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THE DESCENT OF EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Faculty of Society and Design

Professor Damian Cox and Dr Yi Chen

Abstract

In this thesis I explore and critique an emergent metaethical challenge against moral realism called the evolutionary debunking argument (EDA). The EDA surfaces from the attempt to integrate findings from evolutionary science with the philosophical project of understanding the metaphysical and epistemological nature of the ‘ultimate foundations’ of morality. After surveying current literature by identifying four distinct formulations of the argument and existing counter-arguments, I introduce and formulate a new challenge to aspiring debunkers, called the otiosity argument. This argument stipulates that the success of the debunking manoeuvre depends on a series of imported assumptions or pre-established arguments regarding the metaphysical and epistemological nature of morality. I demonstrate how in various instances in the debunking literature these assumptions or attempts to pre-establish certain anti-realist conclusions play out in the otiosity argument. I conclude that the EDA is only as successful as these imported metaethical assumptions and arguments and that the EDA is therefore otiose to the metaethical debate between realists and anti-realists. Upon reviewing the success of the integration of findings from evolutionary science, I propose a positive metaethical account grounded in a renewed perspective towards the evolution of morality and metaethical constructivism. I suggest that the future of this domain of enquiry takes on this renewed perspective and acknowledges the descent of the evolutionary debunking manoeuvre.

Keywords

Morality, Metaethics, Realism, Evolutionary Debunking, Constructivism

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material that has previously been submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

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INTRODUCTION

In discussions of evolution and morality, an important starting point seems to be that we Hominin have a capacity for normative guidance – an ability on the one hand to make judgements about how people ought to have acted and on the other to be motivated through this normative capacity to act in ways which seem to accord with our judgements. But, as has become a common phrasing of this central issue, whence morality?¹ In moral judgement, it appears that we have a general consensus about the rightness or goodness of certain acts or traits of individuals and that some are better than others at articulating these judgements. In deciding how one should act, some are better than others at acting in accordance with what they feel or reason to be right or good. In both the formations of judgements and decisions, the properties of *rightness* or *goodness* might be employed. The metaphysical nature of these properties, our epistemic access to them, and the factuality of the properties themselves, frame important metaethical questions which have become intertwined with our evolutionary story.

With the emergence of sociobiology, and the more recent emergence of evolutionary psychology, those who sought to answer this question have mostly agreed with E.O Wilson's claim that "the time has come for ethics to be removed *temporarily* from the hands of the philosophers and biologized."² The ripples of Wilson's claim have come to form great waves in metaethical debate. It can appear no longer as a temporary removal but an indefinite submersion, where henceforth *morality* espouses a myth, a useful fiction, or otherwise nothing at all. The properties of *rightness* or *goodness* are still employed in discussions of morality. But many, because of this biological integration, are now increasingly sceptical

¹ "Moral Thinking: Biology Invades a Field Philosophers Thought Was Safely Theirs," The Economist, http://www.economist.com/science/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10717915.

² Edward Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). 562 [My emphasis]

about the actual existence of a *true* right and wrong. In modern metaethical debate, this shift can be traced back to the emergence of a particular argument called the evolutionary debunking argument (henceforth, EDA). The argument was first employed by Michael Ruse, though it has since been *fine-tuned* and had its crosshairs widened and narrowed in various ways throughout its development.³

This is an opportune time to draw attention to the mechanisms of this argument, the underlying assumptions and its various formations, because its increasing prominence has a number of serious implications. In this thesis, I will argue that we should not have any confidence in this argument, and we should be sceptical about the debunking role of such evolutionary considerations in metaethical arguments. I conclude that old metaethical questions are at the heart of the debunking literature and, upon examination, carry the argumentative load of the anti-realist. I do not attempt to solve these metaethical questions, but I show how realists facing the EDA are not in as much trouble as they have been led to believe. Having untangled some of the ropes, I close by suggesting some avenues for the ongoing conversation.

In the first chapter, I explore four different formulations of the evolutionary debunking argument. I describe each formulation and briefly explore their strengths and weaknesses. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the deep structure of the argument and present a general structure which I will refer to throughout this dissertation.

In the second chapter, I explore objections to the EDA. I open this chapter with what I believe to be the most considerable and yet mostly underappreciated challenge for aspiring debunkers, a challenge I label the otiosity argument. In brief, the otiosity argument shows that important metaethical assumptions are inherent in the general debunking strategy. These

³ I credit Ruse with the first formal characterisation of the EDA. However, Darwin made important precursory claims which lie at the heart of the EDA when he applied his evolutionary theory to human evolution in, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. I return to Darwin's contribution in chapter one.

assumptions render evolutionary considerations otiose to the debate over the mind-independence of value. I then survey prominent categories of responses to the argument throughout debunking literature. I close this chapter by returning to the significance of the otiosity argument.

In the third chapter I begin to explore those assumptions which I argued were inherent in the general debunking strategy. It is only with a certain understanding of moral ontology, I argue, that evolutionary considerations fix an anti-realist conclusion. I explore a case whereby the EDA fails because moral ontology is construed in a way that is more sympathetic towards the varieties of moral realism. This demonstrates that the anti-realist conclusions of the EDA depend on the construal of ontology as opposed to the mere integration of evolutionary facts. This reinforces the significance of the otiosity argument.

In the fourth chapter, I continue my analysis of the underlying metaethical assumptions of the EDA by accepting relevant evolutionary facts and demonstrating that realism can still follow. Evolutionary facts can be both vindicating and debunking, so I suggest that the fulcrum of the debate lies elsewhere in the characterisation of truth about normative reasons. This further reinforces the significance of the otiosity argument.

In chapter five, I revisit the formulations of the EDA and after identifying further underlying assumptions, locate that fulcrum in constructivist literature – where reasons as opposed to truth-instantiating facts take centre stage.

In chapter six, I focus on the characterisations of truth about normative reasons. I show that the debate about the mind-independence of value rests with how truth is characterised in particular versions of metaethical constructivism. I examine prominent versions and discuss how they accommodate evolutionary facts differently. It is the debate between constructivists, and the viability of each competing constructivist theory, which seem to inform the debate between realists and anti-realists, as opposed to the use of

evolutionary facts. Since the explanatory function of evolutionary facts seems dependent on the version of constructivism adopted, the significance of the otiosity argument is reinforced. But there is another important observation to be made. The construal of constructivism as an anti-realist position involves an array of imported metaethical assumptions.

In conclusion, my claim is that metaethical debate does not crucially depend upon evolutionary considerations. The outcome of metaethical debates rests upon 'good-old metaethical argumentation', as opposed to any solitary evolutionary consideration. This should mark the descent of evolutionary debunking. Instead, I propose, we should look to how our moral discourse can be enhanced by a more open study of our evolved natures and moral capacities, and what this means for our conception of the good life.

CHAPTER ONE: FORMULATIONS OF THE EDA

In the twentieth century, metaethical debate shifted towards philosophical naturalism – the view that all properties are analysable in terms of the physical sciences.⁴ Evolutionary ethics represents one such integration. FitzPatrick proposes three approaches to evolutionary ethics in practice:

Descriptive Evolutionary Ethics: evolutionary theory is integrated in the scientific explanations of how we inherited certain cognitive capacities, patterns of behaviour and thought, or attitudinal predispositions. An example of this kind of explanation would be how we inherited the capacity to efficiently detect cheaters.

Prescriptive Evolutionary Ethics: evolutionary theory is integrated in the normative domain where it may justify or undermine a particular approach to prescriptive ethics. An example of this kind of explanation would be the classic Spencerian prescription, *survival of the fittest*, or attempts to link the human predilection for altruism to altruistic prescriptions.

Evolutionary Metaethics: evolutionary theory is integrated to support or undermine metaethical theories.⁵

Although I will refer to descriptive evolutionary ethics at various points, evolutionary metaethics will be the focus of this dissertation. The evolutionary debunking argument (EDA) is an attempt to integrate evolutionary theory and metaethics. I will explore four different formulations of the evolutionary debunking argument: the Non-Foundational Formulation; the Superfluity Formulation; the Sensitivity Formulation; and the Implausibility Formulation. The formulations are differentiated by their epistemic premise – that is, whether the target is the *truth* of the claim that there are moral facts, our *belief* that there are moral

⁴ This definition suffices for introductory purposes. I will elaborate on this interpretation in chapter three.

⁵ William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2016).

facts that obtain ‘stance-independently’, or our *justification for believing* that there are moral facts that obtain stance-independently.

The Non-Foundational Formulation seeks to debunk the claim of an objective foundation to morality by arguing that morality is the result of the non-truth tracking genealogy of natural selection. The Superfluity Formulation appeals to ontological parsimony and the empirical claim of a completed non-moral genealogy of morality. The Sensitivity Formulation argues through a truth conditional theory of knowledge that moral beliefs do not count as knowledge given their status conferred from their evolutionary origins. The Implausibility Formulation is a two-pronged attack on the justifications offered by realists in the face of the debunking argument.

Before describing these arguments, I will make further distinction. Erik Wielenberg distinguishes between metaphysical and epistemological debunking arguments: “[metaphysical debunking arguments show] that no moral belief that can be given an evolutionary explanation is true” whereas epistemological debunking arguments show that “the existence of an evolutionary explanation for a given moral belief implies that even if the belief is true, it is not knowledge.”⁶ To debunk morality metaphysically is to say that our moral beliefs are in fact false, whereas to debunk morality epistemologically is to say that they are not known to be true – as they are unjustified or do not count as knowledge. I will refer to this distinction throughout my analysis of these arguments.

1.1 *The Non-Foundational Formulation*

Michael Ruse argues that there is no objective foundation to morality given that it is a biological adaptation.⁷ Though humans still have an awareness of right and wrong and a

⁶ Erik Wielenberg, "On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Ethics* 120, no. 1 (2010). 442

⁷ Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989).

sense of obligation, this awareness can be explained by its biological worth.⁸ The first premise of his debunking argument can be constructed from his claim that, “morality is a biological adaptation, no less than are hands and feet and teeth.”⁹ Ruse then argues that, “the recognition of morality as merely a biological adaptation shows that there can be no foundation of the kind traditionally sought.”¹⁰ Ruse argues that predominant belief in the objectivity of morality is a functional illusion. As a species, we needed to believe that morality was objectively true and that it is “a function of something outside of and higher than ourselves” otherwise we would be less inclined to cooperate.¹¹ Given the irrelevance of truth in the fitness-tracking story of the evolution of propensities to form moral beliefs, Ruse forms the conclusion that if morality is biologically adapted, then morality cannot have an objective foundation. This form of the EDA can be stated succinctly:

1. If x is a biological adaptation, then x cannot have an objective foundation
2. x is a biological adaptation
3. Therefore, x cannot have an objective foundation

Ruse’s support for the first premise takes the form of a response to Nozick. Nozick says:

If a speeding train is bearing down on me, I am inclined to jump out of its way. How is it that I am aware of this train? Obviously through my evolved capacities of sight and hearing and so forth. My awareness of the train comes to me through adaptations which selection has put in place. Yet, no one would want to claim that the train does not have a reality in its own right. Why, therefore, should one feel able to deny that ethics or morality has a reality in its own right? The fact that awareness comes

⁸ Ibid. 261

⁹ Ibid. 262

¹⁰ Ibid. 268

¹¹ Ibid.

through adaptations is quite irrelevant to matters of ontology. There is, therefore, a blatant fallacy, right in the middle of the evolutionary ethical position.¹²

Ruse argues that the analogy fails as it assumes the existence of the train. Given that we have no reason to assume the existence of moral facts as the foundation of moral claims, he argues, the analogy collapses. Ruse writes:

Start with the fact that the argument about the train goes through because and only because the existence of the train is assumed independently. Suppose, for instance, one had two worlds identical except that one has a speeding train and the other does not. There would be no reason to think the evolutionist is committed to a belief in speeding trains in both worlds. One is aware of the speeding train only because there is such a train. Now consider two worlds, one of which has an objective morality, whatever that might mean (God's will? Non-natural properties?), and the other world has no such morality. If the evolutionist's case is well taken, the people in *both* worlds are going to have identical beliefs-subject to normal laws of causation and so forth. The existence of the objective ethics is in no way necessary for a derivation of our belief in an objective ethics from an evolutionary perspective. So, at the very least, what we can say is that an objective ethics is redundant to the evolutionist's case.¹³

Ruse attempts to show that "morality is no more than a collective illusion fobbed off on us by our genes for reproductive ends"¹⁴ and that "[m]orality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and has no being beyond this."¹⁵ As a comparative argument, he suggests that following World War I, belief in the supernatural increased as the requirement for solace and comfort rose in the face of death and loss. People were *better off* believing the 'collective

¹² Quoted in Michael Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics," in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew Nitecki and Doris Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). 155-156

¹³ Ibid. 156

¹⁴ Ibid. 152

¹⁵ Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm*. 268

illusion' that they could, for example, communicate with their dead loved ones through supernatural devices such as Ouija boards.

Of course, we see that there was no justified foundation for a claim such as this.

Excluding obvious cases of fraud, and I suspect that these were a lot fewer than the cynics maintain, we know full well of the successes of the séance were due exclusively to the capacity of people under stress to deceive themselves. They wanted to hear (or if you like "hear") the comforting messages – and so they did. Once the causal analysis is given, we see that there is no place for a rational justification.

Likewise, in ethics once we see that moral claims are simply adaptations, there is neither a place for or need of rational justification.¹⁶

In the same way that a 'causal analysis' debunks the supernatural beliefs of the subjects in his analogy, so too does a genealogical understanding of the origins of moral beliefs debunk the claims of the moral realist. To draw out this séance argument, take the following version of the debunking argument:

1. If hearing voices of the dead is the product of self-deceptive wish fulfilment, then x cannot have an objective foundation.
2. x is the product of a self-deceptive wish fulfilment
3. Therefore, x cannot have an objective foundation

We have a number of reasons for positing the causal premise (that the 'hearing' of the voices and the self-deception are linked), and support could be found in an empirical investigation of the causal claims made within the epistemic domain of séance.¹⁷ Ruse likely benefits from this multitude of reasons, as the reader is generally either immune to the causal premise (in

¹⁶ "The New Evolutionary Ethics." 156

¹⁷ The relevant 'causal' claim in EDAs is the claim that evolution did influence the belief, faculty or attitude in question. I will use this term frequently. I will more fully introduce this term when I consider the deep structure of the EDA.

the case of faith), or overly welcoming to it (in the case of already being in ontological agreement with Ruse). But the final and most important feature of Ruse's claim, is how the possibility of defence is removed in the same swipe as the debunking argument in his claim that, "the successes of the séance were due exclusively to the capacity of people under stress to deceive themselves."¹⁸ It is exclusive to the *capacity of*, not just the *tendency for*, or the *possibility of*, and this claim is crucial to the success of Ruse's argument . It is necessary that every justification put forward by the subject be the product of this off-track belief formation system. So, the completed argument is as follows:

1. If x is the product of a spiritual séance, and alternative justifications of x are false, then x cannot have an objective foundation
2. x is the product of a spiritual séance
3. Alternate justifications in defence of x were formed exclusively under these conditions of self-deception and thus are false
4. Therefore, x cannot have an objective foundation

So, in the moral case, the final argument would have to account for this inherited capacity for self-delusion:

1. If x is the product of evolutionary inheritance, and alternative justifications of x are false, then x cannot have an objective foundation
2. x is the product of evolutionary inheritance
3. Alternate justifications in defence of x were formed exclusively under an inherited predisposition to deceive ourselves, bolstering our tendency to cooperate, and are thus false.
4. Therefore, x cannot have an objective foundation

¹⁸ Ibid.

The sociobiological explanation for our reluctance to accept that there is no objective foundation for morality targets our incredulity. Ruse believes that it is evolutionarily beneficial for us to think that morality has an objective foundation and thus we would be understandably hesitant to accept that his argument, the Non-Foundational EDA, is successful. If we didn't consider judgement of right and wrong to be rationally justifiable, "we would be less inclined to obey it and obeying rules is generally adaptive for human beings."¹⁹ Without the illusion of objectivity, we could not experience normativity, and thus Ruse argues that morality would not fulfil its evolutionary function.

If I think I should help you when and only when I want to, I shall probably help you relatively infrequently. But because I think I *ought* to help you – because I have no choice about my obligation, it being imposed upon me – I am much more likely, in fact, to help you.²⁰

Having rid ourselves of this collective illusion, are we thereby more likely to be immoral? If the function of the inherited myth of morality was to bind us to moral behaviour which is beneficial to ourselves, our families or our society, then debunking the myth seems to leave us without a clear reason to be moral at all. On the one hand, Ruse may well concede that this is the upshot of his position – he does indeed think that we have no reasons to be good. On the other hand, he might argue that there exist reasons for cooperating which obtain independently of those inherited predispositions which are tainted by the collective illusion. The first possibility means that, for Ruse, morality doesn't involve any categorical requirements to be good. The second possibility means that morality does involve such requirements. Ruse seems to favour the latter view:

¹⁹ Lemos, 2000, p.214 John Lemos, "Evolution and Ethical Skepticism: Reflections on Ruse's Meta-Ethics," *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems* 21, no. 2 (2000). 214

²⁰ Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm*. 268

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.... Note, however, that the illusion lies not in the morality itself, but in the sense of objectivity. I am certainly not saying that morality is unreal. Of course it is not! What is unreal is the apparent objective reference to morality.²¹

If morality is not objective and is yet still binding, Ruse's challenge is to demonstrate how this post-myth morality functions exactly like the inherited myth-morality, without the illusion – the very motivational bulwark which is apparently required to make us more likely to help each other. He must show how reasons to be good are obtained in post-myth morality independently of any set of illusory reasons and beliefs which were inherited.

1.2 *The Superfluity Formulation*

Proponents of this form of the argument believe that our understanding of evolutionary biology allows us to fully explain moral beliefs and thus to posit that these moral beliefs are objectively true is explanatorily superfluous.

Gibbard touches on this form of argument in his claim that, “[i]f the [evolutionary] account is on the right track, then our normative capacities can be explained without supposing that there is a special kind of normative fact to which they typically respond.”²²

Unlike the manner in which our sense organs can allow us to form judgements based on facts of our surroundings, moral judgements are capacities which allow us to cooperate in mutually beneficial ways.²³ In his evolutionary speculation, Gibbard believes there may be natural facts, but no ‘peculiarly normative’ facts. If it is the role of biology to discuss the ontological status of normative judgements, there is no requirement to posit the existence of normative

²¹ *Taking Darwin Seriously* (New York: Blackwell, 1986). 252-253

²² Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (London: Clarendon Press, 1998). 107

²³ I will address this comparison between senses and morality in chapter two.

facts as well. Gibbard concludes, “[o]ur making [judgements] is to be explained by the rewards of coordination. To suppose there are normative facts is gratuitous.”²⁴ This is the essence of the Superfluity Formulation.

Joyce’s version of this argument is formulated by assessing two hypotheses which aim to describe the phenomenon of moral judgements.²⁵ He contrasts a *completed* non-moral genealogy of moral beliefs with the supposition of moral or normative facts. Since moral judgements, such as judgements grounded in fairness and guilt, have biologically explicable origins, one can explain them in biological and subsequently psychological and sociological terms.²⁶ Moral facts “should be excised from the picture with a swift slash from Ockham’s Razor, since we have a complete explanation of moral judgement with no need to posit any extra ontology in the form of moral facts.”²⁷ However, Joyce acknowledges that this argument might be too hasty. It would be irrational to dismiss the existence of cats because they can be explained in terms of physics as “there is a sense in which *cat* is an ontological category over and above those of physics and chemistry, but there is also a sense in which positing this category does not really amount to adding extra ontological richness of the world, since the zoological category fits into those of the underlying sciences.”²⁸ What is left for Joyce is “a kind of moral scepticism – scepticism, that is, in the classic sense of the word, meaning that the evidence favours neither a proposition nor its negation, and thus one could choose (or is required) to reserve judgement on the matter, at least until new evidence turns up.”²⁹ This results in Joyce arguing for a “cultivating agnosticism”, one that accepts the label

²⁴ Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. 108

²⁵ Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006). 189

²⁶ This premise is vital to the success of the EDA. I question its success in chapter two, section 2.

²⁷ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 188

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.* 223

of an error theoretic position.³⁰ This means that Joyce doesn't believe we have the grounds to endorse moral propositions and that such moral propositions are unjustified.

This is not to say that Joyce doesn't believe that, for example, murdering for pleasure is wrong and thus that he is indifferent to actions that are gratuitously cruel and actions that are not. In fact, Joyce would argue that gratuitous cruelty is not morally permissible or impermissible, for it is not "morally anything."³¹

Just as one can make an autonomous decision not to maximize one's genetic reproductive potential – after all, not many men are queuing at the sperm bank every day eager to max out their donations – so too we can make an autonomous decision to support social cohesion. We can simply decide to be kind to each other, to refrain from harming each other, to repay our debts, and so on.³²

Though there are no absolute moral truths, there are certain fictions to which members of a society can subscribe. These fictions are useful in a pragmatic sense, given their function in the evolutionary framework. In Joyce's view, this sceptical position coincides with epistemological decrees whilst not completely dismantling the possibility of moral discourse.

Hence much of the time one speaks and acts and even thinks as if one really believes in morality. The idea is, then, that one can in this way gain some of the pragmatic benefits that come from sincere moral belief. And yet in doing so one violates no epistemological imperative since one doesn't believe it; one's 'acceptance' of morality falls short of belief since one remains disposed to concede, if pressed in an appropriately serious and critical way, that it's all false.³³

³⁰ Though it is not detrimental to his argument, he later admits that scepticism is more accurate here than error theory. See: Richard Joyce, "Irrealism and the Genealogy of Morals," *Ratio* 26 (2013). 354

³¹ "The Death of Morality - Moral Fictionalism," in *Philosophy Now* (2011).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

With a supposedly satisfactory and complete empirical picture of the phenomenon in question, we have no reason to believe in moral facts.³⁴ However, the possibility remains that a realist account could be embedded in or reducible to this ‘empirical picture’, and Joyce acknowledges this. Such an account would be a form of moral naturalism. Joyce concludes that the burden of proof lies with the naturalist to provide a theory or, at least, provide good grounds for believing that such a theory is forthcoming.

The pivotal claim here is a restatement of Gilbert Harman’s challenge. Essentially, Harman argues that a moral judgement can be explained without reference to the truth of the judgement.

If there is no reductive account available explaining how moral facts relate to naturalistic facts, then moral claims cannot be tested, moral theories cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed, and we have no evidence for the existence of moral facts.³⁵

Importantly, Joyce argues, Harman never establishes the antecedent claim. Instead, Harman attempts to form reductive accounts so as to avoid the challenge. Joyce explores Harman’s argument to first question the plausibility of reductive and non-reductive accounts of naturalism, before expanding argument to include non-naturalism. Harman constructs a scenario whereby we observe a group of children pour gasoline on a cat before igniting it, he continues:

... You make a moral judgement immediately and without conscious reasoning, say, that the children are wrong to set the cat on fire. ... In order to explain your making [this judgement], it would be reasonable to assume, perhaps, that the children really are pouring gasoline on a cat and you are seeing them do it. But [there is no] obvious

³⁴ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 195

³⁵ *Ibid.* 184-185

reason to assume anything about “moral facts,” such as that it is really wrong to set the cat on fire. ... Indeed, an assumption about moral facts would seem to be totally irrelevant to the explanation of your making the judgement you make. It would seem that all we need assume is that you have certain more or less well-articulated moral principles that are reflected in the judgements you make, based on your moral sensibility. It seems to be completely irrelevant to our explanation whether your intuitive immediate judgement is true or false.³⁶

If it is true that the judgement itself can be explained in terms of chemistry and physics for example, without recourse to concepts of “wrongness” or even of “cat”, then to attempt to explain why this particular judgement was either right or wrong is unnecessary. Joyce argues that if we have an explanation as to why we believe a particular act was wrong, a reductive and naturalistic explanation as to why a judgement is the way it is, then it is not clear “how wrongness [is] needed to explain anything in the situation, in which case we have no reason to believe that it is a part of this cat-burning episode at all.”³⁷ Because the moral judgement can be explained without appealing to the moral facts, we cannot justifiably assert that the act is morally wrong. This claim is then extended to us having no reason to believe that anything is actually wrong. Judiciously, Joyce critiques this argument on the grounds that naturalism could explain what is wrong and that it is worth considering the case of the naturalist to discover whether any putative justification is in fact a post-hoc justification, in contrast to a post-hoc rationalisation.

Thus a conclusion about moral naturalism is presupposed by the superfluity formulation of the EDA. Joyce begins his consideration of moral naturalism by exploring Robert Richards’ attempt to vindicate morality. Richards first shows how an inference may

³⁶ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

7. Quoted in: Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 185

³⁷ *The Evolution of Morality*. 186

be possible to move from “is” to “ought” by appealing to the “beliefs and practices” of “rational men.” Just as these rational men consider modus ponens a valid argument structure, so too would they agree on a similar kind of justification in ethics. At the core of his argument, Richards argues for a rational stopping point - one that would be fairly intuitive - so as to not lead the questioner in an infinite justificatory regress. Joyce makes the point that there is sense in this argument, but that, “it is not enough to observe that there must be a stopping point somewhere and then choose your favourite contender (one that, incidentally, supports your pet theory).”³⁸ Joyce disagrees with Richards’ foundation, before taking issue with his central attempt to vindicate morality.

... the evidence shows that evolution has, as a matter of fact, constructed human beings to act for the community good; but to act for the community good is what we mean by being moral. Since, therefore, human beings are moral beings – an unavoidable condition produced by evolution - each ought to act for the community good.³⁹

Rottschaefers incorporates this argument into a more succinct statement of Richards position:

1. Evolution produces in human dispositions to act for the community good.
2. Acting for the community good is what we mean by acting morally.
3. Therefore, humans ought to act for the community good.⁴⁰

Richards’ argument may have merit, despite his asking us to take his empirical premises on faith. Joyce counters that the kind of ‘ought’ that Richards produces does not contain the ‘practical oomph’ that a practical morality requires, as the ‘ought’ claims derived are merely

³⁸ Ibid. 158

³⁹ Robert Richards, "A Defense of Evolutionary Ethics," *Biology and Philosophy* 1 (1986). 289

⁴⁰ William Rottschaefers, "Evolutionary Naturalistic Justifications of Morality: A Matter of Faith and Works," *ibid.* 6, no. 3 (1991). 342

predictive – no more instructive than the claim of a physicist that “a particle *ought to* leave a trail of ions in a cloud chamber.”⁴¹

Next, Joyce explores the attempt to use evolutionary biology to vindicate morality by Richmond Campbell. Campbell claims that morality is justified because it is innate, a claim which he argues for empirically. The essential problem with Campbell’s argument is that it can only be justified instrumentally. Take the following passage:

...the argument rests on the normative but non-moral principle that having some morality rather than none is justified for every member of the group if having some morality rather than none overwhelmingly improves the life prospects of everyone in the group. Since the biological explanation for the existence of morality implies that having some morality rather than none overwhelmingly improves the life prospects of everyone in the group, it follows (given the principle just cited) that having some morality rather than none is justified.⁴²

Campbell’s claim is that if the factors which explain the evolution of morality can be identified, then those very factors can at the same time justify the existence of morality. But Campbell’s claim offers no account of the nature of those properties or why we would be inclined to act in such a way that it improves the life prospects of the group. The claim justifies the existence of a morality, but not necessarily a realist one. The instrumentalist justification here lacks *moral clout*.

Finally, Joyce turns to Daniel Dennett’s attempt to provide an account for moral naturalism, which might be reducible to or embedded in the causal evolutionary premise. Joyce argues that Dennett’s work on this particular issue is mostly incoherent and presumptuous, but he turns on a particular phrase:

⁴¹ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 160

⁴² Richmond Campbell, "Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?," *Biology and Philosophy* 11 (1996). 24

Ethics must be *somehow* based on an appreciation of human nature – on a sense of what a human being is or might be, and on what a human being might want to have or want to be. If *that* is naturalism, then naturalism is no fallacy.⁴³

Joyce is quick to reject this claim as it does not align with his definition of naturalism that, “moral properties and relations exist and can be comfortably integrated within a naturalistic view of the world – the kind of world that science can investigate.”⁴⁴ Joyce argues that the attempt to establish the viability of naturalism fails to satisfy his moral clout requirement, and thus he believes the debunking attempt can proceed.⁴⁵

Joyce’s strategy is to show that an evolutionary consideration debunks rather than vindicates morality. He argues that there could be three hypotheses for explaining moral judgements. Hypothesis A, “promises to explain all our moral judgements, leaving us without need to posit any moral facts...unless the moral facts are somehow implicitly buried in hypothesis A.”⁴⁶ He continues that, “[t]he only way that moral facts could be buried in a scientific genealogical hypothesis is if some kind of moral naturalism were true.”⁴⁷ Hypothesis B would be that non-natural moral facts can adequately explain moral judgements, and Hypothesis C that supernatural moral facts could. Since hypothesis B and C posit an extra ontology in the world, and hypothesis A exists as a fully formed non-moral genealogy, then hypothesis B and hypothesis C are explanatorily superfluous.⁴⁸ Joyce’s main contention against naturalism is the inability for a naturalistic theory to demonstrate ‘moral

⁴³ Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). 468

⁴⁴ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 145

⁴⁵ Ultimately, Joyce’s requirement for moral clout seems to be motivated by his discontent with the ‘practical oomph’ of naturalist accounts. If morality is acting in the best interests of the community then Joyce would argue that morality only seems to matter if the interests of the community matter first. I develop this critique and a response in Chapter Three.

⁴⁶ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 209

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ He reinforces that this is dependent on the availability of Hypothesis A: *ibid.* 187

clout' but his objection to non-naturalism is not made explicit.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, he then forms the following argument:

...Once we have a complete non-moral genealogy of moral judgement, if naturalism succeeds non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk, if moral naturalism fails non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk. Thus non-naturalism and supernaturalism suffer most in this argumentative fray, whereas the moral naturalist is defeated only through independent arguments...⁵⁰

Whether or not a completed non-moral genealogy currently exists is debatable, but what is assumed with Joyce's position as a naturalist about reality (not about moral properties) is that such a genealogy *could* exist and that its existence renders moral realism explanatorily superfluous. Again, this all depends on the reasons counting against moral naturalism – a point I return to in chapter four.

It could be said that Ruse uses this form of the EDA as well. He sets up his argument with the claim that, “[t]he theory of the co-evolution of genes and culture can be used to further understand the origin and meaning of the epigenetic rules, including those that effect moral reasoning.”⁵¹ Next, he argues that realists are committed to the notion that morality is both objective and eternal. If this is so, and evolution can potentially change *ethical laws* through genetic evolution, just as other species have vastly different moral laws to humans, then positing the objectivity and the eternal, fixed nature of moral truths is unjustified. The realists have no reason to posit the existence of *extrasomatic* truths when those moral principles could both be explained by evolutionary processes and at any point be changed by them.⁵² Elsewhere, he writes that:

⁴⁹ I return to this in chapter four.

⁵⁰ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 210

⁵¹ Michael Ruse and Edward Wilson, "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," *Philosophy* 61 (1986). 185

⁵² By *extrasomatic*, Ruse and Wilson mean “divinely placed within the brain or else outside of the brain awaiting revelation.” *Ibid.* 186

...the existence of the objective ethics is in no way necessary for a derivation of our belief in an objective ethics from an evolutionary perspective. So, at the very least, what we can say is that an objective ethics is redundant to the evolutionist's case.⁵³

As Joyce rightly identifies, even if evolutionary theory could account for everything which required explanation, in terms of morality, this does not guarantee that moral facts do not exist. If moral facts are among this evolutionary explanation, or implied by it, in terms of a naturalist realism, then the argument falls through. The debunker is first required to show that naturalism *is sunk*, and thus that non-naturalism and supernaturalism are as well.⁵⁴ Once naturalism, non-naturalism and supernaturalism are shown to fail to meet the demands of a moral theory, the non-moral genealogy – the evolutionary account of morality – renders those realist positions superfluous.

The core of the Superfluity Formulation could be written as follows:

- (1) If s's belief that p is fully explained by ϕ , and ϕ neither entails nor presupposes α , then α is explanatorily superfluous.
- (2) s's belief that p is fully explained by ϕ and ϕ neither entails nor presupposes α .
- (3) Therefore, α is explanatorily superfluous.

The truth of the causal premise (2) is vital to the success of this argument. I explore the evidence for this claim in 2.3.

1.3 *The Sensitivity Formulation*

This argument is based on an epistemological theory proposed by Robert Nozick,⁵⁵ though the idea resembles Fred Dretske's account of knowledge.⁵⁶ Faculties which produce reliable

⁵³ Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics." 156

⁵⁴ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 209

⁵⁵ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁵⁶ Fred Dretske, "Epistemic Operators," *Journal of Philosophy* 67, no. 24 (1970).

information are deemed sensitive to truth or falsity, such faculties would include optical or aural faculties. For early hominins to hear a rustle in the grass (indicative of a stalking predator), and for this observation to be generally true, would have been vital to the longevity of that species. General success of the faculty in question in producing true beliefs allowed the species to respond effectively to evolutionary pressure. The process which formed such a faculty was required to be sensitive to truth. Proponents of the sensitivity argument hold that the faculties that generate moral beliefs are insensitive to truth. What is meant by this is that moral faculties differ from optical or aural faculties in the sense that they need not track truth or falsity, but merely provide some kind of advantage.⁵⁷ It seems that the most that one could claim is that it would have been evolutionarily beneficial to cooperate in some way and this statement does not imply that the processes which give rise to moral beliefs are sensitive to truth or falsity.

Given this, Ruse argues “you would believe what you do about right and wrong, irrespective of whether or not a ‘true’ right or wrong existed.”⁵⁸ From here we can construct the sensitivity argument:

1. The best explanation of the origins of our moral beliefs implies that the faculties responsible for the beliefs are insensitive to truth or falsity.
2. Thus, we would believe what we believe about right and wrong irrespective of the truth or falsity of our beliefs.
3. A belief cannot qualify as knowledge if we would believe it to be true even if it were false.
4. Therefore, our moral beliefs do not track truth well enough to count as knowledge

⁵⁷ Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume Two* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 511-12

⁵⁸ Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. 254

Though one may argue on epistemological grounds against (3),⁵⁹ premise (1) will be the focus of my critique. If some of our moral beliefs were required to be true in order to provide an evolutionary advantage, then the sensitivity argument would collapse. This route of argument would be to accept the causal claim that moral beliefs are caused by evolved patterns of belief determination, but resist the implication of truth-insensitivity. Alternatively, one could deny that a sufficient explanation for the origins of our moral beliefs, or even a sufficient explanation for the faculty which produces moral beliefs, exists, thus denying the causal claim altogether.⁶⁰

Derek Parfit describes a sensitivity argument against moral objectivism. The argument has it that moral beliefs would have been advantageous regardless of truth. He begins with the claim that the justification of our moral beliefs resides in the function of the beliefs themselves.⁶¹ He distinguishes between beliefs about the world which are formed perceptually, which he calls *worldly beliefs*, and beliefs which are formed in unreliable ways, such as hypnosis. Certain beliefs or cognitive abilities, he writes, may have formed because such beliefs were “evolutionarily or reproductively advantageous, by helping early humans to survive and reproduce.”⁶² Worldly beliefs, such as the number of lions seen entering a cave, were advantageous if they were mostly true. Moral beliefs, on the other hand, were not advantageous *because* they were true, but because they caused us to have beliefs which were advantageous. With the advantage of possessing these moral beliefs, Parfit observes that natural selection makes us disposed to have them.⁶³ The advantage of moral beliefs would therefore exist whether or not the moral belief itself was true. As moral beliefs would be

⁵⁹ For such a line of argument, see: Saul Kripke, *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jonathan Vogel, "Reliabilism Leveled," *Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 11 (2000).

⁶⁰ This will be the focus of chapter 2, section 2.

⁶¹ Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume Two*. 511

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* 512

believed whether or not they were true, they are not sensitive to truth and thus do not count as knowledge.

Ruse writes, “[g]iven two worlds, identical except that one has an objective morality and the other does not, the humans therein would think and act in exactly the same ways.”⁶⁴ He considers the possibility of an alien intelligent species, who possess moral rules which might include or justify “cannibalism, incest or the love of darkness and decay” – things which us as human beings would not consider central to being moral. In addition to this, if we were “savanna-dwelling, carnivorous man-apes” we might have an entirely different notion of what is right. He concludes, “[y]ou would believe what you do about right and wrong, irrespective of whether or not a ‘true’ right and wrong existed!”⁶⁵ Granting truth in the premises, the aforementioned conclusion is reached: moral beliefs do not count as knowledge or, more specifically in Ruse’s case, a belief in an objective, ultimate foundation for moral beliefs is not justified. In, *The Myth of Morality* Richard Joyce utilises this formulation also:

Suppose that the actual world contains real categorical requirements – the kind that would be necessary to render moral discourse true. In such a world we would *still* be disposed to make these judgements (most generally, to believe that categorical requirements exist), just as they did in the first world, for natural selection will make it so. What this shows is that the process that generates moral judgements exhibits an independence relation between judgement and truth, and these judgements are thus unjustified.⁶⁶

Another version of this argument is put forward by Karl Schafer (2010). He begins by asserting that the best explanation of the genealogy of our moral beliefs does not imply that, in their development, these beliefs were sensitive to truth. From here, he writes:

⁶⁴ Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. 254

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 163

1. We should believe that their development was unlikely to be sensitive to whether or not they were reliable.
2. If we believe that the process by which some faculty developed was unlikely to be sensitive to whether or not this faculty was reliable, and we do not have any evidence independent of the faculty that it is reliable, then we should not trust the faculty.
3. We do not have any evidence independent of our normative faculties that they are reliable.
4. Therefore, we should not trust them.⁶⁷

Each sensitivity argument is appealing to Nozickian or Dretskesian knowledge conditions to arrive at the conclusion that moral beliefs which are the product of insensitive formative processes are not knowledge.

1.4 *The Implausibility Formulation*

Sharon Street, among many others, construes non-naturalist moral realism as the view that moral facts exist in a sort of mind-independent realm and that our access to these facts is achieved through the exercise of our intuitive evaluative judgements.⁶⁸ Given that it is widely accepted that such intuitive judgements would be the product of a fitness-tracking evolutionary story, the question is raised as to how such judgements have come to coincide with a mind-independent realm of truth. The target of this argument, as Street would have it, are those moral facts or values which are constitutively independent of our attitudes.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Karl Schafer, "Evolution and Normative Scepticism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 3 (2010). 480

⁶⁸ Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Michael Ridge, "Moral Non-Naturalism," Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/moral-non-naturalism>.

⁶⁹ Sharon Street, "Constructivism About Reasons," in *Oxford Studies in Meta-Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The argument is sketched in an analogy by David Enoch (2010). There is a man named Josh who believes a series of things about a remote village in Nepal. Most of Josh's beliefs about the village are in fact true. The analogy describes a "striking correlation" between Josh's beliefs with regards to the village and the truths about the village. It is at this point that we would seek an explanation for the striking correlation - perhaps Josh had visited the village or read about it. It would seem miraculous to suppose that Josh had never visited Nepal or come to know any facts about this remote village through any credible source, and yet hold beliefs which were true. This is of course analogous to the unlikely possibility that evolution, a process which combines random mutations and unpredictable selective forces, brought us to the door of moral truth by a matter of luck. As Enoch puts it, "the meta-normative realist is committed to an unexplained striking correlation, and this may be too much to believe."⁷⁰ The unexplained coincidental link between these beliefs and truth underlies the implausibility formation of the EDA.

To provide a formal structure for the challenge, Street formulates the *Darwinian Dilemma*. Our shared incredulity in the face of Enoch's scenario is the bedrock of Street's argument against moral realism. The argument is posed as having two *horns*:

First Horn: Moral realists can assert that there is a relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.

Or

Second Horn: Moral realists can assert that there is no such relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.

Essentially, the scientific explanation for morality suggests that there is no special relation between the evolutionary forces which shaped our evaluative beliefs and the evaluative truths

⁷⁰ David Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Best Understand It, and How to Cope with It," *Philosophical Studies* 148, no. 3 (2010). 422

posited in the realist account.⁷¹ To embrace the first horn, realists must reject the best explanation we seem to possess for where our moral beliefs came from. To embrace the second horn, realists are no longer required to reject the causal claim, but are now faced with the challenge of explaining the relationship between evaluative beliefs and evaluative truths. On this account, Street argues, even if such truths existed the off-track nature of those evolutionary forces which shaped our evaluative beliefs means that we are not justified in believing that our beliefs are coinciding with those truths. So, embracing the second horn seems to lead the realist to metaethical scepticism. Street argues, “[r]ealism about value, then, has no escape: it is forced to accept either the tracking account of the relation or else the view that there is no relation at all, and both of these options are unacceptable.”⁷²

David Copp embraces the first horn. He attempts to answer Street’s claim that, “insofar as realism asserts any relation between selective pressures on our evaluative judgements and evaluative truths, the position is forced to give a tracking account of this relation.”⁷³ He argues that it might be plausible to suggest that distorting evolutionary forces could still track evaluative truths with reasonable accuracy. He gives an account called society-centred moral realism. The central idea is that “a basic moral *proposition* is true only if a corresponding moral *standard* or *norm* is relevantly justified or authoritative.”⁷⁴ A moral standard is relevantly justified in that “its currency in the social code of the relevant society would best contribute to the society’s ability to meet its needs – including its needs for physical continuity, internal harmony and cooperative interaction, and peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbours.”⁷⁵ Concepts of justice or certain virtues then, might

⁷¹ I have adopted Street’s use of ‘evaluative beliefs’ and ‘evaluative truths’ here. For now, these terms suffice in encapsulating what we mean when we say, ‘moral belief’ and ‘moral truth.’ I explore issues related to the ambiguity of these terms in chapter three.

