

A Justification of the Evolutionary Debunking Argument

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Abstract

In recent decades the debate over the metaethical conclusion from the theory of evolution has intensified. Michael Ruse's epistemological argument has been taken up by Richard Joyce, Guy Kahane and Sharon Street and formalised into the Evolutionary Debunking Argument:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have.

Epistemic premise: Evolution is not a truth-tracking process with respect to moral truth.

Metaphysical Assumption: Objectivism gives the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore,

Moral Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified.

Moral realists have attempted to attack this argument through attacking any one of these premises. In this thesis I will argue that with slight modifications we can justify each of the premises of the EDA and construct a sound argument that will establish moral scepticism. I will justify the causal premise through an inference to the best explanation of the phenomena of moral belief relying on our best currently available empirical data. I will justify the epistemic premise by ruling out any potential relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. The metaphysical assumption will be justified by turning it into an epistemological assumption and using a reconstruction of G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument. This will allow us to recreate the EDA into a sound argument:

Revised Causal Premise: Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

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

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore,

Moral Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified.

I will conclude by pointing out possible avenues for the moral realist to object to the revised EDA I establish. However, I will also point out why each of these avenues is likely to fail and, for the moment, moral scepticism is the most plausible position.

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Introduction to Morality, Natural Selection and the Evolutionary Debunking Argument

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter will set the scene for the Evolutionary Debunking Argument (or EDA) and establish exactly what claims this argument makes and the premises it relies on. To do so I will start by going back to the original debate over the metaethical conclusions of the theory of evolution to contrast the EDA with these failed ideas and establish what the EDA does **not** claim.

For a long time the idea that the theory of evolution had any metaethical implications was discredited by the philosophical community. This status originated from errors in the original interpretation of the theory, most importantly, the claim that it had metaphysical importance. In particular, Herbert Spencer's ill-informed and damaging thesis of Social Darwinism was guilty of using the facts of evolution to derive facts about the metaphysical nature of moral truths (Spencer 1857).

Thankfully, as I will show, this thesis was thoroughly discredited. David Hume's No Ought From Is thesis pointed out the logical impossibility of deriving a moral principle from facts about the world without an analytic bridge principle (Hume 2006). Additionally, G. E. Moore's naturalistic fallacy directly attacked the idea that one can identify facts about goodness with facts about evolution (Moore 1980). The combined application of these ideas pointed out the logical and normative errors that are present when using facts about evolution to derive facts about morality. Further, as will become clear, this is not just a historical worry, but an important point that will become crucial later in this thesis when I analyse objectivism and moral naturalism as a response to the EDA in later chapters.

Up to this point I will have looked at what the EDA is not, it is not in the business of making metaphysical claims, the remainder of this chapter will then be concerned with establishing what the EDA is. In particular I will look at the efforts of Michael Ruse to resurrect the idea of evolution in the field of metaethics not as metaphysically, but as epistemologically, relevant (Ruse 1986). Although I will argue that Ruse's work is rough and in certain areas problematic, I will also show that the ideas of the EDA I wish to explore are present and Ruse's work will provide the beginning of my analysis of the ideas present in the EDA.

Before I go onto these more formal and sophisticated interpretations of the EDA however, I will stop and explore the idea that the EDA is a general epistemological worry that applies to multiple fields and is not unique to ethics. This analysis will rely on a simplified

general interpretation of the EDA rather than the ethical EDA I will be concerned with later, but will help us to understand where the EDA stands in relation to other fields. Using the work of John S. Wilkins and Paul E. Griffiths I will show that the EDA is not unique to ethics, but rather any field where truth is not linked to reproductive success will encounter some form of the argument (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013). This comparison will also highlight a limitation of the EDA; that it can only rule out arguments based on popular appeal or intuition.

From here I will move onto the more sophisticated modern formulations of the EDA; Guy Kahane's attempt to formalise the argument to defeat the use of selective EDA's and Sharon Street's arguments in favour of the EDA.

Guy Kahane will provide the basic framework for my arguments for and against the EDA and (although some of his premises will need to be altered for us to justify them) this framework will stay the same for the course of the thesis. Beyond the basic framework, Kahane's work will also introduce us to the possible problems with the EDA including if it is an account of all moral beliefs, a possible link between moral truth and evolutionary forces and the criteria we must assume moral realism involves for the EDA to work (Kahane 2011).

By contrast my analysis of Sharon Street's work will mainly concern outlining potential responses to these concerns. I will outline her argument why the nature of natural selection means it will affect all our moral beliefs, her interpretation of the epistemic premise, how it differs slightly from Kahane's and how I can still use her arguments concerning the impossibility of asserting a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth (Street, 2006). However, I will show that Kahane's final problem, the necessary criteria for moral realism will prove problematic for Street's attempt to use the EDA to justify the wider area of evaluative scepticism beyond just moral scepticism; in particular the idea of objective moral properties, an important assumption of the EDA, will not translate into the idea of objective evaluative properties.

The final section of this first chapter will explore this idea in more depth. Using Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's work I will explore what features constitute realism. Objectivism, it will turn out, is not a necessary feature of realism in every area (Sayre-McCord 1988). Importantly, while I will leave the discussion of whether objectivism is a necessary part of moral realism, I will show that it is not a necessary part of evaluative realism, resulting in the EDA failing in this wider field and my subsequent chapters will focus exclusively on the moral EDA.

1.2 The Problems of Early Evolutionary Ethics and How the EDA Solves Them

To understand how the Evolutionary Debunking Argument fits within the literature it is worth going back to see how it arose and differentiate it from earlier evolutionary arguments in metaethics. For this I need to go all the way back to Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Published in 1859, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* explains his theory of natural selection; how all organisms came about by a slow, natural process of evolution. This theory was extended to humans in his later book *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871. This second book detailed how the species Homo Sapiens evolved to this day and, importantly for the field of metaethics, how our moral sense is an evolved capacity. For Darwin, humans have the moral sentiments and make the moral judgements we do due to the process of natural selection, just as all our cognitive abilities are the result of this process. At some point in our evolutionary history it was beneficial to make moral judgements and thus individuals who did so were better able to survive and reproduce. To put it in Darwin's words, the "moral faculties of man" evolved from "social qualities" the result of "natural selection. Aided by inherited habit." (Darwin 1871, 162) While this is an important revelation and the starting point for the metaethical discussion, it still remained for Darwin to explain the particular metaethical implications of this fact. Darwin's famous example of the morality of bees, in which our own morality is compared to the morality of bees, "unmarried females would think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers", illustrates his views on this point (Darwin 1871, 73). By comparing our morality to another species Darwin is making the point that our particular moral judgements hold no special status and are only contingent upon facts concerning our evolutionary history; the only reason we hold the particular moral judgements we do is the pragmatic benefit they provided our ancestors.

The normative implications of Darwin's metaethical claims however, were undeveloped. While arguing that our particular moral sentiments are contingent, what this meant for practical ethics was largely unexplored by Darwin himself and instead the idea was picked up by a contemporary of his, Herbert Spencer, and added to his existing philosophy to create the field of Social Darwinism. For Spencer, people and their societies 'progress' through a transformation from the uncivilised brute to the refined English gentleman (Spencer 1857, 446). Spencer then happily embraced the idea of natural selection provided by Darwin as the means by which his idea of 'progression' could take place. Uncivilised society was morally inferior and thus would not succeed in competition with the more refined society of Western Europe. Instead uncivilised societies would, in time, become extinct and the pinnacle of evolution, the English gentleman, would become the dominant human culture. Spencer's

philosophy then went a step further than simply a thesis concerning the evolution of cultures and provided a normative aspect by which we should live our lives and this is where the metaethical mistakes come in. This ‘progress’ was a good thing in of itself and anything which promoted this end was worthwhile (Spencer 1857, 445). We therefore have a responsibility to not help the destitute or undeveloped nations, as their continued existence is hindering moral progress, but instead should allow the natural competition between societies to take place so that the weak may die off leaving only the strong, civilised man.

How much this idea matches with Darwin’s own work is debatable. Certainly strains of similar ideas can be seen. Darwin suffered from a Victorian bias and saw the Western world as superior: “Western nations immeasurably surpass their former savage progenitors and stand at the summit of civilization”, and thought moral development took place through the process of natural selection (Darwin 1871, 178). The conclusions he drew from these facts seems to echo Spencer in many ways as he believed that the “civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races” a future he did not find particularly troubling (Darwin 1871, 201). However, Darwin also radically departs from Spencer in a number of ways. First his normative programme to aid this end is vague at best and lacks any real details. Most importantly though a criticism of Spencer’s ideas can be found in the works of one of Darwin’s greatest supporters Thomas Henry Huxley.

Huxley wrote in response to Spencer that evolution favours the “survival of those forms which, on the whole, are best adapted to the conditions which at any period obtain” (Huxley 1894). Evolution then, has no idea of progress and the fact that an adaptation currently affords an organism a reproductive advantage does not even imply this adaptation will always be beneficial let alone that this current adaptation is a moral progression from what came before. When Spencer writes of progress from the uncivilised brute to the refined gentlemen he is, therefore, making a mistake about the process of natural selection. Reproductive advantage is not ‘progress’ but simply a current contingent status susceptible to change. We do not have a moral responsibility to avoid altering the course of natural selection, but rather natural selection will happen either way and cannot give us normative truths. In this aspect natural selection is more similar to the force of gravity than any metaphysical truths; it is simply the nature of genetic mutation that natural selection will promote the survival of organisms whose mutations favour their reproductive success in their circumstances just as it is the nature of mass to cause an attractive force on other objects with mass. Huxley’s work can be seen as a precursor to the arguments against Spencer’s idea of ‘progress’ that dominated evolutionary ethics for the next 80 years for, as Huxley points out,

contingent facts about the current state of the world have nothing to do with moral facts and therefore we cannot use facts about evolution to derive facts about morality.

Whether or not Social Darwinism is an accurate account of Darwin's own beliefs is up for debate. However, Spencer's Social Darwinism and the rejection of such a philosophy became the dominant philosophical discussion for the evolutionary ethics debate over the next 80 years. This metaethical philosophy was comprehensively defeated by the application of the combined works of David Hume and G.E. Moore, a defeat which highlights the problems with drawing metaphysical conclusions from facts about evolution. These problems are not only relevant in my current exploration of why the early metaphysical claims by Spencer and others fail, but will also be crucial when I discuss moral naturalism as a response to the EDA in later chapters

David Hume's 'no ought from is' thesis argues that one cannot deduce an ought from an is by logic alone. "When of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not." (Hume 2006, 77) While there is a debate as to how far this relationship goes (it is unclear whether Hume is saying that we cannot analytically deduce an ought from an is or just a purely logical claim) the simplest and least problematic interpretation of it as a strict logical claim is enough to prove my point here and for the rest of this thesis I will be interpreting Hume's no ought from is passage as asserting that one cannot deduce an ought from an is by logic alone. When Spencer argues for the normative moral claim that we ought not to hinder the process of natural selection because the 'progress' it generates is a good in of itself, he is using a fact about the world, the course of natural selection, to deduce a moral statement, that we should abstain from interfering with this process and is therefore making a logical mistake. Without an analytic explanation of why this 'progress' is a good thing (an analytic explanation that G. E. Moore will argue is impossible) this logical mistake will undermine his whole argument and Social Darwinism will be defeated.

G.E. Moore's naturalistic fallacy completed the metaethical defeat of Spencer's idea of evolutionary 'progress'. To derive morality from the natural world is to commit a naturalistic fallacy as no natural feature can be equated with good (Moore 1980, 15). Therefore, we cannot give an analytic explanation of good in evolutionary terms. To do so would involve identifying good with a natural feature of the world, the course of evolution, but this idea is vulnerable to the question of whether this natural feature is identical with good. Despite the problems with the naturalistic fallacy (which will be addressed in the next chapter on the status of objectivism in ethics) these two arguments were largely accepted

within the philosophical literature for most of the 20th century leaving social Darwinism defeated and any further metaethical claims based off evolutionary facts were largely discredited. As a result, the idea that the theory of evolution had anything to add to the field of metaethics was left largely ignored until the 1980's when it experienced a resurgence. Of particular interest for this thesis is Michael Ruse's argument that, while the theory of evolution may not have metaphysical implications in the field of metaethics it does have epistemological implications.

To discover what possible implications the theory of evolution has in metaethics we need a convincing account of how natural selection may have promoted moral thinking. To this end Ruse notes that evolution need not be direct physical conflict between individuals, instead the process of natural selection mainly concerns the competition over resources. As social animals one of the ways we maximise our ability to gather the resources necessary for survival and reproduction is through co-operation with others (Ruse 1986, 97). To do this however, we need some method of ensuring that we do in fact co-operate with each other. Ruse describes this mutually beneficial co-operation as 'altruism' and argues that we could achieve this mutually beneficial 'altruism' in a number of ways (Ruse 1986, 98). Currently we have beliefs about right and wrong, or the more traditional interpretation of altruism, to ensure that we are capable of co-operating with each other by creating a complex set of rights and responsibilities that govern our actions. However, we could alternatively have evolved like insects or with perfect rationality. For insects co-operation is achieved through the genetic hardwiring of individuals to respond in absolute ways to preprogrammed conditions. The benefit of this is that each individual cannot do anything other than act in the interests of the colony. However, this is impractical for human beings due to its inflexibility. The relatively low resource cost of losing an individual insect to changing conditions is not replicated in human societies as individuals are far more complicated and have far higher developmental costs. Therefore our solution to the problem of how to achieve 'altruism' will need to allow for a more flexible range of actions to preserve individuals in changing conditions and thus evolution does not select for genetic hardwiring of humans as it is inefficient. However, the other extreme, perfect rationality supercomputers is also impractical. Had we evolved in such a way we would be able to fully calculate the expected returns of each interaction and thus select the best alternative we could achieve the ends of mutually beneficial cooperation, or 'altruism'. However, this method is also inefficient as it would require vastly superior calculating machinery than we currently possess as organisms. Our current cognitive processes use 20% of our oxygen and the detailed calculations necessary for perfect rationality would require vastly more expensive cognitive processes and the time it would take to rationally

calculate every variable may well prohibit action (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 137). Instead Ruse concludes that we have evolved to develop an altruistic capacity, the capacity to make judgements of right and wrong, blames and praises, in order to solve the problem of 'altruism', the need for mutually beneficial cooperation (Ruse 1986, 99). These thoughts are a much better mirror to Darwin's and Huxley's theory than Spencer's; our current concept of altruism is nothing other than the best means to solve a contingent set of circumstances resulting from our biology and habitat and the moral sentiments we feel could be quite different if these factors had been different. No normative conclusions are being made in such a claim but instead the conclusions are restricted to moral sentiments that have been directly produced by evolution. I have therefore drawn no moral conclusions here but have instead limited ourselves to moving from facts about natural selection to facts about our moral sense, neither of which are normative.

Ruse then, agrees with the critics of social Darwinism; facts about our evolutionary history cannot determine what the moral facts consist of. However he differs by arguing that facts about our evolutionary history can affect our justification for believing in any moral facts. If we believe the particular moral sentiments we do due to our evolutionary history this does not tell us anything about the existence of moral truths, it does however, affect our justification for believing our moral sentiments. If we believe our moral sentiments simply because such beliefs are pragmatically beneficial and these beliefs would have been held independent of any possible moral truths, it follows that, absent of independent verification from other sources, we no longer have reason to believe our moral sentiments accurately reflect moral truths. Devoid of any other epistemological access to these moral truths it is unclear how we could possibly know of them. It needs to be noted that Ruse does go a bit further here and argues that this idea can prove that objective moral facts do not exist when all he has proved is that we do not have good reasons to believe they exist (Ruse 1986, 110). However, the later literature concerning the EDA neither features nor needs this extra conclusion and we can therefore concern ourselves with Ruse's more limited conclusion; our moral sense is the product of our evolutionary history and this evolutionary history does not relate to moral truth. This conclusion avoids the pitfalls of Social Darwinism as it does not make any metaphysical claims because it does not infer an ought from an is or identify goodness with any natural properties. Instead all we have are claims about our ability to epistemologically access moral truths. This does not of course disprove moral realism, however, if we do not and cannot ever know any moral truths then moral realism is left an empty thesis that only refers to a realm of completely inaccessible properties.

Darwin's work on natural selection cannot be used to prove any metaphysical claims about the existence or content of moral truths, to do so is to fall to the same hurdles as Social Darwinism. However, as shown by the work of Ruse we can use it to make epistemological claims without falling to any of the perils of Social Darwinism, and the EDA is a continuation of this idea. However, this leads us to one of the problems for the EDA. Our beliefs in any field are the product of our evolutionary history and will share a similar causal story of their origins. To justify beliefs such as everyday perceptions and scientific beliefs, and avoid a Companions in Guilt defence by the moral realist, I need to show that for these other fields discovering truth would be evolutionary beneficial and we are justified in maintaining our beliefs in these fields. By contrast, for the moral EDA to be successful, I need to show that ethical beliefs cannot link truth to pragmatic success and cannot use this same defence.

