert her self-consciousness, or

reflect on the nature of her own existence."[36] Darwin actually wrote in opposition to those who took a high view of the moral nature of indigenous people, arguing that these "savages" had "insufficient powers of reasoning" as well as a lack of self-control from habit and religion to attain to the high morality of his day and age in Victorian England.[37]

It is also worth noting that many of the virtues that Darwin lauded as examples of a high moral sense included "hatred of indecency" and chastity. Darwin approvingly quotes Sir G. Staunton as saying the latter belongs exclusively "to civilised life."[38] This was in contrast to indigenous peoples, of which Darwin writes, "The greatest intemperance with savages is no reproach. Their utter licentiousness, not to mention unnatural crimes, is something astounding."[39] Darwin refers to the work of McLennan which includes examples such as the practice of polyandry, and kinship through females only.[40] McLennan attributes this latter practice to the fact that promiscuity was so widespread that male parentage was uncertain. Examples he gives includes the custom of having wives in common, lending wives and daughters to guests, frequent divorce, marriages for a limited, often short, duration, as well as widespread general promiscuity.[41]

Even in Darwin's day, his low opinion of the moral capacity of indigenous peoples was sometimes challenged by others.[42] Few, if any, Darwinists today would want to defend the

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[36] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:62.

[37] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:97.

[38] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:96.

[39] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:96.

[40] John F. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1865), 176.

[41] McLennan, 177-78.

[42] Alfred Wallace even went so far as to argue that the advanced moral capacities of indigenous peoples proved they couldn't have arisen through natural selection, since they possessed those abilities even though they served no purpose. See Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and*

premise that indigenous people lack essential attributes for advanced moral reasoning. This presents something of a challenge to the gradualist Darwinian view. The option does remain open to argue that what most people see as the clear demarcation between human and nonhuman species with regard to morality is not as stark as is commonly believed. One of the more extreme examples of this is the view of Bekoff and Pierce, who actually argue that we should not regard the behavior of nonhuman species as precursors to morality, but as the real thing.[43] At the opposite end of the spectrum, Kagan argues for the uniqueness of humans in five distinct capacities not found in nonhuman species, namely "The ability and habitual tendency to infer the thoughts and feelings of others," "Self-awareness," "Application of the categories 'good' and 'bad' to objects, events, and self," "Reflection on past actions," and "The ability to decide that a particular action could have been suppressed."[44]

Elsewhere, Kagan hints that his view is at odds with the majority, since in his view "Most natural scientists, even if they had not read him, would have agreed with T. H. Huxley that no clear line of demarcation between animals and humans exists, and therefore they were unwilling to ascribe to humans any qualities that would render them biologically distinctive."[45] At the same time, Kagan finds that "The reluctance to acknowledge the uniqueness of the human moral motive is a bit odd because biologists acknowledge unique traits in a large number of species. The spinning of webs by spiders, echolocation in bats, and imprinting in precocial birds are restricted to a particular genus or species. Unique characteristics are totally consistent with

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Behavior (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 183-84, accessed May 14, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[43] Bekoff and Pierce, 10. Of course, this requires a much more expansive definition of morality than most moral philosophers would probably be comfortable with, among other things. Ibid., 13.

[44] Jerome Kagan, "Morality, Altruism, and Love," in Post et al., 42.

[45] Jerome Kagan, *Three Seductive Ideas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 159, accessed March 25, 2020, Internet Archive.

Darwinian theory."[46] Some would argue that many examples of such remarkably unique traits in fact are not consistent with Darwinian theory,[47] which could explain the reluctance on the part of scientists to acknowledge the uniqueness of humans that Kagan articulates.

Having said that, Darwin himself had no such reservations when he wrote that, "We have no reason to suppose that any of the lower animals have this capacity. . . . But in the case of man, who alone can with certainty be ranked as a moral being, actions of a certain class are called moral, whether performed deliberately after a struggle with opposing motives, or from the effects of slowly-gained habit, or impulsively through instinct."[48] Adjudicating this question is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It does, however, raise the follow-up question – to what extent is the behavior of nonhuman species evidence of evolutionary precursors to human morality, as opposed to being assumed as such as a consequence of a strong commitment to Darwinian theory? If evidence of the continuity between humans and nonhuman species counts in favor of the larger Darwinian thesis, then evidence against that continuity should also count against. This question will become important later on. As far as EDAs are concerned, the immediate question is whether or not Darwinian theory presents a challenge to morality.

The challenge of EDAs, as has already been hinted at but will be seen at greater length below, is based on the commitment to Darwinism, including the assumption that everything about human nature can ultimately be attributed to the operation of underlying physical laws of nature over a long period of time. If that commitment can be shown to be strongly in tension with a commitment to moral realism, that is a very important consideration for moral philosophy

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[46] Kagan, *Three Seductive Ideas*, 164.

[47] See for example Balázs Hornyánszky and István Tasi, *Nature's I.Q.* (Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, 2009).

[48] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:88-89.

in general. In spite of Darwin's statement above about the uniqueness of humans in the moral sphere, he nevertheless did see the behavior of many other species as pointing to precursors to full-fledged human morality. Following Darwin, modern Darwinists also point to the behavior of many non-human species, particularly primates, as demonstrating such precursors. As we will see, this is taken by EDA proponents as another important piece of evidence that morality is an evolutionary adaptation, and that our moral beliefs are thus rife with the primitive influence passed down by our evolutionary forebears.

Morality in Animals?

Flack and de Waal highlight three main areas in which they argue that primates display signs of pre-moral behavior. These include reciprocal behaviors, conflict resolution, and behavior that might indicate a capacity for empathy.[49] Reciprocal behaviors cited by Flack and de Waal include food sharing as well as performing of services like grooming. They argue that, "Monkeys and apes appear capable of holding received services in mind, selectively repaying those individuals who performed the favours. They seem to hold negative acts in mind as well, leading to retribution and revenge."[50] With conflict resolution often relying on dominance relations, nevertheless Flack and de Waal find the presence of other mechanisms among monkeys and apes, specifically "reconciliation; consolation; impartial, protective, and pacifying interventions; and perhaps community concern."[51] Finally, they find that, "There is some evidence to suggest that apes, like humans, are capable of cognitive empathy but its existence in

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[49] Jessica C. Flack and Frans B.M. de Waal, "'Any Animal Whatever,'" in *Evolutionary Origins of Morality: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Leonard D. Katz (Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic, 2000), 4-19.

[50] Flack and de Waal, 9.

[51] Flack and de Waal, 16.

monkeys remains questionable."[52]

These findings are not, however, uncontested. Bernstein argues that none of the behaviors studied by Flack and de Waal require any inference to rudimentary pre-moral or moral systems.[53] Berstein observes that, "To the frustration of those of us who study animal behaviour, motivation is a private internal state."[54] This is not to say that Berstein disputes the conclusions of Flack and de Waal and others like them, but rather that demonstrating those conclusions is beyond the reach of scientific analysis.[55] With regard to the idea that the basis of human morality is present in other primates, he writes that, "Evolutionary theory and biological continuity support such a position. Surely if morality has a biological basis, its rudiments *must* [emphasis added] be present in the behaviour of non-human primates. Demonstrating the existence of these rudiments is quite another matter."[56] This raises the question of whether researchers such as Flack and de Waal are reading into the behavior of other animals motivations that are simply not present.

Another complication of this research is that it admits of very different conclusions about morality and moral systems depending on which data is used. Troyer argues that, "If you look to food-sharing and grooming behaviour in chimpanzees, you may find yourself agreeing with Kropotkin that cooperative anarchistic communities are the way to go. If you instead stumble on apes that are killing and eating their conspecifics, you may find yourself agreeing with Hobbes

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[52] Flack and de Waal, 19.

[53] I. S. Bernstein, "The Law of Parsimony Prevails: Missing Premises Allow Any Conclusion," in *Evolutionary Origins of Morality: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Leonard D. Katz (Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic, 2000), 31-34.

[54] Bernstein, 31.

[55] Bernstein, 34.

[56] Bernstein, 33.

that only a strong state and a large police force can keep us from annihilating one another."[57]

The central question that concerns us for the moment, however, is whether or not research into primate behavior provides supporting evidence for the empirical premise of the EDA, that evolutionary forces have greatly influenced our predispositions to form certain kinds of moral judgments. Flack and de Waal argue that, in spite of the fact that humans do have intellectual capacities that other animals lack, "it is also clear that we are born with powerful inclinations and emotions that bias our thinking and behaviour. It is in this area that many of the continuities with other animals lie."[58] Some of the critiques above would suggest that this conclusion is driven by what must be the case if Darwinian evolution is a true and largely complete account of human nature rather than by strictly evidentiary considerations.

An alternative theory is that our moral faculties are a product not of adaptation, but of exaptation. With exaptation, a biological structure that serves one purpose in an evolutionary ancestor is co-opted for a different purpose in the genealogical lineage. Pievani argues that precursors to human cooperation and altruism could have arisen in the form of "empathy, refusal of someone else's suffering, and reciprocity." Ancient hominids could have retained these traits for protection from predators. Later, these same acquired characteristics could have been exapted for more organized hunting, which in modern humans became a model of social organization "with division of the work and new forms of exploitation of ecosystems."[59] Among the advantages that Pievani sees with the exaptation model is that "We no longer need a radical

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[57] John Troyer, "Human and Other Natures," in *Evolutionary Origins of Morality: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Leonard D. Katz (Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic, 2000), 64.

[58] Flack and de Waal, 23.

[59] Telmo Pievani, "Born to Cooperate? Altruism as Exaptation and the Evolution of Human Sociality," in Sussman and Cloninger, 55.

discontinuity between our biology and our culture."[60] The interplay between biology and culture

will be expanded on below, but with respect to the debunking argument it matters little whether

adaptation or exaptation is the preferred evolutionary explanation. As we will see, the debunking

argument is that the evolutionary dispositions that we have inherited are not likely to lead to

moral truth even if moral truths exist. There is no obvious reason why an exaptation model

would be any more likely than an adaptation model to avoid the debunking challenge. The issue

of culture that Pievani alludes to will be examined more closely later.

Moral Sense Theory Revisited

Returning to theories about the evolution of the moral sense, Monroe, Martin, and Ghosh

argue that the evidence from developmental psychology, the study of animal behavior, and

neuroscience "provide a scientific foundation for the idea of an innate moral sense."[61] In making

this argument, they utilize much of the same research already touched on above, including de

Waal,[62] Haidt,[63] and others. While their main interest has to do with the implications of moral

sense theory for politics, they do not directly address the metaethical implications of it. One of

their central claims is that "much of what is deemed 'moral reasoning' (a la Kant, Kohlberg, et

al.) is often in fact post hoc rationalizing of judgments already made."[64] Our actual moral

judgments are, in their view, primarily emotional rather than rational, and "The evidence . . .

suggests human beings are born with constrained repertoires of behavior for a variety of bodily

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[60] Pievani, 56.

[61] Kristen Renwick Monroe, Adam Martin, and Priyanka Ghosh, "Politics and an Innate Moral Sense: Scientific Evidence for an Old Theory?" *Political Research Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2009): 629, accessed February 12, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/40232405.

[62] Monroe et al., 621f.

[63] Monroe et al., 625f.

[64] Monroe et al., 626.

and social functions; moral behavior is likely consonant with these evolutionarily constrained

faculties."[65]

The closest Monroe and company come to addressing the metaethical implications of this

is when they write,

> The work from animal behavior as a whole seems to answer one critique of moral sense
> theory: How do we resolve differences between one person's moral sense and another
> person's? The external standard that critics of moral sense theory have asked for may be
> provided by the regularity of behavior in the animal kingdom. If all animals show a
> concern for the group and caring for others, is this not strong evidence of the need for
> such behavior as a part of our biologically determined need to flourish as human
> beings?[66]

Contrary to Monroe and company, it isn't critics of moral sense theory that ask for an external

standard for morality, but critics of moral realism. However, the problem with this approach, as

many commentators have pointed out, is that virtually any behavior that one wishes to use as a

standard can be found in the animal kingdom. While Monroe and company point to concern for

the group and care for others as an external standard, one could just as easily point to animal

behavior that resembles revenge and spite. In fact, George Price showed that Hamilton's Rule

could be used to predict not just altruistic behavior, but also cruelty.[67] Thus, there is no

independent reason to select one over the other as an external standard for morality. One would

have to already have an existing set of values to map onto the data in order to justify such a

proposition, but in that case it would be the predetermined set of values that is the actual

standard, rather than the behavior of animals. What matters for the purposes of this study is to

see how this empirical data is used in showing how evolutionary forces may have been

responsible for the creation of a moral sense in Darwinian fashion.

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[65] Monroe et al., 628.

[66] Monroe et al., 630.

[67] See Dugatkin, ch. 6.

As we have seen, theorizing on the development of the moral sense in human beings includes study of nonhuman animals (especially primates), as well as study of human moral development. With regard to reliance on studies of animals, this approach raises the specter of anthropomorphism – that researchers will interpret animal behavior as involving human-like phenomenology from the standpoint of the animal. Cloninger and Kedia warn against this, arguing that "Communication and understanding are compromised when people attribute functions like intimacy to species that have no brain capacity for emotionality, taboo or culture to species that have no capacity for symbolization, or altruism to species that have no capacity for self-awareness."[68] Bekoff and Pierce, in stark contrast, fully embrace anthropomorphism, writing that the negative attitude toward it in science, as well as the negative attitude toward anecdotal evidence, is "a prejudice that science needs to get over."[69] They argue that, "Anthropomorphism endures because it is a necessity, but it also must be done carefully, consciously, empathetically, and from the point of view of the animal, always asking, 'What is it like to be that individual?' We must make every attempt to maintain the animal's point of view. We must repeatedly ask, 'What is that individual's experience?'"[70]

The worry, of course, is that by asking the question about an animal, "what is that individual's experience?" we are naturally going to use imagination to picture ourselves in the same set of circumstances and think of what the experience would be like for us as humans. Thus it seems absurd to suggest that we engage in anthropomorphism from the point of view of the animal, since this is actually the problem with anthropomorphism to begin with. It is a virtual

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[68] Cloninger and Kedia, 98. It should be noted that their argument is based on differences in physical brain structure, and thus requires no special assumptions concerning metaphysical differences between animals and humans.

[69] Bekoff and Pierce, 40.

[70] Bekoff and Pierce, 42.

certainty that the experience of the animal is not like our experience would be in the same set of circumstances. There is also no way to ever know what it is like for the animal.[71] When Bekoff and Pierce write that "we will never know *exactly* what it is like to be a wolf,"[72] they imply that we might get pretty close by imagining ourselves in that situation. But in fact we can't even know if we are in the ballpark. In fact, because of the physiological differences between humans and other species, we can be sure that we are *not* in the ballpark. As Cloninger and Kedia write, "People can observe the behavioral expressions and responses of dogs and may empathically project what another human being would feel if they showed the same expressions and behavioral responses. However, dogs simply cannot have the same affective experience that human beings can imagine they might be having."[73]

Katz makes the observation that there is something of a generational divide among researchers with respect to this very issue, with a "progressive relaxation of norms against ascribing cognitive and conscious states to nonhuman animals in behavioural science."[74] That is to say, older researchers take a more stringent line against any kind of anthropomorphism, while younger researchers are far more open to it. Furthermore, much of the work in this areas appears to rely on a relatively small number of studies, with work by de Waal and Haidt being the most frequently relied upon.[75] Thus the question of anecdotal evidence becomes more of a concern, as well as the issue of anthropomorphism. These are certainly vulnerabilities for evolutionary

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[71] Nagel discusses this problem in terms of the general problem of subjective and objective. See Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435-450.

[72] Bekoff and Pierce, 44.

[73] Cloninger and Kedia, 97.

[74] Katz, xi.

[75] See Joshua Greene, "The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Truth about Morality and What to Do about It" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 188f., accessed July 24, 2020, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

explanations of morality. How they are handled by debunkers will be seen below. But these issues do have the potential to call into question just how objective the findings of researchers in these areas are.

In addition, Kagan might be on to something when he says that "The stringent positivist standards in the biological disciplines require a degree of experimental control that can only be achieved with animals. As a result, investigations of fear, perception, memory, and conditioning, all of which can be studied in animals, take precedence over the study of moral motives and emotions, which have no obvious analogue in animals. There can be no mouse model for human pride, shame, or guilt."[76] Beyond this limitation, he also notes that strong experimental methods are more likely to result in professional success for those researching in this area, but some of the discoveries produced by them "are not very relevant to an understanding of human ethical choice."[77] Nevertheless, as far as evolutionary theory is concerned, there appears to be substantial agreement that "human beings are born with constrained repertoires of behavior for a variety of bodily and social functions; moral behavior is likely consonant with these evolutionarily constrained faculties."[78] With this background in mind, we now turn our attention to EDA proponents themselves.

The Empirical Premise of EDAs

The material that has been examined above, for the most part, comes not from the arguments of EDA proponents, but from evolutionary biologists and researchers (including Darwin himself). The thinkers cited above are not writing with an agenda to debunk morality,

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[76] Kagan, *Three Seductive Ideas*, 161.

[77] Kagan, *Three Seductive Ideas*, 162.

[78] Monroe et al., 628.

and, generally speaking, do not even touch on questions of metaethics even though such questions seem to follow quite naturally from their theorizing. It is important to ask if the arguments of EDA proponents generally line up with the kinds of arguments that are put forward by evolutionary researchers as it pertains to the genealogical history of our moral belief-forming faculties, understood from the standpoint of Darwinian science. To answer this question, we must now examine in some detail the arguments put forward by EDA proponents themselves for comparison. While many EDA proponents give little more than a cursory treatment of the empirical premise, there are some notable exceptions. Ruse, Joyce, Kitcher, and, to a lesser extent, Street, give detailed treatments of how evolutionary forces are thought to have shaped our moral faculties and beliefs by appealing to the findings of evolutionary biologists.[79]

In *Taking Darwin Seriously*, Ruse presents a detailed defense of Darwinian evolution in general and how it bears on philosophical issues in epistemology and ethics. The central argument for debunking is found in the sixth and final chapter. To begin with, Ruse rejects group selection as a viable explanation of cooperation leading to the precursors of morality.[80] In this regard, Ruse is in line with the majority view of biologists, but again the issue makes no difference with regard to the overall debunking argument. He does cite kin selection and reciprocity as the two primary mechanisms favored by Darwinians for the evolution of helping and cooperative behavior.[81] Kin selection in particular he lauds as "one of the great triumphs of twentieth-century biology."[82]

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[79] Ruse; Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), accessed May 23, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central; Philip Kitcher, *The Ethical Project* (Cumberland: Harvard University Press, 2011), Adobe PDF eBook; Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," Philosophical Studies 127, no. 1 (January 2006): 109-66, accessed May 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-005-1726-6.

[80] Ruse, 218.

[81] Ruse, 201.

[82] Ruse, 224.

Ruse also appeals to animal behavior that bears a resemblance to human morality, pointing in particular to de Waal's study of primates.[83] What is at issue for Ruse is not whether all of our behavior is controlled by reciprocity or kin selection, but "whether we have innate tendencies or dispositions inclining us to social thoughts and actions, which later would improve our reproductive chances."[84] Darwinian forces are responsible for our basic moral inclinations, but culture still plays a role in developing them.[85] He likens this to a skeleton (our biology) and flesh (culture), while he leaves "relatively unexplored the ways in which cultures, under the influence of biology, actually develop."[86] Ruse's argument is that the science behind our moral inclinations forces the committed Darwinian to the conclusion that morality is subjective.[87] While he calls this "little more than a statement of faith" at this stage of the argument,[88] he does proceed to give further arguments in support of it. As those arguments relate to the epistemic premise of the EDA, however, consideration of them will be put on hold until chapter two.

Maybe because Ruse's book-length argument for antirealism based on Darwinism is older, it doesn't receive nearly as much attention in recent works as the arguments of Joyce and Street. These are by far the two most-discussed EDAs in the literature. Joyce's argument in particular is worth discussing concerning the evolutionary genealogy of our moral faculties and beliefs due to the fact that, like Ruse's, it is a book-length argument. Many commentators on Joyce in fact pay little attention to his extended discussion of the empirical premise. The first five chapters of *The Evolution of Morality* deal with various aspects of the theory of evolution as

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[83] Ruse, 228.

[84] Ruse, 230.

[85] Ruse, 234-35.

[86] Ruse, 235n5.

[87] Ruse, 252.

[88] Ruse, 252.

it relates to morality, and only in chapter six is Joyce's debunking argument laid out in detail.

Joyce begins in chapter one of *Evolution of Morality* with a discussion of the problem of altruism, although he limits the use of the term to acting with the intention of helping another with a non-instrumental motivation of concern for the other's welfare (in contrast to selfishness).[89] The important point, argues Joyce, is that natural selection has favored certain kinds of helpful behavior in humans, which is regulated by the proximate mechanism of altruism and morality. He writes, "In order to make an organism successfully helpful, natural selection may favor the trait of making moral judgments."[90] The means by which these traits evolved are already familiar from the material covered above. Joyce includes kin selection,[91] direct reciprocity,[92] indirect reciprocity,[93] and the controversial idea of group selection[94] in his explanation of the evolution of altruism, including a separate category of what he calls mutualism. This last principle he takes as describing helping behavior which does not sacrifice fitness for the helper.[95]

In explaining the evolution of our moral sense, it should be noted that Joyce seeks to explain how a moral sense *was* adaptive, not that it necessarily is or continues to be adaptive.[96] He acknowledges that it is beyond the capability of researchers to say how natural selection

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[89] Joyce, 14.

[90] Joyce, 16-17.

[91] Joyce, 19-22.

[92] Joyce, 24-31.

[93] Joyce, 31-33.

[94] Joyce, 31-33. Joyce suggests that reciprocity might be a form of group selection, but nothing of importance rests on this distinction with respect to his EDA.

[95] Joyce, 23.

[96] Joyce, 107.

worked to bring about our moral sense.[97] At the same time, he writes that, "I take seriously the

hypothesis that human morality is a trait that was not selected for. It may be akin to one of

Gould's spandrels: a fortuitous by-product of natural selection, with no evolutionary function."[98]

This seems to create a situation in which the naturalistic origins of the moral sense are a foregone

conclusion. Even if it becomes too problematic to explain the moral sense by Darwinian

adaptation, it can be explained naturalistically some other way.

Joyce argues that the universality of the moral sense is evidence that it is innate, rather

than something that is learned or acquired. "No one would deny that cultural learning plays a

central role in determining *the content* of the moral judgments that an individual ends up making;

the claim is that there is a specialized innate mechanism (or series of mechanisms) designed to

enable this type of learning."[99] The evidence he offers for this comes from research into the

moral development of children. In particular he notes the ability of very young children to

distinguish between moral and conventional norms, as well as an "extremely reliable sequence"

of moral development in general.[100] He further notes that this is a cross-cultural ability.[101]

While the evolutionary processes discussed above had a major role in human ancestry

according to Joyce, he also says that they work only for small groups.[102] He argues that, "This is

not a problem for the hypothesis of this book, for it is quite possible that morality evolved when

our ancestors were still in relatively small bands."[103] Kitcher echoes this when he argues that a

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[97] Joyce, 133.

[98] Joyce, 134.

[99] Joyce, 137.

[100] Joyce, 135.

[101] Joyce, 136.

[102] Joyce, 40.

[103] Joyce, 40.

capacity for normative guidance evolved from altruistic dispositions as the early hominid ancestors of humans lived together in larger groups.[104] The progression to full-blown morality involved additional factors, as psychological mechanisms in humans developed through natural selection which then in turn became the means of transmitting prosocial cultural traits.[105] Cultural evolution thus took over after the foundations of the moral sense were laid down by natural selection, working through the mechanisms given above. Joyce in particular argues that indirect reciprocity is most likely the process responsible for the moral sense,[106] but again the particular details are not crucial to the force of the debunking argument.

Street's approach to the genealogical issue is different from the detailed evolutionary explanations presented by Ruse, Joyce, and Kitcher. Instead of giving details of evolutionary theory on the development of the moral sense, Street begins with our evaluative judgments and works backwards. Specifically, she posits that certain kinds of evaluative judgments, such as endangering one's own survival and causing harm to one's own kin, for example, would have a very negative impact on one's success at survival and reproduction. Meanwhile, other kinds of evaluative judgments, such as promoting one's own survival and caring for one's own offspring, would have a correspondingly positive impact on survival and reproductive success.[107] She argues that the fact that so many of our evaluative judgments correspond to what promotes reproductive success, and the absence of judgments which have the opposite tendency, is evidence "in favor of the view that natural selection has had a tremendous influence on that

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[104] Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," 172.

[105] Joyce, 42.

[106] Joyce, 44.

[107] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 114.

content."[108] Among the evolutionary explanations for tendencies toward certain specific kinds of

judgments, Street includes kin selection and reciprocal altruism, in line with the arguments given

by Ruse, Joyce, and Kitcher.[109]

As with the other writers that we have looked at, Street considers the observable behavior

of many nonhuman species, particularly those closer to humans in the evolutionary tree, to be

additional evidence of the influence of evolutionary forces on our evaluative tendencies. She

appeals to the behavior of chimpanzees in such things as grooming and sharing food as an

example of nonhuman animals experiencing certain behavior as "called for."[110] She concludes

that, "We may view many of our evaluative judgements as conscious, reflective endorsements of

more basic evaluative tendencies that we share with other animals."[111] In Street's view, however,

this does not mean that the content of evaluative judgments is directly heritable. Instead, she

argues that the influence of evolutionary forces on our evaluative judgments is indirect in

shaping our basic evaluative tendencies.[112] According to Street's view, other factors can and do

influence the judgments that we actually make. These include other biological forces such as

genetic drift, not to mention that "many other forces were not evolutionary at all, but rather

social, cultural, historical, or of some other kind. And then there is the crucial and *sui generis*

influence of rational reflection that must also be taken into account."[113]

Still, in setting the stage for her epistemic argument (which she presents in the form of a

dilemma which we will look at in more detail in chapter two), Street maintains that the influence

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[108] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 117.

[109] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 116.

[110] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 117.

[111] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 117.

[112] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 120.

[113] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 113-14.

of evolutionary forces on our evaluative judgments is pervasive through the basic underlying tendencies that we have inherited from our evolutionary ancestors and which we share with other creatures. She also argues that "The truth of some account very roughly along these lines is all that is required for the Darwinian Dilemma to get off the ground."[114] Some might raise the question of just how "roughly" the genealogical account needs to line up with what Street has presented in order to serve as the basis for her argument. With all of these debunking arguments, the specific details at every step are controversial. This might lead one to conclude that the entire argument is therefore suspect, and rests on a faulty foundation. Objections of this kind will be considered below. For the debunkers, however, getting the specific details of the causal premise right is not necessary, and it is important to understand why, from their perspective, that it the case.

How Close Is "Close Enough"?

The reason why the specific details are not so important for the debunker is that this theorizing is not meant to show how the human moral sense developed, but merely to develop a theory of how it *could* have. Joyce, for example, writes that, "remember that the objective is to show how helping behavior *could* develop through the forces of biological natural selection."[115] Ruse also is explicit about the standard for the debunker as far as the empirical premise is concerned, stating that, "At the empirical level, the biologist has got to make good the claim that he can show, through natural selection, how the moral capacity or sense *could* [emphasis added] have evolved."[116] In putting forth his own theory of how morality evolved, Kitcher writes that,

A 'how possibly' explanation is important because we sometimes wonder whether a

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[114] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 121.

[115] Joyce, 37 [italics original].

[116] Ruse, 100.

chain of occurrences *could* have occurred, or whether the occurrence of the sequence is permitted by a particular theory. . . . It would be marvelous, of course, to be able to say how the history actually went, but, given the temporal remoteness of the events and the limitations of our evidence, modesty is required. In the context of rebutting the skeptical challenge, modesty—settling for 'how possibly'—is enough.[117]

To be clear, the skeptical challenge that Kitcher refers to here is the challenge of those who might be skeptical that a naturalistic explanation such as Darwinian evolution can fully explain moral phenomena.[118] Street likewise approaches the empirical premise with initial caution when she writes that, "it must suffice to emphasize the hypothetical nature of my arguments, and to say that while I am skeptical of the *details* of the evolutionary picture I offer, I think its *outlines* are certain enough to make it well worth exploring the philosophical implications."[119]

But the question might well be raised if a "how possibly" explanation is a solid enough base on which to build an argument such as the EDA. "Possibly" is, after all, not the same as "probably." While all of the debunkers just cited take an appropriately modest approach to the evidence for the empirical premise, they reach epistemic conclusions that are much stronger. In his chapter on "Biology and Ethics," Kitcher makes an insightful comment. While it is in the context of his theory of how the transition in early hominids to what he calls a "capacity for normative guidance" came about, it could well be applied to the entire empirical premise of the EDA. Kitcher says, "The principal reason for taking the possibility seriously lies in the difficulty of thinking of serious rivals."[120] It is not expressed what counts as a "serious" rival, but one gets the feeling that a serious rival would be one that fits within the naturalistic framework of modern science, and in particular a Darwinian one. In the introduction to *The Ethical Project*, Kitcher

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[117] Kitcher, *Ethical Project*, 12.

[118] "To answer skeptics claiming that 'real ethics' requires resources naturalists cannot allow, some narrative needs to be given." Kitcher, *Ethical Project*, 12.

[119] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 113.

[120] Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," 172.

writes that his position on the evolution of ethics, which he terms pragmatic naturalism, allows

"only such novel entities as can be justified through accepted methods of rigorous inquiry.

Appeals to divine will, to a realm of values, to faculties of ethical perception and 'pure practical

reason,' have to go."[121]

There is also another worry that might be raised in connection with all of the theories that

have been touched on above about altruism and the development of the moral sense, which is

this: how can we even know that anything like the proposed theories really is possible? It is easy

to say on paper. If the question is one of mere logical possibility, that would hardly seem to

require argument. There is no obvious way to show that it is *logically* impossible for something

like the human moral sense to develop stepwise over a long period of time through a chain of

cause-and-effect. It is worth keeping in mind that, for the Darwinist, there *must* be a natural

explanation of how our moral faculties developed by natural processes. This is crucial in setting

the stage for the debunking argument that stems from it. Resisting the causal premise will be

quite difficult for the committed naturalist, and will require more than simply pointing out that

there are plenty of holes in the theory of how morality developed over the course of evolutionary

history that seem to be filled with a lot of just so stories. In one particularly telling passage, Ruse

writes that, "We know that evolution occurred, that it was Darwinian in nature, and that humans

are part of the natural order. Therefore, in something as important to us as our morality, there is a

strong presumption that natural selection will have had a causal influence. Such a presumption

may ultimately prove wrong. I doubt anyone expects a definitive case. Nevertheless, we go into

our enquiry with a great deal of positive background knowledge."[122] There are several hidden

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[121] Kitcher, *Ethical Project*, 3-4.

[122] Ruse, 224.

assumptions packed into this statement. Perhaps the most significant is the underlying assumption that no other important force or forces had anything to do with the development of our underlying human nature, which includes our moral faculties. The main alternative to Darwinism that Ruse considers (and rejects) is Lamarckism, in which traits can be acquired and passed on to one's descendants.[123] Forces which are not explicable in terms of natural laws are excluded from any consideration at all. The question thus becomes whether or not Darwinism can adequately explain the phenomenon of morality. If the conclusion is that it can, then that raises the metaethical question of the status of moral beliefs.

In cases such as Kitcher, it is unclear if his rejection of moral realism is a conclusion that follows from Darwinism, or if it is a presumption based on naturalism and the Darwinian theorizing is simply an attempt to explain why most people believe in objective moral truth when there is no such thing. Kitcher offers not so much of a debunking argument as a debunking starting point with a Darwinian explanation of moral beliefs. One might wonder if Ruse is in the same boat, although in an autobiographical note in *Taking Darwin Seriously*, Ruse writes that he was a professional philosopher for twenty years before questioning whether his Darwinism might have a bearing on the question of the objectivity of morality – a question which he eventually answered with the conclusion that morality is subjective.[124]

<center>Objections to the Empirical Premise</center>

Before we can move on to discussion of the epistemic premise in the next chapter, we first must consider challenges to the empirical premise. The first objection to be examined is the

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[123] Ruse, 44.

[124] Ruse, xii-xiii; 252. Ruse relates that it was his participation in a trial against creationists that prompted his reevaluation of the relationship between Darwinism and moral truths. Thus it appears that Ruse at least began as a moral realist but was led to change his view because of the outworking of his commitment to Darwinian evolution.

question of whether or not the arguments of the debunkers are adequate to establish that

evolutionary forces have, in fact, had as pervasive an influence on our evaluative and moral

judgments as the debunker maintains.

FitzPatrick is one who answers this question in the negative. According to him, the only

thing that can be shown by the empirical premise is that to the extent that evolutionary forces

have shaped our moral beliefs, that influence was not truth-tracking. However, the really crucial

question is "Q: *How much* influence has natural selection *actually* had on the content of *our*

current moral beliefs, by influencing ancestral moral belief-forming dispositions to whatever

extent it did?"[125] FitzPatrick holds that "Everything depends on the correct answer to Q, and this

issue deserves far greater attention than it receives in these discussions."[126] Because of this,

FitzPatrick thinks that the conclusions of the debunkers are not as scientific as they purport to be,

but simply beg the question against moral realism. He concludes that, "Not only do current

debunking arguments fail, but it is hard to see how evolutionary biology will ever be in a

position to debunk ethical realism."[127]

FitzPatrick's larger argument appeals to the idea that we can use rational reflection to

compensate for any evolutionary influence on our moral judgments. This is a common move

from moral realists who attempt to resist the EDA, but as it falls under realist responses to the

debunking challenge, it will be discussed at length in chapter three. With respect to the empirical

premise, the point for now is that, at least in FitzPatrick's mind, the debunker has a burden to

demonstrate with much more accuracy the extent to which evolution has influenced our moral

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[125] William J. FitzPatrick, "Why There is No Darwinian Dilemma for Ethical Realism," in *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution*, ed. Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 242, accessed June 30, 2020, Oxford Scholarship Online.

[126] FitzPatrick, 242.

[127] FitzPatrick, 237.

beliefs. As we have seen above, the debunkers themselves acknowledge the speculative nature of the arguments. If the realist demands scientific precision, free from just-so storytelling, then likely the debunker is bound to fall short. At the same time, the response of the debunker might well be to ask, as Kitcher does, what the alternative explanation is. FitzPatrick's argument here is more of an attempt to shift the burden of proof back to the debunker to prove that evolutionary forces have had a pervasive distorting effect on our moral beliefs. The debunker, however, would counter that the burden is on FitzPatrick and his fellow anti-debunkers to show how evolutionary forces could produce moral faculties that track with mind-independent moral truths.

The burden-of-proof question will be discussed further in chapter three, but the prima facie case appears stronger with the debunkers. That is, if our moral faculties are really a product of unguided natural selection, then Darwinists who wish to argue for the reliability of our moral faculties have a burden to show how that could be the case. One aspect of this argument also touches on the nature of moral truths. If they are based on discrete, intuitive judgments as opposed to principles of reason, this could make a difference. These questions will be set aside until chapter three as well.

Levy and Levy challenge the argument that the empirical premise of the debunking argument still works even if the details of any particular argument are mistaken. Their aim is to show that both empirical and theoretical considerations "combine to cast doubt on the availability of a satisfactory evolutionary explanation, suitable for the debunker's aims."[128] Against the arguments of Joyce and Street, they suggest that "there is no plausible alternative hypothesis that Street or Joyce *could appeal to* to vindicate their respective debunking

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[128] Levy and Levy, 492.

projects."[129] Even a tentative argument to this effect would put a significant damper on the

enthusiasm of debunkers, so it is worth examining Levy and Levy's arguments more closely.

While Levy and Levy claim that their argument focuses on the causal premise,[130] in fact a

number of their objections seem more of an attempt undermine either the epistemic premise or

the conclusion. Their own version of the causal (empirical) premise of the EDA is very typical:

"One's belief that p (for a moral p) is explained by evolution through natural selection."[131]

However, one of the first objections they raise against Joyce is that his debunking argument

would overgeneralize beyond the moral domain into other areas such as prudential and epistemic

beliefs, and thus potentially be self-defeating.[132] This is an important objection which has been

noted by many commentators (including Joyce), and will be addressed in chapter three.

However, it is not an objection to the causal premise of the EDA per se. Instead, it is better seen

as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire debunking argument, which has different possible

outcomes.[133]

Where Levy and Levy do make a hit on the empirical premise, however, it is in response

to Joyce's argument that the universality of the moral sense is evidence of its evolutionary

origins. Levy and Levy call some of the research relied upon by Joyce into question, particularly

studies by Turiel. In support of this, they cite research by Machery and Mallon.[134] However, a

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[129] Levy and Levy, 492.

[130] "Our approach is novel in focusing on the causal premise, which has received considerably less attention compared to the epistemic premise or the validity of the argument." Levy and Levy, 492.

[131] Levy and Levy, 491.

[132] Levy and Levy, 495-96.

[133] In fact this objection is reflected in Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. But rather than undermining the causal premise, it actually serves to undermine belief in the conjunction of naturalism and evolution, which may not be the result that Levy and Levy are hoping for. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[134] Levy and Levy, 497.

careful reading of Machery and Mallon shows that in fact they themselves recognize they are going against the received wisdom of contemporary psychology.[135] While it is outside of the scope of this dissertation to adjudicate this dispute, Levy and Levy's objection appears to be much weaker than they make it out to be. In addition, Machery and Mallon's argument is that younger children consider *all* norms to be moral, and that the development of coming to see some norms as merely conventional may happen at different times.[136] However, this does nothing to damage Joyce's argument that a moral sense appears to be innate rather than learned. Also, Levy and Levy attempt to undermine the argument that morality is adaptive.[137] However, as shown above, Joyce only argues that morality was adaptive in the past, not that it necessarily is at present. He also holds that it could be a trait which was not selected for at all, in which case Levy and Levy's argument falls flat.

In addressing the causal premise, Kahane argues that "It is not enough if a causal explanation cites factors that are off track. The full causal explanation of any belief will inevitably cite such factors."[138] As an illustration, he says that if Einstein had had more musical ability, he might never have discovered relativity.[139] While some commentators do use counterfactual arguments against EDAs, this particular counterfactual is not quite the same. One counterfactual debunking argument says that if moral realism is true and moral truths were different, we would still have the same moral beliefs that we do at present because of the

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[135] Edouard Machery and Ron Mallon, "Evolution of Morality," in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, by John M. Doris and The Moral Psychology Research Group (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33, accessed September 27, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199582143.003.0002.

[136] Machery and Mallon, 33-34.

[137] Levy and Levy, 497.

[138] Kahane, 106.

[139] Kahane, 106.

influence of evolutionary forces. Another form of counterfactual is that if evolution had taken a different path (such as Darwin's argument about honeybees above), our moral beliefs would be different even if the moral truths were the same. With these counterfactuals, there is a direct relationship between our moral beliefs and the counterfactual claim. With Kahane's illustration of Einstein, the relationship is indirect – Einstein wouldn't have discovered relativity because he was too busy playing piano instead. Thus the parallel that Kahane tries to make is tenuous at best.

However, Kahane does have a point in that there are factors in the causal history of our beliefs which have no connection with the truth or falsity of those beliefs. By themselves, such factors are insufficient to call those beliefs into question, provided there are other justifications for them. In the case of moral beliefs, however, this is the crucial question. If our moral beliefs are based on moral intuitions, then the origin of those intuitions takes on a much greater importance than would be the case if other justifications were available. As Kahane admits, "Debunking explanations of such intuitions can leave a belief lacking both actual and alternative support."[140] Kahane's own conclusion about how successful EDAs are is somewhat ambiguous, as we will see below.

With regard to the empirical premise, Vavova writes that, "The debunker claims that evolutionary forces have shaped our moral beliefs. The evolutionary psychology behind this empirical claim is controversial. Both sides should acknowledge this and move on."[141] Instead, Vavova wants to focus on the conditional that if something like the empirical premise of the EDA is true, then what are the implications of that for the status of moral beliefs. She writes,

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[140] Kahane, 107.

[141] Katia Vavova, "Evolutionary Debunking of Moral Realism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 2 (2015): 104, accessed June 14, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12194.

"We should examine this conditional even if we think its antecedent false. Something very much like it – in form, if not content – may be true."[142] Vavova dismisses two possible responses to the debunker's challenge, namely to reject moral realism or to reject the conclusions of evolutionary science.[143] Instead, she argues in favor of what is often referred to as a third-factor account, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three.[144]

Vavova is correct in saying that the evolutionary psychology behind the debunking claim is controversial, but this masks an important distinction. As we have seen, there are various controversies about specific details, such as whether group selection is a viable explanation, and many specific details concerning the evolution of our moral faculties. However, anyone committed to Darwinian evolution very much appears to be committed to something like the debunkers' explanation in general form. Thus Vavova's statement that something like this *may* be true – again, for someone who is committed to the conclusions of Darwinian science – is too weak. Kitcher's question above about the difficulty of thinking of any serious rival would appear to have enough force against any naturalistic view of morality as to place the burden of proof on the side of moral realists who wish to defend Darwinism to explain exactly how that would be possible. Before getting to that, however, we first need a clearer understanding of how the empirical premise debunks moral beliefs in combination with the epistemic premise. The next chapter will examine in detail the epistemic premise of the EDA and how it supposedly leads to a debilitating conclusion for moral realism.

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[142] Vavova, 104.

[143] Vavova, 108.

[144] Vavova, 112f.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has examined the empirical premise of EDAs. This premise argues that evolutionary forces have had a pervasive effect on our moral judgments in that it was those forces which formed our moral faculties. In support of this premise, theories of evolutionary researchers concerning the evolution of altruism, cooperation, and the moral sense were considered in some detail. These theories did not come from the debunkers themselves, but rather from scientists who were seeking to explain the puzzle of how Darwinian evolution could account for altruistic behavior and for moral phenomena in humans. These theories were compared with the arguments of debunkers, and were found to be consonant with them. Attempts to reject the empirical premise were found to fall short. The conclusion of this chapter is that the empirical premise of EDAs is well-supported by the academic literature. This lays the foundation for a significant challenge to anyone who wants to both defend moral realism and remain committed to Darwinian evolution as a full and complete explanation of human nature. Whether this challenge can be met by moral realists will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING OF MORALITY

In the first chapter we examined the basis for what is called the empirical or causal premise of EDAs. In essence, Darwinian theory gives us reason to believe that our moral faculties (roughly understood as those physiological/mental faculties that help to produce moral intuitions and beliefs) were a result of natural selection working through processes involving things such as kin selection and reciprocity to produce cooperative behavior that would confer measurable benefits in terms of evolutionary fitness. Given that this is the case, it poses something of a challenge for those who believe that our moral beliefs give us knowledge of moral truths which exist independently of what anyone believes about them.

The precise nature of that challenge, however, is the subject of some dispute. It has been formulated in several different ways. This chapter will examine exactly how the empirical premise is thought to challenge morality. We will look at both limited and global forms of EDAs. In addition, we will examine the complicated question of whether EDAs constitute a unique challenge to morality, and, if so, what form that challenge should be thought to take.

Defending the Epistemic Premise

Ruse and Subjectivism

In the previous chapter, we saw that Ruse's conclusion to his debunking argument was that morality is subjective rather than objective. That was left hanging as a "statement of faith" by his own admission. However, he follows that "statement of faith" by presenting arguments in

favor of subjectivism and against objectivism.[145] Ruse writes, "As we know, the big weakness of traditional subjectivism is that it fails to account for the true nature of our moral experience. The whole point about morality is that it is binding, not open to individual choice. It is greater than and above any of us. In other words, it has all of the features that we associate with objectivity."[146] Ruse argues that the Darwinian explanation handles this issue not by explaining how morality actually does have binding authority, but rather why we think it does. Ruse writes, "The point about morality (says the Darwinian) is that it is an adaptation to get us to go beyond regular wishes, desires and fears, and to interact socially with people. How does it get us to do this? By filling us full of thoughts about obligations and duties, and so forth. And the key to what is going on is that we are then moved to action, precisely because we think morality is something laid upon us."[147]

Ruse's argument, then, is that Darwinism accounts for the "true nature of our moral experience" by informing us that we are mistaken about its true nature. Ruse says the weakness of traditional subjectivism is that it fails to account for why we think of morality as objectively binding, but it should be noted that there are non-Darwinian explanations for this phenomenon.[148] Certainly it is crucial for an argument against moral realism to be able to account for moral beliefs, but this does not constitute an argument against realism. The lack of any plausible naturalistic account of morality having actual binding authority leads Joyce to

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[145] Ruse, 252f. Ruse also includes discussion of Hume's law and free will which are outside the scope of this dissertation and not directly relevant to the debunking argument. Because of that, I omit discussion of them here.

[146] Ruse, 252.

[147] Ruse, 253.

[148] For example see J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 42f., Kindle ebook.

reject moral naturalism as a viable metaethical theory.[149] But Joyce doesn't offer this as an

argument against moral realism; rather, he argues that naturalism lacks the resources to ground

actual binding authority (which he calls "practical clout").[150]

In case anyone were to think that this does away with morality altogether, Ruse writes, "I

am certainly not saying that morality is unreal. Of course it is not! What is unreal is the apparent

objective reference of morality."[151] It is hard to know what Ruse means by saying that morality

is not unreal if it has no objective reference. It seems like wanting to have his cake and eat it, too.