⁷² Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006). 136

⁷³ *Ibid.* 135

⁷⁴ David Copp, “Four Epistemological Challenges to Ethical Naturalism: Naturalized Epistemology and the First-Person Perspective,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2000). 68

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 69

be understood as those concepts which a particular society forbids or endorses in the interest of its ends. Street responds to this strategy arguing that Copp relies on his intuitions about what the needs of that particular society might be and thus what would constitute its moral standards or norms.⁷⁶ The first horn of the dilemma seems plausible as belief-forming dispositions yielding the most evolutionarily beneficial behaviours were selected for the reproductive advantages they bestowed upon hominins who possessed them. Hominins with the dispositions out-reproduce any hominins that would lack them. This process would occur irrespective of the ‘metanormative’ truth of any moral beliefs formed. So, if realists are to embrace this first horn, they must propose an account of the tracking relation without presupposing the moral norms or standards they already believe.⁷⁷

The Second Horn is built on the sheer, perhaps unfathomable, coincidence that our evolutionary history has shaped moral beliefs and that these beliefs align with moral truths. We seem to have no justification for holding a position that involves a coincidence on this scale. This conclusion, Street believes, leads to a sceptical position about moral truth itself. She writes,

The key point to see about this option is that if one takes it, then the forces of natural selection must be viewed as a purely distorting influence on our evaluative judgments, having pushed us in evaluative directions that have nothing whatsoever to do with the evaluative truth. On this view, allowing our evaluative judgments to be shaped by evolutionary influences is analogous to setting out for Bermuda and letting the course of your boat be determined by the wind and tides: just as the push of the wind and tides on your boat has nothing to do with where you want to go, so the historical push

⁷⁶ Sharon Street, "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About," *Philosophical Issues* 18 (2008).

⁷⁷ The attempt to continue this line of argument is founded on the premise that Street's justificatory requirement sets an unmeetable challenge for realists, and that *lowering the bar* permits a number of reasonable accounts of the tracking relation. See Chapter 2, Section 3.

of natural selection on the content of our evaluative judgments has nothing to do with evaluative truth. Of course every now and then, the wind and tides might happen to deposit someone's boat on the shores of Bermuda. Similarly, every now and then, Darwinian pressures might have happened to push us toward accepting an evaluative judgment that accords with one of the realist's independent evaluative truths. But this would be purely a matter of chance, since by hypothesis there is no relation between the forces at work and the "destination" in question, namely evaluative truth.⁷⁸

There is room for improvement of this view, as it is not true that a coincidence implies that event couldn't have happened naturally, or that we should question that the event happened at all in the face of the small probability of its happening. Roger White (2010) argues in this case that we should believe the coincidence occurred if we can find evidence that the results are instantiated.⁷⁹ The burden is supposedly on the realist to provide these reasons.⁸⁰ This epistemic claim is thus at the heart of Street's Darwinian Dilemma:

Epistemic Claim: If it would be an extraordinary coincidence if our beliefs about x turned out to be correct, then we shouldn't believe that there are objects of type x .

So, the first question that comes from this horn of the dilemma is whether an explanation for the coincidence is possible. If it is possible, we need to show how that explanation exists and how it is made true independently of the phenomena which is susceptible to debunking. That is, how we might justify objects of type x independently of our pre-existing beliefs about x . Another question that arises is whether the realist must be committed to accepting that the coincidence took place at all.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 121-22

⁷⁹ Roger White, "You Just Believe That Because..." *Philosophical Perspectives* 24, no. 1 (2010).

⁸⁰ I return to the coincidence challenge in chapter 5.

⁸¹ Although the realists would not need to completely deny the causal influence for the debunking challenge to fail. Realists could deny that evolutionary forces shaped *all* of our moral beliefs. See Chapter 2, Section 2.

Enoch (2010), believes this argument can be improved. Before examining this improvement, however, I must momentarily digress. Enoch's improvement looks at expanding the argumentative reach of Street's argument by including not just externalists about epistemic justification, but internalists also.

The debate regarding epistemological internalism and externalism seeks to identify the manner in which a justified true belief is formed – either through internally accessible facts or some form of fact external to the believer. Poston writes that *internal* can refer to “one's bodily states, one's brain states, one's mental states (if these are different than brain states), or one's reflectively accessible states.”⁸² Externalism, on the other hand, can be reduced to a mere denial of the internalist position and that more than just mental states can operate as justifiers.⁸³ This review of Street's argument is an important one as, her argument described above only attacked the reliability of moral beliefs formed through evolution. This notion of reliability, being an externalist method of justification is of too narrow a scope for her to then debunk moral beliefs entirely. Internalists remain unaffected by Street's argument and, though it is not mentioned by Enoch, so do other externalists about justification who do not solely identify with reliabilism.⁸⁴

Enoch writes, “[p]erhaps, if internalists are right about epistemic justification, I can justifiably form a belief using an unreliable belief forming method. But even if this is so, I can't justifiably form a belief using what *I know* is an unreliable method.” With this, he constructs his attack on internalist moral realists, “[k]nowing that there is no correlation between even his own normative beliefs and the normative truths, he can no longer hold these normative beliefs justifiably (and so, perhaps nor can he hold them as beliefs at all). The price

⁸² Ted Poston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology " in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006).

⁸³ George Pappas, "Internalist Vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014).

⁸⁴ Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Best Understand It, and How to Cope with It." §2.3

of denying the correlation is scepticism.” These arguments do not necessarily allude to a distinct moral nihilism (that there are no moral facts of any sort), but rather a kind of moral scepticism (that we should doubt our capacity to have moral knowledge).

Though Street’s general challenge has been mapped, there is an important weakness which Street recognizes may bring down her entire argument. Building upon her analogy regarding the boat in Bermuda, influenced by the *off-track* influence of wind and tides, she writes, “just as a compass and a little steering can correct for the influence of the wind and tides on the course of one’s boat, so rational reflection can correct for the influence of selective pressures on our values.”⁸⁵ But Street maintains that illegitimate influence existed since the very beginning in the formation of our evaluative capacity. Thus, rational reflection is just “a process of assessing evaluative judgements that are mostly off the mark in terms of others that are mostly off the mark.”⁸⁶ She continues:

In rational reflection, one does not stand completely apart from one’s starting fund of evaluative judgements: rather, one uses them, reasons in terms of them, holds some of them up for examination in light of others... Thus, if the fund of evaluative judgements with which human reflection began was thoroughly contaminated with illegitimate influence... then the tools of rational reflection were equally contaminated, for the latter are always just a subset of the former. ... reflection of this kind isn’t going to get one any closer to evaluative truth, any more than sorting through contaminated materials with contaminated tools is going to get one closer to purity.⁸⁷

The only option remaining, Street suggests, is to adopt a theory which is mind-dependent because this construal allows for the possibility of evaluative error resulting from

⁸⁵ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 154

⁸⁶ Ibid. 124

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the influence of evaluative attitudes.⁸⁸ For Street, the search for reflective equilibrium operates within this realm where evaluative judgements are taken only from the poisoned well of evolutionary influence, where evaluative truth is a function of what emerges from this process and thus, is not ultimately true. This is damning for the realist because:

The realist understands the evaluative truths to be prior, in the sense that evolutionary causes are understood to have selected us to track those independent truths. The antirealist, on the other hand, understands the evolutionary causes to be prior, in the sense that these causes (along with many others) gave us our starting fund of evaluative attitudes, and evaluative truth is understood to be a function of those attitudes.⁸⁹

This raises an interesting problem. Having noted the seriousness of this objection to her Darwinian dilemma, Street formulates a new challenge to the moral realist to make up for the weakness of her debunking argument. To effectively eliminate the possibility of correcting the off-track *starting fund* of beliefs through some process of rational reflection, Street must extend her causal claim to reasons which might count in favour of moral beliefs. This requires demonstrating that the tools of rational reflection are not distinct from the contaminated starting fund of beliefs. This is a significant task because rational reflection need only be partly autonomous from the content of those beliefs which were subject to evolutionary inheritance to dissolve the challenge. Street must provide reasons for believing that this level of influence has shaped not just the content of our moral beliefs, but our capacity for rational reflection. In addition to this, Street owes an etiological account of how reasons which count in favour of moral beliefs obtain purely *within* the domain of morality without the very *universal acid* of her debunking argument spreading to reasons which allow

⁸⁸ That is, stance-dependent or attitude-dependent as opposed to stance-independent or mind-independent. Metaethicists often use the terms, stance, mind, and attitude interchangeably in this sense.

⁸⁹ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 154

one to construct scientific claims – such as the causal claim of the debunking argument itself.⁹⁰

At the risk of oversimplification, the following argument could be deemed the core structure of the Implausibility formulation:

1. S's belief that P is explained by ϕ
2. ϕ is an off-track process
3. Given (2), realists can assert that:
 - a. there is a relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth, or
 - b. there is no such relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.
4. (a) is implausible because it is not empirically supported.
5. (b) is implausible because we are committed to asserting that our moral beliefs and mind-independent truth coincide by coincidences, and we are not justified in believing in the product of coincidental doxastic processes.
6. Therefore, S's belief is unjustified because both 3(a) and 3(b) are implausible.

1.5 *The Deep Structure*

I will now attempt to identify an overarching EDA by analysing the deep structure of the argument itself. A distinction between undermining and rebutting facts is vital to maintaining clarity when exploring the deep structure of the EDA. To use a rebutting argument is to provide counter evidence for a belief on the same explanatory level. To use an undermining argument is to say that a belief cannot be true because the mechanisms that produced it are

⁹⁰ I explore the wider issues pertaining to this challenge in Chapter two, Section 2 and 4

unreliable. If I were to argue that all apples were blue, you could rebut me by showing me a red apple. If you wished to debunk me, you would be required to show that the genealogy of my belief that apples are blue is, in some way, unreliable or incorrect, which led to my corresponding incorrect belief. If the causal origins of a belief are shown to be an *undermining defeater*, the belief is defeated.

Joyce provided the often-cited example involving a belief pill, with the aim of capturing the general debunking strategy:

Suppose that there were a pill that makes you believe that Napoleon won Waterloo, and another one that makes you believe that he lost [. . .] Now imagine that you are proceeding through life happily believing that Napoleon lost Waterloo (as, indeed, you are), and then you discover that at some point in your past someone slipped you a “Napoleon lost Waterloo” belief pill. It is not a matter of your learning of the existence such pills and having no way of knowing whether you have ever taken one; rather, we are imagining that you somehow discover beyond any shred of doubt that your belief is the product of such a pill. Should this undermine your faith in your belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo? Of course it should.⁹¹

The argument begins with a belief about a certain state of affairs. The conclusion of the argument calls for us to abandon that belief, following the discovery that the belief is the product of a process which does not accurately track states of affairs. This example uses an historical case which refers to a battle which took place in present day Belgium, a battle which Napoleon did in fact lose and which marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The factuality of this belief is available to us – we have a number of historical documents and artefacts of various kinds which give us good reasons to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo. Through this analogy, the factuality of this belief is available to us only from a *third-person*

⁹¹ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 179

perspective. From this perspective, we have full knowledge that Joyce has plucked this example from history for illustrative purposes and asked us to alter a feature of our pre-existing beliefs about it. We must however take the *first-person* perspective for the argument to go through. On this view, we have the belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo but discover that someone slipped us this “Napoleon lost Waterloo” belief pill. Our discovery of the formative processes behind our belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo should give us cause for concern about the accuracy of that belief. But hold your horses, we need not abandon our Napoleonic beliefs on this information alone.

The aspiring debunker must take care to specify the target belief of this pill. It must be made clear just what beliefs are contained within the target belief, what beliefs might be inferred from the target belief, and what other beliefs might allow us to infer from their own truth that the target belief is justified. Facing these considerations allows us to understand the implications of the belief pill and how these analogous considerations arise in the debunking argument against moral realism.

The target of the pill seems to be relatively clear, but we rarely have beliefs which exist as standalone propositions which the success of this example seems to require. What does it mean to debunk the belief, Napoleon lost Waterloo? To fully appreciate that our belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo is unjustified because of this belief pill, we probably require a number of other beliefs which give this focal belief any meaning in the first place. For example, we believe that Napoleon was a French Emperor, that a battle took place in a region called Waterloo in 1815, and that the armies which Napoleon commanded lost that battle.⁹² These beliefs, let’s call them the necessary beliefs (N-beliefs), must appear in the set of beliefs which are targeted by this pill. If the belief pill didn’t target the Battle of Waterloo which occurred in 1815 (as opposed to another battle of Waterloo in a different year) or the

⁹² I will be relatively relaxed about the finer historical details of this event in the interest of clarity.

actual Napoleon Bonaparte, the debunking attempt fails. I will call this condition pertaining to the specific target of the debunking argument, its *scope*.⁹³

Next, the aspiring debunker must make clear what beliefs might be inferred from the focal belief, Napoleon lost Waterloo, because those beliefs would be undermined as well. Let's suppose that we had built upon our false belief: we came to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo *by a very small margin*. A belief about the degree of the loss at Waterloo makes no sense without a loss at Waterloo to refer to. So, the discovery that our belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo* was the product of a belief pill, means that our auxiliary belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo by a very small margin* is built upon an insecure epistemic foundation. This consideration regards the debunking argument's *corrosiveness*. A debunking argument with a narrow *scope*, so a very specific target belief or set of beliefs, will probably corrode fewer auxiliary beliefs and thus have less of an impact.⁹⁴ A debunking argument with a wide scope will likely corrode more auxiliary beliefs and thus have a greater impact.⁹⁵

Finally, the aspiring debunker must ensure that beliefs which are outside of the *scope* would not allow one to reason from them and consequently establish those targeted beliefs by some other means. For example, suppose we had the belief that Prussian forces won the battle of Waterloo against Napoleons' armies. A pill which targeted the N-beliefs I mentioned earlier would be ineffective, as even upon discovery that our N-beliefs were tainted, we could

⁹³Vavova (2014) makes a similar distinction and argues that it follows an inverse rule, "the potential strength of a debunking argument is inversely proportional to its ambition." See, Katia Vavova, "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Volume 9*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). 20

⁹⁴ If the belief pill targeted my belief that Napoleon had an inferiority complex, it would impact only a very small portion (if any) of my pre-existing auxiliary beliefs about Napoleon. However, if the belief pill targeted my belief that Napoleon was shorter than usual and behaviourally overcompensated for this, it might corrode the auxiliary belief that Napoleon had an inferiority complex. The former is a narrow scope and the latter is a wider scope.

⁹⁵ Debunking arguments as having a corrosive effect comes from Dennett's book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, where Dennett likens Darwinian evolution to a "universal acid" which "eats through just about every traditional concept, and leaves in its wake a revolutionized worldview, with most of the old landmarks still recognisable, but transformed in fundamental ways." Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. 63

deduce from our untainted beliefs regarding the Prussian forces that Napoleon *must have* lost Waterloo. If I were to widen my scope so as to include this belief regarding the success of the Prussian forces, to safeguard against the failure I have just demonstrated, I must further account for those beliefs regarding the German forces, the allies of the German forces, then the War of the Seventh Coalition, then the French revolution, and so on.⁹⁶ Joyce acknowledges this, but doesn't seem to notice the gravity of this consideration in the moral case. He concludes his belief pill analogy with the claim that, "unless you can find some concrete evidence either in favour or against the belief you should cease to believe this thing..."⁹⁷ For now, I will refer to this as the problem of available evidence. I will explore it further in a moment.

An airtight rendition of the belief pill story would have to include a condition to the effect that we could immediately counter the possibility of seeking concrete evidence external to influence of the pill. Suppose that, contained within the package belief "Napoleon lost Waterloo" were all our beliefs about Napoleon and Waterloo. There are two options available to the aspiring debunker in terms of formulating the causal premise. If the pill leads us to *see* properties which confer truth upon any belief relating to Napoleon and Waterloo, and we discover that the pill has had this effect, then our belief "Napoleon lost Waterloo" is debunked. This would require that our capacity to *see* those properties is provided *only* by a *faculty* or *sense* which is directly influenced by the effects of the pill.⁹⁸ Alternatively, the aspiring debunker could argue that the package belief, "Napoleon lost Waterloo" serves as the *starting fund* for any belief pertaining to Napoleon and Waterloo, and thus any belief

⁹⁶ This makes clear a secondary issue pertaining to wide scope debunking arguments, see Chapter Two, Section Four.

⁹⁷ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 180

⁹⁸ To demonstrate that those properties do not obtain outside of this faculty or sense, we would have to face each reason we have for believing that Napoleon lost Waterloo and connect our confidence in those reasons back to this faculty.

which draws from that starting fund is drawn from the poisoned well.⁹⁹ Either option means that there are no alternate justifications that can rescue those beliefs, because those justifications contain the concepts of Napoleon and Waterloo which I am unable to interpret objectively.

In a footnote, Joyce admits that his Napoleon example contains the possibility of incoherence, but that “even impossible thought experiments may serve a useful pedagogic or intuition-priming role.”¹⁰⁰ Having extracted features of the general debunking strategy from this example, I agree that the case of Napoleon can be pedagogical. But in time I will show how the issues pertaining to the scope and corrosiveness of the Napoleon case carry over to the moral debunking strategy. Before I develop these issues, let’s return to the problem of available evidence.

Kahane (2011) structures a general debunking argument as follows:

1. S’s belief that P is explained by ϕ
2. ϕ is an off-track process
3. Therefore, S’s belief is unjustified

It may be helpful to move away from the Napoleonic war example and devise one that more closely correlates to evolutionary debunking. Consider the new case of Jack who possesses a unicorn gene, a gene which is responsible for distorting the views of its possessors and making them likely to believe that unicorns exist. Here is an argument debunking Jack:

1. Jack believes in unicorns.
2. Jack’s belief that unicorns exist is caused by the expression of a unicorn gene.
3. Expression of a unicorn gene is an off-track process.

⁹⁹ This would require that any ‘concrete evidence’ we find elsewhere can be traced back to the starting fund. I have just outlined Joyce and Street’s causal claims respectively. I return to these accounts in 2.2

¹⁰⁰ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 242

4. Therefore, Jack's belief is unjustified.

Here (2) is a causal premise and (3) is an epistemic one. (2) has it that the cause of Jack's belief is the expression of his unicorn gene. (3) has it that belief produced in this way does not reliably track the truth. In addition to the causal and epistemic premises, Kahane stresses the importance of a further premise. He states, "our understanding of the causal premise... needs to rule out what we might call post-hoc justification."¹⁰¹ Say that Jack seeks to reinforce his belief in unicorns by looking for evidence of them. Kahane's further premise is vital to understanding whether or not any such evidence is a post-hoc justification (PHJ) or a post-hoc rationalisation (PHR). Consider this argument.

1. Jack believes in Unicorns.
2. Jack's belief that Unicorns exist is explained by the expression of his unicorn gene.
3. Expression of a unicorn gene is an off-track process
4. Expression of the unicorn gene leads Jack to look for evidence of unicorns, and indeed he finds compelling evidence for their existence.
5. Therefore, Jack's belief is justified. (It is justified post-hoc.)

Jack's belief in unicorns is caused by an off-track process. But the evidence for his belief that he produces after the fact of it really does justify his belief.¹⁰² Jack is epistemically lucky that the off-track process hit the truth, in that it motivated him to find independent evidence for his belief. In this case premise (2) and (3) no longer provide an undermining defeater of Jack's belief. However, the sophisticated debunker is aware of this possibility and thus would

¹⁰¹ Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Nous* 45, no. 1 (2011). 106

¹⁰² This version of the argument invites the subsidiary that since Jack's belief is insensitive it is not a candidate for knowledge. Jack would believe in unicorns regardless of what evidence he finds, so he cannot be said to truly know that there are unicorns. However, there are good reasons to resist such an argument. The idea that sensitivity is necessary for knowledge leads to counterintuitive results, including 'abominable conjunctions' such as, "George knows that he has hands, but he doesn't know that he's not the handless victim of a Cartesian demon". Considerations such as these lead most contemporary epistemologists to reject sensitivity conditions on knowledge. See, Jonathan Ichikawa and Matthias Steup, "The Analysis of Knowledge," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2017). §5.1

try to show that (3) necessitates (\sim 4) in that the possible justification either isn't possible, or through some degree of examination, is insufficient.

Consider this argument.

1. Jack believes in unicorns.
2. Jack's belief that unicorns exist is explained by expression of a unicorn gene.
3. Expression of a unicorn gene is an off-track process.
4. Expression of the unicorn gene leads Jack to study unicorns. He finds what he takes to be evidence of them in history books. In fact, however, what he sees in these books are just horses with hats on. However, he believes that he has found solid evidence for his belief in unicorns.
5. Jack's belief remains unjustified. (His putative justification is in fact a post-hoc rationalization).

In this form Jack is not justified in his belief at all. Jack's arguments for his beliefs are post-hoc rationalizations due to the nature of the evidence he adduces. Perhaps Jack's willingness to believe that the hatted horses were unicorns is increased by the fact that he possesses the unicorn gene, but what Kahane's distinction stresses is that this willingness-to-believe is *exclusively* the reason for the belief. Kahane shows that the debunking argument cannot clearly decide the nature of Jack's belief without a premise to the effect that all post-hoc reflection on the belief is a rationalization, not a justification. I will call this stipulation the post-hoc rationalization premise. It is a strong premise which introduces important vocabulary for understanding the problem of available evidence.¹⁰³

An important final distinction, as I mentioned earlier, is between *epistemic* and *metaphysical* debunking. Where epistemological debunking arguments seek to undermine the

¹⁰³ I return to this in 2.1

justification we have for our moral beliefs or to assert that moral beliefs do not in some way count as knowledge, metaphysical debunking arguments posit that moral beliefs aren't true. Joyce calls the former *justification-debunking* and the latter *truth-debunking*.¹⁰⁴ Other more specific distinctions include the claim that debunking occurs upon the discovery of the off-track premise or that simply in the face of evolution, moral judgements cannot be independently justified.¹⁰⁵ All of these distinctions are important and have allowed for a number of interesting sub-discussions, but for now I will be considering the debunking argument in its most general justificatory form.

With this in mind, we could spell out a general version of an evolutionary debunking argument in this way.

1. Moral beliefs are formed and supported only through unreliable doxastic processes.
2. We are not justified in our beliefs formed only through unreliable processes.
3. Moral beliefs are not justified.

Conclusion

Let us take stock of the considerations I have adduced so far.

The evolutionary debunking argument comes from the attempt to integrate findings from evolutionary science into metaethical debate. It offers an undercutting defeater, as opposed to a rebutting defeater, of the moral realist's claim that belief in objective moral truths is justified. The EDA draws on the discovery that only some beliefs are likely to have emerged from cognitive processes formed via on-track belief forming processes. The debate which emerges from this observation centres around the question of which beliefs are formed via on-track belief forming processes and which are not. The EDA against metaethical

¹⁰⁴ Richard Joyce, "The Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems in Philosophy*, ed. J. Feinberg and R Shafer-Landau (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ Hallvard Lillehammer, "Debunking Morality: Evolutionary Naturalism and Moral Error Theory," *Biology and Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2003).

realism carries the charge that moral beliefs were, at best, instrumental for our evolution, and that our moral beliefs are not necessarily made true by any feature of the world. Broadly, this is the evolutionary debunking manoeuvre. After surveying the literature, I argued that there seems to be at least four different ways of forming the argument.

The Non-Foundational Formulation seeks to debunk the claim of an objective foundation to morality by arguing that morality is the result of the non-truth tracking genealogy of the natural selection of our moral sense. The Superfluity Formulation appeals to ontological parsimony and the empirical claim of a completed non-moral genealogy of morality. The Sensitivity Formulation argues through a truth conditional theory of knowledge that moral beliefs do not count as knowledge given their status conferred from their evolutionary origins. The Implausibility Formulation is a two-pronged attack on the justifications offered by realists in the face of the debunking argument. Each of these arguments have now been introduced and described. The important questions which have arisen in the face of these formulations are discussed in chapter two.

A more rigorous portrayal of each formulation requires moving beyond the EDAs themselves and into the surrounding literature to which the debunkers refer. I began this analysis with a discussion of the deep structure of the evolutionary debunking argument. I followed Joyce in his example of Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo, whereby we are to imagine (disregarding the actuality of its truth or falsity) that at some point we were slipped a pill which has led us to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo. The discovery that our belief comes from the belief pill is supposedly analogous to our discovery that our moral beliefs have come from off-track formative processes of our moral faculties. Just as a pill alone provides no reasonable grounds for believing that Napoleon lost in the battle of Waterloo, so too does the etiology of our moral beliefs provide no reasonable grounds for believing that

moral facts are true mind-independently. I argued that there are three important clarifications to be made in such an argument.

Firstly, I asked what it means to debunk the target belief, *Napoleon lost Waterloo*. To fully appreciate that our belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo is unjustified because of this belief pill, we probably require a number of other beliefs which give this focal belief any meaning in the first place. For example, we believe that Napoleon was a French Emperor, that a battle took place in a region called Waterloo in 1815, and that the armies which Napoleon commanded lost that battle. I named these other beliefs the necessary beliefs (N-beliefs), since they must appear in the set of beliefs which are targeted by this pill for the debunking of them to make any sense. If the belief pill didn't target the Battle of Waterloo which occurred in 1815 (as opposed to another battle of Waterloo in a different year) or the *actual* Napoleon Bonaparte, then the attempt to debunk my belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo fails. I called this first condition the *scope* of the EDA.

Next, I argued that the aspiring debunker must be weary of how widely they set the scope of the EDA. Beliefs which are built upon the target belief are toppled by its undermining. I proposed the example that we came to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo *by a very small margin*. A belief about the degree of the loss at Waterloo makes no sense without a loss at Waterloo to refer to. So, the discovery that our belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo* was the product of a belief pill, means that our auxiliary belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo by a very small margin* is built upon an insecure epistemic foundation and is thus, by extension, unjustified. I called this consideration the debunking argument's *corrosiveness*.

Finally, I posed the question of how we are to understand those beliefs which are outside of a debunking argument's scope yet might provide a means for understanding and synthesising those beliefs which are within the scope. I gave the example of our belief that Prussian forces won the battle of Waterloo against Napoleons' armies. A pill which targeted

the N-beliefs I mentioned earlier would be ineffective, as even upon discovery that our N-beliefs were tainted, we could deduce from our untainted beliefs regarding the Prussian forces that Napoleon *must have* lost Waterloo. If I were to widen my scope so as to include this belief regarding the success of the Prussian forces, to safeguard against the failure I have just demonstrated, I must further account for those beliefs regarding the German forces, the allies of the German forces, then the War of the Seventh Coalition, then the French revolution, and so on. We might even look to the arrangements of states today and deduce something further about the outcome of the war. Either the debunker continually expands the scope of their EDA until all this information is similarly contained within the scope, or their EDA is rendered ineffective. I called this the problem of available evidence. I showed that Joyce was seemingly aware of this condition when he wrote that, “unless you can find some concrete evidence either in favour or against the belief you should cease to believe this thing...”¹⁰⁶ It is precisely this search for alternative evidence which makes up the ongoing debate between realists and anti-realists. The problem of available evidence reveals my central contention with the evolutionary debunking argument. I now turn to this issue and other significant responses to the argument.

¹⁰⁶ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 180

CHAPTER TWO: RESPONSES TO THE EDA

In this chapter I consider a series of problems facing the debunking strategy. I recount prominent responses to the debunking argument and explore the literature surrounding each response. These arguments and the strategies which underly them inform the responses I develop later in this thesis. I begin by setting out the otiosity argument. In 2.2, putting the otiosity argument to one side, I face the ‘Darwinian Hypothesis’ (the claim that our moral beliefs were formed or emerged from some evolutionary process and that that process was not truth-tracking) head on. In 2.3, I explore the work of the realists who seek to respond to the debunking argument by accepting the Darwinian Hypothesis. In 2.4, I set out a challenge set by realists which calls into question the problem of scope in the debunking strategy. In this final section, with the roots of the self-undermining challenge exposed, I show that the problem runs deeper than previously thought. This sets the stage for Chapter Three.

2.1 *The Otiosity Argument*

In Chapter One, I set out Kahane’s post-hoc rationalisation (PHR) and post-hoc justification (PHJ) distinction through the following case:

1. Jack believes in Unicorns.
2. Jack’s belief that Unicorns exist is explained by the expression of his unicorn gene.
3. Expression of a unicorn gene is an off-track process
4. Expression of the unicorn gene leads Jack to look for evidence of unicorns, and indeed he finds compelling evidence for their existence.
5. Therefore, Jack’s belief is justified. (It is justified post-hoc.)

I showed that the post-hoc rationalisation model, which serves as the foundation of the debunking strategy is as follows:

1. Jack believes in unicorns.

2. Jack's belief that unicorns exist is explained by expression of a unicorn gene.
3. Expression of a unicorn gene is an off-track process.
4. Expression of the unicorn gene leads Jack to study unicorns. He finds what he takes to be evidence of them in history books. In fact, however, what he sees in these books are just horses with hats on. However, he believes that he has found solid evidence for his belief in unicorns.
5. Jack's belief remains unjustified. (His putative justification is in fact a post-hoc rationalization.)

The central premise for the debunker is that the causal origins of our beliefs track fitness and not truth. The problem of otiosity arises out of the many possible alternative grounds we may have for our beliefs. The problem of available evidence which I discussed in the case of Napoleon plays out here through Kahane's distinction. What is required of the debunker, without begging the question, is to show that the other grounds one has for a belief are insufficient for knowledge or justification. One must rule out that available evidence first, in order for it to not be a problem. Kahane highlights the importance of a hidden premise that all available grounds for a debunked belief are post-hoc rationalisations rather than justifications. As quoted earlier, he writes that "our understanding of the causal premise... needs to rule out what we might call post-hoc justification."¹⁰⁷ To establish that available grounds of belief are not justifications and are instead rationalisations, I will argue, is not to debunk at all. Simply put, this is to shift the argument from an undermining argument to a rebutting one.

The otiosity argument holds that the mere existence of a possible post-hoc justification means that the EDA cannot run. This is because debunkers cannot rule out the

¹⁰⁷ Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments."

possibility of a PHJ without securing the very anti-realist conclusion they seek to establish with the EDA. Debunkers can't rule out extant philosophical justifications of moral realism, except through rebutting arguments, which renders the undermining attempt otiose.

To demonstrate through the running analogy, I could act as if I aspired to debunk Jack myself. The first step of my debunking process, following Kahane, would be to assess every ground Jack might have for his belief in Unicorns. This step is vital as if it shows that Jack is justified in his belief, then I cannot continue my debunking attempt (I must rule out the possibility of post-hoc justification). I find that Jack is grounding his belief in three history books - these are three separate books which all claim that Unicorns exist. After my study of the validity of these sources, I find strong justification that the information in these books was fabricated and that the photos were tampered with. This would be an exercise of rebutting facts. A simple admission from the authors stating the falsehoods would be enough to deem the entirety of Jack's grounds for belief as rationalisations. I would have thus established that Jack has no reason to believe that unicorns exist. From this point, excited by my knowledge that I can now construct my debunking argument (knowing already that it will succeed), I argue that the expression of the Unicorn Gene is forming beliefs in Jack's mind and that the expression of this gene is an off-track method of tracking truth. In this exercise of mine, what role did debunking play? It seems to be purely explanatory, as opposed to playing any argumentative role. If Jack continued to believe in unicorns even after being told that the history books were fabricated, the unicorn gene (the causal explanation) could explain that. However, the weight of the argument seems to lie with the rebutting facts, that is, with the work done in my analysis of his alternate grounds for belief (showing that his history books were fabricated), as opposed to the discovery of the unicorn gene.

The debunking argument then, serves merely as the football field for which the real players, namely the justifiers, will play out. Kahane's causal premise, that S's belief that P is

explained by X, is only explanatory. The argument can only be carried out if all alternate grounds are deemed unjustified. It becomes clear that the debunker either assumes the putative alternative justifications are post-hoc rationalisations, or they pre-establish that such putative justifications are post-hoc rationalisation. If all putative justifications are rebutted, then the belief is unjustified. Period. The EDA is superfluous in metaethical argumentation - it is otiose.

Applying this to morality, we could say that alternative reasons for believing that moral truths exist can be found in the work of Kant, in the words of naturalist reductionist realists like Brink, or even in theological ethicists like Aquinas (to barely scratch the surface). What would be required of the aspiring debunker, would be to show that all of these alternative attempts at justification are mere post-hoc rationalisations. That is, they would be required to show that every one of these attempts at justifications fail and thus that believing in moral truths is unjustified. After such an ordeal, if the aspiring debunker found no justified and alternative grounds in this history of philosophical ethics, they could reasonably assert that, for example, *morality is a myth*. However, having made his or her point with purely rebutting facts (by discrediting Kant and the like), the EDA is superfluous. EDAs are attempted shortcuts that fail.

Take Joyce's work in *Evolution of Morality*, for example. He meticulously explores the possibility of naturalism. He concludes among other things that cognitivism is an acceptable view, but that naturalism about moral properties is not. He is fully aware that if a viable naturalist explanation exists, his etiological claim is either at odds with it (in which case he must determine which is the best explanation) or otherwise his etiological claim supports it. Provided that his arguments against naturalism hold, his conclusion follows that naturalism is not the best explanation for our moral beliefs.¹⁰⁸ If naturalism is not the best

¹⁰⁸ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. Chapter 5

explanation of our moral beliefs, then non-naturalism or supernaturalism cannot help either.¹⁰⁹ At this point, we should be led to abandon our position as realists and accept moral scepticism. This is not in the end a debunking strategy. Metaethical argumentation is doing all the work here. In 2016 (ten years after his popular EDA), Joyce argues that his metaethical argumentation is not complete, leading him to the more modest conclusion that “our confidence in our moral judgements should be provisionally lowered.” Accepting that this *reopens* the causal premise, he concludes that, although it is an exciting idea that empirical findings can impact on metaethics, “...the arguments examined lead back to the need to do metaethics the old-fashioned way.”¹¹⁰

2.2 *Denying the Darwinian Hypothesis*

Recall the general EDA I formulated in Chapter One:

1. Moral beliefs are formed and supported only through unreliable doxastic processes.
2. We are not justified in our beliefs formed only through unreliable processes.
3. Moral beliefs are not justified.

The Darwinian Hypothesis is the first premise of the EDA, the view that moral beliefs are the product of an epistemically off-track formative process, a process that is off-track because of the nature of the selection of our moral beliefs. There are two ways of expounding the Darwinian Hypothesis. One way is moral nativism, according to which moral beliefs are in effect hard-wired into the brain at birth. Another way of expounding the Darwinian Hypothesis is to say that whatever causes are at work in the production of moral beliefs are saturated with the off-track features due to our evolution. On this latter view, moral beliefs might be the product of emotional schemas, critical reflection, and cultural influences.

¹⁰⁹ I discuss this argument of Joyce’s further in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁰ Richard Joyce, “Evolution and Moral Naturalism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016). 381

However, their basis in our emotional responses poisons the epistemic well, as it were, meaning that our beliefs never escape their off-track origins.

2.2.1 Nativism and the Darwinian Hypothesis

Let us consider the merits of the Darwinian Hypothesis in its nativist form. Contrary to simple versions of nativism, we have the tendency to act in certain ways, form moral judgements or make decisions about how we should act in accordance with our evolved natures. Call this a conservative expressive tendency (CET). On the other hand, we have a capacity to reflect on the ways in which we choose to act and the sort of people we thus become or aspire to be. We seem to be capable of a thoughtful exploration of moral concepts and moral language, with which we can challenge others and ourselves. Call this our critical reflective capacity (CRC).

Neil Sinclair makes a similar distinction when he separates the tendency to form moral judgements and the capacity to think with and express moral thoughts. I find this distinction important though incomplete, as unlike CRC, Sinclair's capacity hypothesis does not explicitly go beyond unreflective habits of moral thought and justification.

According to some accounts, evolution explains why some human beings possess the capacity to deploy moral concepts in thought and language. Call this the 'capacity hypothesis'. According to others, evolution explains why some human beings are disposed to make particular types of moral judgements, distinguished by their contents. Call this the 'tendency hypothesis'. Whereas the former explains our possession of moral concepts, the latter explains our tendency to deploy those concepts in particular ways.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Neil Sinclair, "Belief Pills and the Possibility of a Moral Epistemology," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Debunkers can target and explain our tendencies for particular decision and judgement formations. For example, Street writes that:

...it is clear how beneficial (in terms of reproductive success) it would be to judge that the fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason to do it.¹¹²

Joyce's practicality requirement says that:

...the function that natural selection had in mind for moral judgment was [nothing] remotely like detecting a feature of the world, but rather something more like encouraging successful social behaviour.¹¹³

We make a judgement about x in situation y because it would promote our survival (Street), and we justify acting on that judgement to ourselves and others and this allows us to consistently form judgement x (Joyce). The differentiation between the conservative expressive tendency and our critical self-reflective capacity allows an expansion of what is meant when we speak of moral thought. The debate surrounding where our moral beliefs come from seems to be principally composed of etiological explanations of our conservative expressive tendency and not our critical self-reflective capacity. This is detrimental to the debunking argument as our reasons for holding certain moral beliefs are not fully contained within the scope of the causal claim. Serious debunkers must find a way to connect the off-track forces of evolutionary inheritance to our rational reflection to avoid simply overlooking our capacity to 'correct' our evolved natures through our critical reflective capacity.

To form the rather serious conclusions which have come from this debate, for example, that morality is a myth or that morality is "a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes"¹¹⁴, we require a level of confidence in the causal claim. But this claim seems to be without merit if we are not clear about what a *belief that p* entails. Levy and Levy note,

¹¹² Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 115.

¹¹³ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 131

¹¹⁴ Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. 253

“[q]uite generally, what counts as data about φ inevitably depends on assumptions about the nature of φ . Morality is no exception.”¹¹⁵ If this causal claim cannot be defended, or reasons cannot be provided for believing that such an explanation might be forthcoming, then the debunking argument collapses on empirical grounds. If support for the causal claim can be provided, the claim must be construed so as to include our reasons for belief which might obtain through our critical reflective capacity.¹¹⁶

I will refer to this problem throughout my analysis of the causal claim. The basic argument strategy is to insist that, in order to avoid overgeneralising their target beliefs, debunker’s must narrow the scope of their debunking argument rendering their etiological claim ineffective against the broader position of metaethical realism.

2.2.2 *In search of a completed non-moral genealogy*

Opinions differ about the nature and importance of the causal premise. Kahane writes that, “[i]t is important to see that it does not matter here whether any particular explanation is true. What matters is that some such story is likely to be true.”¹¹⁷ This is echoed in Vavova, who admits to the controversy behind the causal premise but suggests that “both sides should acknowledge this and move on... While it is important that this argument is empirical, the particular empirical claim is not important. It is replaceable and, anyway, not philosophically interesting.”¹¹⁸ Though it may be worthwhile to consider what would happen *if* a genealogy could be provided, the literature in question has quickly moved from this being a hypothetical

¹¹⁵ Arnon Levy and Yair Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2018). 5

¹¹⁶ Additionally, this explanation must include reasons which count in favour of moral beliefs but not reasons which count in favour of our scientific beliefs, lest the EDA become self-undermining. See Section 2.4

¹¹⁷ Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments." 111

¹¹⁸ Katia Vavova, "Evolutionary Debunking of Moral Realism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 2 (2015). 104

conversation to an established one. Contrary to Vavova, it has become quite philosophically interesting.

Street writes that it “does not seem much of a stretch” to argue that fitness enhancing dispositions were responding to some feature of the world “in some primitive, non-linguistic sort of fashion.”¹¹⁹ So, we could view our evaluative judgements as “conscious, reflective endorsements” of certain evaluative tendencies that we share with other animals and that were shaped by some form of off-track inheritance.¹²⁰ However, Street is careful not to assert that “the acceptance of a full-fledged evaluative judgement with a given content ... is a genetically heritable trait.”¹²¹ Rather, our capacity to form judgements is *indirectly* tainted by the *directly* tainted evaluative tendencies we acquired via natural selection. Street argues that evaluative tendencies such as “[t]he fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it”¹²² and “[t]he fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return”¹²³ are supported by appeals to kin selection and reciprocal altruism respectively. Since our evaluative judgements are “conscious, reflective endorsements” of these evaluative tendencies, our reflective endorsements favour certain judgements over others as a result of this off-track influence.

Most debunking arguments target our justification for moral belief. Our realisation that we might only believe that helping others is a good thing because evolution and our upbringing made this so, should give us cause for concern about asserting that our beliefs are *actually* true. Faced with an etiological and supposedly scientifically supported case for the ‘thorough saturation’ of our evaluative tendencies, we see that our justifications for our moral beliefs - grounded in those evaluative tendencies - are influenced by forces of natural

¹¹⁹ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 117

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. 115

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

selection and cultural inheritance. But the success of this argument rests on the support for Street's empirical claim that there exists a relationship between kin selection, reciprocal altruism and our tendency to believe that acting in the interests of our family members or that acting altruistically in general is a morally good thing.

Kin Selection is a term coined by Maynard Smith (1964) to describe the selection for behaviours of an individual organism which impacts upon the reproductive success or survival of other genetically similar organisms, even if it means bringing harm to the actor.¹²⁴ The theory is captured by a simple mathematical expression known as Hamilton's Rule ($rb - c > 0$) outlining the relation between the fitness cost to the actor (c), the resultant fitness benefits to another organism (b), and the genetic relatedness of the organisms in question (r).¹²⁵ Levy and Levy argue that kin selection theory does not account for "behaviour guided by a belief about the significance of the interests of family members" nor does moral belief "exhibit a significant genetic basis" which kinship theory would require.¹²⁶

Street's use of reciprocal altruism seeks to link the proliferation of genes predisposing moral agents to altruism with the predisposition to return altruistic behaviours when they were received. Levy and Levy note that this relationship can be modelled in iterated prisoners dilemmas utilising reciprocal tit-for-tat strategies, but that "there are several concerns about the scope and character of these models...virtually all models in this area deal with pairwise interactions between a single altruist and a single beneficiary. But moral precepts often concern situations with more persons involved."¹²⁷ Additionally, especially in cases

¹²⁴ An idea first developed by Hamilton (1963). See, William Hamilton, "The Evolution of Altruistic Behavior," *American Naturalist* 97, no. 986 (1963); John Maynard Smith, "Group Selection and Kin Selection," *Nature* 201 (1964).