1.3 Companions in Guilt for the EDA

This new epistemic argument could apply to all human senses and cognitive abilities. It is not just our moral sense that has developed through evolutionary forces, but all of our senses including the most basic belief forming mechanisms we have for observing the outside world from common-sense perceptions and more complex scientific beliefs to religious and moral beliefs. If the EDA works in all fields and attacks all our cognitive abilities then we will end up in the situation where we are forced into adopting total scepticism as we will never have epistemic access to any truths. While it is possible that this is true and total scepticism may be the logical conclusion of such considerations, very few of us would want to doubt our basic sense perceptions. To avoid total scepticism we are more likely to alter our conception of knowledge so it would not be an unattainable term rather than admit that all our beliefs are untenable. Therefore I need to differentiate between at least our basic common-sense beliefs (and hopefully our scientific beliefs) and moral beliefs to avoid a companions in guilt defence by the moral realist.

To address this concern I need to establish the general form of the EDA that I will be using. This will allow us to see how the EDA fits together and how it works in all fields, ethics and others and assess whether it will hold in all these fields. To do this I will use Guy Kahane's formulation:

Causal Premise: S's belief that P is formed by X.

Epistemic Premise: X is an off-track process.

Therefore: S's belief that P is unjustified. (Kahane 2011, 106).

Where an off track process is one that does not track truth but is instead insensitive to truth conditions. This formulation will highlight the idea that a justified belief must be formed by processes related to the truth conditions for such a belief.

To distinguish the moral case from our common-sense beliefs about the external world I need to attack the epistemic premise and show that X is only an off-track process in the moral case but not in the other cases where we are strongly justified in our knowledge such as common-sense perceptions and scientific knowledge. Attacking the causal premise in these cases will involve attacking the idea that our common-sense perceptions are not the result of our evolutionary history, an unlikely avenue. However, if I can sufficiently differentiate between the moral and these later cases I can defeat the epistemic premise in these later cases and therefore defeat the EDA in these fields. To do this I will look at John S. Wilkins and Paul E. Griffiths idea of a Milvian Bridge that links pragmatic success to truth in certain areas. A Milvian Bridge, named after Constantine's famous battle of the same name, is a situation where true belief will have pragmatic benefits: "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" (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 134). Therefore, if we wish to avoid the EDA in a given field "true belief must be linked to evolutionary success in such a way that selection will favour organisms which have true beliefs" (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 134). The question that then arises is why true common sense beliefs are beneficial but true moral beliefs are not or, to put it in Wilkins and Griffiths terms, why we can apply a Milvian Bridge in the common-sense but not the moral case.

Wilkins and Griffith start their justification of common-sense beliefs with the acknowledgement that we do make common-sense errors and that in no field does evolution promote perfect belief-formation procedures. In certain instances evolution will favour cheaper less reliable mechanisms to more expensive, more reliable alternatives. Asymmetric bias may also occur if the cost of a false negative is greater than the cost of a false positive so organisms tend to the safe side (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 138). However, such considerations do not show that we do not truth-track in these fields, but rather that perfect truth-tracking is an inefficient use of resources and not the optimal solution. Instead Wilkins and Griffith argue that truth-tracking and fitness-maximisation are not in opposition but are rather different levels of analysis with truth-tracking a possible means to fitness-maximisation (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 136). As covered previously, our cognitive mechanisms are clear adaptations as they are relatively expensive, using 20% of our oxygen, and therefore have to track something. The best expected value in this area is likely to lie with a correlation between how the world is and how we expect the world to be. Our direct perceptions seem to include

the things that can have a direct immediate effect on our reproductive success, obstacles to move around, predators to avoid, prey to catch and such. If we were systematically false in these areas it is clear that we would not survive and reproduce. Thus Wilkins and Griffiths conclude that “organisms track-truth optimally if they obtain as much relevant truth as they can afford, and tolerate no more error than is needed to obtain it” (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 139).

While common-sense beliefs may be justified in such a way, it remains to compare and contrast the availability of such a move in other areas such as science, religion and, most importantly for this thesis, ethics.

Science involves the movement beyond our direct sense perceptions and into new enriched conceptual schemes. This however raises the epistemic question of whether we are justified in believing the results of our new enriched conceptual schemes if truth in these fields does not play a direct role in promoting evolutionary success. The ability to do quantum physics and other complicated scientific fields is not linked to evolutionary success in the same way truths about medium sized objects are and it seems there is no reason to assume we would evolve to hold true beliefs in these fields if no direct Milvian Bridge is available. However, Wilkins and Griffiths argue that there is an indirect Milvian Bridge available in these fields (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 140). Scientific data and methods are justified by our original common-sense perceptions. A scientific theory which consistently fails to predict what our common-sense perceptions observe is not a scientific theory we will believe in. Therefore, as we use our epistemically justified common-sense beliefs to analyse and decide the validity of our scientific theories, these scientific theories are given an indirect Milvian Bridge and we are justified in holding these beliefs despite the problems the EDA poses at first glance.

In ethics we have no intrinsic tendency to produce true beliefs as was discussed in the previous section. Instead our moral beliefs are formed out of practicality and the ability they have to alter our behaviour in such a way that promotes our reproductive success. Therefore, as evolution has shaped our moral beliefs, evolution must either be an off-track process or moral facts are the facts that promote our reproductive success. There is a third alternative, where moral truth is determined by moral beliefs for the moment though, I will exclude this alternative from our consideration as I will cover it when looking at objectivism as a necessary tenet of moral realism. Few moral realists believe that moral truth is determined by how many descendants you leave. Instead moral facts, supposedly, are not determined by facts about the physical world and instead refer to unique moral properties for many moral realists. Under such a conception of moral truths evolution must be seen as a large distorting

force that influenced us to adopt a set of beliefs without any reference to actual truth of the matter. A naturalist conception of morality may avoid this difficulty as I will address later, however, for at least a moral non-naturalist, this will be a significant worry. Wilkins and Griffiths propose that a possible solution to this problem may lay in abandoning the belief in objective moral properties and adopting a form of moral anti-realism, however, this option raises the question of whether moral realism entails moral objectivism something that will also need to be discussed in detail later (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 141).

Morality then, is more like the final field the Wilkins and Griffiths assess the EDA for, religious beliefs (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 142). There exists no Milvian Bridge linking religious truths to pragmatic success. Instead the casual premise will explain the development of religious beliefs through natural selection by their ability to promote social solidity and regulate anti-social behaviours. Religious believers would not ground the truth of their doctrines in their ability to produce more descendants. For religious discourse the possibility of adopting a non-literal approach to the discourse is also untenable as most religions would consider this heretical, similar to how mind-independent moral realists are likely to view adopting a non-literal approach to moral properties. Instead a non-literal approach to moral discourse would involve a shift into accepting moral beliefs are fictions or motivational tools only.

The moral realist seems to be in a similar position to the religious believer if Wilkins and Griffiths are to be believed. There is no Milvian Bridge linking truth to pragmatic success and adopting a non-literal approach to the discourse runs counter to some of the central tenets of their position (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 143). A number of the objections from the realist I will explore later can be seen as trying to respond to this worry; trying to accommodate moral realism within the idea that moral truths promote reproductive success. However, before I finalise the EDA and look at the moral realist's responses an important limitation remains that is illuminated by the analogy to religion.

Anybody who has read any philosophy of religion will know that there exist many arguments for the truth of religious beliefs, some deductive, some inductive and some pragmatic. However, the EDA will not work as a response to all of these. Instead it is only a targeted response at a small section of these arguments as giving an aetiology of a belief does not immediately rule out its reliability. The EDA can be seen as a subversive explanation, it uses a historical explanation of how we formed a set of beliefs, be they religious or moral, and use this explanation to cast doubt over the status of these beliefs. For an EDA to work it must be the case that a set of beliefs are formed by unreliable mechanisms or would be formed irrelevant of their truth-value. Further, it must be that the only good reason for continued

belief is that the set of beliefs are widely held or that they are difficult to individually disbelieve. Other deductive arguments are not affected by the EDA and this idea will apply to an EDA about morality as well as an EDA about religion.

Using a general form of the EDA that can be applied to any field allows us to see where the moral EDA (the focus of this thesis) fits into the wider discourse and allows us to respond to the potential problem of a companions in guilt defence that the moral realist might use to undermine the reasoning behind the EDA. Wilkins and Griffiths' Milvian Bridge allows us to distinguish the moral EDA from the potentially damaging EDAs in the fields of common-sense and scientific beliefs. Instead moral beliefs are analogous to religious beliefs as both fields cannot provide a Milvian Bridge as truth and pragmatic success are not linked under a realist interpretation of their properties. As religious beliefs are already on shaky ground this provides no helpful companion to moral belief.

1.4 Guy Kahane's Framework and Basic Challenges

In the intervening decades since Ruse first put forward his evolutionary epistemological argument to replace the discredited metaphysical version, his epistemological argument has undergone extensive revision and refining. I have already shown a general formulation of Guy Kahane's argument used to target realism in any field and I can easily adapt this for the field of evaluative beliefs:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the evaluative beliefs we have.

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

Therefore,

Evaluative Scepticism: None of our evaluative beliefs are justified. (Kahane 2011, 111)

This framework accurately represents the key ideas I want to take from Ruse. Our evolutionary history is the source of our evaluative belief, the causal premise, and no reference to evaluative truth is needed to explain the origins of these evaluative beliefs, the epistemic premise (Ruse 1986). Kahane's version helps by putting these ideas forward more explicitly and formally and I can use this to discover what responses are likely to be successful to such an argument. Kahane does however, make one change from Ruse's original idea that is potentially problematic. Kahane follows Sharon Street's argument and moves from just a moral EDA into an EDA about the wider field of all evaluative discourse. While I

will ultimately show that this wider argument fails, when discussing the original arguments that Kahane and Street make to avoid confusion I will keep their arguments the same and discuss evaluative properties. Thankfully, as moral properties are a subset of evaluative properties, all of their arguments for evaluative properties will also work in regards to moral properties and even once I have rejected the evaluative EDA I can still use these earlier arguments in favour of or as a response to the moral EDA.

A point to note here is that this is what Kahane calls a Global Debunking Argument as it targets all our evaluative belief and is not a selective Evolutionary Debunking Argument as is sometimes used in normative ethics to target some of our evaluative beliefs. This point becomes important later when trying to respond to the Global EDA because, as Kahane points out, any use of selective EDA's will require a successful response to the Global EDA (Kahane 2011, 113).

However, as Kahane acknowledges, this Global EDA is not complete but misses an underlying assumption. For the Global EDA to work we need to assume that objectivism is the true account of evaluative concepts and properties.

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives the correct account of evaluative concepts and properties. (Kahane 2011, 112)

Without the assumption of objectivism the Global EDA remains vulnerable to anti-realists (and possibly some realist) views of evaluative practice which do not assume there exists independent evaluative truths for us to track. If there are no independent evaluative truths there needs to be no explanation as to how we could track them and the Global EDA has no effect. Instead, as we shall see, our epistemological story can reference non-truth tracking concepts such as adaptive links. Do we need objectivism for a realist account of evaluative practices however? This remains to be proven and, if not, then the Global EDA will not have any effect on any such accounts of evaluative realism and it seems, in some form at least, evaluative realism can avoid the Global EDA. Whether a realist account of evaluative concepts and practices can avoid objectivism is a question I will have to come back and address later.

For now though I have a complete formulation of Kahane's Global EDA that will provide the framework of the argument I seek to justify:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the evaluative beliefs we have.

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

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives the correct account of evaluative concepts and properties.

Therefore,

Evaluative Scepticism: None of our evaluative beliefs are justified. (Kahane 2011, 115)

What remains now is to explore how one can successfully respond to such an argument. Both premises and the assumption are contestable and thus could possibly be rejected.

I have already mentioned how one may respond by rejecting objectivism as the correct account of evaluative concepts and practices. The difficulty in taking such a route is not rejecting evaluative objectivism, many philosophers do this, but rather rejecting evaluative objectivism while maintaining evaluative realism; in other words finding a realist, non-objective account of evaluative discourse.

Alternatively we may reject one of Kahane's premises. To establish the Global EDA Kahane contrasts it to selective EDA's which only target some of our evaluative beliefs. Because of this the causal premise is the sweeping and ambitious claim that all our evaluative beliefs are the result of our evolutionary history. However, this is far more difficult to prove than the selective EDA's which only target some of our evaluative beliefs (Kahane 2011, 118). The evaluative realist may respond that some, perhaps even most, of our evaluative beliefs are the result of our evolutionary history and unjustified. However, there still exists some of them which we are entitled to believe in. If this is true the Global EDA will fail to establish total evaluative scepticism and evaluative realism, although possibly trimmed, will survive. However, there are at first glance two problems with the route. First, to save evaluative realism from practical evaluative scepticism it may not be enough that some of our evaluative beliefs may be justified without some method of determining which ones actually are. Without this second step we are still left in the situation where our evaluative beliefs are unjustified even if they may be justified in the future (Kahane 2011, 119). While currently unjustified is clearly better than unjustifiable, a position where belief in any evaluative proposition was currently unjustified, and may always be so is unattractive. Second, the evaluative sceptic may propose an argument which does establish all our evaluative beliefs to be ultimately sourced from or at least heavily influenced by our evolutionary history. Sharon Street and Richard Joyce attempt such moves as will be discussed in depth in later chapters (Street 2006, 124 and Joyce 2007, 117). The success of such a move by the evaluative sceptic will prove the sweeping global causal premise and remove such an objection by the evaluative realist.

We can also try to reject the second of Kahane's premises, the epistemic claim that evolutionary forces are off track processes with relation to evaluative truth. This move will be largely dependent upon the brand of evaluative realism proposed and whether we can give an account of the evaluative properties that are likely to be tracked by evolutionary forces while still maintaining objectivism (if we find the arguments in favour of the metaethical assumption to be persuasive.)

Guy Kahane's formulation of the Global EDA clarifies some of the arguments from the earlier uses of epistemic evolutionary arguments such as those found in Ruse. In doing so it becomes clearer what we can do to successfully respond to the Global EDA. We can challenge the causal premise, and argue that not all of our evaluative beliefs result from evolutionary forces, the epistemic premise, and propose a link between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth, or the metaethical assumption, and argue that we can maintain evaluative realism without maintaining evaluative objectivism. Defeating any of these premises will allow for the justification of realist evaluative beliefs and defeat the use of the Global EDA as a metaethical argument, and it is this that we need to explore. However, before exploring these criticisms, I will take a preliminary look at some of the arguments used by one of the biggest proponents of the EDA in current literature, Sharon Street, and why she thinks that the EDA is not susceptible to any of these responses and proves evaluative realism is unjustified.

1.5 Sharon Street's Response

One of the most prominent proponents of the EDA is Sharon Street, in particular her article *Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value* not only outlines the EDA but actively tries to answer some of the problems that the argument faces. In her version of the argument, Street slightly alters her formulation, the epistemic side is a dilemma rather than a straight premise, but we can still see parallels to Guy Kahane and, by analysing Streets work, we can highlight some of the problems and possible responses that I will look at later.

Street starts with what she describes as an "uncontroversial" premise: "The forces of natural selection have had a tremendous influence on the content of human evaluative judgements" (Street 2006, 113). By now this should seem familiar, Wilkins and Griffiths, Ruse and Kahane have all at least explored this idea, but Street goes further than any of these in developing a justification for this premise. Street's argument for this causal premise starts with the observation that certain judgements are likely to have great costs and benefits with regards to our reproductive fitness. When I contrast the first list:

- (1) The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason in favour of it.

- (2) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.
- (3) We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.
- (4) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return.
- (5) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.
- (6) The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment. (Street 2006, 115)

With the second Street provides:

- (1') The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason against it.
- (2') The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason not to do it.
- (3') We have greater obligations to help complete strangers than we do to help our own children.
- (4') The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to do that individual harm in return.
- (5') The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to dislike, condemn, and punish him or her.
- (6') The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to seek out that person's company and reward him or her. (Street 2006, 116)

It becomes clear that Street is right here, organisms that make the first set of judgements are far more likely to survive and reproduce than those who make the second for a variety of reasons including kin selection and reciprocal altruism. Therefore, we can see that the particular content of evaluative beliefs will have a significant impact on our reproductive success, something that should not at all be surprising given that these evaluative beliefs serve to guide action. When I combine this fact with the theory of evolution I get the following: organisms will be selected to adopt those evaluative beliefs that best promote their reproductive fitness. Some caveats are needed here, the genetic trait must be heritable and there must be a genetic path to the adaptation, however, enough has been established here that Street's first premise is plausible (Street 2006, 118).