Consider a parallel argument. Ruse says that he doesn't think God is objectively real, either, but

that God "does, however, serve an extremely useful biological purpose, inasmuch as He backs up

the objective, binding status of morality."[152] Imagine if someone made the statement, "of course

God is not unreal! Only the apparent objective reference of God is." Having no "objective

reference" is normally what we mean by saying that something is not real. There appears, then,

to be a very strained asymmetry between Ruse's treatment of God and his treatment of morality

even though they are, in an important sense, parallel in Ruse's thinking. Ruse wants to say that

morality is not unreal even though it has no objective reference. But if he were to say that God is

not unreal even though there is no objective reference for God, this would likely be dismissed as

nonsense. The question of whether antirealism can actually serve as an adequate response to the

debunking challenge will be discussed in chapter four.

Ruse also argues that objectivism in morality is excluded because "You would believe

what you do about right and wrong, irrespective of whether or not a 'true' right and wrong

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[149] Joyce, 209.

[150] Joyce, 199.

[151] Ruse, 253.

[152] Ruse, 254. Capitalization of "He" is original.

existed! The Darwinian claims that his/her theory gives an entire analysis of our moral sentiments. Nothing more is needed."[153] How does this exclude objectivism, according to Ruse? By making it redundant. According to Ruse, this redundancy is unacceptable to the objectivist view in that it would imply something like the following: "God wants us to be good, and that is the ultimate defining source of good, but it wouldn't matter whether He did or not!"[154] Here Ruse's argument appears to confuse epistemology with ontology. Moral realism in general (and theism in particular) has to do with the existence of objective moral truths (ontology), whereas the Darwinian genealogy of our beliefs is an epistemological question (i.e. why we believe things to be objectively right or wrong). But Ruse appears to be drawing an ontological conclusion from an epistemological premise. Furthermore, a committed theist might not be necessarily committed to the view that Darwinian evolution explains everything about human nature, which would make Ruse's argument question-begging against the theist. However, the question of parsimony that Ruse raises is an important issue that will receive more attention later on, as it is an important feature of many debunking arguments.

Ruse further argues that realists ("objectivists" is his preferred term) have no plausible remedy for the redundancy problem "so long as one locates the foundation of morality in some sort of extra-human existence, like God's will or non-natural properties."[155] This still leaves open some version of moral naturalism. Ruse ultimately rejects any version of objectivism based on Kantian thinking, instead arguing in favor of Hume as a precursor to Darwinian thought,[156] but this doesn't go far enough. As Joyce points out, it is too hasty to simply excise moral facts with

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[153] Ruse, 254.

[154] Ruse, 254.

[155] Ruse, 254.

[156] See Ruse, 262-69. It's worth noting that several other debunkers, including Street, Singer, and Greene, expressly identify as Humean as opposed to Kantian.

Ockham's Razor, since moral facts could still be reducible to the non-moral facts of the non-moral genealogy.[157] As we saw above, Joyce concludes that no form of moral naturalism can provide actual authority or "practical clout." He also argues that "a value system lacking practical clout could not so effectively play the social roles to which we put morality, and thus we could not *use* it as we use morality, indicating that clout may be considered a vital aspect of morality."[158] It is Joyce's broader debunking argument that we will examine next.

Ruse concludes that Darwinism rules out objective morality, saying that, "To suppose that evolution will seek out the true morality is to revert right back to Spencerian progressionism."[159] Ruse is touching on the idea of truth-tracking, which will come into sharper focus in later EDAs. One complaint at this point might be that Ruse's argument is a bit vague and the conclusion is stronger than is warranted. For example, FitzPatrick argues that, if the choice is between parsimony and moral realism, one should choose realism.[160] Whether that move would have other repercussions is another matter that will be examined later, but Ruse's argument does not carry the immediate force he seems to believe. It does, however, point in the direction of other debunking arguments that have come along since.

Joyce and the Genealogy of Moral Beliefs

Where Joyce does think parsimony can be properly used is in eliminating non-naturalism

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[157] Joyce, 188-89.

[158] Joyce, 208-9.

[159] Ruse, 254. This argument relates to Ruse's rejection of Lamarckism that was alluded to in chapter one. While Ruse does not spell out the details on this part of his argument, it appears to be connected to the idea that Darwinian evolution is not truth-tracking. Based on this reading, Ruse's argument follows a similar path to Street's more sophisticated and detailed argument which will be examined below.

[160] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 248.

and supernaturalism (presumably theism).[161] Thus Joyce sees the EDA as successful against

theism and non-theistic forms of non-naturalism based solely on parsimony regardless of

whether or not any version of moral naturalism can be found that will succeed. He writes, "Once

we have a complete non-moral genealogy of moral judgment, if moral naturalism succeeds non-

naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk, and if moral naturalism fails non-naturalism and

supernaturalism are sunk."[162]

As we saw in the previous chapter, however, the evidence does not show a *complete* non-

moral genealogy of moral judgment. Instead, theories about the development of altruism and the

moral sense are based on the assumption that Darwinism fully accounts for human nature in one

way or another in spite of the fact that most of the evidence could be categorized as just so

stories (Joyce's complaints notwithstanding) and the lack of what most scholars today would

consider to be a good alternative. Even debunkers themselves recognize that we likely never will

have a complete non-moral genealogy of our moral beliefs. The question of whether moral

naturalism is better positioned to resist the debunking challenge than non-naturalism will be

examined more closely below.

Part of Joyce's argument is an analogy which is often cited in the literature. He imagines

what would be the case if there were two pills, one of which made a person believe Napoleon

lost Waterloo, the other that he won. If a person learned they had been given the "Napoleon lost"

pill, it would undermine that person's belief that Napoleon had lost Waterloo. It wouldn't show

the belief was false, but it would remove justification for the belief.[163] To restore justification,

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[161] Joyce, 209-10. Some thinkers distinguish theism or supernaturalism from non-naturalism rather than considering theism as a version of non-naturalism. At least for Shafer-Landau this issue seems to depend on the idea of mind-independence, but the distinction is not very important for the purposes of this argument.

[162] Joyce, 210.

[163] Joyce, 179-80.

one would have to first take an antidote for the pill and then set about to find evidence supporting the belief that Napoleon lost. This, Joyce argues, is analogous to our moral sense.

Joyce pre-emptively counters two possible objections to his analogy. First, some would object that human traits are not hard-wired to develop inevitably but require input from the environment. Joyce argues that this doesn't make our moral beliefs sensitive to evidence, and so our moral beliefs would still not be justified.[164] Second, it might be objected that Joyce's arguments for an innate moral sense do not claim that specific *moral judgments* are innate, and so the analogy doesn't work because it refers to a specific propositional belief. Joyce counters that the analogy can be modified in such a way that the pill disposes a person to form beliefs about Napoleon in general. This would undermine all of one's beliefs about Napoleon until taking the antidote and investigating the evidence from scratch.[165] Thus, Joyce argues that we should be agnostic not merely about whether our moral beliefs are right, but about whether there exists anything that is morally right and wrong at all.[166]

Shafer-Landau, however, argues that even if one accepts the genealogy of moral beliefs that Joyce gives, the Napoleon pill analogy only works if it's the case that "our inability to exclude the possibility of insensitive doxastic origins for a set of beliefs S mandates suspension of judgment regarding all beliefs within that set."[167] But this, argues Shafer-Landau, would result in "wholesale skepticism."[168] This touches on a very important concern for EDAs, namely how the resulting skepticism can be limited to moral beliefs without extending to other beliefs which

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[164] Joyce, 180.

[165] Joyce, 181.

[166] Joyce, 181.

[167] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 17-18.

[168] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 18.

could even undermine the EDA itself. This issue will be dealt with more fully below. As far as the objection to Joyce's Napoleon pill analogy, however, Shafer-Landau's move amounts to a shifting of the burden of proof. The particular phrasing Shafer-Landau uses above provides the key. In Shafer-Landau's reading of Joyce, Joyce's argument implies that the mere *possibility* of insensitive doxastic origins for a given set of beliefs would render it unjustified, and that only in that case would the analogy succeed. But Joyce's analogy does not turn upon a mere possibility that one *may* have taken the pill, which is how Shafer-Landau characterizes it.[169] Rather, Joyce writes of the pill analogy that "we are imagining that you somehow discover beyond any shred of doubt that your belief is the product of such a pill."[170]

The dispute is between the debunkers' argument that our moral sense must have come about in a way that is at least approximated by the model outlined in the previous chapter (if not in exact detail) and the realists' view here represented by Shafer-Landau who would reduce that to a mere possibility. The challenge for Shafer-Landau and other realists who want to resist the analogy and the argument is to provide an alternative explanation for the development of our moral faculties. The debunking argument claims legitimacy on the basis of science. Under Darwinism, in order for our moral beliefs to be sensitive to moral truth, there would have to be a demonstrated benefit in terms of survival and reproduction in having beliefs which aligned with moral truth. Thus, Joyce (and as we will see below, other debunkers as well) would argue that the burden of proof is on realists to show how true moral beliefs are evolutionarily beneficial. Shafer-Landau subtly reverses that by arguing that we can't exclude the possibility of insensitive

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[169] Shafer-Landau clearly mischaracterizes Joyce's analogy by saying that, "Rather, once we believe that our belief might (for all we know) have been caused by a pill, we must suspend judgment about p because we are unable to discount a doxastic etiology that would reveal our belief to have been formed in a way that is entirely insensitive to the truth." Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 17.

[170] Joyce, 179.

origins for other beliefs. Shafer-Landau's objection also changes the argument from a probabilistic one to something like a logically deductive one. In order to exclude insensitive doxastic origins for a set of beliefs, it would require something like showing such origins to be logically impossible. This not only shifts the burden of proof, but raises the standard of proof to an unreasonably high level. Debunking arguments are typically expressed in probabilistic terms as an inference to the best explanation rather than as a logically deductive argument.

<div align="center">Street's Darwinian Dilemma</div>

Street's debunking argument is the one that is most often cited in the literature, and so it is worth taking an extended look at it. In the first chapter we saw that the target of Street's debunking argument is not morality, but rather value realism. This distinction will become important at certain points. Many commentators, either consciously or not, simply apply Street's argument to morality and take it as a refutation of moral realism more specifically.[171] In Street's formulation, there is a dilemma for the value realist based on whether or not there is a relation between evolutionary forces on the one hand, and the independent evaluative truths affirmed by the realist on the other.[172] Starting with the assumption that there are attitude-independent, evaluative truths, the first horn in Street's dilemma says there is no relation between these truths and evolutionary forces, while the second horn says there is. Either way, argues Street, the realist is stuck in the unfortunate position of having no reliable knowledge of the independent

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[171] Some might think this a distinction without a difference. Street brings it up in her response to Copp, writing that, "Copp considers the dilemma only as it applies to moral realism, and not as it applies to realism about practical normativity in general. While I agree with Copp that one may restrict one's attention to this more limited version of the dilemma, doing so introduces crucial complexities having to do with morality/reasons internalism." Sharon Street, "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About," *Philosophical Issues* 18 (2008): 209, accessed June 22, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27749907. In chapter four we will see in Street's interaction with Dworkin how Street uses this framing to attempt to circumvent Dworkin's argument.

[172] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 121f.

evaluative truths.

If the realist takes the first horn of the dilemma, Street argues that our normative faculties will only arrive at truth by random chance, since natural selection directs us toward tendencies that enhance reproductive fitness, not toward true normative beliefs.[173] Street uses the analogy of someone trying to get to Bermuda by boat, but who simply allows the wind and waves to guide the vessel. Very rarely the boat will end up in Bermuda, but most of the time that won't happen.[174] Street anticipates the objection that we could use our rational faculties for reflection to correct for the distorting effects of evolutionary forces, and argues that this will not help the realist. This is because rational reflection can only work by weighing some evaluative judgments against others which are presumed to be correct. Since our entire fund of judgments is in question from the outset, however, there is no secure starting point for rational reflection to begin its work.[175]

With Street's second horn, there is a relation of some kind between evolutionary forces and the independent evaluative truths. Street argues that the only relation that will help the realist is a tracking relation, in which evolution pushes us in the direction of true normative beliefs.[176] But in that case, Street argues that the realist is committed to engaging in a scientific argument about how natural selection works.[177] This means that the realist's tracking account must serve as a better explanation than other scientific accounts.[178] This would require showing that there is an

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[173] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 121.

[174] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 121-22.

[175] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 124.

[176] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 135.

[177] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 126.

[178] This is a crucial move in the argument as I try to show in my analysis of Street's interaction with Dworkin below. The key point to notice is that Street views best explanation here in scientific terms only, whereas Dworkin insists that best explanation of moral phenomena must also take into account moral explanations. In that

evolutionary advantage to having true evaluative beliefs. Street, however, argues that an

"adaptive link" account, in which the forces of evolution selected for evaluative beliefs (or

dispositions toward beliefs) that resulted in behavior that promoted survival and reproduction

with no regard to independent evaluative truths is superior to any tracking account the realist can

give in terms of parsimony, clarity, and being more illuminating with respect to why people

make certain evaluative judgments rather than others.[179]

Given this predicament, Street argues that we are forced to give up realism altogether and

adopt antirealism with respect to evaluative truths.[180] Elsewhere Street clarifies this point

somewhat. The conclusion of her dilemma is not that normative realism is false. It is, rather, that

if normative realism is true, then "we are in all likelihood hopeless at discovering the normative

truth."[181] However, in order to continue making normative judgments (which we all must do), we

are forced to reject normative realism, since "It is incoherent to affirm, for example, that 'I

should do *Y*, but I'm in all likelihood hopeless at recognizing what I should do.'"[182] In other

words, Street has given a *practical* argument against normative realism.[183]

Street anticipates three objections to her dilemma and attempts to head them off. The first

has to do with value naturalism, that evaluative facts are identical to certain natural facts.[184]

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case, it is by no means clear that Street's best explanation is actually the best.

[179] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 129.

[180] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 141.

[181] Sharon Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics: 11*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 293-333 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 330, accessed June 29, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198784647.003.0012.

[182] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 330.

[183] As we will see, she also has a theoretical argument in favor of antirealism which has received much less attention, but which is still illuminating in her overall argument.

[184] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 135f.

Street argues that any such theory, if it is realist in a fully robust way,[185] will be susceptible to a

slightly modified form of her dilemma. In the case of value naturalism, argues Street,

evolutionary forces would have to track not independent evaluative truths, but rather independent

natural-normative identities. According to Street, this would result in a more serious failure as a

scientific explanation than other forms of realism, "For it is even more obscure how tracking

something as esoteric as independent facts about natural-normative identities could ever have

promoted reproductive success in the environment of our ancestors."[186] The second objection

Street anticipates is the idea that our moral faculties developed as a byproduct of some other

capacity that was evolutionarily advantageous.[187] Street argues that this would only push the

problem back a level, and also that the realist would need to account for what this other capacity

was and how it resulted in the development of our moral faculties.[188]

The third and final objection Street addresses has to do with utilizing the badness of pain

as the starting point for developing an independent evaluative truth.[189] The idea for the realist is

that pain is bad independently of our evaluative attitudes. To defeat this, Street constructs

another dilemma (which she fittingly calls the "pain dilemma"), based on whether or not the

realist accepts a definition of pain as "a sensation such that the creature having the sensation

unreflectively takes that sensation to count in favor of doing whatever would avoid, lessen, or

stop it."[190] If the realist rejects this definition, then it is conceivable that pain could have been

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[185] For Street's criteria of what counts as genuinely realist, see Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 136-139. Street further refines these criteria in her reply to David Copp. See Street, "Reply to Copp," 223-24.

[186] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 141.

[187] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 142.

[188] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 143.

[189] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 144f.

[190] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 146.

such that we would unreflectively want to bring it about or intensify it, in which case it is not

plausible to hold to a realist view that creatures have a reason to avoid, lessen, or stop it

independently of their evaluative attitudes.[191] Even if there would be a reason to fix whatever

problem is causing the pain in a particular case, it wouldn't be the pain itself which calls for

stopping the pain but rather some other evaluative judgment.[192] Also, if the realist accepts the

first horn of the dilemma by rejecting Street's definition of pain, then the question arises as to

why so many people dislike and avoid pain, for which evolution provides a perfectly good

answer.[193] Street writes that, "The realist tells us that it is an independent evaluative truth that

pain sensations (however he or she defines them) are bad, and yet this is precisely what

evolutionary theory would have predicted that we come to think. And once again the realist is

unable to give any good account of this coincidence."[194] If the realist takes the second horn of the

pain dilemma by accepting the definition that Street has given, then the badness of pain depends

upon our evaluative attitudes, and it is those attitudes that make it bad (and thus no longer a

genuinely realist position).[195] Street contends that this argument would also apply to pleasure

being good.[196]

This argument is of particular interest because it relates to what are called "third factor

accounts," which is one type of response by realists to EDAs. The main feature of third factor

accounts is that they attempt to show that natural selection, while not favoring independent moral

or evaluative truth directly, does so indirectly by favoring some other factor (called a third

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[191] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 148.

[192] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 149.

[193] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 150.

[194] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 151.

[195] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 151-52.

[196] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 152.

factor) which itself is good. Several different versions of this type of argument have been given

by realists. This will be covered in more detail in chapter three, but it is worth noting at this point

that Vavova suggests that a third factor account using the badness of pain is a promising route

for realists.[197] Rather than addressing Street's pain dilemma, Vavova defers to Skarsaune's

attempt to challenge Street's definition of realism.[198] Two issues are crucial in evaluating this

response, both of which will be deferred for the time being. One has to do with the definition of

realism, and the other with whether third factor responses are question-begging. Vavova argues

that, while some such responses are, hers is not.[199] However, since she does not include a

response to Street's pain dilemma in her argument or even acknowledge it, it is hard to know

how Vavova thinks she can escape Street's attempt to head it off.

There are some features of Street's argument in particular that are worth noting. First is

the underlying emphasis, occasionally articulated, that our theory of metaethics should be

consistent with science. For example, the opening statement of her paper is: "Contemporary

realist theories of value claim to be compatible with natural science."[200] As we have already

seen, the basis of the challenge presented by the second horn of her dilemma (which posits a

relation between evolutionary forces and independent evaluative truths) is expressed as a

scientific argument between a tracking account and her adaptive link account. Street argues that

antirealism avoids this problem by affirming that our evaluative beliefs have come about because

of evolutionary forces, and thus that there are no evaluative truths which are independent of the

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[197] Vavova, 112.

[198] Vavova, 115n56.

[199] Vavova, 112.

[200] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 109.

evaluative attitudes of people.[201] Thus, antirealism is presented as a means of avoiding the

skepticism which is generated when normative realism is combined with a Darwinian account of

human nature. Chapter four will examine this question more closely to see if Street's antirealism

(specifically her version of constructivism) can avoid skepticism. If it cannot, then if Street's

dilemma does pose a real problem for metaethics, it is also a problem for her own metaethical

theory. Street's commitment to a scientific worldview, however, also assumes that materialism is

true. This, however, is not a scientific conclusion, and not something that can be proven by the

scientific method.

This becomes clear in Street's brief theoretical argument for antirealism. Street writes,

"Before life began, nothing was valuable. But then life arose and began to value – not because it

was recognizing anything, but because creatures who valued (certain things in particular) tended

to survive. In this broadest sense, valuing was (and still is) prior to value. That is why antirealism

about value is right."[202] It is not hard to see what Street is getting at with this argument. In this

account (which she holds to be the correct scientific account of natural history), there was no

God and no realm of independent evaluative or moral truths prior to the arrival of "creatures who

valued." However, this cannot be the basis of an argument against value realism since it would

obviously be question-begging. Thus, Street's argument against realism begins by assuming that

realism is true, and then arguing that in that case we can have no confidence in any of our

evaluative judgments. This leaves us stuck with skepticism unless we become antirealists.

However, Street assumes that we will want to hold to her understanding of what constitutes

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[201] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 153.

[202] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 155-56.

scientific. And indeed, for many academics that will be a persuasive consideration.[203]

One possible implication of Street's view would be that it is impossible for anyone to be mistaken in their evaluative judgment, any more than it would be possible for someone to be wrong about any personal preference. Street's position, however, is that the truth of an evaluative judgment is a function of what judgment one would hold in a state of reflective equilibrium.[204] Thus, someone could be mistaken about a particular judgment if they would not hold that judgment in reflective equilibrium.[205] This raises several worries. One worry has to do with the circularity of this position. Street can't maintain that it is an attitude-independent truth that the judgment one would hold in reflective equilibrium is true for that person, because even if there are attitude-independent evaluative truths we have no knowledge of them by her own argument. Another worry arises when we ask how a person can actually know what judgments they would hold in reflective equilibrium. If this cannot be known, then any advantage from Street's constructivism over normative realism is at least diminished. These concerns and others will be addressed in chapter four.

Other Debunking Arguments

The arguments of Street and Joyce in particular have received a significant number of responses in the literature, both positive and negative. In addition, many other scholars have offered their own variant of debunking argument. Space does not permit a comprehensive

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[203] Nagel, however, finds Street's argument to be persuasive not for adopting antirealism, but rather for rejecting the conclusion that Darwinian evolution offers a complete understanding of human nature. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28-29, accessed May 29, 2014, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199919758.001.0001.

[204] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 111.

[205] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 152.

examination of all of them, but some of the more notable ones will be touched on briefly here. We will look at the arguments by Bedke, Morton, Bogardus, and Fraser and see what issues they bring to light. Like the preceding arguments, these arguments aim to debunk moral realism. There are also EDAs which aim at a more limited target; these will be discussed below as well.

<center>Bedke and Cosmic Coincidence</center>

Bedke's debunking argument aims at a narrower target than that of either Street or Joyce, namely intuitive non-naturalism.[206] He defines intuitionism as "the view that certain cognitions non-inferentially and *prima facie* justify corresponding ethical beliefs."[207] According to Bedke's argument, intuitionism is incompatible with ethical non-naturalism because it would require a mysterious "cosmic coincidence" in order for our intuitive moral beliefs to be in alignment with non-natural moral facts.[208]

While Bedke's argument makes reference to evolution, his emphasis is on the causal closure of the physical universe. He writes, "We would need something like a god rigging the ethical facts and the causal order to ensure their serendipitous coincidence. And without evidence of this happy coincidence one cannot justifiably hold that those ethical beliefs, insofar as they were previously supported by intuition, are true."[209] Thus the real problem, if Bedke's argument is successful, is the commitment to a naturalistic worldview including causal closure. In defense of this, Bedke argues that, "The closure of the physical . . . is widely accepted and supported daily by advances in causal explanations of the various sciences. Any rejection of this premise

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[206] Matthew S. Bedke, "Intuitive Non-Naturalism Meets Cosmic Coincidence," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90 (2009): 188-209, accessed June 14, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2009.01336.x.

[207] Bedke, 188.

[208] Bedke, 190.

[209] Bedke, 190.

motivated by a desire to save a favored blend of theories in ethics is bound to look *ad hoc*."[210]

In response, it should be noted that advances in science do not actually provide evidence for the closure of the physical. Theists can happily recognize that the physical sciences explain many phenomena without stipulating that they can explain all phenomena. Appealing to how widely accepted this principle is does not constitute evidence in favor of it. Furthermore, the view that the physical is not closed has a very long history and includes many notable thinkers. Bedke's suggestion that it would be *ad hoc* for someone to appeal to it to escape debunking is thus unpersuasive. It may be the case that thoughtful examination of debunking arguments might lead someone to take another look at arguments for theism. As we will see, one's prior philosophical commitments play a much bigger role in these arguments than some debunkers might like to admit.

One key premise in Bedke's argument is that moral intuitions "*qua* justifiers" are physical states.[211] In defending this premise, Bedke argues against two competing views. These include the view that intuitions are a kind of perception (either direct or representational), and that ethical truths are self-evident.[212] The details of these arguments are outside the scope of this dissertation, but Bedke's conclusion concerning intuitions is instructive. He writes that, "defensible theories of ethical intuition are hospitable to [the premise that intuitions are physical states]. From this and the causal closure of the physical it follows that ethical intuitions (insofar as they include only that which is needed for justification) are physically caused."[213] This modest conclusion is weaker than the conclusion of his overall argument, which is that the need for

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[210] Bedke, 190.

[211] Bedke, 190.

[212] Bedke, 191-95.

[213] Bedke, 195.

cosmic coincidence defeats justification for intuitive beliefs about non-natural ethical facts.[214]

There is, after all, a difference between saying that defensible theories are hospitable to your position, and arguing that your position is proven. There is still room for the realist to resist this strong conclusion and perhaps concede that Bedke's argument casts some doubt on the justification of those beliefs without entirely defeating it.[215]

Another important point raised by Bedke is whether his argument would debunk other kinds of beliefs besides ethical beliefs. He argues that perceptual beliefs would not be affected. This is so because with ethical intuitions, the "seemings" that are involved can be explained without referring to ethical facts, whereas with perceptual beliefs this is not the case. This is the first of what Bedke calls two crucial ingredients for the cosmic coincidence argument to apply to a class of beliefs.[216] The second ingredient has to do with the properties of the facts themselves.[217] Earlier in his argument, Bedke illustrated how the need for cosmic coincidence serves as a defeater for intuitively justified beliefs about non-physical facts and properties. He uses two separate illustrations – someone with a belief that everyone has a spirit animal and for whom it just seems that way, and someone else who believes there is a non-physical goblin war all around. [218] In the first case, we are asked to suppose that the spirit-animal belief could be explained as being fully determined by sociological and psychological facts,[219] while in the

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[214] Bedke, 190.

[215] Huemer, whose arguments for limited debunking will be examined below, calls attention to this kind of distinction in differentiating between undercutting defeaters, which give reason to doubt the reliability of an ethical intuition, and rebutting defeaters, which provides prima facie reason to deny the content of it. Michael Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 25, no. 1 (January 2008): 380-81, accessed July 22, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S026505250808014X.

[216] Bedke, 202.

[217] Bedke, 202.

[218] Bedke, 197-99.

[219] Bedke, 198.

second case it is caused by a tumor in the person's brain.[220] In both cases, Bedke argues, the

person's belief in spirit animals/goblin war would be defeated and no longer justified.[221]

These illustrations are instructive in that in both cases, the beliefs in question are

abnormal when compared to the overall population. This is most obvious with Bedke's goblin

war analogy. Belief in spirit animals may be (as far as I know) prevalent in certain cultures or

subcultures, but not among humanity as a whole. Belief in moral realism, however, appears to be

ubiquitous. The rejoinder of the debunker is that that is because natural selection has favored

creatures with a moral sense and so forth. But the plausibility of that argument depends upon the

plausibility of other factors, most notably the commitment to a naturalistic worldview. This is

explicitly the case with Bedke's argument, while it is implicit with those such as Street, Joyce,

Ruse, and Kitcher. Thus, Bedke's argument with respect to the justification of belief in spirit

animals/goblin wars appears to be somewhat superfluous. It also is an interesting feature of this

argument that he chooses examples which are not likely to be disputed by any Westerner who

might otherwise be inclined to disagree with his conclusion. Bedke notes that his point is related

to Mackie's argument for error theory based on the "queerness" of ethical facts.[222]

Bedke believes that his argument can debunk belief in ethical facts without debunking

perceptual beliefs, but what about other sorts of beliefs? Bedke applies his own argument to

logical and mathematical beliefs. This is an important topic which will be addressed in more

detail below. Bedke argues that the skeptical damage can be limited to "*a priori* justified belief

in *synthetic* truths about *non-natural* facts."[223] However, he also acknowledges that "The

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[220] Bedke, 198.

[221] Bedke, 198.

[222] Bedke, 199. Cf. Mackie, 38f.

[223] Bedke, 202.

challenge here is genuine and it might require us to rethink the metaphysics or epistemology of some domains."[224]

The solution to the debunking problem in ethics, according to Bedke, is to either deny moral non-naturalism by accepting naturalism, or adopt antirealism.[225] Since Bedke himself sees moral naturalism as unpromising, he adopts the antirealist position.[226] But two noteworthy features of his conclusion should be pointed out. First, he says that "intuitive modes of justification are indispensable in ethics, and so we should explore other metaphysical views that leave the intuitive justification intact."[227] Second is his claim that "the conclusion here does not necessarily lead to skepticism."[228] But consider again Bedke's analogies to spirit animals and an invisible goblin war. According to his own analogy, when the individuals with these beliefs discover that their beliefs are explained by causes which have no bearing on their being true, justification is defeated. Yet somehow Bedke (and other debunkers) argue that justification for moral beliefs can be regained by adopting an antirealist view of them. Bedke offers no explanation of how this is supposed to work, but consider the same move applied to spirit animals. If the person with the belief in spirit animals adopted an antirealist view of spirit animals, would that restore justification to that belief? It is hard to make sense of that because it is hard to know what it even means. Justification for beliefs is typically understood to mean that the person with the belief has a good reason to think the belief is true. But with the antirealist position, the person no longer thinks the belief *is* true. What, then, would it mean for such a

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[224] Bedke, 204.

[225] Bedke, 205. Bedke uses the term "irrealism," which I take to be synonymous with antirealism.

[226] Bedke, 205.

[227] Bedke, 205.

[228] Bedke, 205.

belief to be justified? This question will be addressed more fully in chapter four on antirealism.

Morton's New Evolutionary Debunking Argument

Morton has constructed a version of EDA which he believes is stronger than what he calls the standard EDA.[229] He argues that his version of EDA defeats the claim that categorical reasons exist, which is entailed by all positive moral claims. Thus, we can thus have no knowledge of moral truths.[230] He also argues that his EDA is better able to reply to four key objections to the standard EDA.[231] Although it is debatable whether Morton's version of EDA is superior to preceding ones as he claims, the objections that he lists are useful in highlighting important areas of disagreement between debunkers and realists.

The key important difference that Morton sees between his EDA and the general EDA is that his account aims to defeat categorical reasons in general.[232] He writes, "While the Standard EDA debunks moral beliefs on the basis of their *contents*, the New EDA debunks moral beliefs on the basis of a claim that they all *entail*."[233] Morton's EDA includes the following empirical premise: "Evolution has strongly influenced our belief in categorical reasons."[234] He explicates this premise as meaning that evolution selected for humans "who have a sense that there are some actions (or desires, etc.) that are favored *no matter what*."[235] Because there is no independent justification for believing in such reasons, Morton argues that this belief is defeated. Furthermore, because all positive moral knowledge claims entail that categorical reasons exist,

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[229] For his formulation of the standard EDA, see Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 234.

[230] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 238-39.

[231] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 235f.

[232] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 239.

[233] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 238-39.

[234] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 239.

[235] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 240.

we do not have any positive moral knowledge.[236]

It is not at all clear, however, that Morton's generalization that other EDAs focus on debunking beliefs because of the content of those beliefs really does justice to the arguments. As we already saw above, Joyce spends a considerable amount of space on the topic of "practical clout," by which he means the binding authority of morality. This is precisely what Morton means by categorical reasons. Street, likewise, in her response to Copp which we will look at more closely in chapter three, refines her definition of normative realism that she discussed in "Darwinian Dilemma." In "Reply to Copp," she calls this "uncompromising normative realism," which she describes as the view that "there are at least some normative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes, such that an agent can have normative reason (*simpliciter*) to do Y even though the conclusion that she has this reason in no way follows from within her own practical point of view, understood roughly as her own set of evaluative attitudes."[237] In other words, Street's Darwinian dilemma is aimed at debunking this kind of normative realism, which is exactly what Morton means by categorical reasons. Finally, Ruse's argument also involves evolutionary forces selecting for creatures who hold that certain actions are required in a way that has binding authority. While none of these other debunking arguments explicitly use the language of categorical reasons[238] in formulating the argument, it is clear that this is what they are, in fact, aiming at. If Morton's argument is stronger, it is arguably only by making an explicit formulation of what is implicit in other EDAs. At the same time, there is a danger with Morton's formulation in that it is presented as a deductive argument rather than an

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[236] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 239.

[237] Street, "Reply to Copp," 223.

[238] It should be noted that Ruse agrees with Kant that "the supreme principle of morality is *categorical*." Ruse, 259.

inference to the best explanation. This might appear to have greater force, but it also means that opponents simply have to show that the conclusion does not logically follow from the premises. Hence, even a highly improbable counterargument would suffice to show that the conclusion does not follow, and there are several such lines of attack which are available to the realist as even Morton recognizes.

Morton covers four objections to the standard EDA and why he believes his argument is better equipped to handle each one. The first is what he calls the limited explanation objection, in which the realist argues that, while some moral beliefs can be explained by the evolutionary benefits they confer on those who hold them, others are not so clearly susceptible to this explanation.[239] The realist can point to undebunked moral beliefs as a starting point for establishing reliable moral beliefs.[240] The standard EDA proponent, as Morton points out, will argue that evolution has indirectly affected these other beliefs.[241] His new EDA, he argues, can handle this objection more easily because there is only one belief which needs to be explained as being adaptive, which is belief in categorical reasons.[242] This is an important objection, but Morton's claim to having a superior argument is highly questionable. The belief in categorical reasons only has an evolutionary advantage if the specific beliefs it is attached to also have such benefits. In other words, the belief in categorical reasons does not, by itself, confer any advantage to anyone. It is only by giving certain behaviors the force of apparent authority that the belief in categorical reasons is supposedly effective. But this is no different from other

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[239] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 236.

[240] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 236. This view will be covered below under limited debunking arguments, but it should be noted that Greene, whom Morton cites as taking the realist side in this debate, is actually an antirealist. Singer is harder to categorize, but possibly should also be viewed as such.

[241] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 236.

[242] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 247-48..

debunking arguments, so the apparent advantage of Morton's argument is illusory.

Another objection addressed by Morton is that the reliability of our moral faculties can be established "by showing that it is either identical with or a species of a doxastic faculty that we have independent warrant for believing to be reliable."[243] Morton holds that his argument avoids this objection altogether because it targets a particular belief (that categorical reasons exist) rather than our moral faculties.[244] Again, the advantage of Morton's position is more apparent than real. The debunking arguments we have looked at target moral realism (or in Street's case normative realism), which, in essence, just *is* the belief that categorical reasons exist. Morton's formulation is basically the same argument in different words.

One objection which has already been touched on is the problem of overgeneralization. Morton is less confident in the superiority of his debunking argument in handling this objection.[245] He gives very little detail in this regard, but he is certainly correct that this is a major point of attack by realists which will be examined in chapter three. The fourth and final objection that Morton deals with is the category of third-factor accounts. Morton argues that such objections arguably beg the question[246] (these will also be examined in detail in chapter three). Where this is arguably not the case is when a third-factor account relies on a belief which itself is not easily debunked. In such a situation, argues Morton, the strength of the response by the debunker depends crucially upon the response to the limited explanation objection.[247] Because the details of this argument are of central importance, we will defer further discussion until

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[243] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 236.

[244] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 248.

[245] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 249.

[246] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 249.

[247] Morton, "New Evolutionary Debunking Argument," 251.

chapter three where third-factor accounts will receive careful attention.

To close discussion of Morton's new EDA, while it is questionable that his argument enjoys significant advantages over other formulations, nevertheless the discussion of possible objections from realists is very useful. One question that will need to be asked is if realists can make any of these objections stick. The view which will be defended here is that realists will have a very difficult time of it if they have to start from the same naturalistic assumptions that the debunker relies upon.

<div align="center">Bogardus and Debunking of Naturalists</div>

One argument which does target moral realists who are also naturalists is that of Bogardus.[248] Bogardus analyzes the epistemic challenge of EDAs in terms of four different epistemic principles as candidates for how best to explicate the challenge. Those four principles are sensitivity, safety, accidentality, and symmetry. He contends that EDAs based on sensitivity, safety, and accidentality all fail, while what he calls the argument from symmetry succeeds against naturalism. In addition, Bogardus argues that EDAs depend on a particular view of moral psychology which he calls "representationalism."[249] He distinguishes this from two other views, namely divine revelation and rationalism. To set the stage for his argument requires some unpacking of these concepts.

In Bogardus's terminology, representationalism holds that "all our moral judgments come by way of a mental intermediary, indication, report, or representation, which is delivered by our moral faculty and figures crucially into our formation of moral beliefs."[250] This sounds a lot like

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[248] Tomas Bogardus, "Only All Naturalists Should Worry About Only One Evolutionary Debunking Argument," Ethics 126, no. 3 (April 2016): #, accessed May 23, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/684711.

[249] Bogardus, 638.

[250] Bogardus, 640.

the idea of a moral sense that debunking arguments tend to utilize. Bogardus maintains that these representations "might be sentiments like attraction and revulsion (or 'affect-laden intuitions,' or 'gut reactions'), as Sentimentalists maintain, but they might instead be calculations or thoughts."[251] What Bogardus calls rationalism, on the other hand, is the view that "moral beliefs also can be formed solely on the basis of what's been variously called rational insight, direct perception, direct apprehension, or simply presentation."[252] Divine revelation is relatively straightforward. In this view, "moral beliefs can be formed solely on the basis of divine testimony, a supernaturally endowed conscience, the inward instigation of the Holy Spirit (as Aquinas might say), and so forth."[253] As a theist himself, Bogardus is one of the few writers in this area who gives more than passing or dismissive attention to this topic.

It should be noted that, while Bogardus claims that his analysis of moral psychology is unique in the literature,[254] all debunking arguments address in some fashion or other the question of whether moral beliefs are formed through the operation of a moral sense or if they are derived from the operation of rational principles as a kind of *a priori* knowledge. These roughly correspond to the difference between Humean and Kantian approaches to ethics. Moreover, Bogardus does not explain the difference in phenomenological terms between what could be considered a "calculation or thought" under his representationalist view and what he calls the rationalist one. The question of whether our rational faculties can be used to separate intuitions that are indicative of truth from those that are not is another matter which will be examined more

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[251] Boardus, 640-41.

[252] Bogardus, 642.

[253] Bogardus, 643.

[254] As when he writes that, "I will offer novel objections to evolutionary debunking arguments resting on all these principles, and for the first time bring to light how evolutionary debunking arguments depend for their success on a controversial but widespread view of moral psychology that I call 'Representationalism.'" Bogardus, 638.

fully in chapter three. As we saw above, Street argues that this cannot work. But it is not clear that Bogardus's categories add anything to that discussion.[255]

The main point of interest in Bogardus's argument is his contention that an argument from symmetry defeats naturalistic views. He argues that if our moral faculties were selected for adaptive beliefs rather than true beliefs, then it is not the case that "*had our species evolved elsewhere, elsewhen and we later formed moral beliefs using the same method we actually used, our beliefs would be true*."[256] This means that, in nearby possible worlds, we would have different moral beliefs from those we do have, and those beliefs would be false by our own lights.[257] However, it is not clear that we are in a better epistemic position in the actual world than we would be in these nearby possible worlds. Because of this, our moral beliefs do not constitute knowledge.[258]

Bogardus argues that rationalists and divine revelationists need not worry about the possibility that alternative evolutionary paths would have produced false moral beliefs. With divine revelation this seems fairly clear-cut, but his explanation of why rationalists can escape this implication is less so. He writes that under rationalism we "'just see' the truth value of evaluative propositions in order to form (at least some of our) moral beliefs, and this method

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[255] An additional note on Bogardus's overall presentation is worth making. He says that his aim is to set forth debunking arguments in a more rigorous form than the authors of these arguments use themselves. Bogardus argues that this approach is more charitable than taking the less precise arguments at face value. But this is highly questionable, since many debunking arguments are presented as something like an inference to the best explanation rather than as a deductive argument. By representing them in deductive fashion, Bogardus can then argue that the resulting arguments are invalid. However, in some cases he appears to shoehorn arguments into one of his categories. And of course, inferences to the best explanation might well produce arguments that are logically invalid if rendered in deductive form, including virtually all scientific arguments. This does not show that they are bad arguments. See Bogardus, 639n9.

[256] Bogardus, 657.

[257] Bogardus, 656.

[258] Bogardus, 658.

would not easily lead us astray even if our social ancestry had been different."[259] However, this seems more like an assertion than an argument, and Bogardus never explains exactly how this "just seeing" is supposed to work, what faculties are used in such a case, and how those faculties are supposedly able to "see" mind-independent moral truths in a way that is explicable in terms of the presumed evolutionary ancestry of those faculties. In the end, however, he concludes that rationalism and naturalism are hard to reconcile, and that "Philosophers who self-describe as rationalists tend to be nonnaturalists."[260] Thus, Bogardus believes his debunking argument puts naturalists in a bind between either giving up moral realism or adopting rationalism.[261]

It seems doubtful that the epistemic premise that Bogardus relies on for his argument (symmetry) can succeed. The basis of it is a requirement that, in order to have knowledge, we must have good reason to think that we are in a better epistemic position in the actual world than we would be in nearby possible worlds in which we held different beliefs. The basis for this principle is one that Bogardus credits Kitcher with, although one can find similar arguments elsewhere. It is the idea that if Christians had been born as, say, indigenous Australians, they would hold completely different religious doctrines. Because of that, we should give no credence to any religious beliefs.[262] Rather than challenging this epistemic principle, Bogardus adapts it for use with moral beliefs instead. However, at the very least one could say that the principle enumerated by Kitcher would also undermine belief in naturalism or atheism. Plausibly, if Kitcher had been born at a different time and place, he would not have been an atheist. So, applying his own principle, why should he accept atheism? At the very least, a lot more work is

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[259] Bogardus, 647.

[260] Bogardus, 660.

[261] Bogardus, 661.

[262] Bogardus, 655.

necessary to show that this principle does not undermine a great many other beliefs which would be considered knowledge. Bogardus makes no attempt to show how such a principle can be delimited in this way.

Fraser and Reliability

One of the major concerns of debunkers has to do with the reliability of our moral faculties. The argument is that, given that there are mind-independent moral truths, we have no reason to believe that our moral faculties would have developed by evolutionary processes in such a way as to produce true moral beliefs. Fraser offers a debunking argument that attempts to refine this concern using empirical data to analyze moral faculties in terms of four specific conditions which he argues must be met in order for an evolved faculty to be considered reliable. These conditions are what he calls the environment condition, the information condition, the error condition, and the tracking condition.[263] Fraser notes that most of the focus of EDAs is on the tracking condition. His discussion of tracking consists largely of refuting the arguments of realists who attempt to show how our moral faculties might track moral facts even though they were not selected for that purpose.[264] As such, we will consider those responses in chapter three, and here focus on Fraser's arguments for the other three conditions.

What is of particular interest with Fraser's argument is his emphasis on the cost (in evolutionary terms) of building reliable mechanisms as opposed to alternatives which are cheaper but are more prone to error. Fraser brings this concept to bear on the conditions for reliability that he enumerates in different ways. For example, with the environment condition

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[263] Benjamin James Fraser, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Reliability of Moral Cognition," Philosophical Studies 168, no. 2 (March 2014): 461, accessed July 20, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0140-8.

[264] Fraser, 467f.

Fraser argues that mechanisms which are designed to be reliable in a particular environment may be unreliable in others due to the economy of "'fast and frugal' heuristics."[265] This implies that, even if our moral faculties were reliable in the evolutionary past, the environment of modern, technologically advanced societies may produce quite different results.[266] Fraser does not, however, address the question of whether the moral faculties of our evolutionary ancestors would have been reliable. As we have already seen above, some EDAs argue that morality began as an adaptation for small group cooperation, which would suggest that the moral faculties of the ancestors of modern humans were not reliable in the first place.

The information condition has to do with the trade-offs between mechanisms which produce low error rates but are more costly, versus those which are cheaper but less reliable.[267] If the cost of accuracy is too high, then "it would be adaptive to settle for an error-prone but cheap mechanism."[268] In order to flesh this out, however, one would need to specify the relevant information needed for the mechanism to produce accurate results, which would require specifying the exact nature of the moral facts in question. In the case of non-naturalism, Fraser admits that he doesn't know what kind of information would even be needed, and instead directs his attention to "naturalistically respectable moral facts."[269] We saw above that part of Bedke's debunking argument is related to Mackie's argument from queerness. While Fraser does not mention Mackie, there are again shades of the argument from queerness in the background of Fraser's objection. Essentially, his argument is that it is difficult to specify how reliable our

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[265] Fraser, 461.

[266] Fraser, 465.

[267] Fraser, 462.

[268] Fraser, 465.

[269] Fraser, 465.

moral faculties are without specifying the nature of the facts that are supposed to be reliably cognized. With regard to natural moral facts, Fraser argues that the realist needs to do more work to show that our moral faculties are reliable.[270] Likewise, the error condition specifies that systemic bias in favor of either false positives or false negatives can negatively impact the reliability of mechanisms, and, as with the previous conditions, Fraser argues that there are empirical reasons for believing that our moral faculties are not reliable.[271]

Two features of Fraser's argument should be noted. The first is that he aims at placing the burden of proof on realists to show that our moral faculties are reliable by using empirical arguments about the reliability of information systems in general. The question of burden of proof goes to the heart of many debunking arguments. The question here is whether realists are entitled to assume our moral faculties are reliable unless proven otherwise, or if the opposite is the case. This is not an easy question to settle without making moves that would be considered question-begging by the other side. However, since it appears that there are many more ways for a cognitive faculty to go wrong than for it to get it right, there does seem to be a *prima facie* argument that the burden is on realists to show that our moral faculties are reliable. Given a Darwinian starting point, this seems like a tall order.