¹²⁵ In Gardner *et al* (2011), it is shown that the validity and generality of Hamilton's rule can be questioned, but the theory still seems to possess predictive and explanatory power. The authors also question the accuracy of conflating Hamilton's rule with kin selection theory in general and argue that confusions arise when it is unclear what kind relationship is implied by the use of the phrase, *kin selection* in literature. See, A. Gardner, S. West, and G. Wild, "The Genetical Theory of Kin Selection," *The Journal of Evolutionary Biology* 24, no. 5 (2011). 1021

¹²⁶ Levy and Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science." 19

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 20

pertaining to human morality, significant assumptions are made in terms of the character of the agents used in these models. Environmental factors influencing judgements formed in reality, such as social hierarchy, are not included in the idealised settings of the model environment and thus do not clearly inform our understanding of the evolution of this predisposition.¹²⁸

Elsewhere, evolutionary scientists' express concerns about attempts to explain altruistic behaviours in general. Okasha (2013) distinguishes between biological and psychological altruism, whereby the latter explores altruistic behaviour stemming from motives outside of the biological predisposition. He writes that "[a]n action performed with the conscious intention of helping another human being may not affect their biological fitness at all, so would not count as altruistic in the biological sense."¹²⁹ Street's causal claim focuses on the *established* connection between moral precepts we advance, such as "[t]he fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return" and the evolutionary genealogy of such an altruistic tendency. Since the link has not been established and evolutionary scientists haven't settled on where our motivations to be altruistic might come from, it remains possible that we can ratify our belief that acting in this way is a morally good thing with reasons which are not 'thoroughly saturated' by any inherited evaluative tendency.

Joyce argues that there exists a requirement for practical clout, and thus that some kind of "motivational bulwark" must be a feature of the nativist thesis. He asks us to imagine that there was a community of social creatures with a set of imperatives which assist in the regulation and governance of interpersonal relations. Imperatives such as, "Don't steal for self-gain" or "Keep your Promises" are examples cited, as a community without such

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Samir Okasha, "Biological Altruism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2013).

imperatives would have difficulty securing the cooperation required to flourish as a social animal. However, he writes, “[i]f someone fails to follow one of these prescriptions – say, one of them doesn’t keep a promise, out of selfishness – her fellows don’t subject her to criticism... Let’s say this community doesn’t have a concept of *desert* at all...”¹³⁰ Joyce believes that if the members of the community don’t feel that wrong doers, when *punished*, are actually getting what he or she deserves, then they lack a sense of justice. Similarly, without guilt, the offender can’t recognise that what he or she has done is something morally denounceable, “for what is guilt, if not an emotion that involves the judgement that one deserves some kind of penalty for one’s actions”¹³¹ He thus suggests that we have an innate conception of justice and guilt, and without the corresponding desire to see that moral beliefs are consistently carried out among our peers, it’s difficult to conceptualise how we would have managed to cooperate at all. Without such an evolutionary spur, we wouldn’t *tend* to do that which was evolutionarily beneficial and thus the evolutionary benefit of morality is lost. For Joyce, humans required this bulwark lest we succumbed to the temptations of short-term reward and lose out on the long-term rewards of cooperation.

Levy and Levy take issue with this notion, as there exists a variety of situations in which humans makes decisions between short- and long-term temptations without the need to posit any kind of mechanism resembling the motivational bulwark. Levy and Levy construct a comparative case involving the need to invest in food and shelter in the face of extreme weather conditions. They ask if there must also exist some ‘special motivational mechanism’ which acts as the motivational bulwark for our non-moral normative beliefs such as the belief that “the impending inclement weather is reason to start storing food...[or] the dropping temperatures are reason to believe that inclement weather is impending...”¹³² If we require

¹³⁰ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 67

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 68

¹³² Levy and Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science." 8

this special motivational mechanism for non-moral prudential and epistemic beliefs, then it would seem that the debunking argument has implications beyond the moral domain.

Joyce argues that error theorists are not deprived of motivational support for acting with generosity or integrity. He writes:

The moral error theorist may have as much compassion, love, and generosity as anyone else; she will just not believe these characteristics, or their attendant actions, to be morally desirable...The atheist is still inclined to enthusiastically assert “I ought not kill”—and perhaps takes himself to have grounds for holding that this is true always and for everyone—but he will remain clear in his own mind that he is not employing the “ought...according to God” locution. And this, clearly, doesn’t undermine his atheism in the least.¹³³

Joyce is here describing a form of moral fictionalism. On this view, moral discourse continues to function as it did before we realised that morality was a myth – at least to the effect that we are more likely to be moral than if we were eliminativists.¹³⁴ With clear knowledge that our moral beliefs don’t have an ontological backing – the very backing which supposedly bolsters our cooperation – we can still call morality a *useful fiction* provided this benefit is incurred. Since it is on prudential grounds that we choose to engage in this fiction, Joyce needs a means of distinguishing between moral fictionalism and prudential or epistemic fictionalism. Unless he can provide argument for why we can be trusted to make good decisions about food choices in the face of extreme weather but can’t be trusted to make good moral judgements without the help of some innate mechanism, his argument collapses into wholesale normative scepticism. This is because his causal claim extends to prudential

¹³³ Richard Joyce, "Morality, Schmorality," in *Morality and Self-Interest*, ed. P. Bloomfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 58-59

¹³⁴ That is, an anti-realist who is not willing to engage in the fiction, or at least grant that engaging in the fiction is worthwhile. "Moral Fictionalism," in *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*, ed. M.E. Kalderon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 307

and epistemic normativity as the very considerations which undermine factual moral discourse are required in the mechanisms of motivation under his account of moral fictionalism.¹³⁵

A more powerful argument for Joyce's view would be empirical support for a moral sense which produces moral beliefs. If this mechanism exists, we could expect there to be a dedicated cognitive partition which facilitated its functioning, or at least a group of related mechanisms which would serve this purpose. Since "the discovery of dedicated mechanism is a tell-tale sign of a specialised function...the presence of such a mechanism in the case of human morality should make us more confident in Joyce's hypothesis – and conversely, its absence should decrease our confidence."¹³⁶ Most studies in this area rely on fMRI studies to examine the activation of brain regions during moral deliberation.¹³⁷ Levy and Levy follow Sinnott-Armstrong and Wheatley in concluding that nearly all of these studies show that multiple areas are involved, however that none of the areas which showed increased activity were activated "in all and only" moral judgements.¹³⁸ This suggests that Joyce's moral sense faces a dilemma: either it doesn't produce all moral beliefs, or it doesn't *just* produce moral belief.¹³⁹ The first option means that the causal claim cannot threaten the realist position and is merely operational against *some* of our moral judgements - our moral judgements stemming from disgust, for example. Additionally, to avoid post-hoc justification, those

¹³⁵ I return to this argument in 2.4

¹³⁶ Levy and Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science." 12

¹³⁷ Joshua Greene et al., "An Fmri Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment.," *Science* 293, no. 5537 (2001); Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt, "How (and Where) Does Moral Judgement Work?," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 6, no. 12 (2002); J. Moll et al., "The Neural Basis of Human Moral Cognition," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 6 (2005); J. Moll et al., "Human Fronto-Mesolimbic Networks Guide Decisions About Charitable Donation," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 103, no. 42 (2006); C Parkinson et al., "Is Morality Unified? Evidence That Distinct Neural Systems Underlie Moral Judgements of Harm, Dishonesty, and Disgust," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 23, no. 10 (2011).

¹³⁸ Levy and Levy, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Meet Evolutionary Science." 12; W Sinnott-Armstrong and T Wheatley, "The Disunity of Morality and Why It Matters to Philosophy," *The Monist* 95, no. 3 (2012). 368

¹³⁹ Although, given the possibility that certain faculties could serve multiple functions, much like certain parts of the body do, we should be weary of this line of argument.

judgements stemming from disgust would have to be unreflective and thus be solely the product of that evaluative tendency. The second option means that either the debunker abandons the rhetoric of *sense* and *faculty*, or otherwise demonstrates how this faculty unreliably produces beliefs which are not just moral, and yet none of these non-moral and unreliable beliefs fall into a domain which might undermine the debunking argument itself.

Joshua Greene's work shows that conflict in moral deliberation can be reduced to tension between competing partitions of the brain. Greene's study of consequentialist and deontological judgements is unlike the others in that its target is not particular evaluative tendencies, but kinds of moral judgments which are typically seen to be the product of our critical reflective capacity. His argument is that these two moral outlooks seem to rely on distinct cognitive systems. Deontological processing is more emotional whereas consequential processing is more reasoning-like.¹⁴⁰ The significance of Greene's findings in his study of deontological intuitions have been contested.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, even if his empirical claim goes through, his study represents only deontological intuitions and thus is only useful for debunking those intuitions. Otherwise, as Levy and Levy point out, demonstrating that some moral judgements are emergent from processes which are not grounded in evaluative tendencies, weakens Joyce's motivational argument which requires that a link holds between our evaluative tendencies and moral judgements. On this view, since we didn't need a motivational bulwark for some of our moral judgements, the question arises again as to why we needed this evolutionary spur at all.

The evidence for Joyce's moral sense is not promising. Another route for Joyce is to explore the viability of alternative theories of motivation. He provides an alternative to the

¹⁴⁰ Greene et al., "An Fmri Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment.."; Joshua Greene, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Moral Judgment and Decision Making," in *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, ed. Michael S. Gazzaniga and George R. Mangun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

¹⁴¹ See: Peter Königs, "On the Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience and Dual-Process Theory," *Neuroethics* 11, no. 2 (2018); Selim Berker, "The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 37, no. 4 (2009).

externalisation of sanction with a possible internalisation of sanction: “[o]ne who practices vice thereby damages his soul.”¹⁴² He claims that such an internalisation of punishment, what he calls the self-harm model of normativity, just doesn’t seem sufficient. He provides little argument for this, apart from a *reductio ad absurdum* involving a man named Jack, who commits a series of violent crimes and yet receives no denunciation from his peers. Jack only feels an internal sense of wrongdoing. Joyce finds this conclusion unpalatable, echoing his earlier statement that “without details and supporting evidence [Jack’s internal sense of wrongdoing] amounts to nothing.”¹⁴³

Joyce briefly considers Kant but concludes that “no culture thinks that the wrongness of all such acts depends upon a primary harm that the perpetrator does by frustrating his own ends.”¹⁴⁴ This is derivative of his earlier claim about Jack that “*surely* [the wrongness of torture] derives chiefly from the harm being inflicted on others!”¹⁴⁵ This seems to be a misunderstanding of Kant. Kant’s account of the good will is not a proposal for how social cooperation is possible. It is an account of how a rational being with autonomy as a self-legislating agent would be inherently motivated to act by their nature. To disregard the categorical imperative is not to frustrate one’s ends, but to act against one’s nature as a rational and self-legislating agent. Being a moral person then is to do the right thing for the right reasons. This is overlooked by Joyce.

Recall that Joyce’s main contention with moral naturalism is that an adequate account of why we should be moral seems to be lacking from those theories. With so much resting on this issue of motivation, and with the empirical nature of the motivational bulwark under a shadow of doubt, it is worth considering what, in terms of metaethical argumentation, is

¹⁴² Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 59

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 61 [My Emphasis]

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 60

doing the heavy lifting. As I mentioned earlier, Joyce's own realisation of the significance of considering the nativism debate leads to him calling for a return to "do[ing] metaethics the old-fashioned way." He realises that it might not be settled that nativism supports scepticism until the metaethical argumentation against naturalism is done. Although he doesn't seem to realise that such argumentation would render the debunking attempt otiose, it is at least step towards acknowledging the debate of rebutting facts (as opposed to undermining facts) at the heart of his anti-realist position.

To summarise, we are still in search for a completed non-moral genealogy and thus the causal premise is not complete. A convincing and adequate non-moral genealogy is not available and even as a hypothetical consideration faces challenges pertaining to the containment of the acid of the debunking claim and the broader issue of the theoretical constraint. But exploring this issue has also uncovered a pattern in evolutionary explanations which is worth consideration.

2.2.3 Cherry picking evaluative tendencies

In nativist literature, what is most common is to explore the selection of fitness-enhancing evaluative tendencies which correspond to widely held beliefs. An example would be selecting reciprocal altruism over more denounceable and yet equally fitness enhancing tendencies like philandering or murdering one's stepchildren.¹⁴⁶ If we did inherit such tendencies, how do we explain the scarcity of those beliefs?

What the critical reflective capacity provides is a "concept [with which] we can turn back against evolution. From the mindless and mindlessly selfish rose beings capable of

¹⁴⁶ Murdering one's stepchildren usually occurs in social groups of animals where there is a dominant male and multiple female partners (lions and some species of monkey, for example). When the dominant male is replaced by another male, unrelated infants of the females are usually killed shortly after the group is taken over. Infanticide in this case is a direct example of fitness being gained by the killer and a correspondent loss of fitness by the animal whose offspring were killed.

rationality and morality...”¹⁴⁷ We have been led to believe that our conservative expressive tendency in evolutionary history couldn’t have adequately functioned as normative guidance without some kind of externalised sense of punishment, grounded in, at best, attitudes and desires, such as the desire to have our hunger for *just deserts* satisfied. Given that this is a desire, and that, *surely*, the alternative Kantian, Aristotelian or non-naturalist picture is inadequate, we are more accepting of the view that a causal explanation that *fully explains* morality is in prospect.

When we depart from the view of motivational internalism and when we readily dismiss the potential of our critical reflective capacity, we risk ignoring a feature of human morality which makes us unique. Levy writes, “[o]ur evolutionary past constrains what we can think and believe and hope for; equally, it opens us up to unexpected, and ever-changing vistas of transformation and (we can hope) progress.”¹⁴⁸

The moral thought that dominates nativist literature is the conservative expressive tendency. With this tendency, come those evaluative beliefs acquired via natural selection which serve to bolster our confidence in moral assertions and compel us to generally act in ways which would be, or once were, evolutionarily beneficial. Beliefs about cooperation, tribalism and fairness for example, may be innate beliefs, or may stem from innate beliefs, which exist solely due to the evolutionary benefit their innateness emulates.¹⁴⁹ Cooperation, to take a single case, requires a set of beliefs which we would employ in the event that our evaluative beliefs are challenged. These seem to be the beliefs elicited in time-sensitive situations, or in situations where we are otherwise unable to communicate our reasons for acting a certain way. To borrow from moral psychology, these might be those beliefs

¹⁴⁷ Neil Levy, *What Makes Us Moral?: Crossing the Boundaries of Biology* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2004). 88

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 89

¹⁴⁹ Further to this, they may have other genealogies: Jeroen Hopster, "Evolutionary Arguments against Moral Realism: Why the Empirical Details Matter (and Which Ones Do)," *Biology & Philosophy* 33, no. 41 (2018).

employed in System 1 cognitive processes.¹⁵⁰ This conservative expressive tendency consists of actions and conservative intuitive beliefs, which tend to produce and support cooperative behaviour. But morality is more than this.

Simon Blackburn is among many who argue that in many important moral dilemmas, we require the use of a slow and deliberative thought process in contrast to a purely automatic and emotional one.¹⁵¹ Sterelny makes a similar observation in his survey of nativist literature:

The syntactic model of moral cognition has no natural model of the relationship between reflexive and reflective moral cognition. Suppose [nativists] are right to think that an abstract set of normative general principles develops in every normal individual, principles whose character is invariant but whose specific form depends on individual learning history, principles that automatically, rapidly, productively, and unconsciously generate moral appraisals... We endorse moral generalisations; we do not just make bullet-fast judgements about specific cases.¹⁵²

Moral problems involving inheritance laws, organ donation and immigration law for example, might elicit intuitive responses, and these responses may be the reflection of a social, cultural or evolutionary predilection, but given that fair-minded disagreement can exist on such issues for extended periods of time, intuitive responses are more likely to *backfire*.¹⁵³ In addition to this, we seem to be capable of changing our actions based on periods of slow deliberation, such as in the case of our eating habits.¹⁵⁴ We might become a vegetarian or come to place emphasis on the sourcing and conditions in which our food is grown

¹⁵⁰ Popularised in Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

¹⁵¹ Simon Blackburn, "Response to Marc Hauser's Princeton Tanner Lecture," (2008).

¹⁵² Kim Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2012). 156-157

¹⁵³ Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Morality* (New Jersey Princeton University Press, 2018). 111

¹⁵⁴ Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice*. 157

following a consideration of the longevity of the planet or the cruelty of certain farming methods.

This critical and reflective feature of our moral thought is also capable of modifying our intuitive responses over our lifetime and even across generations. Sterelny cites many examples such as recent shifts in attitudes towards “animal cruelty, the appropriate discipline of children, the role of women in the world... Not so long ago, public execution was an immensely popular public entertainment in England.”¹⁵⁵ With rational reflection as a feature of our moral theories, not only can we better explain these changes in intuitive response, we can give credence to our capacity to formulate sophisticated and universal claims about human behaviours.

This forgetting of the role of our critical reflective capacity, this overlooking of the hypothetical nature of the causal premise, and this mistaken belief of the premise’s empirical completeness, are all the features of a wider pattern. We could call this the Nativist Assumption.

Take the Nativist assumption in Rex and Abrantes:

Morality exists in all human societies we know of and almost every individual develops a sense of it without formal instruction and without intentional effort.¹⁵⁶

The term, ‘morality’, is used here in a way which does not clearly involve or acknowledge the role of rational reflection. Additionally, though ‘a sense’ of morality may exist in all human societies, the fact that some societies may be more reflectively sophisticated than others is a point which is similarly unacknowledged. The harm of this narrow construal is in its illusion of completeness – the idea that there exists an adequate explanation for the origin of morality. Taking nativism for granted means that debunking discourse develops upon an

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 161

¹⁵⁶ Roger Rex and Paulo Abrantes, "Moral Nativism: Some Controversies," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 56, no. 4 (2017). 28

inaccurate and incomplete foundation which threatens the stability of the causal premise as that premise requires that morality be *fully* explained by a particular off-track genealogy.

Interestingly, there seem to be two strands of this nativist assumption, each attempting in opposing ways to explain human nature. The first, seemingly Hobbesian in its view, echoes the ancient sentiments of Plato's Glaucon in the *Republic*. The second perhaps Romantic construal of human nature, echoing the work of Mencius in that human goodness is the foremost expression of our conservative expressive tendency.¹⁵⁷ A paramount example of the former is in Ghiselin's claim that:

The evolution of society fits the Darwinian paradigm in its most individualistic form. Nothing in it cries out to be otherwise explained. The economy of nature is competitive from beginning to end. ... What passes for cooperation turns out to be a mixture of opportunism and exploitation. ... Scratch an 'altruist', and watch a 'hypocrite' bleed.¹⁵⁸

And of the latter Romantic view:

Where once science painted humans as self-seeking and warlike ... today scientists of many disciplines are uncovering the deep roots of human goodness. ... Empathy, gratitude, compassion, altruism, fairness, trust, and cooperation, once thought to be aberrations from the tooth and claw order of things, are now revealed as core features of primate evolution... More and more, it seems that rather than being irrational and superfluous, behaviours like compassion and kindness are actually conducive to human survival – and essential to human flourishing.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 360b-d and Bryan Van Norden, "Mencius," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/mencius/>.

¹⁵⁸ Michael Ghiselin, *The Economy of Nature and the Evolution of Sex* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). 247

¹⁵⁹ Dacher Keltner, Jason Marsh, and Jeremy Adam Smith, *The Compassionate Instinct: The Science of Human Goodness* (New York: Norton, 2010). 5-6

First of all, the existence of two contradictory accounts of human nature gives us good reason to review the question of human nature itself, and exactly what evidence is being used to represent that nature. Emerging predominantly in literature from evolutionary psychology, such as in Tooby and Cosmides, is the view that there exists a complete and optimally functioning faculty which produces those moral beliefs which were likely to secure our tendency to partake in behaviours which safeguard our survival as a species.

Because natural selection is a hill-climbing process that tends to choose the best of the variant designs that actually appear, and because of the immense numbers of variant designs that actually appear over the vast expanse of evolutionary time, natural selection tends to cause the accumulation of superlatively well engineered functional designs.¹⁶⁰

However, it does not follow from a faculty's having-been-selected that it is in any way 'superlatively well engineered'. It may be the case that it was 'better' than competing features of an organism, given a specific pressure or set of pressures, but this is not necessarily conducive to superlative functionality or design. The incremental optimisation of evolutionary adaptation is potentially overlooked in the construal of natural selection as a selection between "an immense number of variant designs." It is relatively small variations facing specific challenges which contribute to the hill climbing process. Thus, the products of evolution are well engineered in the sense that they might have met a particular selective pressure. Nevertheless, this assumption, emerging in evolutionary psychology, creates the foundation of inaccuracy on which others build, especially those in other disciplines. Take the following claim from Steven Pinker:

¹⁶⁰ John. Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "Toward Mapping the Evolved Functional Organization of Mind and Brain," in *The New Cognitive Neurosciences*, ed. Michael S. Gazzaniga (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999).

The parts of the mind that allow us to see are indeed well engineered, and there is no reason to think that the quality of engineering progressively deteriorates as the information flows upstream to the faculties that interpret and act on what we see.¹⁶¹

The success of this comparison rests on the assumption that whatever is the product of evolution has reached a point of ‘superlativity’. Why is there *no reason to think* otherwise? Our eyes are indeed spectacularly functional, superlatively well engineered for creatures like us. But our eyes have a maximum resolution of about two megapixels (a cheap phone is better) and this lack of resolution requires extraordinary – and extraordinarily vulnerable – upstream processing to create an illusion of sharp and full vision. We cannot see cells unaided, we cannot see outside of the visible light spectrum, a considerable percentage of the human population requires glasses, and a smaller percentage will experience some kind of physiological malady which could render them blind. The hill-climbing process gave us a multitude of circumstances in which a particular adaptation would be selected, and to pick a single adapted feature and call it well engineered is to overlook the series of trials in which that feature would fail.

As an extension of this, evolved traits could also be the product of a developmental ‘quirk’ or ‘kluge’ where maladapted features can be repurposed at later points in the hill climb.¹⁶² In terms of morality, if we evolved a specific faculty at all, it might well be a kluge, it might even emerge from one or a series of other faculties with completely different purposes. The point is that superlativity itself is not a necessary feature of products of evolution. The implication of this consideration is firstly a reduction of tension between the contradictory explanations of our conservative expressive tendencies. It is not required that we are superlatively functional as beings in either this Hobbesian or Romantic sense. In terms

¹⁶¹ Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company., 2009). 35

¹⁶² This is a point raised in: Gary Marcus, *Kluge: The Haphazard Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: Mariner Books, 2009).

of measuring tendencies then, we should expect mistakes and we should expect every level of maladaptive possibility that comes with the eye. But what does this mean for the nativist?

The nativist ought to consider an agent's reasons for acting a certain way or holding a particular belief. That we might act in accordance with the Hobbesian or Romantic tradition or have beliefs which these traditions might expect of us, is not a smoking gun. It's not even ammunition. When we talk about reasons for action, we leave the realm of explaining our conservative expressive tendency and we face our critical reflective capacity and the reasons which count either in favour of or against a particular belief.

As I indicated in my introduction to this section, there exists another possibility. If causes which are at work in the production of moral beliefs are saturated with off-track forces due to our evolution, then moral beliefs, even with critical reflection, might be the product of emotional schemas and cultural influences. This means that their basis in our emotional responses renders our beliefs drawn from the poisoned well, whereby our beliefs never escape their off-track origins. Anti-realists (in particular, those who argue that value is mind-dependent) argued well before the prominence of the debunking argument that our moral beliefs were ultimately grounded in off-track beliefs (such as in emotional responses). If we must first value cooperation to take it to be an end worth pursuing, then the anti-realists who argue for this kind of stance-dependence are right. However, this is not a distinctly Darwinian argument, nor is it empirically established. This *other* possibility is identical in argumentative structure to classic metaethical arguments which need not invoke the Darwinian Hypothesis. I return to this issue in chapter five.

2.3 *Accepting the Darwinian Hypothesis*

Although I have just provided a number of reasons which complicate this ambition, there exists substantial literature which plays out the assumption that a satisfactory defence of

the Darwinian Hypothesis might be provided, either along nativist or non-nativist lines. These theorists argue that the Darwinian Hypothesis might not complicate but might instead enrich the realist's story.

If it is true that evolution or some off-track process influences our normative beliefs, then we must on one hand consider whether this influence is complete and thus whether it undermines the justification or truth of those influenced beliefs. On the other hand, and what will be the focus of this section, is the consideration of the nature of this influence. Recall the deep structure of the EDA:

1. Moral beliefs are formed and supported only through unreliable doxastic processes.
2. We are not justified in our beliefs formed only through unreliable processes.
3. Moral beliefs are not justified.

In the previous section, I explored challenges to the claim that moral beliefs were strictly formed and supported through an off-track genealogy. Here, I grant that moral beliefs could have been formed and supported by a process but challenge the claim that this process was off-track. David Enoch (2010, 2011), Knut Skarsaune (2011) and Jeff Behrends (2013) are prominent voices in this debate, each attempting to show that normative belief and normative truth are on the same track.¹⁶³ On this view, we consider the hypothetical availability of an etiological account and how realism might be compatible with an evolved morality.

The first part of this argument challenges the assumptions made in Street's epistemological formulation of the evolutionary debunking argument, in particular, the first horn of her Darwinian dilemma for moral realists. This is the claim that moral realists may embrace the fact that there is no relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution

¹⁶³ Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Best Understand It, and How to Cope with It." *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Knut Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism: Survival of the Fittest," *Philosophical Studies* 152, no. 2 (2011). Jeff Behrends, "Meta-Normative Realism, Evolution, and Our Reasons to Survive," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (2013).

and mind-independent moral truth. Having grasped this horn, moral realists, if they are to persist in their beliefs, must explain the striking coincidence that an evaluative judgment came to accord with one of an independent evaluative truth. This likelihood, she analogises, is like setting out on a boat to Bermuda and hoping to arrive by the sheer chance that the wind and tides will take you there. Enoch sums up the thought in his exploration of Street's argument:

[I]sn't it an amazing fluke that whatever evolution 'aims' at happens also to be good? And isn't this itself something that calls for an explanation, an explanation that the realist is not in a position to offer?...So doesn't it follow that the story just told, far from showing how the realist can avoid commitment to miraculous correlations, *relies* on a miracle?¹⁶⁴

Enoch argues that such a coincidence isn't miraculous at all, "[f]or what would have to be the case for this miracle not to occur?"¹⁶⁵ Whatever evolution aims towards would have to be of no value to us. This view seems untenable because even fundamental normative truths seem "necessary in a fairly strong sense."¹⁶⁶ Enoch doesn't intend to refute challenges such as Street's, but simply to accrue *plausibility points* for the moral realist. He writes, "once it is kept in mind that the game is an explanatory one and that the winner is going to be determined on plausibility grounds, the challenge to the realist – though still serious – seems at least manageable."¹⁶⁷ He concedes that the correlation between the evolutionarily selected normative judgements and supposed normative truths is not that strong, but that "the correlation the realist must acknowledge – and the one it seems independently plausible to believe in – can be fairly weak, so long as it is strong enough to block the inference of

¹⁶⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. 172

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Best Understand It, and How to Cope with It." 421

scepticism.”¹⁶⁸ Referring to his earlier analogy, he writes, “if the correlation between Josh’s beliefs about the distant Nepalese village and the truths about it is rather weak, so that he’s right more often than you would expect a random guesser to be, but not by much, then a very weak explanans would suffice to dispel the mystery – perhaps he just read a story in a magazine about the village. If the correlation is much stronger, though, a more impressive explanans would be needed.”¹⁶⁹ If the realist accepts that, in the face of this weak correlation, she gets things right more than she gets things wrong in regards to normative issues, then she can quite reasonably hold on to the normative beliefs in question.

There is still a questionable amount of luck involved in the possibility that we happened to evolve in an environment where being right more often than we are wrong is conducive to our evolutionary success. But this brute luck, he argues, is apparent everywhere else.¹⁷⁰ This level of scepticism seems to call into question our existence entirely, and it becomes apparent that we are by and large content, everywhere else, with this kind of brute luck. Nevertheless, he provides an account of how we may have to acquire an adequately functioning reasoning mechanism which may give rise to normative beliefs and thus come to ‘track truth.’

Normative beliefs and some reasoning mechanisms could quite possibly come closer to tracking truth by “eliminating inconsistencies, increasing overall coherence, eliminating arbitrary distinctions, drawing analogies...etc.”¹⁷¹ There is a rationality, he argues, in accepting that a reasoning mechanism deemed fallible could become more accurate or refined in the judgements or beliefs it produces over time. Imagining that there is certain starting point for the level of truth in a certain set of normative beliefs, this evolutionary story can

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 428

¹⁷⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. 173

¹⁷¹ "The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How to Best Understand It, and How to Cope with It."

explain a gradual movement from less-true to more-true. Enoch's caveat is that these normative beliefs aren't 'far off' from the start, that is, the strength of the correlation between the starting points – the normative beliefs and the normative truths themselves. After this supposed evolution, where for example inconsistencies are eliminated, we are left with our not-too-far-off beliefs and their correlation to truth. Though richly speculative, this point could be said to be *lowering the bar* to the sort of scepticism welcome in the realist position, a bar previously set to unreasonable or unfair standards by debunkers such as Street.

Enoch's broader argument, and perhaps the most significant aspect of his defence of moral realism, seeks to provide an explanation for the supposedly unfathomable coincidence that our normative beliefs coincide with mind-independent truths. In providing his explanation, Enoch writes that it is not his aim to completely explain the coincidence, but merely to show that the coincidence "should not be a cause for too much distress,"¹⁷² and that even if realism is implausible, "it may still be globally better than all competing metanormative theories."¹⁷³ His explanation of the correlation between the normative beliefs and mind-independent truth is called the third factor explanation. It serves as an alternative to two factor explanations which are the focus of Street's critique. As Street would have it, the correlation would be explained if normative beliefs were (causally, constitutively, or both) responsible for the mind independent truths or if the truths were similarly responsible for the beliefs. Street's argument seemingly succeeds, he argues, because these two factor explanations are "unavailable to the robust realist."¹⁷⁴ Enoch believes that by including a third factor into the explanation of the correlation, the realist position remains defensible. This means that this third factor is somehow (causally, constitutively, or both) responsible for

¹⁷² Ibid. 429

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

the normative beliefs we have and the mind independent truth. This is the godless pre-established harmony explanation.

He begins, “assume that survival or reproductive success (or whatever else evolution “aims” at) is at least somewhat good.”¹⁷⁵ Enoch admits that this is a weak assumption, though he is satisfied with the assertion that survival and reproduction are *usually* better than death and infertility. Since survival and reproduction can be argued to be key selective pressures in our evolutionary story, we can assume that the prevalence of corresponding beliefs and desires would be unsurprising. Though Street argued that considering our evolutionary past formed the foundation of her argument against moral realism, it is Enoch’s consideration of our evolutionary past which seeks to rescue the realist. Enoch shows that what is morally good has a pre-established harmony with what is evolutionarily beneficial. From here, he argues that what is evolutionarily beneficial has a (causal, constitutive, or both) relationship with cognitive faculties and thus the correlation is explained. He writes, it is not “because the normative truths are a function of our normative beliefs, nor because our normative beliefs causally track the normative truths, but because our normative beliefs have been shaped by selective pressures towards ends that are in fact – and quite independently of – value... The fact that (roughly speaking) survival is good pre-establishes the harmony between the normative truths and our normative beliefs.”¹⁷⁶ This connection then, between evolutionary forces and the fact that survival is good, can explain our normative beliefs and their correlation to mind-independent truth. Though there is an ensuing discussion, Enoch concludes that his only aim is to increase the plausibility – and so to null the level of scepticism – in embracing Street’s first horn, that there is a relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 430

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 430-31

At the point of the argument where Enoch argued that survival could serve as a moral good, Skarsaune (2011) offers another account where pain and pleasure are argued to have evolutionary utility. For clarity's sake, I will restate Street's Darwinian Dilemma:

First Horn: Moral realists can assert that there is no relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.

Or

Second Horn: Moral realists can assert that there is a relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth.

Also, recall that this dilemma arose for the realist when responding to the EDA. It is Skarsaune's position that the realist can accept the second horn of the dilemma. As with Enoch, Skarsaune believes that the supposed scepticism in the embracing of the second horn is no burden. He happily embraces this horn and argues that realists can provide an account of the relation between the fitness tracking processes of evolution and mind-independent moral truth, despite Street's charge of the implausibility of such an account.

The foundation for Skarsaune's claim rests on the following argument:

If pleasure is usually good and pain is usually bad, there does indeed exist a relation between evolutionary pressures and the evaluative facts, a relation which is truth-conducive in the sense that it would tend to bias our evaluative beliefs toward truth.¹⁷⁷

His first premise, that pleasure is usually good for an agent, he argues is a plain psychological fact.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism: Survival of the Fittest." 233

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 234

Individuals that took pleasure in nutrient foods, sex, the welfare of the children, social status within their group, and so on, would tend to pursue these things with greater vigour than individuals that did not.¹⁷⁹

It could be argued that *S*'s pleasure in *p* would generally cause *S* to engage in *p*. Given this, there are two inferences to be made: either the statement is true, and so the truth-conduciveness of the influence in the evolutionary account of our evaluative beliefs has been supported. Or, the statement is false, and we don't seem to understand "plain psychological facts," and most of our evaluative beliefs are wrong. He continues, "[f]or if pleasure is usually good, then the activities and states of affairs evolution has caused us to value through this mechanism tend to be good—because they are pleasurable. Hence, if P is true, there is a relation between reproductive enhancement and goodness after all."¹⁸⁰ If it can be accepted that it is even generally true that pleasure is good for an agent, then the valuing done by that agent due to the pleasure response is thereby, in some way, similarly imbued with value. This is not to say that evolution is selecting what is valuable, merely that the role of evolution was in "simply *making these states of affairs pleasurable*. But once evolution has done that, the independent evaluative fact "kicks in", as it were, the end result being that these states of affairs are good."¹⁸¹

If the statement that *S*'s pleasure in *p* would generally cause *S* to engage in *p* is false, then much of what we understand about evolutionary tendencies, psychological responses and a host of other beliefs is wrong. He argues, "if given a case of pleasure is not good for the person who enjoys it, then it is hard to see how it could be good in the absolute sense...if the fact that some event would bring *x* pleasure is not a reason for *x* to bring it about, then it is

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 235 [original italics]

hard to see how this fact could be a reason for *other people* to bring the event about.”¹⁸² In other words, the realist has nothing to fear by embracing the first horn of Street’s dilemma.

2.4 *The Self-Undermining Response*

Consider this general evolutionary debunking argument:

Causal Premise: We believe that p , an evaluative proposition, because we were predisposed to believe that p , and there is an evolutionary explanation of that predisposition to believe that p .

Epistemic Premise: Evolution is not a truth-tracking process with respect to evaluative truth.

Therefore, we are not justified in believing that p .¹⁸³

The issue of self-undermining arises in the analysis of which beliefs are affected by this argument. Beliefs can be directly tainted, as in (1) holding the belief that p was necessary to bolster our tendency to do x , and x was evolutionarily beneficial. Otherwise they can be indirectly tainted, whereby (2) our belief that p_2 is grounded in our belief that p , and (1). When I introduced this problem through the case of Napoleon beliefs, recall that the central issue was how to determine the scope of the debunking argument so that it would allow a clean and contained target for the belief pill. I raised the question of how we could go about debunking our belief that “Napoleon lost Waterloo” without neglecting information which might ratify the belief external to the debunking attempt (our knowledge of who *won* Waterloo), and without our debunking carrying over onto fundamental beliefs about France, Europe, history and so on.

¹⁸² Ibid. 237

¹⁸³ Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments." 111

In terms of morality, the stakes are much higher. The risk is that the debunking argument in metaethics might extend to beliefs outside of the moral domain. If we take all of our belief-forming capacities to be the product of evolution, and we accept the general epistemic claim that evolution selected for fitness and not truth, then we undermine the very faculties responsible for producing our beliefs about evolution and thus the evolutionary debunking argument itself is self-undermining. No debunker forms such a crude debunking argument against moral realism. Instead, the debunker must show a clear way of distinguishing between domains which can be epistemically justified by natural selection and domains which cannot.¹⁸⁴ Call this the demarcation challenge.¹⁸⁵ Debunkers present a common argument to face this challenge:

1. Domains which are epistemically justified are those which pertain to cognitive faculties which would have reliably facilitated survival and reproduction.
2. Faculties which were responsible for producing beliefs about states of affairs needed to be reliable.
3. Scientific beliefs are produced by faculties which are responsible for producing beliefs about states of affairs.
4. Therefore, scientific beliefs are reliable.¹⁸⁶

I consider the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions behind (1) and (2) in the next chapter, as I believe these premises clearly assume a causal theory of knowledge, or related

¹⁸⁴ This way of interpreting the epistemic claim also in: Eleonora Severini and Fabio Sterpetti, "Darwinism in Metaethics: What If the Universal Acid Cannot Be Contained?," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 39, no. 27 (2017). 2

¹⁸⁵ This distinction is characterised in: Christos Kyriacou, "Evolutionary Debunking: The Milvian Bridge Destabilized," *Synthese* (2017).

¹⁸⁶ Models of natural selection can show that 'fitness beats truth' when it comes to perceptual beliefs. This indicates that evolution might generate perceptual belief forming systems that do not track 'objective reality' but rather "fitness payoffs". It is worth observing that we ought not to take the case for the objectivity of our manifest surroundings for granted. See, See, Donald Hoffman, *The Case against Reality: How Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes* (United Kingdom: Allen Lane, 2019).

epistemic theories such as reliabilism.¹⁸⁷ The focus of my present discussion is (3). The question can be posed as, what other fundamental beliefs might be involved in constructing the evolutionary debunking argument outside of scientific beliefs which must also be protected from the *universal acid* to allow for the argument to go through?

Griffith and Wilkins (2015) face the demarcation challenge by proposing The Milvian Bridge principle – named after the battle between Constantinus and Maxentius who fought for the Roman Empire over the Tiber in Rome in 312.¹⁸⁸ As a result of Constantinus’ belief in divine intervention, he won the battle. One could posit that either he won because God supported him and thus made the victory occur, or that he won because he thought that God was supporting him and so he (and his army) fought harder and longer. The historical reference can be reduced to the thesis that one cannot argue from the successful outcome of believing in x that x is therefore true. The analogy drawn then is that the success of moral values in our society means only that members who hold certain moral beliefs will tend to flourish in conditions which favour those behaviours. Moral beliefs which are deemed fitness tracking are by no means truth tracking. Though cognitive processes which allowed our ancestors to adapt and reproduce are generally reliable and truth tracking, if evolutionary theory cannot justify the existence of corresponding truth-making facts, such as moral or religious facts, then the evolved process cannot be deemed reliable.

Kyriacou writes, “we can distinguish between processes that are reliable and truth-tracking and processes that are not on the basis of what truth-making facts the naturalist framework of evolutionary theory could countenance.”¹⁸⁹ Those evaluative processes, of the

¹⁸⁷ Note also that this argument relies on a *causal chain* of inference (that we are justified in our scientific beliefs because we are justified in our empirical beliefs). This is another indicator that a causal theory of knowledge is at play. I return to this issue in the next chapter. See, Alvin Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing," *The Journal of Philosophy* 64, no. 12 (1967).

¹⁸⁸ Apparently, war history was a prerequisite for evolutionary science.

¹⁸⁹ Christos Kyriacou, "Are Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Self-Debunking?," *Philosophia* 44, no. 4 (2016).1360

unreliable kind, and the beliefs output by those processes are susceptible to debunking. This is because faculties which were responsible for producing beliefs about states of affairs needed to, more often than not, reliably track states of affairs – the truth of which was essential to our *knowing* them. The distinction drawn then, allows sensory faculties and the corresponding empirical beliefs to survive the debunking argument.

Griffith and Wilkins (2015) word the argument as follows:

Milvian Bridge: The X facts are related to the evolutionary success of X beliefs in such a way that it is reasonable to accept and act on X beliefs produced by our evolved cognitive faculties.¹⁹⁰

The essential distinction is one between commonsense grounded scientific beliefs and beliefs which do not directly relate to evolutionary success. These commonsense beliefs, such as perceptual or memorial beliefs, are reasonable to accept because they correspond to evolutionary success. These beliefs include, they write, “those everyday beliefs which guide mundane action...the existence of his body, and of other human bodies and inanimate bodies, all arranged in space and time, as well as the fact that those other human bodies knew similar things.”¹⁹¹ To clarify, these ‘commonsense facts’ are facts which must be true, as if they were false we would have been misled about essential features of the universe and would not have evolved much further. To clarify how they save commonsense beliefs from being undermined, take the following argument.

1. In a universe where commonsense facts are necessary, commonsense beliefs were likely formed through reliable, truth-tracking mechanisms.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Griffiths, Wilkins, John, "Crossing the Milvian Bridge: When Do Evolutionary Explanations Debunk Belief?," in *Darwin in the 21st Century: Nature, Humanity and God* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2015).

¹⁹¹A definition of commonsense they borrow from Moore. Ibid. 211

2. If a belief is formed through reliable, truth-tracking mechanisms, it is a justified belief.
3. Therefore, commonsense beliefs are justified.

It seems quite *commonsense* to argue this, as one could posit that from an evolutionary perspective, navigating the complexities of Pleistocene life required doxastic processes grounded in observations which were generally true. Griffiths and Wilkins extend commonsense beliefs to form the foundation to scientific beliefs by arguing that “the world of the commonsense must be seen as...the world described using the perceptual and conceptual categories available.”¹⁹² It is argued that scientific beliefs are separate to commonsense beliefs but serve as a kind of extension from the commonsense realm to the scientific realm. In a way, these commonsense facts serve as the shoulders on which the scientific beliefs stand and so those beliefs can be similarly justified.

It would seem then, that our cognitive faculties were not selected for their ability to do calculus, statistics or even to take a series of known premises, say about an historical event, and deduce from those premises new information about a time in the distant past. But Griffiths and Wilkins argue that such cognitive processes are justified, as “...if evolution does not undermine our trust in our cognitive faculties, neither should it undermine our trust in our ability to use those faculties to debug themselves – to identify their own limitations, as in perceptual illusions or common errors in intuitive reasoning.”¹⁹³ They argue that new concepts and methods which have not been directly shaped by the forces of natural selection, might still be introduced and justified through the use of those faculties which evolved. On these grounds, Griffiths and Wilkins believe they meet the demarcation challenge.