Before moving on though, I need to look at one possible objection that one can glean from comparing Street's argument here with Kahane's. Street's first premise is equivalent to Kahane's causal premise: our evolutionary history explains why we have the evaluative

beliefs we have (Kahane 2011, 111). This means that I need to look at the possible objections I had to Kahane here, in particular the idea that not all our evaluative beliefs are the result of evolutionary forces, fortunately for us Street directly addresses this issue. Street acknowledges that other forces may (and likely did) have an effect on the content of our evaluative judgements (Street 2006, 120). But this seems to conflict with the statement in Kahane that “The role of the off track process in the explanation must be such that it leaves no space for the contribution of processes that would, in this context, track the truth” (Kahane 2011, 106). Unless I can prove that the other factors, such as culture and rational reflection, also fail to track truth then I cannot justify the causal premise of Kahane and Street’s arguments. However, Street thinks that this actually poses no problem for the sceptic due to the nature of these other processes. We use rational reflection to critically assess our evaluative beliefs, but rational reflection does not create new evaluative beliefs. Instead we use rational reflection to compare evaluative beliefs to one another and form a more coherent picture that better reflects our evaluative intuitions (Street 2006, 124). David Hume’s already discussed no ought from is thesis points out that cannot get evaluative ‘ought’ premises from factual ‘is’ premises by logic alone, instead we need some bridging evaluative principles. Hence we cannot reach evaluative conclusion without some evaluative input and rational reflection cannot generate entirely new evaluative beliefs meaning it cannot be used to avoid the EDA as our evaluative beliefs will still be the result of our evolutionary history, as Street puts it, we will be using “contaminated tools” to sort “contaminated materials” (Street 2006, 124).

Having established her version of the causal premise, Street then gives us her version of the epistemic premise presented as a dilemma for the realist. Given that evolutionary forces have had a tremendous role in shaping our evaluative judgements, Street then challenges the realist to explain the relationship between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth.

One option for the realist is to assert that there is no relation between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth. However, a realist taking this approach will run into the problem of accounting for how our evaluative judgements could possibly be reflective of evaluative truth. The causal premise gives us the claim that evaluative judgements have been shaped by evolutionary forces. But if these forces have no relation to evaluative truth, then our evaluative judgements will have no relation to evaluative truth and we will arrive at the sceptical position that our evaluative judgements are likely to be hopelessly off-track in the absence of any alternative means of proving their truth value (Street 2006, 125).

A more fruitful enterprise for the realist may be to assert that there is a relation between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth. The trouble with such an approach for the

realist is to explain exactly what this relation is. Street argues that the realist must propose a tracking account of the relationship (Street 2006, 125). Such a tracking account states that we evolved to track independent evaluative truths because to do so was beneficial to our ancestor's reproductive fitness. Importantly, as Street points out, this puts itself forward as a scientific theory of our evaluative judgements and, as such, faces scientific scrutiny (Street 2006, 126). It is at this point that the tracking account fails as it is scientifically inferior to the alternative adaptive link account. The adaptive link account states that we hold the evaluative beliefs we do because to do so forged adaptive links with our ancestor's environment as it influenced their behaviour to promote cooperation with others. This adaptive link account is scientifically preferable because it is more parsimonious, clearer and better explains the phenomena (Street 2006, 129). The adaptive link account is more parsimonious because it does not posit any extra independent evaluative truths, instead our evaluative judgements are explained without this extra piece of ontology. It is clearer as the tracking account has the mysterious unexplained feature that only true evaluative judgements benefit our reproductive fitness. Finally, it better explains the phenomena as we are given an explanation as to why the evaluative judgements we make roughly correspond to those that would enhance our reproductive fitness. The moral realist can of course contend Street's point that the tracking account is the only possible relation between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth, a response I will look at in depth later.

Although Street poses the epistemic side of the EDA as a dilemma, her arguments will still work within Kahane's framework. This is because Street's dilemma is actually slightly kinder to the realist than Kahane's epistemic premise. Street allows the realist to argue that even in the absence of a relation between evolutionary forces and evaluative truth they can still try and avoid the sceptical conclusion of the EDA, she thinks this approach will fail, but does acknowledge its possibility (Street 2006, 121). The other horn of her dilemma concerns whether Kahane's epistemic premise is in fact true. If I can give a realist account of the moral properties that shows they are related to evolutionary forces then I have defeated the epistemic premise. Street's dilemma then, is a substitute for the epistemic premise, and, importantly, if I cannot defeat her dilemma I will justify the epistemic premise, as if evolution is not linked to evaluative truth it will be an off-track process with respect to evaluative truth.

Street believes that her version of the epistemic premise, posed as a dilemma, provides an inescapable problem for the realist as neither denying nor asserting a relationship is a tenable position. However, there are still a couple of details from Street's account that need to be properly addressed before I can assess these arguments.

First, although not explicitly stated as objectivism, Street does make an assumption along these lines. Street opens her second section with the claim that “the defining claim of realism about value, as I will be understanding it, is that there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes” (Street 2006, 110). Street follows this with an explanation of how this independence relation must hold, but does not address the question of why this independence relation is needed for realism. Instead she simply assumes that realism entails objectivism. However, realism in many fields need not entail objectivism, for example realism about mental states will likely be contingent on mind-dependent facts, and this assumption is something I will explore as a possible response from the realist as explained in relation to Kahane’s argument. Further, Street targets the wider field of evaluative realism and, as will be explored below, this relationship does not in fact seem appropriate in regards to evaluative realism, although the question of whether this relationship is suitable for moral realism will be left for the moment and addressed in the next chapter

The epistemic side of Street’s argument concerns the realist’s possible explanation of the relationship between evaluative truth and evolutionary forces. However, by widening her target from exclusively moral to all evaluative judgements, Street provides an easy response for the realist. To put it simply we are in fact adapted to select truth in some areas of evaluative judgement. Take for instance evaluative judgements about disgust. We find things disgusting because to do so provides an adaptive link to our environment, these things are usually harmful if we ingest or come into contact with them. Therefore we are disposed to make true evaluative judgements about disgusting things. To put it in Street’s terms the relationship between ‘disgust’ truth and evolutionary forces is that truth in this area is that which is likely to promote our reproductive fitness and therefore what we are likely to believe. Street may respond that we are not always accurate in doing so, for instance we are disposed to find maggots disgusting because of their link to rotting food even though other things which share their physical characteristics such as huhu grubs may be nutritious. However, this in no ways discounts the fact that we track truth as we have already discussed. If we recall from Wilkins and Griffiths our adaptations often work off simple heuristics that provide higher expected returns than more expensive, more accurate mechanisms (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 138). This does not mean that we do not track-truth in these areas, but rather that perfect truth tracking is inefficient in much the same way it is for our common-sense judgements. Further, other areas of evaluative judgements also share this status, what makes a good tool or what someone’s facial expressions can tell us about their emotions seem to have

a clear evolutionary link between truth and reproductive success and thus are not susceptible to the EDA.

Street could object that these examples all feature a move away from realism and toward anti-realism to avoid the EDA. In particular, these examples all feature mind-dependent truths and therefore fail to clear the hurdle of objectivism. However, it seems much more likely that this undermines the idea of objectivism about evaluative realism rather than protects the EDA. Our notion of disgust can only be understood in relation to our evaluative judgements, to remove the idea of evaluative judgements from our talk about disgust would render it incoherent. However, whether or not something is disgusting is clearly an evaluative judgement. This then calls into question the idea that objectivism is the right account of evaluative judgements. To put it formally:

- 1) Whether something is 'Disgusting' is an evaluative truth
- 2) The only way to make sense of whether something is 'disgusting' is as a mind-dependent property
- 3) Evaluative objectivism states that all evaluative truths must be mind-independent
- 4) Therefore, evaluative objectivism must be false

Street puts forward her version of the EDA as a dilemma for the evaluative realist, given that evolutionary forces played a significant role in shaping the content of our evaluative judgements, the realist must either assert or deny a relation between the two phenomena. With regards to moral judgements this provides a significant worry both asserting and denying a relationship between moral truths and evolutionary forces raises issues for the moral realist. However, her wider programme of evaluative scepticism is problematic. Some areas of our evaluative discourse can show clear adaptive links such that we would be selected to track-truth in these areas, and the idea of evaluative objectivism that Street relies on has been shown to be false as some evaluative judgements can only be made sense of in a mind-dependent manner. However, how much this affects the narrower moral EDA is unclear and I will need to continue with my exploration of this question.

1.6 Moral Objectivism

The debate between realism and anti-realism exists in many fields and is not limited just to ethics. Instead the debate is on-going in fields such as mental states, mathematical facts, scientific facts and many others. Importantly, these debates are all related and when considering whether a theory counts as realist or anti-realist it is important to consider these wider realism/anti-realism debates. When Guy Kahane explicitly, and Sharon Street

implicitly, assume objectivism they fail to consider this wider debate and the effect this debate can have on the EDA.

The central tenets that will make up a realist position in each individual field will vary depending upon the field in question. Importantly though, objectivism is not a necessary tenet of realism in all areas. Instead whether a theory needs to be objective to be realist will depend upon the field in question. Drawing from the work of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord we can observe that for fields such as mental states the idea of mind-independent objective properties may fail to make sense of the discourse. Conversely, for scientific facts the idea of objective mind-independence will likely be central to what constitutes a scientific fact (Sayre-McCord 1988, 15). The correct account of these areas of discourse will vary greatly despite both being accounts of realism. To account for this variance across a range of fields Sayre-McCord comes up with the idea that realism in a selected field will rely on a 'literal construal' of the discourse being 'literally true' (Sayre-McCord 1988, 6).

This idea then explains why the necessary conditions for realism in each of the fields differ while all are trying to explain the same thing. All of these accounts of realism seek to explain the 'literal construal' for their fields of discourse and it is the differences in what makes up this 'literal construal' that lead to the differences in what constitutes realism in each of these fields (Sayre-McCord 1988, 5). The important question for this thesis is whether objectivism is part of the 'literal construal' of moral discourse. If objectivism is not necessary for the 'literal construal' of moral discourse then certain varieties of moral realism will avoid the EDA, those varieties which include mind-dependent properties. Thus the success of the EDA will rely on the assumption of objectivism, an assumption that the proponents of the EDA have not yet sufficiently considered.

As I have already shown 'literal construal' of the wider field of all evaluative judgements does not entail objectivism. Instead we cannot account for some areas of evaluative discourse without introducing the idea of mind-dependent properties. Truth in areas such as disgust and the value of tools will depend upon the evaluative judgements that people make. Simply assuming objectivism to be the correct 'literal construal' in these areas will lead us off track and to the false conclusion that evaluative realism is unjustified due to the EDA. Therefore we need to be careful about making any similar assumptions about moral discourse without providing evidence for them.

All this being said, until the moral realist can prove objectivism is not a necessary part of moral realism this all remains speculation. The idea that moral properties must be mind-dependent has many supporters and providing a coherent account of moral discourse that does not include this feature is a task that the moral realist still needs to complete for this to be a

forceful objection to the moral EDA. Additionally, even if a coherent account of moral realism can be given which does not include objectivism, it will only be some varieties of moral realism which are vindicated in the face of the EDA; varieties of moral realism which do not feature mind-dependent properties will still fall within the scope of the EDA. Therefore attacking the assumption of objectivism is not without problems for the moral realist. There are significant hurdles in giving a plausible account of moral discourse that does not feature objectivism, and even if such an account can be given only some varieties of realism will be vindicated. However, as I have shown with the wider evaluative EDA, the opposite approach of simply making the assumption also leads to problems and I will explore this issue further in the next chapter.

1.7 Conclusion

Early metaethical arguments about the theory of evolution concerned the metaphysical implications of the theory. Ideas such as Social Darwinism argued that understanding the theory of evolution would result in the revision of our metaethical beliefs so that the metaphysical nature of moral facts would be determined by evolutionary forces.

However, as I have shown, this idea is deeply flawed. To use any natural fact to derive moral facts will encounter the problems posed by David Hume and G. E. Moore. We cannot make the deduction by logic alone and there is no analytic bridge principle that can link natural facts to moral facts (Hume 2006) (Moore 1980). This worry will remain with the moral naturalist throughout this thesis and will become relevant again when I look at their response to the EDA.

Up until the 1980's this was the state of evolutionary ethics; the theory of evolution could not affect the metaphysical nature of moral truths and, therefore, it had no metaethical implications. However, as I covered, the efforts of Michael Ruse have resurrected this field by arguing that the theory of evolution does have epistemological implications. If natural selection influenced our moral judgements but natural selection is not related to moral truth then it follows that our moral judgements are influenced by off-track processes (Ruse 1986). Although Ruse's work does not develop this idea as sophisticatedly as the modern alternatives that will be the primary focus of this thesis, it does still serve as a solid introduction to the idea of the Evolutionary Debunking Argument.

Before looking at these more sophisticated formulations I stopped and looked at how the EDA fit with other fields and if it was a unique problem for ethics or had companions in guilt in other areas. Although I found that the moral realist did have some companions in guilt

(religion and other areas where truth is not linked to reproductive fitness will also encounter some form of the EDA) these companions were already areas we have serious doubts about our ability to accurately access truth. Secure beliefs that we would be concerned about if they were vulnerable to the EDA, such as common-sense or scientific beliefs, are not vulnerable as they can provide a Milvian Bridge linking truth to reproductive success (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013). However, there was one positive for the moral realist that we did glean from this; the EDA will only defeat intuitionist or popular belief arguments for moral realism. If we have good independent reasons, such as deductive, inductive or pragmatic arguments, for believing the moral truths posited by the realist then the EDA will not be effective.

From here I looked at the modern, more sophisticated formulations of the EDA. Guy Kahane's framework provided the structure that my subsequent justifications will rely on and answering his initial concerns about the EDA will become a large part of this thesis. Whether all of our moral beliefs can be given an evolutionary explanation, whether there is a possible link from evolutionary forces to moral truth that the moral realist can use and whether all the assumptions the EDA requires are necessary for moral realism are all questions that need to be answered if we are to justify the EDA (Kahane 2011).

I then had a preliminary look at Sharon Street's arguments in favour of the EDA to give a preview of how this thesis will progress. Street argues that the sceptic is justified in the sweeping causal premise of the Global EDA; all our moral beliefs are the result of our evolutionary past. Given the nature of natural selection we will always be selected to possess the set of moral judgements that best promotes our reproductive fitness irrespective of their truth-value and other forces are incapable of operating outside this influence (Street 2006).

Street then proposed her epistemic side of the argument as a dilemma; given the fact that natural selection has greatly influenced our moral judgements the realist must either assert or deny a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. However, either option is problematic for the realist. As I have shown, to deny a relation is to admit that our moral judgements are likely to be hopelessly off-track and to assert a relation encounters scientific difficulty as moral truth does not seem to be a necessary feature of the best account of moral judgements (Street 2006).

However, I also discovered a problem with Street's argument; by widening her target from moral realism to evaluative realism Street ignores the assumptions that the EDA relies on. In particular the assumption that objectivism is the best account of the discourse is not true for some areas of evaluative discourse. Certain areas of evaluative discourse are best made sense of in a mind-dependent manner and therefore truth in these areas will coincide

with what we judge truth to be providing us with the link from truth to reproductive success necessary to undermine the epistemic side of the EDA.

I ended this chapter with a discussion of the idea of objectivism in ethics. Having already dismissed the idea of evaluative objectivism we need to work out exactly what criteria will decide if objectivism is a necessary feature of a given field. To answer this question I drew on the work of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord and his definition that realism involves the ‘literal construal’ of the discourse to be ‘literally true’ (Sayre-McCord 1988). Whether the ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse requires objectivism I left undecided at this point and the next chapter will be dedicated to answering this question.

My opening chapter has given us the framework for the EDA that I will work off for the rest of this thesis:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have.

Epistemic premise: Evolution is not a truth-tracking process with respect to moral truth.

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore, Moral Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified. (Kahane 2011, 115)

I have also had a preliminary look at problems and justifications for each of these premises from Kahane, Street and others. What the remainder of this thesis will do is look at justifying each of these premise, starting with the metaethical assumption, and making any changes that must occur for this justification to take place, so that by the end of this thesis I have a sound argument.

The Metaethical Assumption of Objectivism

2.1 Introduction

To justify the EDA (and prove moral scepticism) I will need to justify each of the premises I established in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will address the metaethical assumption:

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives us the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

To justify this assumption I will need to define exactly what moral realism is and then show why objectivism is a necessary feature of such realist theories. I will start this process by looking at Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's definition of realism in general and apply this definition to moral realism. I will then look at Christine Korsgaard's initial arguments in favour of the metaethical assumption and why moral realism does require objectivism. This will be followed by a reconstruction of G. E. Moore's famous Open Question Argument by Charles Pigden that can be used to support an epistemological claim. This claim will then be strengthened by arguments from Gilbert Harman. Finally I will look at why Cornell realism is incapable of saving moral realism from Harman's arguments.