The second point about Fraser's argument is that he argues that we actually lack a reason to think there are any moral truths at all. He says, "moral facts may be natural, or non-natural, or non-existent."[272] This, however, is a problematic move. The realist can rightly accuse the debunker of begging the question if the burden is on the realist to prove that moral facts exist. A parallel case can be shown by comparing it to facts about the physical world. There is no non-

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[270] Fraser, 466.

[271] Fraser, 466.

[272] Fraser, 468.

question-begging way to prove that an external world exists without using one's perceptual

faculties, and to do that one must assume that one's perceptual faculties are reliable. Thus, in

order to make the EDA work, the debunker has to grant the existence of moral facts for the sake

of argument on pain of begging the question. This is what most debunkers do. A possible

objection for the realist is whether arguments which debunk morality also debunk perceptual or

other beliefs. That will be addressed in chapter three.

Limited Debunking Arguments

The EDAs that we have examined above all attempt to debunk morality *in toto*. There is a

smaller group of EDAs that takes aim at some particular subset of moral beliefs which are

considered suspect because of their presumed evolutionary genealogy. Examples of this include

arguments by Singer and Greene. However, as we will see they are generally misunderstood.

While they sometimes appear to be taken as realists, in fact Greene is certainly not and it is

doubtful that Singer is. Huemer, on the other hand, is an example of a realist who utilizes

evolutionary considerations to debunk only some beliefs. Kahane, among others, raises serious

doubts about whether such a strategy can succeed.

Singer's Debunking of Intuitionism

Singer appeals to evolution as an argument for debunking moral intuitions in favor of

utilitarianism. He argues that one of the main objections to utilitarianism has been that it is

contrary to many of our moral intuitions.[273] Singer rejects Rawls' idea of reflective equilibrium,

which suggests that, "where there is no inherently plausible theory that perfectly matches our

initial moral judgments, we should modify either the theory, or the judgments, until we have an

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[273] Peter Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," *The Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 3/4 (2005): 343-44, accessed July 22, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/25115831.

equilibrium between the two."[274] Singer objects to this approach because of how it treats our common moral judgments and intuitions as data in a scientific theory.[275] He writes, "A normative ethical theory . . . is not trying to explain our common moral intuitions. It might reject all of them, and still be superior to other normative theories that better matched our moral judgments."[276]

Singer brings two lines of argument to bear against moral intuitions. The first is the understanding of the effects of evolution, which he says is the "single most important advantage we have over the great moral philosophers of the past."[277] While Singer lauds many pre-Darwinian philosophers for throwing off "the myth of the divine origin of morality,"[278] he argues that their understanding was limited in that they did not understand how evolutionary forces at the genetic level affected our attitudes about morality.[279] In particular, Singer sees evolutionary considerations as explaining (and vindicating) many of Hume's ideas about the passions and moral judgements.[280] One idea that is of particular interest is Singer's observation that evolution does not select for "a general feeling of benevolence for the strangers we pass in the street."[281] At the same time, things like cooperation, reciprocity, and detecting and punishing cheats are observable in non-human species (as we have already seen above), and is evidence to Singer that "Morality is a natural phenomenon" even if human beings have introduced their own artificial

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[274] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 344.

[275] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 345.

[276] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 345.

[277] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 333.

[278] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 334.

[279] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 334.

[280] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 334-37.

[281] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 334.

refinements in the form of rules of justice.[282]

Singer's second line of argument is complementary to the first, in the form of research in neuroscience concerning how people actually form moral judgments.[283] Singer argues, based on empirical studies by Jonathan Haidt, that moral judgments are often automatic and intuitive, and deliberate reasoning is usually a rationalization of the immediate, intuitive response.[284] Singer also makes use of the research of Greene into people's responses to moral conundrums like the well-known trolley problem. He argues that these responses are consistent with the evolutionary picture of moral intuitions serving adaptive functions at the group level, but not having any actual moral significance.[285]

Singer anticipates the objection that utilitarianism itself still rests on intuitions about what is good, and so to abandon intuitions altogether will result in moral skepticism.[286] He attempts to circumvent this problem by separating intuitions that are more rational from those that are more immediate and laden with emotion.[287] Intuitions which do not seem to be a result of evolutionary pressures but instead are based on rational considerations, such as Sidgwick's ethical axioms, might still be justified even if our more common intuitions are not.[288] Separating these rational intuitions from those emotion-based intuitions that are the result of our cultural and evolutionary heritage is, in Singer's mind, "the only way to avoid moral skepticism."[289]

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[282] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 337.

[283] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 337f.

[284] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 338.

[285] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 347-48.

[286] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 349.

[287] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 350. As will be seen below, a similar idea is developed by Greene with his own limited debunking argument.

[288] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 350.

[289] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 351.

Singer is sometimes taken to be a moral realist, as we will see below in the discussion

with Greene. However, even Singer appears to be indecisive about his own metaethical views. In

a back-and-forth exchange with Huemer (who asserts that Singer's view is properly viewed as

noncognitivist[290]), Singer suggests that he himself is undecided between a very restricted kind of

intuitionism (following Sidgwick) or noncognitivism (following Hare).[291] While it is beyond the

scope of this dissertation to work out the exact nuances of Singer's metaethical view, it is worth

noting that it would be quite a stretch to regard him as a realist in the sense which universal

EDAs seek to undermine. At the same time, he does state that part of his project is to avoid

skepticism by means of endorsing a thoroughgoing utilitarian ethic. Singer himself appears to be

more concerned with the practical import of his approach than having a clearly worked-out

metaethics.

<center>Greene's Debunking of Deontological Ethics</center>

Greene appeals to empirical research into how people respond to descriptions of various

morally challenging scenarios as a basis for debunking certain moral beliefs. In particular, he

argues that deontological moral beliefs are shown by scientific studies to be rationalizations of

innate, emotional responses to moral situations, whereas consequentialist beliefs are not. He

begins by presenting "multiple pieces of independent evidence that deontological patterns of

moral judgment are driven by emotional responses while consequentialist judgments are driven

by 'cognitive' processes."[292] He then argues that evolution uses emotion rather than cognition as

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[290] Michael Huemer, "Singer's Unstable Meta-Ethics," in *Peter Singer Under Fire*, ed. Jeffrey A. Schaler (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2009), 359.

[291] Peter Singer, "Reply by Peter Singer," in *Peter Singer Under Fire*, ed. Jeffrey A. Schaler (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2009), 392.

[292] Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," in *Moral Psychology* Volume 3: *The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 59.

the drive for moral behavior because, "emotions are very reliable, quick, and efficient responses to recurring situations, whereas reasoning is unreliable, slow, and inefficient in such contexts."[293] The reason this gives rise to deontological moral theories, according to Greene, is that "humans are, in general, irrepressible explainers and justifiers of their own behavior."[294]

This might lead one to conclude that Greene's view is similar to one which some realists take in response to debunking – namely, that our intuitive moral judgments are a result of evolutionary pressures on our moral faculties (which Greene also holds), but that we can utilize our rational faculties to weed out false beliefs and be left with true moral beliefs. However, Greene is not a moral realist even though some scholars seem to read him that way.[295] Greene is an antirealist[296] and thinks that, "consequentialist principles, while not true, provide the best available standard for public decision making and for determining which aspects of human nature it is reasonable to try to change and which ones we would be wise to leave alone."[297] This judgment, however, puts Greene in a conundrum which he apparently fails to see. In claiming that consequentialist principles provide the "best" available standard, he is making an evaluative claim. Is that claim objectively true? First, it raises the question of what would make that the case. Greene's argument addresses moral truths specifically rather than evaluative truths generally. But claiming that consequentialist principles are the best standard would require something like mind-independent evaluative truths (à la Street's argument above), or else agreed-upon criteria by which to evaluate what constitutes "best." Second, even if Greene can

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[293] Greene, "Secret Joke," 60.

[294] Greene, "Secret Joke," 61.

[295] See, for example, Bogardus, 641n16 and Kahane, 112.

[296] See Greene, "Truth About Morality."

[297] Greene, "Secret Joke, 77.

make a case for consequentialism being the best standard, is anyone obligated to follow it? Would that not require a realist understanding of obligation, or of reasons? Here we see that the move from evaluative truths to moral truths still requires a realist understanding of morality. As an antirealist, Greene has lost any standing by which to make such a move. These ideas will be explored more fully in chapter four, but I call attention to them here.

Greene challenges deontologists to explain the coincidence between emotional responses which are taken as morally significant, and the deontological theories which are used to justify them.[298] In doing so, he rejects Kant's explanation, namely God. He writes,

> Present-day rationalist deontologists, as citizens of the twenty-first century, cannot depend on the notion that God gave us our moral emotions to encourage us to behave in accordance with the rationally discoverable deontological moral truth. Instead, they need some sort of naturalistically respectable explanation for the fact that the conclusions reached by rationalist deontologists, as opposed to those reached by consequentialists, appear to be driven by alarmlike emotional responses.[299]

Greene's argument here is reminiscent of Bedke's "cosmic coincidence" argument which was examined above. While Greene is generally taken as advocating a limited debunking argument (which in many ways is true), in fact the scope of his debunking is much more far-reaching. He argues that there is no such thing as moral truth, but that we should be consequentialists. It is hard to see this as anything other than self-refuting. Greene clearly has a personal preference for consequentialist ethics, but his reasons for thinking that this is better than deontological theories lack what Joyce calls "practical clout."

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[298] Greene, "Secret Joke," 68.

[299] Greene, "Secret Joke," 69. It should be noted that Greene differentiates between the emotional component that he believes underlies the immediate responses that underlie people's rationalizations in deontological terms (which he characterizes as "alarmlike"), and the emotions which are involved in consequentialist thinking. See Greene, "Secret Joke," 64-65.

Huemer's Revisionary Intuitionism

In some respects, Huemer uses a similar line of argument to Greene and Singer.

However, Huemer is explicit about his commitment to realism. Huemer endorses a version of

intuitionism which features moral realism and intuition as the ultimate justification for evaluative

beliefs.[300] He gives two different accounts for intuitions, but his main point is that "intuitions are

taken to be cognitive, intellectual states with propositional contents."[301] He also holds that, while

intuitions may not be as reliable as sensory beliefs, "nevertheless, *enough* of our intuitions are

accurate that we can construct a substantial body of ethical knowledge."[302]

Contra Street, Huemer argues that our starting fund of moral beliefs is not so thoroughly

contaminated that we cannot make any headway in attempting to sort the good from the bad.[303]

This will receive more attention in chapter three, since in this respect Huemer is an anti-

debunker. Huemer presents a set of five criteria which we can use to sort our moral intuitions.

These include things like finding a set of intuitions that cohere well, rejecting (or at least

distrusting) intuitions which appear culturally specific, as well as those which promote

reproductive fitness, which are favorable to yourself, and which align with strong emotions.[304]

Huemer actually singles out Singer as an example of using such a method.[305] Like Greene and

Singer, Huemer is highly skeptical of commonsense morality, which he argues tends to be

deontological.[306] Instead, he endorses a consequentialist approach which makes use of certain

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[300] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 370.

[301] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 371.

[302] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 371.

[303] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 379-81.

[304] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 381-82.

[305] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 382.

[306] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 389.

abstract theoretical intuitions in building a moral system, which he refers to as "formal intuitions."[307]

As for moral realism, Huemer argues that antirealist metaethical views do not support a revisionary ethical theory.[308] Huemer, like Greene and Singer, endorses the project of drastically (but not completely) revising commonsense moral beliefs. Greene's approach, as we have seen, is ultimately incoherent in that there is no independent moral truth to ground the project. Huemer, on the other hand believes that there are moral truths. He argues that the moral beliefs of humans in general have been moving in the direction of liberal beliefs for centuries, and that the best explanation for this is that liberal moral beliefs are true.[309] Huemer also maintains that global debunking arguments are unable to account for this universal convergence of human morality on liberal values.[310]

Numerous debunkers (both limited and global) use prohibitions against incest as an example of a moral belief that is the result of evolution. The argument is that, because incest results in a higher rate of birth defects and thus decreases relative fitness of one's genetic line, evolutionary pressures selected for humans with a tendency toward feelings of disgust about incest which became formulated as a moral prohibition. Huemer goes even further, arguing that, "conventional sexual morality should probably be rejected more or less wholesale, excepting those aspects that are mere applications to sexual behavior of general principles of benevolence

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[307] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 386.

[308] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 387-88.

[309] Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 7 (July 2016): 2007-8, accessed July 20, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0588-9.

[310] Huemer, "Liberal Realist Answer," 2007.

and respect for others."[311] What makes this example particularly interesting is that prohibitions against promiscuous sex seem to be very hard to explain using Huemer's own criteria. Specifically, promiscuous sex would seem to be favored rather than disfavored by natural selection for the simple reason that it increases one's chances of reproductive success, yet Huemer's criteria says we should be distrustful of intuitions which would promote reproductive fitness. Promiscuous sex confers benefits to the individual in terms of both physical pleasure and, at least with males, enhanced social status – which again, according to Huemer's criteria is a reason to be suspicious of it. Huemer also says we should be suspicious of intuitions that align with strong feelings. Yet the natural sex drive of humans inclines toward promiscuity, not chastity. It is also somewhat ironic that, as we saw in chapter one, Darwin himself supported Victorian sexual mores using evolutionary principles to buttress them against the promiscuous sexual practices of "savages." It is not hard to see that Huemer's principles are so malleable that they can be used to justify many different, even contradictory moral systems.

Kahane's Response to Limited Debunking

Most of the literature on EDAs deal with arguments against moral realism. Kahane is one of the few writers to argue against limited debunking arguments. Kahane argues that the limited use of debunking arguments is suspect because limited debunkers underestimate the extent to which our evaluative beliefs are contaminated by evolution.[312] For example, Kahane takes aim at Singer's argument that, while kin and reciprocal altruism are evolutionarily adaptive, universal altruism is not and thus is not susceptible to a debunking argument.[313] Kahane, however, argues

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[311] Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 388.

[312] Kahane, 119.

[313] See Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 123, no. 1 (October 2012): 20, accessed July 20, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/667837.

that, "Even if this claim is correct, it would achieve little. If a disposition to partial altruism was itself selected by evolution, then the epistemic status of its reasoned extension should also be suspect."[314] Also, while Singer, Greene, and Huemer all endorse some form of utilitarianism, Kahane argues that utilitarianism requires an account of well-being to supplement it. This is problematic because evaluative beliefs about well-being "are some of the most obvious candidates for evolutionary debunking."[315]

Kahane concludes that even if limited debunking arguments can avoid collapsing into global debunking (which he thinks is a "precarious assumption to make at this stage"[316]), the result will likely be a much more radical overhaul of our moral beliefs than anything proposed by utilitarians like Singer.[317] Kahane does not give a firm answer on whether he thinks EDAs do succeed, but some of the issues that he raises in connection with them will be discussed in chapter three.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined several EDAs, particularly with respect to the epistemic premise which attempts to describe precisely how it is that Darwinian evolution poses a problem for moral knowledge. If the arguments are successful, it seems that a commitment to Darwinian evolution implies moral skepticism. Since Darwinian evolution is considered to be established by science, it also appears that science itself may lead to moral skepticism. As this is an unwelcome outcome, many debunkers propose adopting antirealism with respect to moral truths as a means of avoiding skepticism. However, this strategy requires much closer

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[314] Kahane, 119.

[315] Kahane, 120.

[316] Kahane, 120.

[317] Kahane, 120.

examination. It is not at all clear how adopting an antirealist stance toward some domain of

truths can avoid skepticism, and, at least in some cases, the idea seems absurd on its face. Before

considering this, however, we will consider some of the many responses to debunking arguments

from moral realists of various stripes.

CHAPTER 3

REALIST RESPONSES TO THE DEBUNKING CHALLENGE

In the previous two chapters, we have examined the challenge from evolutionary debunking arguments. That challenge consists of two main ideas: first, that our moral faculties are a product of Darwinian forces working over a long period of time, and second, that this genealogical history makes it so that we have no reason to think our moral beliefs are true. Thus, even if there are mind-independent moral truths, evolution ensures that we can have no knowledge of them.

This conclusion is unacceptable to moral realists. While the debunking challenge does not actually demonstrate that moral realism is false, it does present the serious threat of skepticism with regard to moral beliefs. As we saw in the previous chapter, most debunking arguments target moral realism, resulting in skepticism toward all moral beliefs. Just to be clear, the debunking challenge argues that if moral realism is true, then we can have no knowledge of moral truths. This chapter will examine the responses of moral realists to this challenge.

Defending Moral Realism

Moral Realism Defined

One issue that demands attention at this point is what exactly we mean by moral realism. Some writers give detailed, precise definitions, while others are more general. One widely-cited definition comes from Shafer-Landau, who defines moral realism as "the tripartite view that (i) sincere moral judgments express beliefs, rather than conative attitudes; (ii) some of these beliefs are true; and (iii) such beliefs, when true, are not true by virtue of being the object of, or being

implied by, the attitudes of (even idealized) agents."[318] It is worth mentioning as a side note that

based on this understanding, traditional theistic ethics would not qualify as a form of realism if it

depends upon God's attitudes in any way. Theists might therefore qualify Shafer-Landau's third

criterion somewhat to specify that moral truths are independent of the attitudes of *human* agents.

Clarke-Doane gives a similar set of three conditions for moral realism (or realism in any given

domain), but also adds a fourth, namely that statements from a given domain "should be

interpreted literally."[319] This avoids a situation in which statements are "reinterpreted as being,

for example, only conditional claims about what follows from a given framework or theory."[320]

Of these criteria, the one most universally recognized as defining realism is that of attitude- or

stance-independence.[321]

These definitions provide a good starting point for understanding the "realism" in moral

realism. However, it leaves somewhat open what is meant by "moral." In chapter two we looked

at Joyce's understanding of "practical clout," as well as Street's view of "uncompromising

normative realism." Both of these views see moral truths, if they exist, in terms of categorical

reasons, and thus as having binding authority upon all rational, moral agents. Any answer to the

debunking challenge which is not able to vindicate morality in this sense, even if it can still

fulfill the criteria listed above for being realist, may be questionable as a form of *moral* realism.

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[318] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 1.

[319] Justin Clarke-Doane, "Morality and Mathematics: The Evolutionary Challenge," *Ethics* 122, no. 2 (January, 2012): 317, accessed June 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/663231.

[320] Clarke-Doane, 318.

[321] See Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 110. Cf. Kahane, 121n1; Elizabeth Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments: Moral Realism, Constructivism, and Explaining Moral Knowledge," *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 2 (2014): 127, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2013.855807. Skarsaune, on the other hand, objects that Street's definition is a straw man. Knut Olav Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism: Survival of the Iffiest," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 152, no. 2 (2011): 230, accessed July 4, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41487591. His position will be given more attention below.

As we will see, in some cases the disagreement between debunkers and realists turns on the understanding of moral realism that is being employed.

<div align="center">Naturalism, Non-naturalism, and "Robust" Realism</div>

Some definitions of moral realism include non-naturalism in the definition. Enoch, for example, defines "Robust Realism" as the view that "there are irreducibly, non-naturalist normative truths, response-independent truths that are perfectly objective and that are not reducible to—not even identical with—natural, not-obviously-normative truths."[322] Baras builds on this, writing that "robust moral realism" includes the idea that moral properties are *sui generis* and that "moral facts are never fully grounded in non-moral facts."[323] The general consensus is that moral naturalism is better equipped to handle EDAs than moral non-naturalism. Street observes that, "Since value naturalists construe evaluative facts as natural facts with causal powers, it is much more comprehensible how grasping such facts could have had an impact on reproductive success."[324] This relates to the reason given by debunkers as to why EDAs do not undermine perceptual beliefs – namely, because there is clearly an evolutionary advantage in being able to accurately ascertain truths about threats in one's physical environment. Street, Joyce, and several other debunkers do give special attention to moral naturalism in their arguments. However, their primary target is what is sometimes referred to as "robust" moral realism, which by some definitions at least is incompatible with moral naturalism.

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[322] David Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How Best to Understand It, and How to Cope with It," *Philosophical Studies* 148 (2010): 414-15, accessed June 29, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-009-9333-6.

[323] Dan Baras, "No Need to Get Up from the Armchair (If You're Interested in Debunking Arguments in Metaethics)," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 23, no. 3-4 (August 2020): 577, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10677-020-10085-0.

[324] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 131.

One question in this debate is what the target of EDAs is. Street is quite explicit that her argument targets "robust" normative realism, which includes both the ideas of attitude-independence and something like binding authority on all moral agents. That is, if moral realism is true, then everyone has a reason to do whatever it is that is stipulated by these independent moral truths. Perhaps the important question is what is the view of morality among the general populace, people who are not moral philosophers, and how do EDAs affect that? Dworkin refers to this as the "face-value" view of morality, which he defends against what he calls "archidmedean" skepticism that "concedes objective truth to 'descriptive' claims, including mathematical ones, but denies it to 'evaluative' – moral or ethical or interpretive or aesthetic – ones."[325] While Dworkin's defense does not specifically respond to evolutionary arguments, as we will see his critique of limited skepticism of values is relevant to the argument.

One part of his argument that merits consideration in the present context is the following: Dworkin argues that second-order statements about moral truths are, in fact, simply restatements of the original claim. For example, there is the statement that "genocide in Bosnia is wrong," and additional statements such as that the claim that genocide is wrong is true, and that it is objectively true.[326] Dworkin goes to some length to show that there is no sensible way to interpret the last two statements as anything other than a restatement of the original claim in supposedly neutral language which does not itself contain any value judgements, but which in fact does.[327] If this is correct, then the idea of "robust" moral realism is just the plain, commonsense view of morality that ordinary language users have. The reason why this is

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[325] Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (Spring, 1996): 88, accessed June 18, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2961920.

[326] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 92.

[327] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 94f.

important is that some attempts at undermining debunking arguments do so by redefining moral realism in such a way that it loses the essential features of this commonsense (or "face-value") morality. It is also important because debunkers themselves sometimes seek to salvage morality by understanding it in antirealist terms as we have already noticed. But Dworkin argues that "If anyone is persuaded to give up the face-value view of morality, he must surrender morality along with it."[328] The implication of this statement, which will be unpacked further in this chapter and the next, is that one cannot save one's first-order moral beliefs from skepticism simply by revising the status of those beliefs.[329]

The Argument from Overreach

Perhaps one of the most notable vulnerabilities of EDAs is the question of whether the skepticism of the debunker can be limited to moral truths alone without undermining other domains of knowledge which are needed to support the EDA itself, such as logic. This argument was touched on briefly in chapter one. The argument is about whether EDAs would also eliminate knowledge in other domains besides morality, and, if so, what the implication of that is for the argument. Other domains frequently discussed in the literature include perceptual/empirical beliefs, mathematical beliefs, and logical beliefs. This can also be formulated as an argument about a priori beliefs in general, with moral beliefs constituting one type of a priori belief.

Two complications in this discussion concern the status of a priori knowledge in general, and particularly the status of mathematical beliefs. Not all philosophers agree on mathematical realism, or on whether other kinds of a priori beliefs (such as logical beliefs) are objectively true

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[328] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 97.

[329] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 93.

as opposed to being a construct. In addition, mathematical and logical truths are often thought of

as necessary truths. Thus, it is complicated to assess whether EDAs undermine knowledge in

these areas, as it depends on whether moral beliefs are viewed as a kind of a priori knowledge,

and whether some or all moral beliefs are held to be necessarily true. Thus, the least complicated

domain to consider is that of perceptual beliefs. Virtually everyone accepts realism with regard

to the physical world, and virtually everyone agrees that empirical truths are not necessary truths.

Because of this we will begin the discussion with perceptual beliefs.

Perceptual Beliefs

Street explains why her debunking argument doesn't work against beliefs about our

physical environment. She writes, "consider truths about a creature's manifest surroundings – for

example, that there is a fire raging in front of it, or a predator rushing toward it. It is perfectly

clear why it tends to promote reproductive success for a creature to grasp such truths: the fire

might burn it to a crisp; the predator might eat it up."[330] This is problematic for non-naturalists,

argues Street, because there is no clear advantage in terms of survival in being able to grasp

mind-independent evaluative truths, like the kinds of empirical truths that Street alludes to.[331]

Street suggests that value naturalists might have a stronger case than non-naturalists for positing

that knowledge of evaluative truths could have survival value, since value naturalists consider

evaluative facts to be a class of natural facts. However, Street contends that there isn't any good

explanation for how these special natural facts promote survival and reproduction or what

exactly they are.[332]

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[330] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 130.

[331] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 130-31.

[332] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 131.

Shafer-Landau believes he has an answer as a non-naturalist to this line of argument. He maintains that "We can know that adaptive perceptual practices are also reliable ones only if we already have a sense of which perceptual judgments are true and which are false. We can tell that dispositions to hold false perceptual beliefs are likely to be maladaptive only if we can identify some false perceptual beliefs, show that they tend to undermine fitness and make inferences from those cases."[333] By the same logic, Shafer-Landau argues that we can only know if false moral beliefs are maladaptive if we can identify particular beliefs as false and show how they are maladaptive, which would also imply that we can identify some true moral beliefs.[334]

Shafer-Landau's objection, however, fails to hit the mark. The debunker's argument is not that false moral beliefs are maladaptive; rather, it's that holding certain moral beliefs would still be adaptive even if they were false and conversely that certain moral beliefs would be maladaptive even if they were true. In other words, the issue is that there is no relation between the truth of moral beliefs and their adaptiveness. The same cannot be said for perceptual beliefs. Consider the over-used example of a tiger. If one fails to accurately perceive a live tiger in one's vicinity, that person will be much less likely to survive and reproduce than the person whose relevant faculties are accurate. On the other hand, take a moral belief like "one should care for one's own offspring." Even if there is no corresponding fact of the matter that one should do this, doing it will improve the chances of one's genetic material propagating. Furthermore, believing that this is an overriding imperative will increase the chances that one will do it. The problem with mistaken perceptual beliefs is that the objects of those beliefs, if they are real, present an immediate danger from an evolutionary standpoint. With moral beliefs, there is no such danger

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[333] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 23.

[334] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 23.

presented by the objects of those beliefs *even if* they are real. One might argue that falsely

believing some physical danger is present when it is not would not necessarily be maladaptive, in

which case false positives in perceptual terms are not so bad. False negatives, on the other hand,

are potentially fatal.

Karl Schafer argues that perceptual faculties do enjoy one advantage over our normative

faculties, namely, that the explanation of the origin of our normative faculties "does not, on its

own, imply anything about their reliability,"[335] whereas with our perceptual faculties, this may

not be the case.[336] The key difference is that the development of normative faculties does not

include any reference to normative facts, which, as Schafer notes, is also the case with matters of

taste.[337] While Schafer grants that this could be construed as a reason for more confidence in the

reliability of our perceptual faculties, he ultimately rejects this as mistaken, concluding that the

arguments of the debunkers fail. Schafer argues that this is because we must rely on our

perceptual faculties even in assessing the evidence for evolution, so the only way to vindicate our

perceptual faculties via evolution is if we are entitled a priori to take them as reliable. The result

is what he calls a kind of "reflective endorsement."[338] But, if we allow our normative faculties

the same a priori entitlement to reliability, argues Schafer, then we will find that our normative

faculties pass the same sort of reflective endorsement test when comparing what Schafer calls the

best explanation of our normative faculties with "our best normative theory."[339]

There are several problems with Schafer's argument. One of the most obvious is that the

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[335] Karl Schafer, "Evolution and Normative Scepticism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 3 (September 2010): 474, accessed July 4, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048400903114219.

[336] Schafer, 472.

[337] Schafer, 472-73.

[338] Schafer, 487.

[339] Schafer, 487.

concept of what constitutes "our best normative theory" is controversial to say the least, and Schafer gives only a few hints as to what this might look like. First, he doesn't indicate who the "our" refers to, but presumably it refers to contemporary academic philosophers, since that is his target audience. In that case, "our best normative theory" would equate to something like, "the normative theory most preferred by contemporary moral philosophers." Secondly, "best" is a normative term, and it goes almost without saying that a great many people – in fact, likely most people if one includes all of human history and cultures – will have significant points of disagreement with Schafer about what is the "best" normative theory. Thus, Schafer's reflective endorsement test begins by tacitly assuming a particular set of substantive moral claims and comparing those with the deliverances of our normative faculties, which is clearly a question-begging argument.

Schafer might respond to the objection above by saying that perceptual faculties beg the question in the exact same way, in that it begins by assuming what our "best" scientific explanation for the origins of our perceptual faculties is and so must make a substantive normative claim in making the argument. But this is again to miss the point in much the same way that Shafer-Landau's argument does. The question is what is the case given that Darwinian evolution is true. The debunker makes the same assumption both for our normative faculties and for our perceptual faculties, and thus is not begging any question. The issue is whether the debunker's argument undermines perceptual knowledge in the same way that it purports to undermine moral/normative knowledge. Schafer's argument aims at a different target, by showing that the debunker's argument does not answer a deeper and more pervasive kind of skepticism. This is an important question to be addressed later, but it does not directly answer the challenge posed by debunkers toward moral knowledge, given that Darwinian evolution is taken

as true.

There are other serious problems with Schafer's argument as well. For example, in his

discussion of our normative faculties Schafer talks about feelings of disgust, tracking pain of

ourselves and others, and reciprocity relations. [340] He argues that reflection will lead us to the

conclusion that feelings of disgust do not actually have normative significance, while the other

two faculties he mentions do.[341] Again, there is no indication of who is included in the "we," but

since Schafer is writing for academic philosophers we can assume this is who it refers to. In

other words, of the three normative faculties that Schafer mentions, he considers one of them to

be largely unreliable. He gives no explanation, however, as to why we should consider our other

normative faculties reliable when one of them, by his own admission, is not. If one or more of

our perceptual faculties was generally unreliable, one might think that would be a troubling

phenomenon in need of explanation. But if the explanation is that evolution has equipped us with

feelings of disgust for reasons related to adaptiveness rather than correspondence with moral

truth[342], then that seems like a reason to think that our other normative faculties can also be

explained that way. As we have seen in the previous chapters, pain and reciprocity are, in fact,

used as examples of evolutionary adaptations.

Furthermore, Schafer's argument is problematic in that he at first denies that rational

reflection can save realists from the debunker's challenge, but then later relies on exactly that

device for a crucial step in his own argument. Schafer agrees with Street's argument (which we

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[340] Schafer, 477.

[341] Schafer, 477.

[342] In fact, feelings of disgust with respect to incest are often used as an example of an evolutionary adaptation which does not correspond to any objective moral truth. See Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," *Philosophy* 61, no. 236 (1986): 183-84, accessed June 4, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/3750474.

looked at in chapter two) that higher-level reasoning and reflection, using the materials provided by "our basic normative responses to certain sorts of stimuli," will not help the realist in ascertaining normative truth.[343] However, just two pages later, while arguing about the reliability of our normative faculties, Schafer writes that, "our reactions of disgust are highly sensitive to what we might call 'cleanliness' or 'purity'—factors that most of us, *upon reflection* [emphasis added], do not regard as significant in many cases."[344] The problem, as Schafer himself has already pointed out, is that our reflection can only be based on other normative judgments which themselves are produced by our normative faculties, which we take to override these feelings of disgust. But if these other normative judgments are also contaminated by distorting influences, that is of no use in attaining true normative beliefs.

With respect to the question at hand, there appears to be no good reason for thinking that EDAs overreach by undermining perceptual beliefs in addition to moral beliefs. The debunker can show that there is reason to think that, if evolution is true, then natural selection would select for reliable perceptual faculties, whereas the same cannot be said for reliable moral or normative faculties. The issue becomes murkier, however, when it comes to other domains such as mathematics and logic.

<center>Mathematical Beliefs</center>

Joyce argues that a faculty for simple mathematical beliefs, which appears to be innate in the same way as with moral beliefs, would be of no use if it produced false beliefs. "Suppose you are being chased by three lions, you observe two quit the chase, and you conclude that it is now safe to slow down. The truth of '1 + 1 = 2' is a background assumption to any reasonable

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[343] Schafer, 475.

[344] Schafer, 477.

hypothesis of how this belief might have come to be innate."[345] Thus, he argues that his

genealogical critique of moral beliefs would not have an adverse effect on the status of at least

these beliefs.[346] One initial response might be that it is questionable how many people engage in

this kind of arithmetical calculation in such circumstances. Other creatures, which seem to lack

any mathematical faculties at all, still seem to be able to evade predators. One might wonder why

evolution would invest in such an inefficient mechanism to do the same job that is done in

animals that lack mathematical faculties by more direct methods.

Sinnott-Armstrong echoes the point made by Joyce, arguing that, while the evolutionary

explanation of moral beliefs works even if there are no moral facts, people would not have

survived if they believed that $2 + 3 = 4$.[347] He may be thinking of a similar scenario to the one

postulated by Joyce in which being mistaken about the number of predators one must evade can

have deadly consequences, but he does not give any reason for his conclusion. As we will see,

however, the problem facing debunkers in this regard may go deeper.

Morton provides a more sophisticated argument as to why mathematical beliefs are not

debunked by EDAs but moral beliefs are. His analysis is based on what he calls probabilistic

independence, which is when the probability that we believe some proposition P is independent

of the truth of P.[348] In the context of his larger argument, this relates to when a realist response to

skeptical challenges begs the question, in particular as it relates to third-factor accounts which

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[345] Joyce, 182.

[346] He does note, however, that "if an argument that moral beliefs are unjustified or false would by the same logic show that believing that $1 + 1 = 2$ is unjustified or false, this would count as a reductio ad absurdum." Joyce, 243n5.

[347] Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Moral Skepticisms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43, accessed October 12, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195187725.001.0001.

[348] Justin Morton, "When Do Replies to the Evolutionary Debunking Argument Against Moral Realism Beg the Question?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 2 (2019): 271, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2018.1455718.

will receive extended treatment below. Morton argues that if one assumes some substantive, first-order beliefs in a given domain, but gives no explanation as to why we ended up with reliable faculties for those beliefs, then it is question-begging.[349] The condition which he proposes that must be met by debunkers (including himself) is that beliefs within the domain must be probabilistically independent of their truth in order to vindicate the relevant faculties. In other words, we must be more likely to hold the belief if it is true than if it is false.[350]

We have already seen how this can be accomplished by debunkers in the domain of perception. If there is a dangerous predator within striking distance, we are more likely to survive if we believe that to be the case than if we do not. Thus, evolution will select for faculties which form the relevant belief. In that case, by Morton's analysis, the perceptual belief is not probabilistically independent of the belief which is formed from reliance on perception. The difficulty with mathematical beliefs (as well as logical beliefs), according to Morton, is that mathematical and logical beliefs are necessarily true. The result of this is that the probability of the truth of the relevant belief does not affect the probability that we will believe it, since it is impossible for the belief to be false. He further argues that this is not the case with moral beliefs, based on his conclusion that not all moral beliefs are necessarily true. Because of that, Morton argues that mathematical and logical truths are *trivially* probabilistically independent of their truth, whereas moral beliefs are so *non-trivially*.[351]

So, while Morton does see a problem for realism with respect to mathematical and logical beliefs, it is a broader problem of skepticism generally rather than the evolutionary problem of moral beliefs. It should also be noted that Morton's analysis applies to realists who hold that

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[349] Morton, "Replies," 268.

[350] Morton, "Replies," 271.

[351] Morton, "Replies," 277-78.

moral beliefs are causally impotent. His argument allows that moral naturalists might be able to escape the charge of begging the question in replies to EDAs.[352] The problem of begging the question will be examined more fully below as well.

It is not clear, however, that Morton can successfully carve out this special exemption for mathematical and logical beliefs that is distinct from moral beliefs. Morton admits that, while some moral beliefs are contingent, beliefs about fundamental moral principles are not.[353] Examples of moral beliefs which are contingently true include things like beliefs "about whether Hillary is a good person or whether we ought to donate to relief efforts for the latest hurricane."[354] In order to make his exemption for mathematics and logic work, Morton specifies that "we have to understand mathematical truths such that they do not include truths like 'There are more than 10 words in this paper'—and similarly for logic."[355] In other words, he ensures that mathematical and logical truths only include fundamental principles rather than contingent truths with a mathematical/logical component, but includes contingent truths in his taxonomy of moral beliefs. Because of this, fundamental moral principles are left untouched by his own argument. So even if contingent moral beliefs like the ones he offers are non-trivially probabilistically independent of their truth value, fundamental moral principles (if they are necessarily true, which Morton grants) are not. Morton fails to account for this in his final analysis, but instead lumps all moral beliefs together in debunking them. However, if Morton were to treat mathematical/logical beliefs and moral beliefs the same way (either by excising contingent truths uniformly across the board or including them uniformly), then the distinction

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[352] Morton, "Replies," 272.

[353] Morton, "Replies," 269.

[354] Morton, "Replies," 269.

[355] Morton, "Replies," 277n11.

he makes would disappear. Either they are all non-trivially probabilistically independent or none of them are (the question of whether moral truths are necessarily true is a separate one which will be addressed below, but realists sometimes use this as an escape route around the debunking argument).

Clarke-Doane argues that if moral realism falls to EDAs, so does mathematical realism. Clarke-Doane's argument has two parts – first, that the argument that our faculties would not be selected for true moral beliefs also shows that they would not be selected for true mathematical beliefs, and second, that the assumption that moral truths could be very different also show that mathematical truths could be very different.[356]

With respect to the former argument, Clarke-Doane challenges the arguments of debunkers like Joyce and Street. Clarke-Doane maintains that their argument depends on the assumption that "if we must presuppose the contents of beliefs of a kind, D, in any evolutionary explanation of our having those beliefs, then we were selected to have true D-beliefs."[357] However, Clarke-Doane believes this assumption is doubtful, arguing for example that, while we likely need to assume the truth of elementary logical beliefs in an evolutionary explanation of having those beliefs, "the question of whether we were selected to have true elementary logical beliefs seems to be very much open."[358] Rather than presenting an argument for this, Clarke-Doane simply gives a reference with arguments for and against this idea.[359] With respect to EDAs, however, it is precisely the point of the argument that, if our faculties weren't selected for true beliefs in a given domain, then having reliable faculties would be something like a massive

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[356] Clarke-Doane, 326-27.

[357] Clarke-Doane, 328.

[358] Clarke-Doane, 328.

[359] Clarke-Doane, 328n39.

coincidence. What the anti-debunker needs to provide is an argument that this is not the case –

that, even if our faculties in a given domain were not preferred by natural selection, there is some

explanation for why they are reliable. Clarke-Doane's objection amounts to little more than

suggesting that there is a still a logical possibility of having reliable faculties in elementary logic

and mathematics even given the debunkers' arguments. But this is not in question, so the

objection is moot. None of the debunking arguments that we have examined argue against the

logical possibility of reliable moral faculties, but rather that it is enormously improbable.

Clarke-Doane also argues that, "In order to argue that we would be evolutionarily

selected to have true mathematical beliefs, one must argue, on the basis of evolutionary

considerations, that had the mathematical truths been very different, our mathematical beliefs

would have been correspondingly different."[360] This, however, appears to be a mistake. It

assumes that our current mathematical beliefs are largely correct and largely correspond to mind-

independent truths, which is the very question under dispute. Thus, it is a question-begging

argument. What the argument actually needs to show is that our beliefs would correspond with

truth, regardless of what the truth is. For the sake of the argument, for all we know our current

mathematical beliefs are all wrong, but there was some evolutionary advantage in thinking them

to be right. With respect to mathematics, this seems like an implausible assumption, which is

why Clarke-Doane tacitly assumes that our current beliefs are largely correct. He also points out

later in his paper that disagreements about certain mathematical axioms almost always come

down to arguments about mathematical realism, which is a controversial topic among

philosophers.[361] Clarke-Doane is, after all, mainly trying to show that arguments for

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[360] Clarke-Doane, 329.

[361] Clarke-Doane, 337.

mathematical realism and moral realism are on a par, so that "there would seem to be no epistemological ground on which to be a moral antirealist and a mathematical realist."[362]

One final important point made by Clarke-Doane has to do with the kinds of examples that are used by debunkers to support the reliability of our mathematical faculties. He argues that it is not the mathematical truths which are evolutionarily adaptive, but rather that there are first-order logical truths about our surroundings that correspond with arithmetical truths such as $1+1=2$ with respect to counting lions or other predators.[363] Clarke-Doane concludes that, "What matters, as in the case of elementary arithmetic, is how such creatures' mathematical beliefs 'line up with' truths about their environments. If the physical world appropriately aligns with their mathematical beliefs, it does not matter whether the mathematical world does too."[364] This is an intriguing argument in its own right, and suggests that there could be a sort of "cosmic coincidence" in the alignment between the physical world and the mathematical world, akin to the kind of cosmic coincidence which debunkers argue would be necessary for moral truths to line up with our evolved moral faculties. That argument, however, is outside the scope of this dissertation. The important point to note is that Clarke-Doane's argument calls into question the argument from debunkers that their arguments can be limited to the moral domain without spilling over into other areas. Even if perception is still safe from debunking, mathematical beliefs may well not be. Logical beliefs may also be in danger of falling prey to debunking, but more work would be needed to show that.

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[362] Clarke-Doane, 340.

[363] Clarke-Doane, 331.

[364] Clarke-Doane, 329.

Overreach and the "Plantingian Pickle"

Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN) uses evolutionary considerations to undermine belief in naturalism based on a similar line of reasoning to EDAs. However, in Plantinga's argument, the conjunction of naturalism and evolutionary theory undermines not just our moral faculties, but our cognitive faculties in general, and thus undermines belief in naturalism. Crow argues that the reasoning used by Street is parallel to Plantinga's argument, and that if Street's argument is successful she should be committed to theism. Since this would contradict her own argument against moral realism, Street's argument is defeated by her own line of reasoning.[365]

There are, however, problems with Crow's argument. Street's argument against normative realism does not directly address the existence of God. As we saw in chapter two, Street has something like a theoretical argument in favor of normative antirealism which simply assumes that God does not exist. Street does have a separate argument against the existence of God which will be dealt with in chapter five. But she curiously omits from her Darwinian dilemma any consideration of what would be the case if God did exist. Crow himself argues that there are two ways to avoid skepticism in the face of a "cosmic coincidence" type of argument. He writes, "One way is to embrace anti-realism – by claiming that the facts are (in some sense) projections of our cognitive faculties. The other way is to accept the theological conviction that God has engineered the coincidence between our beliefs and the stance-independent facts."[366] So why can't Street accept the second option? Crow gives no reason for this, he simply calls

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[365] Daniel Crow, "A Plantingian Pickle for a Darwinian Dilemma: Evolutionary Arguments Against Atheism and Normative Realism," *Ratio* 29, no. 2 (June 2016): 147-48, accessed September 15, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/rati.12092.

[366] Crow, 140.

attention to the fact that Street takes the position of antirealism. However, I will argue in chapter four that antirealism is not an escape from skepticism at all, but rather an acceptance of skepticism with a sort of rhetorical camouflage. In that case, Crow's own argument points to theism rather than to antirealism.

It seems to be an assumption of many realist responses to EDAs that if EDAs do in fact overreach into domains such as mathematics and logic, this would constitute a refutation of the argument. As we have seen above, debunkers like Joyce also believe this to be the case (although in Joyce's case he believes his EDA can be restricted to morality). But why is this the case? The most that such an argument from overreach can show is that there is a tension between naturalistic evolutionary theory and certain domains of knowledge. By itself, the argument says nothing about how to resolve such a tension. This issue will come to the forefront in chapter five, but one way to resolve the problem is that suggested by Plantinga, which is to give up belief in naturalism.[367] This is not to say that the argument from overreach should be considered settled one way or the other. The debate is still very much a live one, but it is far from clear that debunkers can limit their argument to the moral domain.

Third Factor Arguments

Several realist arguments against EDAs fall under a category collectively known as "third factor" arguments. These arguments aim to circumvent the skeptical conclusion of EDAs by proposing that, rather than selecting for true moral beliefs directly, evolution selects for true moral beliefs indirectly by means of a third factor which is correlated both to survival and reproduction *and* to moral truth. How this is supposed to work depends upon the particular factor

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[367] Plantinga, *Warrant*, 237.

which is utilized. There are several third factor arguments in the literature. The examples to be

examined here include those by Wielenberg, Enoch, Behrends, Skarsaune, Vavova, and Brosnan.

Wielenberg and Rights

Wielenberg's attempt at refuting EDAs is based on the notion that belief in a "moral

barrier" that surrounds us enhances fitness from an evolutionary standpoint by motivating us to

resist behavior from others that would decrease our evolutionary fitness.[368] This explains why

evolution would select for creatures with a propensity to believe in a moral barrier for

themselves and their close kin, although Wielenberg recognizes that there is a problem with this

explanation for non-kin.[369] His solution to this is what he calls a "likeness principle," by which

creatures infer that things which are alike in their known properties are also alike in their

unknown properties.[370] Wielenberg argues that this principle is fitness-enhancing when it comes

to knowing what sorts of food to eat, and when applied to the moral realm causes us to infer that

other people have moral barriers the same way that we do.[371] In this way, Wielenberg tries to

explain how evolution could select for such a moral tendency even though it may not be fitness-

enhancing itself.[372]

Granting that Wielenberg's argument for belief in the rights of others is at least plausible,

there remains the need to explain having actual rights. Wielenberg argues that in order to form a

belief that one has certain rights, one must have the capacity to have a concept of rights.