¹⁹² Ibid. 212

¹⁹³ Ibid. 214

These commonsense and perceptual beliefs come together to form what Griffiths and Wilkins characterise as the human Umwelt, a term introduced by Estonian biologist Jacob von Uexkull. What is available to a species, in terms of available perceptual and conceptual categories, constitute the Umwelt of that species. For a social bird like the Jackdaw, though they may view other Jackdaws purely in terms of their social function (as companions for flocking, mating, and parenting) and not as simply other Jackdaws (which we humans perceive), they are not mistaken about their world any more than we are mistaken about colours and objects.¹⁹⁴ Griffiths and Wilkins write, “[w]hatever ontological authority may attach to the concepts and categories of science, the commonsense way in which we see the world has no more or less ontological authority than the way in which birds see the world.”¹⁹⁵ So, adopting this language, we could say that what is justified by natural selection is what is emergent (either directly or indirectly) from cognitive faculties which were selected because they tracked truth in the human Umwelt.

We can question the success of this attempt at meeting the demarcation challenge. First of all, it is not made clear why moral beliefs are not similarly derivative of the commonsense world or why a set of commonsense moral beliefs couldn’t have formed independently of commonsense empirical beliefs. This is because it is not established that the faculty responsible for producing (at least some) commonsense facts necessarily involved a selection *for* as opposed to a selection *of* truth. Sober distinguishes between ‘Selection of’ and ‘Selection for’ to better understand the causal processes behind certain adaptations that would lead to an organism’s survival and certain adaptations that increased in representation as a byproduct of a causal process.¹⁹⁶ To illustrate the difference between the two kinds of selection, Sober refers to a child’s toy which acts like a selection machine. The toy is a large

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 210-211

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 210

¹⁹⁶ Elliot Sober, *The Nature of Selection: Evolutionary Theory in Philosophical Focus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). 99-102

cylinder which has four tiers, each containing different sized balls. The top tier contains larger balls and each successive tier contains balls of gradually smaller sizes. Each tier also has holes of the same size. If all of the balls are at the top, shaking the toy distributes the balls to their respective tiers. Balls of the smallest size make it all the way to bottom. It could be said then that the toy *selects for* smallness – because the success of descending the tiers depends on the ball’s smallness. However, he adds, balls of the same size are also the same colour and the smallest balls happen to be green. There are now two kinds of selection at play in the selection machine, selection of objects (balls) and selection for properties (colour). There is selection for smallness, but not selection for green. The colour of the balls at the bottom of the toy is still a fact about the toy, but it was a byproduct as opposed to a mechanism of the selection process. This raises a challenge for attempts to locate the origin of our commonsense beliefs because they need not be directly related to our capacity for survival or reproduction, and upon these beliefs might be formed other beliefs which have come to play indispensable roles in our deliberation. To meet the demarcation challenge, debunkers must show why (on independent grounds) commonsense beliefs might be formed indirectly but truly, but moral beliefs are not.

Kyriacou argues that the Milvian Bridge principle does not satisfactorily meet the demarcation challenge. He writes that “the [Milvian Bridge] principle itself does not satisfy the epistemic rationality standard for ontological commitment that it purports to set.”¹⁹⁷ Our Pleistocene ancestors were unlikely to have benefited by the Milvian bridge itself. Recall that the belief produced by our evolved cognitive faculties required a sort of *practicality*, it is hard to see how such *practicality* can be attributed to the Milvian bridge. Our ancestors, Kyriacou concludes, “would not have had the leisure time we have to develop an interest to such highly

¹⁹⁷ Kyriacou, "Are Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Self-Debunking?." 1357

theoretical issues. Practical, survival needs would have been pressing.”¹⁹⁸ The *truth makers* of the Milvian bridge principle wouldn’t be any less mysterious than the running construal of truth makers in moral principles.¹⁹⁹

When utilised as a debunking argument against normative facts, Kyriacou argues that, “it entails an evaluative-epistemic assertion which itself claims that evolution is not a reliable and truth tracking process with respect to normative-evaluative truth.”²⁰⁰ By specifying the target of the epistemic premise to include evaluative truths, the debunking argument is still self-defeating if evolutionary theory itself is an evaluative-epistemic truth. As a result, he writes, “debunking evaluative truths implies *debunking* debunking evolutionary arguments because they rely on evaluative truths.”²⁰¹

With this very logic, the Milvian Bridge principle similarly debunks a range of evaluative facts that seem counter-intuitive to debunk, these could include the beliefs that “we ought to pursue the truth and avoid falsity, be logically and probabilistically consistent, sensitive to counterevidence, proportionate belief on evidence, be intellectually honest, open-minded, love truth’ etc.”²⁰² Such norms could be indispensable for rational reasoning, and such rational reasoning seems to be indispensable for formulating complex arguments such as the Milvian Bridge principle itself.

It would seem that without a clear understanding of what is entailed by their use of *commonsense* facts, the Milvian Bridge cannot adequately show a clear way of distinguishing between domains which can be epistemically justified by natural selection and domains which cannot. Commonsense facts that pertain to “the existence of his body, and of other

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 1358

¹⁹⁹ But the question could be raised as to why the principle would need to be an accessible truth to our ancestors. Griffiths and Wilkins would probably respond that the principle could be arrived at long after the fact, based on our secure cognitive faculties and the process of science. It seems a stretch to demand that our Pleistocene ancestors were answerable to the question of demarcation.

²⁰⁰ Kyriacou, "Are Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Self-Debunking?." 1359

²⁰¹ "Evolutionary Debunking: The Milvian Bridge Destabilized." 5

²⁰² Ibid. 6

human bodies and inanimate bodies, all arranged in space and time, as well as the fact that those other human bodies knew similar things” seems to either commit the debunker to “debunk[ing] virtually everything (even ordinary natural facts and objects) or in an ad hoc and question begging way [to applying] double standards [in order] to debunk only some of the facts that could be debunked by its own lights.”²⁰³

Griffiths and Wilkins also extend their principle to scientific facts, which might be just as troubling. Having shown that the Milvian Bridge principle extends to perceptual and memorial beliefs, Griffiths and Wilkins appeal to the history of science to argue that “we have reasons to believe that we can derive reliable knowledge in the more adequate conceptual schemes of science.”²⁰⁴ Just as “[n]o human being had the concepts of differentiation and integration before Leibniz and Newton’s introduction of the calculus” humans seem to be capable of implementing “radical changes” through “individual cognitive innovations.”²⁰⁵ The Milvian Bridge applies to scientific beliefs *indirectly*, in their view, opposed to the direct bridge connecting commonsense beliefs to pragmatic success. These commonsense beliefs play the role of justifying the methods by which we arrive at scientific beliefs – methods which Kyriacou suggests first require a capacity to ground an external reality using metaphysical and epistemological theory. Griffiths and Wilkins develop this account of the indirect Milvian Bridge:

The reasons we have to think that our scientific conclusions are correct and that the methods we use to reach them are reliable are simply the data and arguments which scientists give for their conclusions, and for their methodological innovations.

Ultimately, these have to be able to stand up to the same kind of commonsense scrutiny as any other addition to our beliefs.

²⁰³ Ibid. 8

²⁰⁴ Griffiths, "Crossing the Milvian Bridge: When Do Evolutionary Explanations Debunk Belief?." 12

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Although there is care taken to connect purely pragmatic beliefs to the highly conceptual beliefs which lend support to the scientific methodology, in the face of the demarcation challenge, it seems that this explanation is still inadequate. Debunkers require a clear method of showing which domains are epistemically justified by natural selection and those which are not. In attempting to salvage the complexity of science out of purely pragmatic beliefs, Griffiths and Wilkins only complicate this distinction. Broadly, both science and philosophy “build theories that postulate posits and entities to abductively explain bodies of data in the best possible way, as they seem to be...”²⁰⁶ This seems to include, at least, our *best* philosophical beliefs, in much the same way as we would salvage complex scientific beliefs in order for the epistemic foundations of the evolutionary debunking argument to hold itself.

Kyriacou argues that the number of unsalvageable commonsense beliefs is large enough to topple the structure which Griffiths and Wilkins sought to build, namely that of grounding scientific beliefs in commonsense beliefs. Kyriacou concludes that debunkers are required to clarify their meta-epistemological commitments, as their argument faces many challenges in its operation.²⁰⁷

Elsewhere, more localised debunking attempts present analogous concerns. Vavova argues that an appropriate narrowing of the scope to purely moral beliefs, leaves us knowing nothing about morality. It is not clear how we would go about knowing what we are mistaken about, without some concrete notions of what morality *is*.²⁰⁸ In the same vein, even further narrowing of the scope to particular kinds of moral theorising, such as in Greene’s debunking

²⁰⁶ Kyriacou, "Evolutionary Debunking: The Milvian Bridge Destabilized."

²⁰⁷ Kyriacou also develops a normative defence of Cuneo and Schafer-Landau’s claim that there exists a host of substantive claims that are non-natural conceptual truths called moral fixed points. Kyriacou argues that failing to acknowledge and act in accordance with these moral fixed points exemplifies a failure of our rational agency, which he identifies as a meta-conceptual deficiency. Kyriacou thus identifies another ‘way out’ of the challenge raised here. See, "From Moral Fixed Points to Epistemic Fixed Points," in *Metaepistemology*, ed. C Kyriacou and R McKenna (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

²⁰⁸ Vavova, "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking." 13

argument against deontological intuitions, the argument spills over into our consequentialist intuitions.²⁰⁹

Overall, what is found is that Griffiths and Wilkins need to establish the validity of their use of epistemic norms, without presupposing the factuality of those norms. Kyriacou grants that, as a possible solution to the self-undermining problem, “the debunker could propose that antirealists can ‘construct’ epistemic facts (via social construction or via the Kantian categorical imperative) in virtue of which debunking arguments operate.”²¹⁰ This leads to the consideration that this exact move is open for the realist.²¹¹ Griffith and Wilkins also owe an account of why moral properties are not a part of, or even possibly a part of, the natural world. In the same way that, according to Jack’s history books, unicorns either exist or do not, a viable form of naturalism would show that the Darwinian Hypothesis is vindicating rather than debunking – a possibility which is at odds with their argument, yet left untouched by their conclusions. At this point, however, I will conclude that without further specification, perhaps to the debunkers peril, at just what can be debunked without forming a self-undermining argument, further doubt can be cast upon the effectiveness of the EDA.

Conclusion

In this chapter I surveyed prominent responses to the EDA and introduced the otiosity argument. The otiosity argument shows that it is underlying metaethical argument and rebuttal that carries forward the realist and anti-realist debate, as opposed to this progress coming from any undermining facts emerging from the evolutionary debunking literature. To summarise the argument, suppose I make the claim that blue is the best colour. If you showed me that I only think blue is the best colour because it is my favourite colour, then my claim

²⁰⁹ Vavova argues that this claim either “accomplishes nothing new philosophically... [or] the argument collapses into the more ambitious and less promising one.” Ibid. 17-18

²¹⁰ Kyriacou, "Are Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Self-Debunking?." 1358

²¹¹ That debunking arguments and their responses lead us back to this consideration of constructivism, reveals a feature of the debunking strategy which I develop in Chapter’s 3, 4 and 5.

that it is the best colour is not justified – clearly I am biased and unable to advance a stance-independent reason to hold that blue is the best colour. But, if you went on to say that I was predisposed to favour such a colour purely because of my upbringing, you would not be developing any new argument against my original claim that blue is the best colour. You would, perhaps, only be cladding your claim that my favouritism skews my judgement of colours (you would be adding descriptive weight to the charge of bias). However, assuming that I was sensitive to reasons, I would have already retracted my claim that blue is the best colour once I realised the poverty of my reasons for thinking it so, and perhaps I am now in the process of trying to separate my quest for the best colour from the distorting influence of my favouritism. Your causal claim about my upbringing may be true, but it is no longer pertinent. Now, you and I should both return to the question of bias: I can still be biased and make a judgement which is true, so we must determine what colour is really the best, as objectively as we can, taking care to distance ourselves from causal influences which might be directing our choices. In this example, the undermining facts would be the discovery that my upbringing led me to favour blue. I am arguing that debunkers must first establish that this is the *only* available reason for me to believe blue is the best colour in order for the argument to have any force. If the debunker must establish this prior to constructing their debunking attempt, then they must effectively rule out any reason I might have had to believe that blue is the best colour. This would establish the post-hoc rationalisation premise. Since establishing this premise would achieve the very conclusion which the debunking attempt aims at, the debunking argument itself is otiose. In metaethics, the argumentation which debunkers provide in order to establish their versions of the post-hoc rationalisation premise plays out this very problem. In each proceeding chapter I seek to demonstrate this.

In the remainder of this chapter, I turned to prominent arguments against evolutionary debunking arguments. The first argument I explored challenges the claim most central to the

evolutionary debunking of morality – the claim that there is any appropriately complete evolutionary story to be told of the origins of our moral beliefs in the first place. I called the view that moral beliefs are the product of an evolutionary and epistemically off-track formative process, the Darwinian Hypothesis. Recall the stipulation of the Darwinian Hypothesis from Chapter One, which is the first premise of the general version of the EDA set out in that chapter:

1. Moral beliefs are formed and supported *only* through unreliable doxastic processes.
2. We are not justified in our beliefs formed only through unreliable processes.
3. Moral beliefs are not justified.

If moral beliefs are not formed *only* through unreliable doxastic processes, then the debunker must concede the more modest conclusion that only some moral beliefs are unjustified. Such an argument does not threaten the broader position of metaethical realism. The literature on denying the Darwinian Hypothesis weakens this first premise on several fronts. I first began by emphasising what it would mean to debunk ‘morality.’ I argued that a significant portion of debunking literature draws on the empirical evidence underlying our conservative expressive tendency (CET) as opposed to our critical reflective capacity (CRC).

We have the tendency to act in certain ways, form moral judgements or make decisions about how we should act or certain characteristics we should express, in accordance with our evolved natures and, on the other hand, we have a capacity to reflect on the ways in which we choose to act and the sort of people we thus become or aspire to be. The existence of this latter *capacity* problematises the attempt to empirically investigate morality since it exceeds the kind of disposition to believe targeted by EDAs. Next, I argued that there does not yet exist a satisfactory and completed non-moral genealogy for our moral beliefs. So, the conclusions drawn through EDAs are hypothetical considerations until more work is done to demonstrate that the Darwinian Hypothesis is true. Then I explored the problem of cherry-

picking in nativist literature. Often theorists draw upon ‘evidence’ from our evolutionary past in order to defend a certain image of our evolved natures. I argued that this evidence is often contradictory and that this reinforces the incompleteness of this research. We have good reasons to doubt that the Darwinian Hypothesis is true.

The second argument I explored drew from the literature which accepts, at least for the sake of argument, that the Darwinian Hypothesis is true. Realists in this debate sometimes call themselves the pre-established harmony theorists, since they claim that there is a pre-established harmony between certain moral facts and the evolved cognitive processes which evolved to track them. These theorists seek to ‘lower the epistemic bar’ of scepticism towards the belief that we might have evolved to have certain moral beliefs because those beliefs are true. I return to this discussion in Chapter Five.

The third and final argument I explored was the self-undermining argument. The self-undermining argument builds upon the problem of defining a debunking argument’s scope. Debunkers must have a clear target for their EDA in order to avoid unleashing a universal epistemic acid and a debunking argument which generalises to its own epistemic foundation. It is in this move, in meeting the demarcation challenge, that is, the challenge to distinguish between beliefs debunked and those that are not, that the debunkers must assume or preestablish arguments about epistemic norms which are not distinctly evolutionary, undermining facts. This reinforces the significance of the otiosity argument against the debunking manoeuvre. To be in a position to begin a debunking argument, the conclusion of that argument must already be settled on other grounds. In Chapter Three I explore how this problem surfaces in the debunker’s attempt to meet the demarcation challenge.

CHAPTER THREE: ONTOLOGISING MORALITY

3.1 *Meeting the Demarcation Challenge*

In Chapter Two I argued that the debunker must show a clear way of distinguishing between domains which are epistemically justified within natural selection and domains which are not. Kahane's formulation of the EDA is that if S's belief that p can be explained by X, and X is an off-track process, then p is unjustified.²¹² But as we have seen, in explanations for p evolutionary debunkers share the position that our cognitive faculties are the product of natural selection. The demarcation challenge is the task of demonstrating which beliefs are the product of cognitive faculties formed via off-track (non-truth-tracking) doxastic processes and which are formed via on-track doxastic processes. In the final section of the previous chapter, I argued that this challenge is significant because the epistemic norms which operate behind the EDA might themselves be susceptible to an EDA. The response from the debunker is the attempt to locate a meta-epistemic norm which meets the demarcation challenge for our perceptual and commonsense beliefs. The example I explored was the Milvian Bridge principle proposed by Griffiths and Wilkins:

The X facts are related to the evolutionary success of X beliefs in such a way that it is reasonable to accept and act on X beliefs produced by our evolved cognitive faculties.²¹³

Here, I show that this attempt to meet the demarcation challenge assumes that moral truth, if it exists, must be appropriately responsive to fitness-enhancing tendencies. This presupposition begs the question against moral realism because moral knowledge need not be causal in nature and fitness-enhancing tendencies are likely to be causal in nature. A related presupposition of the debunking strategy is that natural properties are the only candidates for

²¹² Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments." 111

²¹³ Griffiths, "Crossing the Milvian Bridge: When Do Evolutionary Explanations Debunk Belief?." §2

evaluative truth and thus that the available options for the realist are limited to moral naturalism or moral nihilism.²¹⁴ I will argue that this leads to a dilemma for the aspiring debunker.

3.1.1 What Does it Mean to Track Truth?

Goldman (1967, 1976) proposed that “S knows that p if and only if the fact that p is causally connected in an “appropriate” way with S’s believing p.”²¹⁵ Here, “appropriate” denotes the knowledge-producing causal processes of perception, memory, and a causal chain of correctly constructed inference from perception or memory. A simplified version of this causality could be expressed in that S’s belief that P is appropriately caused by the fact that P.²¹⁶ For perception, take the case where a vase situated in front of S is blocked by a photograph of a vase which, when illuminated in a certain way, looks to S as if it were the real vase. S does not really see the vase in front of him, as Goldman argues there is no causal connection between the vase (the fact that p) and S’s belief. In terms of memory, “the causal connection between an earlier belief (or knowledge) of p and a later belief (knowledge) of p is certainly a necessary ingredient...”²¹⁷ So the case of remembering is much like perceiving, but the process of recollection at time t_1 , is justified in the instance that at t_0 S’s belief that p was causally connected to the fact that p.

The theory becomes more complex as an account is developed which attempts to consider cases of interrupted memories and interfering background propositions. What is important for my purposes, however, is that Goldman’s theory concerns empirical propositions only, as, according to Goldman, the “traditional analysis is adequate for

²¹⁴ Moral naturalism encompasses a number of positions. I explore these principal options in the next chapter.

²¹⁵ Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing." 369

²¹⁶ This simplification is formulated by Ichikawa, in: Ichikawa and Steup, "The Analysis of Knowledge." §6.2

²¹⁷ Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing." 360

knowledge of nonempirical truths.”²¹⁸ His theory is dependent on the existence of truth-conferring properties, the objects of our perception themselves. This is troubling because a number of epistemological cases, such as the Barn County case described below, show that the causal theory of knowledge is questionable. If the debunking strategy rests on a relationship with truth such as that in Goldman’s causal theory of knowledge, then the EDA may inherently beg the question against the realist whose moral beliefs are not necessarily dependent on a causal relationship with moral facts.

Epistemic reliabilism was proposed by Goldman a decade after he proposed the causal theory. Following the Barn County case, Goldman abandoned the causal theory which, he argued, failed to meet the challenge of Gettier cases. The Barn County case involves a town full of barn facades and one true barn. S (who is travelling through the county) observes and believes in the barns of Barn County.²¹⁹ In the instance that S unknowingly observes a false barn and believes it to be an actual barn, he is clearly mistaken. But in the instance that he unknowingly observes the one true barn in the county, it would seem that his belief is both true and appropriately caused by the barn itself, yet the truth of S’s belief in this instance is a matter of luck. As a result, it is plausible to think that S’s belief does not count as knowledge. His belief that p is causally connected to the truth that p, but S doesn’t *know* that p. However, the epistemological debate concerning the causal theory is not the foremost concern here. The link between this causal theory and Goldman’s later reliabilism, is that in both cases objects in existence play a causal role in our knowledge of them.

In terms of meeting the demarcation challenge, under reliabilism we are led to conclude that justified domains were those which were fitness-enhancing because they were truth-tracking. Beliefs which were fitness-enhancing irrespective of whether they were truth-

²¹⁸ Though, he doesn’t explicitly state what the traditional understanding is. Ibid. 357

²¹⁹ Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 20 (1976).

tracking are rendered unjustified. The problem for debunkers is that in order to characterise moral beliefs as the latter, they must assume or demonstrate that moral belief forming processes are purely instrumental and thus that moral truths do not exist mind-independently. This suggests that the success of the EDA relies on a metaphysical assumption about the nature of moral facts.

This presupposition of the debunking strategy is that truth-tracking belief forming processes evolved when objects in existence *caused* the belief of our ancestors, so that inherited beliefs of this kind are justified in spite of the fact that they are as much the product of our evolved cognitive processes as anything else. If moral realists are to meet this presupposed standard of knowledge, they must commit to the existence of moral facts whose mind-independent existence reliably cause beliefs in them. Few realists are actually committed to such a view. These facts would be something like Dworkin's *morons* – mysterious free-floating values, acting as truth-conferring properties for our moral beliefs.²²⁰ I will attempt to show how it is that debunkers construe realism in this way, and why it is that debunking strategies depend on this characterisation.

3.1.1 The Objectivist Assumption

As previously discussed in Chapter One, Nozick disputes this aspect of debunking strategies in the following passage:

If a speeding train is bearing down on me, I am inclined to jump out of its way. How is it that I am aware of this train? Obviously through my evolved capacities of sight and hearing and so forth. My awareness of the train comes to me through adaptations which selection has put in place. Yet, no one would want to claim that the train does not have a reality in its own right. Why, therefore, should one feel able to deny that

²²⁰ Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). 32

ethics or morality has a reality in its own right? The fact that awareness comes through adaptations is quite irrelevant to matters of ontology.²²¹

Ruse argues in response that we have no reason to assume the existence of moral facts, although we have a reason to assume the existence of Nozick's train provided, crucially, that it is actually there. He writes:

Start with the fact that the argument about the train goes through because and only because the existence of the train is assumed independently. Suppose, for instance, one had two worlds identical except that one has a speeding train and the other does not. There would be no reason to think the evolutionist is committed to a belief in speeding trains in both worlds. One is aware of the speeding train only because there is such a train.²²²

Since it would make sense that we would not perceive speeding trains if they were not actually there, the assumption is that what is reliably tracked by our capacity to perceive are features of the world, as these features "impinge upon our sensory surfaces."²²³ On these grounds, Ruse argues that the metaethical posit of the 'ultimate foundation' of morality is redundant:

Now consider two worlds, one of which has an objective morality, whatever that might mean (God's will? Non-natural properties?), and the other world has no such morality. If the evolutionist's case is well taken, the people in *both* worlds are going to have identical beliefs subject to normal laws of causation and so forth.²²⁴

²²¹ Quoted in: Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics." 155-56

²²² Ibid. 156

²²³ A phrase referencing Quine's position on our causal relationship with objects. I return to Quine's criterion of existence in the next section. See, Michael Woods, "Scepticism and Natural Knowledge," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 80 (1979). 241

²²⁴ Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics." 156

If the instrumental beliefs are identical in both worlds, then the appeal to an ultimate foundation seems to be unjustified. However, the most immediate concern with this case is that a world without an objective morality, which we are asked to imagine, wouldn't contain moral beliefs by its very design. The success of the argument, on one hand, seems largely dependent on the construal of moral truths as truth-conferring properties. On the other hand, the argument seems to be a restatement of a counterfactual challenge that, "the people in *both* worlds are going to have identical beliefs subject to normal laws of causation and so forth"²²⁵ and thus that, "you would believe what you do about right and wrong, irrespective of whether or not a 'true' right or wrong existed."²²⁶

The core claim here is that truth is ontologically superfluous in the formation of our moral beliefs, and thus that we seem to be capable of holding and communicating our moral convictions without invoking the properties which instantiate their truth. This assumes rather than argues for the fact that moral beliefs are purely fitness enhancing, as opposed to truth-tracking. Yet, he rests his case for the superfluity of moral truth on this premise when he writes elsewhere that:

We are not prisoners in the cave because we can make sense of things by making all of our beliefs hand together. Metaphysical reality is nothing to us. We cannot use it... We can live without the hypothesis, so dismiss it.²²⁷

The first response to the train case is that the construal of objectivity inherent in this EDA does not hold for many realist accounts of truth. For example, Raz formulates a version of objectivity which is centred on the reality of *domains* as opposed to *objects*.²²⁸ Pettit

²²⁵ Ibid. 156

²²⁶ Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. 254

²²⁷ *Darwinism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 248

²²⁸ Henry S. Richardson, *Articulating the Moral Community: Toward a Constructive Ethical Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). 242

following Raz, develops an account of domain objectivity for morality, which is adapted by Richardson into three main conditions:

1. *Truth-aptness*: Ethical judgements are robustly truth-apt, rather than simply serving to express feelings or attitudes.
2. *Some success in attaining truth*: Some ethical judgements are true.
3. *The availability of nonrelative justification*: The justifying reasons conveyed by an ethical truth do not vary with the values, evaluative perspective or *Weltanschauung* of the persons entertaining it.²²⁹

I will not follow this line of argument now, but this contemporary account of our relationship with moral facts presents a problem for Ruse's counterfactual. I only mean to demonstrate that we must assume that objectivity functions as Ruse construes it for his argument to go through. We must take the conditions for truth to be such that the truth of S's belief that p is appropriately caused by the truth conferring property that p, because trains (as features of the world) cause our beliefs of them. Since moral facts do not impinge on our sensory surfaces, we do seem to face a special problem as to how we might come to know them. But arguing that, "[o]ne is aware of the speeding train only because there is such a train," construes the awareness of the train as dependent on its existence, whereby the factuality of the train is conferring truth upon the claim that there is such a train. In the world without morality, we are led to believe that the content of our moral beliefs is no longer made true by virtue of the existence of moral properties and yet the people in both worlds have identical beliefs. So, Ruse argues, "what we can say is that an objective ethics is redundant to the evolutionist's case."²³⁰ But Ruse's conclusion only goes through if we take moral properties (as truth-

²²⁹ Ibid. 243

²³⁰ Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics." 156

conferring properties) to be ‘out there’ in the world – a claim which I will show realist’s are not committed to.

Street meets the demarcation challenge by evoking an argument similar to Ruse’s case:

Take first the irreducibly normative truths posited by non-naturalist realists such as Nagel, Dworkin, Scanlon, or Shafer-Landau. A creature obviously can’t run into such truths or fall over them or be eaten by them. In what way then would it have promoted the reproductive success of our ancestors to grasp them?²³¹

Returning to the Milvian Bridge principle, which I argued presupposes a causal theory of knowledge, take the following reformulation:

MB: Moral facts are not related to the evolutionary success of moral beliefs in such a way that it is reasonable to accept and act on moral beliefs produced by our evolved cognitive faculties.²³²

Given MB, Street argues that the realist must provide an answer as to why it might promote the reproductive success for an individual to have a moral belief or judgement that is true in the way that the truth of a nearby cliff or a burning fire is justified by recourse to our reliance on perception.²³³ As in Ruse, this move presupposes a casual relation between moral belief and the truth-maker of that belief. Take the following explanation of evaluative truth as construed by Street:

To say that these truths could kill you or maim you, like a predator or fire, would be one kind of answer, since it makes it clear how recognizing them could be advantageous. But such an answer is clearly not available in the case of the

²³¹ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 129

²³² I have only substituted for *x* in the original phrasing: Griffiths, "Crossing the Milvian Bridge: When Do Evolutionary Explanations Debunk Belief?." §2

²³³ Street refers to beliefs which are likely to be true, because of the Darwinian explanation for them, our beliefs about our ‘manifest surroundings’ – a term borrowed from Gibbard arguing a similar point.

independent irreducibly normative truths posited by the non-naturalist realists. In the absence of further clarification, then, the non-naturalist's version of the tracking account is not only less parsimonious but also quite obscure.²³⁴

The realist is positioned to believe that failing to provide a reason for how the causal connection might be accounted for (in terms of the Milvian Bridge principle), leads them to the Darwinian dilemma: denying the tracking account or accepting it. But the relationship with truth invoked here guards against other realist responses.

It makes sense to propose that the accurate belief formation of the presence of fires, predators and cliffs would have been instrumental to our evolutionary success. But for the argument to succeed, Street acknowledges that one will need to posit "in one's best explanation that there were indeed fires, predators, and cliffs, which it proved quite useful to be aware of, given that one could be burned by them, eaten by them, or could plummet over them."²³⁵ But she does not grant moral realists this choice. She identifies that it is these features of our manifest surroundings that have causal powers, "in particular being the kinds of things that can kill us, injure us...and so on."²³⁶ Because of this, she argues, "they are the kinds of things that it would have promoted the survival and reproduction of our ancestors to track with reasonable accuracy."²³⁷ The existence of the objects is primary in this explanation, which is not damning in itself for realism because naturalist accounts might accept this causal relationship with moral belief.²³⁸ But Street's argument is targeting non-naturalism, where normative truth is "independent and yet lacking in causal powers" thus "there is no reason to think that natural selection, or for that matter any other causal process,

²³⁴ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 130

²³⁵ Ibid. 160

²³⁶ Sharon Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2016). 29

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Pre-established harmony theorists do just this. Some third factor, such as survival or successful cooperation, functions as the *aim* of selection in the evolution of our moral capacities. I return to this in chapter four.

would shape us in such a way that we would be able to track such truths.”²³⁹ The only response Street believes is available for the realist, is to posit that some concept like friendship or family is valuable, and that causes X, Y and Z led us to believe this fact. But these explanations, she argues, don’t provide reasons to think that causal forces might have shaped our evaluative judgements in the same way as they shaped our judgements about our manifest surroundings, “it merely confidently reasserts that they did.”²⁴⁰ Street is arguing that the realist response must demonstrate the very causal relationship which is implicit in the case of our relationship with our manifest surroundings, lest the realist simply presuppose that truth-conferring moral properties (*morons*) exist.

Street’s argument is unlike Ruse’s in that, at its heart, it is not just leaning on the argument that truth is superfluous to our best explanation of morality, because she also seems to defend a claim about mind-dependence. As a constructivist, Street is demonstrating that our “moral reality is constituted by the attitudes, actions, responses, or outlooks of persons, possibly under idealised conditions.”²⁴¹ So, stripped of its evolutionary premise, Street’s argument challenges our stance-independence.²⁴²

Scanlon writes of moral facts that, “[n]othing in the content of normative or mathematical judgements suggests that they are about objects with any particular spatio-temporal location at all, hence in particular not one “outside of us.”...No causal link can bridge the gap, so some mysterious form of intuition seems to be required.”²⁴³ If moral facts aren’t of the kind which might confer truth in the causal manner which Street supposes, then

²³⁹ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 31

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). 14

²⁴² I argue that Street’s Darwinian dilemma rests on an argument which seeks to establish this conclusion. I return to this argument in Chapter 5.

²⁴³ Here the Scanlon outlines the general anti-realist argument that the alternative of naturalism is some ‘mysterious form of intuition’ which is generally followed by the conclusion that intuitionism is not a strong version of realism. See, Thomas Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). 70

it is not clear why the realist must present a case for instrumental truth which might justify the existence of moral truth-conferring properties. Scanlon's quote above outlines the general anti-realist *reductio*, which could be interpreted in two different ways. The first works in favour of the anti-realist and the second in favour of the realist. Either we take this to mean that moral facts are of a kind which are of no importance to us, since they do not exist in the way which other facts, such as scientific facts, exist.²⁴⁴ Or, we could say that this is precisely the advantage of moral facts (at least in the face of the EDA). Realists are not answerable to why, from an evolutionary perspective, recognizing moral truths would be advantageous because realists are not committed to the causal relationship between S's belief that p and the factuality of p – which, further still, is just one way of modelling our epistemic access to features of the world.

Scanlon's claim gives us cause to review one of Street's earlier claims. If moral realists can't present their ontological commitment to moral facts in the same way as we can present facts about our manifest surroundings then, Street writes, "the non-naturalist's version of the tracking account is not only *less parsimonious* but also quite *obscure*."²⁴⁵ Absent of a completed non-moral genealogy, it would seem that the charge of non-parsimony falls through. But this argument needs to be considered on independent grounds. The second metaethical claim is that charge of obscurity, which again requires independent consideration.²⁴⁶ A number of viable options exist for the realist which might fall under this category of obscure, and this presents a problem for ensuring a clean *scope* in the EDA.²⁴⁷ But more broadly, this reveals an assumption which is allowing the EDA to go through, at least against some versions of moral realism: either (1) the moral realist must provide a

²⁴⁴ This would be an argument about moral ontology. I explore this in the next section.

²⁴⁵ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 130 [my emphasis]

²⁴⁶ Street is not alone in believing that the queerness of non-natural properties is a reason to question our access to them, or at least our justification in believing in them. The question I pose in the next section is how much work this assumption does for the anti-realist's argument.

²⁴⁷ Recall that the EDA must be structured so as to guard against the possibility of post-hoc justification.

naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or (2) the moral realist must accept that naturalism fails and that we are led to moral scepticism. I am arguing that (1) presupposes a causal theory of knowledge and only seriously considers moral naturalism, and that the argumentation undergirding (2) relies heavily on this charge of parsimony and obscurity.

To reiterate, Street and Ruse's argument begs the question against moral realism because our relationship with our reasons for holding certain moral beliefs need not be characterised in terms of a causal relationship with truth-conferring properties – properties which are justified in virtue of our best explanations of their existence. I gestured towards two metaethical arguments (parsimony and obscurity) that require independent consideration which, absent a coherent genealogy, seem to carry the debunking argument. Before I respond to these independent challenges, I will discuss Joyce's approach to meeting the demarcation challenge.

Joyce's argument is directed at salvaging mathematical beliefs in addition to beliefs about our manifest surroundings. In a sense, Street holds a contradictory position on this:

It is important to me that the challenge I am raising does not go through with regard to objects in our manifest surroundings, or with regard to many of the things that are the object of study in the natural sciences. I don't, however, mean to deny that a parallel challenge might go through in other important domains, for example the domain of mathematics.²⁴⁸

There has been much speculation on whether or not one could reasonably do away with an ontology for mathematics whilst maintaining an ontology for science. Perhaps in the face of those speculations, Joyce takes mathematical beliefs much more seriously; arguing that

²⁴⁸ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 28

natural selection would have selected for the capacity to facilitate simple arithmetic. He seems to suggest that our reasons for salvaging mathematical beliefs are because the environment would necessitate generally accurate beliefs regarding basic arithmetic. He writes:

This ... is an eternal and necessary truth, and thus by “hard wiring” such a belief into our brains natural selection takes no risks – it is not as if the environment could suddenly change that $1 + 1$ would equal 3... 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 hypothesis of how this belief might have come to be innate.²⁴⁹

This follows for commonsense concepts as well, such as the concept, *child*. He writes, “the genealogical story will surely involve the presence of children...” as “[d]eveloping a preparation to form beliefs about children will be useful only in an environment where children exist...”²⁵⁰ We might understand these beliefs as useful in the sense that they are about features of the world which seem indispensable to our proper functioning.²⁵¹ Joyce then argues that we would require an environmental ‘trigger’, transforming this tendency to form beliefs about concepts which are useful from those preparations, a process which he argues would “presumably involve an exposure to children.”²⁵² Here, the factuality of p – the fact that our best explanation about p holds that p exists – confers truth upon our belief that p. It seems here that Joyce falls back on the existence of (exposure to) children.

In the case of arithmetic beliefs, the appeal to pragmatic success seems to fall back on this very argument. However, the justification is inferential in that it is sensible to assume

²⁴⁹ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 182

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ That is, success in the human Umwelt, as Griffiths and Wilkins would prefer, or an accurate representation of our manifest surroundings, as Street would prefer.

²⁵² Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*.

that basic arithmetic beliefs are justified only because they afford beliefs *about* objects which confer truth upon our belief that p.²⁵³ That is, because our capacity for perception and memory in the case of the three lions involves a basic arithmetic calculation, without which perception and memory would have less utility, arithmetic calculation can be instrumentally justified.

Applying this to moral beliefs, Joyce cites Kitcher's claim that:

...proto-morality is introduced as a system of primitive rules for transcending the fraught sociality of early hominids: there's no issue here of perceiving moral truths. Nor at any further stage is there a need to suppose that moral truths play a role in constraining the normative systems adopted. The criterion of success isn't accurate representation, but the improvement of social cohesion in ways that promote the transmission of the system itself.²⁵⁴

Joyce wants to show that the genealogy of morality differs from arithmetical and scientific beliefs because, in the case of morality, the truth of the moral beliefs does not depend on the factuality of moral beliefs. Drawing on Kitcher, we can infer that Joyce's argument is that the "criterion of success" is the accurate representation of an object whose existence *triggers* belief formation about that object. In the case of the domain of arithmetic beliefs, what is signified by the manoeuvre which led to the salvation of arithmetic beliefs is that certain facts function as background assumptions to reasonable hypotheses about how certain beliefs might have become innate.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Since he is only referring to basic mathematical truths – as opposed to the mathematical domain itself, which would include abstract mathematical truths – this argument can be clearly distinguished from the commonly employed indispensability argument. It is not clear why Joyce is interested in salvaging basic mathematical truths, but it does afford a broader understanding of how debunkers attempt to meet the demarcation challenge.

²⁵⁴ Phillip Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics*, ed. David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2005). 176

²⁵⁵ In acknowledging this point, Joyce, like Griffiths and Wilkins, accepts certain commonsense facts which we might employ in the synthesis of useful beliefs. As I showed in the previous chapter, the line in the sand between what is contained in this realm of commonsense facts and what is not is problematic in regards to the containment of the universal acid of the debunking claim.

What I hope to have made clear is that a common argument is employed in each of these cases; if moral beliefs can be explained without invoking their truth, then the truth of those beliefs is superfluous and thus we are in error about a host of our moral beliefs (Ruse and Joyce) or our moral beliefs are not justified (Street). In their attempt to explain the evolution of the belief forming processes which give rise to our moral beliefs, debunkers have assumed that a causal connection must hold between our moral beliefs and their truth-conferring properties. Our epistemological relationship with moral facts may not be of this kind and construing it in this way makes important metaphysical assumptions about the nature of moral facts. If the debunking strategy inherently relies on these metaphysical assumptions in order to meet the demarcation challenge and salvage perceptual and commonsense beliefs, then it either fails – and our perceptual and commonsense beliefs are similarly unjustified – or EDAs do not succeed in debunking moral realism.²⁵⁶ Instead, I will argue, they derive their force from implicit, non-evolutionary metaethical arguments.

These attempts to meet the demarcation challenge present a shared challenge. If moral realists can't present their ontological commitment to moral facts in the same way as we can present facts about our manifest surroundings, then realists must face the charge of parsimony or obscurity. But there is another response. What if the case for the existence of our manifest surroundings was not as obviously true as debunkers thought? If this were the case, the objectivist assumption fails for perceptual and commonsense beliefs as well. Based on Bayesian and Game theoretic modelling, Hoffman argues that it is not necessarily true that we can assume that fires, cliffs and predators exist in our explanations for which faculties would have evolved to track truth.²⁵⁷ In modelling, it is found that “fitness beats truth” in the

²⁵⁶ Ramon Das also argues this point. He writes, “[i]nsofar as EDAs crucially depend on such assumptions...[e]ither the debunkers' metaphysical assumptions find no application anywhere and EDAs do not succeed in debunking anything; or else their assumptions apply everywhere and EDAs end up debunking our knowledge of science and the external world, along with morality.” See, Ramon Das, “Evolutionary Debunking of Morality: Epistemological and Metaphysical,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 2 (2016).

²⁵⁷ Hoffman, *The Case against Reality: How Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes*.

evolution of our perceptual faculties. It was found that the formative doxastic processes underwriting our perceptual faculties evolved to track a perceptual space, but that it is possible that “the perceptual space... is not the objective world, nor is it homomorphic to it. It is simply a representational format that has been crafted by natural selection in order to support more effective interactions with the environment...”²⁵⁸ This means that evolution can generate perceptual belief forming systems that are not necessarily tracking an ‘objective reality’ but rather the very reality which would permit beings like us to operate and flourish within it. The authors conclude that “evolutionary pressures do not push perception in the direction of being increasingly reflective of objective reality...”²⁵⁹ contrary to the debunkers’ strategy of citing our ‘optimised’ perceptual systems in their attempt to meet the demarcation challenge. This presents a considerable problem for the aspiring debunker, but I will not follow this particular response any further here. Instead, I will focus on the argument that the EDA does not succeed in debunking moral realism as it rests on important metaethical assumptions about the nature of moral facts.

I now turn to the wider issue of understanding metaethical realism as relying upon the existence of truth-conferring properties.

3.2 *Moral Ontology*

Moral fabric has become a blanket term.²⁶⁰ Inherent in this phrase is the notion of materiality - that moral beliefs are made true in virtue of features of the world. With morality deemed part of the ‘fabric of the cosmos’, it becomes subject to the very physical laws which

²⁵⁸ Kyle D. Stephens Chetan Prakasha, Donald D. Hoffman, Manish Singh, Chris Fields., "Fitness Beats Truth in the Evolution of Perception.," (Forthcoming). 533

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Perhaps perpetuated by the popular use of this metaphor in physics, *The Fabric of Reality/the Cosmos*. See for instance: John Mackie, *Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). 12; Jonathan Dancy, "Two Conceptions of Moral Realism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60 (1986). 172; and Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Fabric of the World, Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

govern it. But moral facts aren't visible. Furthermore, moral facts aren't necessarily reducible to natural properties. I showed in the previous section that in their construal of reliable faculties, debunkers assume causal relationship between a belief and its truth-maker. They assume that realists posit the existence of truth conferring properties which entail the truth of moral claims, in much the same way that the existence of a train or a lion entails the truth of our belief that there is a train or a lion impinging upon our sensory surfaces. Here, I focus on the assumption that there exist truth conferring properties for moral beliefs.