Starting with the work of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord I will look at what is the common feature of realism in all fields. As I shall show, objectivism is not a necessary feature of realism in all fields. Instead all that is required for a theory to be counted as realist is that it avoids becoming a non-cognitivist or error theory. To this end Sayre-McCord comes up with the definition that moral realism requires the 'literal construal' of the discourse be 'literally true' (Sayre-McCord 1988). The discussion will then turn to the question of whether the 'literal construal' of moral discourse requires an objectivist account of the discourse.

From here I will look at the work of Christine Korsgaard who argues that only an objective account of moral discourse can account for the normative nature of moral judgements (Korsgaard 1996). Although these arguments will be far from conclusive, they will rely on the unproven claim the moral judgements are intrinsically normative and are inductive rather than deductive, Korsgaard will provide us with the beginnings of my argument against a non-objective account of morality; we can always question if such accounts fulfil the necessary characteristics for a 'literal construal' of the discourse.

To further this argument I will look at a reconstruction of G. E. Moore's famous Open Question Argument, or OQA. Moore's OQA, if true, would prove that naturalistic accounts of morality are all false and, as mind-dependent facts are natural facts, objectivism is a necessary part of moral realism (Moore 1980). However, Moore's OQA is problematic and instead I

will use Charles Pigden's OQA reconstructed. This move comes at the cost of a weaker conclusion; we will move from a metaphysical to an epistemological claim and our conclusion will soften to a probabilistic claim (Pigden 2011). Despite this, the OQA reconstructed will give us evidence that objectivism is in fact a necessary part of the 'literal construal' of realism.

I will then turn to Gilbert Harman's argument that we cannot give an empirical account of the moral facts, and cannot therefore provide the synthetic identity between natural facts and 'good' that we need to escape the OQA reconstructed and therefore strengthen the arguments from the last section (Harman 1988). Harman's arguments will show that our best empirical theories do not require moral facts to exist. Although this argument is criticised by Cornell Realists, and Nicholas Sturgeon in particular, I will show that this criticism contains a hidden and unjustified necessity claim that ensures it fails and Harman's argument stands (Sturgeon 2012).

This will lead us to conclude that objectivism is likely to be the only epistemologically viable account of moral discourse. This is a move from a metaphysical to an epistemological assumption, however, for this thesis, that is still enough as the EDA only deals in epistemological claims.

2.2 Is Objectivism necessary for Moral Realism?

As previously mentioned, objectivism is not a necessary feature of realism in every field. Fields such as mental states and evaluative truth do not seem to be suited to such a reading. Instead whether the proper conception of a particular field requires an objective account will depend upon the 'literal construal' of the field in question. To start answering this question I will look at the original work of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord where I got the idea of 'literal construal', and then some of the preliminary arguments present within Christine Korsgaard's work that suggest a literal construal of moral discourse does, in fact, imply objectivism.

Given the presence of significant debate over what constitutes realism in many fields it is worth linking these ideas together to come to an idea about what constitutes realism in general. Sayre-McCord does this in *The Many Moral Realisms* and comes to the conclusion that the only consistent feature necessary for realism is that the 'literal construal' of the discourse be literally true (Sayre-McCord 1988, 6). The idea of 'literal construal' rules out any non-cognitivist account of the discourse. For realism it is necessary that there be some fact of the matter whether a given claim is true or false. As such, we cannot take the discourse to be composed of non-cognitivist entities as these are not truth-apt but instead express

commands, preferences or such. Further the claims must be literally true to avoid falling into an error theory in which the claims may be literally construed but are systematically false due to some error ridden preconception. The ‘literally’ true aspect here also serves to remove fictionalist accounts of moral discourse that ascribe a different role to moral truths than what they literally mean. This framework then, can be used to distinguish moral realism from any of the sceptical alternatives. It also fits into the realism/anti-realism debate present in other fields. We can distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitivist accounts and can distinguish between error and success theories. Sayre-McCord’s map will provide the basis for my analysis of moral realism; moral realism is the belief that the ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse is ‘literally true’.

To answer the question for this chapter, whether objectivism a necessary feature of moral realism, I will use this map provided by Sayre-McCord. With this map the question will become, does the literal construal of moral discourse entail an objective understanding of moral facts? For many this will seem an uncontroversial truth. Objectivism is thought by many to be a necessary feature of moral realism, however this has not always been the case and some philosophers still challenge this idea. The most important reason why I need to spell this out though, is that in doing so I can establish exactly which moral views are targeted by the Evolutionary Debunking Argument and which can avoid it. Further it will be helpful to place moral realism in wider realism debates because, as I have shown, EDA’s exist in many fields and we will need a similar conception of what constitutes realism in each of these fields to accurately apply the EDA. A plausibly realist account of the philosophy of psychology is that the truth-conditions about pain will be subjective and rely on individual’s mental states. A plausibly realist account of the philosophy of law will rely on the intersubjective conventions and practices of groups (Sayre-McCord 1988, 16). Any attempt to provide an EDA in these fields will fail as the epistemic premise will not work if truth is decided by our judgements. Therefore, these two examples show how the EDA cannot be applied to certain fields that do not have objectivism as a necessary feature of the ‘literal construal’ of their discourse. Other fields such as the philosophy of science and the philosophy of religion plausibly rely on the idea that objectivism is the ‘literal construal’ of the discourse and will be susceptible to the EDA with one, science, avoiding epistemological scepticism and the other, religion, falling to epistemological scepticism as I have already covered (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 142).

Having established the map and the question I need to answer before the EDA can be brought to effect against moral realism, I now need to look at how I can answer this question

and whether objectivism is indeed a necessary feature of the ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse. To do this I will start by looking at the work of Christine Korsgaard.

There is a trend in early modern philosophy of grounding morality’s obligations in God, the Sovereign or another figure of authority, a set of theories Korsgaard calls voluntarism (Korsgaard 1996, 18). Under such a theory, rationalists such as Korsgaard point out, morality becomes an invention. No longer do we have objective moral standards to discover but rather we create the moral standards as a society. This can be seen as similar to Sayre-McCord’s idea of an intersubjective truth that holds due to the conventions of groups of people, such as legal codes or modern stock market prices (Sayre-McCord 1988, 16). While these fields can operate with intersubjective truths, we openly acknowledge the intersubjective nature of laws and stock prices yet continue to use them, the rationalists argued that the normative aspect of morality rules out an intersubjective account of truth.

Moral truths are supposed to be normative, that is they are supposed to provide us with obligations, commands and recommendations. When we invoke them we are making demands of others, and when others invoke them they may be making demands of us due to being moral judgements. We need not be motivated by these demands, to avoid a lengthy discussion of moral internalism we will avoid this question, but moral judgements do contain some prescriptions for action. Further, these demands can be difficult, morality may demand that some people sacrifice their lives for certain ends. The problem with the voluntarist account is that it fails to match these demands as Korsgaard puts it “our commitment to these practices would not survive our belief that it was true” (Korsgaard 1996, 9). To see this we can ask ourselves the question; under the voluntarist account why should I be moral? In Mandeville’s theory morality is the invention of politicians, in Hobbes theory, it is the will of the sovereign. However, in both of these theories morality only has an instrumental ability to make demands of us. For instance Hobbes argument that we should obey morality lies in the sovereign’s ability to protect and punish us. Importantly this answer does not involve morality itself having any normative element. Instead the prescriptive aspect of morality is reliant on the idea of self-interest. Once this self-interest ceases to be, for instance when the sovereign is not capable of protecting or punishing us, the normative aspect of morality disappears. Is this true of all intersubjective accounts? It is unclear. While not conclusive it seems that all intersubjective, or subjective, accounts of morality will require some explanation as to why the particular nature of the moral judgements they propose are normative. That a particular judgement is the will of someone, or some group, does not seem to entail that such judgements necessarily provide us with commands or obligations. To put the argument formally:

- 1) The ‘literal construal’ of moral judgements requires that these judgements be inherently normative.
- 2) Morality may be given a subjective, intersubjective or objective account.
- 3) It is unlikely that subjective or intersubjective accounts of morality can give a normative account of morality.
- 4) Therefore, it is likely that, the only ‘literal construal’ of morality requires that it be given an objective account.

Although far from conclusive, 1) the idea that moral judgements must be inherently prescriptive and cannot be instrumentally prescriptive is not fully justified, and we only get a probabilistic argument in the conclusion, this argument does provide some evidence for the fact that only an objective account of morality can match our ‘literal construal’ of the discourse. I will however, want to provide further arguments before I can justify the metaethical assumption of the EDA.

It may also be objected that all accounts of moral discourse fails to meet this intrinsically normative standard and therefore we cannot give a ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse. To answer this I will need to show how objective accounts of morality can answer this normative question. This brings us to what Korsgaard calls moral realism, but can equally be thought of moral rationalism for the moment. Rationalism is the belief that moral truths exist in the external world independent of people and can be discovered through rational reflection. For the moral realist these rationally discovered moral facts are intrinsically normative. It is a brute fact about the world that these external, normative facts exist and through rational reflection we can discover them and come to judgements that are also, in turn, prescriptive. Therefore, we are no longer worried by the question of why I should be moral, instead it is in the nature of moral facts to include some sort of obligation command or recommendation. As Prichard puts it, the question of why should I be moral is a mistake. If the answer is grounded in morality then it is circular and if the answer is grounded in self-interest then it is irrelevant (Prichard 1912, 22). The rationalists conclude from this that to ask the question why should I be moral is an analytic mistake and that there must simply exist normative entities to generate the normativity we believe exists. To put the rationalists position formally:

- 1) We have normative beliefs
- 2) The only account of normative beliefs that can account for their truth is that normative entities exist
- 3) Therefore normative entities must exist

Now the obvious objection to this is that our normative beliefs may not be true. If this is the case then the conclusion here will be false (or at least unjustified) and it is only our confidence that our normative beliefs are true that sustains rationalism. While this original argument for rationalism may fail, I can use this framework to explore Korsgaard's argument why rationalism is the only possible form of moral realism:

- 1') We have normative beliefs
- 2') The only account of normative beliefs that can account for their truth is that normative entities exist
- 3') Moral realism requires normative beliefs to be true
- 4') Therefore moral realism requires the existence of normative entities

The first premise here is uncontroversial; we clearly do have normative beliefs concerning obligations, rights and such. I have provided evidence for the second premise already when I looked at how we could answer the question, why should I be moral, and the only plausible answer was that there must exist some normative entities that are intrinsically prescriptive (Korsgaard 1996, 30). To provide evidence for the third premise I considered the sceptical approach that would exist if moral realism does not entail that morality is normative. In such an account the moral realist belief that moral truths are inherently normative is absent (Korsgaard 1996, 32). However, it is worth noting that I only say I provide some evidence for the second and third premises and I have not deductively proved them. The evidence I have for these premises is instead largely inductive; the only plausible explanation, to date, of normative belief is that normative entities exist and the only way we can conceive of avoiding the sceptical conclusion that moral truths are not prescriptive is to argue that intrinsically normative entities exist. Due to this my reconstruction of Korsgaard's argument does not prove that a 'literal construal' of moral realism requires objective normative entities, but will serve as evidence for this conclusion

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's framework helps us to understand the nature of realism. Realism is the belief that the literal construal, or cognitive account, of at least some of the discourse is literally true, or a success theory. When applying this framework to the discussion surrounding moral realism, and in particular the question of objectivism, we arrive at the question for the chapter, does a literal construal of moral discourse entail the necessity of objectivism? To respond to this question I have looked at the work of Christine Korsgaard. For Korsgaard the only plausible account of normative beliefs that can account for them being true is an account where intrinsically normative entities exist. Therefore to fulfil the 'literally true' criteria of Sayre-McCord's realism we require intrinsically normative entities. Additionally, the only conceivable account of moral realism that can avoid sceptical worries

is one that holds some normative beliefs to be true. The combination of these two facts leads her to the conclusion that the only possible account of moral realism comes from the moral rationalist position that objective normative entities exist in the external world. However, I have already shown how this argument is not deductive but rather relies on inductive, probabilistic ideas, and, as such, Korsgaard's work provides some evidence for, but does not prove, the idea that objectivism is a necessary feature of the 'literal construal' of moral discourse. Because of this limitation, I will continue on and look at attempts to provide a knock-down deductive argument through reconstructing G. E. Moore's famous open question argument.

2.3 The Naturalistic Fallacy Reconstructed

From Geoffrey Sayre-McCord I took the definition that what defines moral realism is the 'literal construal' of moral discourse being 'literally true' (Sayre-McCord 1988, 6). Importantly this definition still fits within Christine Korsgaard and other rationalist's definitions as no claims about objectivism are being made. Instead that status of objectivism in ethics will depend on whether moral discourse 'literally construed' entails that moral properties are objective and exist outside of human reactions. To decide this I can go back to work I have referenced earlier, that of G. E. Moore and his Open Question Argument and Naturalistic Fallacy.

Moore's Open Question Argument argues that the concept of good cannot be reduced to any natural property but is instead about an unanalysable property and denotes a non-natural concept (Moore 1980, 6). If this is true then moral properties, or at least the property of good, will exist independent of our moral judgements, as such judgements are natural analysable properties. The success of the OQA will therefore remove any objection to the metaethical assumption of objectivism present within the EDA and block such a move by the moral realist. However, despite grand initial success, Moore's OQA has been successfully attacked and few support its original formulation. Instead I need to see if I can reformulate the OQA in such a way that it will still work to support the metaethical assumption of objectivism present within the EDA.

Moore's original OQA starts with the idea that 'are X things good?' remains a significant open question no matter what naturalistic predicate we put in for X. For any such predicate it can still be coherently asked by a competent speaker if 'good' consists of this predicate. From this Moore reaches the conclusion that 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate. This conclusion is then combined with the idea that the meaning of a predicate is the property for which it stands and if two words have different meanings, they

are not synonymous, they denote different properties to reach his overall conclusion that goodness is not identical with any naturalistic property (Moore 1980, 9). Charles Pigden's article *Identifying Goodness* lays this argument out formally and puts in the missing premises needed to make it valid.

- 1) 'Are X things good?' is a significant or open question for any naturalistic predicate 'X' (whether simple or complex).
- 2) If two expressions (whether simple or complex) are synonymous this is evident on reflection to every competent speaker.
- 3) The meaning of a predicate or property word is the property for which it stands. Thus if two predicates or property words have distinct meanings they denote distinct properties.

From 1) and 2) it follows that

- 4) 'Good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness').

From 3) and 4) it follows that

- 5) Goodness is not identical with any naturalistic property of X-ness. (Pigden 2011, 94)

Laying it out this way we can see the formal structure of the argument. 1) establishes the open question, 4) uses this and 2), the obvious nature of analytic truths, to establish that 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate. This idea is combined with 3), this idea that predicates with distinct meanings denote distinct properties to reach the overall conclusion that goodness is not identical with any naturalistic property. However, by putting it out formally we can start to see the problems that lead to the objections to the OQA which I will have to tackle to reformulate it as any kind of defence for objectivism. In particular 2) is obviously false as it leads to the Paradox of Analysis and 3) is false when we consider synthetic identities (Pigden 2011, 96).

2) states that 'if two expressions (whether simple or complex) are synonymous this is evident on reflection to any competent speaker' (Pigden 2011, 94). If this is true then all our analytic truths are obvious and can be immediately known simply through understanding the terms present. By contrast, the field of philosophical analysis concerns uncovering analytic truths linking our concepts together, a field which Moore himself was active in for most of his career. However, if 2) is true then philosophical analysis is useless. Either philosophical analysis can only produce analytic truths that we already know, as they are evident to every competent speaker, or it produces falsehoods, as any truths that are not already known are not true at all (Lewy 1964). However, philosophical analysis is a useful field, it does produce new

and interesting truths, and our analytic truths are not always immediately obvious to us. This means that 2) is false and we have not proved Moore's conclusion of 4), that 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate. If I have not proved 4) I also have not proved 5); that goodness is not identical with any naturalistic property. Instead goodness may have a non-obvious analytic link to a naturalistic predicate and natural mind-dependent properties are still plausibly realist.

If I want to save some version of the OQA I will therefore need to reformulate premise 2) into a form that does not lead us to the Paradox of Analysis while still showing that the open question established in premise 1) is a significant worry for naturalistic theories of ethics. Pigden does this and gives us:

2*) If it is evident to some competent speakers that two expressions 'X' and 'Y' are not synonymous (since it is conceivable that something could be X without being Y), then this is evidence (though not conclusive) that they are not in fact synonymous. (Pigden 2011, 101) This will then require a reworking of 1) into:

1*) For any naturalistic predicate 'X' that we have so far considered, it is evident to some competent speakers that (so far as our understanding of the words is concerned) a thing can be X without being good. (Pigden 2011, 100)

From 1*) and 2*) we get the revised:

4*) Probably 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or goodness with x-ness). (Pigden 2011, 101)

Now this is obviously a much weaker conclusion than that present in 4). I have not established the semantic autonomy of ethics that the original 4) in Moore's OQA established. However, this does not mean this weakened 4*) is useless. Instead 4*) gives us good reason to believe that the semantic autonomy of ethics is probably true on inductive grounds. If I have no success in reducing 'good' to any naturalistic predicate [1*]) and I have some evidence that to do so may in fact be impossible [2*]) then, as the conclusion [4*]) states, I have evidence that 'good' cannot be reduced to any naturalistic predicate and instead are unlikely to encounter difficulties in proceeding with this assumption, as long as we recognise that this is only a contingent truth that may be overcome in the future.