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[368] Erik J. Wielenberg, "On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (2010): 444-45, accessed June 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/652292.

[369] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 445. See chapter one for discussion of kin selection.

[370] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 445.

[371] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 445-46.

[372] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 445.

Moreover, if rights exist at all, they are founded on having certain cognitive faculties which are the ones required to form beliefs about rights (or are closely related), meaning that if you think you have moral barriers (or rights), then you do actually have them.[373] Wielenberg concludes that, "The very cognitive faculties that lead such beings to believe that they possess moral barriers also entail the presence of those very barriers."[374]

There are at least two problems with Wielenberg's argument at this point. One is his statement that, "assuming that rights are real, the processes that ultimately generate, say, the belief that one has a right not to be tortured just for fun are significantly reliable, at least with respect to beliefs of the relevant type."[375] The problem here is that it is a patently question-begging argument to begin with the assumption that rights are real, since that is part of the question that is in dispute. Debunking arguments generally allow that moral realism is true in order to show that there is no evolutionary explanation as to how our beliefs line up with moral truths. Wielenberg assumes that a belief such as "I have a right not to be tortured just for fun" is one of those moral truths. He claims later in his paper that the coincidence between belief in moral rights and having rights might be explained by a combination of the laws of nature and "the existence of certain supervenience relationships."[376] He further contends that this is just a brute fact with no further explanation.[377] It seems unlikely that any debunker would be impressed by this kind of argument.

A second problem has to do with the basis for his claim that thinking you have rights

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[373] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 449.

[374] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 449-50.

[375] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 449.

[376] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 460.

[377] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 460.

entails that you do have rights. Wielenberg's argument for this is very thin indeed. He writes at

one point that, "While there are various theories about the foundation of rights, it is widely

agreed that if rights exist at all, their presence is guaranteed by the presence of certain cognitive

faculties."[378] For this statement, he cites an article by Zechenter along with the statement that he

(Wielenberg) is "proposing only a sufficient condition for the possession of a moral barrier, not a

necessary condition."[379] A closer look at Zechenter's article, however, belies Wielenberg's

argument. Zechenter gives three major theories that have been used to justify universal human

rights.[380] Of the three, only rationalism comes close to Wielenberg's position, in that it holds that

rights are derived from "the universal capacity of all humans to think rationally."[381] This is in

contrast to natural law theory, which holds that rights are "granted to all individuals by God or

Providence,"[382] and positivism, which bases human rights on the worldwide acceptance in

modern nation states of laws and treaties concerning human rights.[383] Zechenter writes that,

"Both rationalism and natural law theory are often combined in the modern human rights

discourse and take the form of claims that universal human rights exist independent of culture,

ideology, or value systems."[384] But this is highly problematic for Wielenberg's position, since it

is not rationalism alone that is the basis for rights. In order to arrive at mind-independence, one

would conclude from reading Zechenter that natural law theory with its appeal to God or

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[378] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 449.

[379] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 449n35.

[380] Elizabeth M. Zechenter, "In the Name of Culture: Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 320, accessed June 20, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3630957.

[381] Zechenter, 321.

[382] Zechenter, 320.

[383] Zechenter, 321.

[384] Zechenter, 321.

Providence must be included.

It is questionable if a rationalistic view of rights alone would even qualify as realist, since it bases rights on our cognitive abilities, and thus most plausibly on our evaluative attitudes. If moral truth depends upon having a particular attitude toward moral truth, it can hardly be considered to be attitude- or stance-independent. Thus, Wielenberg's theory is not only question-begging, it is hard to see how it qualifies as a realist view except with a very strained definition of realism. Rationalism alone would indicate that rights are relative, and depend upon one's cognitive ability. In fact, Zechenter's entire paper is an argument against relativism. Applying positivism to Wielenberg's theory would produce a kind of constructivism, in that it would suggest that rights depend upon the attitudes of people who have made these international agreements. Debunkers like Street would have no problem with such a view, except that they would not consider it realist in any kind of robust way.

At one point, Wielenberg cites the example of an icon made by a Quaker abolition society in the eighteenth century that depicts a slave in shackles along with the words "Am I not a man and a brother?"[385] Wielenberg's point has to do with the importance of recognizing others as having the same kind of moral barriers as oneself. Wielenberg's use of this, however, is problematic. Quaker thinking about the common rights of slaves was based not on the possession of certain cognitive abilities, but rather on Christian theology which teaches that all humans are created in the image of God. The rationale behind the Quaker icon is not some "likeness principle" such as that proposed by Wielenberg, even if he can artificially construe it that way. Also, even Wielenberg admits that all major civilizations have treated out-groups as not having

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[385] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 446.

the same rights as insiders.[386] Thus the genealogical explanation that Wielenberg proposes

appears to not only be nothing more than a just so story, it is also contradicted by the historical

evidence which Wielenberg himself presents. As we saw in chapter one, in-group/out-group

thinking is much more easily accounted for by evolutionary theory than the idea of universal

human rights. Wielenberg's idea of a likeness principle applied to the moral realm seems like a

post hoc rationalization rather than an example of people using the same cognitive mechanism

that recognizes edible, as opposed to poisonous, foods and applying it to the realm of morality.

Enoch's (Godless) Pre-established Harmony

One highly influential third factor argument is that of Enoch. To set the stage, Enoch

argues that the best way to understand the debunking challenge is in terms of explaining the

correlation between normative truths and normative judgments.[387] He illustrates this with an

analogy of someone holding a number of beliefs about a village in Nepal which turned out to be

true. We would expect some explanation of this correspondence, without which it would be "too

miraculous to believe."[388] As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Enoch's view of robust

moral realism holds that normative truths are non-natural and response-independent, and so are

causally inert.[389] This makes it particularly challenging to explain how we could come to have

knowledge of them using faculties with a naturalistic, evolutionary genealogy.

One problem with Enoch's analogy of the Nepalese village should be noted at the outset.

With regard to a person's claims about a particular village, we could discover whether or not the

claims were true by investigating ourselves – either by going to the village to find out or by

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[386] Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking," 446.

[387] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 420.

[388] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 421.

[389] See Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge,", 422.

asking people who had been there or were from there. With moral knowledge, we are left with no such method of verification. A better analogy would be if the person made claims about a colony of beings on a planet in a distant galaxy, call them Andromedans. Since we have no way to independently verify claims about Andromedans and no explanation for how the person could have gained such knowledge, we would conclude that the claims were false even absent proof that they were false.[390]

Before proposing his own solution to the challenge, Enoch makes what he calls two methodological remarks.[391] The first has to do with finding the best explanation by what Enoch calls "scoring points in an explanatory game."[392] While a brute, unexplained coincidence might lose points for the realist, it doesn't necessarily refute realism, but rather means that "we should opt for the best metaethical theory, the one that—perhaps among other desiderata—best explains whatever needs explaining."[393] Keep in mind that Enoch's preferred explanation is non-naturalist, but also non-theist (hence the "godless" in his theory[394]). But, says Enoch, the correlation between our beliefs and the moral truths isn't that striking because "We are not, after all, *that* good in forming and revising our normative beliefs."[395] To illustrate this, Enoch writes in a footnote, "Consider the false but seemingly evolutionarily useful 'The interests of others with whom we have no privileged genetic of reciprocal relations do not count at all,' and 'The

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[390] Of course, not everyone claims to have knowledge of such things and if they did we would judge them to be mentally deficient, whereas everyone claims to have knowledge of moral truths. However, part of the debunking argument is that there is an evolutionary explanation for this fact which does not require any of the claims to be true.

[391] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 427.

[392] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 427.

[393] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 427.

[394] See Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 430.

[395] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 427.

interests of non-human animals do not count at all'."[396] Enoch appeals to the Nepalese village

illustration in arguing this point, suggesting that it would be as if a person made claims about the

village which were true more often than would be expected by guessing, but only by a little.[397]

But notice that this requires that we can verify how many of the beliefs are true, which Enoch

can't do for normative beliefs without begging the question.

Again, our Andromedan illustration above is more suitable here. We can't say, "the

accuracy of this person's claims about Andromedans is only a little bit better than if she was

guessing," because we are not in a position to say any such thing. Enoch assumes these beliefs he

mentions to be false and hence an example of a poor correlation, but he isn't entitled to that

assumption since that is the very point in dispute. Very likely all of his readers will agree with

him that these moral beliefs are false, but that is irrelevant. The debunker argues that we don't

know if there is *any* correlation between our moral beliefs and moral truth. For Enoch to argue

that the correlation isn't *that* great is thus from the debunker's perspective overly generous to the

realist.

Enoch's second point about score keeping for explanations is that, as long as the starting

points of our normative beliefs are not too far off, our other reasoning mechanisms should be

able to get us closer to the normative truth.[398] As we saw in chapter two, however, Street's

argument is that there is no starting point from which rational deliberation can begin to work and

separate true beliefs from false.[399] Before presenting his own third factor argument, Enoch has

already made some assumptions about moral beliefs as we saw above by assuming that our

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[396] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 427n31.

[397] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 428.

[398] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 428-29.

[399] See Street, 124.

beliefs are in general reasonably close to the truth, even if not much better than someone could get by guessing. But this presumes some moral knowledge to start with.

Enoch's argument, then, is that he just has to rack up more explanatory points on the whole than other metaethical views, including Street's constructivism, preferably by avoiding simply calling it a fluke.[400] To do this, he proposes what he calls a "pre-established harmony" between evolutionary forces and normative truths by proposing that we assume that survival and reproductive success are "at least somewhat good."[401] Enoch argues that it need not be the case that the survival and reproductive success of *all* creatures are good, since "some creatures just do not have interests, and so presumably nothing is good for them."[402] As for creatures like us and our ancestors, Enoch suggests, "the claim that their survival and reproductive success is of value gains much plausibility, I think, from the observation that survival (or some such) is at the very least good *for* the creature surviving, or *for* a close group of relatives, or something of this kind."[403]

This is a questionable starting point for the moral realist. Enoch specifies that survival is good *for* the creature surviving, providing that the creature has an interest in its own survival. For creatures with no interests, nothing is good. It seems questionable that this will qualify as robustly realist, or even as realist at all. Rather than a mind-independent truth, Enoch has settled for a starting point which depends entirely upon the attitude of the creature who values it. Thus, even Enoch's starting point is mind-dependent. Street would have no problem at all affirming that survival is good *for the creature that values survival*. In fact, that is the entire basis for her

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[400] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 429.

[401] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 430.

[402] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 433.

[403] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 433.

antirealist view, that values did not exist until creatures who valued came to exist. Survival can be good for a creature who values survival without "survival is pro tanto good" being a mind-independent truth. Furthermore, the debunker can respond that it is easy to see how evolution would have selected for the belief that survival is good, even if it is not the case that survival is good.

Assuming that survival and reproductive success are good (even if only somewhat) looks patently question-begging. Enoch's reply is that, for this not to be the case, "The evolutionary 'aim' would have had to not be of any value. And how could that be?"[404] The answer to that is that naturalistic evolution is a mindless process. Where would "values" come from? They must be imported from somewhere else. One might as well argue that a supernova is good since that is the end toward which stars progress. When evolution is said to have an "aim," this is purely metaphorical, which Enoch recognizes by the use of scare quotes. Evolution has no "aim" per se. Naturalistic evolution is a substitute for teleological explanations, but evolution itself has no telos. When a person has an aim or a goal, that aim or goal is by definition something that they value. But with an impersonal process, there is no "aiming" involved, and the process does not value anything.

Enoch's argument thus fails to establish a basis for robustly realist normative values that can stand in the face of the debunking challenge. Chapter four will examine the question of whether antirealism/constructivism can provide a better explanation. However, Enoch has failed to take into consideration how a theistic solution might resolve the problem he seeks to solve with a godless one, and thus fails to consider the full range of metaethical views. We will return to that question in chapter five. Enoch's argument has nevertheless been quite influential, as both

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[404] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 433.

of the next two accounts attempt to build off of it in some way.

Behrends and Our Reasons to Survive

Behrends acknowledges that Enoch's argument is question-begging in assuming that our own survival is good.[405] However, Behrends believes that Enoch's approach nevertheless can be modified in a way that will make for a successful rebuttal of the debunking challenge. Behrends does endorse Enoch's strategy of lowering the bar for the amount of correlation needed for a successful realist explanation, both in terms of how many of our beliefs need to be correct, and also in terms of only requiring a reasonably good starting point from which further reflection can begin.[406] While this strategy is laudable in attempting to give realists an easier task, as we saw above both lowering the bar strategies are dubious. The first can only work if we have some way of ascertaining which beliefs are correct and which are false. This would require a lot more than begging the question about a single normative belief such as survival being good, but rather on a whole host of other beliefs. The second strategy of finding a good starting place and working our way up through the use of reason is really the central point of contention.

Behrends attempts to craft an argument that is based on meta-normative realism, which he says is parallel to moral realism. He writes, "Just as moral realists take there to be facts about morality that are stance-independently true, so too do meta-normative realists take there to be stance-independently true facts about what reasons we have."[407] As we saw in chapter two, Street targets value realism in general, which encompasses moral realism but is broader in scope.

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[405] Jeff Behrends, "Meta-Normative Realism, Evolution, and Our Reasons to Survive," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (December 2013): 492, accessed July 25, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/papq.12010.

[406] Behrends, 491.

[407] Behrends, 486.

Behrends's argument aims to defend that same target. The argument is based on the proposition that if meta-normative realism is true, then we have reason to do something or other. Our continued existence is necessary for us to do anything at all, so if meta-normative realism is true (which debunkers must grant on pain of begging the question against realism), then we have a reason to pursue our continued existence.[408]

Part of Behrends's argument is that it makes no difference if we do not know the details of what we have reason to do as long as we know we have reason to do something or other. Behrends argues that virtually any normative reason will entail that we have reason to pursue our own continued existence, as long as it entails that we have reason to do something at some future time.[409] One example he gives is having a reason to care for your children for an extended period of time.[410] Of course, this is an appealing argument because most people would affirm the principle that we ought to care for our own offspring at least until they can take care of themselves. As we have seen above, however, it is also highly susceptible to debunking, since there is clearly an evolutionary advantage to such a belief. Behrends's point, however, is not that this particular belief is true, since the realist only requires that *some* belief entailing future obligation is true, even if we don't know what it is. He generalizes this into what he calls the "Do Better" principle.[411] This principle holds that "There is a *pro tanto* reason to make things better than they are now."[412] Behrends argues that this also gives us a reason to pursue our own survival (our own persistence as he puts it), since it "will entail that we always have some reason

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[408] This is a summary of Behrends's detailed argumentation. See Behrends, 493ff.

[409] Behrends, 496.

[410] Behrends, 496.

[411] Behrends, 497.

[412] Behrends, 497.

to continue acting, unless we have reached the maximally good state of affairs."[413] He contends that in order to defuse this, the debunker would have to argue that the current state of affairs is maximally good, which would be almost miraculous if true.[414]

Using his argument for survival, Behrends then argues that we can gain more knowledge starting from this, such as having a reason to exercise, avoid danger, and "enter into mutually advantageous relationships with others."[415] Behrends sees the possibility of building something like a social contract theory based solely on the survival argument.[416] It's worth noting that Behrends's argument depends crucially upon Huemer's concept of "formal intuitions" which we discussed in chapter two. Behrends writes, "What is important about formal intuitions is that they are unlikely to be the results of potentially distorting genealogical influences, such as evolutionary forces."[417]

Behrends considers his own argument to be unsound because it leaves open the possibility that one's only reason might be to kill oneself, but he thinks this is so implausible that it can be discounted.[418] However, it is worth giving this a bit more thought. Suppose that Behrends is correct that we have reason to survive (and thus reason to pursue our own persistence) so that we might do good. Then suppose that we are in the unhappy position of not having knowledge of what is good. Behrends has argued that we can at least have reason to do those things which contribute to our own persistence, but notice that this is an instrumental good toward the aim of "doing better." Until we find out exactly what it is that we are persisting to do,

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[413] Behrends, 497.

[414] Behrends, 497.

[415] Behrends, 498.

[416] Behrends, 498.

[417] Behrends, 495.

[418] Behrends, 496-97.

we don't know if we are actually making things better or not, or even how to go about it.

Moreover, for all we know we might be making things worse instead of better. And if our life

ends up making things worse instead of better, would we still have reason to pursue our own

persistence? On the contrary, it actually seems like we would have reason to pursue our own

demise, if our life were to end up making things worse instead of better. Behrends's "Do Better"

principle could be superseded by a "Don't Do Worse" principle. In that case, Behrends's idea

that having one's only reason being to kill oneself might actually not be so implausible after all –

if, that is, we really have no knowledge of what it is that will make things better.

While Behrends argues that virtually any normative reason will give us reason to pursue

our own persistence, the only example he gives is caring for our children for an extended period

of time. Besides its susceptibility to debunking that was noted above, another problem with this

idea is that presumably when we die we are no longer subject to such reasons. One might well

say that a parent has reason to care for her offspring while the parent is alive (at least until the

child can take care of herself), but if the parent dies prematurely, surely that in itself is not a

moral failure on the part of the parent. Behrends's argument, however, implies that it is.

It seems dubious, then, to speak of having reasons in the future rather than in the present.

Circumstances might change in the future which would also change one's reasons, so it cannot

be properly said that I have reason *now* to do something in the future.[419] It hardly makes sense to

say that I have a reason to pursue my own persistence when my demise would relieve me of the

very reason which was supposed to be a reason to pursue my persistence to begin with. The most

we could say is that we have reason to care for our offspring now, providing that we can find a

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[419] One might say that, if certain states of affairs at the present do not change in the future, then I will have a reason to do something at that point in time. But even this would still require knowing what it is that I have reason to do.

way to support the intuition that we should care for our offspring. But Behrends fails to provide that, and so we are left with an intuition which is subject to the debunker's challenge. Without knowing what it is that we need to do to make things better, we are also left without a reason to pursue our own persistence. All of this obscures the fact that the survival instinct is easily explained by debunkers. It is thus questionable in the end if Behrends's argument presents any more of an adequate response to debunkers than Enoch's.

<div align="center">Skarsaune and Vavova – Pleasure and Pain</div>

Both Skarsaune and Vavova attempt to subvert the debunking challenge by appealing to the badness of pain, with Skarsaune also postulating the goodness of pleasure as a premise. We will examine each in turn.

Skarsaune follows after Enoch in calling his own third factor account a pre-established harmony.[420] Skarsaune's argument is based on the proposition that pleasure is usually good and pain is usually bad.[421] He notes that this is the case for the person experiencing them, and also that there may be exceptions to this rule (hence "usually").[422] In Skarsaune's thinking, the pre-established harmony is established by evolution itself. Evolution has a truth-conducive effect on our beliefs by causing us to value that which is good.[423] Skarsaune argues that evolution "imbues" certain states of affairs with value by making those states pleasurable, while it is an independent evaluative fact that pleasure is good (at least usually).[424] He argues that, "The role evolution has played is simply *making these states of affairs pleasurable*. But once evolution has

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[420] Skarsaune, 235n2.

[421] Skarsaune, 232.

[422] Skarsaune, 232.

[423] Skarsuane, 234.

[424] Skarsaune, 235.

done that, the independent evaluative fact 'kicks in', as it were, the end result being that these states of affairs are good."[425]

As we saw in chapter two, Street has a pre-emptive argument against using the badness of pain as the basis for a realist account of value, which she calls the pain dilemma.[426] That argument also applies *mutatis mutandis* to pleasure being good. Skarsaune presents an attempt at avoiding Street's pain dilemma argument by challenging Street's definition of realism.[427] He takes issue with Street's contention that realism about values means that evaluative truths are independent of all of our evaluative attitudes, including "the unreflective, affective responses involved in pleasures and pains."[428] Skarsaune writes that "Together, this explicit definition of 'realism' and implicit definition of 'evaluative attitudes' allows Street to impute to realists the bizarre commitment that, in effect, the evaluative facts are independent of our pleasures and pains!"[429] Skarsaune wants to define realism as holding that evaluative truths are independent of our beliefs or judgments, but not of our unreflective, affective responses.[430]

Skarsaune also claims to have quotes from Parfit, Nagel, and Shafer-Landau which supposedly contradict Street's definition of realism, and hence showing that leading realist philosophers are not affected by her argument.[431] Upon close examination however, Skarsaune's quotes from these other writers are cherry-picked and taken out of context. Part of the problem appears to be a confusion on Skarsaune's part. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, moral

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[425] Skarsaune, 235.

[426] See Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 144f.

[427] Skarsaune, 238f.

[428] Skarsaune, 241.

[429] Skarsaune, 241.

[430] Skarsaune, 230.

[431] Skarsaune, 240-41.

realists (including Shafer-Landau) take it that there are *some* evaluative truths which are independent of our attitudes. Certainly no realist would argue that *all* evaluative truths are mind- or stance-independent. But Skarsaune's argument is all-or-nothing, which might explain why he thinks the standard realist definition is "bizarre." It also should be noted that Nagel is on record as saying that he finds Street's argument convincing. Nagel writes, "I agree with Sharon Street that an evolutionary self-understanding would almost certainly require us to give up moral realism—the natural conviction that our moral judgments are true or false independent of our beliefs."[432] It's true that Nagel only talks about beliefs in this passage and not pleasures and pains, but Nagel does not suggest that Street's definition of realism is a straw man. Instead, he uses Street's dilemma as an argument for ditching evolutionary naturalism, a position we will examine more closely in chapter five. As for Shafer-Landau, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, part of his definition of moral realism includes the proposition that moral beliefs "when true, are not true by virtue of being the object of, or being implied by, the attitudes of (even idealized) agents."[433] Skarsaune's reading of Shafer-Landau would seem to contradict this last point, assuming that there is a direct connection between our unreflective affective responses and our attitudes. While this might seem like quibbling, by using a different definition of realism Skarsaune changes the nature of the entire argument. It is Skarsaune who appears to be out of step with leading realists, not Street.

Before presenting her own third factor argument based on pain, Vavova acknowledges the question-begging nature of other third factor accounts such as Wielenberg's and Enoch's.[434] She writes that, "We do believe that survival is good and that we have rights. But aren't these

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[432] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 28.

[433] Shafer-Landau, "Moral Knowledge," 1.

[434] Vavova, 111.

moral beliefs what is called into question by the debunker's story?"[435] She continues, suggesting

that, "Perhaps we may assume that there are moral truths – though this isn't obvious. But may

we also make substantial assumptions about the particular contents of those truths? May we

assume, for example, that we have rights, that pain is bad, or survival good? That is less clear,

and gets to the heart of the debate between the realist and the debunker."[436] So how does Vavova

justify starting with the assumption that pain is bad when she rejects Wielenberg's and Enoch's

arguments on the basis that they make substantive assumptions about the content of a particular

moral truth? Vavova has this to say: "return to the reason that third-factor responses seemed

question-begging. They begin, recall, with minimal moral assumptions, like that survival is good

or that we have rights. But we can run a third factor explanation with an even less controversial

claim: that pain is bad."[437]

This is a head-scratching statement. It appeared as though Vavova's complaint against

Enoch and Wielenberg was that they made any substantive moral assumptions at all, not that

they made *controversial* substantive assumptions. Furthermore, how is Enoch's claim that

survival is pro tanto good any more controversial than "pain is bad"? Vavova makes no attempt

to explain this. Admittedly, she seems to be on firmer ground in this regard when it comes to

Wielenberg's argument about rights. As we saw above, even the source Wielenberg uses to

justify his rather weak defense of this does not support his central claim that believing we have

rights entails that we do have rights. However, Vavova's argument begs the same question in the

same way as Enoch's, even if not Wielenberg's.

As we have seen, Skarsaune tries to avoid the charge of begging the question by

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[435] Vavova, 111.

[436] Vavova, 111.

[437] Vavova, 112.

redefining realism so that our unreflective affective responses to certain states can serve as a

realist basis for goodness and badness. Vavova notes Skarsaune's strategy in a footnote, calling it

"interesting" but without passing judgment on it.[438] Vavova's strategy for avoiding the charge of

begging the question is different. She argues that the problem is in allowing the debunker to

claim that morality could be about anything.[439] Vavova suggests the we follow Cuneo and

Shafer-Landau, who argue that "some basic moral claims (like the claim that pain is bad) are

conceptual truths: if we don't have them, we don't have our concept of morality."[440] Vavova

comments on this saying, "If that is right, then it is not true that morality could be about

anything, and we have some foothold against the debunker."[441]

It is difficult to see how a response like this could move the debunker. After all, the

debunker can simply reply that the reason we think certain moral claims are conceptual truths is

because the moral intuitions produced by our evolved faculties tell us that. Joyce makes a similar

point with regard to what he calls a foundationalist view of morality – namely, that "certain

beliefs are epistemically privileged and non-inferentially justified."[442] Joyce writes that,

> The fact that morality may *seem* justified, and that we are deeply reluctant to admit
> otherwise, doesn't make it so, and in fact is itself a phenomenon predicted by the
> genealogical hypothesis. It should be an embarrassment to the discipline of philosophy
> that its history is crowded with thinkers taking their own parochial, contingent, personal
> opinions and, observing that these propositions seem "just obvious," elevating them to
> the status of "self-evident truths."[443]

The issue is not whether morality could be about anything, it's about what reason there is for

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[438] Vavova, 115n56.

[439] Vavova, 112.

[440] Vavova, 112.

[441] Vavova, 112.

[442] Joyce, 217.

[443] Joyce, 218-19.

thinking that there is a correspondence between faculties selected for adaptive advantage and mind-independent moral truths. It is not an answer to that question to simply assert that it's a conceptual truth that pain is bad. Also, as we saw in chapter two, Kahane points out in a different context that "many of our evaluative beliefs about well-being, including the beliefs that pleasure is good and pain is bad, are some of the most obvious candidates for evolutionary debunking."[444]

Vavova also argues that because the burden of proof is on the debunker, the realist need not worry. Vavova writes, "If we cannot make any substantive assumptions about particular moral norms, then morality could (conceptually) be about anything. But if morality could be about anything, then we have no idea what morality is about. So we have no idea if evolutionary forces would have pushed us toward or away from the truth. So we have no reason to think we are mistaken."[445] To this Vavova adds that, "The burden here, recall, is on the debunker to give us reason to think we are in error. It isn't on us to demonstrate that our beliefs are true. If the debunker can't give us reason to think we are wrong, she fails. We might have independent reasons to worry about skepticism. But the evolutionary debunker hasn't given us any."[446]

This argument might be more convincing if Vavova were to fairly represent Street's dilemma and show how it can be refuted. However, like several other realist responses, Vavova instead creates a different debunking argument and attacks that. Vavova's reconstruction of Street's dilemma is deficient firstly because it only includes the coincidence argument[447] which is part of Street's first horn. In the first horn of Street's dilemma, the realist is obliged to accept that there is no relation between evolutionary forces and independent evaluative truths. But in

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[444] Kahane, 120.

[445] Vavova, 112.

[446] Vavova, 112.

[447] Vavova, 106-7.

Vavova's reconstruction, the problem arises purely from the number of possible coherent

normative belief systems of which only one is right, thus making it very low odds that ours is

right with no non-question-begging evidence to support it.[448] This, however, is a straw man.

With Street's first horn, the problem is that our faculties have been developed by a process which

has no relation to the independent evaluative truths, which is why it would be a massive bit of

luck if they coincided. The fact that there are many possible beliefs of which only one is right

does not by itself make an argument for or against anything.

Vavova entirely leaves out the second horn of Street's dilemma, which is that if there is a

relation between evolution and evaluative truths, then the realist needs to explain how a tracking

account is better than Street's adaptive link account. Third factor accounts like Vavova's aim to

split the horns of the dilemma by stipulating that some particular normative belief is true, and it

happens to be a belief that provides an evolutionary advantage. But the initial belief can always

be explained by the debunker using something like Street's adaptive link account. Essentially,

Vavova's argument is that if we know what morality is about, then we have a basis for attacking

the debunker. But if have no idea what morality is about, then we are entitled to assume our

beliefs are right. This seems like arguing that we can assume beliefs about Andromedans are

largely correct (see argument under Enoch above). Surely the burden would be on the person

claiming to have knowledge about beings in a distant galaxy rather than the reverse.

<center>Brosnan, Bayes's Theorem, and Well-Being</center>

Brosnan provides a slightly modified third factor argument which is based on well-

being.[449] Before examining how he attempts to ground this and avoid the critique of debunkers, it

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[448] Vavova, 107.

[449] Brosnan, 62.

is worth examining Brosnan's claim that tracking failures do not necessarily imply that a belief is probably false.[450] Brosnan supports this claim by using the odds form of Bayes's Theorem. Brosnan begins with the probability of our belief in a particular proposition p, given that p is true versus false. He gives this as a ratio of Pr (We believe that $p|p$) / Pr (We believe that $p|$not-p).[451] If the process which generates the belief is not truth-tracking, then the probability in each case will be the same, giving a ratio of 1. If the process is truth-tracking, then the ratio of the probabilities will be greater than 1.[452] So far so good. But, says Brosnan, to show that our beliefs are probably false, it isn't enough to know the likelihood ratio, we also need to know the ratio of the prior probabilities of p and not-p. Brosnan argues that assigning prior probabilities to our moral beliefs has no justifiable basis, so we can't calculate the ratio of the posterior probabilities.[453]

Is that really the case? Think back to Street's argument about the boat drifting on the ocean, hoping to reach Bermuda. That argument is based on the plausible assumption that there are a great many possible evaluative judgments which are false, given value realism, while the number of true judgments is much smaller. In the same way, there are a great many more possible destinations on earth besides Bermuda, so a boat drifting on the ocean is much more likely to arrive somewhere else. If that is true, then the ratio of Pr (p) / Pr (not-p) for any given evaluative judgment will be extremely bottom-heavy. Furthermore, as Brosnan points out, the

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[450] Brosnan, 54.

[451] Brosnan, 54.

[452] Brosnan, 54. Confusingly, Brosnan says that with tracking success the ratio "is greater or less than 1." But if the process tracks truth then the probability of our belief that p should be higher if p is true than if it is false. If it is higher given not-p, then we would not call that a truth-tracking process, but maybe more like a truth-averse process. So if the numerator is always with p being true as presented by Brosnan, then the ratio should always be greater than 1. But maybe Brosnan means the ratio of the two, regardless of which is the numerator and which is the denominator, will be greater or less than 1.

[453] Brosnan, 55.

likelihood ratio of a non-truth-tracking process is exactly 1. Therefore, the ratio of the posterior probabilities will be exactly equal to the ratio of the priors. The important question, then, is whether the prior probability of the truth of p is less than 0.5. If it is, then we can say that the belief is probably false. If the number of possible true evaluative judgments and the number of possible false evaluative judgments are exactly the same, then the prior probability of p is 0.5. This, however, seems highly implausible. On the other hand, if the number of possible false evaluative judgments is higher, then the prior probability of p is less than 0.5. We don't need an exact number, we only need to posit (as Street does) that the number of possible false evaluative judgements exceeds true ones, probably by a very large amount. It is hard to see how that could *not* be the case. In any domain of knowledge, there are many more wrong answers than right ones. If morality is somehow different, why is that the case?

Also, notice that it doesn't save the realist to argue that moral truths are necessary truths, because that still doesn't explain the correspondence between our belief and the necessary truth. Arguably the solution to x + 1 = 2 is a necessary truth, but there are an infinite number of possible false values for x.[454] And if moral truths are *not* necessary truths, then the problem is greater still. If this is correct, then the burden would be on Brosnan to show that there is some reason for us to think that the number of possible true judgments is greater than or equal to the number of possible false judgments in the moral domain. That is the only way he can avoid the conclusion that, with a non-truth-tracking process, our beliefs are probably false. It would be like having a bin with all possible evaluative judgments in it on a slip of paper, including both true and false. Assuming the false judgments vastly outnumber the true ones, the probability of a

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[454] If the argument then turns on how many of those values it would be possible for people to actually believe, we are back to the question of whether our faculties are reliable or not.

given judgment being true – with nothing else to go on – will be very low. If the process that produced the belief is not truth-tracking in some way, then there is nothing else to go on. We can't independently verify the mind-independent truths as we have already seen. Brosnan is technically correct in his argument that a process which does not track truth does not *by itself* imply that our beliefs are probably false. However, if the possible number of false beliefs is much higher than the number of true ones (which seems to always be the case), then it does imply that.

Brosnan also disputes Street's contention that rational reflection cannot help us progress toward moral truth if our starting beliefs are thoroughly contaminated by evolutionary influence. Brosnan believes it is still possible to make progress as long as our moral beliefs are not *radically* false.[455] To illustrate this, he suggests starting with the following two moral judgments:

J_1: One ought to help kin, but not members of one's community who aren't kin
J_2: One ought to help unrelated members of one's community, but not outsiders[456]

Brosnan argues that we could reflect on the "kernel of truth" in each belief to arrive at the conclusion that we should help anyone.[457] But notice that this is a patently question-begging argument. First, each of J_1 and J_2 is not a single belief, but a conjunction of two beliefs (i.e. J_1 can be formulated as two propositions: "one ought to help kin," and "one ought not to help members of one's community who aren't kin."). In each case, one of the beliefs is, Brosnan assumes (along with his readers no doubt), true, and the other false. But in order to accomplish successful rational reflection with this, one still has to know (or at least figure out somehow) which part is true and which false. One could just as easily start with these two propositions and conclude that

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[455] Brosnan, 57.

[456] Brosnan, 57.

[457] Brosnan, 57.

we ought not to help anyone, not even kin. There is no logical reason to reach one conclusion rather than the other. There is, however, an evolutionary explanation for preferring one to the other.

In the final part of his argument, Brosnan challenges Street's contention that evolution does not track truth. This is where his third factor argument comes into play. For this, Brosnan relies on a distinction between selection *of* and selection *for* based on the work of Sober.[458] Brosnan argues that while evolution did not select *for* faculties that track moral truth, there could still have been selection *of* those faculties.[459] This would require that creatures were selected for some other trait which was connected in some way to truth-tracking moral faculties. This is, in essence, the structure of all third factor arguments. The third factor in Brosnan's argument, as mentioned above, has to do with well-being. Brosnan asks us to consider the belief that cooperation is morally good. He argues that, "The helping behavior that this belief generates has two effects: it promotes fitness, and it promotes wellbeing [sic]. The former effect is what explains why it might evolve by natural selection. The latter effect is part of what may explain why it is that cooperation in fact is morally good. If what's morally good has to do with behaviors that promote rather than hinder wellbeing [sic], then part of what makes cooperation good is that it typically has this effect."[460]

This seems problematic, since as we saw above beliefs about well-being seem to be a particularly easy target for debunking. Thus, simply assuming that moral goodness consists in behavior that promotes well-being seems like exactly the kind of propensity that one would

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[458] Brosnan, 58. Cf. Elliot Sober, *The Nature of Selection: Evolutionary Theory in Philosophical Focus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 97f.

[459] Brosnan, 58.

[460] Brosnan, 60.

expect from evolved moral faculties. Brosnan contends that his position does not beg any important questions, because "Joyce and Street both assume for the sake of argument that moral facts exist. . . . Moreover, it's as reasonable an assumption as any that among these facts is this one: what's morally good has to do with actions that promote rather than hinder wellbeing."[461] But this simply will not fly. It's true that sophisticated debunkers assume that moral facts exist; without that assumption, they would rightly be accused of begging the question against realists. However, to assume that "behavior that promotes well-being is morally good" is one of those mind-independent moral facts is something different altogether. One can assume the former without assuming the latter, no matter how reasonable it appears. Thus Brosnan does appear to be begging a very important question indeed.

Other Realist Responses

If third factor arguments are an attempt to split the horns of Street's dilemma, other responses take a more direct approach. The following two responses take direct aim at one or the other of the two horns of the Darwinian dilemma.

FitzPatrick's "No Dilemma" Argument

FitzPatrick argues that there is no dilemma for realists because Street's second horn (which requires the realist provide a tracking account superior to the adaptive link account) is simply not an option.[462] FitzPatrick must therefore challenge the first horn, which includes Street's argument that evolutionary forces have had such a distorting effect on our evaluative judgments that there is no good starting place for rational reflection to lead us to moral truth.

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[461] Brosnan, 62.

[462] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 239.

FitzPatrick thinks the crucial question in the argument is "Q: *How much* influence has natural selection *actually* had on the content of *our current moral beliefs*, by influencing ancestral moral belief-forming dispositions to whatever extent it did?"[463] FitzPatrick argues that, "without a very strong answer to Q, we can grant everything implied by the best scientific account of how evolution would have shaped moral belief *to whatever extent it did*, without granting any general claim about how our current moral beliefs have in fact been shaped on the whole. Everything depends on the correct answer to Q, and this issue deserves far greater attention than it receives in these discussions."[464]

Although he is willing to grant that our moral beliefs have been partially formed by unguided influences, FitzPatrick argues that this does not preclude the possibility that humans have risen above those influences by apprehending (moral) facts, which is what he argues has happened in other fields of knowledge including science, math, and metaphysics.[465] FitzPatrick argues that diversity of moral beliefs shows that humans are not "condemned to moralize along tracks laid down for us by Pleistocene evolutionary history,"[466] which is a surprising move since many debunking arguments point to diversity of moral beliefs as part of a debunking strategy.[467]

As an example, FitzPatrick posits that "We might, for example, grasp the fact that slavery is wrong through grasping values such as human dignity in the course of rich, emotionally laden human interactions in the context of a decent upbringing, and then reflecting on how this grounds

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[463] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 242.

[464] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 242.

[465] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 243.

[466] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 243.

[467] Tersman suggests that the argument from moral disagreement can actually be combined with EDAs to fill in what he believes is the gap exploited by third factor arguments. Folke Tersman, "Debunking and Disagreement," *Nous* 51, no. 4 (December 2017): 767f., accessed September 16, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/nous.12135.

strong negative moral rights, and then seeing that the practice of slavery is a gross violation of such rights—though again, various realists could offer alternative accounts here, developing the details in different ways."[468]

It should be pointed out that Street herself grants that evolutionary forces are not the only thing that has influenced our evaluative judgments, because "we are reflective creatures, and as such are capable of noticing any given evaluative tendency in ourselves, stepping back from it, and deciding on reflection to disavow it and fight against it rather than to endorse the content suggested by it."[469] While FitzPatrick argues that rational reflection *could* have led us to evaluative truths, this would still require some faculty which was in tune with those truths. With FitzPatrick's slavery example, he suggests we could grasp the value of human dignity. This assumes that human dignity is a mind-independent value, and that we have some faculty which has the ability to grasp it. But whatever faculty that would be would have been produced by evolutionary processes (assuming, as FitzPatrick seems to grant, that all of our faculties were thus produced), so FitzPatrick's vague theorizing seems far too weak to escape Street's dilemma. Also, it would be question-begging to simply assume that human dignity is an independent value, no matter how strongly FitzPatrick or his readers believe it is.[470]

FitzPatrick wants to make a parallel between moral beliefs on the one hand and science, mathematics, and metaphysics on the other. We have already seen above that there are potential issues with mathematical beliefs. For FitzPatrick to appeal to metaphysics is likely to be even

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[468] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 243-44.

[469] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 120.

[470] This is very much in line with Wielenberg's illustration above of the Quaker icon depicting slaves as having equal dignity and rights as everyone else. The Quaker view was grounded in Christian values. FitzPatrick's theory lacks both the means of grasping a value like human dignity and also a means of grounding it without simply begging the question.

more controversial. Scientific beliefs are, of course, central to the debunking challenge, and a ripe area for debate as we saw above – a debate in which it may be too early to declare a winner. FitzPatrick assumes these other areas are a given and that morality should therefore be included. For many debunkers, however, moral truths are particularly problematic, so appealing to other domains is not a quick resolution.

FitzPatrick grants that, once we become aware of the evolutionary influence on the content of certain of our moral beliefs which were not corrected by grasping moral facts, "our justification for those beliefs is defeated. And realists should in fact be happy to grant that this *is* plausibly the situation for any number of familiar moral beliefs that stem from unreflective moralizing about such things as sexual purity, rigid gender roles, clan loyalty, or deference to traditional authority, and that do not stand up to open, informed, critical reflection."[471] Thus, FitzPatrick argues that limiting moral consideration to out-group members can be discarded, while we retain the belief that we have a duty to care for our children.[472] Mitigating climate change also makes FitzPatrick's approved list.[473] This, combined with his somewhat vague reference to questioning traditional beliefs about sexual purity, gender roles, and so forth, gives the impression that FitzPatrick is essentially endorsing the general moral code of modern progressive academics, while rejecting what are held as conservative beliefs as being the result of distorting influences from the past.

It is worth remembering from chapter one that Darwin held up traditional Victorian sexual mores as a reflection of high moral development. With FitzPatrick, meanwhile, it very much appears that the moral truths which we attain by rational reflection just happen to line up

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[471] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 245.

[472] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 245.

[473] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 245.

with modern, Western, progressive values. Also notice that it is not the case that FitzPatrick simply rejects beliefs which align with evolutionary influences; instead, he picks and chooses based on what he believes are "good reasons." It is not hard to imagine that one could come up with a very different set of moral beliefs simply by picking and choosing different evolutionary influences to reject – all for what someone would consider to be "good reasons."

FitzPatrick is willing to grant that the debunker's argument presents a challenge to realism, but he maintains that it does not debunk it.[474] He also concedes that the realist "still owes a moral metaphysics and epistemology that provides some plausible account of how we have been able to develop reliable moral belief-forming dispositions analogous to what we've done in other domains."[475] However, he also believes that until such an account is given, realists are under no obligation to abandon their moral convictions.[476] With regard to this point, Street would likely respond that she does not expect realists to abandon their convictions, but rather to adopt an antirealist view toward them. We will examine that strategy more closely in the next chapter.

FitzPatrick argues that other realist responses to EDAs, including Copp's, Wielenberg's, and Enoch's, concede too much ground to the debunker by essentially granting what FitzPatrick calls the "Extreme Explanatory Claim" (EEC).[477] FitzPatrick presents this claim as consisting of two propositions relating to the content of our moral beliefs across the board, namely that said content "(i) reflects deep shaping by evolutionary forces that operated on the moral belief-forming dispositions of ancestral humans, according to principles insensitive to the truth of the

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[474] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 247.

[475] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 247.

[476] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 248.

[477] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 249-51.

content of moral beliefs, and (ii) does *not* reflect any independent influence from developed forms of moral reflection *guided by independent moral facts as such*, through a grasp of their grounds as such."[478] The problem is that FitzPatrick wants to avoid the EEC while also disavowing any attempt at supporting a tracking account. However, in order to posit that we are in possession of faculties capable of apprehending independent moral truths, he needs something very much like a tracking account.

This might explain why in his argumentation he appears to inch toward such an account. For example, FitzPatrick discusses Street's appeal to parsimony by saying that, "Her view may be more parsimonious, but that is only one philosophical consideration among others, and parsimony is a theoretical virtue only where reality is correspondingly spare, which is just what is at issue."[479] Street's discussion of parsimony is in relation to her argument that her adaptive link account is superior to a tracking account. This in turn is part of her discussion of the second horn of the dilemma which FitzPatrick ostensibly rejects.[480] The only reason for FitzPatrick to care about parsimony is if he *does* want to posit some kind of tracking account. Meanwhile, FitzPatrick is perfectly willing to take parsimony off the table, saying that, "If parsimony comes at the cost of having to deny, for example, that our belief that rape is wrong has anything to do with its actually *being* wrong (in the realist's attitude-independent sense), then so much the worse for parsimony."[481] On the one hand, it might be pointed out that abandoning parsimony in order to retain a favored metaethical view might be a questionable move, particularly where scientific views are in question. In addition, parsimony is only one of three theoretical virtues in

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[478] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 247.

[479] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 248.

[480] See Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 129.

[481] FitzPatrick, "No Darwinian Dilemma," 248.

which Street thinks her adaptive link account is superior to any tracking account.[482]

FitzPatrick's argument appears to be an attempt to have his cake and eat it, too. He disavows the need for a tracking account, but then argues that we may have been able to eliminate or greatly reduce the distorting effects of evolution on our faculties by a process of rational reflection on truths which we have somehow managed to grasp. It seems illegitimate to claim that realists are entitled to maintain their convictions that their moral beliefs correspond to the mind-independent moral truths in the absence of an explanation for how their normative faculties have arrived at these truths. At the same time, FitzPatrick is on to something in suggesting that realists maintain their stronger convictions even in the face of the debunking challenge. That very idea could point the way toward showing that Street's constructivism does not grant her an escape route from her own dilemma as we will see in the next chapter.

Copp's Society-Centered Theory

Copp responds to Street's Darwinian dilemma by taking the second horn and attempting to show a relation between the forces of evolution and moral facts.[483] Rather than a tracking relation, however, Copp argues that the realist only needs to provide a "quasi-tracking" account in which evolutionary forces influenced the content of our moral beliefs to an "epistemically sufficient degree" for rational reflection to be able to correct for distorting influences.[484] In order to do this, Copp argues that the realist needs "to propose a theory of the truth conditions of moral

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[482] See discussion of Street's argument in chapter two.