3.2.1 *On What There Is Not*

In meeting the demarcation challenge, debunkers are taking the Archimedean view which, Dworkin writes, is “to stand outside of a whole body of belief, and to judge it as a whole from premises or attitudes that owe nothing to it.”²⁶¹ In their attempt to meet the demarcation challenge, the debunkers adopt a selective version of the Archimedean view; that descriptive propositions can be objectively true, but that evaluative propositions – such as moral and aesthetic claims – cannot be. Their position is only selectively Archimedean because, to form their debunking argument, they require a firm ground to stand on and materials with which they can construct their debunking argument which are not tainted by the off-track evolutionary influence they attribute to our moral and aesthetic beliefs. They require a concept of the thing they are trying to debunk, and thus they must at least partially acknowledge its reality. The kind of scepticism inherent in the debunking strategy is external (Archimedean) about moral and aesthetic values, yet debunkers often claim themselves to be mounting an internal challenge, and this is how they can maintain their selective Archimedean position (meeting the demarcation challenge).²⁶² By internal, it is meant that the

²⁶¹ Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1996). 88

²⁶² I believe this is what Severini and Sterpetti mean when they write, “if one adopts a debunking position in metaethics, then, to be coherent, she risks embracing a full-blooded sceptical position, i.e. a sceptical position

belief under examination is a posit within a given domain which it challenges. For example, a science-based argument rejecting a religious cosmology is internal in that the cosmology is subject to causal scrutiny – an evaluative feature of the domain of science. However, a religious-based belief, say some claim about what constitutes piety, is formed and supported internal to the domain of religion. The religious cosmological claim is scientifically scrutable because it is reducible to the scientific domain. The opposing cosmological explanations conflict and we are required to analyse the reasons counting in favour of each view in terms of the domain which the belief is about. In the piety case, since the belief is about religion in that it is formed and supported with reasons internal to the religious domain, there is no conflict and, furthermore, it wouldn't make sense to settle a conflict between belief p and q about piety in terms of reasons pertaining to the domain of science. This equips us with the vocabulary to posit that the debunking strategy may be a case of attempting to make an Archimedean argument about the moral domain – because the EDA applies the standards of the scientific domain to a dispute potentially internal to the moral domain.

Dworkin argues that “[a]ny successful – really, any intelligible – argument that evaluative propositions are neither true nor false must be internal to the evaluative domain rather than Archimedean about it.”²⁶³ Internal scepticism must be austere and neutral. It is austere “in the sense that it does not rely even on very general or counterfactual or theoretical positive moral judgements.”²⁶⁴ It is neutral “in the sense that it takes no sides in substantive moral controversies.”²⁶⁵ This means that this form of scepticism is directed towards second-order views on moral convictions, as opposed to views to the moral convictions themselves.

pertaining to all kinds of belief.” Vavova also acknowledges this, she writes, “we cannot determine if we are likely to be mistaken about morality if we can make no assumptions at all about what morality is like.” See, Severini and Sterpetti, “Darwinism in Metaethics: What If the Universal Acid Cannot Be Contained?.” 9; Vavova, “Debunking Evolutionary Debunking.” 92

²⁶³ Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It.” 89

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 92

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

The Archimidean (anti-realist) and the realist both believe that genocide and slavery are instances of moral wrongs, but the anti-realist questions whether the wrongness is really “out there” in reality.²⁶⁶ The anti-realist believes that the wrongness is not *really* true, or as Dworkin prefers, true at “face value”, and instead that “wrongness is “in here,” in our own breasts, that we have “projected” moral quality onto reality, that events are not, after all, true or false, or part of what we do or do not know, but are only, in complex ways, products of our invention or manufacture.”²⁶⁷

Most of us would believe that the torturing of innocents for pleasure would be a cruel and wicked act. We would probably also believe that this claim was true – that torturing innocents for pleasure being a cruel and wicked act is true at face value – and that those who opposed this notion would be in error. Furthermore, we might also deny that our belief is merely a subjective reaction to the idea of torture, and instead is a factual report of an objective matter. Dworkin distinguishes between the first statement – the positive moral judgement – and the final two statements which express philosophical opinions regarding the nature of the positive moral judgement. The positive moral judgement is an internal (I) proposition, and the latter two are external (E) propositions.

1. Cruelty (I)
2. Truth (E)
3. Objectivity (E)

Dworkin argues that the external propositions are supposedly metaphysical positions – and he attributes this belief to the Archimedean. From here, if the Archimedean were to examine the above claim, they would commit to (1), but not (2) and (3). However, Dworkin argues

²⁶⁶ We could add that, in Street’s case, she is sceptical as to whether the wrongness is *really* wrong independent of our attitudes.

²⁶⁷ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It."

this is incoherent. To form the argument that this belief is mistaken, Dworkin cites Rorty's language game:

Given that it pays to talk about mountains, as it certainly does, one of the obvious truths about mountains is that they were here before we talked about them. If you do not believe that, you probably do not know how to play the usual language-games which employ the word "mountain." But the utility of those language-games has nothing to do with the question of whether Reality as It Is In Itself, apart from the way it is handy for human beings to describe it, has mountains in it.²⁶⁸

Regarding mountains, Rorty offers two levels of discourse. The first is at an ordinary level. Mountains exist now, before we existed, and will likely exist long after we die. Even if there were never humans to observe those mountains, they would have existed. The second level considers whether *Reality as It Is In Itself* contains mountains. On this level, Rorty argues that the debate consists of those who believe that mountains do exist and those who believe that they do not (but exist in so far as they provide utility in the "language game" of the first level of discourse). The response to Rorty, and the response that Dworkin believes is analogous to a defence of his domain realism, is that his position doesn't actually contradict what someone believes and is therefore not "interesting." Dworkin applies this criticism to Rorty in that:

If [Rorty] gives the sentence "Mountains are part of Reality as It Is In Itself" the meaning it would have within our "language game" if any of us actually said it, then it means nothing different from "Mountains exist, and would exist even if there were no people," and the contrast he needs disappears. If, on the other hand, he assigns some novel or special sense to that sentence – if he says, for example, that it means that

²⁶⁸ Richard Rorty, "Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?," in *The Future of Academic Freedom*, ed. Louis Menand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 29-30

mountains are a logically necessary feature of the universe – then his argument loses any critical force or philosophical bite.²⁶⁹

Dworkin questions whether anti-realists who would endorse this critique of Rorty would accept that the parallel holds for their selective Archimedean scepticism.

They would insist that E-propositions like the proposition that morality is a matter of objective fact or that there can be right answers to moral questions really are different from I-propositions...and that it does make sense, in virtue of that difference, to deny the first pair of [propositions]...while affirming...the second.²⁷⁰

Returning to the torture case, say I was to add a number of E-propositions. It is true that it is wrong, and this is an objective fact. Can I read these as I-propositions rather than metaphysical existence questions? Dworkin believes we can, and thus the anti-realist is committed to rejecting not just the objectivity claim, but the internal proposition as well – the neutrality requirement cannot be maintained if we view claims about objectivity and truth as external propositions (as questions of ontology).

If I-propositions are not philosophically distinct from E-propositions, then “anyone...persuaded to give up the face value view of morality...must surrender morality along with it.”²⁷¹ My claim that it is objectively wrong to torture innocents for pleasure is equivalent in “ordinary discourse” to the claim that it is wrong to torture innocents for pleasure even if no one ever thought it was. Thus, if debunkers attempt to separate the I-propositions from the E-propositions, they must either abandon their belief in the I-propositions or take the Archimedean view.

Dworkin believes that facts being the floating values which instantiate the truth of our moral propositions, are not the kind of objectivity we refer to. Instead, these characterisations

²⁶⁹ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." 97

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 96

²⁷¹ Ibid. 97

are “inflated, metaphysical ways of repeating what some of the earlier further claims say more directly...”²⁷² That, for example, the wrongness of torturing innocents for pleasure does not depend on anyone’s thinking it wrong.

To further illustrate, consider the following conversation:

A: Abortion is morally wicked: we always in all circumstances have a categorical reason – a reason that does not depend on what anyone wants or thinks – to prevent and condemn it.

B: On the contrary. In some circumstances abortion is morally required. Single teenage mothers with no resources have a categorical reason to abort.

C: You are both wrong. Abortion is never either morally required or forbidden. No one has a categorical reason either way. It is always permissible and never mandatory, like cutting your fingernails.

D: You are all three wrong. Abortion is never either morally forbidden or morally required or morally permissible.

The Archimedean claim is supposedly D, but Dworkin argues it is incoherent and ultimately an I-proposition. If D is arguing that “[a]ny proposition that assumes the existence of something that does not exist is false”, then D assumes that morons exist.²⁷³ The intelligibility of A, B and C requires that moral duties exist, but their intelligibility does not depend on morons. However, the moron assumption means that, if we suppose morons have colours, then A argues abortion is red, B that abortion is yellow and C that abortion is green. Dworkin argues that D is declaring that there are no colours, and thus that abortion cannot be red, yellow or green. D is also insisting that his declaration, that there are no colours, is not itself a moral claim. But the claims of A, B and C offer categorical reasons that people either have or

²⁷² Ibid. 99

²⁷³ Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. 42

do not have for abortion, whereas D's argument (that no colours – duties – exist), means that no one has a reason of the categorical kind. It becomes unclear then how D can truly disagree with C without contradiction. D, Dworkin concludes, must be expressing a moral position.

In our attempts to justify our beliefs, we provide internal reasons for why we might hold such a position. This means that any statement about the reasons we have for or against abortion for example, is a declaration about a stance towards abortion. In the same way, any statement about what responsibilities people have is a declaration of “how things stand – morally speaking. There is no way out of or around the independence of value.”²⁷⁴

We can understand these *morons* as, “special particles...whose energy and momentum establish fields that at once constitute morality or immorality, or virtue or vice, of particular human acts and institutions and also interact in some way with human nervous systems so as to make people aware of the morality or immorality or of virtue or vice.”²⁷⁵ This “moral field” thesis articulates the ontological presupposition set in the debunker's challenge.

Inherent in the assumption that a causal story could undermine our moral beliefs – and any justification which might alternatively explain those moral beliefs – is the notion that a property (truth-maker, moron etc.) instantiates the truth of moral propositions. Instead, by accepting that the moral domain need not make any scientific claim and is itself an independent domain (unlike in the religious cosmology example), the debate between antirealists and realists need not be constricted by the ontological presupposition at work in the debunking debate.

The kind of support a judgement can and therefore should have depends...on what it is about, and since empirical judgements...are about phenomena that supposedly can

²⁷⁴ Ibid. 44

²⁷⁵ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." 104

causally affect our own experience, directly or indirectly, it is sensible to count evidence of some such impact on those judgements...[but] judgements of morality...have a very different content, and must therefore seek support in different ways.

This support, I will argue, takes the form of reasons which either count in favour of or against what we believe. These reasons face each other head-on, on rebutting grounds, and are not susceptible to undermining unless certain ontological presuppositions are in play. Thus, the antirealist's construal of moral ontology begs the question against the moral realist. It calls for a satisfaction of a criterion of existence which the moral realist is not necessarily committed to. So now we will return to the problem I outlined earlier. In their attempt to meet the demarcation challenge, debunkers back the realist into a corner and assert that either (1) the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or (2) they must accept that naturalism fails and that we are led to moral scepticism.

3.2.2 The Criterion of Existence

Objections to moral realism also stem from the following, related, concern: to posit that there exist irreducibly normative truths would be at odds with our most fundamental views on what there is. Mackie writes, "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe."²⁷⁶ By "anything else in the universe", we can infer that "our ontological commitments must be understood as claims about what exists in the physical world of space

²⁷⁶ Mackie, *Ethics*. 38

and time.”²⁷⁷ Though this is a view compatible with naturalism, it is by no means an accurate representation of the variety of metaethical realisms.

Quine’s most succinct statement of this concern comes in the form of a criterion:

A theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true.²⁷⁸

Quine would say is that we should formulate our best scientific theory of the world in its logically purest form and see what entities we are quantifying over in that formulation of the theory. If only objects in space and time are the values of bound variables, then our scientific theory only commits us to objects in space and time. We have no ontological commitments – and should make no ontological assertions about – any other objects. If we take a scientific view of the natural world, in Quine’s sense we become ontologically committed to only the natural things of which that world is composed. Mackie’s argument builds upon this sentiment. The world which impinges on our sensory surfaces, Scanlon argues, “immediately excludes the normative...[as] exclusive emphasis on the physical world is built in from the start.”²⁷⁹ Scanlon, like Dworkin, argues that domain-centred realism “makes the most sense”, whereby over the range of domains – including mathematics, aesthetics, morality and science – no particular domain is ontologically superior. Scanlon writes, “...statements within all of these domains are capable of truth and falsity, and that the truth values of statements of one domain, insofar as they do not conflict with statements of some other domain, are properly settled by the standards of the domain that they are about.”²⁸⁰ Scanlon’s non-naturalism is not susceptible to Mackie’s critique, as Mackie is

²⁷⁷ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 17

²⁷⁸ Willard Van Orman Quine, "On What There Is," *The Review of Metaphysics* 2, no. 1 (1948). 33

²⁷⁹ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 18

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 19

writing about objects in space and time (morons) and Scanlon is writing about truth. The assumption at work in Mackie is that all truths are made true by objects; this is the truth-maker correlative of the causal theory of knowledge.

Schafer calls for a similar shift in our view towards ontology – a *what grounds what* relationship as opposed to a question of *what there is*. The former he calls the Aristotelian task, and the latter the Quinean task.²⁸¹ The return to traditional (Aristotelian) metaphysics means departing from the orthodox view of our ontological commitments.²⁸² The orthodox view has “focused on existence questions such as whether properties, meanings, and numbers exist, as well as whether possible worlds exists, whether and when mereological composites exist, etc.”²⁸³ Schafer argues that metaphysics is better understood as the discipline that “studies substances and their modes and kinds, by studying the fundamental entities and what depends on them.”²⁸⁴ This grounding approach may support the ambitions of domain-centred realism.²⁸⁵

A construal of realism as dependent on *morons* means that the anti-realist challenge (set by debunkers when they attempt to meet the demarcation challenge) can be rephrased to read something like the following:

Moral propositions internal to the moral domain presuppose or entail the truth of certain scientifically verifiable facts, and thus the moral domain can be tested against

²⁸¹ Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, ed. David J. Chalmers & Ryan Wasserman David Manley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). 348-351

²⁸² Bricker argues that the Quinean regime is known as the orthodox view, following Quine's considerable influence in 20th century metaphysics. See, Phillip Bricker, "Ontological Commitment," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N Zalta (2016).

²⁸³ Schaffer, "On What Grounds What." 356-357

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 351

²⁸⁵ This might be what is meant by Richardson's use of the name 'domain centred realism', though he only alludes to the ontology I am defending here. Richardson, *Articulating the Moral Community: Toward a Constructive Ethical Pragmatism*. 242

the standards of scientific inquiry which involve claims about causal interaction between our beliefs and truth-conferring properties in existence.

We might interpret Mackie's argument from queerness as an allusion to this idea – only properties or kinds of type x are justified, and moral properties are not of property or kind x and are thus not justified.²⁸⁶ From my discussion of the debunker's attempt to meet the demarcation challenge it seems that reliance on Mackie's argument is implicit in them. But the rephrasing of the anti-realist challenge allows a better articulation of the charge of ontological superfluity. If it is true that the moral domain can be tested against the standards of scientific inquiry, which involves claims about causal interaction between our beliefs and states of affairs that obtain in space and time, then the existence of a complete non-moral explanation of human behaviour would render the postulation of moral truth superfluous. In the same way, a religious cosmology would be superfluous given a complete physicalist account of the universe, since the universe is better explained in terms of science, where parsimony is preserved and obscurity avoided.

So, to return to the argument that the debunkers are offering:

(1) the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or

(2) they must accept that naturalism fails and that they are led to moral scepticism.

I am arguing that (1) presupposes something like the moral field thesis and thus only seriously considers moral naturalism. To establish (2), debunkers depart from any distinctly debunking manoeuvre and instead rely on the outcome of (1). The debunking manoeuvre is absent here. If it is not a distinctly evolutionary debunking argument, then what is at the core

²⁸⁶ Or, at least, that this would give us reason to be skeptical about our belief in moral properties. For a similar critique of this interpretation of Mackie's argument from queerness (and other interpretations), see: Lee Shepski, "The Vanishing Argument from Queerness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 3 (2008).

of this anti-realist challenge? I now turn to this question.

3.3 Revisiting the Otiosity argument

Recall Joyce's formulation of the debunking challenge. Three explanations are on offer for morality: Hypothesis A, which "promises to explain all our moral judgements, leaving us without need to posit any moral facts...unless the moral facts are somehow implicitly buried in hypothesis A..." and "[t]he only way that moral facts could be buried in a scientific genealogical hypothesis is if some kind of moral naturalism were true."²⁸⁷

Hypothesis B and Hypothesis C consist of non-natural and supernatural facts respectively. Crucially, he reconsiders the possibility of post-hoc justification. If any reasons can be found in the debunking attempt which might count in favour of the debunked belief, the debunking argument would carry no challenge. The debunker must ensure that S's belief cannot be ratified external to explanation X to properly debunk S's belief.

In chapter one, I explained this condition in terms of our N-beliefs about Waterloo – beliefs which needed to be within the scope of the debunking challenge set by the belief pill for the debunking argument to go through. Recall that, if one was interested in debunking our belief that 'Napoleon lost Waterloo', a set of beliefs would actually be the target. The bare minimum of these beliefs (N-beliefs) would have to include our belief that Napoleon was a French emperor, that a battle took place in a region called Waterloo in 1815, and that the armies which Napoleon commanded lost that battle. But suppose we aspired to debunk these N-beliefs, and the belief pill targeted these exact beliefs. I raised the issue that if there were a fourth, residual belief - perhaps that the Prussian forces won the battle of Waterloo against Napoleon's armies – then the fourth belief could give us grounds to deduce (after the fact) that Napoleon *must* have lost the battle of Waterloo. Since the Prussian forces won, and they

²⁸⁷ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 209

were among the opposing forces in the war with Napoleon's armies. I presented this problem as the problem of available evidence. We now know that this is a sketch of how the otiosity argument plays out.

Joyce acknowledges the possibility of this problem when he writes, "...unless you can find some concrete evidence either in favour or against the belief you should cease to believe this thing."²⁸⁸ Kahane echoes this concern as well, he writes that "...our understanding of the causal premise... needs to rule out what we might call post-hoc justification."²⁸⁹ Joyce and Kahane, who both offer a formulation of the EDA, underestimate the significance of this condition. This surfaces in the argument with which I closed the previous section. Recall that the debunkers, through their attempt to meet the demarcation challenge, are ultimately offering the following argument:

- (1) the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or
- (2) they must accept that naturalism fails and that they are led to moral scepticism.

Joyce offers this argument in the chapter before he offers his debunking argument. He writes that:

...Once we have a complete non-moral genealogy of moral judgement, if naturalism succeeds non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk, *if moral naturalism fails non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk*. Thus non-naturalism and supernaturalism suffer most in this argumentative fray, whereas the moral naturalist is defeated only through independent arguments...²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 179

²⁸⁹ Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments." 106

²⁹⁰ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 210 [my emphasis]

In this excerpt, we are offered two options. Either we face head-on the *independent* reasons which count in favour of moral naturalism and they stand, or we accept that naturalism fails and thus that non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk (and therefore that realists have no leg to stand on). Joyce's attempt to satisfy the debunking condition is conditional:

...if moral naturalism fails [then] non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk.

But if naturalism does indeed fail, and by extension non-naturalism and supernaturalism are sunk, then the metaethical argument is complete as the anti-realist conclusion is established. The EDA is otiose. But it is interesting to consider what is carrying this argument. Joyce states openly that he is relying on Harman's challenge – an appeal to explanatory parsimony in the explanations for our moral judgements. In his effort to satisfy the debunking condition (to rule out post-hoc justification), that S's belief cannot be ratified external to explanation X, Joyce secures the very conclusion the debunking argument is meant to achieve – that naturalism, non-naturalism and supernaturalism are not viable positions and thus that realism is unjustified.

The success of Joyce's debunking argument depends on the affirmation of the antecedent claim that naturalism fails. This means that the debunking argument depends on the 'independent arguments' Joyce believes count against moral naturalism.²⁹¹ One of Joyce's independent arguments is that a moral naturalist "who wants to account for inescapable practical authority must locate it in the natural world."²⁹² That is, the moral naturalist must provide reasons for action which contain the practical authority (the motivational bulwark) that a satisfactory account of morality seems to demand. Since he doesn't believe the naturalist can provide these reasons, he argues that moral naturalism fails. There are two arguments to unpack here. Firstly, Joyce's dismissal of non-naturalism and supernaturalism

²⁹¹ More arguments are explored throughout Chapter 6 of *The Evolution of Morality*.

²⁹² Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 193

via Harman's challenge. Secondly, Joyce's claim that naturalism cannot satisfactorily account for the motivational bulwark he believes an evolved morality requires. I will explore the first challenge here. I will explore the second challenge in Chapter Four.

3.3.1 Meeting the first underlying challenge

Joyce argues against non-naturalism and supernaturalism via the application of Harman's challenge. To formulate Harman's challenge, we must begin with the belief that we are ontologically committed to that which plays an explanatory role in the happenings of the natural world. In scientific and moral observations, one factor seems to set the two kinds apart. Harman argues that an "observation has occurred whenever an opinion is a direct result of perception"²⁹³ and that "an immediate judgment [is] made in response to the situation without any conscious reasoning having taken place."²⁹⁴ The difference is that in scientific observations, scientists rely on the truth of background beliefs to make accurate observations, whereas the same does not hold for moral observations. Compare the following cases, taken directly from Harman:

1. If you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you do not need to conclude that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can see that it is wrong. But is your reaction due to the actual wrongness of what you see or is it simply a reflection of your moral "sense," a "sense" that you have acquired perhaps as a result of your moral upbringing?²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation," in *Ethical Theory 1: The Question of Objectivity*, ed. James Rachels (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). 5

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 6

²⁹⁵ Ibid. 4-5

2. Consider a physicist making an observation to test a scientific theory. Seeing a vapor trail in a cloud chamber, he thinks, "There goes a proton."... His making the observation supports the theory only because, in order to explain his making the observation, it is reasonable to assume something about the world over and above the assumptions made about the observer's psychology. In particular, it is reasonable to assume that there was a proton going through the cloud chamber, causing the vapor trail.²⁹⁶

In the moral case, "there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a given situation can have any effect on your perceptual apparatus."²⁹⁷ So, the belief regarding the truth of the proposition that x is morally wrong, seems to be explanatorily superfluous to our understanding the wrongness of the act. The above argument goes through because the explanatory requirement calls for a physical explanation – our experience of phenomena and our reaction to it – an explanation which the psychology of our dispositions can potentially supply. But this applies the methods of enquiry specific to the scientific domain to the moral domain. In other words, it assumes that *morons* exist and that the realist response must invoke such truth-conferring properties.

On the one hand, such an argument seems to call for an intuitive response, and thus we might say that it only targets proponents of moral intuitionism. An intuitionistic epistemology would suppose that there exists a truth-conducive faculty of the mind capable of detecting (sometimes autonomously) moral facts. These facts are comprehended in a way comparable to perceptual *seeming* in that they are self-evident.²⁹⁸ Stratton-Lake writes, "[j]ust as certain things can seem perceptually to be a certain way, e.g., coloured, or straight, so

²⁹⁶ Ibid. 6-7

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 8

²⁹⁸ Richard Price, "A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals," in *The British Moralists 1650–1800*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Elijah Chudnoff, "Intuitive Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 162, no. 2 (2013).

certain propositions can seem to be true, or present themselves to the mind as true.”²⁹⁹ In Harman’s example, moral facts are intuited through a kind of sensation that leads to an understanding and it is from this understanding that one can form the moral belief that the act is wrong. Such a construal of morality is reminiscent of Moore, who argues that *good* exists but does not have *being*, a claim which he coupled with the “supersensible reality” of numbers.³⁰⁰ Our access to this supersensible reality is supposedly made possible by a faculty of intuition – a faculty we could say has the capacity to *perceive* morons. As I have shown, not all realists are committed to the view that we possess a ‘moral sense’ (an intuition which responds to a supersensible reality) and thus that a supersensible counterpart of the moral field thesis is true (that supersensible morons exist). In the face of this challenge, the intuitionist response remains open for realists in the face of the EDA, but these realists unnecessarily commit themselves to accounts that make *mixed* as opposed to *pure* statements about morality – whereby the reasons invoked in the moral domain are scientifically scrutable.³⁰¹

On the other hand, Harman’s case seems to target a rapid response, emotional kind of morality, which is potentially exploring our conservative expressive tendency, but is nonetheless ignoring or not fully appreciating our critical reflective capacity. As I argued in 2.2, we possess the capacity to change our intuitive responses based on periods of slow deliberation, and to reflect, develop, and in some cases, deny these affectations. For now, I will call a theory grounded in our critical reflective capacity a form of constructivism. Joyce’s treatment of realism overlooks the possibility of a mind-independent account of constructivism.³⁰² Additionally, an account of moral naturalism can be shown to be

²⁹⁹ Philip Stratton-Lake, "Intuitionism in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2016).

³⁰⁰ G. E. Moore, "Principia Ethica," ed. T. Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 161–63, 174–76

³⁰¹ See, for example, Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*.

³⁰² I explore this account in Chapter Six.

embedded in Hypothesis A, and this is problematic for the aspiring debunker who must first consider such cases head-on. I return to this in the next chapter.

Scanlon argues that the original assumption of Harman's, that our best explanations play an explanatory role in explaining features of the world, does not apply to the moral domain or, he adds, the mathematical domain. We have reason in the domain of mathematics, "to quantify over numbers if quantifying over numbers is a good way to formulate this theory."³⁰³ Just as we have good reason to introduce concepts such as imaginary or complex numbers, if such concepts provide a "more coherent and satisfactory account for the relevant parts of mathematics"³⁰⁴, reasons which count in favour of certain moral beliefs, internal to the domain of morality, are capable of ratifying our beliefs without evoking mixed explanations which would warrant an analysis in terms of the scientific domain. Wright calls this analysis the width of an entities "cosmological role." Whereby *cosmological* extends to entities not only satisfiable by causal relations between truth and belief, but by the uses these *additional kinds* have in discourse.³⁰⁵ Wright states that an entity's cosmological role is "the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object."³⁰⁶ So, we have reasons to introduce moral concepts and cause to believe that, at least some of these concepts, are independent and pure statements internal to that domain.

Scanlon's claim is that "the basic element of the normative domain is a relation, *being a reason for*, can be seen as a claim about the metaphysics of the normative."³⁰⁷ The world impinges on our sensory surfaces, but this does not set the ontological precedent for all forms

³⁰³ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 26

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). 198

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 196

³⁰⁷ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 25-26

of understanding. Taking domain centred realism seriously opens up conceptual space for reasons fundamentalism, whereby in order to “earn the right to think that some moral judgement is true...I have to provide moral arguments for that very strong opinion.”³⁰⁸ These moral arguments consist of reasons which either count in favour of a particular belief or do not.

Harman’s challenge, which is at the heart of Joyce’s debunking argument, can be resisted on non-naturalist grounds. Joyce’s EDA, in order to go through, relies on the assumption that accounts such as Scanlon’s are not viable. The first underlying challenge can be met and possibly settled on independent grounds. This renders the EDA otiose.

Conclusion

The demarcation challenge sets the task of distinguishing which beliefs are formed via reliable doxastic processes and which beliefs are not. Debunkers must provide reasons for the claim that moral beliefs are formed and supported only through unreliable doxastic processes whilst beliefs which underly the scientific and epistemic claims inherent in their own argumentation were formed and supported reliably – lest their debunking arguments collapse upon themselves.

The debunker's attempt to meet the demarcation challenge reveals that truths about our manifest surroundings must first be posited 'in one's best explanation' in order to explain how our ancestors adapted to overcome the challenges of fires, cliffs, and predators. Debunkers do not offer this option to the realists. Instead, debunkers suppose that realists are committed to the mysterious position of proposing that moral truth also features in our manifest surroundings. I argued that there is a strong history for this kind of ontologising assumption is metaethics. As Dworkin argues through his moral field thesis, realists are not committed to such a view. I showed that reducing realism to this view leads to a dichotomy

³⁰⁸ Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. 26

which is elucidated by Joyce's analysis. I argued that the dichotomy offered by the debunkers seems to be that:

(1) the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or

(2) the moral realist must accept that naturalism fails and that they are led to moral scepticism.

This surfaces in Joyce's analysis when he argues that Hypothesis A can supposedly explain the history of our moral judgements. If Hypothesis A is true, he argues, then Hypothesis B and C (representing non-natural and supernatural facts) are rendered superfluous to explaining our moral judgements. Debunkers such as Joyce must first show that a naturalist account is not embedded within Hypothesis A. This requires argumentation which is independent of undermining facts emerging from debunking literature. Joyce runs an independent argument when he attempts to dismiss the claim that naturalism is embedded within Hypothesis A on the grounds of his moral clout requirement. This means, he argues, that Hypothesis B and C must also be sunk. Firstly, his argument against Hypothesis A relies on the outcome of the debate between motivational externalists and internalists as opposed to any distinctly evolutionary consideration utilising undermining facts. Secondly, his dismissal of Hypothesis B and C seems to rely heavily on this ontologising assumption.

Meeting the demarcation challenge ultimately requires that debunkers construe the debate between realists and anti-realists as a naturalistic one, whereby moral facts can be situated within our manifest surroundings. Scanlon and Dworkin's domain-centred realism offers a different perspective whereby "the basic element of the normative domain is a relation, *being a reason for*, can be seen as a claim about the metaphysics of the

normative.”³⁰⁹ It may be so that the world impinges on our sensory surfaces, but this does not set the ontological precedent for all forms of understanding. Taking domain centred realism seriously opens up conceptual space for reasons fundamentalism, whereby in order to “earn the right to think that some moral judgement is true...I have to provide moral arguments for that very strong opinion.”³¹⁰ I highlighted that the ontologising assumption immediately limits the scope of the EDA to the debunker’s peril, since cases of moral realism where metaphysics is construed differently remain open.

I then turned to Hypothesis A. On naturalistic grounds, I proposed that the debate over the mind-independence of truth is unsettled. This problematises the debunker’s position further. Although the possibility of domain-centred realism is more devastating for the debunkers, since it is inherently overlooked by the attempt to meet the demarcation challenge, it is worth considering the wider debate between the naturalists and the anti-realists. Does there exist a reasonable account of naturalism that could be embedded within Hypothesis A?

³⁰⁹ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 25-26

³¹⁰ Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. 26

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DARWINIAN HYPOTHESIS

I continue my analysis of the assumptions underlying the debunker's attempt to meet the demarcation challenge by accepting the 'Darwinian Hypothesis' and demonstrating that realism can still follow. Since, as I will show, accepting the Darwinian Hypothesis can be both vindicating and debunking, I will argue that the actual fulcrum of the debate lies in how we characterise truth about normative reasons. This sets the playing field for Chapter Five where I expound the next underlying challenge.

4.1 *Whence Morality?*

What makes the EDA unique is that it is grounded in facts of evolutionary theory. In the previous chapter I argued that the debunking strategy relies on an assumption at the heart of the debate surrounding a classic metaethical problem of ontological classification. Here, I develop an account of moral naturalism which shows that a reductive case for moral facts can still vindicate, rather than debunk moral realism. This does not mean that moral naturalism is true. But that this debate remains open poses a problem for the aspiring debunker since they must rule out moral naturalism before the EDA can be formed. Recall the dilemma that the debunkers seem to implicitly pose to the realist:

- (1) that the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or
- (2) that the moral realist must accept that naturalism fails and that we are led to moral scepticism (because moral non-naturalism is not justified).

I argued that (1) presupposes a causal relationship between evaluative facts and our inherited belief-forming processes and therefore only seriously considers moral naturalism. In the last chapter I concluded that the argumentation undergirding (2) relies heavily on this

charge of parsimony and obscurity; two arguments which, (a) only go through against non-naturalist realists if we accept the moral field thesis and (b) render their debunking argument otiose from the very beginning if the underlying argument establishes the very conclusion the debunker aspires to establish (moral facts are superfluous to our explanations of moral judgements and are thus unjustified). I argued that a viable realist response remains available, domain centred realism (roughly, a kind of realist constructivism), whereby the moral field thesis need not be invoked. I speculated that holding realists accountable to the moral field thesis is an ontologising assumption, and this issue will resurface in the debates I am yet to explore. My focus now is on (1). If the realist can meet this horn of the argument, then the realist has a post-hoc justification. Recall that I am now exploring the underlying arguments of the debunker's challenge. The residual challenge to come from my analysis of the debunking strategy is how an account of moral naturalism problematises the debunkers ambitions from the beginning. The demarcation challenge is primarily a call for a naturalist account of morality. In what follows, I develop one line of response.

4.2 *Ultimate and Proximate Causes*

Ultimate and proximate causes relate to developmental processes which occur during an organism's lifetime (proximate) or prior to it (ultimate). Andreas Mogensen writes, "[n]atural selection is just one element in a broader explanatory picture in which proximate factors also play their part. Virtually every textbook on animal behaviour begins with the instruction that readers keep these points in mind and avoid confusing different levels of explanation. I believe that proponents of evolutionary debunking arguments have fallen prey to just this sort of confusion."³¹¹

³¹¹ Andreas Mogensen, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Ultimate/Proximate Distinction," *Analysis* 75, no. 1 (2015). 199

Proximate causes refer to the events which are immediately responsible for an observed result, which refers to that which occurs during an organism's own lifetime. These usually involve causal factors which are physiological or environmental. Ultimate causes relate to the more distal explanatory picture, in this conversation this involves understanding the evolutionary forces (in terms of natural selection or phylogeny) acting on a particular organism. Separating the two, allows for a clearer understanding of the events and systems involved in the change of an organism over time. Mogensen constructs the following example:

Imagine that insects in one species, S1, have a certain pattern of colour action that serves as a camouflage: it resembles the surrounding foliage. Natural selection has favoured this pattern of colour action because it allows the insects to avoid predators. Suppose the colouration arises because juveniles eat a certain kind of moss during a critical developmental period. However, the fact that the juveniles have this diet is irrelevant in explaining why having this kind of colouration confers greater relative fitness: the colouration would be equally advantageous if it came about as a result of a different set of developmental factors...³¹²

In the example, we couldn't fully understand the causal factors leading to the colouration of insects in S1 without appealing to facts about the juvenile insects and their eating habits. Though the broader ultimate cause would dictate that their colouration is explained by the rewards of camouflage, the mossy diet of the juvenile insects is not suddenly a superfluous explanatory factor. Mogensen continues:

It would be similarly outlandish to insist that to explain why S1 insects are coloured as they are, we do not need to suppose that they have a special diet during the juvenile stage; all we need to suppose is that having this pattern of colouration has tended to

³¹² Ibid. 200

promote reproductive success in ancestral environments. Anyone advancing these claims would be obviously guilty of confusing proximate and ultimate causes.

However, the proponents of evolutionary debunking arguments advance exactly analogous claims with respect to human moral beliefs.³¹³

Mogensen believes that debunking morality purely on the Ultimate level (natural selection) is incomplete, as it is generally believed to be also the product of causes on the proximate level through phylogenetic explanation.³¹⁴ From an understanding of the proximate story, we learn that we have the beliefs we have because the developmental processes that we undertake and the socialisations that occur during that developmental process are afforded by genetic dispositions (occurring on the ultimate level) but are not fully caused by them. This means that morality might not be something that has been selected for, but something that what has been selected for affords.

This gives us cause to review the causal premise of the EDA. On the one hand, we could argue that this collapses the causal premise, but Mogensen takes this as the foundation of a new debunking argument. He argues that a new debunking challenge can be built with a phylogenetic explanation. I will set out this argument, before turning to what this explanatory expansion in the causal premise means for the case for moral naturalism.

By placing traits on the *tree of life*, Mogensen believes a more robust debunking claim can be formulated. Through a borrowed analogy, he considers the horizontal tail-flukes of whales:

These are, in one respect, an obvious adaptation for swimming. But why have whales evolved flukes that are horizontal, and not vertical, like the caudal fins of fish? It is

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ That is, through factors such as inheritance or development during the organism's life time. A claim supported in the work of: Joel Pust, "Natural Selection and the Traits of Individual Organisms," *Biology and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (2004); Elliot Sober, "Natural Selection and Distributive Explanation: A Reply to Neander," *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 46, no. 1 (1995). David Walsh, "The Scope of Selection: Sober and Neander on What Natural Selection Explains," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 1 (1998).

implausible that whales inhabit special ocean environments in which horizontal flukes confer some advantage over the vertical alternative. The answer lies instead in cetacean phylogeny. Whales are descended from terrestrial mammals in the Artiodactyla order that ran on land by flexing their spinal columns in the vertical plane. When the ancestors of whales returned to the seas, their inherited body-plan necessitated the evolution of horizontal flukes that could be waved up and down to propel the animal forward. Thus, constraints imposed by phylogenetic inheritance explain the horizontal tails of whales.³¹⁵

Mogensen believes that the capacity to explain the horizontal tail-flukes mirrors the possibility of explaining a *moral sense* in humans. Since this sense would be founded on inherited social instincts, it wouldn't be surprising if other animals sharing a similar intellectual faculty would come to acquire the moral beliefs we have. The basis of his variation of the causal premise is that morality is a group level, culture bound adaptation. This is contrasted with the individual-level selection models of Ruse, Joyce and Street. His conception of morality is centred around the evolutionary requirement for social order and regularity on a group level. Moral norms which are known and enforced by a group, "serve to organise social life by encouraging and suppressing certain behaviours, thereby delimiting conflict and fostering cooperation."³¹⁶ For Mogensen, moral norms bolster social coalitions and supply groups with the capacity to resolve moral conflicts through sanctions.³¹⁷ These norms are both genetic and cultural traits developed through evolving traditions as well as genetic evolution, and thus he argues that we are the beneficiaries of a dual inheritance.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Andreas Mogensen, "Do Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Rest on a Mistake About Evolutionary Explanations?," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 1 (2016). 22

³¹⁶ "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Ethics" (University of Oxford, 2014). 32

³¹⁷ Though I will leave this challenge aside, a formulation of moral normativity grounded in sanction assumes motivational externalism.

³¹⁸ Mogensen, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Ethics." 33

Mogensen argues that moral systems, of the kind found in the Code of Hammurabi and the Pentateuch, are constituted by moral norms which are variably constructed.³¹⁹ He contends that these norms, which are acquired through a process of social learning, should be thought of as cultural traits capable of feeding into evolution, which is both genetic and cultural. Genes which predispose one to aggressive and antisocial behaviours for example, would be maladaptive in his model because of their general incompatibility with cooperative behaviours.

Mogensen's argument for the genealogy of these moral norms begins with the claim that our moral theorising is influenced to a considerable extent by emotional predispositions. He then argues that the evidence which demonstrates the prevalence of these emotional predispositions in other primates, gives credence to the view that they are evident in our own early development during childhood. If our moral verdicts are the product of emotional states arising from these dually inherited predispositions, then they are the product of a non-truth tracking genealogy and are rendered debunked. The strength of this argument as a debunking claim rests on the case for 'functional truth irrelevance' and phyletic contingency, whereby phylogenetically acquired moral beliefs were produced to secure functionality (social cohesion) irrespective of truth (what I've been calling, *off-track*), and that these functional beliefs are socially variable and inscrutable (cultural relativism).

For his causal premise, Mogensen makes the case for sentimentalism, the view that emotional states influence moral responses, including judgements, to the extent that they are determinative of our concept of right and wrong. He writes, "[t]here's no denying that morality is emotive. Moral arguments quickly raise tempers and voices. Our moral verdicts are often associated with intense feelings: injustice makes us seethe with anger; corruption

³¹⁹ By which he means, culturally relative. I would argue that the charge of relativism is doing metaethical work in Mogensen's argument, but I won't develop this argument here.

leaves us sick with disgust.”³²⁰ We might also feel a satisfaction when observing some acts of cooperation and generosity. However, to establish that morality is emotive, Mogensen must demonstrate that moral emotions form the basis of moral judgements and decision making and that our critical reflective capacity, like our emotive and conservative expressive tendency, are determined by these emotions. This means that emotions are not simply interwoven with certain decisions or judgements but are the foundation of morality itself. This level of influence is an echo of Hume who, in the case of promises, argued that it is the pain of social disrepute that safeguards the breach of the promise.³²¹ This is also the underlying claim of Street, which I expand upon in the next chapter. If Mogensen cannot demonstrate that our beliefs are formed and supported *only* through these unreliable doxastic processes, he faces (1) an *universal acid* containment problem and (2) a problem pertaining to post-hoc justification. But a more general problem arises with Mogensen’s approach – and perhaps highlighting this problem gives new insight into the debunking strategy itself – unreliable doxastic processes becomes synonymous with attitude-dependence. The causal premise is not distinctly causal (let alone, evolutionary). The fundamental claim is an anti-realist one: our emotional predispositions are overriding or epistemologically superior to our reasons in cases of judgement formation and decision making. This is a claim about normative reasons as opposed to an EDA.

Mogensen’s argument for sentimentalism is that emotional states can impact the intensity of moral judgements, even in cases where the act would have otherwise been morally innocuous. He cites a study by Wheatley and Haidt (2005) which attempts to show that moral judgements are grounded in “affectively laden moral intuitions.”³²² In this study,

³²⁰ Mogensen, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Ethics." 37

³²¹ Michael Pratt, "Promises and Perlocutions," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2002).