While this reformulation will provide a defence for 4*) and gives us evidence in favour of semantic autonomy of ethics, the wider conclusion present in 5), that 'good' is not identical to any naturalistic predicate is no longer true, as 4) is false and, as I will explore, premise 3) is vulnerable to the idea of synthetic identities.

While it may be true that we cannot get an analytic link from a natural predicate to 'good' it does not follow that 'good' is not identical with any naturalistic predicate. Instead

we may be able to provide a synthetic link between ‘good’ and a naturalistic predicate. The inspiration for this synthetic link comes from the synthetic links discovered through scientific enquiry (Durrant 1970, 360). While water and H₂O denote different predicates, one is the clear liquid we drink the other a molecular compound, they still denote identical properties. Similarly, heat and average kinetic energy are different predicates that denote the same property. The objection then, is that premise 3) is false and different predicates do not need to denote different properties. If this is true I cannot conclude 5), that goodness is not identical with any naturalistic predicate, from 4), the semantic autonomy of ethics, let alone from 4*), the probable semantic autonomy of ethics.

Pigden however, proposes an important difference between these scientific cases and ethics, which allows us to distinguish between them and show how finding a synthetic identity between any naturalistic predicate and goodness will be difficult if not impossible (Pigden 2011, 102). We can discover synthetic identities when the common-sense term, be it water or temperature, is present and plays a causal role within our scientific theory that postulates our scientific term, H₂O or average kinetic energy, that matches the observable effects of the common-sense term, clear drinkable liquid or sensations of hot and cold. To provide such an explanation of ‘good’ we would need to provide a scientific theory in which good plays a causal role and postulates our naturalistic predicate to explain the observations caused by good. To do this ‘good’ would need to express an empirical concept that plays a causal role and has observational tendencies. Further, that ‘good’ has these causal effects must be analytic. We cannot have a synthetic link between goodness and these goodness effects without losing the ability to identify goodness (Pigden 2011, 107). The synthetic link would have to show that something is good if it tends to have the goodness effects specified, however, this relies on an existing conception of what the goodness effect is, the effect that good things have. This leads to a circular argument where ‘good’ is defined by having the goodness effects and the goodness effects are defined by what effect ‘good’ has. Without putting an analytic link in here we can only escape this circular argument by postulating another means of detecting goodness, a second set of goodness effects. However, the same problem arises in justifying these goodness effects, we would have to reference a third set of goodness effects to explain why good is what has the second set of goodness effects and so on into an infinite regress if we do not reference an analytic link anywhere.

To provide a synthetic identity between ‘good’ and any naturalistic predicate we need to propose a theory in which ‘good’ must express an empirical concept that analytically has an observable causal role that can be explained by our naturalistic predicate. We can do this for water as it analytically is a clear, drinkable liquid that can be explained by the molecular

structure of H₂O, and for temperature as it analytically has the effects of causing hot or cold sensations and can be explained by the average kinetic energy. However, we cannot do this for 'good' as we cannot give an analytic account of its causal effect that can be explained in terms of a naturalistic predicate. It remains an open question whether any such naturalistic predicate is identical with 'good'. Therefore we will not be able to find a synthetic identity for 'good' in terms of any naturalistic predicate at least by any method analogous to how we find such identities in scientific cases.

However, this conclusion is much weaker than Moore's original one. No longer have we proved that it is impossible for 'good' to be identical to any natural property but instead simply that we cannot find any identity between 'good' and a natural property. This change is due to the fact that the original position of the synthetic naturalists, that premise 3) is false, still holds. As I showed from our scientific examples different predicates can mean the same property. Therefore I need to change premise 3) into:

3*) If 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or goodness with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness'), then it is difficult if not impossible, to show by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness. (Pigden 2011, 98)

This then necessitates a change in premise 5), which relied on the now disproven 3) and 4), to:

5*) It is probably impossible to *show* by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness. (Pigden 2011, 98)

I can then put all this together to reconstruct Moore's original OQA into Pigden's OQA*:

1*) For any naturalistic predicate 'X' that we have so far considered, it is evident to some competent speakers that (so far as our understanding of the words is concerned) a thing can be X without being good.

2*) If it is evident to some competent speakers that two expressions 'X' and 'Y' are not synonymous (since it is conceivable that something could be X without being Y), then this is evidence (though not conclusive evidence) that they are not, in fact, synonymous.

3*) If 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness'), then it is difficult, if not impossible, to show by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some property of X-ness.

4*) Probably 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with the corresponding noun 'X-ness'). [From 1*) and 2*)]

5*) It is probably impossible to show by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness. [From 3*) and 4*)] (Pigden 2011, 108)

This reconstruction avoids the problems Moore's original OQA encounters. 2) has been changed to 2*) and avoids the paradox of analysis as it is still possible for philosophical analysis to be a useful programme. Instead 2*) simply argues that our concepts are not completely opaque but rather we do have some knowledge of what they entail and therefore if two concepts do not seem synonymous then this is some evidence for them being unique. Additionally, premise 3) has changed to premise 3*) as it is false that distinct predicates must denote distinct properties. Instead we have the idea that we (probably) cannot show a synthetic identity between 'good' and any naturalistic predicate. These two problems have caused us to weaken the conclusion that we can prove from the OQA. Instead of proving that goodness cannot possibly be identical with any naturalistic property, I have shown that providing an identity between goodness and any naturalistic property is likely to be impossible. Importantly this is a shift from a metaphysical conclusion to an epistemological one. No longer is it impossible for such an identity to exist, but rather it is likely to be impossible to show such an identity. However, if we remember back to the EDA, the conclusions I got from Kahane and Street's formulations only concerned epistemological claims. The aim of the EDA was simply to prove moral scepticism, that our moral beliefs are unjustified rather than false, therefore changing the assumption of objectivism from a metaethical assumption to an epistemological one does not affect the conclusion. Instead I can reconstruct Kahane as such:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have.

Epistemic premise: Evolution is not a truth-tracking process with respect to moral truth.

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore, Evaluative Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified.

2.4 The Impossibility of an Empirical Account of Morality

G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument, if successful would discount the possibility of identifying 'good' with a natural property, instead good must exist independent of our moral judgements and is an objective non-natural property (Moore 1980, 9). However, as I have shown, Moore's OQA in its original formulation is unsuccessful; it leads to the paradox

of analysis and cannot account for synthetic identities (Pigden 2011, 96). Instead I need the revised OQA* found in Charles Pigden's *Identifying Goodness* to attack moral naturalism. This move however, comes at a cost of a far weaker conclusion. The original OQA gave us the defeat of moral naturalism, the revised OQA* gives us a probabilistic claim that moral naturalism is epistemologically untenable. As discussed, for the purposes of this thesis, the epistemological claim is sufficient as the Evolutionary Debunking Argument also restricts itself to epistemological claims. However, to avoid objections from the moral realist I may wish to strengthen the probability claim. Gilbert Harman's *Ethics and Observation* and its attack on Cornell Realism gives us an argument that can be used to do just this.

Pigden's *Identifying Goodness* establishes that in order for the moral naturalist to avoid scepticism resulting from the reformulated OQA*, they need to produce an identity between moral terms and naturalistic predicates (Pigden 2011, 107). An analytic identity has already been discounted, at least as a likely option, so instead a synthetic identity needs to be provided. I have also established the method for which we may find such synthetic identities, the same way we find synthetic identities between our scientific and common-sense terms such as water and H₂O or heat and mean kinetic energy (Pigden 2011, 107). To restate, we find the identity between the common-sense term and a scientific term when the common-sense term has a causal role within our scientific theory which postulates our scientific term that matches the observable effects of our common-sense term. In ethics this means we need to propose a theory of good in which 'good' expresses an empirical concept that analytically has a causal role that can be explained by our naturalistic predicate. Pigden gives us the objection that any such analytic link is vulnerable to an open question argument and therefore is probably false. Harman's argument comes into play here to strengthen this conclusion as he argues that we cannot give an empirical account of moral principles and terms and therefore 'good' cannot express an empirical concept and we cannot provide the necessary synthetic identity.

Harman starts by acknowledging that both science and ethics makes use of observations, in ethics we use thought experiments to compare our principles with our sentiments and in science we use physical experiments to compare hypothesis with observations. Further observation in both fields is theory laden, it cannot be made sense of without assuming some underlying theoretical claims. To use Harman's example, we cannot understand the ethics of a group of children setting a cat on fire without the underlying theories concerning the terms 'cat', 'children' and 'fire'. Similarly when concluding the presence of a proton from the observation of a vapour trail in a cloud chamber the scientist must make use of theories concerning 'proton', 'vapour trail' and 'cloud chamber' (Harman

1988, 121). The key difference between ethics and science lies not in the presence of observations, but in the way they are used in each of the theories. In science we test our observations against the world and the observations only serve as confirming evidence for a theory to the extent that the theory serves as a reasonable explanation of the observation over any competing theory. To use observations in such a manner in ethics would undermine the existence of moral facts, Harman argues, as they would not feature in our best explanations of the observable phenomena. The best explanation of the intuitive observation that the children are doing something morally wrong when you observe them burning the cat will not invoke moral facts. Instead we can give an explanation relying on the physical facts of what is occurring and the psychological facts about you as the observer. The physical fact of the children intentionally inflicting pain upon the animal for their own amusement combined with the psychological fact of your disapproval of acts of committing pain upon others for your own amusement is enough to generate the observation of a morally condemnable act (Harman 1988, 123).

Cornell Realist's however, have sought to respond to Harman, and of particular note in the literature is Nicholas Sturgeon's *Moral Explanations*. Sturgeon accepts the point that for belief in moral facts to be justified they must play a role in our best explanation of moral observations, moral beliefs or physical observations. Where he differs from Harman is arguing that moral facts do in fact play an explanatory role in our best explanations of such phenomena (Sturgeon 2012, 170). In particular, for Sturgeon moral facts play an explanatory role in our observations of moral character. To demonstrate this point Sturgeon uses three examples. The first two concern the moral character of individuals, Passed Midshipman Salim Woodworth and Adolf Hitler, while the third concerns the moral character of an institution, slavery in the 18th and 19th century. The common point to all these examples is the claim that we can best explain the observations in these cases by reference to moral facts. Hitler and Woodworth acted the way they did because they were morally depraved, and opposition to the institution of slavery was great in the 18th and 19th century because it was especially bad at these times (Sturgeon 2012, 171). To this simplified argument there is an easy response; while we are able to explain these observations through reference to moral facts, this is not the best explanation, instead an explanation in the style of Harman with reference to particular physical or psychological facts, Woodworth's vanity, Hitler's promotion of genocide and the pain caused by slavery and our psychological tendency to disapprove of these things is a much better explanation as it is more parsimonious and has far greater explanatory power in its ability to predict similar cases. What Sturgeon's argument needs to have a chance at success is some way of linking his moral observations to these physical facts that seem to be

required in our best explanation, to do this Sturgeon makes use of the idea of moral supervenience.

Moral supervenience is the idea that the moral properties of an event supervene on the natural properties of the event. This means that in order for two events to have different moral properties they must have different natural properties. Sturgeon combines this idea with an assumption that moral facts exist and challenges the sceptic to prove from this starting point that moral facts do not exist (Sturgeon 2012, 172). If Harman cannot do this then his objection will win no converts to scepticism as Harman's argument relies on already believing in moral scepticism. If two events cannot differ naturally without differing morally then Harman's argument that we would believe Hitler to be morally depraved even if he were not fails. Instead in order to imagine that Hitler was not morally depraved we have to imagine that he acted differently, as to act in the way he did is to act morally depraved because the moral facts supervene on the natural facts. However as I shall show this argument relies on a hidden necessity claim and fails to address Harman's chief concern.

The main point of Sturgeon's argument is that in order for us to conceive of a situation where Hitler was not morally depraved we must conceive of a situation where he acted differently (Sturgeon 2012, 173). However, this relies on more than just his starting assumptions of moral supervenience and the existence of moral facts. Instead we also need to add in a dubious necessity claim as is shown when I put it formally. This is what Sturgeon's Hitler example currently looks like:

- 1) The moral properties supervene on the natural properties in such a way that the moral properties of two events cannot be different unless the natural properties are also different.
- 2) There are true moral facts.
- 3) If there are any true moral facts then Hitler's moral depravity is one of them.
- 4) Therefore, to conceive of Hitler as not morally depraved we would have to imagine a different set of natural facts where Hitler did not act in the morally depraved way he did.

This argument relies on the premise 3). To justify this premise I need more than just a moral supervenience claim, I also need a moral necessity claim, such that the moral fact that Hitler was morally depraved is true. Sturgeon however, cannot justify this. Instead Sturgeon's justification for Hitler's moral depravity in his own words "relies on a moral view that... only a morally depraved person could have initiated a world war, ordered the "final solution" and done any of the number of things Hitler did." (Sturgeon 2012, 174) However, if Harman's claim is that you would believe this even if it were not true, to such a claim it is no response

to say 'but I believe it very strongly'. Even if I grant that moral facts exist to start with, which in itself is a strange starting point to try and determine the truth of moral facts, what Sturgeon really needs here is for us to grant that particular moral facts exist (a necessity claim). Without this his argument looks very different:

- 1) The moral properties supervene on the natural properties in such a way that the moral properties of two events cannot be different unless the natural properties are also different.
- 2) There are true moral facts.
- 3) Therefore, to conceive of Hitler's actions as morally different we would have to conceive of Hitler's actions as naturalistically different.

This conclusion has none of the argumentative power against Harman that the previous one does. A moral sceptic would happily accept this conclusion as premise 2) is doing no work here, the conclusion is really just a particular instantiation of the idea of moral supervenience and without the unjustified necessity claim Sturgeon's argument fails to undermine Harman's position.

Sturgeon's response to Harman can be split into two parts. The first part, an attempt to undermine Harman's argument by reference to moral supervenience, I have already seen and dismissed. The second part concerns the relationship between scientific claims and ethics and suggests that scientific observations can be attacked the same way the ethical observations can be.

Sturgeon points out there are two potential readings of the question that had the children not been doing something morally wrong in burning the cat we still would have thought they were (Sturgeon 2012, 174). The first reading is that the non-moral facts of the story are the same, the children still burn the cat and you still observe it. However if this action is not wrong, would you still think it was wrong? According to Harman yes you would because your moral judgement of wrongness depends upon the actions and your moral sensibilities not the actual presence of a property of moral wrongness. The second reading is that what you observe the children doing must be different because what is wrong supervenes on the natural so the imaged case must be naturally different. In this reading what you imagine would not be wrong because what you imagine would be different.

I have already shown the objection to the second reading; that it actually relies on a necessity claim. However, Sturgeon also uses these two readings to interpret the scientific question of whether the scientist would have thought the proton to be there even if the proton was not. The first reading is that we imagine that the scientist saw the exact same thing, yet the proton was not there, under such a reading the scientist would still believe that the proton

was there, it would just be that his underlying physics was wrong. The second reading is that if the proton was not there the scientist would not have the observation they have and therefore would not form the belief that the proton was there. The worry that Sturgeon believes this comparison presents is that we need to provide some reason why we adopt reading one for ethics but reading two for science (Sturgeon 2012, 175). Further, as I have already discussed the problems of using reading two for ethics, I must ensure that these problems are not present for the scientific case.

To counter this companions in guilt attack I can refer back to Harman's original argument. The first reading is actually a perfectly acceptable interpretation of the question in the scientific case and we can give an account of how scientific knowledge fits within the interpretation. We often do make incorrect scientific conclusions due to mistaken theoretical assumptions concerning background entities. What sets scientific theories apart here is that if a theory cannot accurately predict what is in fact observed then that theory will not be believed. It may be that we observe a vapour trail in a cloud chamber and conclude that a proton is present, but if that vapour trail does not then have the additional effects we expect from a positively charged sub-atomic particle we will revise our theory to stipulate some other entity as the cause of this vapour trail. Therefore, when we consider the situation as a whole, we need all the causal effects of a proton to conclude one is present. It is this set of causal effects that means the theory that a proton is present is the best possible explanation as it is capable of explaining and predicting observations of similar events. The same is not true in ethics. Under the first reading we can get two competing explanations of why we may make the observation that the children are committing a morally depraved act when they set the cat of fire for fun. The first explanation is Sturgeon's, that the children are morally depraved and this led them to commit the act. The second explanation is Harman's; the children are inflicting pain on another for their own amusement and you disapprove of acts that inflict pain on others for one's amusement. In this case it is the second explanation that is far superior. This second explanation explains why you disapprove of relevantly similar things (they also are acts of inflicted pain upon another) explains why people have moral disagreement (we do not all approve and disapprove of the same thing) and does not posit causally irrelevant moral facts (as for a full explanation the first option will still need to explain what it is about the situation that causes it to be morally depraved). I therefore have sufficient differences between the scientific and ethical cases when I adopt the first reading of the question, would the scientist have still believed there was a proton even if there was not one, and I have sufficiently differentiated ethics from science to alleviate any concerns.