[483] David Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism about Moral Realism," *Philosophical Issues* 18 (2008): 196, accessed June 23, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/27749906. Another argument in favor of the tracking account is found in Marc Artiga, "Rescuing Tracking Theories of Morality," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 172, no. 12 (December 2015): 3357-74, accessed September 25, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24703914. Artiga attempts to argue that the tracking account and the adaptive link account are compatible, but this seems highly implausible in spite of his use of teleosemantic theories of representation.

[484] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 194.

judgments."[485] Copp attempts to meet this by offering what he calls a society-centered moral

theory.[486] In Copp's view, moral truth consists in those norms which best enable society to meet

its needs in living together "peacefully, cooperatively, and productively."[487]

Appealing to the intuition that "a society needs a 'social moral code,'"[488] Copp writes

that, "According to society-centered theory, the code that would best serve the basic needs of a

society, if it were to serve as the societal moral code in that society, is the code that is morally

authoritative with respect to that society."[489] Because of this, wrongness is relative to the moral

code of a given society.[490] Copp believes his theory can escape Street's dilemma because

societies will be more successful at meeting their needs with a moral code that promotes

prosocial behavior, and this is what determines (approximately) the truth of the resulting moral

beliefs that people within the society will tend to hold.[491] This implies that Copp's theory is a

kind of moral naturalism, in which "the moral facts are identical to certain ordinary natural facts

having to do with the needs of societies."[492]

Copp attempts to avoid Street's objection to value naturalism by reframing it. Recall from

chapter two that Street's objection to value naturalism was based on her contention that tracking

independent natural-normative identities is even more obscure than tracking independent

evaluative truths when it comes to providing an evolutionary advantage.[493] According to Copp,

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[485] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 198.

[486] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 198f.

[487] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 198.

[488] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 199.

[489] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 199.

[490] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 200.

[491] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 201-2.

[492] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 203.

[493] See Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 141.

the basis for Street's objection is that "a naturalist must rely largely on moral intuitions in devising a theory as to which natural facts are identical to the moral facts, and, on the Darwinian hypothesis, the content of these intuitions has been heavily influenced by natural selection."[494] Copp replies that his theory rests on second-order philosophical intuitions rather than moral intuitions, and argues that it is implausible that these are susceptible to Street's challenge.[495] But Street's dilemma is targeted at *evaluative* facts, not just moral facts. Even if Copp is correct that his theory does not rest on moral intuitions, it still depends on evaluative judgments such as that society needs a moral code to be more successful, as well as the criteria for what constitutes success, how different needs in society should be ranked in case of conflict, and what constitutes a "better" way of meeting them. In relying on these, Copp assumes a whole array of evaluative judgments as the starting point for building his theory, but those are the very judgments that Street's dilemma calls into question as far as corresponding to mind-independent truths. Copp cannot escape Street's dilemma by appealing to second-order philosophical intuitions when those intuitions themselves are based on other evaluative judgments.

It could also be asked how mind-independent Copp's theory is. He insists it is a version of moral realism, but that would seem to depend on one's definition of realism. In her response to Copp's argument, Street argues that, on the most likely reading, Copp's theory is not the kind of robust, mind-independent realism that her dilemma targets.[496] Street appears to have the upper hand in that argument. All of the criteria which Copp appeals to are clearly mind-dependent, such as what constitutes a society which is most successful at meeting its needs. Copp asks us to think about society's need for a moral code. He writes that,

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[494] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 203.

[495] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 203.

[496] Street, "Reply to Copp," 222.

> Other things being equal, a society with such a moral code would experience less conflict among its members, and less harmful conflict, than it would if it lacked such a code. Other things being equal, there would be more cooperation among its members than would be the case if it lacked such a code, and its members would be more successful at meeting their own needs and pursuing their values. A society with such a code does better, other things being equal, than it otherwise would, at meeting its need for there to be cooperation among its members, and its need to avoid harmful internal conflict.[497]

It is one thing to say that a society with a moral code will have more cooperation and less internal conflict than one without, but it is entirely another to say that more cooperation and less conflict is "better," or that any given society has "needs." Individuals within a society have various needs relative to a specific function or purpose. For example, we have needs for nutrition in order to continue to physically function. And it is natural that we would consider adequate nutrition to be good. That doesn't make it a mind-independent truth that this is good any more than a star having an adequate supply of hydrogen to continue burning is good. A society's "needs" can only be assessed with respect to a particular purpose or function; if naturalism is true then the idea that there is a purpose or function to society beyond what its members attribute to it has no basis. In that case Street is correct – there were no values until creatures came along who valued.

Even more problematic is Copp's argument that "According to society-centered theory, the code that would best serve the basic needs of a society, if it were to serve as the societal moral code in that society, is the code that is morally authoritative with respect to that society."[498] It is questionable, to say the least, that any such ideal moral code exists. Copp's pragmatic approach reduces morality to a kind of engineering problem. The problem is that in engineering there is no ideal way to solve a problem. Think of, say, building a bridge in a

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[497] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 199.

[498] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 199.

specific location. Is there one ideal bridge that would be best? Of course not. Instead, there are a variety of criteria which must be weighed, such as cost, safety, aesthetics, durability, time needed to complete, and so forth. The "best" bridge will be determined by how one weighs these different factors, and even then there will be an element of subjectivity involved. So just the thought that there is an ideal moral law for any given society if naturalism is true seems naïve at the very least. There is also the problem of how we can have knowledge of this ideal moral law even if it exists. Is it just by attaining agreement among the majority of moral philosophers? But then why should that be the morally authoritative standard?

If by "most successful at meeting its needs" Copp simply means the society which is best at reproducing and propagating itself, then he has simply made evolution itself the standard for good, except at the social rather than individual level. However, it should be easy to see why evolutionary processes would "program" us to think that evolution itself is the highest good. If Copp wants to assert that the mind-independent moral truth just happens to line up with evolution at a societal level, then as Street points out he owes us an explanation for such a convenient happenstance. However, Copp provides no specific details on any of his proposals.

Another major weakness of Copp's theory is that it does a poor job of explaining commonsense moral discourse. When someone says that murder is wrong, they do not typically mean that prohibiting murder is the best way for society to meet its needs. Even if they consider that to be the case, few people would say that this is what makes it wrong to murder. In such a case, murder might be acceptable under circumstances in which it would help society better meet its needs.[499] Typically, moral realists would want it to be the case that murder is always wrong,

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[499] It is not hard to think how such a moral view could be used to justify murder if it is committed against a minority group which is blamed for many social problem, for example.

no matter what society's needs are, and no matter what society is under consideration. Copp

acknowledges such complications to his theory as relativism, and argues that this simply shows

that Street's Darwinian dilemma does not offer a unique challenge that is not already part of the

background of moral philosophy in general.[500] But this depends, at least in part, on Copp's

theory being understood as a form of moral realism.[501]

Begging the Question and Burden of Proof

It might be thought that there is something of a stalemate between debunkers and realists.

From the debunking standpoint, third factor arguments are all fatally question-begging. From the

realist perspective, however, they are simply assuming one or two fairly obvious moral truths as

starting points from which to build a realist metaethical theory. As we have seen, some realists

acknowledge that other third factor arguments are question-begging, but then attempt to

introduce a different argument which appears to make a very similar move using a different

factor. Recall that Vavova thought it was question-begging for Enoch and Wielenberg to assume

substantive moral truths about survival and rights, respectively, but thought that pain being bad

was acceptable because supposedly it is less controversial. For the debunker, however, a claim

like this is less controversial precisely because evolution would be expected to produce creatures

with a propensity to believe it because of its fitness-enhancing tendency, not because of its truth

value.

Copp and Morton have both made attempts to specify when and how responses to

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[500] Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 204.

[501] Street is correct in saying that in her view Copp's theory "doesn't construe morality as objectively binding in the way one might have thought a realist theory aspires to, or indeed in any way that wouldn't be perfectly acceptable to an antirealist about normativity, who holds that things are required ultimately because we take them to be" (Street, "Reply to Copp," 211). Indeed, one could point out that Mackie provides a theory of how society can function through the kinds of norms that Copp talks about – after having argued that moral truth does not exist (see Mackie).

debunkers beg the question. We saw above how Morton tries to show that debunking arguments

do not debunk perceptual and inductive beliefs, while mathematical and logical beliefs are

somewhat more ambiguous. Now we can look more closely at his argument for why he thinks

third factor arguments are question-begging. As we saw above, Morton endorses a principle of

"probabilistic independence." He presents this in Bayesian form as "Pr(We believe that P|P) =

Pr(We believe that P)."[502] This means that the truth value of P makes no difference to the

probability of our holding the belief. Morton argues that "A reply to some sceptical worry begs

the question if, having assumed the substantive claims in question, our beliefs within the relevant

domain are probabilistically independent of their truth."[503] We also saw above that his final,

modified version stipulated that beliefs should be non-trivially probabilistically independent of

their truth.[504] It should also be noted that Morton thinks only moral realists who hold that moral

facts are impotent are susceptible to this argument.[505] This would suggest that moral naturalists

are exempt from Morton's criteria for begging the question, along with non-naturalists who

believe moral facts are efficacious.[506]

Notice that Morton's probabilistic independence formula has some affinity with

Brosnan's likelihood ratio, except that for Morton includes Pr (We believe that P) instead of Pr

(We believe that P|not-P). The effect is the same – the probability of our belief in P is unaffected

by whether or not P is true. While Brosnan's use of this was to argue that tracking failure does

not imply that a belief is false (which I have argued is a mistaken argument), Morton's analysis

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[502] Morton, "Replies," 271.

[503] Morton, "Replies," 271.

[504] Morton, "Replies," 278.

[505] Morton, "Replies," 272.

[506] Morton, "Replies," 275.

gives reason to think that Brosnan cannot simply assume that behavior which promotes well-being is good. The same can be said for the other third factor arguments we have looked at above, with the possible exception of Copp's. The reason Copp's might be exempt is that he argues that moral facts are identical with certain natural facts (for which see above).

Copp, on the other hand, develops his own argument for what constitutes begging the question which is much more favorable to the realist position. Copp's aim is to find a non-question-begging argument against what he calls the "transitional premise" in EDAs, which is that, given the genealogical history of our moral beliefs, "it would be a *mere coincidence* if the beliefs we form as a result of the operation of our evaluative belief-forming tendencies happened to track the truth. It would be a matter of happenstance."[507] Copp argues for a pragmatic rather than formal view of begging the question, so that whether a particular argument begs the question depends upon context.[508] In addition, Copp argues that it also matters if an assertion is given in a conversation which is not part of the common ground of what is taken as given by the participants.[509] In this view, an argument which is question-begging in one context might not be in another.[510]

So, are third factor arguments question-begging? According to Copp, it depends. If they are offered as a rebuttal to debunkers, then they are question-begging, because "They do not give the debunkers a rational ground to change their view."[511] Taking Wielenberg and Enoch as an example, however, Copp argues that in the context in which they offered their accounts, they are

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[507] Copp, "Begging the Question," 232.

[508] Copp, "Begging the Question," 235.

[509] Copp, "Begging the Question," 236.

[510] Copp, "Begging the Question," 236.

[511] Copp, "Begging the Question," 237.

not begging the question. This is because, in Copp's view, Enoch's goal "is to explain the correlation between the truths postulated by the normative realist and the moral beliefs,"[512] while Wielenberg's aim is "simply to explain a puzzling correlation."[513] Copp compares this to a group of thinkers (presumably realists) who are not debating debunkers but instead are trying to decide what to make of the argument.[514] It isn't question-begging to offer a third factor account in that context, because the moral claims in question are part of the common ground and the transitional premise has not yet been added to that common ground.[515]

This analysis, however, seems off-base. First of all, Enoch and Wielenberg both published their articles as rebuttals of debunking arguments, so it isn't really fair to say that they were just trying to explain an otherwise puzzling correlation. Also, if a group of realists is trying to decide what to make of the debunking argument, if they want to resist the transitional premise then they need to show what's wrong with the argument. It isn't enough to simply say they aren't going to accept the transitional premise into the common ground if they don't have good reason to exclude it. It's perfectly possible for people to refuse to accept a conclusion because they don't like where it leads or the conclusion is otherwise unpalatable. This, however, seems like an illegitimate response to an argument. Copp writes, "The upshot seems to be that Wielenberg's and Enoch's responses will not satisfy debunkers, but they might help others see how they can resist the debunking argument."[516] However, using a strategy like this to resist the debunking argument is unnecessarily complicated. If one assumes that, for example, the claim that "survival

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[512] Copp, "Begging the Question," 238.

[513] Copp, "Begging the Question," 238.

[514] Copp, "Begging the Question," 238.

[515] Copp, "Begging the Question," 238.

[516] Copp, "Begging the Question," 238.

is pro tanto good" is true, that by itself is enough to resist the debunker's argument. So if that is

allowed as a non-question-begging response for those considering but not yet decided on the

debunking challenge, the rest of Enoch's argument is superfluous (the same would be true

mutatis mutandis of the other third factor arguments).

The important question, however, is whether there is a non-question-begging answer that

can be given to the debunker as a rebuttal to the transitional premise, and Copp contends that

there is.[517] For this, he presents two strategies, starting with what he calls the "smorgasbord

strategy."[518] Copp argues, "first, that there is a variety of 'circumstances' in which the

transitional premise would be false, second, that the argument has not ruled out these

circumstances, and third, that these circumstances are plausible enough to be taken seriously."[519]

As it turns out, the "circumstances" in question are, among other things, the assumption that the

moral truths of various third factor arguments are true. So, Copp writes that, "if Enoch is correct,

the transitional premise would be false if survival is good."[520] He repeats a similar conditional

for Wielenberg's argument about rights, for his (Copp's) society-centered theory, for Street's

antirealist theory (which is a blunder on Copp's part, because Street doesn't offer antirealism as a

rebuttal of the transitional premise, but rather as a means of avoiding skepticism in the face of it),

and adds in two more: if moral truths are a priori truths and if God exists and "nudged"

evolution.[521]

Copp contends that the debunker must show each supposition to be false or show that the

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[517] Copp, "Begging the Question," 241.

[518] Copp, "Begging the Question," 241.

[519] Copp, "Begging the Question," 241.

[520] Copp, "Begging the Question," 241.

[521] Copp, "Begging the Question," 241-42.

argument from the supposition to the falsity of the transitional premise is wrong.[522] This would be more aptly named the "shifting the burden of proof strategy," because that is all Copp has done for the most part. After having presented the debunking argument, Copp contends essentially that the burden is entirely on the debunker to prove every realist response false, with no burden on the realists to prove their response true. It is enough in Copp's mind for the realist to say that "if the society-centered theory is true, the debunking argument is false," and then insist that the debunker prove it false. At no point does the realist ever have to show the debunker's argument to be false, because the realist simply refuses to accept the transitional premise. A strategy like this could seemingly be used to resist virtually any argument about anything.

The reason why Copp's strategy will not persuade a debunker has to do with the basis for the beliefs on which the various third factor arguments rest. Ultimately, they are based on what boils down to an intuition or sense that they are true – that survival is good, that we have rights, that pain is bad, that whatever promotes well-being is good, etc. These beliefs just seem obviously true. But the debunker says this is because evolutionary forces have formed our moral faculties and predisposed us to believe things like this, and that would be the case whether they are true or not. By starting with the truth of the belief as a foundational premise, the realist is assuming the very point which is in dispute.

Copp's final attempt at a non-question-begging argument is what he calls the "ambitious natural strategy," which is using his society-centered theory to show the transitional premise false.[523] This is evidently because Copp does not rest his theory on a particular substantive moral

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[522] Copp, "Begging the Question," 242.

[523] Copp, "Begging the Question," 242.

claim, but rather on meta-level philosophical principles as we saw above.[524] However, since

Street is arguing against value realism, it makes no difference against her dilemma that Copp's

theory does not rest on a substantive moral belief, as long as it rests on normative beliefs, which

it clearly does. Copp does not engage Street's critique of his theory in any kind of detail, in

particular her argument that under the most plausible reading it is not realist and thus not a target

of her dilemma in any case.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Much more could be said about each of these topics. We have seen that debunkers have a

plausible answer to the charge that EDAs would also debunk perceptual beliefs. In other

domains, particularly mathematical and logical beliefs, the answer is not so clear. It is also not

clear what the ramifications would be if it could be shown that EDAs would undermine

mathematical and logical beliefs. Given that these domains are very closely tied to the very

scientific theories which support the debunking challenge to begin with, it could well be a major

problem. But what exactly would the outcome of that be? It would be hasty to conclude that

EDAs undermine themselves, since as we will see in chapter five that is not the only available

option. It could be that we should rethink our philosophical commitments in the light of all of the

available evidence.

We have also looked at several attempts to circumvent the debunking challenge by means

of a third factor argument. While some of these arguments are meticulously detailed, they all

appear to be fatally flawed. For most the issue has to do with a question-begging assumption of

one or more substantive moral truths. As plausible as these assumptions might seem, the

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[524] Copp, "Begging the Question," 243.

debunker's argument purports to explain why they would seem plausible regardless of their truth value.

The issue of what it means to beg the question is itself a highly controversial one, and as we have seen, both sides have criteria for begging the question which put their own argument in a favorable light. Furthermore, the question also arises as to who has the burden of proof and why. The debunking argument aims to place the burden on the realist to show why we should believe that our moral faculties are reliable, while some realists respond that we are entitled to our moral beliefs unless the debunker can prove them false. If the debunker has to prove our moral beliefs false, then it seems that realists have won by default. However, the debunking arguments we have looked at generally aim at showing that, given the genealogy of our moral beliefs, it would be a highly improbable coincidence if they happened to line up with independent moral truths. This is the argument which realists must refute, and they must do so without assuming the truth of particular substantive moral claims. If they are unable to do so, then we are in danger of moral skepticism. One attempt to avoid skepticism comes from the ranks of the debunkers themselves, and that is antirealism. The next chapter will explore how viable of a solution this is.

CHAPTER 4

ANTIREALISM AND MORAL TRUTH

If non-theistic versions of realism are unable to adequately answer the debunking challenge without begging the question or illegitimately shifting the burden of proof, then the question is how to avoid moral skepticism. As mentioned earlier, Street herself has an answer for this, which is to embrace antirealism. Street endorses a specific type of antirealism, which is Humean metaethical constructivism. This chapter will examine her theory to see if it is a solution to her own Darwinian dilemma as she claims. It will also include extensive discussion of the interaction between Street and Dworkin's defense of objectivism. The reason for this will hopefully become clear by the end, when it comes time to evaluating antirealism as a solution to the problem of moral knowledge.

Sidestepping the Darwinian Dilemma

In her "Darwinian Dilemma," Street sketches out how antirealism allows one to avoid falling into the trap set for moral realists. According to Street's constructivism, "the truth of the evaluative judgement that 'X is a reason for agent A to Y' is a function of A's evaluative attitudes – in particular, of whether that judgement would be among A's evaluative judgements in reflective equilibrium."[525] By appealing to reflective equilibrium, Street argues that this allows for the possibility that someone could still be mistaken in a particular moral judgment.[526] Street's antirealism, then, does not automatically grant every evaluative judgment that we make the status of being true, which is a feature that overlaps with a realist view. Where realists and antirealists

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[525] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 152.

[526] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 152.

differ, according to Street, is in the antirealist's denial "that there are evaluative truths which hold independently of the *whole set* of evaluative judgements we make or might make upon reflection, or independently of *the whole set* of other evaluative attitudes we hold or might hold upon reflection."[527]

As we saw in previous chapters, Street argues that rational reflection is of no use in helping us move toward attitude-independent moral truth because the distorting effects of evolution mean that we have no good starting point for reflection, and rational reflection only works by comparing some of our evaluative judgments against others. In this regard, she writes, "The widespread consensus that the method of reflective equilibrium, broadly understood, is our sole means of proceeding in ethics is an acknowledgment of this fact: ultimately, we can test our evaluative judgements only by testing their consistency with our other evaluative judgements, combined of course with judgements about the (non-evaluative) facts."[528] The idea of reflective equilibrium comes from Rawls.[529] As we will see below, even realists like Dworkin endorse it as a test of internal consistency. The distinctive feature of how reflective equilibrium works in Street's metaethical constructivism is that the internal consistency test is just what it means for one's normative judgments to be correct.

With Street's antirealism, there is no external normative truth for anyone's normative beliefs to answer to, so those beliefs answer to the agent's other normative judgments, combined with relevant non-normative facts. Street asks us to consider a hypothetical creature (let's call it C) with only two values: that its own survival is valuable and that the survival of its offspring is

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[527] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 111.

[528] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 124.

[529] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (London: Harvard University Press, 1971), 20f., Adobe PDF eBook.

valuable.[530] Whereas a creature whose only value was its own survival would not be in error to cease valuing its own survival, C *would* be in error to do so from the standpoint of its other value, given that C's survival is necessary to ensure the survival of its offspring.[531]

This can be seen in Street's account of what it means for a judgment to withstand scrutiny. She writes,

> when we ask whether the judgment that *X* is a reason to *Y* (for *A*) withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of *A*'s other normative judgments, we are not asking what *A* or anyone else *thinks* withstands scrutiny from that standpoint. Rather, we are asking whether, as determined by the standards set by *A*'s other normative judgments in combination with the non-normative facts, the judgment that *X* is a reason to *Y* (for *A*) *does* withstand scrutiny from that standpoint.[532]

One question this raises is that, if the agent doesn't know whether her judgments withstand scrutiny, then who does? Part of the answer to this question is that Street's view requires, as mentioned, knowledge of all relevant non-normative facts (and no false beliefs with respect to relevant non-normative facts). We will examine such examples below. If *A* is lacking some such knowledge, then nobody knows if *A*'s judgments withstand scrutiny. This could be a problem in that the reason we are forced into adopting antirealism is that supposedly realism leaves us in the position of being hopeless at knowing what our reasons are. Antirealism is supposed to provide us with a big improvement over that. It's also possible Street means that *A* might be mistaken about whether a particular one of *A*'s judgements withstands scrutiny *before* reflection. *After* reflection, assuming that *A* has knowledge of all of the relevant non-normative facts and has taken into account all of *A*'s other relevant evaluative judgments, then perhaps *A* can be said to have knowledge of the truth of a particular evaluative judgment.

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[530] Sharon Street, "Constructivism About Reasons," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 3, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 223, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[531] Street, "Constructivism," 223.

[532] Street, "Constructivism," 231.

Returning to the example of creature C above, the question is if C is correct in ceasing to value its own survival. The problem is this judgment has come into conflict with C's judgment that the survival of C's offspring is valuable. But we still don't know which of the two values should be changed to restore equilibrium. Let *OWN* be the belief that C's own survival is valuable and let *OFF* be the belief that the survival of C's offspring is valuable. In Street's constructivism, the grounding set of normative judgments which sets the standard for correctness is "*all* of the relevant agent's normative judgments, minus the normative judgment whose correctness is in question."[533] This creates a conundrum, because if C is questioning the correctness of C's belief not-*OWN*, the grounding set is the belief *OFF* and so C should change her belief not-*OWN* and value her own survival. But if C is questioning the correctness of *OFF*, the grounding set is the belief not-*OWN* and so C should change her belief *OFF* and *stop* valuing the survival of her offspring.

So even with only two evaluative judgments to work with, there are already two apparently equally correct sets of beliefs at reflective equilibrium that are contradictory, depending on which of C's beliefs is in question. Which set is correct? Street believes she has an answer to this. She writes,

> When we're asking what reasons a given agent has all things considered—and not just what reasons she has from the standpoint of some (implicitly or explicitly) specified subset of her values—which standpoint gets priority? The answer, roughly, is that the standpoint that determines what reasons she has is whichever standpoint is most deeply *hers*, where this is a function of how strongly she holds the normative judgments in question and how close to the center of her total web of normative judgments they lie.[534]

Street acknowledges that this can be tricky in certain situations. In that case there may be no "fact of the matter" about a given judgment, and the truth value of it will be indeterminate –

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[533] Street, "Constructivism," 226.

[534] Street, "Constructivism," 234-35.

though she hypothesizes that such situations "may be fairly rare."[535]

Let's assume that C reflects on the matter, realizes that she cares very deeply about her offspring (we'll assume C is female with strong motherly instincts), and decides she was in error to not value her own life. As Street imagines it, C's sibling says to her, "Of course your survival is valuable . . . your children need you."[536] What has constructivism given us that normative realism did not? Under constructivism, just as under realism, C has inherited the tendency to value caring for her offspring thanks to evolutionary forces. In both cases, C formulated a normative judgment that she should take care of her kids. The problem under realism was that C had to conclude that her normative beliefs were probably off track, so the resulting normative belief was probably mistaken. Under constructivism, C can rest assured that, having spent time in reflection, her belief is probably true. By changing the status of her normative beliefs from robustly realist (attitude-independent) to antirealist/constructivist (attitude-dependent), C changed the truth value as well. At least, this is what constructivists say has happened. Below we will see some reasons for calling this into question.

While this might all seem a bit esoteric, for Street the implications are very much practical. She argues that, "If one genuinely thinks one is in all likelihood hopeless at recognizing one's reasons, one will be paralyzed and unable to proceed with normative reasoning."[537] Street appeals to a point made by Gibbard, who writes that, "In order to pursue my life at all, I have to assume, if the question arises, that I am not hopeless at figuring out how to live."[538] If we grant Street's point that continuing to function from the practical standpoint

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[535] Street, "Constructivism," 236.

[536] Street, "Constructivism," 223.

[537] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 330.

[538] Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 261, accessed June 25, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

commits us to the proposition that we are not hopeless in recognizing our reasons, are we really thereby committed to antirealism? We will have to return to this question at the end of the chapter.

One thing to notice about the example of C, who has only two values and is trying to decide if not valuing her own life withstands scrutiny, is that the value Street ends up affirming is the one we all thought she should. Of course, C should care for her kids. What kind of a *bad parent* wouldn't? It's easy to gloss this because, of the two options, Street made sure C took the "right" one. However, there is nothing in the theory to say that C couldn't have gone the other way and decided that she just didn't care about living anymore, realized upon reflection that her kids weren't that important to her after all, and so because of that she should change her judgment about her kids and decide she didn't value their survival. In doing so, C would not be doing anything wrong according to Street.

To see this implication, we need to look at a passage from Street where she spells out more details about her version of constructivism.

> According to metaethical constructivism . . . judgments of truth and falsity in the normative domain must always relativize to a particular practical point of view. . . . One option is to understand the truth of '*X* is a reason to *Y* for agent *A*' as a function of the normative judgments of *the person judging* whether *X* is a reason to *Y* for agent *A*—for example, my normative judgments if I'm the one making the judgment about *A*'s reasons, your judgments if you're the one making the judgment about *A*'s reasons, and so on. A second option is to understand the truth of '*X* is a reason to *Y* for agent *A*' as a function of the normative judgments of *the person whose reasons are in question*—that is, of *A* herself. Metaethical constructivism selects the second route. The standards of correctness determining what reasons a person has are understood to be set by *that person's* set of judgments about her reasons.[539]

So C's reasons, then, can only be judged by what judgments C would make at reflective equilibrium. If C decides to cease caring about her offspring to bring her beliefs into equilibrium,

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[539] Street, "Constructivism," 224.

she is doing nothing wrong according to Street's constructivism. Moreover, *nobody else can judge C to be in the wrong*, because the only standard for any given judgment is the standard set by the other evaluative judgments of the agent making the judgment in question. But what if C can't make up her mind which value judgment is stronger and more deeply held? In that case Street says there is no fact of the matter and the truth value is indeterminate. This was alluded to above. Street says that constructivists have no objection to this kind of indeterminacy.[540] It should be pointed out, however, that this would lead to the same practical paralysis that Street says will befall us if we remain realists, at least in those situations.

As mentioned above, Street's view also requires knowledge of all non-normative facts that would be a relevant factor in a particular judgment. One example she gives is of a woman (Beth) who takes herself as having reason to eat a bowl of chili.[541] Unbeknownst to Beth, the chili contains peanuts, to which she has a deadly allergy. Because Beth also takes herself as having reason to live a long and healthy life, she has reason not to eat the chili, except that she is unaware of it. These two judgments conflict, and they both fail to withstand scrutiny from the standpoint of the other, so this again raises the question of how to settle which one should be dropped. As we already saw above, according to Street the answer is that the one most deeply held should be retained. If Beth "is even remotely statistically normal,"[542] then at reflective equilibrium she will judge that she has reason not to eat the chili, and her belief that she has reason to eat the chili is mistaken by Beth's own lights. Of course, she isn't at reflective equilibrium as she sits down to eat and, as a consequence, doesn't know the chili might well kill her. So it's hard to know what good this does anyone. Also, Street acknowledges the possibility

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[540] Street, "Constructivism," 236.

[541] Street, "Constructivism," 235.

[542] Street, "Constructivism," 235.

that someone might value a certain bowl of chili more than life itself, and so have reason to eat it even at reflective equilibrium.[543]

The example of eating chili might seem tangential to the question of moral skepticism. This has to do with the way Street frames the entire realism/antirealism discussion in terms of normative reasons, as we will see below. Street gives other examples of how constructivism works in various circumstances. For instance, if someone is looking for her lost keys and the keys are under the fridge (unbeknownst to anyone), then she has reason to look there and is mistaken in thinking that she does not.[544] In another example, someone is torn between joining the French resistance or caring for his mother. In that case, Street suggests it might be indeterminate if there is no other value or principle in the agent's set of evaluative judgments to break the deadlock.[545]

To these examples one might well reply that of course someone with a deadly peanut allergy shouldn't eat chili with peanuts in it, and of course you should look under the fridge for your keys if that's where your keys are. One might wonder, though, if we really needed a complicated metaethical theory to know this. The example that looks most likely to raise important moral issues – whether to join the French resistance or care for one's mother – leaves us with no answer (and thus a practical paralysis of the same debilitating kind that normative realism allegedly commits us to). So far, the areas where constructivism seems to offer the most help is exactly where we need it the least. As Enoch observes, "The reasons for which we act – that it contains vitamin C, that she needs help, that he's charming, that it's so expensive, that I

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[543] Street, "Constructivism," 235n44. Or maybe the person would have reason to consult a mental health professional and not a metaethicist.

[544] Street, "Constructivism," 224-25.

[545] Street, "Constructivism," 236.

really want to – these can be perfectly ordinary, naturalistically respectable things. So Robust

Realism – and any other metanormative theory, really – need have nothing interesting to say

about them."[546]

Having looked at some of the basics, we need to investigate some deeper issues with

Street's antirealism and in particular her framing of the entire discussion. As a starting point for

this, we will engage with an interaction between Street and Dworkin.

Dworkin and Objectivism

In the previous chapter we looked briefly at some of Dworkin's thoughts about robust

realism and its relation to commonsense (or what he calls "face-value") morality. Dworkin's

main argument is that morality (and other domains of knowledge) cannot be attacked by

skepticism from the outside, but only from the inside. Street herself has written a lengthy

response to Dworkin's argument. Unpacking the details of this exchange provides valuable

insights for understanding both why Street's constructivist approach is fatally flawed, and also

why Dworkin's non-theistic view is inadequate. It also will provide important insights as to why

so many realist responses to the debunking challenge come up short.

Dworkin's argument is a defense of objectivism against subjectivism/skepticism.[547]

Dworkin notes that there are two main versions of skepticism of objective truth – wholesale

skepticism of objective truth about anything, and selective skepticism "that concedes objective

truth to 'descriptive' claims, including mathematical ones, but denies it to 'evaluative'–moral or

ethical or interpretive or aesthetic–ones."[548] His argument focuses on selective skepticism, which

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[546] David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 219, accessed February 3, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579969.003.0007.

[547] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 89.

[548] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88.

he also thinks is the most dangerous.[549] Both of these forms of skepticism are external according

to Dworkin in that they "purport to stand outside a whole body of belief, and to judge it as a

whole from premises or attitudes that owe nothing to it."[550] As mentioned in the previous

chapter, Dworkin refers to these as "archimedean" arguments.[551]

Dworkin posits that a successful skeptical argument must be internal rather than

achimedean.[552] One example he gives of an internal argument against morality is the argument

that God is necessary as a basis for morality, but that no such being exists.[553] Because it assumes

a substantive moral claim as a counterfactual and argues that the counterfactual does not hold, it

is internal rather than external.[554] The external, archimedean attack, however, is different.

Dworkin frames it this way: "These selective archimedean skeptics offer to justify their skeptical

claim–that these domains cannot provide objective truth–from premises that are not themselves

evaluative. They argue, they say, not from moral or ethical or aesthetic assumptions, but from

non-evaluative theories about what kind of properties exist in the universe, or how we can gain

knowledge or reliable belief about anything."[555]

Notice that this last point corresponds with EDAs in general, and with Street's Darwinian

dilemma in particular. Evolutionary debunkers critique morality on the basis of a *scientific*

argument about the genealogy of our moral faculties, arguing that this shows those faculties are

unable to produce knowledge or reliable belief. Dworkin's point about the kind of properties that

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[549] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 89.

[550] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88.

[551] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88.

[552] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 89.

[553] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 91.

[554] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 91.

[555] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88.

exist in the universe, moreover, fits very comfortably with Street's short argument for antirealism which we saw in chapter two. That argument is based on the supposition that there were no values until creatures who valued came along.

Dworkin considers all second-order statements about first-order moral claims to be misleading. They purport to be neutral statements about a substantive moral claim, but in fact are simply restatements of the original claim. For example, when it comes to the claim of whether genocide is wrong, Dworkin argues in favor of the view that "it is an objective matter–a matter of how things really are–that genocide is wrong."[556] What Dworkin denies is that this latter claim is of a different kind than the bare statement, "genocide is wrong," whereas archimedeans want to say, as Street does say, that the latter statement is a second-order statement about the first-order substantive claim. Dworkin differentiates these as I-propositions (internal or first-order) and E-propositions (external or second-order), for this idea.[557] Dworkin argues that skeptics "think that when they contradict those E-propositions they leave all I-propositions, like the claim that genocide is wicked, untouched."[558] But Dworkin thinks this is a mistake.

According to Dworkin, archimedeans pretend not to be taking sides in a substantive moral debate, but in fact they are. Dworkin does not use the language of attitude-independence that is common in current literature, but it is easy to see that it fits the same pattern. In Dworkin's understanding, the statement that "'genocide is wrong' is an attitude-independent truth" is just a restatement of the claim that genocide is wrong. Thus arguing against this proposition, as debunkers do, is an illegitimate, external form of skepticism. While the details of Dworkin's distinction between internal and external skeptical arguments are interesting and important, we

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[556] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 92.

[557] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 92-3.

[558] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 93.

need not unpack them here. For the purposes of this argument, it is enough to notice that Street

says she agrees with this point of Dworkin's (among other things) and attempts to argue that hers

is actually an internal argument rather than an illegitimate, archimedean one.[559] She writes,

> I assume that realism and antirealism are best understood as substantive normative
> claims, and I also accept Dworkin's point that the only viable form of normative
> skepticism is internal—that is, that one can legitimately reach skeptical conclusions only
> about subparts of the normative domain, and only by working from further normative
> assumptions. . . . What I intend to defend, then, is not a thoroughgoing, external
> skepticism about normativity that relies on no normative premises at all, but rather a form
> of internal skepticism directed specifically at *normative realism*, understood as a
> substantive normative position according to which value is robustly attitude-
> independent.[560]

This seems surprising, since a straightforward reading of Dworkin would indicate that Street's

argument, along with every other EDA, is an external, archimedean one by his categorization,

and thus illegitimate. How, then, can Street argue that she is making an internal argument?

Morality and Normativity

The answer is that Street reads Dworkin as talking about normative rather than moral

truths. After giving a quote from Dworkin where he talks about morality as a distinct and

independent dimension of experience, Street writes in a footnote, "When Dworkin states his

conclusions he sometimes focuses, as in this passage, on the domain of *morality*. But he is best

read as making claims about the domain of the *normative* in general, and this is how I read him

throughout this chapter (though recall that I am focusing on the domain of practical reasons,

setting aside the domain of epistemic reasons)."[561] Street gives no argument for preferring this

reading of Dworkin. This is particularly odd given that Dworkin uses the word morality

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[559] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 304.

[560] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 304.

[561] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 302n15. This dissertation will not address issues surrounding applications of Street's argument to epistemic reasons.

frequently and appears to do so deliberately.

The reason this is problematic is that for Street, the normative domain includes any "consideration that counts in favor of, or justifies, some action."[562] But it may or may not be what most people (including Dworkin) consider to be a *moral* reason. This is particularly confusing because some thinkers like Enoch use "normative" virtually as a synonym for "moral" in a robustly realist sense.[563] Street, however, is using Humeanism as a theory of normative reasons in which, as Enoch puts it, "all your normative reasons are grounded in your desires or motivational set."[564] One might think this unimportant, because "normative realism" means essentially the same thing either way. But there are two issues in which it is important as we will see below. The first has to do with the question we have been discussing – whether Street's argument qualifies as internal or external under Dworkin's analysis – and the second has to do with what Copp calls the different grades of normativity.[565] We will examine each of these issues in turn.

<center>Whose Domain is it, Anyway?</center>

On Street's interpretation of Dworkin, a challenge to normative *realism* is internal and legitimate so long as it comes from within the broader normative domain because she treats normative realism as a subpart of the normative domain. In Street's view, the normative domain includes both attitude-dependent and (perhaps) attitude-independent, normative truths.[566] Notice

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[562] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 293n2.

[563] Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 236.

[564] Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 218.

[565] David Copp, "Moral Naturalism and Three Grades of Normativity," in *Normativity and Naturalism*, ed. Peter Schaber (Frankfurt: De Gruyter, 2004), 15, accessed June 7, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[566] It's important to keep in mind that Street herself does not think that attitude-independent, normative truths exist at all even though she assumes them for the sake of argument in her Darwinian dilemma argument.

that attitude-dependent normative truths are subjective by definition, because they depend upon the evaluative judgment of a given agent, whereas attitude-independent normative truths are objective. Call the former claims SN truths (for subjective-normative) and the latter ON truths (for objective-normative) and call the corresponding claims SN claims and ON claims. Street wants to argue that it is legitimate to use an SN truth to mount a skeptical challenge against the entire subdomain of ON truths, because both SN and ON truths are internal to the normative domain.

For Dworkin, morality is a distinct domain. While a careful reading of Dworkin should make this clear, he is explicit about it in several places, including this statement: "In this essay I concentrate on this selective version of archimedeanism–about truth in the 'soft' domains of morality and art rather than the 'hard' ones of physics or mathematics."[567] Some reflection will also demonstrate that for Dworkin, morality *has* to be exclusively attitude-independent. Dworkin says in multiple places that he is defending the "face-value" view of morality.[568] He also says, "I would not volunteer the more baroque formulations of that view, about timeless truths among the furniture of the universe. But if pressed I would insist that, so far as they mean anything at all, they are true."[569] Dworkin even describes his view as robust, saying "there is no more robust thesis for any realism to deploy or any anti-realism to refute."[570] Reading Dworkin the way Street does by taking him as talking about the normative domain in general instead of the moral domain changes the entire meaning of his argument.

In the previous chapter we looked at definitions of moral realism, including the idea that

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[567] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88-89.

[568] See, for example, Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 127-28.

[569] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 128.

[570] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 128.

under moral realism, moral truths are attitude-independent. That might create the impression that

there could be moral truths which are attitude-dependent (which is ostensibly the case with moral

antirealism). Under the face-value view, however, such truths would not be *moral* truths at all. In

other words, "attitude-independent normative truth" is not another term for "attitude-independent

moral truth." Whatever meaning "normative" has in the former term, it is not synonymous with

"moral." But Dworkin's whole point is that, in order to mount a legitimate skeptical challenge to

morality, you need to have a *moral* reason.[571] Dworkin's view is that each evaluative domain has

its own normative standards that can only be applied within the given domain. He writes, "the

epistemology of any domain must be sufficiently internal to its content to provide reasons,

viewed from the perspective of those who begin holding convictions within it, for testing,

modifying, or abandoning those convictions."[572] The upshot of this is that for Dworkin, ON

truths just *are* moral truths. Whatever SN truths are, they are not *moral* truths. Thus, Street's

move of attempting to argue for skepticism of normative realism from within the broader

normative domain is, according to Dworkin, illegitimate. We will see below why this is more

than an interpretative dispute. The entire argument hinges on how the domains are delineated to

begin with.

Grades of Normativity and Reasons

Copp distinguishes three different kinds ("grades") of normativity: generic, motivational,

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[571] Huemer makes a similar point in arguing that, "Intuitionists who accept the is-ought gap (myself included) will grant that a *rebutting defeater* for an ethical intuition must derive from other ethical intuitions." The second part of Huemer's statement, however, does create some problems for the moral realist, when he writes, "however, an *undercutting defeater* for an ethical intuition may derive from nonevaluative premises." Huemer, "Ethical Intuitionism," 380.

[572] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 120.

and authoritative.[573] Different kinds of normative claims can have different grades of

normativity. While moral realists hold that morality has all three, other types of claims

(prudential, conventional, etc.) do not. Moreover, Copp highlights some issues with explicating

normativity in terms of reasons. He writes that, "One problem for this approach is that claims

about what we have reason to do are themselves normative, so such an approach does not go

very deep. Another problem is that there seem to be reasons of different kinds. There appear to

be moral reasons, reasons of etiquette, epistemic reasons, and so on. Moreover, these different

kinds of reasons appear to have different grades of normativity."[574] Thus by lumping all

normative claims into a single domain, Street includes claims with different grades of

normativity. The only distinguishing feature is that some are attitude-dependent and some are

attitude-independent. Any normative claim which is true in a robustly realist sense will by

definition be attitude-independent. An attitude-dependent normative claim can include any other

practical claim *except* for a moral claim in the robust realist sense.

As Street puts it, "when we think of the set of normative claims, the sorts of claims that

often leap to mind are claims such as 'Abortion is wrong' or 'I should exercise regularly'."[575]

The first of these two claims is clearly a moral question (one which Dworkin frequently uses as

an example). Few people, however, would think it immoral not to exercise, so the second is best

viewed as prudential. As we saw above, Street uses other examples of normative beliefs in her

essay which are not moral questions, such as eating a particular bowl of chili.[576] By expanding

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[573] Copp, "Three Grades," 14f. Copp's project involves defending the proposition that moral naturalism can account for all three of these, a proposition disputed by both Street and Joyce.

[574] Copp, "Three Grades, 15.

[575] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 303.

[576] Obviously there could be situations in which it is a moral question, such as the chili having been stolen. But this does not apply to Street's usage.

Dworkin's domain from morality to the normative in general, Street includes all such claims. A close reading of Dworkin, however, will show that his examples are all clearly moral issues. Furthermore, Dworkin distinguishes several different domains as being evaluative (as opposed to descriptive), including moral, ethical, interpretive, and aesthetic, as we already saw above.[577] He is careful to specify that he uses moral skepticism as an example, but that a similar argument can be constructed for other evaluative domains separately.[578] Street's reading obliterates these important distinctions.

To speak of the normative as a separate domain might make sense if it is taken as a synonym for "moral." However, with Street's usage it makes no sense. By changing the scope of the domain to include any *practical* normative claim, Street opens the door to anything which is a reason for doing something. To illustrate, take three different claims, all of which involve practical reasons and so count as normative in Street's broad sense. Say that Carl has a) reason to buy flour, b) reason to stop at the red light on the way to the store, and c) reason not to murder the store owner when it turns out the store is out of flour. Of these three, c) is clearly a moral question, a) is prudential, and b) is conventional. According to the moral realist, c) is true independently of Carl's or anyone else's attitude toward it, while the other two are not. But notice that it makes a difference what reason *in particular* Carl has for not murdering the store owner. If Carl's reason is that he didn't have a weapon on him and didn't want to risk injury to himself by trying to kill the owner with his bare hands, we would not consider that to be a *moral* reason for not committing murder even though Street would still call it a normative reason. A moral reason for not committing murder would be that murder is wrong (in the robust realist

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[577] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 88.

[578] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 89.

sense).

When the constructivist says that Carl has reason not to murder the store owner, it means that within Carl's own set of evaluative judgments at reflective equilibrium, Carl's judgment "I should not murder the store owner" would withstand scrutiny. But the reason for the judgment can be any practical reason whatsoever. Carl's wanting to avoid injury (or maybe jail) is just as legitimate as the reason that Carl values the life of the store owner. It is important to see why this matters. While the constructivist claims that we are simply changing the status of our normative beliefs from attitude-independent to attitude-dependent, that's not what's happening. What's actually happening is that we are replacing a moral belief (like "murder is wrong") with any non-moral belief *which happens to entail the same normative sentence* – a sentence of the form, "I have reason not to murder," "I shouldn't murder this person," or some other equivalent. Notice also an important difference in that under moral realism, the moral belief entails the normative sentence all on its own, for everyone. Under constructivism, the non-moral replacement belief only entails the normative sentence if it withstands scrutiny against all of the respective agent's other evaluative judgments, and then only for that agent.[579]

The moral belief that we started with has simply disappeared, along with every other moral belief, but that is hidden behind the normative sentence which has been retained.[580] This can be especially hard to detect if the (ostensible) non-moral replacement belief sounds a lot like a moral reason. Suppose that Carl's reason for not murdering the store owner is that he values the store owner's life. This might sound like a moral reason (in the good old-fashioned sense), but

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[579] This might be why Street thinks that on Dworkin's view the realism/antirealism debate is a matter of degree rather than of kind. But this is only true on Street's view. For Dworkin it is a matter both of degree *and* of kind, but it is the difference of kind which produces the difference in degree. Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 304.