³²² Thalia Wheatley and Jonathan Haidt, "Hypnotic Disgust Makes Moral Judgments More Severe," *Psychological Science* 16, no. 10 (2005). 1

participants were hypnotically induced to feel disgust upon reading neutral trigger words such as ‘take’ and ‘often’. Participants rated the severity of moral transgressions higher when under suggestion.³²³ Mogensen also cites cases of anger skewing moral judgements, in the studies of Lerner *et al* (1998) and Seidel and Prinz (2013).³²⁴ But the case for sentimentalism is not without opposition. The vast majority of studies like these, May argues, generalise findings from subgroups, scarcely contain significant effects, and that differences in moral judgement between induced subjects and controls are quite small.³²⁵ The most substantial issue however is that the polarity of moral judgements has not yet been shown to shift under suggestion. Judgements are yet to move from ‘Moral’ or ‘Okay’ to ‘Immoral’ in response to cases under emotional influence. There is an epistemic leap made then, when sentimentalists argue that, “[w]e can form the belief that something is morally wrong by simply having a negative emotion directed towards it.”³²⁶

A broader issue is that none of these studies make clear the distinction between acting intuitively and grounding one’s moral justification in an intuition. The former is part of our conservative expressive tendency and the latter an ability made possible through our critical reflective capacity. For the realist, the question of whether a reasonable principle is capable of being proposed is left untouched by the suggestion that, under certain pressures, we tend to act in concert with emotional cues. Even for the intuitionists, there is still elbow room in the face of the sentimentalist challenge. Intuitionists can accept that moral transgressions occur but deny the claim that this necessitates affectively laden moral judgements and decisions. Our tendency to act can be clearly separated from what might constitute a sensible decision in

³²³ Similar results were found when participants were in “disgusting rooms” or around “disgusting smells.” See: Simone Schnall *et al.*, “Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, no. 8 (2008).

³²⁴ Jennifer S. Lerner *et al.*, “Emotions and Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 66 (1998).; Angelika Seidel and Jesse Prinz, “Sound Morality: Irritating and Icky Noises Amplify Judgments in Divergent Moral Domains,” *Cognition* 127, no. 1 (2013).

³²⁵ Joshua May, “Does Disgust Influence Moral Judgment?,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92, no. 1 (2014). 134

³²⁶ Jesse Prinz, “The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgements,” *Philosophical Explorations* 9, no. 1 (2006). 31

a given set of circumstances. Furthermore, Audi's (1997) intuitionist self-evidence model stresses the need to accommodate epistemological errors, such as in the case of accepting self-evident propositions simply on the basis of making sense of them.³²⁷ On our critical reflective capacity, Ross writes that the "moral convictions of thoughtful and well-educated people are the data of ethics just as sense-perceptions are the data of a natural science."³²⁸ Over generations, moral convictions are refined and "an extremely delicate power of appreciation of moral distinctions" becomes possible, but only because those convictions are capable of being *corrected*.³²⁹ Huemer (2005) writes that "[o]nce we have a fund of *prima facie* justified moral beliefs to start from, there is great scope for moral reasoning to expand, refine, and even revise our moral beliefs, in exactly the manner that the contemporary literature in philosophical ethics displays."³³⁰ If we accept that moral biases might be errors in perception in the same way that standard cognitive biases are, then we can accept that working through the fallibility of an empirical judgement is not unlike reflecting on our moral intuitions and refining them. It does not follow from the fallibility of intuitions that affective states are the foundation of those intuitions. Without recourse to the reasonableness of these moral judgements, a crucial function of our moral capacity risks being overlooked. For the sentimentalist to make the case that moral judgements are grounded in affectively laden moral intuitions, they need to look further than our tendency to act or judge in certain ways under certain conditions. The quality (reasonableness, validity) of the available justification for a particular judgement would need to be assessed – and this discourse is fundamentally incommensurable with affectations as it requires recourse to moral reasons.

Secondly, Mogensen's argument can be reduced to a metaethical argument identical to that which is at the heart of Street's debunking strategy: we believe that X, Y and Z are

³²⁷ Robert Audi, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). 46

³²⁸ W. D. Ross, "The Right and the Good," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1930] 1988). 41

³²⁹ *Ibid.* 31, 41

³³⁰ Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*. 105

valuable, right or wrong, true or false, and so on, “ultimately because we take them to be.”³³¹ For Mogensen, our emotional predispositions play a foundational role in the selection and amplification of our moral judgements of rightness and wrongness. For Street, our starting fund of evaluative beliefs is off-track, and since we reason from this starting fund, moral deliberation is “a process of assessing evaluative judgements that are mostly off the mark in terms of others that are mostly off the mark.”³³² Thus, the ‘evolutionary causes’ are prior, “in the sense that these causes (along with many others) gave us our starting fund of evaluative attitudes, and evaluative truth is understood to be a function of those attitudes.”³³³

Emotions, desires or subjective and scientifically inscrutable intuitions, either contaminate our rational reflection, or they do not. These off-track starting funds are, in the context of the EDA literature, synonymous with the evolutionary claim that our beliefs that x were formed and supported through unreliable doxastic processes (which can be given evolutionary explanations) and are thus unjustified. This means, as I indicated earlier, that the evolutionary debunking argument is not a metaethically distinct challenge. It seems to provide a new bottle for old wine – that normative truth is constitutive or contingent upon our evaluative standpoint. Moving beyond the metaphysical challenge which I explored in the previous chapter, what remains is this debate about the mind-dependence (or independence) of value. Either we, as realists, accept that our evolutionary nature (and what we are causally predisposed to believe) is prior to our believing it, or we provide a reasonable story as to how we struck upon evaluative truth under such unlikely circumstances.

What the case of Mogensen demonstrates is that the search for a ‘cause’ of our moral beliefs requires that we assume that our epistemological relation with moral facts is of a certain kind. Mogensen openly argues for sentimentalism, whereas Street’s challenge is more

³³¹ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 38

³³² "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 124

³³³ Ibid. 154

explicit as she argues that it is our normative reasons that are fundamentally grounded in desires. But the problem facing either formulation of the challenge is the same. If our reasons are, in fact, grounded in subjective states, then we have no reason to believe that those beliefs are justified. If this were true, then to mount an EDA at this juncture is otiose, because it is clear that some kind of anti-realism is best suited to explain our relationship with moral facts. This question must be explored outside of debunking literature if we are to reach a consensus. I will now explore one realist response, and in doing so, I play out the otiosity of the debunking manoeuvre.

4.2.1 Uni-Directional Causation and its Discontents

As I wrote in the previous section, the core of the anti-realist's discontent seems to be that we believe that X, Y and Z are valuable, right or wrong, true or false, and so on, ultimately because we take them to be. The crux of my wider argument is how we arrive at this claim. Joyce and Ruse appear to believe that it is a consideration of evolutionary facts which lead to this conclusion. I argued in Chapter Three that they rely heavily on the assumption that non-natural facts are unjustified (because they are ontologically queer or non-parsimonious) and that they must first, problematically, preestablish that a viable naturalist account does not exist. Street too seems to rely on an argument for attitude-dependence, but I will leave my analysis of Street until Chapter Five.

The first method in which we can respond to this claim is to accept it. We take X, Y and Z to be valuable because we were predisposed to, but we can add that (just as in sense-perception), we are justified in our beliefs about X, Y and Z because the doxastic processes which led to their formation reliably tracked truth.

The first step towards accepting this causal story is acknowledging that, even with Mogensen's expansion, the evolutionary story is not complete. On the inadequacy of the proximate and ultimate distinction, Kim Sterelny writes that:

We need a framework that emphasises interactions between a population's response to selection and the selective environment, and we need a framework that emphasises the interactions between organism's proximate biology and the selectable variation available in the population built from those organisms.³³⁴

Here, Sterelny outlines a need which developmental systems theory (DST) fills – an account of inheritance which acknowledges that a number of developmental resources work together in influencing the generation of traits.³³⁵ On this, Oyama writes that, “[h]uman biology is...not a matter of individuals with fixed internal natures, but of changing natures that are a function of reciprocal relations with environments that always have a social aspect.”³³⁶ What is missing in the ultimate/proximate distinction, is an acknowledgement of the complexity and non-fixed nature of organisms transitioning through life cycles and living in an interdependent relationship with their environments – a consideration of the fact that an organism and its environment are in a process of continual, mutual construction. This means that the unidirectional view of causation does not adequately account for the development of an organism's traits.

Oyama writes that, in contrast to a view of a “master molecule”, a “central directing agency” capable of explaining some aspect of development, we should instead view “both development and evolution as processes of *construction* and *reconstruction* in which heterogenous resources are contingently but more ~~of~~or less reliably reassembled for each life

³³⁴ Kim Sterelny, "Cooperation in a Complex World: The Role of Proximate Factors in Ultimate Explanations," *Biological Theory* 7, no. 4 (2013). 359

³³⁵ Though this might be an over-simplification. Peter Godfrey-Smith writes that DST offers, “a collection of ideas about development, causation, inheritance, and evolution...” which contribute to a “proposal for a scientific research program”, capable of steering biological research in new directions while enriching literature on the philosophy of nature. See, Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Status and Explanatory Structure of Dst," in *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*, ed. Susan Oyama, Paul Griffiths, and Russell Gray (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001). 284

³³⁶ Susan Oyama, *Evolution's Eye: A Systems View of the Biology/Culture Divide* (London: Duke University Press, 2000). 171

cycle.”³³⁷ On such a view, the evolution of an organism and an environment is interdependent and the environment is not seen to be static any more than those organisms which inhabit it. Changes that take place in organisms and the environment lead to changes in the relationship between the organism and its environment which leads to new, subsequent changes as part of a wider developmental system.

If evolution is change in developmental systems, then... it is no longer possible to think of evolution as the shaping of the organism to fit an environmental niche. Rather, the various elements of the developmental systems coevolve. Organisms construct their niches both straightforwardly by physically transforming their surroundings and, equally importantly, by changing which elements of the external environment are part of the developmental system and thus able to influence the evolutionary process in that lineage.³³⁸

DST “expands the scope and power of adaptive/historical explanations” and thus, at the very least, should lead us to reconsider the haste in which we classify a particular etiological account, non-truth-tracking.³³⁹ This notion of reciprocal causation invites the critique that determining which cause leads to which outcome becomes exceedingly more complex. This is echoed by Oyama:³⁴⁰

Oppositions between genes (or biology) and learning, or between genes (or biology) and culture, are endemic to many fields but are miserably inadequate for capturing the multitude of causal factors needed for any reasonable treatment of ontogeny or

³³⁷ "Introduction," in *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*, ed. Susan Oyama, Paul Griffiths, and Russell Gray (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001). 1

³³⁸ *Ibid.* 6

³³⁹ Paul Griffiths and Russell Gray, "Darwinism and Developmental Systems," in *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*, ed. Susan Oyama, Paul Griffiths, and Russell Gray (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001). 214

³⁴⁰ Oyama, "Introduction." 7

phylogeny. DST emphasizes crucial but often overlooked similarities among resources that are usually contrasted.³⁴¹

Laland offers a clear example which might facilitate connecting DST to its metaethical implications:

...earthworms change the structure and chemistry of the soils in which they live and thereby modify selection acting back on themselves, thereby influencing the fitness consequences of their water-balance organs... The ‘ultimate explanation’ of the earthworm soil-processing behaviour is selection stemming from a soil environment, but a substantial cause of the soil environment is the *niche-constructing activity* of ancestral earthworms.³⁴²

The debate about whether this vindicates or debunks in the moral case, turns to what constitutes the *niche-constructing activity* of humans in the development of morality.

Severini sees niche-construction as the platform for a new debunking challenge. Just as in Mogensen’s attempt with phylogenetic explanation, Severini suggests that one might be able to construct a new debunking argument on this expanded view of our inheritance, moving beyond just ultimate causes and including a consideration of our phylogenetic and ontogenetic inheritance.

The ontogenetic view is open to how the ecological niche – the changing environmental and social factors of an organism – can be impacted by and can impact upon organisms, an interaction which is capable of generating changes in selection pressures and thus the ‘direction’ of selection. Severini writes, “[i]n this sense, since the human ecological niche includes also the social relations in which human beings are involved, it is precisely in

³⁴¹ Outside of this metaethical consideration, I concede van der Weele’s warning that, apart from providing some useful comparisons to approaching science, “DST and [normative] ethics... are worlds apart. See, Cor van der Weele, “Developmental Systems Theory and Ethics,” in *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*, ed. Susan Oyama, Paul Griffiths, and Russell Gray (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001). 361

³⁴² Kevin Laland et al., “More on How and Why: Cause and Effect in Biology Revisited,” *Biology and Philosophy* 28, no. 5 (2013). 722

this context that we can look for moral “facts”, insofar as there is an ecological niche made up by moral constraints among other things.”³⁴³ The human ecological niche opens the conceptual space for the development of a *moral* niche.

The human ecological niche is made up of cultures and societies which are ever-evolving, and thus some have concluded that “[n]ot only technologies and other artefacts are part of this ecology but also morality... That is to say, humans (like other creatures) do not simply live in their environment, but they actively shape and change it...”³⁴⁴ Severini takes this to mean that a biological consideration of the origins of morality pushes us towards constructivism, of the anti-realist kind. She writes that, “the environmental setting which influences our moral beliefs is the one that human beings have *built up*.”³⁴⁵ As understood in Street’s sense, this means constructed *from* our evaluative attitudes – and thus accepting the former option in the question of whether “things are valuable ultimately because we value them (antirealism), or whether we value things ultimately because they possess a value independent of us (realism).”³⁴⁶ As I have argued, for Street and other debunkers to secure this anti-realist conclusion, they must first demonstrate that the history of our moral belief formation, including the complex puzzle of cultural and social learning, shows that value (our evaluative attitudes, our emotional predispositions, and so on) is prior to belief – that we only believe what we do about right and wrong because of this etiological account. To secure this conclusion, they must first show that this etiological account of the realist relationship with truth is epistemically insensitive, is superfluous to our best explanations of why we believe what we do, or is otherwise the product of an unfathomable coincidence (which we should take as a poor method of belief formation). But all of these conclusions would require

³⁴³ Eleonora Severini, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Moral Niche," *Philosophia* 44 (2016). 873

³⁴⁴ Lorenzo Magnani, *Understanding Violence. The Intertwining of Morality, Religion and Violence: A Philosophical Stance* (Berlin: Springer, 2011). 116

³⁴⁵ Severini, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Moral Niche." 873 [my emphasis]

³⁴⁶ Sharon Street, "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 5 (2010). 370

independent argumentation. Only having established any of these conclusions, could the debunker then show how the etiological account explains this fact. Severini, like the proponents of evolutionary debunking before her, first owes an account of why this expanded analysis of our moral genealogy is debunking as opposed to vindicating. Severini must provide reasons as to why moral naturalism is unjustified, before suggesting that the expanded causal analysis has the metaethical implications of an anti-realist constructivism. Without this explanation, her argument is not metaethically distinct from anti-realist arguments which conclude that moral objectivity is ultimately grounded in subjective states. Further, once she has eliminated viable candidates for a naturalist account of moral realism, we would be in a situation where the etiological explanation itself explains why we have the moral beliefs that we do – to construct the EDA against moral realism at such a point would be otiose; the anti-realist conclusion is already established.

If moral doxastic processes tracked truth at least partially, the debunker's causal premise falls through as the debunking strategy requires that the beliefs within an argument's scope are formed and supported *only* through an off-track doxastic process.³⁴⁷ Sterelny develops an account of moral naturalism which incorporates the expanded analysis. He locates moral truths outside of the traditional ultimate/proximate dichotomy, whereby “[i]ndividual psychology, social life, information flow, metapopulation structure, and the selective environment all interacted.”³⁴⁸ His version of naturalism offers an account of moral truth that supports the truth-tracking of cooperation, whereby certain maxims survive and become widely endorsed both because they were adaptive and because they were true. One example is cultural group selection which favoured moral norms that were “relatively efficient means to the ends of social peace, regulation of conflict, and the restraint of selfish

³⁴⁷ See 1.5.

³⁴⁸ Sterelny, "Cooperation in a Complex World: The Role of Proximate Factors in Ultimate Explanations." 365

or destructive impulses.”³⁴⁹ Other processes might include the learning which is guided by prosocial emotions and trial-and-error learning in heterogenous environments. The ongoing process of gene-culture evolution leads us to form moral beliefs, some of which contain “lingering prejudices of various kinds” which might act as “levers for exploitation and injustice” but other beliefs will result from “tracking and responding to levers of cooperation.”³⁵⁰

The explanatory task of the naturalist requires a differentiation between moral practices which include “fast, implicit, reflex-like online cognitive systems...” and what I am understanding as our critical reflective capacity, our “slow, explicit, offline systems”³⁵¹ capable of restructuring or rejecting certain moral beliefs over time. Sterelny’s naturalism seems better able to incorporate this view of our moral deliberation, as under gene-culture evolution and moral niche construction, the truth of certain maxims “is not causally idle: it is relevant to its presence, persistence, and learnability.”³⁵² An example of such an evolving belief, sensitive to presence, persistence, and learnability, is cruelty. Long gone are the days whereby execution in the public eye is an acceptable form of punishment and entertainment, a change which Sterelny argues is propelled, at least in part, “by the acceptance of an anti-cruelty maxim, and that maxim has been accepted because it is true.” He writes that the reflective vindication of certain maxims, and I would add our reflective rejection of certain maxims, is a mark of our evolved cognitive ‘maturity’. Recourse to our innate, emotional predispositions does not count against the possibility of such maturity, it merely reasserts that that moral thought is error prone. Sterelny concludes:

³⁴⁹ Kim Sterelny and Ben Fraser, "Evolution and Moral Realism," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 68, no. 4 (2016). 999

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid. 983

³⁵² Ibid. 1000

Just as ancient astronomy was a response to the celestial world, moral views are a response to the opportunities and challenges of a world in which cooperation is profitable, but fraught with potentials for conflict, coordination failure, and misunderstanding. As in the case of pre-modern astronomy, these responses do not typically identify and solve those challenges ideally. But in a range of cases, the normative practices of individuals and groups are appropriately shaped by these challenges and the available solutions, and they enable individuals and groups to act adaptively in their social environments with some reliability. Moral thinking is neither a well-polished mirror of social nature, nor an adaptive fiction.³⁵³

So, Severni and the debunkers must face tracking accounts such as Sterelny's head-on and show how such accounts fail to fit into Hypothesis A if they are to suppose the Darwinian Hypothesis has debunking implications. Such an expanded account of moral naturalism has so far escaped the analysis of debunkers. If accounts such as Sterelny's do not contain a satisfactory explanation for *moral clout* (Joyce) or seem to assume an all-too-convenient third-factor (Street), then the debate swings in favour of the anti-realists. But, as I have been arguing, these arguments are not utilising undermining facts from debunking literature. Since Joyce's central contention is with the viability of realist accounts of moral motivation, it is worth exploring this argument before turning to Street.

4.3 *Practical Oomph and Keeping Promises*

In earlier metaethical discourse, there existed disagreement surrounding the content of moral utterances.³⁵⁴ Suppose I happen to come across Harman's hooligans harming the cat.

³⁵³ Ibid. 1003

³⁵⁴ I use the past-tense here as, following van Roojen, I believe that most non-cognitivist challenges have been watered down to the point that it would be difficult to distinguish distinctly non-cognitivist positions from quasi-realist and anti-realist views. See, Mark van Roojen, "Moral Cognitivism Vs. Non-Cognitivism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2016).

“That’s wrong!” I would say, safely to myself. The expressivists took such a moral utterance to be reducible to the expression of a mental state. They would argue that the cat torturing case arouses a great deal of disapproval in me, and that my utterance that it is wrong is reducible to the claim, “Boo to torturing cats!” But Joyce argues that I shouldn’t expect such an utterance to have any practical implication – it is highly unlikely that my utterance, understood as an expression of my conative attitudes, would have any sway over the hooligans.³⁵⁵ Instead, Joyce would contend that when I declare that an action is wrong, what I really mean is that my utterance deserves consideration as a reason which counts against the hooligan’s behaviour, and thus that, properly received, my reason would provide a cause for the hooligan’s to cease torturing the cat. My declaration, understood this way, is “purporting to put forward a consideration of practical importance.”³⁵⁶ Through such utterances we deploy moral concepts, and Joyce seems to understand this act as one which evokes a transcendent normativity which is not actually real.³⁵⁷ The inherited tendency to form moral judgements includes, for Joyce, the inherited tendency to be influenced by this illusory force driving us to carry out what we believe to be the right things to do – this is the *motivational bulwark* or *normativity* of moral reasons.

Joyce argues that such a cognitive process would follow from the “transgressive acts and the negative responses that they provoke (and compliant acts and the rewards they provoke).”³⁵⁸ It would seem that this normativity bolstered our tendency to sustain social order by inheriting responses to certain acts which, themselves, led us to believe that certain responses are deserved. This is Joyce’s *Just Deserts* model, which he argues is one way of understanding moral judgement. The strong thesis he warily advances here is that, “morally

³⁵⁵ At least, it is not likely to motivate them to cease torturing the cat.

³⁵⁶ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 58

³⁵⁷ This interpretation is also offered in, David Wong, "Constructing Normativity in Ethics," *Social Philosophy and Ethics* 25, no. 1 (2008). 239

³⁵⁸ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 66

judging that somebody ought to do something involves the thought that she deserves some form of punishment if she doesn't do that thing."³⁵⁹ If it is true that moral beliefs contain the content they do because such beliefs promote helping and cooperation and assist in the regulation of interpersonal relationships, and we have evolved this corresponding 'sense' or 'conscience' which produces guilt (in the instance that we fail to do our part in a particular social good) or a desire for just deserts (in the instance that we observe someone not acting in the interest of the community and getting away with it), then the practical oomph of morality can be explained in evolutionary terms.

In defence of this view, Joyce invites readers to imagine that there was a community of social creatures with a set of imperatives which assist in the regulation and governance of interpersonal relations. Imperatives such as, "Don't steal for self-gain" or "Keep your Promises" are examples cited, as a community without such imperatives would have difficulty securing the cooperation required to flourish as a social animal. These social creatures are much like us apart from one important feature, he writes, "[i]f someone fails to follow one of these prescriptions – say, one of them doesn't keep a promise, out of selfishness – her fellows don't subject her to criticism... Let's say this community doesn't have a concept of *desert* at all..."³⁶⁰ Joyce believes that if the members of the community don't feel that a wrong doer, when punished, is actually getting what he or she deserves, then they lack a sense of justice, which he defines as "the element pertaining to getting what one deserves."³⁶¹ Similarly, without guilt, the offender can't recognise that what he or she has done is something morally denounceable, "for what is guilt, if not an emotion that involves the judgement that one deserves some kind of penalty for one's actions?"³⁶² He thus suggests

³⁵⁹ This is just one way of understanding the Joyce's relationship between actions and reasons. Throughout his book, Joyce runs similar arguments with the concepts of guilt and fairness. Ibid. 69

³⁶⁰ Ibid. 67

³⁶¹ Ibid. 67

³⁶² Ibid. 68

that we have an innate conception of justice and guilt, and without the corresponding desire to see that moral beliefs are consistently carried out among our peers, he believes it is difficult to conceptualise how we would have managed to cooperate at all. Without these corresponding responses acting as evolutionary spurs for cooperative behaviour, Joyce speculates that citing moral imperatives would be like citing “Do not kill” to an animal. But this seems to reduce our reasons for acting to mere responses to emotional cues. Joyce briefly considers alternatives such as the case for internalist views whereby, for example, “one who morally trespasses in some manner harms himself, and thus a moral judgement might be like a piece of advice on how to avoid such self-harm.”³⁶³ But Joyce finds this view problematic, as “[o]ne can simply state “One who practices vice thereby damages his soul,” but without details and supporting evidence this amounts to nothing.”³⁶⁴ The question can be raised as to what kind of details and supporting evidence Joyce calls for, as the concern is that he has done away with a viable account of reasons and normativity on the basis of the seeming ontological queerness of such an account. Keeping with the example of a promise, I can explore a candidate account of normative reasons which seems to exist outside of the list of candidate accounts that Joyce supplies.

Emerging from the constructivist tradition is the view that there exist accounts of normativity that rest in the expectations we set in our interpersonal relations – in what we reasonably believe we owe to each other. Pratt distinguishes between promises bound by the exercise of normative power and promises bound by the need to protect the value of assurance. The first is a volitional, broadly Humean notion.³⁶⁵ The second is a perlocutionary and contractualist notion, which signals a path so far unmarked on the debunker’s map. Pratt explores the work of Scanlon’s *What We Owe To Each Other*, where Scanlon grounds moral

³⁶³ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 59

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Pratt, "Promises and Perlocutions." 93

obligation in the expectations that we set for ourselves in others.³⁶⁶ Thus, for Scanlon, “the wrong of breaking a promise is an instance of a large family of moral wrongs concerned with ‘what we owe other people when we have led them to form expectations about our future conduct.’”³⁶⁷ The moral expectation of the promisor that she would keep her promise rests on her regard for the *wrongness* of betraying another’s expectation of her. But the question on the debunker’s mind would be, from where does our assurance come that we are bound to care about the expectation we lead others to have of us? From the first-person perspective, we must have some reason for believing that our promisee will view it as wrong to break our promise to them. From a third-person perspective, the promisee requires a reason to believe in the integrity of the promisor that is independent of the wrongness of breaking the promise.

One reason might be that antecedent non-moral expectations are set by the promisor. If both the promisor and the promisee are aware of the consequences of resiling from the promise, the confidence of the promisee is grounded in a judgement about the responsiveness of the promisor to this prospective consequence. The adoption of a social norm of promise-keeping might carry out this function. Mogensen and Joyce would argue that it is the responsiveness to social disrepute that binds the promisor, and that our responsiveness can be given a genealogy embedded in promoting cooperation and suppressing competition.³⁶⁸ But I argue that this view inadequately encapsulates the complexity of the promise. Scanlon writes:

When I say ‘I promise to help you if you help me’, the reason that I suggest to you that I will have for helping is my awareness of that fact that not to return your help would, under the circumstances, be wrong: not just forbidden by some social practice but morally wrong.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). 296

³⁶⁷ Pratt, "Promises and Perlocutions." 93

³⁶⁸ Mogensen, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Ethics." 70

³⁶⁹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 306

In making a promise, we rarely and need not invoke non-moral commitments or agree upon consequences of failure to keep the promise. Such an act might even counter the force of the commitment. When one regards oneself as obligated to fulfil an expectation, the assurance of the promise is “moral all the way down.”³⁷⁰

For Scanlon, being part of the reason fundamentalist tradition, moral judgements are claims about reasons. Thus, our moral deliberation as an exercise of our critical reflective capacity, considers whether our actions “could be justified to others on grounds that they, if appropriately motivated, could not reasonably reject.”³⁷¹ The morality of what we owe to each other possesses the normative authority and ‘reason-giving force’ due to this ideal of justifiability.³⁷² Valid principles are those which are not able to be reasonably rejected by other rational and appropriately motivated beings, and so Scanlon’s theory provides us with a framework with which we can construct a normative morality. One such valid principle, Scanlon argues, is his Principle of Fidelity.

The promise consists of an act which seeks to summon in its perlocutors a feeling of mutual trust. Within the promise, the intention of carrying out the desired action and the mutual awareness of the ‘general moral fact’ of promising must be communicated. The Principle of Fidelity supplies the promisee with a reason to believe that the promisor does in fact intend to carry out the desired action, and that the rationality of the promisor confers on them an inherent moral awareness of the ‘general moral fact’ associated with the promise. To demonstrate, take the case of the promisor that makes promise P, with no intention of fulfilling it. Any principle that includes the act of making false promises, subjected to the rational scrutiny of others, cannot withstand Scanlon’s test of reasonable rejection. An attempt to construct a promise that P, with no intention of fulfilling it, is a moral wrong. It

³⁷⁰ Pratt, "Promises and Perlocutions." 95

³⁷¹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 5

³⁷² *Ibid.* 3

follows that the act of promising creates an expectation in the promisee of sincerity. The fact of the promise introduces a new moral relation between promisor and promisee, and this relation tends to generate expectation and assurance.

By attempting to induce assurance while admitting that she is in a situation in which if she succeeds in doing so she will attract a duty of fidelity, the promisor *thereby* induces assurance, thus attracting the duty. She acknowledges that an obligation is being created, and by doing so creates one.³⁷³

It is not by recourse to the consequential social disrepute or psychological harm that commitment is communicated, but in that shared value of assurance. What matters here is that the promisee registers the promisor's awareness that they have entered into a moral relationship with them. The nature of this assurance and the test of rational scrutiny briefly explored here, are just examples of how we are capable of moving beyond affective dispositions in justifying our moral beliefs. The biological basis of certain predispositions need not be denied for this discourse to occur. But to fully explore complex moral cases such as the act of promising, we use reasons to navigate and determine the viability of certain beliefs. We move beyond describing and understanding behaviours and attitudes of our conservative expressive tendency, which may be influenced to some degree by both ultimate and proximate factors, and we consider the proper functioning of our critical reflective capacity.³⁷⁴ Joyce's account of normativity overlooks accounts such as these, and instead debunkers tend to assume that concepts like the value of assurance are volitional and Humean. On this view, debunkers are already advancing the anti-realist conclusion that they seek to secure through debunking. This shifts the debate from an evolutionary one, to one that

³⁷³ Pratt, "Promises and Perlocutions." 110

³⁷⁴ The use of this case of promising was merely indicative of an account of realist constructivism. In chapter six, I consider constructivist theory more fully.

is between the constructivists who are realists about reasons, and the constructivists who deny this claim. I return to this question in Chapter Six.

Joyce's contention with moral naturalism leads us back to the metaethical question of the primacy of value. As does Severini's debunking argument and, as I will now turn towards, Street's Darwinian dilemma. What remains of the debunker's challenge to moral realism is the underlying argument which leads debunkers to argue that realists accept that naturalism fails and that we are led to moral scepticism. I have made several allusions throughout this chapter to an assumption undergirding this move which is not an appeal to ontological parsimony or a charge of ontological obscurity. One reading of the Darwinian Hypothesis seems to establish that our reasons which might count in favour of certain moral beliefs are drawn from the poisoned well of evaluative truth. This means that we do not stand entirely independent of our evaluative attitudes when we reason about right and wrong. I believe a residual challenge for the moral realist resides here. The question now is how, if the realist accepts the Darwinian hypothesis and that it might not have tracked truth, one is justified in believing the seeming coincidence that evaluative truth and our evaluative beliefs correspond.

Conclusion

Recall the dichotomy that I argued debunkers offer the realist:

- (1) that the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or
- (2) that the moral realist must accept that naturalism fails and that we are led to moral scepticism (because moral non-naturalism is not justified).

If the Darwinian Hypothesis is true, the question still remains as to whether it is vindicating or debunking in regard to moral truths. This is what the first horn (1) is about. I explored an

account of naturalism grounded in developmental systems theory which acknowledges the complexity and non-fixed nature of organisms transitioning through life cycles and living in an interdependent relationship with their environments. The human ecological niche opens the conceptual space for the development of a *moral* niche, whereby cultures and societies which are ever evolving constitute the interdependent development of human morality. Though this explanation is a significant improvement on the ultimate/proximate distinction, it only carries the important question – the vindicating or debunking nature of this development – further down the river.

Severini, who represents an important line of response for the debunkers, reads this expanded developmental picture as evidence for the *constructed* nature of human morality – an argument in favour of anti-realism. In order to make this argument, I argued that Severini must take a position on what moral truth is constructed *from*. Since this is a question of the mind-independence of truth, Severini must ultimately rely on metaethical argumentation external to the purely undermining facts of debunking literature. To sum up, the debunker must pre-establish or otherwise assume the mind-dependence of moral truth in order to claim that the developmental processes which led to the formative processes behind our moral beliefs were off-track. I argue that this move plays out the problem of otiosity for the EDA.

I then considered the residual concern of moral motivation emerging from Joyce's work. Joyce argues that moral naturalism – and by extension non-naturalism and supernaturalism – do not provide a feasible account of why we should be moral. I argued that his analysis assumes motivational externalism and that his reasons for dismissing internalism as a candidate theory are grounded in ontologising assumptions about the nature of moral facts.

In the next chapter, I show how along this line of argument debunkers attempt to pre-establish that value (our evaluative attitudes, our emotional predispositions, and so on) are

prior to belief – and that we ultimately believe what we do about right and wrong because of this etiological account of the origins of moral belief. This is where the second horn (2) comes in. Why is non-naturalism unjustified? Underlying the EDA are important challenges against non-naturalism which carry this debate forward. I now turn to this issue.

CHAPTER FIVE – EXPOSING THE UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

Over the past two chapters I have examined the dilemma which I proposed was at the heart of the debunking strategy. The first horn of the dilemma called for an account of naturalist realism which would demonstrate that evolutionary facts vindicate, rather than debunk, our belief in mind-independent truth. The second horn was to concede anti-realism, which was a conclusion reached via metaethical challenges outside of purely evolutionary debunking (the explanatory inadequacy of naturalism and non-naturalism). I now turn to the external challenges underlying this second horn. There seem to be two kinds of challenges. The first is an epistemological one. How can realists justify the claim that the causal influences behind our normative judgements just so happened to lead to us towards those normative judgements which realists suppose are true? The second is a metaphysical one. If moral truth could have been anything, since we could have evolved to be entirely different creatures, then it seems that truth is fixed to our nature. This means that there are no fundamental moral truths, just those truths which are true *for creatures like us*.

5.1 Revisiting Street's Darwinian Dilemma

The first premise of Street's debunking challenge is causal.

Evolutionary forces shaped the content of our moral judgements.³⁷⁵

Take the case of our moral judgements towards the act of cheating. We have the belief that cheating is wrong and we are capable of expressing this belief in a number of ways. First, regarding our conservative expressive tendency, we can observe our tendency to denounce cheaters by recourse to (1) our skill at identifying them and, (2) our commonsense beliefs towards the wrongness of the act. In defence of (1), evolutionary psychology has produced a

³⁷⁵ As I discussed earlier, this claim is contentious and at best, an interesting hypothetical consideration for metaethicists until it is shown that this influence is debunking rather than vindicating. From here, I am exploring Street point of view, according to which such forces are debunking.

number of experiments which support the existence of a cheater detection module.³⁷⁶ Most prominently, the Wason selection task demonstrates that our application of propositional logic, specifically in conditional arguments, is mostly fallacious unless applied to social contexts.³⁷⁷ In regards to (2), our commonsense beliefs are calibrated towards viewing cheating negatively. It suffices to say that, in sport or in academia for example, the norm violation of cheating (at the expense of the integrity of the individual and the fairness of the system) is well monitored by the collective and mostly condemned. One way of formulating the causal claim then, is to argue that our beliefs regarding cheating are grounded in an affective disposition tracking the instrumental rewards of cooperation – rewards which are bolstered by the capacity to detect and punish cheaters. The belief is thus formed irrespective of whether or not it tracks the truth.

Our critical reflective capacity, outside of our conservative expressive tendency, allows us to express the thought that cheating is wrong in another way. We can claim to possess a reason, which is outside of some affective disposition, that explains why the act of cheating is wrong. Street argues that even this reason, whatever it might be, is drawn from the poisoned well. Street maintains that the distorting influence of evolution is part of our critical reflective capacity as much as it is part of our conservative expressive tendency. It “does not seem much of a stretch” she writes, to argue that these fitness enhancing dispositions were responding to some feature of the world “in some primitive, non-linguistic sort of fashion.”³⁷⁸ So, we could view our evaluative judgements as “conscious, reflective endorsements” of certain evaluative tendencies that we share with other animals, and that were shaped by evolutionary forces.

³⁷⁶ Jens Van Lier, Russell Revlin, and Wim De Neys, "Detecting Cheaters without Thinking: Testing the Automaticity of the Cheater Detection Module," *PLoS One* 8, no. 1 (2013).

³⁷⁷ Peter Cathcart Wason, "Reasoning," in *New Horizons in Psychology*, ed. Brian Foss (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin, 1966).

³⁷⁸ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 117

From this, Street offers an “exhaustive” dilemma of possibilities in her Darwinian dilemma. She writes, “either the evolutionary influence tended to push our normative judgements *toward* the independent normative truth, or else it tended to push them *away from* or *in ways that bear no relation to* that truth.”³⁷⁹ Realists can embrace one horn of her Darwinian dilemma by providing what she calls a *tracking* account of the relation between our normative judgements and mind-independent truth.³⁸⁰ Otherwise realists may suppose that, since these judgements were formed in such a way that bore no relation to truth, they are the beneficiaries of a striking coincidence between the off-track genealogy of these judgements and the supposed correspondence of those judgements with evaluative truth. The coincidence challenge is captured in the following passage:

As a purely conceptual matter, the independent normative truth could be anything. ... But if there are innumerable things such that it's conceptually possible they're ultimately worth pursuing, and yet our [normative judgments] have been shaped from the outset by forces that are as good as random with respect to the normative truth, then what are the odds that our [normative judgments] will have hit, as a matter of sheer coincidence, on those things which are independently really worth pursuing?³⁸¹

The first sentence here indicates an underlying counterfactual challenge. I return to this in 5.4. This formulation of the realist's relationship with truth also presupposes the moral field thesis. Elsewhere, Street writes that “because [the realist] views these evaluative truths as ultimately independent of our evaluative attitudes, the only way for realism both to accept that those attitudes have been deeply influenced by evolutionary causes and to avoid seeing these causes as distorting is for it to claim that these causes actually in some way tracked the

³⁷⁹ Original italics. "Mind-Independence without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have It Both Ways," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics: Volume 6*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 12

³⁸⁰ Street's main contention with this account is that it is scientifically indefensible. I would argue that naturalists such as Sterelny could rise to this challenge. *Ibid.* 13

³⁸¹ *Ibid.* 14

alleged independent truths.”³⁸² Street forms this argument with the view that realists are committed to the existence of a “huge universe of logically possible evaluative judgements and truths.”³⁸³ Street’s analogy regarding sailing across Bermuda, discussed previously, further demonstrates this supposed commitment:

On this view, allowing our evaluative judgements to be shaped by evolutionary influences is analogous to setting out for Bermuda and letting the course of your boat be determined by the wind and tides: just as the push of the wind and tides on your boat has nothing to do with where you want to go, so the historical push of natural selection on the content of our evaluative judgements has nothing to do with evaluative truth. Of course every now and then, the wind and tides might happen to deposit someone’s boat on the shores of Bermuda. Similarly, every now and then, Darwinian pressures might have happened to push us toward accepting an evaluative judgement that accords with one of the realist’s independent evaluative truths. But this would be purely a matter of chance, since by hypothesis there is no relation between the forces at work and the “destination” in question, namely evaluative truth.³⁸⁴

The destination she seems to have in mind are the properties which instantiate the truth of the evaluative judgements.³⁸⁵ She adds that even our capacity for rational reflection cannot help; although it might seem that “just as a compass and a little steering can correct for the influence of the wind and tides on the course of one’s boat”, illegitimate influence existed

³⁸² Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 134

³⁸³ Ibid. 122

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 121

³⁸⁵ In reading the analogy this way, I follow Rocheleau-Houle who writes that, “...realists use the notion of normative truths to explain our normative judgments. They must therefore postulate the existence of a fixed moral point that we should arrive at in order for our judgments to be true, just as we must postulate the existence of a fixed point such as Bermuda if we want to explain how this represents the place that we wanted to arrive at.” See, David Rocheleau-Houle, "Le Quasi-Réalisme Et L’argument De La Coïncidence," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 57 (2018). 539-540 [my translation]

since the very beginning in our capacity for evaluation. Thus, rational reflection is just “a process of assessing evaluative judgements that are mostly off the mark in terms of others that are mostly off the mark.”³⁸⁶ She continues:

In rational reflection, one does not stand completely apart from one’s starting fund of evaluative judgements: rather, one uses them, reasons in terms of them, holds some of them up for examination in light of others... Thus, if the fund of evaluative judgements with which human reflection began was thoroughly contaminated with illegitimate influence... then the tools of rational reflection were equally contaminated, for the latter are always just a subset of the former. ... reflection of this kind isn’t going to get one any closer to evaluative truth, any more than sorting through contaminated materials with contaminated tools is going to get one closer to purity.³⁸⁷

The only option remaining, Street suggests, is to adopt a theory which is mind-dependent because this construal allows for the possibility of evaluative error resulting from the influence of evaluative attitudes. The reflective equilibrium for Street operates within this realm where evaluative judgements are taken only from the poisoned well of evolutionary influence, where evaluative truth is a function of what emerges from this process – and thus, is not ultimately, mind-independently true. This is supposedly damning for the realist because:

The realist understands the evaluative truths to be prior, in the sense that evolutionary causes are understood to have selected us to track those independent truths. The antirealist, on the other hand, understands the evolutionary causes to be prior, in the sense that these causes (along with many others) gave us our starting fund of

³⁸⁶ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 124

³⁸⁷ Ibid. 124

evaluative attitudes, and evaluative truth is understood to be a function of those attitudes.³⁸⁸

Substituting back into my cheating example, one rendition of the core claim is that cheating related beliefs which are the product of forces of natural selection are unjustified because beliefs formed in this way (with this function of *merely* securing the outcome of social cohesion, for example) are often false. But, crucially, beliefs pertaining to cheating are not false because they are influenced by our attitudinal predispositions towards acts of cheating and cheaters themselves. They are false because the evolutionary consideration suggests that, at the core of our beliefs pertaining to cheating, are predispositions which are not at all connected to moral truth. The poison of the poisoned well – from which we supposedly draw our moral justifications – is truth-irrelevance. The challenge for the realist is thus posed as how they propose to remain committed to believing that a relationship holds between evaluative belief and evaluative truth under such *unlikely* circumstances. This is an epistemological challenge against the belief in the mind-independent truth of moral evaluations.

Such an epistemic reading of the dilemma could be stated as follows:

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.
 - b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief

³⁸⁸ Ibid. 154

and truth do coincide, how can realists be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

A satisfactory account of moral naturalism would meet (1) and I suggested that this is a live option in Chapter Four. In what follows, I explore the nature of the challenge raised in (2).