Cornell realists seek to give an account of the moral facts in terms of synthetic identities with natural properties. However, as we can see from Harman this cannot be done. Instead the best explanation of our empirical moral observations does not posit moral facts but concerns the physical world and our psychological tendencies. If we cannot give an empirical account of the moral facts, we cannot provide the synthetic link that we need to overcome the objections raised in the revised OQA*. Thus Cornell realism does not provide an escape for the realist and instead we cannot give an account of our moral discourse in naturalistic terms.

2.5 Conclusion

For the formal EDA to work I need to justify each of the premises, or something sufficiently similar. To do this I have looked at arguments for and against the metaethical assumption:

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives us the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

I found that although it requires some altering, the metaethical assumption can be justified as an epistemological claim and that this can stand in its place within the EDA.

I started this justification by looking at how I might accurately define moral realism. Drawing on Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's work on realism in general, I found that moral realism require that the 'literal construal' of moral discourse be 'literally true' (Sayre-McCord 1988). This leads to the key question of this section, does the 'literal construal' of moral discourse require an objectivist interpretation of the discourse?

To answer this question I started with a look at the work of Christine Korsgaard. Korsgaard argues that only an objective reading of moral judgements can account for the normativity that the 'literal construal' of moral discourse requires. Non-objective accounts of morality will all be forced to ground this normativity in self-interest or some other external feature (Korsgaard 1996). While this argument started the discussion and pushed us in the right direction, subjective moral truths struggle to account for all the features we expect from morality, this argument was also far from conclusive. Instead the idea the moral facts need to be intrinsically prescriptive was unjustified and the arguments that subjective moral facts could not be intrinsically prescriptive was inductive rather than deductive. Therefore I needed further arguments on top of those gathered from Korsgaard to defend the metaethical assumption necessary for the EDA to work.

To provide these further arguments I looked at G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument. Moore's OQA, if true, would prove that naturalistic accounts of morality are all false and, as mind-dependent facts are natural facts that reference natural properties rather

than any external non-natural properties, objectivism is a necessary part of moral realism (Moore 1980). However, as I saw, the OQA fails as it entails the uselessness of philosophical analysis and cannot account for synthetic identities. To solve these problems I turned to Charles Pigden's OQA reconstructed. This argument changed Moore's strict necessity claims into probabilistic claims and weakened the conclusion to an epistemological claim (Pigden 2011). While this epistemological claim works fine within the EDA I wished to strengthen the probabilistic claim.

To strengthen this probabilistic claim I turned to the work of Gilbert Harman. Harman argued that we cannot give an empirical account of moral facts as such facts do not feature in any of our best empirical theories (Harman 1988). This means that we cannot give the empirical account of moral facts that we need to provide a synthetic identity.

Cornell Realists have sought to attack Harman's arguments. Nicholas Sturgeon argues that, given the notion of moral supervenience, moral facts will actually play an explanatory role in our best empirical theories (Sturgeon 2012). However, as I have shown, this argument actually relies on a hidden necessity claim that is unjustified and therefore Sturgeon's argument fails and Harman's claim that we cannot give an empirical account of the moral facts holds.

I have not succeeded in justifying the original metaethical assumption present within the EDA. However, I have given good reason to believe in a similar epistemological assumption that does all the work require of it:

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

This epistemological assumption will still work in this thesis as the EDA only makes epistemological claims; if objectivism is the only epistemological viable account of moral concepts and properties then the EDA will still reach the conclusion that moral realism is epistemologically untenable. However, there are still a couple of objections the moral realist may make to avoid this epistemological conclusion. The realist may object that, even though we have not to date and it seems an unlikely avenue, we may find an analytic identity between moral and natural properties. Alternatively, the moral realist may provide a synthetic identity between moral and natural properties that does not require an empirical account of moral facts. However, both these routes seem unlikely and I have provided sufficient evidence that such programmes are unlikely to be successful that the burden of proof is firmly with the moral realist to explain how such identities may be proven.

Justification of the Causal Premise

3.1 Introduction

I have justified my version of the metaethical assumption by turning it into an epistemological assumption.

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives us the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

To justify the EDA as a whole I now need to justify the causal and epistemic premises. In this chapter I will focus on the causal premise and show why some version of the causal premise will be the best explanation of the phenomena of moral belief.

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have. (Kahane 2011)

I will start this justification by looking at Guy Kahane's initial problems that any justification of the causal premise must overcome before I can use it in the EDA. Chief among these is the challenge that the proponent of the EDA must show why all our moral beliefs are the result of our evolutionary history (Kahane 2011). To answer this I will look at four different interpretations of the causal premise and show why the best interpretation is reading the causal premise as the claim that all our moral beliefs are, in part, the result of evolutionary forces and that other factors cannot override this influence. To use this reading in the EDA I will need a causal story that answers the questions why all our moral beliefs are the result of evolutionary forces? And why other factors cannot overcome this influence?

To answer these questions I will look at the question of what influence evolutionary forces may have had on our moral beliefs. Drawing from the work of Sharon Street I will see that natural selection will completely rule out the possibility of organisms adopting some moral beliefs due to the extreme negative effects these beliefs will have on an organism's reproductive fitness (Street 2006). In fact, I will show that the part of our moral beliefs that is the result of evolutionary forces will only concern pragmatic success and not moral truth.

To complete my justification of the causal premise I will then look at how great the part of our moral beliefs that result from our evolutionary history actually is and why other influences cannot overrule this part. To do this I will look at Richard Joyce's causal account of the origins of our moral sense and how it is an evolved mechanism that manipulated our emotional mechanisms to promote adaptive behaviour (Joyce 2007). I will then finish this section by using Street's argument that rational reflection cannot create new moral

judgements to transfer Joyce's conclusions from our moral sense to our moral judgements (Street 2006).

Looking at the causal premise I will narrow down possible interpretations until I am left with the one that best fits the literature and ensures the validity of the EDA; all of our moral beliefs are the result of, in part, our evolutionary forces and this influence cannot be overruled by other forces. From these I will look at arguments attempting to justify this claim. Although these arguments are not in the form of deductive proofs, they do combine into a compelling explanation of the origins of moral belief. Until the moral realist can prove a better explanation, the causal premise will be justified as an inference to the best explanation.

3.2 Potential Problems with the Causal Premise

In the last section I justified objectivism as the only epistemologically viable form of moral realism. To prove the evolutionary debunking argument as I have formally presented it, I now need to prove the causal and epistemic premises. In this section I will address the causal premise and show that although, the causal premise is not a necessity claim, by using an inference to the best explanation I can give a compelling account of why it is likely to be true.

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have. (Kahane 2011, 115)

My starting point for this analysis will be the work of Guy Kahane and his efforts to highlight the problems with the causal premise that need to be addressed before we can consider using it in the EDA. From there I will look at the works of Sharon Street and Richard Joyce, two of the biggest proponents of the EDA, and their efforts to find a solution to these problems. I shall show that a combination of these two philosophers work can be used to justify the causal premise as an inference to the best explanation, and also why an inference to the best explanation is all we can reasonably expect and look for when considering this causal premise.

The major problem that Kahane highlights is not to question whether some of our moral beliefs originate from evolutionary sources, but rather to question whether they all originate from non-truth tracking evolutionary sources (Kahane 2011, 118). Street writes that our moral beliefs are "thoroughly saturated" with evolutionary influences (Street 2006). But this is a vague phrase and depending on which interpretation we use, may have vastly different effects for the truth value of the casual premise and the validity of the EDA.

If we take this phrase to mean that all moral beliefs are solely the result of evolutionary forces then this is a very ambitious, and likely false, claim. While such a claim would justify the validity of the EDA, as Street herself points out, other factors such as

cultural and social factors and the influence of rational reflection are at play when we make moral judgements (Street 2006, 114). Instead Street and Joyce both reject this claim and are willing to acknowledge the influence of other factors.

Could the phrase “thoroughly saturated” instead be claiming that all our moral beliefs have some evolutionary input? This claim still requires some work to prove but is not obviously false like the first interpretation. Instead Street or Joyce would need to give us some reason why it is an inescapable feature of human moral judgements that they have some evolutionary influence. Further this claim may not do enough to justify the validity of the EDA. Even though all our moral beliefs may have some input from evolutionary influences, we would still need to prove that the other influences that go into moral beliefs are not capable of correcting any distorting effect these evolutionary forces may have.

The third interpretation is that “thoroughly saturated” means that some, possibly most, of our moral beliefs are in some way the product of evolutionary influences but that we cannot prove which are and which are not. Therefore we cannot prove that a particular moral belief is not the product of distorting evolutionary influences and thus cannot trust them to accurately reflect moral truths. However, it is doubtful whether this does enough to ensure the validity of the EDA. Instead such an interpretation supports a change in the degree with which we hold our particular moral beliefs proportional to how many of our moral beliefs are likely to be influenced by evolutionary forces and how sure of each moral belief’s origin we are. This interpretation therefore is unlikely to be successful in justifying the strict version of the EDA I have been working with and, although it may be possible to reconstruct it into a new, probabilistic argument, will not be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

The fourth and final interpretation we need to consider is that only some of our moral beliefs are the result of evolutionary influences and we are able to discover which are and are not. The problems with this interpretation should be evident; we no longer have a global EDA working but instead it is a localised EDA that targets some of our moral beliefs. Such localised EDA’s are not capable of defeating moral realism as a whole but are only capable of undermining particular moral realist beliefs and therefore this interpretation of the causal premise will not support the conclusion of the EDA and the EDA would not be valid under such a reading.

We are left with two alternatives that can, at least plausibly, be used within the EDA, the second and third interpretations. The first interpretation is obviously false and even the proponents of the EDA do not wish to endorse it. The fourth interpretation does not do enough to justify the global EDA but can only be used for targeted, localised EDA’s. As I will show Street and Joyce can best be read as trying to justify the second interpretation and this is

the interpretation we will focus on. To justify this interpretation I will have to give reasons why our moral beliefs are inescapably the product of evolutionary influences to some degree, and why that degree is sufficient that the distorting effects of these evolutionary forces is not overcome by other factors.

Before looking at the efforts of Street and Joyce in this regard however, there is a caveat that needs to be mentioned. The causal premise is a scientific claim about an empirically observable, external feature of the world. It is not a claim of conceptual necessity. As such Street and Joyce will not try to provide a deductive proof of their claims. Instead the arguments will be that the best explanation of the phenomena of moral beliefs is that they are the product of evolutionary influences among other factors, but that these other factors are incapable of overriding the influence of evolutionary forces. For such an empirical, observable truth this is the only justification available and therefore, when considering the justification of the causal premise this is all we should be looking for.

3.3 The Force of Natural Selection on Moral Judgements

Sharon Street's argument for the causal premise concerns the relative evolutionary costs and benefits that different evaluative, and therefore moral, beliefs entail for their host organism. Comparing two basic lists of possible moral beliefs will show why, given the nature of natural selection, organisms are selected to hold the moral beliefs that best promote that organism's reproductive success. I shall show that this entails our evolutionary influences have had a large impact on our moral beliefs to the extent that some moral beliefs simply would never be formed due to their extreme evolutionary costs irrespective of the potential truth-value.

To formalise Street's argument I first need to note that our moral beliefs have an impact upon our actions and motivations. This is not however, a strict internalist position. Although I have touched on the internalist debate in the previous chapter on objectivism, it is not worth going into depth here as I do not need a strict internalist reading of motivation and the associated controversy. Instead Street's argument only requires the more limited, less controversial claim that moral beliefs usually have motivational force for most people. Using this claim I subsequently arrive at the uncontroversial idea that moral beliefs have an influence on our actions.

- 1) Our moral beliefs have an influence on some of our actions.

Next I can note that our actions will clearly have a great impact on our reproductive fitness, again this is an uncontroversial statement.

- 2) Some of our actions that are influenced by our moral beliefs have an effect on our reproductive fitness.

From this I can conclude that our moral beliefs must have an influence on our reproductive fitness.

- 3) Therefore our moral beliefs have an effect on our reproductive fitness.

Again this conclusion should seem uncontroversial to most. Moral beliefs effect actions which in turn affect our reproductive fitness. It is when I combine this idea with facts about natural selection that I arrive at the core of Street's argument why our moral beliefs are influenced by our evolutionary history (Street 2006, 114). I can add that organisms will be selected to possess those characteristics that best promote their reproductive fitness. While there are some limitations with this statement, for instance the characteristics must be heritable, this statement is true in general and I will address these concerns later (Street 2006, 118).

- 4) Organisms will be selected to possess those characteristics that best promote their reproductive fitness.

Which when combined with 3) gives us the secondary conclusion.

- 5) Humans will be selected to possess the moral beliefs that best promote their reproductive fitness.

This argument establishes that the particular content of human evolutionary history will have had an effect on our moral beliefs; it is simply the nature of natural selection to influence anything which has an effect on our behaviours such as moral beliefs. However, I still need to answer the questions raised by Kahane, has our evolutionary history affected all our moral beliefs? And is this influence so great that nothing else can override this influence? (Kahane 2011, 118)

To answer these questions Street contrasts two different sets of possible moral beliefs. The first consists of moral beliefs that are likely to promote an organism's reproductive success, the second of beliefs that are likely to hinder an organism's reproductive success.

- (1) The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason in favour of it.
- (2) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.
- (3) We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.
- (4) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return.

(5) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.

(6) The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment. (Street 2006, 115).

Compared to:

(1') The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason against it.

(2') The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason not to do it.

(3') We have greater obligations to help complete strangers than we do to help our own children.

(4') The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to do that individual harm in return.

(5') The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to dislike, condemn, and punish him or her.

(6') The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to seek out that person's company and reward him or her. (Street 2006, 116)

The first list seems to be a set of beliefs that will promote an organism's reproductive success. (1) will motivate an organism to act in such a way as to promote their own survival. (2) and (3) relies on the idea of kin selection and the preservation of an individual's genetic material through future generations. (4), (5) and (6) rely on the idea of reciprocal altruism and the benefit of co-operation it brings (Street 2006, 115). However, the unifying feature of all of these different moral beliefs is that all of them promote the reproductive success of the individual who holds them and, importantly, all these beliefs seem to mirror the actual moral beliefs that humans have.

While the first list may promote an individual organism's reproductive success, the second list seems to do the opposite. An organism with the belief in (1') will act in such a way to achieve its own death. Acting according to (2') and (3') will contribute to the death of family members who could potentially spread that organisms genetic code. (4'), (5') and (6') will lead to a break down in reciprocal altruism and the benefits that such a system brings. Importantly though, despite the fact that these moral beliefs would lead to the extinction of the genetic line of any organisms which held such beliefs, these moral belief are still logically possible moral beliefs to hold. That no organism we know of does hold them is a fact that needs explaining. Why do we hold beliefs the more closely match with the first set of moral beliefs rather than the second?

The proponents of the EDA have an easy answer to this question. We hold the moral beliefs we do because these beliefs were beneficial to the reproductive fitness of our ancestors. It is no surprise then that the moral beliefs we hold are ones that would seem to best promote reproductive fitness (Street 2006, 117). For the moral realist by contrast, such a simple explanation is not available. Unless the moral realist can provide a link between moral truths and evolutionary influences they cannot explain the similarity between the moral beliefs that best promote our reproductive fitness and the moral beliefs we actually hold and must instead conclude that it is simply a coincidence and, given the immense range of possible moral beliefs available to us, a massive coincidence at that (Street 2006, 117).

This comparison of two different lists of potential moral beliefs also highlights another feature of the evolutionary influence on the content of our moral beliefs; some beliefs are simply untenable no matter what the influence of other factors. Even a quick look at the second list will make it clear that any organism that believes this list will be incapable of surviving and reproducing and therefore the genetic material which lead the organism to form these beliefs will become extinct, assuming that these moral beliefs have a motivating influence and can therefore effect our actions as explained previously. Therefore, irrespective of their truth values, some moral beliefs will simply be untenable and unavailable to an organism. When we consider the influence that evolutionary forces has on the content of our moral beliefs, the influence has to be at least great enough to completely rule out certain moral beliefs completely.