[580] This raises the worry that the moral realist is begging the question against the constructivist. That worry will be dealt with below.

that's only the case if "everyone's life is valuable" is an attitude-independent truth.[581] If so, then anyone who held the belief that "not everyone's life is valuable" would be in error. According to moral realists, that's true. According to constructivism, however, normative truth is determined by all the other evaluative judgments of the agent making the judgment, so we can only judge Carl's belief that "everyone's life is valuable" by Carl's other evaluative judgments at reflective equilibrium – but even then, we can only go so far as to say that everyone's life is valuable *to Carl*. So the belief that we are examining isn't even "everyone's life is valuable" (an ON claim), it is "everyone's life is valuable to Carl" (an SN claim). Even if Carl refrains from murdering the store owner because he values the store owner's life, this is not a moral reason even though it might sound like one – but it *is* a normative reason. This ties into Dworkin's point that in denying the E-proposition ("'everyone's life is valuable' is an attitude-independent truth"), one also denies the respective I-proposition ("everyone's life is valuable"). Dworkin does not add that resourceful antirealists can substitute a similar attitude-dependent claim by adding an egocentric expression that entails the same normative sentence(s), but if the above analysis is correct, that is the case.

Under constructivism it might even be possible that Carl's belief that "everyone's life is valuable to me" is mistaken if he would not hold that at reflective equilibrium. Carl might just think that everyone's life is valuable to him because he's been told that's what people should think. But deep down, Carl doesn't actually think that. In that case, even if Carl thought he shouldn't murder the store owner because he thinks everyone's life is valuable to him, he would be wrong. This would open up the possibility that Carl *should* murder the store owner, even

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[581] One could also suggest that there is an attitude-independent truth that only some people's life is valuable and the store owner is part of that group, but we will let that pass.

though he mistakenly thinks he shouldn't because he mistakenly thinks everyone's life is valuable to him – a highly counterintuitive result to say the least.

One more complication that Street herself calls attention to has to do with future contingencies. In the example of the man who couldn't decide between joining the French resistance and caring for his mother, Street suggests that if he knew how effective he would be at each one, then he could choose based on that factual knowledge. The issue, then, would not be indeterminacy, but rather uncertainty.[582] But if we apply this idea to Carl, assuming that his reason for not murdering the store owner is that Carl is afraid of being injured in hand-to-hand mortal combat, we could imagine that Carl underestimates his own strength and agility and overestimates that of the store owner so that Carl would in fact only sustain minor injuries. The result would be that Carl would again be mistaken in his belief that he had reason not to murder the store owner, and should murder him. This also highlights the difficulty of attempting to resolve the debate with these kinds of thought experiments. It's easy for constructivists to rig the experiment so that it produces something close to the expected results (such as with the example of the creature C at the beginning of this chapter), and hope that moral realists don't ask too many questions when it doesn't (as we will see below with ideally coherent Caligula). However, it is impossible to show what is actually happening in people's internal, moral deliberations.

Street claims that her constructivism "allows us to say almost everything we ever were inclined to say about people's reasons, with the exception of a swath of extremely strong realist claims."[583] Based on the above analysis, this is plausibly true; it also carries a lot less weight than Street wants it to. In order to make constructivism work like she wants, all Street needs to do is

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[582] Street, "Constructivism," 236.

[583] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 328.

to find non-moral reasons which sound close to moral reasons, and then say that those are the

reasons behind people's normative sentences . . . or at least, that they *could* be. But this does

nothing to show what is really going on in people's deepest, inner attitudes and beliefs.

Alternatively, if Street simply keeps the discussion at the level of "reasons" talk, then she doesn't

even need to get into the complications that would arise from the vast array of possible practical

reasons someone could have for, say, not committing murder. But then, Street might argue that,

as long as she has a plausible (or at least somewhat plausible) account of our reasons that is

entirely based on attitude-dependent truths, that's all she needs. The Darwinian dilemma has

already done the work of showing that we have no reason to think that our normative beliefs are

reliable when it comes to discerning attitude-independent truths such as those posited by the

realist. Street might think that ends the discussion. But does it?

Dworkin and Reliability

As we have seen in previous chapters, one of the big concerns of evolutionary debunkers

has to do with the reliability of our moral beliefs given moral realism and evolution. We also saw

in chapter three numerous attempts by realists to give an account of this in various ways,

including third-factor accounts and attempts to grasp one or the other of the horns of Street's

dilemma. All of these arguments appeared to either beg the question in some important way or to

attempt to illegitimately shift the burden of proof back onto the debunker. Dworkin proposes a

different solution, which is to refuse to accept the terms of the challenge in the first place. He

writes,

> Some so-called moral 'realists' add to the confusion by accepting the archimedean
> challenge as sensible and trying to meet it. They declare that there really are objective
> and normative properties or facts in the universe, which is true. But they declare this in
> language that strives for metaphysical resonance, as if its truth was to be discovered in
> some philosophical domain other than that of substantive evaluation. If I am right, they
> share the fallacy of the archimedeans, which is to suppose that some sense can be

assigned to the supposedly metaphysical claims that is not itself a normative sense, or that there is some way to establish a normative proposition other than through substantive normative arguments.[584]

This analysis would explain the failure of moral realists to answer the debunking challenge on its own terms, at least in part. It would also mean that this does not, in fact, imply a failure of moral realism; it would only mean that, by allowing skeptics to set the terms of the debate, the argument is effectively lost before it even begins.

There is only one brief passage in "Objectivity and Truth" where Dworkin directly touches on Darwinian considerations. In leading up to it, he speculates that a large part of contemporary philosophical skepticism may be rooted in the belief that God is necessary for morality, combined with "the defeat of crude anthropomorphic religion."[585] Dworkin asks rhetorically, "How else can we explain the widespread but plainly mistaken assumption that a successful Darwinian explanation of moral concern – that human animals with such a concern were more likely to survive – would have skeptical implications?"[586]

We have seen that the question of the reliability of our moral beliefs is central to the debunking challenge. Dworkin addresses this concern in his response to Harman's critique that "we cannot regard any belief as reliable unless we think that the best causal explanation of why we hold it refers to the state of affairs it describes."[587] Dworkin argues that this kind of test makes sense for beliefs about the physical world, but not for beliefs in domains such as morality, aesthetics, mathematics or philosophy because of the nature of the *content* of those domains.[588]

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[584] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 127.

[585] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 123.

[586] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 123.

[587] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 119.

[588] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 119.

Dworkin writes, "If the 'best explanation' causal test is universally sound, therefore, no moral (or aesthetic or mathematical or philosophical) belief is reliable. But we can reverse that judgment: if any moral belief is reliable, the 'best explanation' test is not universally sound. Either direction of argument–taking either of the two hypotheses as axiomatic and using it to deny the other–begs the question in the same way."[589]

Dworkin mentions Rawls's method of reflective equilibrium as a way of arriving at harmony between our different beliefs, but argues that "none of these can be given an automatic or antecedent veto over the rest."[590] Later, Dworkin adds that, "We may well discover that what we now think about virtue or vice or duty or right is inconsistent with other things we also think, about cosmology or psychology or history. If so, we must try to reestablish harmony, but that is a process whose results must make moral sense as well as every other kind of sense."[591] It is clear that Street and other debunkers regard scientific conclusions as holding sway over normative ones, which we will look at more closely below. This entire idea is exactly what Dworkin calls archimedean. It is also question-begging, but in a much more subtle way than many of Street's critics seem to think. This might be because most of Street's critics share many of her underlying assumptions, including assumptions about scientific claims.

A Dworkinian Dilemma for Antirealists

Dworkin has his own dilemma which he offers in response to a challenge similar to the debunking challenge, namely that moral realists have the burden of proof to provide an explanation of "how human beings could be 'in touch with' or aware of [moral] properties."[592]

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[589] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 119.

[590] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 119.

[591] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 128.

[592] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 117.

But before he does, he argues that the burden of proof depends on "how opinion stands when the investigation begins. . . . none of us can accept such an argument unless we find its premises convincing even when we grasp their skeptical import. We must find these premises more plausible than what they require us to abandon."[593] In light of this, he asks this question: supposing we must choose between the following two options, which should we reject?

> (1) Human beings have a special though sometimes fallible faculty of judgment that enables us to decide which moral claims to accept or reject, a capacity whose malfunctioning may sometimes result only in moral misjudgment with no spillover impairment of other cognitive activity. (2) There is no moral objection to exterminating an ethnic group or enslaving a race or torturing a young child, just for fun, in front of its captive mother.[594]

Dworkin answers his own dilemma by writing, "if the hypothesis of the first proposition–that the moral capacity is *ad hoc* and not systematically integrated into other intellectual powers–is the only alternative to denying any capacity to reach credible moral opinions at all, I would be content to accept it. It involves nothing mysterious or artificial or counterintuitive."[595] Of course, the Darwinian debunker says that Dworkin's hypothesis *does* involve something mysterious and artificial from an evolutionary standpoint, namely that there is no good scientific explanation for how we could have moral faculties that are attuned to attitude-independent moral truths. The reason it isn't counterintuitive, again according to the debunker, is because evolutionary forces produced our moral intuitions in the first place. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that Dworkin's argument or something like it is really at the heart of the resistance of moral realists to EDAs.

Street gives a lengthy response to this passage from Dworkin.[596] Interestingly, she

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[593] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 117.

[594] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 117-18.

[595] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 118.

[596] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 325-330.

concedes that if the choice that Dworkin presents is accurate, then "we are justified in cleaving to realism."[597] Street, however, argues that Dworkin's choice is a false one and that the real choice is between these two propositions:

> (1') I am in all likelihood hopeless at grasping the normative truth; and (2') Some conceivable agents have reason to exterminate an ethnic group or enslave a race or torture a young child for fun in front of its captive mother, but most real-life human beings have no such reasons, and if we ever encounter any who do, then we (you and I and the vast majority of human beings) have reason to band together against them, lock them up, and throw away the key.[598]

Street's (1') is, of course, the conclusion of her Darwinian dilemma. It is based on a scientific argument even though it draws a (non-moral) normative conclusion, and stipulates that a special moral faculty of the kind that Dworkin posits in (1) above has no good scientific explanation. This may be true, as the realist responses that we saw in the previous chapter seemed unable to provide an answer to the debunking challenge other than shifting the burden of proof and begging the question in various ways. But Dworkin's whole point is that scientific explanations do not automatically have pride of place, and so if (2) follows from the denial of (1), he'll take (1) even without an adequate scientific explanation for it (or explanation of any kind). For Street, science effectively rules out (1), so (1) is simply not an option (bearing in mind that even Street's (1') says "in all likelihood," which does not, strictly speaking, rule out the possibility of (1)). We will have more to say about this below.

Before launching into a defense of (2'), Street first objects that Dworkin's (2) is "a deeply misleading, boogeyman characterization of what is involved in accepting antirealism. A sophisticated antirealist will agree to no such thing."[599] Regardless of what a sophisticated

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[597] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 326.

[598] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 326-27.

[599] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 327.

antirealist will agree to, is Dworkin's characterization really that far off? Street begins her

defense of this charge by complaining that Dworkin's (2) is unfair to antirealists because it's

couched in terms of what there is a *moral* objection to rather than in terms of normative reasons

in general.[600] Street also argues that an antirealist could opt for morality/reasons externalism so

that even if there is a moral objection to (2), not everyone has a reason to always be moral.[601]

It's actually Street's complaint that is unfair, however. Dworkin is defending the face-

value view of morality so it's not legitimate to complain about him using that conception in his

argument. Forcing Dworkin to adopt the antirealist framing would be begging the question

against him. There is also a real irony to Street's objection, since, as we saw above, it was

actually Street who decided to read Dworkin's statements about morality in terms of general

normative reasons in the first place. Dworkin is being consistent with his use of terms – it is

Street who is arguably trying to stack the deck by changing it. Street writes that, "To avoid

prejudicing the debate against the antirealist with an implicit appeal to platitudes associated with

the concept of *morality*, then, the claim in question should be couched in terms of reasons."[602] As

we will see below, however, implicit appeals to platitudes associated with the concept of

morality are unavoidable, which is, in fact, part of Dworkin's whole point. Street actually

illustrates the archimedean's pretension of neutrality – which she thinks requires the language of

reasons – while in fact it is not neutral at all. Street's framing of the argument in terms of reasons

obscures the underlying moral issues, as we have already seen. If Street is accusing Dworkin of

begging the question, Dworkin's response is that the question is being begged either way.

Street's second point against Dworkin's (2) follows a similar vein. She writes, "An

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[600] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 327.

[601] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 327.

[602] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 327; italics original.

antirealist will not accept blanket statements of the form 'There is no reason not to *Y*' or 'There

is reason to *Z*.'"[603] Again, notice that Street has re-cast Dworkin's statement about moral

objections into the language of reasons, which obfuscates the point being made. Dworkin is not

asking anyone to accept a blanket statement of the form, "there is no reason not to *Y*," but he is

insisting on rejecting the statement that "there is no *moral* objection to *Y*," where *Y* is the

atrocities he describes. The debate is, after all, about *moral* realism.

Street says, "one might think that it's a conceptual truth or near conceptual truth that

there is 'some moral objection' to torturing a child for fun—such that any 'morality' that denied

this wouldn't be recognizable as a brand of *morality* at all. Because it denies such a fundamental

moral platitude, proposition (2) sounds almost crazy."[604] Dworkin's answer would be yes, that's

exactly the point. If we can't conclude that genocide is *morally* wrong (as opposed to just our

having no reason to do it but somebody else might), then we can reach no credible moral

opinions at all. But that's just what Street thinks – that we can reach no credible *moral* opinions

at all, only non-moral (i.e. mind-dependent) normative ones. In that case, the only objection for

Street appears to be that having it spelled out in such stark terms looks obviously wrong to any

normal, rational person.

Street does admit that the antirealist might agree to a statement such as the following:

"Some agents, because they possess a starting set of evaluative attitudes very different from our

own, have no normative reason not to exterminate an ethnic group, enslave a race, or torture a

young child for fun. An ideally coherent Caligula would be an example of such an agent."[605] At

the same time she notes that "*Kantian* antirealists such as Korsgaard—would not even assent to

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[603] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 328.

[604] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 327.

[605] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 328.

this much, claiming instead that it's entailed from within every practical point of view that one *has reason* [emphasis added] not to do such things."[606] Leaving aside for the moment that Street herself has said that she thinks Kantian antirealism is implausible, the point to notice is that Street is still reading (2) by replacing "moral objection" with "reason" and importing her expansive category of reasons which includes non-moral reasons. That objection holds just as much against Kantian antirealists as against Humeans. Dworkin's (2) is correct if moral realism is false and moral antirealism is true, assuming that "moral objection" is taken in the face-value sense. Street may not like it or want to accept it because of its stark counterintuitive force, but this seems to be simply bringing to light the full effect of adopting antirealism and forcing antirealists to "bite the bullet."

<div align="center">Biting the Bullet: Ideally Coherent Caligula</div>

Street's reference to an ideally coherent Caligula is a useful point of departure for discussion. The concept is straightforward enough: "Caligula judges that he has most normative reason to torture others for fun, and this conclusion (it is stipulated) follows perfectly from within his own practical standpoint: he is utterly consistent in holding that he has this reason, and he is making no mistakes about matters of non-normative fact."[607] Street notes that realists would hold that such a person could exist, but he would be mistaken about his reasons, whereas Street's Humean antirealism says that he can exist and is not mistaken.[608] On the Kantian view which was mentioned above, an ideally coherent Caligula is not even possible.[609] With only minor adjustments we can see that an ideally coherent Caligula could have reason to commit genocide

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[606] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 328.

[607] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 296.

[608] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 297.

[609] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 297.

or enslave a race under antirealism. Street has the unenviable task of defending Caligula. The question is how much water her defense holds.

For ease of reference, here again is the proposition that Street gives as a more palatable replacement for Dworkin's (2) above:

> (2') Some conceivable agents have reason to exterminate an ethnic group or enslave a race or torture a young child for fun in front of its captive mother, but most real-life human beings have no such reasons, and if we ever encounter any who do, then we (you and I and the vast majority of human beings) have reason to band together against them, lock them up, and throw away the key.[610]

A straightforward reading of the words "most real-life human beings have no such reasons," with no other context, would mean that most people have no reason of any kind to commit genocide, not even one which is outweighed by other reasons. Street's readers will no doubt be apt to accept this statement without question, because of course we know that only evil monsters would even *think* of committing genocide. But that's because Street's readers most likely have a strong intuition that genocide is unspeakably evil and abhorrent in the robust realist sense, even if they profess to be antirealists. It's not simply that we have no reason to commit genocide, it's that we have a strong *moral* reason not to even think about doing such a thing.

With constructivism, the question is what someone's reasons are *on the whole*. In line with what we saw earlier, if Joe's reason for not committing genocide is that, as much as he would like to see some particular ethnic group exterminated, on the whole he considers it to be too much of a time commitment that would detract from other pursuits that he values, then he can be said to have normative reason not to do it. A little reflection will show that it would be unusual for there to be any person who had *no normative reason whatsoever* not to commit genocide (i.e. an ideally coherent Caligula), given Street's expansive understanding of

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[610] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 326-27.

normative. To put it in language that is abhorrent from a moral standpoint, genocide would be an enormous undertaking with significant obstacles and risks. Given the number of possible practical reasons for *not* doing it, it would be unsurprising to find that very few people have *no* such reasons in their entire range of evaluative judgments.[611] So the fact that there are few ideally coherent, genocidal Caligulas does not help Street's cause. That would be true even if the world was mostly populated by people who would love to commit genocide but were simply too preoccupied to tackle such an intense and demanding project. It seems more likely that Street is thinking most real-life people have no reason to commit genocide because most people aren't evil monsters.

Again returning to previous points, even if someone does have reason not to commit genocide, Street's argument guarantees that it is *not* a moral reason. Instead, it has to be an SN truth which entails the sentence, "I have reason not to commit genocide." Once more, just as we saw earlier with Carl, if someone's reason is that they value all people, that still isn't a moral reason even though it sounds close. But in Street's constructivism, it makes no difference if it's because the person cares about other people including out-group members or if it's because he's just too tired after torturing puppies all day. In both cases he has reason not to commit genocide. Neither reason is a moral reason, though one of them looks like it is.

One final point to make about ideally coherent Caligula before moving on is this. So far, we have talked about a very small number of behaviors that most people find morally abhorrent. Street assures us that most likely there are very few ideally coherent Caligulas with respect to genocide, enslaving a race, or torturing a child. Consider all of the other possible atrocities we

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[611] The same would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to enslaving a race, Dworkin's second point of objection. Torturing a child in front of its captive mother, which is no less heinous, would be comparatively easier from a practical standpoint. But notice how abhorrent it is to even speak in such terms.

could mention – rape, assault, various acts of terrorism, animal cruelty, etc. These kinds of things happen all the time. How does Street know – how can she know – that many of the people who do these things do not have normative reason to do them? Under antirealism, she can't.

Good Reasons and Not-So-Good

The constructivist view is made to seem more palatable in part by not thinking it through deeply enough. Consider that A's reason for not committing genocide is that he just doesn't want to make the effort, while B's reason is that B values all people including members of out-groups. Is one of those reasons better than the other? Not according to constructivism, because "better" is a value judgment that can only be made relative to the set of evaluative judgments of the agent making the original judgment. I can't judge someone else's reasons to be bad, even if those reasons wouldn't withstand scrutiny in my own set of evaluative judgments.

Street's statement that most people have no reason to commit genocide is true. But by appealing to real-life human beings, Street is smuggling in everything that those human beings believe about morality. Most of those human beings see things the way Dworkin does, not Street. This is not to say that if people become constructivists they are more likely to commit genocide. It just means that constructivism is an artifice that hides what is really going on in people's moral deliberations (though one might be tempted to ask constructivists who are forced to concede that genocide might be okay for some people but is unthinkable for them why they aren't more open-minded).

We could apply a similar analysis to Street's statement that the vast majority of human beings would have reason to lock all the ideally coherent Caligulas up "and throw away the key." Under Street's constructivism, Caligula is doing nothing wrong in committing genocide. It doesn't matter if what he is doing is wrong by our lights, because for Street the only standard

that counts is Caligula's, and by Caligula's own lights, he *should* commit genocide. So, even if we personally find genocide abhorrent, that has no bearing on whether Caligula's actions are right or wrong.[612]

Street argues that "even if it's true that a person has *reasons* that are repugnant to us, there are still plenty of other things we can say about this person—for instance that he is despicable to us, and that it's sad, from our point of view, that he and his reasons are like this."[613] To this one might reply, "so what?" What we're looking for is an SN reason to lock him up and throw away the key, even though he has done nothing wrong. Street can't argue that he has done something wrong from our point of view, because our point of view is not the view that counts for right or wrong when it comes to Caligula's actions, only his does. This, of course, is just the problem with relativism. Much more could be said about it, but space does not permit.

Constructivists might say that even though the status of our moral intuitions has changed (since we no longer think they correlate with attitude-independent truths), the intuitions themselves can still be used. A parent can still follow the intuition to care for her offspring even if it is in a mind-dependent sense (what Street refers to as "an antirealist's more modest sense"[614]). So we can still follow the intuition to stop genocidal maniacs even if it isn't an attitude-independent truth that we should. Even this is much more complicated than it sounds, because we have a variety of conflicting intuitions in that case. For example, there is an intuition already alluded to that we shouldn't lock people up who haven't done anything wrong. What about the intuition that we should protect the innocent? That would mean that we should protect

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[612] One of Street's arguments is a self-defense argument. She uses an analogy of aliens trying to eat us, that we would fight them even if they were not making any normative mistake. Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 329. This would at most be a reason for a member of the persecuted ethnic group, but not for anyone else.

[613] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 329.

[614] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 156.

Caligula, because he is innocent by his own standards. The answer might be that, even if genocide isn't wrong according to the agent's own standards, it is still against the law. This would make "genocide is wrong" a conventional, rather than a moral standard. But that would also mean that in a jurisdiction where there is no such law, there is no reason to lock up Caligula (not to mention that the reason genocide is illegal in many places is because people writing laws thought it was morally evil). It really is not as simple as just changing the epistemic status of our moral beliefs and acting like not much has changed. At least some of the intuitions we held in a realist sense would have to go, and probably more than we realize. The real question is if any actual constructivist would ever undertake that project.

This does not prove that Street is wrong about what most people would have reason to do. What it does show is that 1) things are not nearly as simple as Street would have us believe, and 2) nobody really knows how the entire web of our normative beliefs would be affected by replacing every single reason that would be considered an attitude-independent (i.e. moral) reason with an attitude-dependent one. In the end, Street's defense of Caligula looks like a smokescreen which trades on the fact that people reading it believe deep down that genocide is wrong – really wrong – and that anyone who commits genocide is unspeakably wicked and evil. Without the support of that and a great many other face-value moral beliefs, the argument rings quite hollow.

Our inner convictions are inescapably saturated from top to bottom with beliefs and attitudes which we take to be true in the robust realist sense no matter how much we might try to pretend otherwise in abstract philosophical arguments. There appears to be one particularly revealing instance of this in Street's "Darwinian Dilemma," in a passage where Street is discussing the tendency for people to give "out-group" members lesser treatment than those in

their "in-group." As we saw in previous chapters, this phenomenon is readily explained by evolution. Street is making the point that tracking accounts don't explain our tendency to make evaluative judgments contrary to evolutionary forces (in chapter five we will see how theism can answer this in a much more satisfying way that Street's antirealism). But as for the belief itself, that out-group members should be given lesser treatment than in-group members, Street writes, "More and more, many of us are coming to think that *this is not true* [emphasis added]."[615] It's possible that Street means "true" in the constructivist sense of "withstands scrutiny at reflective equilibrium relative to our other beliefs," but in that case what would it matter how many people were having a similar reflective experience? According to Street's own theory, someone who thinks that out-group members *should* be treated with less regard is just as correct, provided that person's other beliefs mesh with it. But reading this passage gives a very strong impression that Street thinks discrimination against outsiders is *objectively* wrong and momentarily let her guard down in voicing that belief. It even sounds as though Street thinks growing numbers of people are becoming aware of this fact, suggesting that something like moral progress is occurring.

Assessing Street's Assessment of Dworkin

In responding to Dworkin's solution to the realism/antirealism debate, Street repeats the same interpretive mistakes that we have seen above. For example, she addresses the question about internal and external arguments, saying, "one might worry that the argument is asking for the very thing that Dworkin has already argued is impossible—namely a justification of one's normative convictions from some standpoint *outside* the normative domain."[616] As we have already seen, this is not Dworkin's argument, but rather Street's reformulation of Dworkin's

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[615] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 133.

[616] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 318.

argument in what Dworkin would call archimedean terms. But according to Street, Dworkin still

has left unresolved the following problem:

> on the one hand, Dworkin accepts that there are robustly independent normative truths, and on the other he thinks that he has a good idea of what they are, but it turns out that these two normative views are incompatible when combined with other plausible normative premises—in particular, reasoning about the odds that among all the possible consistent evaluative systems, one's own is among the independently true ones, coupled with the point that one has no non-trivially-question-begging reason to think it is.[617]

Dworkin does see that there is a problem here, but argues that the archimedean conclusion is too

strong. At one point, Dworkin discusses the question of moral progress in the context of

answering the charge that, if moral disagreement is not the result of factual error or defective

cognitive faculties on the part of one or more of the disputants, then moral progress can't be

explained. The archimedean conclusion which Dworkin resists is that "our moral opinions and

the opinions of those who disagree with us are all wrong because no moral opinions can be

right."[618] Dworkin counters that, for example, someone who is convinced that slavery is wrong

and that therefore we are right and the Greeks were wrong about this still has some explanations

available depending upon that person's personal beliefs and convictions.[619] However, Dworkin

concedes that in some cases we might have no good explanation other than that others "did not

'see' or show sufficient 'sensitivity' to what we 'see' or 'sense.'"[620]

In responding to this, Street latches onto this last statement and suggests that this is akin

to saying that we won the lottery "without any non-trivially-question-begging reason to think

so."[621] That's because Street thinks that Dworkin's preferred solution to the entire debate is to

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[617] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 318-19.

[618] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 122.

[619] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 121.

[620] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 121.

[621] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 316.

consider our capacity for true moral beliefs to be pure luck.[622] However, the passage in which

Dworkin appeals to moral luck is not in regard to how it is that our moral faculties happened to

be able to light upon attitude-independent moral truths, but is a response to a different question

altogether, namely the problem of psychological egoism.[623] Space does not permit a detailed

examination of this, but Dworkin is addressing the supposed claim to austerity of archimedean

arguments and showing how, even in the worst-case scenario in which psychological egoism is

true, "non-moral discoveries cannot undermine or structurally change morality without

morality's help."[624] As we saw above, Dworkin's preferred solution to the realism/antirealism

debate is to refuse to accept the archimedean's terms to begin with.

One might want to ask Street if she does or does not agree that we are right about slavery

being wrong, and that those who practiced it in the past were wrong in doing so. This isn't to say

that constructivists think slavery is right, of course, but that it is not an attitude-independent truth

that slavery is wrong. Antirealists want to retain convictions such as "slavery is wrong," but then

claim that they are retaining it in some subjective (i.e. attitude-dependent) sense. Dworkin thinks

part of the appeal of this view is that

> It allows its partisans to be as culturally modest and relative as anyone might wish, to abandon all claims as to their own morality's ultimate truth or even superiority to other moralities. But it allows them to do this while still embracing their morality as enthusiastically as ever before, denouncing genocide or abortion or slavery or gender discrimination or welfare cheats with all their former vigor. They need only say that they have revised their view not about the substance but about the status of their convictions. They no longer claim objective truth for these convictions; they no longer think their thoughts 'mirror' an external 'reality.' But they still hold them with the same intensity. They can be as willing to fight or even die for their beliefs as they ever were, but now with a difference. They can have their moral convictions and lose them too. Richard

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[622] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 310.

[623] See Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 124-127 for the context of this entire argument.

[624] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 127.

Rorty calls this state of mind 'irony.'[625]

Dworkin says that there is no way to retain a moral belief in a subjective sense, there is only the

restatement of the original claim in philosophical language. Street and other antirealists want to

argue that it is question-begging for realists to talk about moral reasons rather than normative

reasons in general. After all, what is a moral reason except an attitude-independent, normative

truth? To claim that "slavery is wrong" is one of those attitude-independent truths is just begging

the question in the same way that many realist responses we saw in the previous chapter beg the

question. Dworkin is actually happy to concede this, except that he says the antirealist is begging

the question in the same way by restating the argument in subjective, rather than objective,

terms. As we saw in the previous chapter, the charge of begging the question has frequently been

lobbed at the other side by all combatants in this debate. If Dworkin is right, then both charges

have some truth to them. The problem with most realist arguments is that they want to level the

charge of begging the question at antirealists while retaining the same archimedean language and

way of thinking. Dworkin says this effort is misguided and doomed to failure.

The response of the debunker, of course, is to say that we only think of morality in

objective terms because evolutionary forces made us do it. The reason we are supposed to be

required to accept this is because of a scientific argument about the genealogy of our moral

faculties and beliefs.

Science and Moral Skepticism

Street argues that we are forced to become antirealists simply by continuing to function

from the practical standpoint. Street says that if her Darwinian dilemma is successful, "the realist

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[625] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 93-94.

is committed not only to a somewhat mysterious epistemology, but also to the much more radical conclusion that—given the apparent odds against having won the normative lottery and the lack of any (internal) reason to think we did—we are in all likelihood hopeless at discovering the normative truth."[626] By continuing to reason practically – that is, by making choices based on our practical reasons – Street argues that we are implicitly affirming that we aren't hopeless at knowing what our reasons are, and are thus practically affirming antirealism.[627] Thus, in this way of framing it, we have an SN reason to be skeptical of all ON claims.

But this isn't quite right. According to the Darwinian dilemma, the reason we are supposedly hopeless at discovering normative truth is because of a *scientific* claim, not a normative one. Street is explicit about this in several places. For example, in talking about how evolution could have produced an ability to grasp independent evaluative truths, Street writes that, "this proposal, for the reasons I've already given, is *scientifically* [emphasis added] unacceptable."[628] Many realists who want to resist the debunking conclusion also want to give science pride of place in the discussion, which is why their arguments fail. Recall that FitzPatrick's solution in chapter three was to be willing to give up the principle of parsimony in order to hold onto the belief that rape is wrong. The conviction that morality is worth holding onto is a good one. Parsimony, however, is an essential principle that is applicable not just in science but in every domain, so we can't just give it up when it suits us. The problem with FitzPatrick's approach is in wanting to give scientific explanations the highest billing, but then to arbitrarily deprive science of a vital tool if its machinations hit too close to home. Dworkin's solution, which is much closer to the mark, is to say that no domain automatically gets the

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[626] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 329-30.

[627] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 330.

[628] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 144.

highest billing, not even science. Sacrificing morality is too high of a price to pay in order to keep science as preeminent.

Suppose that the debunkers are correct and science does rule out the possibility that our moral faculties are reliable – as Street says, that this idea is scientifically unacceptable? Notice that Dworkin's point is that the antirealist position is *morally* unacceptable. Given the choice between scientifically unacceptable and morally unacceptable, which should we choose? If Dworkin argues that taking either side begs the question in the same way, then where does that leave us? According to Dworkin, it leaves us to consider our own convictions and find what we believe. He writes, "I mean that any reason we think we have for abandoning a conviction is itself just another conviction, and that we can do no better for any claim, including the most sophisticated skeptical argument or thesis, than to see whether, after the best thought we find appropriate, we think it so. If you can't help believing something, steadily and wholeheartedly, you'd better believe it."[629] In response to this statement, Street writes, "I agree with this. But the thing I claim we can't help believing, steadily and wholeheartedly, is that we have some idea of what our reasons are. And this conviction is what drives us to antirealism."[630]

Think back to Dworkin's dilemma and Street's response to it. Dworkin's point was that accepting (2) was simply out of the question, so whatever qualms there might be about (1) (which might well be more than he allows), he'll take it. Street's rejoinder was, in effect, the opposite. Because rejecting (1') was out of the question, whatever qualms there might be about (2') (which were substantial in spite of her valiant attempts to mollify us), we must bite the bullet and accept (2'). In each case it was a question of which premise was not up for discussion. For

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[629] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 118.

[630] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 330.

Dworkin, the moral premise (2) is not up for debate. But for Street, the conclusion of her

Darwinian dilemma, which is based on the results of science, is not an open question. According

to the debunker, if we have no scientific explanation for having reliable moral faculties, then we

can't accept them as being reliable. It would have to be fantastic luck or a miracle, and neither of

those is acceptable in scientific terms. If morality has to go, it has to go; but we can retain

something close if we become antirealists about morality – or so the antirealist claims.

Suppose we bite the antirealist bullet and accept the possibility of an ideally coherent

Caligula. Are we really willing to accept that, for example, Hitler might have been an ideally

coherent Caligula for all we know? That he might not have been morally depraved?[631] Would

Street really care to defend the proposition that Hitler might not have done anything wrong,

while hastening to add that we still had reason to go to war against him even though he might not

have done anything wrong? With regard to the question, "what can we not help believing?" isn't

it the case that we can't help believing that what Hitler did was really wrong, and it would be

wrong no matter who did it or what their evaluative judgments were? Or that not committing

genocide because you value all people including out-group members is really a better reason than

not committing genocide because you would rather spend your life getting rich off the stock

market – even though you wish someone would exterminate some minority ethnic group that you

find annoying? Dworkin's point seems to be that of course this is what antirealists believe; they

just think they've found a way of "having their convictions and losing them, too." The bulk of

this chapter has aimed at showing that antirealists have to *really* bite the bullet, not just pretend

to for the sake of philosophical arguments. Part of the contention of these concluding sections is

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[631] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 111. Street mentions that realists believe Hitler was morally depraved, and that the truth of this statement holds independently of what anyone thinks. She neglects to spell out the antirealist conclusion, which is that Hitler, for all constructivists (at least of Street's Humean variety) know, did nothing wrong according to the only standard that matters, which was his own.

that, no matter how hard they might try, they can't.

On the other hand, what about biting the bullet of holding that we have no scientific explanation for how we could have reliable moral beliefs, but we're going to hold them anyhow? Street thinks that the Darwinian dilemma forces us to conclude that if moral realism is true (I deliberately use "moral" instead of Street's "normative") then we are hopeless at knowing what our reasons are, and will experience practical paralysis as a result. Yet moral realists don't seem to have any more paralysis than antirealists – and as we saw at the beginning, antirealists can have paralyzing situations as well.

Dworkin says that no domain should get veto power over the others. However, can the antirealist argue that Dworkin is giving morality veto power over science? Is it just a case of deciding which of our domains to give veto power to? The answer to that question is tied up with the question of whether it's really the case that science rules out human beings having a special moral faculty that is in tune with attitude-independent, moral truths. This will be addressed in chapter five.

Antirealism and Skepticism

One question which still remains to be asked is how exactly antirealism is supposed to provide relief from skepticism in the first place. Recall Bedke's cosmic coincidence argument with the illustration of someone with a belief in a non-physical goblin war caused by a tumor.[632] Upon learning that the tumor was causing his belief, the man's belief in a goblin war would no longer be justified. Could he save himself from goblin war skepticism by changing the status of his goblin war beliefs to antirealist? It is hard to know what that would even mean. The man's

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[632] Bedke, 198.

belief has been shown to be caused by a tumor, so he knows the goblin war is not real. What is the difference between being an antirealist about a goblin war and holding that the goblin war is not real? They seem to be two different ways of saying the same thing. So, if knowing the goblin war is not real makes someone a goblin war skeptic, then being an antirealist about goblin wars is just another way of saying that one is a goblin war skeptic. Yet Bedke argues that the cosmic coincidence argument does not necessarily lead to skepticism because of the possibility of antirealist options such as constructivism and expressivism.[633]

Bedke is not the only one who thinks that antirealism can help avoid skepticism. Kahane opines that, "anti-objectivist metaethical views are attempts to give an account of existing evaluative discourse, and as such, if successful, should leave our first-order evaluative beliefs exactly as they are."[634] As we have seen, this is debatable. While we might be able to preserve some of the normative sentences we had as realists, the beliefs lying behind those sentences will have changed from moral to non-moral as we saw above. The important question is whether all of the non-moral beliefs can continue to support the weight of all of the normative sentences that used to be supported by our moral beliefs. Or at least, that would be the question if we could actually get rid of all of our moral beliefs in the first place. Part of Dworkin's argument, as we have seen, is that we cannot.

Enoch argues that if realists cannot explain the reliability of their moral beliefs, then they can only remain realists by accepting skepticism. Thus, he writes, "If the only way to be a realist is to deny epistemic justification for any normative belief . . . then antirealism gains significant ground"[635] – which seems to imply that if realists become antirealists, their normative beliefs are

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[633] Bedke, 205.

[634] Kahane, 104.

[635] Enoch, "Epistemological Challenge," 424.

then justified. The appropriate question here would seem to be "justified in what way?" Typically, justification is the status of a belief in which the person holding it has good reason for thinking it to be true. This can be the case even if the belief is not true, but the person holding the false belief has good reason to think it is true anyhow. But with antirealism, we are talking about believing that some supposedly objective fact is not an objective fact. Applying this again to goblin war beliefs, it would be like saying that the man's belief in a goblin war is justified – meaning that he has good reason to think it is true. Except that it is not true, and he knows it is not. So whatever "justified" means in this context, it is a much different sense from someone who has good reason for thinking that a belief is true. It seems misleading to use the language of justification to describe an antirealist belief. Of course, as we have seen above, a belief such as "genocide is evil," when translated into the language of reasons, does not simply change its status and suddenly become justified. Instead it disappears altogether and is replaced by a different belief entirely – or a belief which is almost the same, but not quite.

Schafer and Crow both argue that adopting antirealism is one way to ensure that our normative faculties are reliable, since our normative beliefs in that case are mind-dependent.[636] But this is even more perplexing than speaking of justification. One might as well argue that our beliefs about Andromedans are reliable as long as we understand them in a mind-dependent way rather than mind-independent. Crow, recall, argued that there are two ways to save a domain from skepticism in the case that a cosmic coincidence argument was needed for those beliefs to be reliable – antirealism or theism.[637] Crow also argued against Street by saying that if Street's dilemma was successful, then so was Plantinga's. However, as we saw, theism was still an

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[636] Schafer, 473; Crow, 140.

[637] Crow, 140.

option for Street as it was for Plantinga. If antirealism is not an option, then, theism will remain as an option, if not the most plausible option for explaining moral knowledge.

Not everyone sees antirealism as an escape from skepticism, however. Machuca argues that antirealism just is a form of skepticism. He writes that, "though some might be reluctant to regard moral anti-realism as a form of skepticism, not only is it a fact that it is commonly regarded that way among metaethicists, but there are also good reasons for so doing."[638] Machuca observes that metaethicists find it obvious that antirealism is a form of skepticism, but that epistemologists see this as "a surprising mistake."[639]

Street addresses this worry briefly, asking that, supposing we discovered good evidence that our perceptual beliefs were being caused by a "whimsical hypnotist," if it would make sense to change our beliefs about our surroundings to antirealist beliefs "so that we'd no longer have reason to think we were hopeless."[640] Street says she doesn't think this would make sense, but then follows that up by saying that "I think that every domain of judgment needs to be looked at individually, and—as Dworkin would agree—it's a question of what's most plausible all things considered."[641] But this misses the point. If you have a set of beliefs that you come to conclude are false, and thus those beliefs are no longer justified, they don't suddenly become justified because you decide to hold them in some attitude-dependent way. It has nothing to do with what domain it is – if it makes no sense to do it with perceptual or empirical beliefs, then it makes no sense to do it with moral beliefs, either.

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[638] Diego Machuca, "Moral Skepticism: An Introduction and Overview," in *Moral Skepticism: New Essays*, ed. Diego Machuca (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3, accessed September 17, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315627861.

[639] Machuca, 2.

[640] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 325.

[641] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 325.

The idea that antirealism can rescue us from skepticism seems to be based on the same kind of archimedean thinking that Dworkin argues so forcefully against. It seems on the one hand like a kind of make-believe in which we have our own set of beliefs which are "true for us" but no one else, like some kind of an invisible friend. Some atheists think that's what theism is like, but Street (an atheist herself) would likely scoff at a religious believer who said he was an antirealist about God. What would that mean? That God existed for that believer in an attitude-dependent sense? In that case, that wouldn't be God at all. The same is true of morality. What the moral (or normative) antirealist claims is morality in an attitude-dependent sense isn't morality at all, but a cheap imitation. Antirealism does not deliver us from skepticism; it just encourages us to embrace it and make peace with the consequences as best we can.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has examined Street's claim that becoming antirealists, besides being something we are forced into by her Darwinian dilemma, also allows us to avoid the normative skepticism entailed by that argument. By adopting an antirealist view toward our normative beliefs, those beliefs could go from being unjustified to being justified, and allow us to continue living as people who were not saddled with the predicament of being hopeless at knowing what their reasons are. What we saw, however, was not what was promised.

The moral beliefs we had as realists did not just change their status; they disappeared altogether. We received assurances that our normative beliefs would not be affected much, but that there might be some – probably very few – people who would now have reason to engage in murder, genocide, and other practices that most people find morally abhorrent. The reason this was supposed to be a price worth paying was that science rules out the possibility that our moral faculties are in tune with attitude-independent, moral truths. We also saw Dworkin resist this

idea by appealing to things that we can't help believing. The antirealist and the realist just can't agree on what those things are.

In the end, antirealism does not seem like a way around moral skepticism at all, but just a special form of it. There is still the problem lurking in the background raised by the debunking challenge, that says that maybe morality isn't real, after all. If that's the case, then maybe skepticism is the fate that awaits us. There is still some reason for hope, however, as we have not yet exhausted all options. The final chapter will be an examination of one such option, namely theism.

CHAPTER 5

THEISM AND EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING

It would be good at this stage to review the results of the previous chapters. Chapters one and two laid out the evidence and arguments for the two premises of evolutionary debunking arguments: the empirical premise and the epistemic premise. We looked at some preliminary objections that were aimed at keeping the argument from getting off the ground, but none of those objections provided any compelling reason not to engage with the debunking challenge. We also saw several different versions of EDAs. The most prominent challenge is that of Street, though Joyce, Ruse, and several others also made notable contributions to the argument. The conclusion of those arguments seemed to pose a real challenge to moral realism, with the focus of that challenge on how to explain the correlation between moral truths and our moral beliefs, given that our moral faculties were produced by evolutionary processes.

In chapter three we saw numerous attempts on the part of realists to answer this challenge in various ways. One such way was to point out that the debunker's challenge proves too much, and thus poses a threat not just to moral knowledge, but other kinds of beliefs such as perceptual beliefs, as well as mathematical and logical beliefs, which would possibly undermine the debunker's own argument. The strongest rebuttal to this from the debunkers had to do with explaining perceptual beliefs, while mathematical and logical beliefs were somewhat more of an open question. Nevertheless, there did not seem to be any conclusive reason to show that the debunking challenge had failed. Other attempts included a number of third-factor arguments which all seemed to be susceptible to the charge of begging the question by assuming one or more of the beliefs that the debunking challenge had called into question in the first place. Other attempts tried to escape Street's Darwinian dilemma by taking one of the two horns and showing

how we could reason our way to moral truth in spite of evolutionary influences on our starting

values, or how evolution might be able to track moral truths after all. None of these efforts

provided much hope for moral realists. Most of them appeared to be designed to shift the burden

of proof back onto the debunker, or show why realists shouldn't have to shoulder it to begin

with.

In chapter four we looked at the idea that antirealism could help us avoid moral

skepticism in spite of the debunking challenge. The primary argument here was that of Street

herself, and her version of Humean metaethical constructivism. Rather than showing how

antirealism avoids moral skepticism, however, the arguments indicated that in fact antirealism

just is a kind of moral skepticism. Part of Street's argument, however, was to show that we could

avoid *normative* skepticism, where normativity is understood as including any practical reason.

Street's primary argument was that it was scientifically unacceptable to postulate that human

beings have a faculty which could reliably discern attitude-independent, moral or normative

truths. We saw Dworkin's response to this, which was to argue that the debunking challenge is

morally unacceptable, and to point out that both sides are begging the question in the same way.

This seemed to leave us at an impasse, standing on the brink of moral skepticism with nothing to

break the deadlock.

This chapter will examine a solution which is occasionally mentioned in the debunking

literature but rarely developed or considered seriously, and that is theism. It will be argued that a

special moral faculty is not ruled out by scientific arguments at all, but rather by underlying

philosophical assumptions which do not themselves have a scientific basis. It will also be argued

that Dworkin is correct in his judgment that the debunking conclusion is morally unacceptable.