5.2 *The Euthyphro Problem*

Each of us faces the inevitable loss of everyone and everything we love. More generally, we face an ineliminable gap between how things are and how we would like them to be. Is there a way to live in full awareness of this fact without falling into anxiety or depression, or resorting to one form or another of forgetfulness, denial or numbing out?³⁸⁹

Whatever the answer to the above question, Street believes that a realistic metaethical basis for it requires a “strong form of ethical objectivity” but “without positing anything metaphysically or epistemologically mysterious.”³⁹⁰ Ultimately, Street argues that the answer “...somehow necessarily involves coming to occupy a compassionate point of view from which one sees the suffering of all beings as mattering.”³⁹¹ It is here that value takes precedent in Street’s metaethical constructivism.³⁹² Street’s version of Humean constructivism evades the EDA because, although its proponents are committed to the existence of moral facts, those facts can be compatibly rendered constitutive of – dependent upon – aspects of our moral psychology (which the Darwinian Hypothesis can supposedly explain). Moral realism cannot seem to accommodate this fact as it is at odds with its own central tenet: that moral facts obtain independently of any particular attitude or perspective,

³⁸⁹ Sharon Street, "Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90, no. 1 (2016). 163

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* 167

³⁹² This is Street’s *Standpoint* characterisation of constructivism. I return to this in the next chapter.

such as that fixed by our moral psychology (again, that which there supposedly exists an evolutionary explanation for).

The Euthyphro Problem plays out this very contention – is a pious act loved by the gods because it is a pious act, or is it a pious act in virtue of its being loved by the gods? Later in this essay, which begins with the important question above, Street writes, “[o]bviously I can’t argue for the falsity of realism here, but in my view the most devastating objection to realism is epistemological.”³⁹³ The footnote which is attached to this quote leads to four papers. The first paper is the Darwinian Dilemma in which Street proposes her popular EDA. The second is a reply to David Copp’s preestablished harmony account. The third is a reply to the quasi-realists metaethical position which I will not explore here. The fourth and final paper is a response to Dworkin’s account of realism. I will show how these papers, which she insists contain the devastating epistemological objection on which her Humean constructivism rests, rely heavily on assumptions inherent in the debunking strategy. I will argue that this epistemological objection is otiose because it does no more, argumentatively, than restate her version of constructivism: standpoint constructivism. The epistemological objection can be reduced to the question of the primacy of value. I will discuss these papers chronologically.³⁹⁴

5.2.1 Replying to Copp (2008)

Copp, a central figure in the pre-established harmony line of response, wants to accept that certain moral beliefs were influenced by the forces of natural selection, but adds that it might be the case that certain moral beliefs are made true by moral facts which are the

³⁹³ Street, "Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss." 173

³⁹⁴ The papers she cites are: "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value."; "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About."; "Mind-Independence without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have It Both Ways."; and "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." I believe I have recounted the 2006 paper on the Darwinian Dilemma enough, I will thus proceed to her response to Copp. In the interest of clarity, I will not explore her paper on Quasi-realism.

product of *quasi-tracking* – whereby the doxastic process tracked moral facts to “an epistemically sufficient degree.”³⁹⁵ This means that those who accept the quasi-tracking thesis can, Copp argues, avoid the sceptical implications of the Darwinian consideration.

Copp originally responds to Street by reformulating the Darwinian Dilemma with quasi-tracking in mind.³⁹⁶ On the first horn, Copp writes that:

Realists accept the quasi-tracking thesis... that Darwinian forces caused our moral beliefs to quasi-track moral facts... because the capacity to detect moral truths promoted reproductive success among our ancestors.³⁹⁷

This means that realists can safely grasp the first horn of Street’s dilemma, as the causal premise can be reformulated in such a way that would suggest that our ancestors would be generally ‘responding’ to moral facts. Copp seeks to provide such an account which he calls society-centred moral theory. He argues that his realist solution is a kind of ‘moral functionalism’ because if a society is to be successful, he argues, “it needs to be governed by shared norms or standards, which we can think of as constituting the moral code. In this sense, ‘morality’ has the function of enabling a society to meet its needs.”³⁹⁸ The central idea of society-centred theory is that “a basic moral *proposition* is true only if a corresponding moral *standard* or *norm* is relevantly justified or authoritative.”³⁹⁹ A moral standard is relevantly justified in that “its currency in the social code of the relevant society would best contribute to the society’s ability to meet its needs – including its needs for physical continuity, internal harmony and cooperative interaction, and peaceful and cooperative

³⁹⁵ David Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism," *Philosophical Issues* 18, no. 1 (2008). 192

³⁹⁶ Note that Copp is assuming that the “Darwinian Hypothesis” is true. I have shown how it is far from clear what is meant by this, and how a sophisticated account of natural facts can be located in the genealogy of moral beliefs. This means that the aspiring debunker would have to first show why such an account is inadequate. In order to see where Street’s argument leads us, I must put these responses aside.

³⁹⁷ Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism." 193

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 198

³⁹⁹ Copp, "Four Epistemological Challenges to Ethical Naturalism: Naturalized Epistemology and the First-Person Perspective." 68

relations with its neighbours.”⁴⁰⁰ To show how such a theory might function as an answer to Street’s first horn, take the property of wrongness. Copp writes, “the property of wrongness – in relation to society S – is the property of being forbidden by the social moral code of currency of which in society S actually would best enable S to meet its needs.”⁴⁰¹ When reflecting on difficult cases such as euthanasia, the naturalist owes an account of the nature and epistemic status of the reasons employed in reflection and “of how it gives us access to the empirical truths that it identifies with moral truths.”⁴⁰² Copp’s grounding of truth is that, “a basic moral proposition is true only if a corresponding moral standard is included in or implied by the moral code the currency of which in the relevant society would enable society to better serve its basic needs than would the currency of other sets of norms and better than would be the case if no set of norms had currency in the society.”⁴⁰³ So, wrongness is fixed by societies and their contexts in their aim to secure their needs. But, Street argues, where do these needs come from?

Street’s response is that Copp’s view either makes no normative claim and is thus outside of the purview of her debunking considerations (Street supposes that she is only interested in debunking *normative* realism), or otherwise it simply assumes “a large swath of substantive views on how we have reason to live...and then note[s] that these are the very views evolutionary forces pushed us toward.”⁴⁰⁴ The primary concern for Street is that realists face the coincidence challenge, and she argues that Copp only succeeds in “trivially reassert[ing] the coincidence” rather than providing an explanation for it. Why is it that “physical continuity, internal harmony and cooperative interaction...” are among a society’s

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. 69

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. 70

⁴⁰² Ibid. 58 See also: Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 1; Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986).

⁴⁰³ Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism."

⁴⁰⁴ Street, "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About." 214

needs?⁴⁰⁵ The coincidence the realist must explain is, if these values are valuable stance-independently, then why are these are the very things that we *would* be predisposed to think are good? She writes that “the explanandum in question is the striking degree of overlap between the content of the normative truth and the evaluative directions in which evolutionary forces pushes us...”⁴⁰⁶ Without an explanation for this coincidence, Street argues that Copp (representing the realist camp) simply “takes a position on how we have reason to live.”⁴⁰⁷

It may be so that Copp has cherry-picked these values and that his justification for selecting these values over others is left wanting. Street’s response would be that cherry-picked values reflect Copp’s stance-dependence in his attempt to establish the mind-independence of value.

Street is offering the following argument.

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.
 - b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief and truth do coincide, how can realists be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

⁴⁰⁵ Copp, "Four Epistemological Challenges to Ethical Naturalism: Naturalized Epistemology and the First-Person Perspective." 69

⁴⁰⁶ Street, "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About." 212

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. 213

Street's charge is that Copp does not succeed at (1) and therefore must face (2) and explain the all-too-convenient coincidence that it is these values that we evolved to track mind-independently. Street's argument is a strong one, but it is worth noting that succeeding in her critique of Copp's attempt to develop a truth-tracking account does not show that there is no possibility of such an account. Metaethical realism remains a viable option so long as alternatives to Copp's account exist. If Street were to establish that all attempts to determine the value claims of morality are merely extensions of a stance towards those values, rendering realism unjustified, then the Darwinian Hypothesis need not be invoked. The evolutionary consideration does no argumentative work.

Street extends this argument by adding that it would be a bizarre coincidence if the values which realists suppose are true are the very values which we evolved the capacity to track and are the very values which are true mind-independently. Street's devastating epistemological objection then, surfaces here as a restatement of her stance-dependent constructivism and calls for a response to 'the coincidence challenge.' Neither of these arguments require the Darwinian premise – upon closer inspection, this is not an evolutionary debunking argument.

5.2.2 Replying to Dworkin (2016)

In Street's reply to Dworkin, Street adopts new language for the Darwinian Dilemma:

The practical/theoretical puzzle as I am raising...is a puzzle about our normative judgements in general: it notes that whatever our more specific normative views, we are forced to think that there is a general coincidence between the true normative judgements and the ones that causal forces led us to make, and it demands that this coincidence be explained.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 22

Dworkin believed that the coincidence need not be explained, "... why shouldn't you count it as a piece of luck[?]"⁴⁰⁹ But Street is unsatisfied with Dworkin's position.

Street distinguishes between three metaethical accounts through the case of the Ideally Coherent Caligula.⁴¹⁰ Essentially, Caligula possesses consistent and coherent moral beliefs, yet he is different to us in that he values the act of torture. The Kantian view, which Street attributes to Korsgaard, explicitly rejects the possibility of Caligula because it follows from every consistent and coherent agent's set of practical commitments that torture is morally wrong. Street believes that her own account of constructivism shares the common feature of stance-dependence with Korsgaard's, because for Korsgaard, "if one makes any normative judgments at all, one is thereby committed to valuing the humanity of others in such a way that rules out torturing them for fun..."⁴¹¹ This means that, ultimately, the act of valuing is primary in Korsgaard's account, meaning it falls under the purview of stance-dependent anti-realism. Street's own view differs from Korsgaard's account in that there are no shared values that necessarily exist in every rational agent and thus a character such as Caligula is entirely possible. For the realist view, Street extracts from Dworkin's claim that:

We may be forced to concede, in some cases, that those who held different views lacked no information we have, and were subject to no different distorting influences. All that we can say, by way of explanation of the difference, is that they did not "see" or show sufficient "sensitivity" to what we "see" or "sense," and these metaphors may have nothing behind them but the bare and unsubstantiated conviction that our capacity for moral judgment functions better than theirs did.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." 125

⁴¹⁰ A case of Gibbard's (1999).

⁴¹¹ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 4

⁴¹² Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." 121-122

But the crux of Street's argument is how the realist supposes to possess this "sense" while also proposing that their evaluative judgements are aligned with evaluative truths. Street continues:

...there is no reason to think that natural selection, or for that matter any causal process, would shape us in such a way that we would be able to track such truths....[the realist's account] provides no reason to think that the causal forces described by our best scientific explanations shapes our normative judgements in ways that might have led those judgements to track the truth; it merely confidently reasserts that they did....One may explain each side of the coincidence in as much depth as one likes...[b]ut all this goes nowhere toward explaining the thing that really needs to be explained, namely the coincidence itself."⁴¹³

Since the available explanation for the coincidence exists in her account of mind-dependent constructivism, Street believes the realist is in error. She concludes that, "[c]onstructivism is not self-defeating, then, for no matter what one's starting set of normative judgments, constructivism follows from within the standpoint constituted by those judgments. It thus meets its own standard, and no problem arises when we apply it to itself."⁴¹⁴ But if Street's constructivist account best explains the link between our evaluative judgements and evaluative truth, and this is the *best* scientific explanation of that link, then the debunking consideration carries no argumentative weight – the conclusion was already established on the grounds that value is stance-dependent.

It may be that the challenge set by Street functions as an endorsement of her account of constructivism, rather than as a distinct metaethical challenge. Street's devastating epistemological objection surfaces again as a restatement of her stance-dependent

⁴¹³ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 31

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. 42

constructivism and calls for a response to ‘the coincidence challenge.’ Neither of these arguments require the Darwinian premise. This supports the otiosity argument since it demonstrates that the metaethical argumentation necessary to establish that all realist justifications are in fact post-hoc rationalisations establishes the anti-realist conclusion that the EDA seeks to establish. I now turn to the merits of the coincidence challenge.

5.3 *The Coincidence Challenge*

Recall that I am dissecting the Darwinian Dilemma, which I argued has the following structure:

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.
 - b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief and truth do coincide, how can realism be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

Copp provided a case for (1). Street’s response against Copp did not consist of stance-independent reasons counting against (1). Instead, Street leans on the claim that in Copp’s answer to (1), he conveniently identifies (i) the very needs of a flourishing society that he supposes are true (ii) the very needs that a society of creatures like us would probably acquire under the Darwinian Hypothesis. I have been arguing that (ii) is otiose if (i) is true. Recall that the otiosity argument shows that it is underlying metaethical assumptions or otherwise what has already been established through rebutting facts that carries forward the realist and

anti-realist debate, as opposed to this progress coming from purely undermining facts emerging from evolutionary debunking literature. Reiterating my example from Chapter Two, suppose I make the claim that blue is the best colour. If you showed me that I only think blue is the best colour because it just happens to be my favourite colour, then my claim that it is the best colour is not justified – clearly I am biased and unable to form a stance-independent reason about the best colour. But, if you went on to say that I was predisposed to favour such a colour purely because of my upbringing, you would not be developing any new argument against my original claim that blue is the best colour. You would, perhaps, only be cladding your claim that my favouritism skews my judgement of colours (you would be adding descriptive weight to the charge of bias). However, assuming that I was sensitive to reasons, I would, on recognising my bias, have already retracted my claim that blue is the best colour, and perhaps I am in the process of trying to separate my quest for the best colour from the distorting influence of my favouritism. Your causal claim about my upbringing, while perhaps true, is no longer to the point. Now, you and I should both return to the question of bias: I can still be biased and make a judgement which is true, so we must determine what colour is really the best, as objectively as we can, taking care to distance ourselves from causal influences which might be directing our choices. In this example, the undermining facts would be the discovery that my upbringing led me to favour blue. I am arguing that debunkers must first establish that this is the *only* reason that I believe blue is the best colour in order for the argument to have any force. If the debunker must establish this prior to constructing their debunking attempt, then they must rebut any reason I might have to believe that blue is the best colour. This would establish the post-hoc rationalisation premise. Since establishing this premise would achieve the very conclusion which the debunking attempt aims at, the debunking argument itself is otiose.

In the previous section, I showed that Street's argument seeks to establish that moral realism is unjustified through an argument which rests on the implausibility of this coincidence in our moral beliefs. In this section, I want to show how she achieves this conclusion.

The coincidence challenge need not appeal to the 'Darwinian Hypothesis', further, it need not appeal to any causal claim at all. For Street's coincidence challenge to go through we must assume the moral field thesis. I will show that without the Darwinian premise and the causal premise in general, we can wear thin the foundation of Street's Darwinian dilemma in order to expose the Humean constructivism underneath.

The challenge goes like this. You think that you have just won the New York Lottery. The odds are unfathomably low, and yet you believe that your numbers coincide with the winning numbers. How would you be justified in supposing that you have in fact won, merely on the basis of having entered the lottery?⁴¹⁵ Street's point is simply that the evaluative beliefs that we have and think are true, and the evaluative beliefs that causal forces led us to believe "coincide" – and this is puzzling.⁴¹⁶ How did we happen-upon the shores of Bermuda (evaluative truth), steered by only the wind and currents (Darwinian forces)? Appealing to the unlikelihood of an event does not provide grounds to dismiss that the event occurred. Yet, often when faced with highly improbable coincidences, we respond with incredulity and rush to make sense of them (the event *must* represent the intervention of some higher-order force). In and of themselves, coincidences often have simple scientific explanations – lightning striking St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City on the very evening that Pope Benedict XVI decided to abdicate can be explained in terms of meteorology, despite that most people tended to believe otherwise. Though I couldn't fully explore the concept

⁴¹⁵ Street writes, "... imagine someone who insists that she has won the lottery, but when we ask her how she knows, she merely repeats to us, in so many words, "Because I know I won!".... to state the obvious: if the odds of your having won the lottery are very low, and you have no non-trivially-question-begging reason to think that you did, then you should conclude that you probably didn't." Ibid. 20-21

⁴¹⁶ Street isolates this argument and calls it the practical/theoretical puzzle. She states the challenge like this in, *ibid.* 13

here, in the face of coincidences there seems to be some kind of epistemic challenge raised. I will follow Hopster in naming this disposition which calls for an explanation, our epistemic anxiety.⁴¹⁷ So, we can now say, Street seems to have generated an argument which creates an epistemic anxiety for the realist account of truth.

The call for a coincidence is in the fact that without a causal connection between two events, their supposed connection seems to be mysterious and is thus deserving of an explanation as to the nature of the causal connection, or at least as to why we should be content with viewing the coincidence as an instance of luck. Hopster highlights that in Owens, a coincidence is defined as “an event which can be divided into components separately produced by independent causal factors.”⁴¹⁸ He also cites Mogensen’s rendition of the phenomena which holds that a coincidence is “a conjunction of facts whose conjuncts are explanatorily independent of one another: neither fact figures in the explanation of the other, and there is no relevant explanatory factor shared by the members of the conjunction.”⁴¹⁹ Coincidences call for causal explanations, as they are about observed events which have causal structures. Hopster acknowledges that in some cases, coincidences are just that, mere coincidences. But in these cases, he suggests that further context may be provided to support the chanciness of the observed event, or otherwise that some causal explanation will become available and render the coincidence explained.⁴²⁰ Dworkin’s response to this challenge is that the coincidence is a “piece of luck”, but – as I mentioned earlier – Street finds this unsatisfactory.⁴²¹ This means we can understand Dworkin’s contentedness and Street’s dissatisfaction in a new way: Dworkin accepts that the coincidence was an instance of luck.

⁴¹⁷ Jeroen Hopster, "Striking Coincidences: How Realists Should Reason About Them," *Ratio* Special Issue (2019).

⁴¹⁸ David Owens, *Causes and Coincidences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 13

⁴¹⁹ Mogensen, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Ethics." 9

⁴²⁰ Hopster, "Striking Coincidences: How Realists Should Reason About Them." 4

⁴²¹ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." 125; Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 310

Street, on the other hand, is calling for a causal explanation for the apparent concurrence, or otherwise that we deny that the coincidence actually occurred (as the epistemic anxiety need not be faced under Humean constructivism).

The realist's problem is that our conception of truth *could* have been otherwise, according to Street. When we consider cases of amoralists, whose constitution is identical to our own and yet choose to behave opposite ways, we seem to be committed to the view that we are right and they are wrong, purely on the basis of responding properly to properties. As I discussed in the previous section, Street finds this conclusion weak and argues that the Humean constructivists need not face the problems raised in such explanations. Realists, Street argues, are committed to unreasonably insisting that they won the New York Lottery just as there is a "winning" system of normative thought for reporting the right facts, which just so happens to be the one that we have. Street doesn't think such a view can be reconciled with the fact that realists also suppose that there are countless possible systems of normative thought which are wrong. Street continues:

Given the odds we can reasonably suppose to be in play in this "normative lottery" case, we should conclude that in all probability we didn't win—that, if there is indeed such a thing as the robustly independent normative truth we are positing as a substantive normative premise, then we are probably among the unlucky ones who (just like the ideally coherent Caligula, grass-counter, hand-clasper, and so on) are hopeless at recognizing it. This conclusion is so obviously implausible, however, I suggest, that we should reject the substantive normative premise that generates it—namely the supposition of robustly attitude-independent normative truths.⁴²²

This leads Street to argue that:

⁴²² "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 24

Normative realism has become a strange form of religion—a religion stripped clean of everything except the bare conviction that there are independent normative truths that one is capable of recognizing.⁴²³

This coincidence challenge is not a debunking argument. Additionally, it is not a new argument. A similar challenge was instituted against mathematical Platonists – arguably the mathematical equivalent of the moral field theorists. Exploring the mathematical challenge provides an interesting case study for how the coincidence challenge only brings us back to the question of the primacy of value.

5.4 *Morons and Mathematics*

Benacerraf proposes that we should view the following sentences as sharing the same truth conditions:

- (1) There are at least three large cities older than New York.
- (2) There are at least three perfect numbers greater than 17.
- (3) There are at least three FG's that bear R to a.⁴²⁴

He argues that “...the concept of mathematical truth, as explicated, must fit into an overall account of knowledge in a way that makes it intelligible how we have the mathematical knowledge that we have.”⁴²⁵ He adds that mathematical truths which do not fit into ‘an overall account of knowledge’, “are introduced as a convenience to make simpler and more elegant the theory of the things you really care about.”⁴²⁶ The model Benacerraf proposes for the grounding of truth in mathematics rests on a causal theory of knowledge, he writes:

⁴²³ Ibid. 26

⁴²⁴ Paul Benacerraf, "Mathematical Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (1973). 663

⁴²⁵ Ibid. 667

⁴²⁶ Ibid. 664

...for X to know that S is true requires some causal relation to obtain between X and the referents of the names, predicates, and quantifiers of S... For Hermione to know that the black object she is holding is a truffle is for her (or at least requires her) to be in a certain (perhaps psychological) state.... Further...the black object she is holding is a truffle must figure in a suitable way in a causal explanation of her belief that the black object she is holding is a truffle.⁴²⁷

He later connects this to mathematics when he writes that:

If our account of empirical knowledge is acceptable, it must be in part because it tries to make the connection evident in the case of our theoretical knowledge, where it is not prima facie clear how the causal account is to be filled in. Thus, when we come to mathematics, the absence of a coherent account of how our mathematical intuition is connected with the truth of mathematical propositions renders the overall account unsatisfactory.⁴²⁸

Benacerraf sets the precedent that there must be some causal manner in which to “link up what it is for p to be true with my belief that p.”⁴²⁹ Since there is no clear way to form this account in the case of mathematics, it would seem that we are not justified in positing mathematical truths. Since epistemologists came to reject the causal theory of knowledge, as I explored in chapter three, when Benacerraf’s problem was revisited it was improved upon by Field who wrote that:

Benacerraf formulated the problem in such a way that it depended on a causal theory of knowledge. The [following] formulation does not depend on *any* theory of knowledge in the sense in which the causal theory is a theory of knowledge: that is, it does not

⁴²⁷ Ibid. 671

⁴²⁸ Ibid. 675

⁴²⁹ Ibid. 667

depend on any assumption about necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.⁴³⁰

Field's improvement of the challenge is framed by Baron as a problem which:

...focuses on mathematician's mathematical beliefs. The mathematical propositions that mathematicians believe tend to be true. If Platonism is correct, however, then these propositions are about mathematical objects. So, the mathematical beliefs held by mathematicians...are reliably correlated with facts about such objects. The challenge facing the Platonist, then, is to provide an account of this reliable correlation.⁴³¹

Following Hopster's account of coincidences, we can understand this argument as calling for a causal explanation. If the challenge is for realists about mathematical truths to explain how their beliefs are reliably correlated with objects which instantiate their truth, then the explanation called for is still causal in nature – a kind of field thesis for mathematics is presupposed. Clark-Doane and Klenk agree with this reading.⁴³² Clark-Doane identifies the core of Field's challenge to be such that, "it appears in principle impossible for us to explain the reliability of our mathematical beliefs."⁴³³ Severini and Sterpetti propose that debunking does not guarantee scepticism as one solution is to adopt epistemic instrumentalism, the view that we "should refrain from claiming that scientific theories tell us truth about inaccessible reality [morons], and we should be content in regarding those theories as useful and powerful tools to cope with the world."⁴³⁴ However, realists can do better than this mere epistemic

⁴³⁰ Field, 1989, 232-233

⁴³¹ Samuel Baron, "Mathematical Explanation and Epistemology: Please Mind the Gap," *Ratio* 29, no. 2 (2016).

⁴³² Klenk also argues that the challenge relies on a metaphysical assumption about realist facts as opposed to contingent Darwinian facts about moral beliefs. See, Michael Klenk, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Benacerraf-Field Challenge," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20, no. 4 (2017).

⁴³³ Justin Clarke-Doane, "What Is the Benacerraf Problem," in *Truth, Objects, Infinity: New Perspectives on the Philosophy of Paul Benacerraf*, ed. Fabrice Pataut (Springer International Publishing, 2016).

⁴³⁴ Severini and Sterpetti, "Darwinism in Metaethics: What If the Universal Acid Cannot Be Contained?." 26

instrumentalism. The realist need not respond in the confines of this argument. Street's epistemic anxiety seems to squeeze realists into believing that only two responses exist:

- a. Provide a causally satisfactory account of our relationship with truth instantiating facts. Or,
- b. Resist the challenge by appealing to the instrumental epistemic value of the facts in question.

But realists can reject the moral field thesis in mathematics under domain-centred realism. Realists need not confine themselves to explanations (a) or (b). Following Scanlon, the explanation we ought to call for about say, the property of moral wrongness, is not causal. Instead, it is, "a matter of identifying the relevant reasons"⁴³⁵ as "normative statements are statements involving claims about the reasons that people have."⁴³⁶ The question that this response opens up is what it means for a reason to count in favour of a certain belief. If we understand this as an explanation which gives "authority to reasons", then one line of response, and one Scanlon attributes to the Kantians, is that "the authority of reasons can be grounded in an idea of rationality."⁴³⁷ This would be a question of the source of normativity, and I will argue that it is on this point, that Street and the realists ultimately disagree. I return to this momentarily. There is one more argument at play here. Field adds that:

...we would have had exactly the same mathematical... beliefs even if the mathematical... truths were different; because of this, it can only be a coincidence if our mathematical or logical beliefs are right, and this undermines those beliefs.⁴³⁸

I believe that here I can return to the metaethical equivalent of this argument. Recall that Street's central contention is that:

⁴³⁵ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 44

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.* 34

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.* 44

⁴³⁸ Harty Field, "Recent Debates About the a Priori," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, ed. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005). 74

...as a conceptual matter, the independent normative truths could be anything....

[W]hat are the odds that our values will have hit, as a matter of sheer coincidence, on those things which are independently *really* worth pursuing? That the odds seem low is an understatement.⁴³⁹

I formulated this claim as underlying (2) in Street's Darwinian dilemma. Recall that:

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.
 - b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief and truth do coincide, how can realism be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

Since (b) appeals to coincidence, and we can understand the epistemic challenge of coincidences as calling for a causal explanation of the phenomena in question, (b) seems to be reducible to (1) – or at least (b) would be a non-starter if realists could face (1) – and (following my response here) I add that realists need not confine themselves to such an explanation. Street's coincidence challenge interprets moral claims about reasons for action as incompatible with a scientific view of the world if these claims entail or presuppose facts about the natural world which do not figure into our best explanation of what there is. Under domain-centred realism, one can see that a broader understanding of realism renders the coincidence challenge insignificant as our reasons for action do not presuppose or involve

⁴³⁹ Street, "Mind-Independence without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have It Both Ways." 114 [my emphasis]

such claims. Without this coincidence challenge to lean on, Street's argument leads us back to the question of the primacy of value. Before I face Street's constructivism however, (2a) remains to be discussed.

5.4 *Putting the 'Darwin' back into the Darwinian Dilemma*

I showed that Field suggests this counterfactual line of argument (stated as 2a above). On one reading, it makes sense to propose that this gives us cause to consider the correlations of certain beliefs and the properties which instantiate their truth as miraculous. But following my arguments in the previous section, I don't think the coincidence challenge is the most charitable reading. Instead, what is offered is a general sensitivity counterfactual – one which can be traced back to Darwin's own comments on morality; one which, importantly, evokes no causal premise at all. Street seems to partly acknowledge this, she writes, "I have focused on the case of Darwinian influences on our evaluative judgments because I think it raises the problem for realism in a particularly acute form. In principle, however, an analogous dilemma could be constructed using any kind of causal influence on the content of our evaluative judgments.... At the end of the day, then, the dilemma at hand is not distinctly Darwinian." However, I want to argue that the dilemma is not distinctly genealogical either (in that it need not evoke a causal premise or presuppose any etiological account). If there is an argument to be salvaged, it is not an EDA – it is an argument mounted internal to the moral domain using rebutting facts (as opposed to undermining facts).⁴⁴⁰ The Darwinian Dilemma, I will conclude, only continues to lead us back to cases for Humean constructivism. What is Darwinian about the Darwinian dilemma then, I will show, is not that there exists a Darwinian Hypothesis which undermines moral realism, but that an argument

⁴⁴⁰ See, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 2006. 155

for moral scepticism – arising from the attempt to integrate evolutionary science and metaethics – can be traced back to Darwin.

The challenge is stated as follows:

It may be well first to premise that I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours. In the same manner as various animals have some sense of beauty, though they admire widely different objects, so they might have a sense of right and wrong, though led by it to follow widely different lines of conduct. 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.⁴⁴¹

Darwin's observation is primarily about relativity. The idea is that our moral beliefs are sensitive to our evolutionary genealogy and thus seem to be contingent upon that genealogy. If our moral beliefs are contingent upon our evolutionary past, then they are to some extent fixed by or grounded in natural facts. But there are two ways to read this. As we will see, the first is through an anti-realist lens. Street's standpoint constructivism is perfectly suited to explaining how, from the standpoint of creatures like us, we have beliefs X, Y and Z, and that those beliefs are constitutive of our standpoint towards them. That is, those beliefs are true mind-dependently. However, Darwin's observation is still consistent with realism. Unless one is willing to argue that relativism extends to our cultures, traditions or even our personal psychology, there is a strong realist tradition of grounding moral truth in natural facts about a species to which those moral truths refer. Phillipa Foot's Species Being principle, for

⁴⁴¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871). 99

example, is one such case from the neo-Aristotelian camp. Foot writes, “the evaluation of human action depends... on essential features of specifically human life.”⁴⁴² Moral claims are just further facts about an organism, as much as our hands and feet and teeth, and the evaluation of a claim as *right for* an organism is dependent upon – but true independently of – the organism in question. The naturalist reading means a claim can be dependent on minds (as objects to refer to) but still true mind-independently (as it is true regardless of the organism’s perspective towards it).

Extending from this relativist reading is also a potential sensitivity argument, however I believe it leads us to the same fulcrum. Recall the sensitivity epistemic condition which holds that “*S*’s belief that *p* is sensitive if and only if, if *p* were false, *S* would not believe that *p*.”⁴⁴³ The premises which give rise to the conclusion that *p* would, on a standard account of justification, necessitate that *p* from their content. But if those premises did not necessitate that *p*, and yet one held that *p*, it would seem that one is not justified in believing that *p*. Recall Schafer’s rendition of this argument, whereby this manoeuvre is given an evolutionary twist:

1. We should believe that their development was unlikely to be sensitive to whether or not they were reliable.
2. If we believe that the process by which some faculty developed was unlikely to be sensitive to whether or not this faculty was reliable, and we do not have any evidence independent of the faculty that it is reliable, then we should not trust the faculty.
3. We do not have any evidence independent of our normative faculties that they are reliable.
4. Therefore, we should not trust them.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Phillipa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). 14

⁴⁴³ Ichikawa and Steup, "The Analysis of Knowledge." §5.1

⁴⁴⁴ Schafer, "Evolution and Normative Scepticism." 480

In this argument, reliability (as a kind of epistemic externalism) takes the place of truth – and the claim is that the faculty responsible for producing moral beliefs was not reliable (non-truth-tracking). Since moral beliefs emerge from faculties which arose from non-truth-tracking developmental processes, the truth of those beliefs seems to be fixed by the manner in which they were derived. If the truth, *could* have been otherwise, had the developmental process been different, then our conception of truth is surely constitutive of our own stance towards them. Put this way, this is clearly a claim about stance-dependence. Cobbe also extracted this view, he writes:

Mr. Darwin will leave us only the sad assurance that our idea of Justice is all our own, and may mean nothing to any other intelligent being in the universe... We have now neither Veil nor Revelation, but only an earth-born instinct, carrying with it no authority whatever beyond the limits of our race and special social state, nor within them further than we choose to permit it to weigh on our minds.⁴⁴⁵

This is a claim that I believe Street arrives at, and this leads her to form the case against the realist:

I am by no means requiring that we explain – from a standpoint that makes no assumptions whatsoever about our manifest surroundings – why we are not hopeless at recognizing objects in our manifest surroundings, and no more so am I requiring that we explain – from a standpoint that makes no normative assumptions whatsoever – why we are not hopeless at recognising our reasons. Again, the question is not whether we have normative reasons; it's whether those normative reasons are robustly independent of our attitudes, as I'm claiming that they *can't* be.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays*, ed. University of Toronto Robarts Library, Theological and Fortnightly Reviews (London: Williams and Norgate, 1872). 11

⁴⁴⁶ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 30 [my emphasis]

The appeal to epistemic insensitivity in these arguments secures the conclusion that the Darwinian consideration only *seems* to secure – namely that our beliefs in stance-independent moral truths are not justified. The anti-realist argument is thus made without the need to suppose that the Darwinian Hypothesis is doing any argumentative work. This is made clearer by contrasting the conclusions of Schafer, who writes that:

...if we want to apply a test to our normative faculties that corresponds to the test involved in an evolutionary vindication of our perceptual ones, we need to test whether the normative ones pass the corresponding sort of reflective endorsement test—that is, we need to test whether our best explanation of these faculties when combined with our best normative theory vindicates our reliance on them.⁴⁴⁷

Yet, Street's Humean constructivism is stated as:

...the fact that *X* is a reason for agent *A* to *Y* is constituted by the fact that the judgement that *X* is a reason (for *A*) to *Y* withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of *A*'s other judgements about reasons.⁴⁴⁸

For Street, the test of reflective endorsement *is* the source of normative reason, and it is what we choose to endorse that is constituted by our *agency* – by which Street would mean, “our own, contingently held values in combination with the non-normative facts.”⁴⁴⁹ Anti-realism permits that independent truth could have been anything, because under Humean constructivism, “no matter what one's starting set of normative judgements, constructivism follows from within the standpoint constituted by those judgements.”⁴⁵⁰ So, Darwin's consideration that, had we been reared under the same conditions as bees then, “...unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers...” can be

⁴⁴⁷ Schafer, "Evolution and Normative Scepticism." 487

⁴⁴⁸ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 34

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. 42

read as a metaethical claim about stance-dependence. Darwin and Street are pressing a similar line of argument: what counts as a normative reason is entailed by the point of view of the moral agent. This is an argument internal to the moral domain about the embracing of the anti-realist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, which Street states elsewhere as the question of whether the normative status of facts is “ultimately “conferred” upon these facts by our own evaluative attitudes, or do at least some facts possess normative reason giving-status in a way that is robustly independent of our attitudes?”⁴⁵¹ Street and Darwin are acknowledging that normative commitments vary based on their constitutive relationship with the agent in question. Street is making the further claim that the truth of those commitments for an agent follow from the starting set of normative commitments – which again, could have been anything. So, since “the constructivist can see her way to constructivism no matter what the starting set of normative judgements she accepts or might have accepted, she needn’t view herself as merely “lucky” in having reached this conclusion.”⁴⁵² Whereas the realist seems to remain committed to the view that they are in a “mysteriously privileged” epistemic position. The Humean constructivists, Street concludes, can find harmony in the face of the Darwinian consideration.

But, as I argued earlier, Street overlooks the naturalist line of response:

Now if Mr. Darwin had simply said that under totally different conditions of life many of the existing human duties would have been altered, we could have no possible fault to find with his remarks. In a world where nobody needed food there could be no duty of feeding the hungry; in a world of immortals there could be no such crime as murder. Every alteration in circumstance produces a certain variation in moral obligation, for the plain reason (as above stated) that Morals only supply

⁴⁵¹ Sharon Street, "Evolution and the Normativity of Epistemic Reasons," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. sup1 (2009). 213

⁴⁵² "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 42

abstract principles, and, according to the circumstances of each case, their application must necessarily vary. If the triangular field have a rood cut off it, or a rood added on, it will no longer be the half of the rectangle beside it.⁴⁵³

This kind of naturalist constructivism is dependent on facts but not on our stance towards those facts – I return to this in chapter six. Further, a non-naturalist account of constructivism is also a live option, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation. I return to this debate in the next chapter.

Conclusion

I began with the formulation of Street's Darwinian dilemma, which was as follows:

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.
 - b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief and truth do coincide, how can realism be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

I have shown in Chapter 4 that (1) is a consideration that debunkers must face head on, as the Darwinian hypothesis, if true, may still vindicate rather than debunk mind-independent truth. I began by exploring what Street refers to as her devastating epistemological objection, and I argued that she means to refer to her Darwinian Dilemma. Upon a closer analysis of the dilemma, I argued that Street proposes (1) in the case of realist's cherry-picking evaluative facts to suit their varieties of realism. Instances of cherry-picking value claims support

⁴⁵³ Cobbe, *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays*. 30

Street's constructivist claim that our evaluative beliefs are constituted by our evaluative stance towards those facts, however this observation does not guarantee anti-realism. It is still an open question as to whether a satisfactory naturalist account can be provided that can better account for our evolutionary relationship with stance-independent moral facts – and in chapter four I explored the literature which provides a promising line of response. There is also room for a non-naturalist line of response, however, Street's second horn (2a and 2b) attempts to guard against such a response. This is because Street's devastating epistemological objection rests on the coincidence challenge, which calls for a naturalist explanation of our relationship with moral facts. This kind of argument is not a new or distinctly evolutionary consideration in metaethics or in debates on mathematical realism. I argued that this argument ultimately equates realism with a causal understanding of our relationship with moral facts.

I argued that any residual challenge lies in how realists and anti-realists interpret this species-level relativism which is described in the quoted passage from Darwin about our moral nature. Had we evolved under different circumstances our evaluative beliefs would have been entirely different. Anti-realists seem to rely on reading this as the claim that our evaluative beliefs would be different because they are fixed by our evaluative stances. I argued that this reading ultimately adopts a position on the stance-dependence of value. It is here where Street imports her version of Humean constructivism. In the next chapter, I argue that this importation is mistaken.

CHAPTER SIX – DECONSTRUCTING CONSTRUCTIVISM

In the previous chapter, I traced the steps of the final constituent challenge in my analysis of the underlying metaethical assumptions in debunking literature. I argued that Street's epistemological challenge was reducible to a claim about the stance-dependence of value, rather than a distinct evolutionary metaethical challenge. I now turn to how Street's epistemological challenge gains its appearance of force. At least in debunking literature, no doubt due to the influence of her Darwinian Dilemma, Street's construal is the dominant current characterisation of the constructivist viewpoint. The next step in the evolution of how we understand constructivism lies in expanding the scope of Street's construal of it. A limitation of Street's construal is that two strands of constructivism, which, following Southwood, I label the local normative and local constitutive varieties, are run together. I will argue that Street's Darwinian Dilemma profits from this conflation. Without this assumption, the EDA cannot run. This reinforces the significance of the otiosity argument.

6.1 *The Evolution of Constructivism as Anti-realism*

A precise scope and understanding of constructivism which is fair to its many subvarieties is so far unavailable.⁴⁵⁴ Some construe constructivism as a metaethical position somewhere between nihilism and realism;⁴⁵⁵ some, as a cognitivist and objectivist framework which could well be called realism;⁴⁵⁶ some have tried to remain neutral on the matter;⁴⁵⁷ but

⁴⁵⁴ However, I will argue that Southwood's characterisation seems to offer the most fair account thus far. Nicholas Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons," in *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, ed. Daniel Star (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴⁵⁵ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*. 14, 39-40.

⁴⁵⁶ David Copp, *Morality, Normativity, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*.

⁴⁵⁷ At least, he is alleged to be doing so. Ronald Dworkin, "Symposium on Objectivity and Truth: A Response to Critics," (1997), <https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Philosophy/bears/9704dwor.html>.

most prominently, thanks to the work of Street, it is now more commonly understood as a variety of anti-realism.⁴⁵⁸ What complicates the task of defining constructivism further is that the varieties of constructivism are differentiated by background commitments to metaphysical, epistemological and psychological facts. Expressivism, naturalism, cognitivism, and situationism are examples of metaethical commitments which bear upon one's conception of constructivism, yet ought to be external to any attempt to define it.⁴⁵⁹ The first challenge, then, is to avoid being led astray by supplementary metaethical questions, which only prima facie seems to be related to the task at hand. Significant improvements in how constructivism has been understood over time has involved casting off these other metaethical questions, allowing a more refined focus on reasons.⁴⁶⁰ Ultimately, construing constructivism as a kind of anti-realism seems to require that we import metaethical assumptions outside of constructivism. I will show this through an exploration of Korsgaard and Street's work. Then I will argue that this problem haunts Street's conception of constructivism, and it is by these means that Street's EDA gains its apparent force.

6.2 Korsgaard's Proceduralism

We can see evidence of this manner of refinement in the history of constructivism in metaethics. Korsgaard differentiated between procedural realism and substantive realism. The procedural realist holds that "there are answers to moral questions *because* there are correct procedures for arriving at them."⁴⁶¹ But the substantive realist, she argues, "thinks that there

⁴⁵⁸ Street, "Constructivism About Reasons." "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?."; "Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss."

⁴⁵⁹ Although, some authors have found ways to discuss constructivism without evoking these terms. Bagnoli uses absolutism and objectivism as terms which distinguish versions of constructivism (a broadly conceived moral realism, and a kind of Kantian objectivism). However, one could enquire into the ontology of either account, thus resurfacing those complications. See, Carla Bagnoli, "Ethical Objectivity: The Test of Time," *Ratio* 32 (2018). 325.

⁴⁶⁰ "Constructivism in Metaethics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2017).