In fact, the influence is even greater than this. Assuming that humans live in a competitive environment, as all organisms do, the humans best adapted to survive and reproduce will become the humans who leave the most descendants. Their genetic code therefore, will become the most dominant. As particular moral judgements come with evolutionary costs and benefits the individuals with the moral judgements that best promote their reproductive fitness will be best adapted to their conditions and leave more descendants. Therefore the particular moral code that best promotes an organism's reproductive success will be the one best suited to surviving and spreading. The limitation of this argument is that our particular moral judgements are not solely the result of evolutionary forces, as I have already stated other factors have had an influence as we are critically reflective organisms. However, the part of our moral judgements that is the result of evolutionary influences will push us toward pragmatic success irrespective of moral truth, a part that I shall show is significant.

Finally, the nature of proto-moral judgements also lends support to the idea that the content of our moral beliefs have been largely shaped by the forces of natural selection. While

I have been so far talking as if organisms choose between sets of fully-developed moral beliefs and natural selection governs that they end up with those that best promote their reproductive success, it is almost certainly true that this is not how our evolutionary history occurred. Instead it is likely that our moral beliefs evolved through the establishment of proto-moral judgements that lacked the linguistically infused aspect of our current moral beliefs and instead looked more like basic pushes for certain things being called for or avoided that we see in other animals (Street 2006, 117). These proto-moral judgements seem to serve as pushes toward behaviours that promote reproductive fitness, what we call survival instincts. For the proponent of the EDA this is explained by the fact that the content of these pushes is the result of natural selection choosing the proto-moral judgements that best promote that organism's reproductive fitness. For the moral realist however, the claim must be that these pre-language proto-moral judgements are in some way the early stages of the realisation of moral truths. Somehow animals and, if this account of human evolutionary history is correct, early humans are capable of some level of access to moral truths despite their limited linguistic and rational capacities. To deny this the moral realist must argue that the similarity between the content of these proto-moral judgements and our fully formed moral judgements is a coincidence and it is only when we have the full linguistic and rational capabilities that we are capable of accessing moral truths. While this is limiting for accounts of moral realism it is not a knock-down argument that rules out moral realism completely. Instead the moral realist can respond that it is the evolution of our capacity to undertake rational reflection that leads to our discovering moral truths, the similarity we observe between the content of proto-moral judgements in animals and our fully-formed moral judgements is due to the proto judgements by animals being formed by the early stages of rationality they possess. However, this already ties together the idea of our epistemic access to moral truths and our evolutionary history, and, as we shall see in the next section on the epistemological premise, this creates questions as to how and why our capacity for rational reflection results in our ability to discover moral truths (Street 2006, 123).

Sharon Street gives a good account of why certain moral beliefs would be advantageous, and why others would be disadvantageous, to our reproductive fitness. Her comparison between two possible sets of moral judgements highlights the similarities between the actual content of human moral judgements and the content we would expect to result from natural selection. What is more, a consideration of the proto-moral judgements that animals make, and I assumed early humans made, lends support to the fact that the best explanation of the content our human moral judgements is not moral realism but is in fact an evolutionary debunking explanation. Finally, the nature of natural selection, how it works to

select those traits that best promote an organisms reproductive success, means that certain moral beliefs are simply untenable for any organism to possess and pass on to its descendants and will instead quickly go extinct if they ever evolve. Therefore, I can conclude that the force of natural selection is at least strong enough to rule out some moral beliefs irrespective of their truth value due to their phenomenal cost to an organism's reproductive fitness. However, what is lacking so far is an argument that can explain why all of our moral judgements are the result of our evolutionary history and how this evolutionary history actually works to shape the content of human moral beliefs. For this I will turn to the work of Richard Joyce and his attempt to explain how our evolutionary history has shaped the content of our moral judgements and how this history has resulted in our moral beliefs being inseparably linked to our evolutionary past in such a way that this past serves as a starting point for all human moral judgement.

3.4 The Unavoidable Connection Between Natural Selection and Moral Judgements

To provide a satisfactory answer to the question of whether our moral beliefs are the result of our evolutionary history it is necessary to provide an account of how morality was adaptive for our ancestors and therefore why we may have evolved to hold such moral beliefs. This is not a definitive answer to the question, that an evolutionary explanation is possible does not entail an evolutionary explanation is the only or the right explanation. However, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, I am not searching for definitive proof to justify the causal premise. Instead I am looking for the best possible explanation of the phenomena of moral belief. To support the causal premise I shall show that our moral sense is likely the product of our evolutionary history and all our moral beliefs rely on this moral sense. It is because of this that all of our moral beliefs are, ultimately, the product of our evolutionary history and I can justify some version of the causal premise.

When providing a compelling account of our evolutionary history that describes how our moral sense evolved as an adaptation in early humans the question that needs answering is not how morality **is** adaptive, but rather how it was adaptive. We can also then split this question up into two different areas according to the way in which a moral sense may be adaptive. Did our moral sense evolve through group or individual selection? And did our moral sense evolve to judge others or our own actions? (Joyce 2007, 107) Although I shall show that the answer to these questions will be a bit of both, it is worth splitting up these questions to clarify the different ways in which morality was adaptive.

As I have already noted, if a psychological mechanism effects our actions, then that psychological mechanism is adaptive if it promotes actions that benefited the reproductive fitness of the host organism. Therefore, as self-directed moral thought, or a conscience, is clearly capable of influencing our actions then it too may have been adaptive. What I need to finish the story, is an account of why a conscience would result in actions that benefited humans' reproductive fitness.

Humans have the seemingly contradictory capabilities of the potential to make prudential, long-term plans that sacrifice immediate satisfactions for greater, future satisfactions and the ability to knowingly forego these plans for lesser, immediate satisfactions. One would expect that natural selection would be capable of removing this seemingly harmful contradiction and humans would prove much more adept at self-control (Joyce 2007, 110). The likely answer to his problem is that the 'weakness of will' that human's exhibit is a necessary side effect of some other trait that is adaptive. Such a trait may be human's ability to subjectively value different objects given different times and circumstances (Joyce 2007, 110). Food may be the premier good when an individual is on the brink of starvation, however, in a food rich environment humans need to be able to adjust the value that they assign gathering food in their decision making procedure to optimise their reproductive fitness.

This may be true, but how does this fit into the evolutionary of an individual moral sense or conscience? All the problems our individual moral sense seems to solve involve large scale, long term costs if broken (Joyce 2007, 111). Our individual moral sense primarily involve our social interactions with others in a community, if we were tempted in these cases to break our agreements in favour of immediate pleasures, the resulting loss of reputation would ensure the individual who broke the agreement would no longer be trusted in co-operative enterprises. As social animals such a loss of reputation could quickly lead to a loss of reproductive partners or even death for the individual, clearly harming their reproductive fitness. The benefit of flexibility that subjective valuing gives an organism are not present, or at least much weaker, in moral cases and thus natural selection favoured organisms with the 'conversation stopper' effect that moral considerations have (Joyce 2007, 112). Moral considerations are not considered dependent upon our immediate desires and instead are thought to have objective status and act as 'conversation stoppers' that prohibit any actions that go against their precepts (Dennett 1995, 506). It is for this reason that self-directed moral judgements are capable of serving as a personal commitment device that promotes individuals long-term, reputation based reproductive fitness.

Despite this, moral considerations can be overridden, we do not always act in accordance with our moral beliefs, and immoral action is psychologically possible for humans. Given all that I have just said about the cost to our reproductive fitness associated with breaking from society's norms and risking social ostracisation, why would natural selection not favour a simple motivational push that forced organisms to act in accordance with their moral sentiments? The answer to this is twofold.

First, the benefits of reproductive fitness for individuals in acting in accordance with their moral sentiments does not come from the individuals tracking some independent objective moral standard, but rather that they conform to the social norms present in their society. This is not to claim that there are no objective standards or that our moral judgements do not reflect them, if such a claim was needed to prove the causal premise of the EDA it would be circular as it would already require the defeat of moral realism. Rather this is the claim that the reproductive benefit that humans get from following moral sentiments derives from their status of culturally acceptable norms rather than as independent objective standards. Given this fact, what is reproductively advantageous for individuals is not to track some objective standards but to conform to the particular moral norms of the society they live in. It is not therefore, adaptive for individuals to possess simple motivational pushes towards certain moral standards, but for them to have a psychological mechanism capable of projecting objective standards on the world the content of which is defined by the social norms provided by their society.

Second, for morality to work at a group level it needs to act through deliberative considerations that cannot be legitimately ignored rather than simple motivational pushes that could not work in the public sphere. Morality acts not just as a private conscience governing the acts of an individual but also as the source of a public standard of acceptable and unacceptable actions (Joyce 2007). This is achieved through deliberative considerations. A consequence of this is that we can still overrule our own individual moral considerations even though they have greater motivational force than normal considerations. As I have shown this is important as individuals need to conform their moral standards to those of the community to get the maximum benefit.

This brings us to the next benefit of a moral sense as opposed to simply strong desires; that we can make claims and influence the actions of others. "I do not like X" will serve as motivation for "I will not pursue X" (Joyce 2007, 117). However, "I do not like X" will not serve as motivation, in most cases, for "you should not pursue X". If we want clear societal norms for governing interactions between individuals, a reproductive benefit for language using social organisms, we will need some sort of motivational push to get all the members of

society to act in accordance with the norms of the society. Natural selection solves this problem through promoting individuals with a sense of prescriptive standards; “the pursuit of X is morally wrong so you should not pursue X” does have a motivational aspect (Joyce 2007, 117). Morality therefore, has the additional benefit of creating society wide norms, something individual preferences cannot do, and allows for the creation of socially acceptable punishment.

While I have explored why natural selection is likely to favour moral thinking, it prevents weakness of the will, creates socially accepted norms and conforms individuals to them through socially accepted punishment, I have yet to answer how natural selection would bring about moral thinking. In answering this question our current scientific knowledge is not developed enough to give us a comprehensive genetic and neurological account. Instead I will have to use the currently available scientific knowledge to give the best explanation I can. This will be far from conclusive, but, in absence of any contradictory evidence or superior explanation, will remain the best explanation of the phenomena of moral belief.

It is likely that natural selection brought about moral thinking through the modification of our existing emotional structure. Studies of individuals with “acquired sociopathy” show that damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex tends to produce individuals who lack the ability to make social decisions, long-term plans or show remorse (Damasio 2000, 20). Importantly, the individuals also show a dampening of emotional but not rational responses suggesting that moral decision making is far closer linked to emotional capacities than rational capacities. Further, fMRI scans show increased activity in the emotional centres of the brain when facing moral dilemmas (J. D. Greene 2001, 2106). All this suggest that natural selection achieved moral thinking through the manipulation of emotional mechanisms and moral thinking remains closely linked to our emotional capacities. While this is not a definitive account nor rules out the possibility of non-emotionally laden moral judgements, it does suggest a connection between emotional and moral capabilities and as, I shall show, moral projectivism.

Humean moral projectivism is the idea that we experience moral phenomena because humans project moral ideas onto the external world we observe. For example if we see and animal suffering and feel pity it is not because the external situation is pitiful but rather than humans project the idea of pity onto the scenario when they encounter it and that therefore certain properties that we think of as of the external world in fact owe their existence to the mental states of the perceivers. Although sometimes thought of as such, this is not a non-cognitivist account; projectivism argues that the world seems to us to contain these external properties but that in fact they are only due to our mental capacities (Joyce 2007, 126).

Projectivism is however, inconsistent with the definition of moral realism we have been using for this thesis as the idea that the moral properties are projections of our mental states is inconsistent with them ‘literally true’.

But why does this empirical data support moral projectivism? There are two key claims to moral projectivism that must be proven for it to be true. First, our moral phenomenology must be ‘in the world’ or external to us. Second, this phenomenology must be caused by emotional activity and not by the detection of some external feature of the world (Joyce 2007, 129). In support of the first claim is the fact that ‘folk’ morality includes claims to objectivity and, as I have shown, non-objective moral realism is epistemologically challenging. The second claim is supported by the evidence I have already given supporting the link between moral and emotional capacities. If both these claims are true, human moral capacities do not act like a perceptual organ detecting properties in the external world, instead morality may be adaptive without reference to truth if it is seen as referencing truth.

But why is projectivism adaptive? The alternative to experiencing moral properties as objective features of the world is to experience them as our own mental states like we do with pain. For instance fire would not be hot but would give us hot-sensations, murder would not be reprehensible but we would experience a sensation of reprehension when we encountered it. This extra step of presenting each occurrence as an extra experience of the individual has no selective benefit like it does with pain. With pain we want to experience it as something wrong with the body and not something wrong with the external world so that we can adjust our body to avoid the sensation. However, if we adopted the same approach with moral properties we would undermine their usefulness. If we thought that we needed to change something about ourselves when we encountered a morally reprehensible situation moral standards would lose all ability to act as socially accepted norms. Therefore, if the projectivist thesis that moral properties are really due to the mental states of the perceiver is correct, there is a clear evolutionary benefit in the perceiver believing that moral properties are part of the external world.

If all this is correct, our moral capacities are the result of natural selection manipulating our emotional mechanisms to project the idea of objective moral properties onto the external world to solve the problems of ‘weakness of will’ and creating adherence to social norms governing human interaction, there is still one final worry that needs to be addressed before I can fully justify the causal premise. So far I have explored and given evidence that our moral sense is the result of our evolutionary history, however, the causal premise states that our moral judgements are the result of our evolutionary history. This still leaves room for the moral realist to object that our moral sense is only one factor in the

creation of moral judgements and that other factors such as rational reflection also go into this process. These other factors may then be capable of correcting any distorting influence that natural selection causes and the causal premise of the EDA may in fact be false.

To avoid this move by the moral realists the proponents of the EDA need to link the idea of the human moral sense and human moral judgements in such a way that no other influences can override the influence that natural selection has had. I can start by putting in the strict premise that the human moral sense is the only source of human moral judgement:

- 1) Human evolutionary history is the source of the human moral sense.
- 2) The human moral sense is the only source of human moral judgement.
- 3) Therefore human moral judgements are the result of human evolutionary history.

However, 2) in this is false. Other factors clearly play a role in the formation of human moral judgements and this led us to rule out the first alternative at the start of this chapter (Street 2006, 114). Therefore I need to change premise 2):

- 1) Human evolutionary history is the source of the human moral sense.
- 2') The human moral sense has an unavoidable influence on human moral judgements.
- 3') Therefore human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

'Unavoidably' here means that the influence of our evolutionary history will always play a key role in shaping our moral judgements and that, crucially, none of our moral judgements would have formed without the process of natural selection. This second argument when combined with the earlier idea that the forces of natural selection have at least been strong enough to rule out certain moral judgements and strongly push us in the direction of others, is enough to support the causal premise.

However, why must one accept this revised argument? In particular 2') is still a controversial claim and more needs to be said about why other factors cannot override the influence that our moral sense has had in shaping our moral judgements. The simple fact that our moral sense is the product of our evolutionary history does not entail that our moral judgements are unavoidably linked to this sense.

The problem with the moral realist using rational reflection as a tool to save moral judgements from the influence of our evolutionarily created moral sense is that rational reflection is incapable of creating new moral judgements. Instead, rational reflection is only capable of refining and pruning existing moral judgements, the cause of which will always ultimately be our moral sense (Street 2006, 114). When we use rational reflection we assess moral judgements against other moral judgements which we temporarily set as fixed because they seem the most obvious to us. We then use these set moral judgements to remove any

judgements that contradict them until we produce a complete set of workable moral judgements that seem the most likely to be true. Rational reflection does not however, decide that some moral judgements are false and then create wholly new ones that have no relation to our existing moral judgements and are simply dependent upon non-moral facts. To do so rational reflection would need to create an ought from an is, a contradiction to Hume's famous argument, or we would need to discover an identity between moral facts and natural facts, and identity that we dismissed as extremely unlikely in the previous chapter.

If neither rational reflection nor any other method can give us new moral judgements that are not based on existing moral judgements then our moral sense, as the source of these existing moral judgements, is the only source of moral judgements. Other factors may be used to select, prune and combine existing judgements but this does not disprove 2') and the revised argument holds. I am therefore justified in believing in the revised causal premise of the EDA:

3') Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

Where, 'unavoidably' here means that without the input of the forces of natural selection we would not have the particular, or possibly any, moral beliefs we hold.

3.5 Conclusion

The justification of the EDA, the topic of this thesis, will require the justification of the causal premise, or something sufficiently similar. To this end I have developed a causal story that explains the origins of our moral beliefs. This causal story will work as an inference to the best explanation and justify the causal premise.

I started this justification by looking at the problems that I need to overcome to establish the causal premise. Drawing from the work of Guy Kahane I showed that the key problem for the proponent of the EDA is in explaining why all our moral beliefs are the product of our evolutionary history and why other factors cannot override this influence (Kahane 2011). Because of this I chose to interpret the causal premise of the EDA as the claim that all of our moral judgements are the result of, in part, evolutionary forces and that no other influence can overrule these forces. To justify this claim I looked at arguments that the influence of natural selection upon our moral beliefs has been so great as to completely rule out certain beliefs and pervasive enough to influence all our moral judgements through our moral sense.