Where Dworkin's analysis falls short, however, is in providing no way to break the deadlock

between science and morality. Not only does theism provide a solution to that, but also arguably offers a much more satisfactory solution to other issues which have arisen during the course of this dissertation.

Background Assumptions

Wielenberg notes that "most of the parties to the contemporary debate over EDAs assume that theism is false," and because of this, the possibility of theistic implications of EDAs is not developed or seriously considered.[642] We did see, however, Crow's contention in chapter three, reiterated at the end of chapter four, that antirealism and theism were the only options for avoiding skepticism in the face of a cosmic coincidence argument.[643] We have seen that antirealism does not avoid skepticism at all, so in a sense the challenge is still unanswered. It's just that the options might be reduced to a choice between skepticism and theism. On the face of it, it certainly seems as though theism can account for a cosmic coincidence, since the coincidence would turn out to have been orchestrated.[644] Klenk suggests that divine revelation could be one response to the tracking problem.[645] This is essentially the idea to be explored in this chapter, and in particular the question of whether such an explanation actually is scientifically unacceptable as is often alleged. Locke, meanwhile, suggests that a theist could answer the debunking challenge by arguing that "God set up the initial conditions of the universe in the way that he did *because* the normative facts are what they are, and he knew that setting

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[642] Wielenberg, "Ethics," 511.

[643] As noted, however, Crow's own preferred solution was a *reductio* argument against Street by combining it with Plantinga's EAAN.

[644] As noted in chapter two, this idea is also affirmed by Bedke, though he dismisses it on the basis of lack of evidence. Bedke, 190.

[645] Michael Klenk, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Benacerraf-Field Challenge," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20, no. 4 (August 2017): 786, accessed July 18, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10677-017-9797-y.

things up in that way would lead us to normative beliefs in line with the normative facts."[646] This

option might appear, on the surface at least, to be more acceptable to someone inclined to think

that causal closure is an essential principle of science and is not congenial to the idea of a God

who intervenes in the created order. We will not have any more to say about this here, but it is

mentioned as an option.

It will be recalled that Greene's debunking argument was aimed not at morality *per se* but

at deontological moral theories (although Greene himself is an antirealist who endorses

utilitarianism for pragmatic reasons). It is worth taking another look at a quote from Greene in

which he gives his reasons for rejecting Kant's solution to the coincidence between moral

emotions (such as disgust responses) and the conclusions of his deontological theories (which

Greene views as rationalizations of the underlying emotions with evolutionary origins). Greene

writes,

> Present-day rationalist deontologists, as citizens of the twenty-first century, cannot
> depend on the notion that God gave us our moral emotions to encourage us to behave in
> accordance with the rationally discoverable deontological moral truth. Instead, they need
> some sort of naturalistically respectable explanation for the fact that the conclusions
> reached by rationalist deontologists, as opposed to those reached by consequentialists,
> appear to be driven by alarmlike emotional responses.[647]

It is difficult for theistic arguments to even get a hearing in an environment in which even

serious consideration of them is considered a relic of bygone centuries. Notice that Greene says

twenty-first century deontologists need a "naturalistically respectable explanation." This is

reminiscent of Street's "scientifically acceptable" requirement. While this is likely to remain as

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[646] Dustin Locke, "Darwinian Normative Skepticism," in *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief:
Disagreement and Evolution*, ed. Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014),
226n11, accessed June 30, 2020, Oxford Scholarship Online.

[647] Greene, "Secret Joke," 69. For an overview of Kant's moral argument see David Baggett and Jerry L.
Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 19-33.

an unspoken assumption, nevertheless it is an assumption that "scientifically acceptable" and "naturalistically respectable" are part and parcel of the underlying theoretical commitments of vast swaths of modern academic philosophy. It is also an unspoken assumption that scientifically acceptable and naturalistically respectable are part of the same package deal. This assumption, however, is not a scientific one at all, as we will see.

Bogardus is one of the few published authors in this debate to treat divine revelation as a serious option, saying that this was important "if only because there have been and still are many Divine Revelationists—perhaps not lately in academia but certainly out there in the wild."[648] Joyce makes a similar observation with respect to his preferred categories of moral nonnaturalists and moral supernaturalists. He writes that, "Even if these stances are not abundantly populated by contemporary philosophers, I think it is safe to say that they come the closest to capturing what ordinary speakers believe."[649] A 2014 survey by Bourget and Chalmers backs up these statements. According to their research, only about 26% of philosophers identify as non-naturalists, while a scant 15% are theists. At the same time, over 56% are moral realists.[650] The implication seems to be that a sizable number of contemporary philosophers are moral naturalists. But almost all of the moral non-naturalists we have looked at in this dissertation are atheists.

Dworkin observed that the question of burden of proof in a philosophical investigation depends upon "how opinion stands when the investigation begins."[651] To put this statement in

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[648] Bogardus, 643.

[649] Joyce, 209.

[650] David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 170, no. 3 (2014): 476, accessed July 1, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42920613.

[651] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 117.

context, Dworkin is responding to Wright's argument that moral realists have the burden of proof to explain the mechanism of how human beings can come to know about moral facts, and includes an appeal to Ockham's razor (parsimony) in the process. Dworkin says that there is no such "free-standing methodological postulate" to resolve such disputes.[652] This could lead to the troubling result that someone could simply hold onto any belief in anything whatsoever, whether morality or invisible goblin wars or Andromedans, no matter what the evidence suggests. This is not what Dworkin is saying, as he explains later: "Of course, we cannot simply stipulate that some set of opinions—astrological propositions, for example, or religious doctrines about a God with causal powers—are true and then declare that whatever methods of investigation would confirm those opinions, no matter how apparently scandalous, are for that reason reliable."[653] The issue is that debunkers like Street, Joyce, and company are demanding an explanation for moral knowledge that is able to receive the stamp of approval of science, when morality as a domain makes no scientifically testable or verifiable claims. As Dworkin points out, such explanations are not available for many philosophical disputes, either.[654] Nevertheless, there does seem to be something right about wanting an explanation for how human beings can have knowledge of moral facts.

Sauer analyzes Street's argument in terms of what he calls "the weakest link argument," which nicely captures the ideas here – with one important caveat. Given the following three beliefs which are incompatible, says Sauer, the question is which one to give up:

> *(i) Our evaluative beliefs have been shaped by evolutionary forces that did not track mind-independent evaluative facts.*
> *(ii) We are justified in accepting (and continuing to accept) our most central evaluative beliefs.*

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[652] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 117.

[653] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 120.

[654] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 114.

(iii) There are mind-independent evaluative facts.[655]

The caveat is that (iii) isn't the issue for Street, at least as not as far as her Darwinian dilemma is concerned. The issue for Street is ostensibly epistemic – whether we can have *knowledge* of mind-independent evaluative facts. In his attempt to lay out Street's dilemma, Sauer makes the same mistake when he presents the conclusion of it as "*Therefore, there are no mind-independent moral facts.*"[656] But no evolutionary debunking argument or any other scientific argument can reach this conclusion, any more than scientific arguments can prove that God does not exist. Street tries to work around this by, as we saw in the previous chapter, expanding the relevant domain from morality to normativity in general and arguing that we have a practical reason to adopt normative antirealism.

As Sauer presents it, Street's argument is that (i) is non-negotiable and (ii) is practically necessary, so (iii) is the one that has to go. In response, Sauer suggests that if pragmatic considerations are allowed (which is what Street uses in her assessment that we can't live without (ii)), then there is no obstacle to someone using that as a reason to drop (i), since "it is clear that human beings can get along without accepting it, as evidenced by the fact that they *have* gotten along without accepting it for most of their history."[657] Sauer's point is not that he would take that option himself, saying "that most people, myself included, would find this bullet too hard to bite"[658] (although by "most people," Sauer may be mainly thinking of most of the people he associates with – namely, other academics). The point is that there is no reason why someone couldn't just drop (i) based on the choices that Street offers. In response it might also

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[655] Hanno Sauer, *Debunking Arguments in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 53, Adobe PDF eBook.

[656] Sauer, 52.

[657] Sauer, 61.

[658] Sauer, 62.

be pointed out that one does not even have to go so far as to give up evolutionary science, but instead the more expansive conclusion that evolutionary science says everything there is to say about human nature. This seems to be the approach taken by Nagel, for example. He writes, "There is no reason to allow our confidence in the objective truth of our moral beliefs, or for that matter our confidence in the objective truth of our mathematical or scientific reasoning, to depend on whether this is consistent with the assumption that those capacities are the product of natural selection."[659]

In the previous chapter we saw that Street's position involved biting the bullet of rejecting the view that certain clear moral intuitions, like that genocide is wrong, pointed to objective moral facts. Dworkin's view, on the other hand, involved biting the bullet of not having a scientifically approved explanation for the reliability of our moral faculties. For both Dworkin and Nagel, adopting theism evidently involves biting other bullets that they are not willing to bite, which we will examine at the end of this chapter. The upshot, however, is that the argument does seem to often resolve into a question of one's prior philosophical commitments and which bullets one is willing to bite.

Without the underlying assumptions that give reason to think that objective moral values do not, in fact, exist, debunking arguments would have significantly less appeal. These assumptions are not the result of scientific investigation, but rather an assumption of materialistic philosophy that is often fused with science in modern academia. The reason this matters has to do with Dworkin's observation that the results of a philosophical investigation depend upon the starting points. If the starting point is that moral values couldn't have existed before creatures with the ability to value something evolved (as Street argues), then it is very difficult to account

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[659] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 28.

for those values being attitude-independent. However, as we have seen there are several atheists who defend moral realism against EDAs. Two of those arguments that have not yet been examined in detail include one by Huemer and another by de Lazari-Radek and Singer. Both Huemer and Singer were included in the discussion of limited debunking arguments. In the next section we will examine their arguments against global debunking arguments. Singer and de Lazari-Radek base their argument on universal benevolence, while Huemer's is based on what he calls liberal values. I will argue that neither of these arguments succeed in providing a non-theistic account of moral realism, but that both point the way toward a theistic argument which does succeed.

The Argument from Universal Altruism

One issue which has been discussed at some length in previous discussion is that of altruism. The phenomenon of altruism is an important issue with regard to ethical theories in that altruism has to do with behavior done for the benefit of another rather than for the benefit of the agent. In fact, this can be seen as the very essence of morality. Dugatkin writes, "at its heart, altruism is about incurring a personal cost in order to help others, and that is close to what most of us mean when we speak of doing good. So in essence, a theory on altruism is a theory on goodness."[660] Alexander agrees as far as the connection between altruism and morality goes, saying that, "the concept of morality implies altruism or self-sacrifice."[661] While he notes that not all moral acts require self-sacrifice, and not all self-interested acts are immoral, he says that, "I suspect most would agree that a moral life will inevitably call for *some* acts with net cost to

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[660] Dugatkin, ix.

[661] Richard D. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987), 12, https://archive.org/details/biologyofmoralsy0000alex.

the actor."[662]

If it is the case that altruism and morality go hand-in-hand, then the problem for moral realism is accounting for an attitude-independent truth that altruism is good. Moreover, in light of the debunking challenge that has occupied our attention for the previous four chapters, realists also need to account for how we can have knowledge of such an attitude-independent truth. We saw various attempts to provide an account of moral knowledge in chapter three, either indirectly (via third factor arguments) or directly. None of the realist models in that chapter attempted to explicate altruism or benevolence as a substantive moral truth. The reason for this in regard to third factor arguments is that these arguments require a starting point (the so-called "third factor") which evolution would select for – things such as survival being good, pain being bad, having rights, promoting well-being, and the like. As we saw in chapter one, altruism does not make a good fit for that. We saw several different models that attempted to account for altruism in evolutionary terms, with the primary models being kin selection, group selection (which is controversial among biologists), and reciprocity. We also noted that these models only work under very specific circumstances and require all of the factors to be just right. Moreover, even the best of them result in what Sober and Wilson describe as "within-group niceness and between-group nastiness."[663]

As we already know, the debunker's charge against realists is that our moral (or evaluative) judgments are strongly influenced, even if not entirely determined, by evolutionary forces. In discussing these evolutionarily-influenced values, Street writes,

> Why, for instance, do we view the death of our offspring as a horror, rather than as something to be sought after? Why do we think that altruism with no hope of personal reward is the highest form of virtue, rather than something to be loathed and eliminated?

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[662] Alexander, 12.

[663] Sober and Wilson, 326.

> Evolutionary biology offers powerful answers to these questions, very roughly of the form that these sorts of judgements about reasons tended to promote survival and reproduction much more effectively than the alternative judgements.[664]

But Street's contention that evolution has a "powerful answer" for the belief that altruism is the highest form of virtue is simply not true. Biologists have struggled to explain altruism in evolutionary terms ever since Darwin's time, even in a limited sense. Universal altruism is beyond what any evolutionary model can account for. Darwin himself attempted to gloss over this problem by saying that once altruism within the group had arisen, there was only an "artificial barrier" to extending it to all of humanity.[665] This, however, is mistaken. With evolutionary models, it is not an artificial barrier at all. In fact, evolutionary pressures will select *against* any tendency toward universal altruism or benevolence, because such benevolence will decrease the fitness of the group that has it and increase the fitness of rival groups that lack it. Far from being an "artificial barrier" as Darwin said, the barrier is actually natural selection itself. Evolution might explain (with some difficulty) limited altruistic tendencies toward family and possibly members of close groups, but not universal altruism.

<center>Universal Altruism as Maladaptive Moral Intuition</center>

De Lazari-Radek and Singer argue that universal benevolence escapes Street's Darwinian dilemma because of its inexplicability in evolutionary terms. To be precise, de Lazari-Radek and Singer offer an argument in support of the proposition that Sidgwick's axiom of rational benevolence (which they also refer to as universal benevolence) counts as moral knowledge. They correctly observe that "It is . . . difficult to see any evolutionary forces that could have favored universal altruism of the sort that is required by the axiom of rational benevolence. On

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[664] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 115.

[665] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:100-101.

the contrary, there are strong evolutionary forces that would tend to eliminate it."[666] This strategy would also receive support from Shafer-Landau's principle of causal immunity, which states that if we have cognitive and conative commitments that were probably not adaptive in the past, "then their presence is not (or not very substantially) the result of doxastically discriminating selective pressures."[667] This appears to give the realist a potential foothold that was lacking from third factor accounts, because third factor accounts must be based on beliefs which *are* adaptive in order to support the claim that evolution would indirectly track them. So what about starting from moral intuitions which are maladaptive?

Street's answer as to why people hold values which do not reflect evolutionary influences is that evolutionary pressures are indirect, shaping our basic tendencies toward certain evaluative judgments. The specific *content* of our judgments is also influenced by other factors such as culture, upbringing, and personal reflection.[668] One objection to this might be that it is so vague and malleable as to be virtually useless. The exact genealogy of any particular moral belief is very difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint. Part of the challenge for the realist, however, is to show not just that a belief such as universal benevolence is not evolutionarily adaptive, but that it was produced by a truth-tracking process. De Lazari-Radek and Singer, as well as Huemer, see moral truths as a kind of a priori truth, and the cognitive faculties used to grasp these truths as a kind of rational intuition.

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[666] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 19.

[667] Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral Realism and Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, eds. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge Handbooks in Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 180, Adobe PDF eBook.

[668] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 118-120.

Moral Beliefs as Rational Intuitions

De Lazari-Radek and Singer suggest that the ability to discern self-evident moral truths which do not help with survival may have arisen as a byproduct of reasoning abilities which *did* help with survival as part of "a package that could not be economically divided by evolutionary pressures."[669] As we saw previously, Street has an answer to the byproduct hypothesis which is that this only pushes the problem back a level and requires an explanation for what this other faculty was and how it produced truth-tracking moral faculties. At that point, her Darwinian dilemma can be run again on the byproduct faculty, with the same skeptical results. De Lazari-Radek and Singer acknowledge Street's objection, but think they can survive it by appealing to Sidgwick's intuitionist utilitarian philosophy, which views moral truths as truths of reason similar to other a priori truths (such as mathematical truths).[670] They present three criteria by which they think an intuition can be established as having the highest degree of reliability: "1. careful reflection leading to a conviction of self-evidence; 2. independent agreement of other careful thinkers; and 3. the absence of a plausible explanation of the intuition as the outcome of an evolutionary or other non-truth-tracking process."[671] They argue that Sidgwick's maxim of universal benevolence meets all three of these criteria, a claim which we will evaluate in more detail below.

Huemer also holds that moral knowledge is "of a kind with our other a priori knowledge, such as our knowledge of mathematics and of necessary truths of metaphysics."[672] According to Huemer,

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[669] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 17.

[670] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 18.

[671] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 26.

[672] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1986.

> Rationalist intuitionism simply needs the assumption that there is *some* substantive, a priori (non-evaluative) knowledge. Knowledge requires a reliable belief-forming mechanism . . . so there must be a reliable mechanism that produces these non-evaluative a priori beliefs. Whatever that mechanism is, the rationalist intuitionist maintains, that mechanism is also capable of producing some moral beliefs.[673]

Notice carefully that Huemer says that a faculty which produces non-evaluative beliefs is also capable of producing some moral beliefs. This will become important below in discussing what morality is. In spelling out the details of how one can attain this moral knowledge, part of Huemer's answer is a response to a challenge from cultural debunkers – that is, those who argue that we hold the moral beliefs we do only because of the culture we live in.[674] As we saw above, Street appeals to culture as one of the factors that influences the specific content of our evaluative beliefs, even while evolutionary pressures play an indirect role in shaping our general tendencies. Huemer argues that we can have confidence in the moral beliefs of our culture in the same way that we can have confidence in the scientific beliefs of our culture – by trusting those in our culture with relevant expertise, knowing that they have more reliable methods than experts in other cultures. As an example, Huemer says we can trust our culture's answer to the question of how old the earth is, when in most times and places relying on the experts in one's culture for an answer to this question would lead someone astray. The belief now is reliable "because my society used a reliable method to arrive at its estimate of the Earth's age—even if other societies in other times used unreliable methods."[675]

The natural question that follows is what is this method that experts in our culture have that other cultures have lacked for moral beliefs? Before attempting to explain that, Huemer presents five assumptions. These include two assumptions of rationalist intuitionism, namely that

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[673] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1986.

[674] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2002.

[675] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2003.

we have a capacity for producing substantive, a priori knowledge and that ethics is one area where this is possible.[676] Before even moving on to Huemer's three additional assumptions, the immediate problem is that his account of how one can know that moral knowledge in one's culture is produced by a reliable process begins by assuming that human beings are equipped with faculties that can produce, among other things, reliable moral beliefs. But this, of course, is not what debunkers are looking for when they ask for an account of how our moral faculties can be truth-tracking if they were produced by evolution. They actually want an account of how those faculties work at the level of detail, and specifically how evolution happened to result in them tracking attitude-independent truths. Rather than giving such an account, Huemer just assumes that there is one and that it's a relevantly similar process to how we have knowledge of other a priori truths, like mathematical and logical truths. It isn't clear if the same cognitive abilities that make one good at, say, math or logic also make one good at discerning moral truth, but that seems to be the implication. This will strike many people as odd, but it will make more sense below once we understand that Huemer's idea of morality is much different from the commonsense, face-value view.

Huemer's three additional assumptions that he tacks on to the two above involve the fact that people are influenced by various non-rational biases, that it is hard for anyone to diverge too greatly from their culture, and that some people are better at grasping moral truths and are less biased than others.[677] Because of these factors, Huemer argues that even relatively unbiased individuals will still find it difficult to differ from their culture too much, so change happens gradually over time as reformers – those people who are more rational and less biased than

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[676] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2003.

[677] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2004.

average – promote ideas that are closer to the truth even if not all the way there. Huemer uses the example of John Locke and his intolerance for atheists, even though he tolerated members of other religions.[678] It isn't clear which experts the common folk should defer to, although Huemer does give some hints: they are the reformers who are more rational and less biased than "their conservative opponents," and tend to be overrepresented in influential professions such as "authors, professors, other intellectuals, or business or political leaders."[679] The message is that if we want reliable moral knowledge, we should listen to the cultural elites.

It isn't entirely clear what it is about the method of gaining moral knowledge in modern Western culture that is different from any other culture. The scientific method does give modern Western culture the edge in scientific claims, and hence in fields like technology, engineering, medicine, aeronautics, and so forth. But even in Huemer's account moral claims are not scientific claims – they are comparable to a priori truths like mathematical truths, not a posteriori claims like scientific ones. Perhaps Huemer means to argue that, because moral change accumulates gradually over time, cultures in later times will be closer to the truth than previous ones. But this is far from obvious and admits of plenty of counterexamples. As we will see momentarily, Huemer offers evidence for this which we will have opportunity to assess.

Huemer's "trust the experts" moral epistemology, then, fails to actually explain how the experts have access to moral truths that the regular folk do not – except that the experts are, according to Huemer, smarter and less biased than everyone else. Huemer writes, "It is even compatible with the story I have told that almost everyone's moral beliefs be almost entirely determined by genes and culture—but not quite everyone, not quite entirely. Thus, empirical

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[678] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2004.

[679] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2005.

evidence showing that moral beliefs are often strongly influenced by genes and culture does not undermine my account."[680] In other words, some people have moral faculties that are more trustworthy – namely, the experts. Apparently not all smart people are moral experts though, since it evidently doesn't include antirealists and debunkers even though many of them appear to fit the general profile Huemer has sketched. It isn't clear how the rest of us are supposed to recognize the right experts from the wrong ones. Huemer seems not to account for the possibility that there might be people who are not the right kind of expert but might portray themselves as such to others – or perhaps even be convinced in their own minds that they are even though they are not. In that case, there could be clever people who are inching society in the wrong direction instead of the right one.

In chapter two we discussed briefly Huemer's argument that the convergence of worldwide moral beliefs on liberal values is evidence that those values are true. In Huemer's view, liberalism involves three interlocking parts of a coherent whole that, "(1) recognizes the moral equality of persons, (2) promotes respect for the dignity of the individual, and (3) opposes gratuitous coercion and violence."[681] Huemer gives several areas where he believes that the development of moral beliefs across history have moved toward liberalism. This includes war and murder (movement in the direction of a lower death rate from these causes over time), torture and execution, slavery, racism and sexism, democratization, and decolonization.[682] He argues that this moral progress toward liberalism "has been ongoing for millennia, accelerating in the last two centuries, and even the last 50 years, and it affects virtually every country on

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[680] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 2005.

[681] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1987.

[682] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1988-93.

Earth."[683] Huemer argues that evolutionary explanations do not account for how the emergence

of liberal values has occurred so recently and quickly, if they emerged because they were

adaptive.[684] Huemer's and de Lazari-Radek and Singer's arguments have this in common: they

both argue on the basis of a claim which they believe is not susceptible to the debunker's attacks.

For de Lazari-Radek and Singer, it is the intuition of universal benevolence. For Huemer, it is the

global convergence on liberal values. As we will see, however, both of these arguments are

better support for theism than for the consequentialist views of these thinkers. Before looking at

that, however, we need to unpack the above observations with respect to our moral faculties.

<p style="text-align:center">Moral Faculties and What Morality is For</p>

Huemer, de Lazari-Radek, and Singer all think of moral truths as being relevantly similar

to truths in mathematics. We saw in chapter three one problem with appealing to mathematical

truths in answering the debunking challenge, since it isn't clear that debunking arguments will

not also debunk mathematical truths. Another problem is that there appears on the surface at least

to be a fundamental difference between a priori truths in, for example, mathematics and logic on

the one hand, and morality on the other. The difference is the evaluative part – the part that says

that something is not just correct or incorrect, as in when we get a math problem wrong, but that

something is good or evil, which is right and wrong in a (face-value) moral sense. If someone

makes a mistake working on a math problem, we don't consider that to be evil. It might be due to

inattention, to ignorance, or just that the person lacks an aptitude for math. But if someone

commits genocide, we think that is more than just making a mistake or being inattentive – it is

morally blameworthy, wicked, depraved, and evil. To place moral beliefs in the same category as

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[683] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1994.

[684] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1995.

mathematical ones is to fundamentally alter what morality is all about. It isn't just that thinking

of morality this way leaves out something important – it leaves out the most important part, that

which distinguishes moral truths from non-moral truths. It is related to the approach of Street

who views everything in terms of reasons, but in the process loses any distinction between

different kinds of reasons. In that approach, any distinctively (face-value) moral reason simply

disappears altogether.

Huemer, along with de Lazari-Radek and Singer (not to mention Sidgwick), endorse a

kind of consequentialism. However it is spelled out, it involves the idea that actions which are

good are those which produce certain consequences, such as increasing the overall happiness in

the universe as in Sidgwick's universalistic hedonism.[685] As Anscombe points out,

consequentialist philosophies such as Sidgwick's are incompatible with what she calls the

Hebrew-Christian ethic, the reason being that "it has been characteristic of that ethic to teach that

there are certain things forbidden whatever *consequences* threaten."[686] This also happens to

correspond with what is normally understood by robust moral realism. With consequentialist

theories, Anscombe points out, there is no basis for holding that it is never right to kill the

innocent.[687] This leads to something which most people wouldn't recognize as morality at all.

With consequentialist views, the goal of morality is to figure out what actions will lead to the

greatest net increase in universal happiness, which is perfectly compatible with great increases in

misery for certain unfortunate individuals. Recall Copp's society-centered moral theory, in

which the authoritative moral code for a society is the one that would best serve that society's

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[685] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1930), 407, Adobe PDF eBook.

[686] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 10. For a challenge to the notion that this was an idiosyncratic feature of the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Baggett and Walls, 220n2.

[687] Anscombe, 10.

basic needs. It reduces morality to a kind of engineering problem. But the face-value view of morality is not like that.

When it comes to a discussion of what kind of faculty would be required to correctly intuit moral truths, it is important to notice that that discussion has to proceed based on what one's underlying view of morality is. In the face-value view, there are important differences between claims like "do to others as you would have them do to you," $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, and modus ponens. It certainly seems as though people who lack the capacity to readily grasp and utilize the second and third truths in this set nevertheless can grasp and appreciate the first. However, if the same faculties are used for cognizing all of these types of truths, then it would seem to imply that someone who has a natural aptitude for math and logic will also have the same for morality. But this raises a further problem. We know someone is good at math and logic by their practices in those disciplines. Can someone be good at morality without practicing being a good person? Of course, this requires a definition of good, and of what constitutes being a good person – both evaluative, moral claims. The ethical views of Singer and Huemer are so different from that of commonsense morality that someone who would qualify as a good person under the one might be considered an evil monster under the other, as we will see below.

As Dworkin writes, "Even the deepest skepticism is an opinion about what morality demands, and no argument can be decisive of that question that does not include premises or assumptions about what morality is for."[688] This is inseparably connected to the conception of what kind of faculty is required to produce beliefs which are compatible with a given metaethic. If morality is like an engineering problem, then you want people working on it who are good at solving those kinds of problems – in which case Huemer's moral epistemology might actually

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[688] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 127.

make some sense. But if morality is more like a higher law, then attempting an engineering solution is liable to get you into trouble. Also, the type of faculties that are good for engineering will be of no help at all. Notice the circularity problem involved as well. The conception that one has of what morality is for will determine what sort of truths moral truths are. And that question will be determinative of what sort of cognitive faculties are needed to perceive those truths. But the question then becomes where does the foundational view of what morality is for come from? If the answer is it came from our rational faculties, it becomes viciously circular.

If moral truths are the same kind of truths as mathematical and logical truths (or at least relevantly similar), then what was wrong with Hitler's final solution? Assume Hitler believed that eliminating the Jewish people would result in a net increase of happiness in the universe, which would be a good result from a utilitarian standpoint. Assume also that he was mistaken in that belief. In that case, Hitler's error would seem to amount to something like getting his sums wrong, or of committing a fallacy along the lines of affirming the consequent. We can use the term "wrong" to describe both committing a logical fallacy and committing genocide, but of these two only the latter also merits the description of "evil." Huemer refers to Hitler as evil in a footnote,[689] but he can't possibly mean by that word the same thing that the rest of us mean. In the face-value view of morality, genocide would still be evil even if one could somehow show that in fact it would result in a net increase in happiness in the universe. Moral questions are not merely mathematical problems to be solved in the face-value view. Moreover, would we think that Hitler was not morally blameworthy if he sincerely believed that eliminating the Jews would be a net benefit to humanity? After all, in that case he was just sincerely trying to do what he thought was best. Again, it implies that genocide might be just a miscalculation or an example of

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[689] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1986n13.

fallacious reasoning.

Notice that this actually shares more in common with Street's antirealist constructivism than with face-value morality. As we saw in the previous chapter, an ideally coherent Caligula would be perfectly justified in committing genocide – in fact, it would be wrong for him *not* to. Under utilitarianism, someone could be perfectly justified in committing genocide if the end result is an overall increase in happiness. A utilitarian might argue that genocide could never produce a result like that, but it would at least be a question open to debate. In the same way, someone might commit genocide under Street's constructivism and be mistaken if they wouldn't make that judgment at reflective equilibrium. But in that case, it would just be a matter of having made an error or miscalculation in their thinking. This is in line with Anscombe's observation that the differences between modern moral philosophers are "trifling" compared to the fact that they all exclude the Hebrew-Christian ethic, and without any evident awareness that there is such an ethic to exclude.[690] Huemer, along with de Lazari-Radek and Singer, often speak about people's preferences and common intuitions about morality, and are fully aware that their own moral views are greatly out of step with the commonly held ones. Moreover, they see this as a feature, not a bug. What really needs to be noticed, however, is not just that the consequentialist view is greatly at odds with people's common moral intuitions, but with their entire concept of what morality is. This must be kept firmly in mind during discussions about moral faculties and how they produce reliable moral beliefs.

Consequentialism and Moral Truth

Even if someone holding the face-value view of morality might see more in common

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[690] Anscombe, 10.

between consequentialist views and antirealist ones, Huemer, de Lazari-Radek, and Singer all claim to be defending realist or objectivist views.[691] It is time to examine their defenses of that position to see if they hold up under scrutiny. We begin with de Lazari-Radek and Singer's view that universal benevolence is a substantive moral truth that can evade the debunking challenge. As we have seen, they begin by arguing that moral truths are similar to other a priori truths such as mathematical ones. Setting aside the serious concerns raised above about this move for the time being, another problem for de Lazari-Radek and Singer is the objection by Kahane mentioned in chapter two, namely that because the disposition for limited altruism has an evolutionary explanation, the reasoned extension of it to universal altruism should fall under suspicion as well.[692] Kahane's objection is too quick, since as we have seen evolutionary pressures would actually work *against* universal altruism, thus eliminating any tendency to make such a reasoned extension. Taking a different tack, however, de Lazari-Radek and Singer argue that if we can reach the principle of universal benevolence from a starting point which is *not* debunkable, Kahane's objection can be avoided altogether. Remember that de Lazari-Radek and Singer have three criteria for establishing the highest degree of reliability for an intuition, the first of which is "careful reflection leading to a conviction of self-evidence."[693] In their account, "We form the intuition [of universal benevolence] as a result of a process of careful reflection that leads us to take, as Sidgwick puts it, 'the point of view of the universe.'"[694]

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[691] It was noted in chapter two that Singer expressed indecision on his own metaethical views, but he does expressly defend objectivism with de Lazari-Radek. De Lazari-Radek and Singer, 16n22.

[692] Kahane, 119.

[693] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 26.

[694] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 25.

Self-Evidence and the God's-Eye View

The quote from Sidgwick about the point of view of the universe comes from a passage

in which he derives the maxim of benevolence based on an inference from two other principles

which he holds as self-evident: first, that present good is not preferable to future good (excepting

for the relative uncertainty of future good),[695] and second, in Sidgwick's own words, that "the

good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of

the Universe, than the good of any other; unless, that is, there are special grounds for believing

that more good is likely to be realised in the one case than in the other."[696] Sidgwick appeals to

these principles as self-evident; we saw in chapter three what a debunker like Joyce would say to

this – namely, that it should be an embarrassment to philosophy that so many thinkers appeal to

their own opinions as self-evident truths. But there are other problems here that should be

noticed.

For starters, the universe doesn't *have* a "point of view," so whatever it is that Sidgwick

imagines as the point of view of the universe is simply an abstraction which is ostensibly neutral.

It is what Nagel means by "the view from nowhere," an attempt to view oneself and the world

objectively.[697] The question, however, is why is the "view from nowhere" the "right" view for

deciding questions of value? This, itself, is an intuition – not just that the good of one individual

is no more important than that of any other, but also that the detached, external point of view

which we can attain only through imagination is better than the internal, subjective view which

we all actually inhabit. But rather than a "view from nowhere" (which makes no sense if taken

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[695] Sidgwick, 381.

[696] Sidgwick, 382.

[697] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Adobe PDF
eBook.

literally), I submit that this is actually an attempt to take God's point of view.[698] It is the point of view of a conscious agent which is able to see all people at once without the limitations of time and space that actual people have.

So, what we actually have here is an intuition that a God's-eye view of the world is "right" for questions of moral value, and that it is a better perspective than our own, limited views. De Lazari-Radek and Singer might respond that it makes sense to take an objective view for arriving at moral values because that's the view that we try to use as much as possible for scientific enquiries. However, it only makes sense to do this for moral values if one assumes that there are objective moral values in the first place which can be perceived somehow from that objective standpoint – but this is the question under dispute. It also assumes that by this act of imagination we can actually free ourselves from the subjective standpoint. A little reflection, however, should make it clear that we cannot. The imagined being which occupies the place of God in this thought experiment is simply a projection of our own selves and our own values.

If the view from nowhere does not actually exist – which it doesn't if there is no conscious agent able to view the world from the outside, as it were – then there is no reason to think that such an abstract, neutral point of view is to be preferred to any other point of view. The reason why the good of any individual is no more important than another's from the point of view of the universe is because nothing is important to the universe at all. One might just as well say that no one person's good is more important than another's from the point of view of some particular slab of granite in Madagascar. That's true in a trivial sense, but also entirely irrelevant from a moral standpoint. If, however, the God's-eye view does exist (which it does if theism is

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[698] As Tersman observes, "replace 'Universe' with 'God,' and you get a doctrine that will impress many a Christian." Folke Tersman, "The Reliability of Moral Intuitions: A Challenge from Neuroscience," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 86, no.3 (2008): 401, accessed February 21, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048400802002010.

true), then it makes sense why that would be the right view to take for deciding questions of value. It would also explain why we have an intuition that this is the case, assuming that our moral intuitions are given by God in some way. Finally, if the Christian teaching that God is love is true, this would also account for the intuition that universal benevolence is the highest good – an intuition which may not depend upon what de Lazari-Radek and Singer think it does.

<div align="center">Jesus and the Golden Rule</div>

The second criterion for maximal reliability for de Lazari-Radek and Singer is "independent agreement of other careful thinkers."[699] They point to the fact that universal benevolence is endorsed across cultures and religious traditions as supporting their claim that it is a principle of reason. Specifically, they refer to various formulations of something like the Golden Rule in Confucian, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions in addition to Jewish and Christian ones.[700]

Of course, de Lazari-Radek and Singer have more recent examples of careful thinkers they can point to for endorsement of the Golden Rule. Sidgwick held that the Golden Rule is self-evident and has practical importance even while he questioned some imprecision with it.[701] Darwin also pointed to the Golden Rule as a singularly important moral principle, but then spoke as if it was a result of evolutionary and scientific progress while ignoring the fact that it was taught by Jesus as a revelation from God. Darwin wrote that, "the social instincts,—the prime principle of man's moral constitution—with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them

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[699] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 26.

[700] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 25-26.

[701] Sidgwick, 379-80.

likewise;' and this lies at the foundation of morality."[702] Not only does Darwin not acknowledge the origin of the Golden Rule in the teachings of Jesus, he also speaks elsewhere of how ancient Rome – the era when Jesus lived – was lacking in advanced moral sensibilities, offering by way of evidence "their abhorrent gladiatorial exhibitions."[703] It might be easy for philosophers living centuries after it was introduced to breezily opine that the Golden Rule is perfectly natural, obvious, and rational. But those same thinkers were intellectually fed by the culture that was founded upon and promulgated this teaching for generations before they were born.

Tersman points out that the Christian teaching of love toward outsiders was "something entirely new, and could not be found in, for example, Judaism or the pagan religions that at the time existed in the Roman Empire."[704] For Tersman, a debunker himself, the implication is that Singer has as much reason to reject the intuitions behind the maxim of universal benevolence as he does the other moral intuitions which Singer takes to have been passed down by centuries of Christian teaching. More relevant for the present argument is Tersman's point that it was centuries of Christian teaching that "encouraged the train of thought that leads to the conclusion that the good of no one is more important from a moral point of view than the good of any other, especially in the case of a philosopher like Sidgwick who so strenuously searched for consistency and generality."[705] Hart makes a similar point when he argues that it took "centuries of the relentless and total immersion of culture in the Christian story, to make even the best of us conscious of . . . the moral claim of all other persons upon us, the splendor and irreducible dignity of the divine humanity within them, that depth within each of them that potentially

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[702] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:106.

[703] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:101.

[704] Tersman, "Moral Intuitions," 401.

[705] Tersman, "Moral Intuitions," 402.

touches upon the eternal."[706] Sidgwick's "point of view of the Universe" intuition also seems

most likely to originate in the cultural influence of Christianity, and in the teaching of

disinterested benevolence as the highest good. So even Sidgwick's "self-evident" starting

assumptions upon which he builds his maxim of benevolence appear to be due to cultural

influences – specifically the influence of the Christian faith.

It might seem a bit peculiar for de Lazari-Radek and Singer to be citing ancient religious

texts as an example of the confirmation of other careful thinkers, given that they reject virtually

all traditional moral systems and intuitions. Singer, for example, sees the intuitions that have

been formed based on the cultural domination of Christianity as something to be gotten rid of.[707]

One of his complaints about Rawls's method of reflective equilibrium is that it utilizes our

intuitive moral judgments as part of the data that we take into account in trying to reach

equilibrium.[708] If those intuitions are faulty, then using them as inputs will skew the results in

unwanted directions. Instead, Singer argues for getting rid of all of them since they "are likely to

derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from

customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic circumstances that now

lie in the distant past."[709] He instead argues that we should start with self-evident moral axioms

such as Sidgwick's and do our reflective equilibrium on those.[710] The problem is, those "self-

evident moral axioms" likely seemed self-evident because of the influence of the religious

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[706] David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 214, Adobe PDF eBook.

[707] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 345.

[708] Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 345-46. Cf. Peter Singer, "Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium," *The Monist* 58, no. 3 (1974): 516, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27902380.

[709] Singer, "Reflective Equilibrium," 516.

[710] Singer, "Reflective Equilibrium," 516.

system that Singer says we should discard.

It also seems highly doubtful that any of the traditions cited by de Lazari-Radek and Singer reached their beliefs by using anything remotely like Sidgwick's method. It is also worth noting that, while de Lazari-Radek and Singer suggest that the Golden Rule is present in many traditions, the actual versions that they cite in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are not the Golden Rule but the Silver Rule, which says not to do to others what you would not want them to do to you. Meanwhile the quoted version that they and Sidgwick actually use is that of Jesus, who taught that the Golden Rule was a direct revelation from God.[711] As far as Jewish tradition goes, Neusner concludes that, "Classical Judaism is defined by generative propositions and invites judgment concerning systemic traits. But the Golden Rule in its articulated form is not one of these."[712] If Jesus was such a careful thinker, one might ask, then how is it that he discovered such an important moral principle while getting the source of it completely wrong according to de Lazari-Radek and Singer? We will consider possible answers to that below.

<center>Universal Benevolence and Truth-Tracking</center>

The third and final criterion given by de Lazari-Radek and Singer for establishing an intuition as highly reliable is "the absence of a plausible explanation of the intuition as the outcome of an evolutionary or other non-truth-tracking process."[713] The proposition that there is no plausible evolutionary account for the intuition of universal benevolence appears to be

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[711] For this argument I make two minimal assumptions about the Gospels of the New Testament which are eminently defensible even against skeptical scholars. First is that Jesus actually taught the Golden Rule. Second is that the Gospels are accurate in reporting that Jesus told others that his teaching was from God. Neither assumption relies on viewing the Gospels as inspired Scripture or on any specifically Christian doctrine about the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

[712] Jacob Neusner, "The Golden Rule in Classical Judaism," in *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (London: Continuum, 2008), 64, accessed March 4, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472549440.ch-005.

[713] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 26.

unassailable. However, de Lazari-Radek and Singer shift the burden of proof to the debunker to

provide a non-truth-tracking process to explain the intuition. This could seem like a bit of

cheating, since the absence of a non-truth-tracking explanation does not prove that there is a

truth-tracking one. They do admit that "the absence of good rival explanations for our intuitive

grasp of the principle of universal benevolence does not prove that it is a substantive normative

truth, but we consider it makes that a reasonable hypothesis to hold, at least until a better

explanation is offered."[714] So they at least must think there is some reasonable truth-tracking

explanation, perhaps in similar terms to the position of Huemer above since they hold along with

Huemer that moral truths are rational intuitions. The question, then, is if it is really the case that

debunkers have no good non-truth-tracking explanation – and, if not, what does that actually

show?

As we saw above, Street argues that culture, upbringing, and personal reflection all play a

role in determining the content of our evaluative beliefs. We have also argued that cultural

factors played a greater role in producing the supposedly self-evident intuitions above – namely

that the God's-eye view is the "right" one and also the intuitions favoring universal benevolence

and the Golden Rule – than the thinkers mentioned above appreciated. If that is the case, then

debunkers can posit that a kind of selection occurred between different cultural systems in which

the successful ones were passed down, grew, and continued, while systems that did a poorer job

of successfully transmitting their ideas and values did not survive as a civilization, as Kitcher

argues.[715] Ayala likewise posits that

> The moral systems that currently exist in humankind are those that have been favored by
> cultural evolution. They were propagated within particular societies for reasons that
> might be difficult to fathom but that surely must have included the perception by

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[714] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 26.

[715] See Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," 174.

individuals that a particular moral system was beneficial for them, at least to the extent that it was beneficial for their society by promoting social stability and success.[716]

Joyce argues along a similar line, albeit somewhat whimsically, when he writes that, "A group whose cultural value system revolved around wearing a pumpkin on one's head would, on the whole and in the long run, lose out to a group that valued intragroup peacefulness and a degree of self-sacrifice for the welfare of one's fellows."[717] From the debunker's perspective, the Christian tradition was simply more successful than most of its competitors, even if some of the reasons why are obscure.

These arguments purport to show that the debunker doesn't need attitude-independent moral truths for reason to discern in the way that de Lazari-Radek and Singer propose. Rationality can serve the function of coming up with ideas which are better able to survive the passage of time, or of sifting through ideas of previous efforts. The same debunking argument could be run against Huemer's theory, arguing that the convergence (as he sees it) of liberal values is not evidence for moral truth but rather for a successful society, with "success" being measured in terms of ability to pass on ideas. The values that Huemer argues for as the core components of liberal values are basically Western values, and Western culture has spread around the globe in recent times through technology and consumer goods. It is no great mystery, then, why those changes would accelerate in more recent times, as it coincides with the rapid and accelerating development of technology during the same period. In making this argument, however, the debunker must also argue that things like ending slavery were not objectively good, but simply the result of people coming to hold the belief that they have no reason to practice

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[716] Francisco J. Ayala, "The Difference of Being Human: Morality," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 107, S2 (May 11, 2010): 9021, accessed October 12, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25681533.

[717] Joyce, 42.

slavery for whatever reason. Under Street's constructivist view, for example, this gives no impetus or motive for anyone to end the practice of slavery by other people, since those people might well have reason to practice slavery. It also means the debunker must deny the claim that universal benevolence – or any kind of benevolence – is actually good.

But notice that the values which Huemer identifies as liberal – the equality and dignity of persons and concomitant opposition to gratuitous violence – are recognizable corollaries of the Golden Rule or the maxim of universal benevolence. In other words, these are also Christian values. Huemer tries to make much out of the supposed coincidence that major social changes in many different countries have all moved in the direction of liberalism, such as abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, democracy, decreased popular support of war and use of torture.[718] The coincidence that Huemer points to as evidence that liberalism is true is much less impressive when it is seen that all of them follow from the Golden Rule or something like it. In other words, it would be strange if some of the changes went in the direction of universal benevolence and some went the opposite direction.

Unlike the debunker, Christian theists should have no trouble accounting for the data. If Huemer's argument from the spread of liberal values actually goes through as an argument for realism, it would serve to show that Christian values are true. Huemer, like de Lazari-Radek and Singer, ignores the historical influences which brought about Western liberal values in the first place, in particular the influence of Judeo-Christian teaching on values such as the dignity of human beings as created in the image of God, and on the equality of all people. If, as I have argued, Huemer's liberal values are simply another variation of the Golden Rule or maxim of universal benevolence then debunking arguments against these as moral truths run up against the

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[718] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1999.

same problem as against de Lazari-Radek and Singer's – they still fail to explain how a society that promotes the idea of universal benevolence would succeed over societies that promote fierce loyalty within the group and utter disregard for those outside. From an evolutionary standpoint the latter kind of civilization should have a significant advantage, all other things being equal, over the former. If the debunker responds that all other things were not equal or the society that taught universal benevolence would not have survived, it becomes ad hoc and viciously circular. The debunking argument on this score is so malleable as to be able to "explain" any result whatsoever, and thus is vacuous. Also, notice that in Joyce's comparison above between pumpkin-wearers and another hypothetical culture, the hypothetical society includes among its values "a degree" of sacrifice for others – not unlimited or universal benevolence. Arguing that Christianity was successful because it promoted social cohesion and stability is unsatisfactory. Values promoting "within-group niceness and between-group nastiness" will work at least equally as well for this, while universal altruism exacts a cost in terms of fitness from the society that has it and gives that benefit to competing societies for free.