⁴⁶¹ Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 36-37

are correct procedures for answering moral questions *because* there are moral truths or facts that exist independently of those procedures, and which those procedures track.”⁴⁶² The distinction sought to offer a contrasting view to her neo-Kantian position, whereby substantive realism captured the non-reductive variety of realism which she was opposed to. But substantive realism, which is committed to procedure-, mind-, or stance-independent facts, as we have come to call them, seems completely compatible with Korsgaard’s claim that procedural realism holds that “there are answers to moral questions...that there are right and wrong ways to answer them.”⁴⁶³

Hussain and Shah argue that Korsgaard intends to argue that procedural realism does not require a commitment to substantive realism.⁴⁶⁴ But if the answers to normative questions are simply “the results of some constructive procedure”⁴⁶⁵ then a host of realist accounts are constructivist under Korsgaard’s view. Korsgaard fails to provide a meaningful distinction between non-reductive realism and her Kantian objectivism. Perhaps, Hussain and Shah suppose, Korsgaard intends to argue that the output of those procedures are moral facts themselves. Constructivism is then, in a sense, synonymous with creation – whereby moral truth is the product of certain procedures. But an important question is only left to be carried further downstream, for she requires an explanation as to which procedures and conditions produce moral facts. Rawls’ characterisation of constructivism, for example, holds that “...truths about social justice are explained in terms of what is rationally required of anyone who accepts certain liberal democratic substantive norms.”⁴⁶⁶ The ‘original position’ is thus a procedure of *reasoning from* the premise that one accepts liberal democracy as a valid starting point. In Rawls’ account, reasonableness as a normative concept is left to be

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid. 35

⁴⁶⁴ Nadeem Hussain and Nishi Shah, "Misunderstanding Metaethics: Korsgaard's Rejection of Realism," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. R Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 209

⁴⁶⁵ Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. 35

⁴⁶⁶ Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 18

explained.⁴⁶⁷ Even in non-normative terms, the constructivist is ultimately committed to the normative judgement that there are *correct* procedures for arriving at truth.⁴⁶⁸ But what standards denote correctness? Korsgaard's later work emphasises responding to this challenge by grounding correctness in the result of one's practical reasoning, namely, by means of the categorical imperative.

Korsgaard's Kantian account is that rational agents are constitutively bound by the moral law.⁴⁶⁹ Since we humans are capable of self-reflection – the act of considering one's "thoughts and desires from a detached perspective"⁴⁷⁰ – we are capable of self-governance. By endorsing universal standards, standards to which any rational agent could subscribe, self-legislation becomes a mode of fixing the moral law insofar as the moral law is self-legislated by the agent. For Korsgaard, normative reasons arise from the capacity for practical reason. Our senses of self, which she calls our practical identities, are many and varied. It is from these identities – our identities as students, mothers, utilitarians and so on – that we derive our normative reasons. She writes that these identities are, "a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking."⁴⁷¹ Without such identities, we have no sense of agency and thus are without "any reason to live and act at all."⁴⁷² Human beings are creatures who must assert themselves by adopting these practical identities and asserting themselves through the reasons obtained by reflecting upon these identities. Ultimately, and importantly as a stepping stone for Street's case, there is one practical identity which we must fundamentally value in

⁴⁶⁷ Hussain and Shah, "Misunderstanding Metaethics: Korsgaard's Rejection of Realism." 291

⁴⁶⁸ Ultimately, Hussain and Shah argue that constructivism must import other metaethical views in order to answer this question, and thus that ultimately constructivism is not a distinct metaethical position. But I will not follow this line of argument here. Ibid. 292

⁴⁶⁹ Christine Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 207-229

⁴⁷⁰ Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics."

⁴⁷¹ Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. 101

⁴⁷² Ibid. 102

order to value any other identity which we hope to adopt, and that is our practical identity as human beings. What justifies the claims that morality makes upon us, then, are our own commitments to our practical identities which we consciously adopt when we choose to act.

Korsgaard argues that we possess self-consciousness in that we can have a conception of ourselves and are thus capable of reflecting upon ourselves from a deliberative standpoint.⁴⁷³ Reason, for Korsgaard, refers both to the active capacity of the mind to carry out this activity of deliberation, and those principles which are “constitutive of reflective mental activity itself.”⁴⁷⁴ When we are acting, we are conscious of being guided by principles of reason, so, when we make choices we are advancing reasons for action.⁴⁷⁵ Since we are “a reflective being who needs reasons to act and live”⁴⁷⁶, when we act and advance reasons we are also adopting particular practical identities which are constitutive of those reasons. So,

1. Practical identities give rise to reasons for action.
2. You only have practical identities if you fundamentally value yourself.
3. So, you only possess reasons for action if you fundamentally value yourself.

Just as “[t]rue lovers learn how to be made for each other.... agents transform contingent values into necessary ones by valuing the humanity that is their source.”⁴⁷⁷ Korsgaard seems to hint that we must embrace the contingency of our values when she writes that we “take things to be important because they are important to us.”⁴⁷⁸ If our values are contingent upon our biological, psychological and historical setting, then Korsgaard would seem to align with a kind of subjectivism. But Korsgaard’s Kantian story seems to offer an opposing objectivist account. Hussain and Shah argue that Korsgaard ultimately fails to provide a clear semantic and metaphysical response to the issue of how morality fits into practical reason, and that the

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 100

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. 236

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. 243

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. 121

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. 242

⁴⁷⁸ Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. 242

issue is blurred by her ‘normative question.’⁴⁷⁹ O’Neill argues that constructivist views such as Korsgaard’s become ‘avowedly circular’ upon examination, and this critique has since gained footing in metaethical debate, being presented by a number of authors since.⁴⁸⁰

Essentially, the critique runs that constructivism grounds practical reasons in arbitrary standards of correctness or otherwise collapses into moral realism. The question is, which of Korsgaard’s commitments make her Kantian account anti-realist? If it were to come down to the fact that one must value oneself in order to have practical reasons, then her anti-realist constructivism seems reducible to a claim about the mind-dependence of the practical reasons that emerge from this self-valuing.

6.3 Street’s Standpoint Characterisation

Street argues that such a critique can be avoided if one abandons the proceduralist characterisation of constructivism and instead adopts a *thoroughgoing* characterisation. According to this view, “the truth of a normative claim consists in that claim’s being entailed from within the practical point of view, where the practical point of view is given a formal characterisation.”⁴⁸¹ Street seeks to avoid “tak[ing] the truth of any given substantive normative claim for granted...” and instead explain how standards of correctness arise from the attitude of the valuer.⁴⁸² Street makes the further distinction between Humean and Kantian thoroughgoing accounts. Where the Kantian derives moral values from the formalised understanding of what is entailed by a particular agent’s standpoint – a view which Street attributes to Korsgaard – the Humean takes moral value to be that which “...one finds oneself alive as an agent – such that one come [sic] alive with an entirely different set of

⁴⁷⁹ Hussain and Shah, "Misunderstanding Metaethics: Korsgaard's Rejection of Realism." 271

⁴⁸⁰ Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reasons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 29. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*. Caroline Arruda, "Constitutivism and the Self-Reflection Requirement," *Philosophia* 44, no. 4 (2016); Carla Bagnoli, "Constructivism and the Moral Problem," *ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ Street, "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?." 369

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

evaluative attitudes, or were mere causes to bring about a radical shift in those attitudes, one's reasons would have been, or would become, entirely different."⁴⁸³ Street's own view as a constructivist is at once a challenge to realism and an attempt to capture what is metaethically distinct about metaethical constructivism. Reasons, for the thoroughgoing Humean constructivists (let us shorten this to the standpoint view), are dependent and contingent upon evaluative starting points. Street's critique of realism is that the 'rabbit of substantive reasons' is being pulled from a hat, and that her version of constructivism avoids the epistemic anxiety with which realism is supposedly saddled.

We have seen how her Darwinian Dilemma leads us to an argument of this nature, and in Chapter Five I argued that this challenge is set independently of any evolutionary premises.⁴⁸⁴ To recall, Street's coincidence challenge is that,

Given the odds we can reasonably suppose to be in play in this "normative lottery" case, we should conclude that in all probability we didn't win—that, if there is indeed such a thing as the robustly independent normative truth we are positing as a substantive normative premise, then we are probably among the unlucky ones who ... are hopeless at recognizing it. This conclusion is so obviously implausible, however, I suggest, that we should reject the substantive normative premise that generates it—namely the supposition of robustly attitude-independent normative truths.⁴⁸⁵

Since "the constructivist can see her way to constructivism no matter what the starting set of normative judgements she accepts or might have accepted, she needn't view herself as merely "lucky" in having reached this conclusion."⁴⁸⁶ The realist, on the other hand, finds themselves in a "mysteriously privileged" epistemic position. However, it would seem that Street's

⁴⁸³ Ibid. 370

⁴⁸⁴ This argument, I argued, is identical in nature to epistemological objections in her reply to Copp, her reply to the Quasi-Realists, and her reply to Dworkin. See §5.2-3.

⁴⁸⁵ Street, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." 24

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. 42

standpoint characterisation seems to both create a challenge for realism and solve it at once. Street's objection to realism rests on a shared incredulity towards the mysteriously privileged position of the realist, but such an objection dissolves if realism is not be understood as having *won* the normative lottery. I will develop this possibility in what follows. But first, it is worth enquiring further into Street's own constructivism. The putative improvement upon constructivism since Korsgaard rests in Street's notion of entailment, the notion that rules follow from what is "constitutively involved in the attitude of valuing, or normative judgment, as such."⁴⁸⁷ Take the following case.

[S]uppose that someone says, 'I have all-things-considered reason to get to Rome immediately, and to do so it is necessary that I buy a plane ticket, and I have no reason to buy a plane ticket.' ... Our diagnosis of such a case is not that the person is making a false judgment about his reasons, but rather that he doesn't genuinely judge himself to have all-things-considered reason to get to Rome (or else doesn't genuinely judge himself to have no reason to buy a plane ticket) at all.⁴⁸⁸

We can interpret the case as containing all but the correspondent attitude which would entail action. This is also demonstrated in Street's example of the ideally coherent Caligula. Caligula values, above all else, torturing innocents for pleasure. The Kantian, argues Street, believes that it follows from the formal characterisation of the agent's standpoint that Caligula is in error. It is just incoherent that Caligula could value such a thing, and that continuing to value in this way would not generate a practical reason since it follows from Caligula's evaluative standpoint that such a value is unacceptable. The Humean, representing Street's own position, believes that Caligula is not in error and can coherently hold such a value, provided that Caligula "is aware of all the non-normative facts and has recognized

⁴⁸⁷ Street, "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?." 373

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. 374

every normative conclusion that follows from his own values in combination with those facts...”⁴⁸⁹ The realist supposedly believes that in such a case, even if Caligula was fully aware of all non-normative facts and coherently recognizes those normative conclusions which follow, he is still in error because there exists “a fact of the matter about how there is reason to live ... one that holds interpedently of what is entailed from within his practical point of view in combination with the non-normative facts.”⁴⁹⁰ Realism is thus construed as the view that posits that it is Caligula’s evaluative starting points which are false and that Caligula is failing to recognise these *true* starting points. This is not a fair characterisation, as Street has overlooked versions of realism that start not with a set of attitudes, but with commitments and relationships with others – features of our moral reality which are seen as more significant than value stances. What follows from these starting points can be correctly or incorrectly adduced, and the standards evoked in such an analysis are either dependent or independent of the standpoint of the valuer. Locating realism in the view that Caligula is unaware of or mistaken about some evaluative truth, despite being fully informed about all relevant facts, does not fairly demarcate realism about stance-independent standards of correctness and the constitutivism of Street’s standpoint characterisation. Instead, it runs them together as anti-realist.

Constructivism in metaethics has been defined into opposition with realism, yet this characterisation hinges on the assumption that what functions as an evaluative starting point are our evaluative attitudes – attitudes which are contingent and dependent upon causal factors outside of any critical reflective process. It is here that the EDA becomes an ally to Street’s constructivism, but only because the assumption is set that what is constructed is what is entailed from an evaluative attitude. This means that anti-realism (as

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. 371

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

stance/attitude/mind-dependence) is established from the very beginning. This means that, firstly, evolutionary considerations guarantee anti-realist conclusions under Street's construal. Street's argument is supported by the Darwinian Hypothesis because it supports her view that starting points of critical moral reflection are all given to us as pure evaluative attitudes: prior to, and independent of, the operation of our critical, reflective capacities. Our capacities need something to work on which is immune from criticism; we cannot be critical all the way down. This makes her view a form of Humean foundationalism; and the Darwinian Hypothesis supplies one explanation for such foundationalism – but only one; the real work here is done by the foundationalist assumption. The Darwinian Hypothesis plays no undermining role. Instead, it plays a part in explaining the contingency of our evaluative attitudes which the realist can grant are partly constitutive of our moral deliberation. Secondly, and it is to this issue that I now turn, it signifies that the challenge of demarcating constructivism from other metaethical positions remains unfinished.

6.4 *Expanding the Scope of Constructivism*

Southwood distinguishes between local normative and local constitutive varieties of constructivism. Scanlon's account falls under the former and Street's the latter. Standpoint constructivism is mistaken as it runs these varieties of constructivism together.

Scanlon's account grounds rightness and wrongness in the mutual recognition (between rational agents) of the justifiability of a certain act or judgement.⁴⁹¹ Southwood characterises such a view as local normative, whereby "certain standards of correct reasoning normatively explain or ground certain truths about reasons..."⁴⁹² The normative element of this follows from the manner in which standards of correctness are derived from other truths

⁴⁹¹ Elizabeth Ashford and Tim Mulgan, "Contractualism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2018). §1

⁴⁹² Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 21

about relevant reasons. Recall the ‘domain realism’ I introduced earlier. Scanlon writes that, “[n]ormative truths do not require strange metaphysical truth-makers. Such truths are determined by the standards of the normative domain itself.”⁴⁹³ What is required to justify a certain claim, and what follows from that claim varies in virtue of what is under examination – mountains, numbers or reasons, Scanlon says – as each form parts of independent domains of inquiry. Southwood characterises this as an important element of the local normative characterisation, he writes, “...the explanation must appeal to truths about the *same kinds of reasons* as those that it purports to explain.”⁴⁹⁴ For example, earlier I argued that Harman’s Hooligan case calls for an unfair explanatory requirement on moral realists, as it – under the guise of an epistemic standard – ultimately calls for a scientific explanation of the realist relationship with moral facts. Scanlon responds that we are committed to the existence of natural kinds iff they play a role in explaining some feature of the natural world, of which moral properties need not be a part. He develops this account by recourse to the domain of mathematics.

We have reason to quantify over numbers if quantifying over numbers is a good way to formulate this theory. We also have reason to introduce terms denoting new kinds of numbers (such as imaginary and complex numbers) just in case these are useful in providing a more coherent and satisfying account of the relevant parts of mathematics.⁴⁹⁵

Crucially, what counts for relevant reasons in a justification depends on how a certain entity or concept fits into a domain. It is from within the domain that standards of correctness are derived from what can be reasonably accepted.⁴⁹⁶ Though there are further metaethical

⁴⁹³ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 62

⁴⁹⁴ Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 21

⁴⁹⁵ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 26

⁴⁹⁶ In Chapter Three, I argued that Dworkin espouses a similar view.

questions to be explored in Scanlon's account, this suffices to demonstrate that Scanlon's account grounds truths about reasons in standards of correctness – the mutual recognition (between rational agents) of the justifiability of a certain act or judgement.

Local constitutive constructivism, on the other hand, "holds that certain standards of correct reasoning constitutively explain certain truths about reasons..."⁴⁹⁷ Under such a view, truths about relevant reasons *cannot* form part of one's justification of the entity or concept under examination. Recall that in Street's epistemological objection to realism, she argues that rational reflection cannot correct the off-track influence of causal forces on our moral beliefs, because this would merely be "a process of assessing evaluative judgements that are mostly off the mark in terms of others that are mostly off the mark."⁴⁹⁸ She continues:

In rational reflection, one does not stand completely apart from one's starting fund of evaluative judgements: rather, one uses them, reasons in terms of them, holds some of them up for examination in light of others... Thus, if the fund of evaluative judgements with which human reflection began was thoroughly contaminated with illegitimate influence... then the tools of rational reflection were equally contaminated, for the latter are always just a subset of the former. ... reflection of this kind isn't going to get one any closer to evaluative truth, any more than sorting through contaminated materials with contaminated tools is going to get one closer to purity.⁴⁹⁹

Following my analysis of Street's constructivism, we can see that Street is detailing her Humean thoroughgoing version of constructivism.⁵⁰⁰ It is this view which entices the solution that we adopt a theory of moral truth which is stance-dependent. However, with

⁴⁹⁷ Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 24

⁴⁹⁸ Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 124

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ By Humean, I mean only to refer to the tradition of grounding evaluative belief in evaluative attitudes. In another paper, Street moves beyond Humean constructivism towards a Kantian version. See, Street, "Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss."

Scanlon's account of standards of correctness in mind, we can view this characterisation of realism by Street with new eyes:

The realist understands the evaluative truths to be prior, in the sense that evolutionary causes are understood to have selected us to track those independent truths. The antirealist, on the other hand, understands the evolutionary causes to be prior, in the sense that these causes (along with many others) gave us our starting fund of evaluative attitudes, and evaluative truth is understood to be a function of those attitudes.⁵⁰¹

Street seems to be referring to a robust account of realism here, whereby moral truth functions like the truth-makers of moral claims, as opposed to Scanlon's account of moral truth where truths are determined by standards internal to the moral domain. Street is mistaken in running local normative and local constitutive varieties of constructivism together as it means that first of all, some versions of realism are not properly contained within the scope of her EDA and thus that her EDA ultimately fails as a comprehensive critique of moral realism. Secondly, it reveals that what makes Street's Darwinian Dilemma a forceful objection to traditional varieties of moral realism is the very characterisation of realism, as local normative varieties of constructivism remain unaddressed.

Furthermore, Street's characterisation reduces constructivism to constitutivism. Though such a characterisation includes the important work of Street and Korsgaard, it, by definition, rejects the view that the theories of Rawls and Scanlon, for example, are versions of constructivism. This is an unsatisfactory result. What is missing from the standpoint characterisation, Southwood shows, is a proper recognition of the primacy of reasoning that all constructivists share in explanations of truths about reasons.⁵⁰² Southwood suggests that

⁵⁰¹ "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." 154

⁵⁰² By extension, I would add, a proper recognition of the role of our critical reflective capacity in moral deliberation.

expanding the scope of constructivism means understanding correct reasoning as the foremost question in constructivist enquiry. Truths about reasons, he writes, “are then explained in terms of correct reasoning, that is, reasoning that satisfies certain standards of correctness that are prior to and independent of reasons of the kind that are being explained.”⁵⁰³ Street actually hints at such an account when she writes that, “...one way to present ... constructivism is as claiming that normative facts are constituted by facts about what is entailed by the ‘rules of ... reason’ in combination with the non-normative facts. The trick, of course, is to give a plausible account of the ‘rules of ... reason.’”⁵⁰⁴ Such a suggestion does not commit one to constitutivism and instead emphasises the primacy of adducing standards of correct reasoning.

Street’s work represents an innovation in the EDA which sought to recognise this feature of our moral deliberation, but I have shown here why we should be sceptical of this attempt. What we learn from this investigation of Street is that it is not just our critical reflective capacity that must be acknowledged and further discussed, but our standards for its correct exercise as well. This just is the task of the correct reasoning characterisation, and thus the debate between realists and anti-realists remains unsettled.

6.5 *A Positive Account of Our Relationship with Reasons*

A concern that I have pressed at various points throughout this thesis is that what is missing from debunking literature is a proper recognition of our critical reflective capacity. By proposing a positive account of our relationship with reasons I only mean to defend the prima facie plausibility of a constructivist realism – where moral truths are constructed through the enhancement of our reason-responsive natures in such a way that they are profoundly

⁵⁰³ Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 16

⁵⁰⁴ Street, "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?." 373

independent of our evaluative stance. The correct reasoning characterisation offers a new schema for constructivism which can be filled in a variety of ways. Further, Southwood's expanded analysis demonstrates that the constructivist territory to which Street stakes a claim still has space for realist accounts. Take the following principle from Scanlon.

...an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behaviour that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement.⁵⁰⁵

Southwood's account frames the task of constructivism as a matter of adducing the standards of correctness, which in Scanlon's work mirrors the task of adducing the grounds one would have for the reasonable rejection of a certain principle. These are standards of correctness that are, "prior to and independent of reasons of the kind that are being explained."⁵⁰⁶ Scanlon's Reasons Fundamentalism is an attempt to adduce the standards of correctness, as he writes that for questions of right and wrong, "...it is enough to show that we have good grounds for taking certain conclusions that actions are right or wrong to be correct..."⁵⁰⁷ and that "...judgements of right and wrong [are] claims about reasons – more specifically about the adequacy of reasons for accepting or rejecting principles under certain conditions."⁵⁰⁸ So, realism defined in opposition to constructivism is mistaken, if Southwood's correct reasoning characterisation of constructivism is fair. Furthermore, understanding realism as purporting to advance a metaphysical stance is similarly unjustified if the standards of correctness can be understood in the way that Scanlon proposes.⁵⁰⁹ That there are answers to moral questions

⁵⁰⁵ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 153

⁵⁰⁶ Southwood adds that Scanlon is insistent about this claim as well, that "...there are no truths about what we owe to each other that are prior to and independent of correct reasoning about how to live with one another on terms that no one could reasonably reject." Southwood, "Constructivism About Reasons." 16-17

⁵⁰⁷ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 2-3

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. 3

⁵⁰⁹ Scanlon argues this on several occasions. For example, he writes that "[t]he question at issue is not a metaphysical one..." and that "...truths about reasons are not reducible to or identifiable with non-normative truths, such as truths about the natural world of physical objects, causes and effects, nor can they be explained in terms of notions of rationality or rational agency that are not themselves claims about reasons." Ibid. 2; Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 2

and that these answers can be right or wrong based on reasons that we discover through moral inquiry, seems to be compatible with Street's call for a "strong form of ethical objectivity... without positing anything metaphysically or epistemologically mysterious."⁵¹⁰

Scanlon writes that, "...we bring to moral argument a conception of generic points of view and the reasons associated with them which reflects our general experience of life, and that this conception is subject to modification under the pressures of moral thought and argument. Some of the most common forms of moral bias involve failing to think of various points of view which we have not occupied, underestimating the reasons associated with them, and overestimating the costs to us of accepting principles that recognise the force of those reasons."⁵¹¹ He goes on to say that an important role of moral theory is to find a way to correct these biases. Moreover, we use our critical reflective capacity, not merely to answer problems inherent in evaluative stances we already find ourselves to have adopted, but to draw upon our expanding experiences and interactions with others so that we are capable of radically reshaping our moral considerations.

What we learn from this debate is that biases and evolutionary affectations play a role in our moral deliberation. The metaethical question turns towards whether the correct standards for adducing truths about moral reasons are appropriately stance-independent in such a way that one can engage in moral deliberation independently of those biases and evolutionary affectations – that is, do we, or could we, escape the forces of our inherited predispositions? I think, tentatively, that we can. I am swayed by the arguments of Sterelny, who cites our capability of changing our actions based on periods of slow deliberation, such as in the case of our eating habits. We might become a vegetarian or come to place emphasis on the sourcing and conditions in which our food is grown following a consideration of the

⁵¹⁰ Street, "Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss." 167

⁵¹¹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. 208

longevity of the planet or the cruelty of certain farming methods.⁵¹² Such shifts in attitudes are not just seen in perspectives towards animals, there have been radical generational shifts in our attitudes towards raising children, the roles of women in the world and our moral obligations towards the environment. We can learn from the adoption of the standpoint of others, including other non-human creatures, that our currently extant evaluative tendencies are fundamentally amiss.

Paul Taylor argues for one such principle which demonstrates this in environmental ethics. Consider, he writes, that “[t]he natural world is not there simply as an object to be exploited by us, nor are its living creatures to be regarded as nothing more than resources for our use and consumption. On the contrary... [t]he living things of the natural world have a worth that they possess simply in virtue of their being members of the Earth's Community of Life.”⁵¹³ Were we to truly adopt Taylor’s principle of species impartiality and to respect, among other tenets, the fact that “...all organisms are teleological centres of life in the sense that each is a unique individual pursuing its own good in its own way”⁵¹⁴ then we would have adopted a respect for nature which seems to radically contradict our evolved natures.⁵¹⁵

Expanding the Circle of our moral considerations to include the interests of non-human creatures and the ecosystems that support them, plays out our ability to exceed our biases and evolved tendencies through learning from the world and by critically reflecting upon our place within it.⁵¹⁶ Although such principles are not always fully accepted and accommodated, they are moral reasons nonetheless, and like a trail of breadcrumbs from a forest, mark our path beyond our evolved natures. These reasons challenge us to constantly reconsider what

⁵¹² Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice*. 157

⁵¹³ Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011). 12-13

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.* 99

⁵¹⁵ I take it to be a fairly safe assumption that of the principles we were evolutionarily predisposed to believe, a wider respect and appreciation for the inherent value of non-human creatures was not one of them.

⁵¹⁶ I refer here to Singer’s work which invokes a similar principle. Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

we owe to each other and the world. Whether or not we ever live up to these reasons is another question.

Conclusion

Southwood's expanded analysis of the task of constructivism demonstrates that the final constituent challenge that I identified in debunking literature rests on an assumption about how constructivism is characterised. I argued that Street's account of constructivism carried forward metaethical literature in important respects, but that following Southwood's distinction between local normative and local constitutive varieties of constructivism, Street's innovation is mistaken as it runs these varieties of constructivism together. It is only with this assumption, and her coincidence challenge which I discussed in the previous chapter, that Street's epistemological objection gains its illusion of force. I argued that Scanlon's account meets the task of adducing standards of correctness and is thus a viable candidate for a realist constructivism. That such a candidate account remains indicates that the aspiring debunker faces the problem of available evidence. This means the debunker cannot argue that purely evolutionary considerations guarantee anti-realist conclusions. Instead, the metaethical debate between realists and anti-realists is settled externally to any debunking attempt, utilising rebutting – as opposed to undermining – facts.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter One I introduced the evolutionary debunking argument. The EDA is unique in metaethical argumentation in attempting to offer an undercutting defeater, as opposed to a rebutting defeater, for the moral realist's claim that moral truth is justified. The EDA draws from the discovery that only some beliefs are likely to have emerged from cognitive processes which were formed via on-track belief forming processes. For reasons I explored in a later chapter, moral beliefs are classified by debunkers as a set of beliefs which emerged from cognitive processes formed via off-track belief forming processes. The general argument is that the benefits of moral beliefs being grounded in truth were unlike those benefits which presented more immediate threats to our survival and evolution, such as those beliefs which are formed via our senses, senses which allow us to navigate the challenges of our manifest surroundings. The EDA begins with the premise that moral beliefs have been, at best, instrumental for our evolution, and as a result our moral beliefs are not necessarily made true by any feature of the world. I argued that there seems to be at least four different ways of forming the argument, each importing different epistemic claims.

The Non-Foundational Formulation seeks to debunk the claim of an objective foundation to morality by arguing that morality is the result of the non-truth tracking genealogy of the natural selection of our moral sense. The Superfluity Formulation appeals to ontological parsimony and the empirical claim of a completed non-moral genealogy of morality. The Sensitivity Formulation argues through a truth conditional theory of knowledge that moral beliefs do not count as knowledge given their status conferred from their evolutionary origins. The Implausibility Formulation is a two-pronged attack on the justifications offered by realists in the face of the debunking argument.

I argued that each formulation of the EDA required a shared set of attributes in order to succeed as an EDA. I stipulated these conditions in my analysis of the deep structure of the

argument. I followed Joyce in his example of Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo, whereby we are to imagine that at some point we were slipped a belief pill which has led us to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo. The discovery that our belief comes from the belief pill is supposedly analogous to our discovery that our moral belief has come from the off-track formative processes of our moral faculties. Just as a pill alone provides no reasonable grounds for believing that Napoleon lost in the battle of Waterloo, so too the etiology of our moral beliefs provide no reasonable grounds for believing that moral facts are true mind-independently. I argued that this thought experiment assists in the elucidation of three important considerations for aspiring debunkers.

Firstly, I asked what it means to debunk the target belief, Napoleon Lost Waterloo. To fully appreciate that our belief that Napoleon Lost Waterloo is unjustified because of this belief pill, we probably require a number of other beliefs which give this focal belief any meaning in the first place. For example, we believe that Napoleon was a French Emperor, that a battle took place in a region called Waterloo in 1815, and that the armies which Napoleon commanded lost that battle. I named these other beliefs the necessary beliefs (N-beliefs), since they must appear in the set of beliefs which are targeted by this pill for the debunking of them to make any sense. If the belief pill didn't target the Battle of Waterloo which occurred in 1815 (as opposed to another battle of Waterloo in a different year) or the *actual* Napoleon Bonaparte, then the attempt to debunk my belief that Napoleon Lost Waterloo fails. I called this first condition the *scope* of the EDA. The scope in the case of the metaethical implementation of this argument must involve all our reasons for believing that moral truth is mind-independent.

Next, I argued that the aspiring debunker must be weary of how widely they set the scope of the EDA. Beliefs which are built upon the target belief are toppled by its undermining. I proposed the example that we came to believe that Napoleon lost Waterloo *by*

a very small margin. A belief about the degree of the loss at Waterloo makes no sense without a loss at Waterloo to refer to. So, the discovery that our belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo* was the product of a belief pill, means that our auxiliary belief that *Napoleon lost Waterloo by a very small margin* is built upon an insecure epistemic foundation and is thus, by extension, unjustified. I called this consideration the debunking argument's *corrosiveness*. The corrosiveness in the case of the metaethical implementation of this argument pertains to the concern that certain beliefs which are *like* moral beliefs in their development, such as some epistemic and prudential beliefs, might be susceptible to debunking were the scope of the EDA set too broadly.

Finally, I posed the question of how we are to understand those beliefs which are outside of a debunking argument's scope yet might provide a means for understanding and synthesising those beliefs which are within the scope. I gave the example of our knowledge that the belief that Prussian forces won the battle of Waterloo against Napoleons' armies. A pill which targeted the N-beliefs I mentioned earlier would be ineffective, as even upon discovery that our N-beliefs were tainted, we could deduce from our untainted beliefs regarding the Prussian forces that Napoleon *must have* lost Waterloo. If I were widen my scope so as to include this belief regarding the success of the Prussian forces, to safeguard against the failure I have just demonstrated, I must further account for those beliefs regarding the German forces, the allies of the German forces, then the War of the Seventh Coalition, then the French revolution, and so on. We might even look to the arrangements of states today and deduce something further about the outcome of the war. Either the debunker continually expands the scope of their EDA until all this information is similarly contained within the scope (making the problem of corrosiveness a more considerable one), or their EDA is rendered ineffective. I called this the problem of available evidence. I showed that Joyce was seemingly aware of this condition when he wrote that, "unless you can find some

concrete evidence either in favour or against the belief you should cease to believe this thing...”⁵¹⁷ It is precisely this search for alternative evidence which makes up the ongoing debate between realists and anti-realists. The problem of available evidence reveals my central contention with the evolutionary debunking argument, which I called the otiosity argument.

The otiosity argument shows that it is underlying metaethical assumptions or otherwise what has already been established through rebutting facts that carries forward the realist and anti-realist debate, as opposed to this progress coming from purely undermining facts emerging from evolutionary debunking literature. This is because in order to cope with the problem of available evidence, the aspiring debunker must first show that no reason outside of the scope of the EDA exists for a realist to believe in the mind-independent truth of moral facts. In this exercise, the aspiring debunker would be effectively demonstrating the conclusion that they seek to establish via the EDA, namely that belief in the mind-independent truth of moral facts is unjustified. Chapters Three, Four and Five, play out this issue as I show that through their attempt to safeguard against the problem of available evidence, debunkers merely assume or otherwise attempt to preestablish various anti-realist conclusions. These arguments demonstrate the otiosity of the EDA, since the debunkers are either successful or unsuccessful in their attempts to establish that realists have no reasons independent of the EDA to believe in the mind-independent truth of moral facts.

I then turned to prominent arguments in existing debunking literature. The first argument I explored challenged the most central claim to the evolutionary debunking of morality – the claim that there is any evolutionary story to be told of our moral beliefs in the first place. I called the view that moral beliefs are the product of an evolutionary and epistemically off-track formative process, the Darwinian Hypothesis. Recall the stipulation of

⁵¹⁷ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*. 180

the Darwinian Hypothesis, which was that “moral beliefs are formed and supported *only* through unreliable doxastic processes.” If moral beliefs are not formed *only* through unreliable doxastic processes, then the debunker must concede the more modest conclusion that only some of our moral beliefs are not justified. Such an argument does not threaten the broader position of metaethical realism. The literature on denying the Darwinian Hypothesis attempts to establish this. I first began by emphasising what it would mean to debunk ‘morality.’ I argued that a significant portion of debunking literature draws on the empirical evidence underlying our conservative expressive tendency (CET) as opposed to our critical reflective capacity (CRC).

I proposed this distinction in order to gain clarity in what we mean when we discuss ‘morality’. I argued that we have the tendency to act in certain ways, form moral judgements or make decisions about how we should act or certain characteristics we should express, in accordance with our evolved natures and that, on the other hand, we have a capacity to reflect on the ways in which we choose to act and the sort of people we thus become or aspire to be. The existence of this latter *capacity* problematises the attempt to empirically investigate morality since it exceeds the kind of disposition to believe targeted by EDAs. Next, I argued that there does not yet exist a satisfactory and completed non-moral genealogy for our moral beliefs. So, the conclusions drawn through EDAs are hypothetical considerations until more work is done to demonstrate that the Darwinian Hypothesis is true.

I then explored the problem of cherry-picking in nativist literature. Often theorists draw upon ‘evidence’ from our evolutionary past in order to defend a certain image of our evolved natures. I argued that this evidence is often contradictory and that this reinforces the incompleteness of this research. Because of this gap in the literature, debunkers must currently propose that *some* moral beliefs are formed and supported *only* through unreliable

doxastic processes. This is a perfectly accommodatable claim for the realists, and thus the debunking argument carries no force on this front.

The second argument I explored drew from the literature which accepts, at least for the sake of argument, that the Darwinian Hypothesis is true. The realists in this debate call themselves the pre-established harmony theorists, since they claim that there is a pre-established harmony between certain moral facts and the evolved cognitive processes which evolved to track them. These theorists seek to ‘lower the epistemic bar’ of scepticism towards the belief that we might have evolved to have certain moral beliefs because those beliefs are true. Later in the thesis I agree with Street that this avenue of response might require that certain values be deemed valuable prior to our belief in them.

The third and final argument I explored was the self-undermining argument. The self-undermining argument builds upon the problem of defining a debunking argument’s scope and the problem of an EDA’s corrosiveness. Debunkers must have a clear target for their EDA in order to contain the universal acid and avoid a debunking argument which generalises to its own epistemic foundation. It is in this move, in meeting the demarcation challenge, that the debunkers must assume or preestablish metaethical arguments which are not distinctly evolutionary, undermining facts. Instead, rebutting facts settled external to the attempt to meet the demarcation challenge are relied upon. In Chapter Four I set out those assumptions.

The demarcation challenge set the task of distinguishing which beliefs were formed via reliable doxastic processes and which beliefs were not. Debunkers must provide reasons for the claim that moral beliefs are formed and supported only through unreliable doxastic processes whilst beliefs which underly the scientific and epistemic claims inherent in their own argumentation were formed and supported reliably – lest their debunking arguments collapse upon themselves.

The debunker's attempt to meet the demarcation challenge reveals that truths about our manifest surroundings must first be posited 'in one's best explanation' in order to explain how our ancestors adapted to overcome the challenges of fires, cliffs, and predators. This assumption is not without philosophical disagreement, and furthermore the debunkers do not offer this option to the moral realists. Instead, debunkers argue that realists are committed to the mysterious position of proposing that moral truth also features in our manifest surroundings. I argued that there is a strong history for this kind of ontologising assumption in metaethics. As Dworkin argues through his moral field thesis, realists are not committed to such a view. I argued that the dichotomy offered by the debunkers seems to be that:

(1) the moral realist must provide a naturalistic account as to how moral properties might have conferred truth upon the beliefs of our ancestors, and explain why this would have been beneficial, or

(2) the moral realist must accept that naturalism fails and that they are led to moral scepticism.

I demonstrated this assumption through an analysis of how Joyce sets up his EDA. Joyce argues that Hypothesis A can supposedly explain the history of our moral judgements. If Hypothesis A is true, he argues, then Hypothesis B and C (representing non-natural and supernatural facts) are rendered superfluous to explaining our moral judgements. Debunkers such as Joyce must first show that a naturalist account is not embedded within Hypothesis A. This requires argumentation which is independent of undermining facts emerging from debunking literature. Joyce runs an independent argument when he attempts to dismiss the claim that naturalism is embedded within Hypothesis A on the grounds of his moral clout requirement. This means, he argues, that Hypothesis B and C must also be sunk. Firstly, his argument against Hypothesis A relies on the outcome of the debate between motivational externalists and internalists as opposed to any distinctly evolutionary consideration utilising

undermining facts – and I consider the merits of that argument in a later chapter. Secondly, his dismissal of Hypothesis B and C seems to rely heavily on this ontologising assumption.

Meeting the demarcation challenge ultimately requires that debunkers construe the debate between realists and anti-realists as a naturalistic one, whereby moral facts can be situated within our manifest surroundings. I introduced Scanlon and Dworkins domain-centred realism, which offers a different perspective whereby “the basic element of the normative domain is a relation, *being a reason for*, can be seen as a claim about the metaphysics of the normative.”⁵¹⁸ It may be so that the world impinges on our sensory surfaces, but this does not set the ontological precedent for all forms of understanding. Taking domain centred realism seriously opens up conceptual space for reasons fundamentalism, whereby in order to “earn the right to think that some moral judgement is true...I have to provide moral arguments for that very strong opinion.”⁵¹⁹ I highlighted that the ontologising assumption immediately limits the scope of the EDA to the debunkers peril, since cases of moral realism where metaphysics is construed differently remain open.

I then turned to another problem with Hypothesis A. If the Darwinian Hypothesis is true, the question still remains as to whether it is vindicating or debunking in regard to moral truths. Joyce acknowledges this problem as well. I introduced the background of an updated account of moral naturalism which takes our evolved natures seriously yet is not necessarily anti-realist in nature. I explored the recent debate seeking to enrich the weight of the Darwinian Hypothesis and argued that the most promising candidate for an account of moral naturalism is in developmental systems theory. DST acknowledges the complexity and non-fixed nature of organisms transitioning through life cycles and living in an interdependent relationship with their environments. DST opens the conceptual space for the possibility of a

⁵¹⁸ Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*. 25-26

⁵¹⁹ Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. 26

moral niche, whereby cultures and societies which are ever evolving constitute the interdependent development of human morality. Though this explanation is a significant improvement on the ultimate/proximate distinction, it only carries the important question – the vindicating or debunking nature of this development – further down the river. In order to settle this question, I turned to metaethical literature attempting to synthesise DST.

Severini, a prominent author at this intersection, reads this updated developmental picture as evidence for the *constructed* nature of human morality – an argument in favour of anti-realism. In order to make this argument, I argued that Severini must take a position on what moral truth is constructed *from*. Since this is a question of the mind-independence of truth, this means that Severini must ultimately rely on metaethical argumentation external to the purely undermining facts of debunking literature.

I then considered the residual concern of moral motivation emerging from Joyce's work. Joyce argues that moral naturalism – and by extension non-naturalism and supernaturalism – do not provide a feasible account of why we should be moral. I argued that his analysis assumes motivational externalism and that his reasons for dismissing internalism as a candidate theory are grounded in ontologising assumptions about the nature of moral facts.

In chapter five, I turned to the final of the underlying arguments that I believe play out the otiosity argument. I began with a formulation of Street's Darwinian dilemma, which was as follows:

- (1) Realists must provide a tracking account without presupposing the mind-independent truth of certain ends of selection as values for creatures like us. Or,
- (2) Realists can deny that truth was tracked, but must provide a story as to how evaluative belief and truth happen to coincide now, for creatures like us, when:
 - a. Independent truth could have been anything.

- b. The forces which led to our belief formation produced indifferent to mind-independent truth (in contrast to empirical beliefs), so if evaluative belief and truth do coincide, how can realism be justified in the face of this strikingly convenient coincidence?

I have shown in Chapter 4 that (1) is a consideration that debunkers must face head on, as the Darwinian hypothesis, if true, may still vindicate rather than debunk mind-independent truth. I began by exploring what Street refers to as her devastating epistemological objection, and I argued that she means to refer to her Darwinian Dilemma. Upon a closer analysis of the dilemma, I argued that Street proposes (1) in the case of realist's cherry-picking evaluative facts to suit their varieties of realism. Instances of cherry-picking value claims support Street's constructivist claim that our evaluative beliefs are constituted by our evaluative stance towards those facts, however this observation does not guarantee anti-realism. It is still an open question as to whether a satisfactory naturalist account can be provided that can better account for our evolutionary relationship with stance-independent moral facts – and in chapter four I explored the literature which provides a promising line of response. There is also room for a non-naturalist line of response, however Street's second horn (2a and 2b) attempts to guard against such a response. This is because Street devastating epistemological objection rests on the coincidence challenge, which calls for a naturalist explanation of our relationship with moral facts. This kind of argument is not a new or distinctly evolutionary consideration in metaethics or in debates on mathematical realism. I argued that this argument ultimately equates realism with a causal understanding of our relationship with moral facts.

I argued that any residual challenge lies in how realists and anti-realists interpret this species-level relativism which is described in Darwin's quote about our moral nature. Had we evolved under different circumstances our evaluative beliefs would have been entirely

different. The anti-realists seem to rely on the reading of this claim that our evaluative beliefs would be different because they are fixed by our evaluative stances. I argued that this reading ultimately adopts a position on the stance-dependence of value. It is here where Street imports her version of Humean constructivism. A limitation of Street's construal is that two strands of constructivism are run together. Since one of these versions of constructivism, a version I attribute to Scanlon, permits a positive account of reasons, I argue that Street must first preestablish that Scanlon's account is unviable. However, if Street can establish the stance-dependence of value, then she need not construct the EDA against moral realists. So, even though this debate remains unsettled, the otiosity of the EDA in metaethical argumentation is reinforced.

The evolutionary debunking argument has become a popular metaethical challenge against the ultimate foundations of moral belief that grew from the consideration of the role that evolution played in the development of human morality. Though an important number of innovations have come from this consideration both in philosophy and science, the attempt to integrate evolutionary facts into the metaethical debate between realists and anti-realists is deeply problematic and inconclusive. In the end, in so far as moral reasons constitute an independent domain of inquiry, it is doubtful that evolutionary considerations alone can lead to the rather serious conclusions – that morality is a myth, a useful fiction, and so on – that have arisen in recent literature. Instead, the debates about the ultimate foundations of morality, our justifications for moral belief and our reasons for acting, are debates which must continue internal to the moral domain.

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