What is needed, then, is an explanation for why the successful values from a cultural evolutionary standpoint would run counter to the expected results of biological evolution. Simply arguing that some societies are successful but we can't really say why does not prove anything. On the contrary, it gives a strong indication that the values associated with universal benevolence are better for human beings in that they create a society which is conducive to well-being. For this to be the case, it would require a correspondence between universal benevolence and human flourishing – where human flourishing does not line up with evolutionary pressures but in fact goes contrary to them. This is a kind of cosmic coincidence, but on a different level from the cosmic coincidence needed to explain how our moral faculties could track with attitude-

independent moral truths. Instead, human nature somehow has to line up with those moral truths, with universal benevolence being one of them – if not the foundational one. There is a need here for a deeper cosmic coincidence, not just on the epistemological level, but on the ontological level. Unlike the epistemological cosmic coincidence of having our beliefs line up with attitude-independent moral truths, however, this one cannot be denied simply by changing one's metaethical stance.

<p style="text-align:center">Sidgwick's Dualism of Practical Reason and Debunking</p>

De Lazari-Radek and Singer believe that the evolutionary perspective provides a solution to Sidgwick's problem of the dualism of practical reason. Sidgwick believed that rational considerations alone could not resolve the tension between acting in one's own self-interest and acting in disinterested benevolence. While often helping others also gives one a sense of satisfaction, this is not always the case and so self-interest and benevolence never fully overlap. But there is no rational reason for anyone to choose benevolence over selfishness. Sidgwick hypothesized that the existence of God could resolve this tension (a solution to which Kant actually did appeal[719]), but Sidgwick himself rejected that solution and famously left the problem unresolved. Because self-interest is easily subject to a debunking explanation while universal benevolence is not, de Lazari-Radek and Singer argue that this resolves Sidgwick's problem and shows as a conclusion of reason that we should act in disinterested benevolence rather than self-interest.[720]

We have already seen above part of the problem with de Lazari-Radek and Singer's proposed solution, which is that it is questionable how much Sidgwick's maxim of benevolence

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[719] See Baggett and Walls, 28.

[720] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 28.

is really based on rational self-evident beliefs rather than on the cultural heritage of Christian

teachings starting with Jesus, who taught the Golden rule as a revelation from God. In that case,

the solution that we should act in disinterested benevolence might well be true, but not because it

is a conclusion of reason. Yet the problem in Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason was that it

seemed impossible to fully rationalize self-interest and universal benevolence.[721] If universal

benevolence is not a principle of reason after all, then de Lazari-Radek and Singer's proposal

will not solve it. On the other hand, Sidgwick did suggest that God could resolve his dualism.

Sidgwick gives his reason for rejecting this solution, saying that

> I find that I undoubtedly seem to perceive, as clearly and certainly as I see any axiom in
> Arithmetic or Geometry, that it is 'right' and 'reasonable' for me to treat others as I
> should think that I myself ought to be treated under similar conditions, and to do what I
> believe to be ultimately conducive to universal Good or Happiness. But I cannot find
> inseparably connected with this conviction, and similarly attainable by mere reflective
> intuition, any cognition that there actually is a Supreme Being who will adequately
> reward me for obeying these rules of duty, or punish me for violating them.[722]

In taking the view of "the Universe" as the "right" view, one might argue that Sidgwick is

actually tacitly assuming the existence of God without realizing it. How much weight can be

given to the fact that some people (such as Sidgwick and others) testify to lacking any sense or

intuition that God exists? Many other people report having such a sense and/or intuition.

Moreover, it is questionable if everyone finds the maxim of benevolence as self-evident, given

the number of philosophers we have seen already who reject moral realism altogether. Sidgwick

can't have it both ways – if his finding universal benevolence to be intuitively true is an

argument in favor of utilitarianism in spite of the fact that many people do not share that

intuition, then the fact that many people find the existence of God to be intuitively true is an

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[721] Sidgwick, 508.

[722] Sidgwick, 507.

argument in favor of theism – in spite of the fact that Sidgwick reports not finding it that way.

There is also a further consideration that throws cold water on de Lazari-Radek and Singer's proposed solution to Sidgwick's dualism. This is a problem which was alluded to in chapter three, namely that a utilitarian ethic such as the one they propose also requires an account of well-being in addition to the utilitarian principle.[723] However, virtually any account of well-being is going to run squarely into the debunking challenge, since it is almost surely to consist of things like pursuing pleasure, avoiding pain, survival, and other considerations that we have looked at in our previous examination of third factor arguments. De Lazari-Radek and Singer acknowledge the problem but then brush it aside by saying that, "we will limit ourselves to pointing out that if no theory of well-being or intrinsic value were immune to a debunking explanation, this would show only that no theory could be preferred over others on the ground that it alone cannot be debunked. It could not show that no theory of well-being is true."[724] This, however, looks exactly like other realist responses we have seen which simply attempt to shift the burden of proof. De Lazari-Radek and Singer can't argue that we should reject all moral intuitions that have a debunking genealogy on the one hand, and then on the other hand slough off the fact that any plausible candidate for an account of well-being will be based on debunkable claims by shifting the burden of proof.

Notice, however, that the correspondence between the doctrine of universal benevolence on the one hand and social success measured as being able to pass down moral values and beliefs to succeeding generations on the other, as we saw above, requires a cosmic coincidence between moral truth and human flourishing. Of course, an account of human flourishing also requires an

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[723] See Kahane, 120.

[724] de Lazari-Radek and Singer, 28.

account of well-being given that those two things are, if not synonymous, at least joined at the hip. Theism provides the solution to both problems at once. Moreover, it also provides an account of how Jesus discovered such an important moral principle centuries before it was declared to be rational by eminent scholars like Darwin and Sidgwick. Jesus taught that it was a revelation from God because it was. The fact that such an explanation is not scientific (how could it be?) and does not jibe with modern academia should not be disqualifying. It simply does a better job of explaining the observed phenomena, which should be all that matters. We will have more to say on this below.

<div style="text-align:center">Consequentialism Re-examined</div>

We should also ask if Singer actually believes that "do to others as you would have them do to you" is an attitude-independent moral truth – or even "do not do to others as you would not have them do to you." Going back to Anscombe's complaint about modern moral philosophy, her contention was that there is nothing in any of these philosophies by which one could say that you should never have an innocent person put to death. For Singer, the right thing to do is whatever promotes the greatest net increase in universal happiness. What if that means putting an innocent person to death? Huemer, himself a consequentialist, points out that Singer's view commits him to the proposition that it would be right for a doctor to kill an unsuspecting healthy patient and distribute his organs to five people in need of transplants.[725] Not that Huemer is off the hook, since he says he thinks Singer may be right with his highly revisionary ethic.[726] This only raises the question if Huemer really believes that the liberal values he talks about are attitude-independent moral truths. As a reminder, according to Huemer, those were that

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[725] Huemer, "Meta-Ethics," 363-64.

[726] Huemer, "Meta-Ethics," 364.

liberalism "(1) recognizes the moral equality of persons, (2) promotes respect for the dignity of the individual, and (3) opposes gratuitous coercion and violence."[727] Which of these three would *not* be violated by a doctor who kills an unsuspecting healthy patient to harvest that patient's organs for the sake of maximizing overall utility? Perhaps Huemer would not consider it gratuitous to kill someone for organ harvesting, but the patient might disagree if given the choice. The fact that Huemer only says that this position "may well be right" doesn't help his cause. If he really believes the values that he claims are objectively correct, it shouldn't even be an open question. As Anscombe writes, "if someone really thinks, *in advance*, that it is open to question whether such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration – I do not want to argue with him; he shows a corrupt mind."[728]

Given this, in what sense can Singer (or Sidgwick, for that matter) affirm the Golden Rule as an objective moral truth? For Sidgwick, it is partly in a change of perspective to the more abstract principle "that individuals in similar conditions should be treated similarly."[729] This, however, is not the Golden Rule. It is a caricature of the Golden Rule as viewed from the point of view of "the Universe." If one puts oneself in a distant, removed vantage point and ignores the inner emotional tugging that says it's wrong to murder an innocent person to harvest his organs (perhaps by dismissing such feelings as the vestige of some old, discarded religion), then it makes it easier to approve of such a heinous act. But we are not in the place of God, and the Golden Rule says to do to others as we would have them do to *us*, not to some other, random person. The personal involvement is a crucial component of the principle. If we don't want to

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[727] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1987.

[728] Anscombe, 17.

[729] Sidgwick, 380.

have our organs harvested against our will, then we shouldn't do it to someone else. So it is

highly questionable that Singer even believes that the Golden Rule is actually a self-evident,

objective moral truth. If he does, he seems to miss the fact that it is utterly incompatible with his

consequentialist ethics.

Atheism and Methodological Naturalism

Non-theistic moral realists, then, still require an account of truth-tracking for our moral

faculties. The question is whether such an account is forthcoming that can fit within the confines

of what is regarded as scientific explanation. While Huemer doesn't offer such an account, he

does assume that there is one when he writes that "an evolutionary account of ethics must be

correct: human beings evolved; therefore, however our capacity for moral judgment works, that

capacity is 'a product of evolution,' in the same sense that our capacity for any sort of judgments

is a product of evolution."[730] For a debunker like Tersman, however, this sort of hand waving is

unlikely to impress. Tersman argues that,

> if an explanation of an intuition entails that it is true or likely then it is 'validating.' . . .
> Unfortunately, modern intuitionists largely ignore the task of developing such an account.
> The defence they offer consists mainly in the assurance that intuitionism is not committed
> to the controversial metaphysical and epistemological claims associated with the early
> intuitionists (such as the view that there is a special organ or faculty for grasping moral
> truths).[731]

Metaphysical naturalists, of course, want an account of such intuitions that holds up to scientific

scrutiny. But what if the reason such an explanation has not been given is because it is simply

not available? We saw in the previous chapter Dworkin's statement that a special moral faculty

involved nothing mysterious, artificial, or counterintuitive. Perhaps he was reflecting the same

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[730] Huemer, "Liberal Realist," 1994.

[731] Tersman, "Moral Intuitions," 404.

kind of blasé overconfidence shown by Huemer – there must be a suitable evolutionary explanation, since we have knowledge of a priori truths of various kinds and we assume evolution can explain that, too. As we saw above, this depends crucially on one's view of what morality is. Robust moral realism insists that there are moral truths that are true regardless of what anyone thinks about them; perhaps one should add regardless of consequences.

Dworkin argued against Harman's challenge that a belief is reliable only if it can stand up to a causal explanation that includes the state of affairs it describes by pointing out that the content of moral, philosophical, and mathematical beliefs is not appropriate for such a test. This is all well and good, but it still doesn't explain how we have knowledge of such things. The problem of a priori knowledge is outside the scope of this dissertation, but suffice to say that there is still not, at present, a satisfactory naturalistic account of a priori knowledge even of mathematical truths. The argument from non-theistic moral realists is to say that we have mathematical and other metaphysical knowledge without invoking God in any way, so we can just be confident that it's the same with moral knowledge. But what if that isn't the case? Nagel questions the assumptions behind the debunkers' epistemological arguments, such as the presumption that mathematical truths have a satisfactory naturalistic explanation. He writes, "The existence of conscious minds and their access to the evident truths of ethics and mathematics are among the data that a theory of the world and our place in it has yet to explain."[732] Like Dworkin, Nagel does not find theistic accounts to his liking, admitting that he is not only unreceptive but strongly averse to the idea of God.[733] Nevertheless, he recognizes the inadequacy of reductionistic materialist explanations to account for mental phenomena. It is not

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[732] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 31.

[733] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 12n10.

an answer to that to simply say that there must be an explanation even if we don't know what it is – absent some sort of actual proof that materialism is true. As it stands now, the only reason for even thinking materialism true is that it is the prevailing view among cultural elites. But even debunkers have to admit how cultural influences can lead our beliefs off-track.

At the beginning of the chapter we looked briefly at what I have called Street's short theoretical argument for antirealism – namely, that there were no values until creatures who valued came along. This reflects the view of metaphysical naturalism. Note that this is not a conclusion of empirical science, even though it might sometimes be presented that way. Instead, it is an assumption based on methodological naturalism (MN)[734] combined with the belief that science can ultimately explain everything. Something like Street's scenario follows if it's true that science can explain everything, and if the only explanations that count as scientific are those that follow from MN. But what reason is there to think this is the case? Popular arguments to this effect might appeal to the fact that science has explained a lot of things that people used to explain by appealing to supernatural causes, so we have reason to expect that science will eventually explain everything. To deny this would be to risk being labelled "anti-science" – which seems to be not just mistaken in the eyes of many people, but reprehensible in a way that almost seems like a moral sense. As we have seen in this dissertation, even academic philosophers dismiss any kind of supernatural explanation with comments about what twenty-first century scholars should and should not be saying. But the belief that science can explain everything is not itself a scientific belief. It is a statement of faith – namely, the faith of naturalism.

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[734] Plantinga gives an overview of several important issues with respect to methodological naturalism. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168f., accessed May 25, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812097.001.0001.

We saw in chapter four that Dworkin challenges the notion that science should have veto power over other domains of knowledge. This is a particularly important argument when it is understood that "science" is generally understood in terms of MN, so to give science veto power over every other domain of knowledge means that every other domain must accept MN as an operating principle. Dworkin, however, is still not persuaded by theistic arguments. Nagel is in a similar boat, not persuaded by theism but also resisting the consensus to adopt MN as an overriding principle of enquiry. They are both moral realists and also non-naturalists, and thus share many commitments with theists. They make an interesting case study, as they both settle on what looks like a kind of halfway house between metaphysical naturalism and theism. In what follows, I hope to show that their non-theistic explanations still come up short of a satisfactory account of robust moral realism.

<center>Dworkin, Religious Atheism, and Faith</center>

We ended chapter four with essentially a deadlock between moral realism and skepticism (having concluded that antirealism is simply a form of skepticism). Dworkin, recall, challenged Harman's causal explanation test of knowledge, arguing that, "If the 'best explanation' causal test is universally sound, therefore, no moral (or aesthetic or mathematical or philosophical) belief is reliable. But we can reverse that judgment: if any moral belief is reliable, the 'best explanation' test is not universally sound. Either direction of argument—taking either of the two hypotheses as axiomatic and using it to deny the other—begs the question in the same way."[735] The crucial ingredient in this is that causation is to be understood purely in terms of the operation of the physical laws of nature. While Dworkin sees this as giving science veto power over all

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[735] Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth," 119.

other domains, that's only the case if physicalism and causal closure are taken to be tenets of science. These, however are not proven tenets of science, nor could they ever be. What is actually going on is that Street, Joyce, Ruse, and the rest of the debunkers are operating under the assumption of MN, and insist that the discussion be carried on under those restrictions. The moral realists that we have seen seem to have essentially agreed to that stipulation, which is why they have such a hard time of it. Under MN as a constraint, Dworkin's insistence that a special moral faculty would involve nothing mysterious or counterintuitive might appear to be just silly. Considering the fact that Dworkin is a non-naturalist moral realist (which is the primary target of Street's dilemma argument recall), how can unguided evolutionary processes develop a special faculty for acquiring moral truths? Street sees this as an "unreasoned faith, with realism about reasons and value thus becoming a rather odd form of religion."[736] In modern academia, of course, "religion" is one of the worst pejoratives one can receive – right up there with "faith."

For his part, Dworkin might not object to either pejorative. In *Religion without God*, Dworkin writes about what he calls "the religious attitude," which, as he understands it, "accepts the full, independent reality of value."[737] Dworkin seeks to establish a basis for "religious atheism," which he hopes will demonstrate a deeper rapport between traditional theists and atheists than the sort of atheism represented by Richard Dawkins. To do this, Dworkin argues that traditional theistic religions have a science part that seeks to provide answers about things like the origin of the universe and human beings and life after death, as well as a value part, which includes how we should live.[738] The value part of theistic religion, in addition, can be

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[736] Street, "You'd Better Rethink It," 299.

[737] Ronald Dworkin, *Religion without God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10, Adobe PDF eBook.

[738] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 22-23.

divided into a godly part (including things like prayer and worship), and a part that is not godly in that sense.[739] Religious atheists, thinks Dworkin, can accept the non-godly part of value and reject the rest.

Moreover, Dworkin argues based on an application of Hume's law that the science part of theism cannot ground the value part.[740] As Dworkin puts it,

> There is no direct bridge from any story about the creation of the firmament, or the heavens and earth, or the animals of the sea and the land, or the delights of heaven, or the fires of hell, or the parting of any sea or the raising of any dead, to the enduring value of friendship and family or the importance of charity or the sublimity of a sunset or the appropriateness of awe in the face of the universe or even a duty of reverence for a creator god.[741]

This is the basis of Dworkin's argument that God can't underwrite value because that very conviction "presupposes a prior commitment to the independent reality of that value."[742] Dworkin thinks the theist must be stymied by the following challenge: "Is there an intelligible, even if unfamiliar, conception of agency from which it follows that its exercise can in and by itself create value?"[743] This, however, is the wrong question. The position offered here is not that God creates value, but that God *values*. Moreover, everything he creates, including human nature, is a reflection of his values. How could it be any different? Anything we create is formed by and reflects our values – whether it be a work of art, a building, a book (or dissertation!), or a civilization. If universal benevolence is one of those values, then that would explain the deep cosmic coincidence between universal benevolence and human flourishing mentioned above (among other things).

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[739] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 24.

[740] Dworkin refers to it as "Hume's principle." Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 26.

[741] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 25.

[742] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 2.

[743] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 30.

The challenge to Dworkin would be to present an intelligible concept of any kind by which values can exist apart from being the property of the mind of a conscious agent. Consider again Street's formula: "Before life began, nothing was valuable. But then life arose and began to value – not because it was recognizing anything, but because creatures who valued (certain things in particular) tended to survive. In this broadest sense, valuing was (and still is) prior to value. That is why antirealism about value is right."[744] There certainly seems to be something right about the intuition behind Street's logic. What is it about "creatures who value" that separates them from other creatures? At least in Street's understanding, at a bare minimum it would seem to require sentience, or something like a mind. Another way of saying this is that in a mindless universe, there are no values. I am calling this an intuition, but it seems correct.

The universe does not value. Rocks, trees, and atomic nuclei do not value. But beings with minds do. When living beings on earth first began to value, either value was already present in the world, or it wasn't. If it wasn't, then it seems that Street is correct and the only values are the ones that depend on our own attitudes. In order to account for attitude-independent values, however, something more is needed. Whatever that something more is, it must be something with a mind. This can be seen by means of an argument as short as Street's. If value depends upon mind, and if value was already present before the first earthly valuing creatures appeared, then there must have been a mind already present. Moreover, something about that mind made it such that there is a deep correspondence between universal benevolence and human nature. Nagel, Dworkin, and other realists who are non-naturalists might hope for a non-theistic explanation for this, but certainly none has presented itself. Even a non-theistic solution to this would still need to involve something with at least some properties that are normally associated

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[744] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 155-56.

with God. Any other value realist explanation would require values to somehow exist without being in any mind, such as some of Platonic realm of abstract ideas. In that case, however, there is no explanation for the deep coincidences we have observed.

Dworkin's analysis in this case is superficial. Theism, at least Christian theism, holds that God created human nature in the *imago dei*. Given that that's the case, it stands to reason that human nature would have a deep coherence with God's nature in the same way that any creative work bears something of the imprint of its creator. Dworkin is mistaken in thinking that theism requires values to be grounded in purely scientific descriptions of historical events. Rather, theism provides a grounding for objective human values which is independent of the attitude of any human being. This is sufficient for robust moral realism. There is nothing that requires theists to be committed to the independent reality of value apart from God as Dworkin argues. In fact, there isn't even a compelling reason for theists to hold such a view. Indeed, if it's correct that values are a property of minds, then the idea of value independent from any mind is incoherent and Dworkin's challenge to theists fails to hit the mark.

In the end, Dworkin argues that it is a matter of faith. He writes that, "We accept our most basic scientific and mathematical capacities finally as a matter of faith. The religious attitude insists that we embrace our values in the same way: finally as a matter of faith as well."[745] But with nothing to ground that faith, it is faith in faith. Dworkin also writes, "Acknowledging the role of felt, irresistible conviction in our experience of value just recognizes the fact that we have such convictions, that they can survive responsible reflection, and that we then have no reason at all, short of further evidence or argument, to doubt their truth."[746] This

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[745] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 17.

[746] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 20-21.

appears to be faith in his own convictions and his own reasoning. But this is not an explanation as to why his faculties are reliable. The above quote comes right after he says that, "But of course I do not mean, in speaking of faith, that the fact that a moral conviction survives reflection is itself an argument for that conviction."[747] The problem is that at a certain point, one can only rest on one's moral intuitions. Surely it matters where those intuitions came from.

One can argue that explanations have to stop at some point, since infinite regresses are nasty things and should be avoided. Dworkin can choose to stop explaining and just take it as a kind of atheistic faith or brute fact that his moral faculties are reliable, and simply point out that the debunker is taking it just as much by faith when it comes to many, perhaps even most, of the debunker's beliefs. But that only shows that both he and the debunkers are groping in the dark, simply choosing to put their respective faith in different things (while agreeing among themselves that whatever the object of their faith is, it isn't God because we don't do that in the twenty-first century). Dworkin could argue that the theist is also taking it by faith that the theist's faculties are working properly in the assessment of arguments in favor of theism. This is also true; we are all ultimately at the mercy of our own faculties. However, Dworkin's explanation still seems like no explanation at all, whereas the theistic explanation also includes within it an explanation of why our faculties would be attuned to moral facts.

Nagel: Values, Mind, and Consciousness

Nagel has doubts about the entire reductive project of naturalism and many things that it entails. For example, he expresses skepticism about the probability that self-replicating life forms could have spontaneously come into existence through only the laws of physics and chemistry,

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[747] Dworkin, *Religion without God*, 20.

as well as the occurrence of the necessary sequence of viable genetic mutations permitting

natural selection to produce the organisms that exist within the available geological time.[748] He

writes that,

> My skepticism is not based on religious belief, or on a belief in any definite alternative. It
> is just a belief that the available scientific evidence, in spite of the consensus of scientific
> opinion, does not in this matter rationally require us to subordinate the incredulity of
> common sense. . . . I realize that such doubts will strike many people as outrageous, but
> that is because almost everyone in our secular culture has been browbeaten into regarding
> the reductive research program as sacrosanct, on the ground that anything else would not
> be science.[749]

For the purposes of this argument, the point is that the supposed science behind EDAs is not as

solid as is often portrayed, and is based more on underlying assumptions, chiefly MN.

Nagel's attempt at working toward a non-theistic solution to this problem begins with his

conviction that mind is a basic aspect of nature.[750] This is a consequence of Nagel's anti-

reductionism. At the same time, Nagel's cosmological theory doesn't sound that much different

from Street's. He writes that, "Each of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe

gradually waking up and becoming aware of itself."[751] Nagel wants to find a theory in which

mental properties are somehow present in all matter but are only manifested in certain

arrangements. The final arrangements are not to be seen as accidental, but rather include a

teleological aspect along the lines of Aristotelian thought without the intention of a personal

agent behind it.[752]

Nagel gives no concrete answers to the problem of mind and consciousness, only that the

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[748] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 6.

[749] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 7.

[750] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 16.

[751] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 85.

[752] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 93.

prevailing worldview of reductive materialism is wholly inadequate to explain everything. Nagel, like Dworkin, reverses the inferential logic of the debunking argument. He writes, "Street concludes that realism cannot be right; I conclude that something is missing from Darwinism, and from the standard biological conception of ourselves."[753] One obvious solution to the problem that Nagel sees is that Mind preceded the first "creatures who valued." If the universe was not mindless from the very beginning, but in fact was the product of a Mind, then values have a reality that is independent of the attitudes of any human being. If the nature of that Mind is also benevolent, then universal benevolence also has a basis in reality beyond human values. Faith in God, however, is ultimately personal; Nagel admits a personal aversion to the idea of God, for whatever reason. Those with no such personal aversion might wonder that Nagel fails to see the solution which is right under his nose. Nagel says he wants to "extend the boundaries of what is not regarded as unthinkable, in light of how little we really understand about the world."[754] However, in extending the boundaries beyond naturalism, Nagel has no principled reason to exclude theism – something that perhaps many of his fellow atheists understand better than he does.

Moral Truth and Theism

I promised above to show that the arguments of Huemer and de Lazari-Radek and Singer point toward an argument for theism. Several hints have already been dropped in that regard in the previous sections, but it is time to refine them. The following argument supposes that someone finds plausibility in Huemer's premise that a convergence on liberal values shows that those values are true, and also in de Lazari-Radek and Singer's proposition that there is no

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[753] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 111.

[754] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 127.

evolutionary explanation for the widespread belief in universal benevolence or the Golden Rule.
I have argued that Huemer's liberal values are actually corollaries of the Golden Rule, so that
whatever is said about that in the following also applies to Huemer's liberal values. Furthermore,
I have argued that the accounts of these premises offered by these philosophers is inadequate.
First, the idea that universal benevolence is a self-evident truth of reason as held by Sidgwick is
highly dubious. In fact the supposedly self-evident truths used to make this inference, including
the intuition that the God's-eye view is the right one for making moral judgments as well as the
intuition that all people are morally equal, are a part of the Christian heritage of the society in
which Sidgwick was born and raised. Second, I have argued that the fact that Jesus taught the
Golden Rule as a revelation from God – given that the principle itself has been widely affirmed
as true – is at least an indicator that it was just that. Third, I have argued that, given that
Christianity has been so successful at passing down its ideas and values in spite of being founded
on a set of beliefs that is maladaptive from an evolutionary standpoint (and thus beyond the reach
of EDAs), there is evidence for a deep cosmic coincidence between moral truths and human
nature such that universal benevolence promotes human flourishing and well-being – which goes
contrary to evolution. This also is beyond the reach of EDAs because it is based on empirical
rather than evaluative facts. The success of Christianity since its inception is an empirical fact,
and Huemer's data for the convergence of liberal (Christian) values is also an empirical fact.
Non-theistic views have no obvious way to account for such a deep cosmic coincidence.

There is also, as we have seen in previous chapters, the cosmic coincidence that is
necessary to explain moral knowledge – namely, the coincidence between attitude-independent
moral truths and our moral faculties. The consequentialist solution to this is unsatisfactory
because it requires a concept of morality which bears little to no resemblance to robust moral

realism. The other arguments for moral realism that we have looked at all come up short in one way or another in that they ignore or attempt to explain away any need for a cosmic coincidence, given that such a happenstance would be inexplicable in (scientific) non-theistic terms. The argument here is that the cosmic coincidence is in fact greater and deeper than has been appreciated. Far from being evidence that moral realism is not true, however, it is in fact evidence for theism as the most viable solution to the problem of moral knowledge.

<div align="center">Parsimony Reconsidered</div>

The question of parsimony has arisen at various times in the course of this discussion. Parsimony is usually thought to favor the atheist in arguments about the existence of God due to the fact that theism postulates an entity which the atheist does not. As we have seen, it also is thought to favor debunkers over moral realists, even if those moral realists are atheists. Again, the reasoning is that postulating extra entities (in this case attitude-independent moral truths) saddles moral realists with too much extra ontological baggage to allow them to shoulder the burden of proof. One challenge to the claim that parsimony favors atheism comes from Swinburne, who argues that theism is actually a simpler (i.e. more parsimonious) explanation for the universe with its observed characteristics than rival non-theistic explanations.

To understand this, we must first understand Swinburne's distinction between scientific explanation and personal explanation. For the purpose of this argument, I am glossing a number of important details. However, the main point is that personal explanation is not reducible to scientific explanation because of the nature of intentions.[755] Indeed, Swinburne argues that explaining intentions requires some kind of dualism.[756] A scientific explanation, argues

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[755] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 38f.
[756] Swinburne, 41.

Swinburne, "will have to postulate as a starting point of explanation a substance or substances that caused or still cause the universe and its characteristics."[757] This would either require postulating more entities than required by theism, or a single entity which is not infinite and thus not as simple as God.[758] This in turn is based on Swinburne's argument than an infinite person is the simplest person there could be, because finite limitations require some explanation of why there is a particular limit rather than another.[759] Finally, Swinburne argues that "A substance who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free is necessarily a terminus of complete explanation."[760] This is because the ultimate explanation for a given observed characteristic of the universe is God's free choice of his intention, which, as a personal explanation rather than a scientific one, is not caused by anything else.[761] Swinburne's argument shows that the question of parsimony which is thought to favor the atheist against that theist is not the slam-dunk that its proponents make it out to be.

There is also another issue with respect to parsimony that complicates things. What happens if explanations in terms of MN come up short of accounting for the data? In this chapter we have looked at some such data, courtesy of atheists Singer and Huemer. These arguments point to universal altruism or benevolence as an attitude-independent, moral truth (which also happens to be inconsistent with their consequentialist ethical theories). This gives us reason to believe that the debunkers are wrong in their contention that Darwinian explanations can account for our moral beliefs, seeing how EDAs have no explanation for the widespread intuition

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[757] Swinburne, 106.

[758] Swinburne, 106.

[759] Swinburne, 97.

[760] Swinburne, 98.

[761] Swinburne, 99.

pointing toward universal benevolence. Furthermore, since universal benevolence is close to, if not identical with, what we think of as morality, it means that EDAs do not explain morality. In other words, this is not a case of some random moral belief that EDAs cannot account for, it is rather one of the most central moral beliefs, if not the central one. Critics might point out that I have argued above that this intuition itself is based on the cultural influence of Christianity, and thus my belief about what morality is and what it is for is question-begging. A fuller account such as the one I am giving would require examining the connection between morality and altruism as it is viewed in other cultural traditions, but there is not space here for that.[762]

The appeal to parsimony which Street and other debunkers make is thus illegitimate in any event because we do not have a complete naturalistic explanation of the phenomena in question. Occam's Razor can be legitimately applied in cases where there are two explanations, *both of which adequately explain the data in question*, and one of them proposes extra entities which the other does not. That is not the case with EDAs. The assertion that EDAs are adequate is based in several key respects on nothing more than an assumption of naturalism. Most realist arguments against EDAs are made by thinkers who share the same naturalistic faith, and thus are forced to make question-begging moves or shift the burden of proof back to the debunker. Some theists might be tempted to play by the same rules, but this would be to concede ground to naturalists which there is no reason to concede in the first place.

Faith and Belief

Dworkin has suggested that it all comes down to a matter of faith, which is part of what he calls "the religious attitude." He means this not as an epithet, but as more of a recognition of

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[762] For efforts in this direction, see Stephen G. Post, "The Tradition of Agape," in Post et al., 51-64; cf. Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, eds., *Altruism in World Religions* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

the epistemic limitations that we all must face. Faith in Dworkin's sense means something like drawing conclusions that are unsupported by evidence, but instead are based on personal inner conviction or practical necessity. It is hard to see how this is different from wishful thinking, which is just what faith *is* to many skeptics. In Dworkin's case he simply embraces that understanding of faith and argues that there is nothing wrong with it, because he thinks both the skeptic and the theist are in the same boat with him when it comes down to it. Dworkin's understanding of faith is much like the skeptical view of Christian belief that C. S. Lewis addresses in his article, "On Obstinacy in Belief." Lewis writes, "We have been told that . . . the Christian regards it as positively praiseworthy to believe without evidence, or in excess of the evidence, or to maintain his belief unmodified in the teeth of steadily increasing evidence against it. Thus a 'faith that has stood firm,' which appears to mean a belief immune from all the assaults of reality, is commended."[763] This contrasts with what Lewis calls the scientific attitude to belief, which involves proportioning the strength of one's beliefs exactly to the evidence.[764] Lewis, however, argues that this is not an accurate understanding of faith and belief in the Christian view.

The important issue for Lewis is that the Christian, having come to faith, comes to trust in a person, not a theoretical proposition or hypothesis.[765] As Lewis observes, "Our opponents, then, have a perfect right to dispute with us about the grounds of our original assent. But they must not accuse us of sheer insanity if, after the assent has been given, our adherence to it is no longer proportioned to every fluctuation of the apparent evidence."[766] Lewis illustrates this point

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[763] C. S. Lewis, "On Obstinacy in Belief," *The Sewanee Review* 63, no. 4 (1955): 525, accessed March 13, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27538479.

[764] Lewis, 525.

[765] Lewis, 535.

[766] Lewis, 537.

by means of analogy, as when a child must trust a parent in allowing the parent to extract a thorn from the child's finger, causing more pain, as the way to make the pain eventually cease.[767] The theist (Christian theist in this example) is similarly called upon to trust in God's good work in the Christian's life in spite of appearances to the contrary. Driving the point home, Lewis writes that, "I am not saying that the strength of our original belief must by psychological necessity produce such behavior. I am saying that the content of our original belief by logical necessity entails the proposition that such behavior is appropriate."[768]

Given that the theist (or at least Christian theist) has reason to maintain belief in spite of challenges based on the content of those beliefs, it is worth asking if this is the case for the debunker and for the non-theistic moral realist, respectively. One challenge for the debunker was discussed at length in chapter four – that antirealism simply is a form of skepticism and does not save us from it, nor does it preserve our first-order moral beliefs. In the case of Street's Humean constructivism, it also implies that some people might be perfectly right in committing genocide and other acts that are held to be morally reprehensible by most people. There is nothing in the content of the debunker's belief to justify an unwavering commitment to antirealism in the face of such clear moral objections – instead, the debunker's commitment is based on a commitment to methodological naturalism and the view that the debunking position is more parsimonious than rival views. But as we have seen above, neither of these considerations are legitimate bases for the debunker to claim that hers is a better explanation than either theism or non-theistic moral realism. Furthermore, the arguments presented above shows that the debunking argument does not account for all of the data, given the widespread acceptance of universal benevolence and

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[767] Lewis, 533.

[768] Lewis, 534.

corollary beliefs. The debunker, then, has no principled reason to maintain her commitment to antirealism based on the content of her beliefs.

Next, we turn to the non-theistic moral realist position and ask the same question: is there anything in the content of the position itself to give a reason for standing firm in the face of challenges? Taking Dworkin's understanding of faith, the answer is clearly no. Dworkin's confidence in his position is based purely on the strength and seemingly inescapability of the conviction itself; nothing in the content of the belief provides a reason for maintaining the conviction. Dworkin would argue that we cannot help but make moral judgments, and even the attempt to deny morality involves making moral judgments. He would be content to accept a special moral faculty without any further need for justification or explanation. The problem is that this seems like a very inappropriate terminus of explanation, besides the fact that such a special moral faculty does not appear to admit of any good, natural explanation.

Nagel's position is somewhat different. He holds that there are attitude-independent, moral truths. But rather than suggesting we just rest content with this as Dworkin does, Nagel tries to point the way toward a more or less complete overhaul of the reductionistic program of modern science in search of a theory of everything that will include mental properties as a fundamental part of reality, but which are only manifested in certain arrangements. Nagel's approach is very much susceptible to Swinburne's argument for the simplicity of theism. Even if a theory like Nagel's were to be developed, it still would not explain the underlying grounds for it. It also would not explain the phenomenon of intentionality. By focusing only on consciousness, Nagel leaves out this important facet of our experiences, not to mention one that is vital with respect to morality. Again, however, there is nothing in the content of Nagel's belief which gives a principled reason for resisting the debunking challenge. Vavova calls Nagel's

response to debunkers a kind of dogmatism,[769] a criticism which could also be applicable to Dworkin.

Finally, there is the non-theistic moral realist view represented by Singer and Huemer above. Their evidence shows the debunking position to be inadequate. At the same time, their consequentialist approach to ethics belies the very moral truths which they claim are attitude-independent. Their account of moral facts as being largely similar to *a priori* truths in other domains such as mathematics and logic is based on the same consequentialist view of morality. It is questionable whether it would work for the face-value view of morality that is reflected in a robustly realist account. Beyond that, we have seen that the truths which are touted as self-evident in the Sidgwickian sense are most plausibly the result of centuries of transmission of the Christian tradition going back to Jesus, who taught universal benevolence as a revelation from God.

Of course, a non-theist must argue that Jesus was mistaken about the origin of this belief. Nevertheless, the principle which Jesus taught has been affirmed as true by subsequent thinkers, including notable and highly influential scholars. It seems peculiar that anyone should be impressed by a philosopher like Sidgwick who, eighteen centuries later, claims to have confirmed a truth which was originally taught by an ancient Jewish peasant, yet without so much as an acknowledgment that that's what he is doing. De Lazari-Radek and Singer, meanwhile, seem to take it that the fact that Jesus taught the Golden Rule provides some confirmation of their theory – a theory which they came up with centuries later, having been brought up in a civilization which was built on the teachings of Christianity, one of which was the Golden Rule. The circularity is obvious. Unlike Dworkin and Nagel, Singer and Huemer do have a basis for

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[769] Vavova, 109.

resisting the debunker: facts which the debunker cannot explain. However, they do not have a basis for resisting the theistic argument that has been presented above. If they attempt to hold onto their atheism through appeal to parsimony or methodological naturalism, they will run into the same problems that have been indicated above with the debunker's view.

Plausibility, All Things Considered

The above arguments address the question of whether the various positions have within them a principled reason to maintain that position in the face of challenges. It will be pointed out that little to nothing has been said about coming to hold the position in the first place. This is largely because the focus of this study is on responding to the challenge presented by EDAs to moral realism. A full account of the evidence for theism in general and Christian theism in particular would require several more dissertations, many of which have already been written by others. I have, however, attempted to show that the most compelling arguments from non-theistic moral realists against EDAs actually point toward theism as a better explanation than any non-theistic account. I have also tried to show that non-theistic responses from moral realists are inadequate to stave off the debunking challenge. Non-theistic arguments between debunkers and moral realists result in a stalemate. Neither side has a principled reason to resist the objections of the other; the main appeal of the debunking argument is in its appeal to the supreme authority of science, and the naturalism on which it is presumed to rest, but it is an illegitimate appeal as I have tried to argue above.

It has sometimes been taken for granted that theism can adequately address the debunking challenge.[770] However, most theorists in this area do not give the theistic option any

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[770] For example, see Kahane, 109.

consideration due to the factors mentioned in this chapter. What I have attempted to show is more than this relatively bland conclusion. I have argued that realist responses to the debunking challenge that begin from non-theistic premises do not adequately meet that challenge. The strongest such arguments either result in a stand-off, or else they point toward theism as a better explanation for moral knowledge.

In one comment that we looked at in the previous chapter, Street argued for antirealism on the basis of what is most plausible "all things considered." That is sound advice. The naturalistic arguments that we have seen, however, do not generally consider all things – only those things which they believe are allowed by their prior commitment to methodological naturalism. Freed from this artificial constraint, theism provides a better explanation than non-theistic solutions to the challenge of EDAs for reasons that we have examined in some detail.

CONCLUSION

Either universal benevolence is an attitude-independent moral truth, or it is not. If it is, then we ought to love all other people – including members of out-groups. It also means that the Golden Rule is something that everyone should practice, just as Jesus taught his followers. It is beyond the scope of Darwinian evolution to account for how we could have knowledge of this kind of truth, as it would require an inexplicable cosmic coincidence. It is also beyond the ability of evolution to account for how a society based on universal benevolence could avoid being eliminated by societies which teach care for in-group members and hostility to out-group members. The evidence that we saw in the last chapter points toward a deep cosmic coincidence between universal benevolence and human nature such that belief in the former promotes human flourishing and well-being.

In chapter four, a passing comment from Street was mentioned which was quite puzzling given her commitment to antirealism. The comment was in reference to the belief that out-group members should be treated with less consideration than members of one's in-group – a belief which makes sense under the evolutionary models of altruism that we have seen. In response to this, Street wrote, "More and more, many of us are coming to think that *this is not true* [emphasis added]."[771] If it is not true that out-group members should be given less consideration than in-group members, then something like universal benevolence should be regarded as an attitude-independent moral truth – yet Street's own antirealism denies that there are any such truths. Other non-theistic approaches might claim universal benevolence as some sort of brute fact, but that would be an arbitrary *terminus* of explanation.

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[771] Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 133.

Traditional theism, meanwhile, holds that God is omnibenevolent. For this reason, theism

provides a satisfactory explanation of the above data. Non-theists may argue that theism is

objectionable on other grounds. Street does have a separate challenge for theism, which is

essentially a version of the problem of evil.[772] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to

examine that argument. However, we saw above Lewis's argument for why the Christian's

obstinacy in the face of challenges and attacks on faith is not only not irrational, but virtuous;

that argument is particularly germane to objections such as Street's. Moreover, universal

benevolence itself provides an argument not merely for maintaining belief in God in the face of

various challenges, but also for coming to faith in the first place. Someone who thinks that

universal benevolence is an attitude-independent moral truth has reason to become a theist.

The Revisionary Ethics of Jesus

Many of the moral philosophers that we have reviewed here have an interest in

overthrowing what they consider to be traditional moral beliefs. This is particularly true of

Singer, Greene, and Huemer, and the idea of "revisionary ethics." The main differences between

these different writers has to do with just how far they think we should diverge from traditional

moral views. What they seem not to realize is that whatever moral system takes the place of

"traditional" morality will simply become another tradition. Moreover, nothing in their package

of supposedly revisionary ethics is new. Upon closer examination, it appears to be little more

than an attempt to justify the current popular trends in ethics, which are themselves the result of

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[772] Sharon Street, "If Everything Happens for a Reason, Then We Don't Know What Reasons Are," in *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution*, ed. Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 172-93, accessed June 1, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199669776.003.0010. For an argument in response to Street, see Philip Pegan, "Sharon Street's Unsuccessful Argument Against Theism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 86, no. 1 (August 2019): 17–24, accessed May 24, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11153-018-9696-8.

various cultural trends and forces. Just as Darwin saw Victorian English morality as the pinnacle of evolution, so these contemporary philosophers see modern progressive values as the best and most reliable views.

In chapter two, for example, we briefly looked at Huemer's supposedly revisionary ideas about sexual behavior in which he advocated a complete overthrow of "conventional" sexual morality. What Huemer calls conventional is, in fact, Christian sexual morality. It takes very little thought to realize that the views of the early church in this area, based on the teachings of Jesus, were far more radical and revisionary than anything that Huemer advocates. In fact, Huemer's supposedly revisionary ethics of sexuality is actually a stamp of approval on almost all of our basic sexual instincts, drives and urges – tempered with a call for benevolence and respect which he borrows from the same tradition whose overthrow he advocates. The New Testament records Jesus as saying that even to look at a woman with lustful intent is enough to make one guilty of adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28). It is hard to imagine a more radically revisionary ethical statement that deviates more drastically from our natural intuitions and inclinations. What Huemer and others are proposing, however, is not far removed from the sexual ethics of ancient paganism, and which has had a popular following in every age since the earliest recorded history.

Jesus' teachings were also highly revisionary in other areas; especially in the area of moral consideration for out-group members that, as we have seen, is affirmed even by Street and (ostensibly) by Singer and Huemer. Jesus taught his follower to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44), and specifically enjoined going beyond the ethic of reciprocity (Matt. 5:46-47). This was centuries before evolutionary psychologists told us that reciprocity made sense from a Darwinian standpoint – even though it already made sense to everyone else. So if Huemer, Singer, and others of their ilk are looking for a revisionary ethic, they might want to try looking a little

harder at the tradition which they seek to overthrow and replace with the current culturally dominant ethic of secular progressivism.

Future Directions

Several questions have arisen in the course of this dissertation which require further thought and development. One of those has to do with our moral faculties, and in particular the relationship between one's view of morality and the kind of faculties which would be suitable for it. I suggested in chapter five that the view of moral truths as being relevantly similar to *a priori* truths in mathematics and logic might make sense if one has a consequentialist view of morality. This, however, is not the face-value, commonsense view of morality that most people have. If face-value, commonsense moral realism is at least generally correct, then a reassessment of what sort of moral faculties are suitable for that is needed. I am aware that some theists (notably Audi) endorse a similar view of intuitionism as that of Singer and Huemer – that is, a broadly Rossian form of intuitionism.[773] My suggestion is that this view is in need of revision, although I have no specific suggestions here as to how to approach that.

I have also suggested that the teachings of Jesus concerning universal benevolence, in particular his formulation of the Golden Rule, be given further consideration as evidence of divine revelation. Others have previously undertaken such work, but the present work might dovetail with that and provide a new and fruitful angle on the teachings of Jesus and his influence on Western moral philosophy. Also relevant to this wider discussion is the question of other religious traditions, and how their teachings compare and contrast with Christianity.

I am of the view that all moral realists should be theists, and that everyone should be a

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[773] Robert Audi, "Intuitionism, Pluralism, and the Foundations of Ethics," in *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*, 32-65 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

moral realist. It is my hope that this dissertation has contributed toward establishing that

conclusion.

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