Sharon Street's argument that certain moral beliefs are simply untenable due to their extreme cost to an organism's reproductive success provides the basis for the claim that

evolutionary forces are strong enough to greatly influence our moral beliefs (Street 2006). By comparing two sets of moral beliefs it becomes clear that the influence of natural selection is great enough to rule out certain moral beliefs regardless of their truth value. Further, the part of our moral beliefs that is the result of natural selection will only concern pragmatic success and not moral truth.

I then turned to arguments from Richard Joyce to establish just how much of our moral belief is the result of our evolutionary history. Using the best available empirical data I showed that human evolutionary history has created a moral sense that manipulated existing emotional structures to project moral sentiments onto the external world (Joyce 2007). This generated the conclusion that human evolutionary history is the source of the human moral sense. To widen this conclusion to include moral judgements and not just our innate moral sense I looked at Street's argument that other factors cannot overrule the influence of natural selection and that all our moral judgements will have their basis in our, evolutionarily produced, moral sense (Street 2006).

This chapter has provided an inference to the best explanation to support the causal premise. The best explanation of moral judgements is that they are inescapably the product of our evolutionarily produced moral sense. This resulted in the new causal premise:

Revised Causal Premise: Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

To object to this premise the moral realist needs to provide a superior explanation of the phenomena of moral judgement. While this is not a logical impossibility, the current explanation is based of the best currently available empirical data and what we know about the theory of evolution, as such, the realist has significant work to complete if they wish to undermine the causal premise and, for now, its use within the EDA is justified.

Justification of the Epistemic Premise

4.1 Introduction

I have justified an iteration of the metaethical assumption and causal premises. To make the EDA sound I need to finish by justifying the epistemic premise or something sufficiently similar.

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

To do this I need to explore the possible relation between the evolutionary forces that most likely influenced our moral judgements and the objective moral truths these judgements supposedly refer to. If I can show that there is no relation that is likely to generate true moral beliefs then I will have justified the epistemic premise and provided a complete justification for the EDA.

I will start this process by looking at the possibility of moral realists asserting no relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. The problem for the realist with such an account is that it makes evolutionary forces a “purely distorting influence” on our moral judgements making them likely to be hopelessly off-track of any objective moral truths (Street 2006). I will then look at a response by the realist that we can still knowingly hold true moral beliefs if these beliefs are self-evident (White 2010). However, as I will show, the moral sceptic can also account for this self-evidence and we will have to assess each account as an inference to the best explanation.

From here I will look at the option of asserting a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. Sharon Street argues that this relation must be a tracking account where we have evolved to track moral truths because to do so was beneficial to our ancestor’s reproductive success. If the realist proposes a non-tracking account of the relation they are committed to the idea that evolutionary forces pushed us in a completely random direction with regards to moral truth. However, the tracking account fails on scientific grounds as an alternative adaptive link account that does not stipulate moral facts is more parsimonious, clearer and better explains the particular content of the moral judgements we make. Therefore, Street argues, the realist cannot escape the epistemic premise by asserting a relation between moral truth and evolutionary forces (Street 2006). As I will show, Street is guilty of missing some potential relations in her argument. In particular I will look at David Enoch’s third factor account.

Enoch’s third factor account argues that while evolutionary forces and moral truth do not have a direct relation, there is a third factor which they both work toward; survival. This

means there will be a harmony between evolutionarily produced moral judgements and objective moral truths as both will trend toward judgements that favour survival (Enoch 2010). However, I will show that Enoch's argument relies on the intuition that survival is a moral good, precisely the sort of intuition that the EDA targets. Therefore, by already assuming an objective moral claim, Enoch's third factor account cannot be used as a response to the EDA claim that all objective moral claims are unjustified.

I will finish this chapter by looking at David Copp's argument that his society-centered view (and other forms of moral naturalism) can avoid the EDA if the moral judgements they promote are sufficiently similar to those we would expect from natural selection (Copp 2008). However, Street will argue that this just pushes the EDA back to the level of the natural-normative identities that the particular theory of moral naturalism postulates (Street 2008). If the moral naturalist proposes a synthetic identity between moral facts and natural facts they will need to refer to moral intuitions to justify this identity. However, these moral intuitions are susceptible to the EDA. Therefore, moral naturalism will face a similar problem to Enoch's third factors account as it will contain an unjustified assumption that certain moral intuitions are true.

4.2 The Possibility of Denying a Relation between Moral Facts and Evolutionary Forces

If we accept the causal premise and acknowledge that evolutionary forces have played an unavoidable role in shaping the content of our moral beliefs what does this mean for the moral realist? Although on the face of it this seems to undermine our belief in moral realism, as I will show, some realists have actually tried to use this fact to explain how we access moral truths and how moral realism is actually supported by this idea. What this argument, and the epistemic premise, will hinge on is what exactly the relationship between evolutionary forces and moral truth is, if there is one.

Sharon Street, one of the biggest proponents of the Evolutionary Debunking Argument, argues that the realist can either assert or deny a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth, but that either path will lead to moral scepticism (Street 2006, 121).

If the realist denies that there is a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truths, and some robust moral realists that posit acausal, objective properties seem to be heading in this direction, then they are committed to the idea that any influence from evolutionary forces on the content of our moral beliefs must be a purely distorting one. This is not to say that we could not have true moral beliefs under such a system, but rather that, as there is no relation, there is no force from natural selection pushing us toward true moral

beliefs. Street compares this to the idea of setting out for Bermuda on a boat and letting the tides take you where they will. Certainly it is possible that you may successfully arrive at Bermuda, but with no force actually pushing you in that direction, the odds against are astronomical (Street 2006, 121). For our moral beliefs to accurately reflect moral truths the realist needs to rely on a miraculous coincidence. Instead, it seems most likely given this scenario that our moral judgements are hopelessly off track of any independent, acausal moral truths that may exist.

Is there any way for the moral realist to avoid this sceptical conclusion while still asserting that there is no relationship between evolutionary forces and moral truth? As I have already shown rational reflection cannot help here as it is incapable of working independent of our current moral beliefs to form entirely new ones, but instead relies on modification of our existing moral beliefs (Street 2006, 124). But what about the supposed self-evidence of certain moral beliefs that is sometimes claimed by moral realists? Street may be right, given the immense number of possible moral beliefs it seems extremely unlikely that we would come to possess true ones, but this does not entirely rule out the possibility of correct ones, or even of knowingly holding correct moral beliefs.

If true moral beliefs are self-evident then, even given the astronomical odds of stumbling across a correct moral belief, once natural selection has accidentally pushed us into a correct moral belief we can retain it with epistemological justification. To use Street's Bermuda analogy, we may be extremely unlikely to land at Bermuda due to the winds and tides, but once we do land and look at the street signs it becomes pretty obvious to us that we are there (White 2010, 589).

To fully give substance to such a theory we will need to assume that humans have evolved to hold some form of general intelligence that has allowed us to access moral truths even though that was not the direct evolutionary purpose of this direct intelligence. There is even some evidence for this sort of evolution of our moral sense; Kim Sterelny writes "moral cognition develops from our interaction between emotions, exemplar-guided intuitions and explicit principles" rather than as a single modular faculty (Sterelny 2010, 293). The moral realist may then argue that our moral judgements are the result of our general intelligence leading us to detect external moral facts. Therefore, even though there is no direct relation between evolutionary forces and moral facts, our ability to detect moral facts is a by-product of other adaptations. We know when we have discovered a true moral proposition as they are self-evident to anyone with this properly functioning general intelligence.

However, is this account accurate? In particular, is this a reasonable account of how the supposed self-evidence of certain moral propositions is supposed to work? At face value

some moral propositions seem like they may be self-evidently true. For example few people would ever doubt the moral proposition that one has a duty to look after ones children. But importantly, the sceptic can account for this in the causal explanation. Given what I have said about how natural selection may have altered our emotional structures to create a feeling that certain actions are ‘called for’ or ‘demanded’ then we will be lead to believe that certain moral prescriptions are self-evident when they are in fact false. If it adaptive to believe one should look after their children, then it is even more adaptive to believe that it is an external, self-evident moral truth that one should look after ones children irrespective of whether this self-evidence claim is true. Therefore we may feel that certain moral propositions are self-evident even if they are false and our analogy will be more like setting off into a fake Caribbean with many false Bermuda’s and trying to find the real one without any means to steer (White 2010, 589). This does not rule out moral realism as an accurate account of moral properties but leaves us to decide which of these competing explanations is better and as the moral sceptic does not need to posit the extra entities of moral facts their explanation seems more parsimonious.

4.3 The Possibility of Asserting a Relation between Moral Facts and Evolutionary Forces

Having looked at and rejected the plausibility of the moral realist denying any relation between evolutionary forces and moral facts, I am now in a position to look at the possibility of asserting there is a relation and what sort of relation may vindicate moral realism. At first glance this seems the more promising avenue given the causal premise. We think that evolutionary forces have played an important role in forming our moral judgements and we think that our moral judgements reference independent moral facts, therefore, it seems most likely that there is some link between these two areas (Street 2006, 125). Further, if we can successfully link evolutionary forces and moral truths we no longer have to try and explain a massive coincidence and will have given at least a rough answer to any general epistemological worries about how we can access moral truths. To answer this I first need to establish exactly what kind of relation exists between evolutionary forces and moral truth.

On the face of it the most attractive option is what Street calls the ‘tracking account’. Because it was advantageous to our reproductive fitness, human beings evolved to track moral truths (Street 2006, 125). Importantly, this is a scientific account of the origins of a particular psychological mechanism that humans possess, as such it is subject to philosophical scrutiny against other scientific theories of the origins of our moral beliefs.

To assess this ‘tracking account’ Street proposes an alternative ‘adaptive link account’ (Street 2006, 127). The ‘tracking account’ stated that making true moral judgements was beneficial for our ancestors and they therefore evolved to make such judgements. By contrast the ‘adaptive link account’ states that the tendency to make certain moral beliefs was reproductively advantageous irrespective of their truth value and therefore natural selection promoted individuals who made such judgements (Street 2006, 127). In this view the human capacity to make moral judgements is a mechanism that allowed our ancestors to forge adaptive links to our environments similar to the reflective avoidance of hot surfaces, or the closing of a venus fly trap.

There is of course a significant difference between simple hardwired mechanisms like reflexes and a conscious mental state subject to reflection and revision. However, the analogy persists when we consider their functional roles from an evolutionary standpoint; “to get the organism to respond to its circumstances in a way that is adaptive” (Street 2006, 128). Moral judgements create this response by creating a concept of certain actions being ‘called for’ or demanded’ (and the opposite for actions deemed immoral) rather than unthinking reflexes but the purpose is still the same.

The difference between the tracking account and the adaptive link account concerns why we make the moral judgements we do and, in particular, why these judgements were beneficial to our ancestor’s reproductive fitness (Street 2006, 129). In the tracking account particular moral judgements were true and it was beneficial to grasp true moral beliefs. In the adaptive link account particular moral judgements were beneficial because believing them, and acting upon them, forged an adaptive link to our ancestors environment. As I will show, there are three reasons why the adaptive link account is the superior scientific account of the phenomena of moral beliefs.

First, the adaptive link account is more parsimonious than the tracking account. The tracking account posits extra independent moral truths, knowledge of which was beneficial to our ancestors’ reproductive success. By contrast the adaptive link account only relies on the uncontroversial idea that certain psychological mechanisms can regulate actions to create adaptive links to an organism’s environment, something the tracking account is also committed too, and no extra entities need to be postulated (Street 2006, 129).

Second, the adaptive link account is clearer than the tracking account. The tracking account is actually rather vague once properly examined. In particular, it cannot give an account of why only true moral beliefs are beneficial to reproductive fitness (Street 2006, 130). Presumably these moral truths caused our ancestors to forge adaptive links to their environment, but why do only true moral beliefs do this? Unless moral truths consist of the

judgements that are best at promoting an individual's reproductive fitness (which would make moral truths mind-dependent and violate the assumption of objectivism) the question remains why do only true moral beliefs provide an adaptive link? Back in the first chapter I explored the idea that truth in any field would benefit reproductive success and found this claim to be false. In fields such as the detection of medium sized objects a Milvian Bridge linking truth to pragmatic success is available and natural selection will favour individuals who make true, or usually true, judgements, but moral truths do not have this feature (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013, 140). If there is no innate tendency to prefer true moral beliefs then the realist will need to posit some other reason why truth is pragmatically beneficial, something they have yet to do.

Third, the adaptive link account is better at explaining the actual content of the moral judgements that humans do in fact make. We judge survival to be beneficial, protecting our children to be necessary and feel a sense of responsibility to help those who have helped us. As I have already discussed all of these moral judgements roughly match up to the ones that we would expect natural selection to promote in organisms such as us. It seems then that there is a strong correlation between the moral beliefs we hold and the moral beliefs we would expect to hold if the adaptive link account was correct. By contrast the tracking account can only explain this coincidence by answering that we have such judgements because they are true, which adds no explanatory power (Street 2006, 132).

The adaptive link account is vastly preferable to the tracking account from a scientific perspective and therefore the tracking account cannot serve as the scientific account of the origins of our moral beliefs that it claims to be. However, the realist is not limited to just the tracking account as an explanation of the origins of our moral belief. Instead the realist could surely posit any range of possible relationships between evolutionary forces and moral truth. However, Street argues, this is not the case and the tracking account is actually the realist's best option (Street 2006, 134).

The nature of mind-independent moral realism is that any moral truths must be true independent of any moral beliefs we, or anyone else, does, or could, hold. However, given that our evolutionary history has deeply influenced our moral beliefs, to avoid the sceptical conclusion that these beliefs are reflective of our evolutionary history rather than independent moral truths, we must posit that our moral beliefs tracked moral truths. Selective pressures may have pushed us toward, away from or in a completely random direction with respect to moral truth. These last two options will lead to the sceptical conclusion I explored when considering no relation, evolution would have acted as a massive distorting force in such a scenario, and therefore the moral realist must take the first option that selective pressures

pushed us toward moral truths (Street 2006, 135). While this may be true, where Street goes wrong in this section of her argument is to assume that the tracking account is the only possible account in which selective pressures push us toward moral truths. As I will show David Enoch's third factor account shows how we do not need the direct link that the tracking account posits.

4.4 Asserting a Relation: Objective, Acausal Properties

David Enoch argues that the Evolutionary Debunking Argument is just one particular instance of the epistemological challenge faced by realism in any field in which it posits independent, acausal facts (Enoch 2010, 414). Such facts have no causal effect upon the world we observe and are not constituted by any mental states we may have, as such, it is unclear how we could ever have epistemic access to them. The most common move made by the realist is reference to rational reflection but, as I have already shown, this reference is problematic and Enoch wishes to avoid using this move as much as possible. Instead Enoch will propose a third factor account in which evolutionary forces and moral facts share a third factor that explains their indirect relationship (Enoch 2010, 430).

Before I get to the core of Enoch's argument however, it is worthwhile to explore this general epistemological challenge and how it fits with the EDA as I have described it. Any incidence of correlation between our beliefs and supposedly independent truths needs explanation. Enoch uses the example of fictional Josh and his beliefs about a Nepalese village (Enoch 2010, 421). Suppose Josh has many beliefs about a distant Nepalese village and these beliefs are mostly true. What we would expect is some reason why these beliefs would be true, presumably there is some causal explanation, Josh went to the village or talked to someone who had been. However, if we are talking about acausal, independent properties like those posited by some realists in mathematics and ethics, this causal explanation is not available. How then can we account for the coincidence between our moral, or mathematical, beliefs and moral, or mathematical, truths that the realist believes in? To many this should seem analogous to Hartry Field's famous argument against mathematical Platonism; how can we account for the amazing coincidence between the truths mathematicians believe in and the actual mathematical truths if these mathematical truths are acausal and could not therefore, have caused these beliefs (Field 1989). This analogy is due to Field's challenge to mathematical Platonism is another instance of the epistemological challenge that Enoch is referencing.

In regards to the moral case Enoch writes "very often when we accept a normative judgement j , it is indeed true that j ; and very often when we do not accept normative

judgement j , it is indeed false that j ” (Enoch 2010, 421). But given a robust view of realism how can this be true. How can independent moral truths effect our moral judgements? In the contrast case, medium sized physical objects, the presence of causal relations make this an easy explanation. However, these relations are unavailable for the moral realist and the epistemic challenge therefore, applies to all metaethical theories that postulate non-causal, independent moral truths. If a brute correlation between normative judgements and normative truths is too implausible and no other explanation is available, then the realist must conclude there is no correlation between our moral judgements and truth. Knowing this, there is no justification for moral beliefs and moral realism is epistemologically untenable.

The vindication of moral realism will therefore rely on our ability to explain the correlation between our moral beliefs and moral truths. The most obvious explanation of a correlation between two phenomena is that one caused the other, that either the A-facts caused the B-facts or vice versa (Enoch 2010, 429). In our moral case this is the idea that either moral truths caused moral judgements or that moral judgements caused moral truth. As I have mentioned, for the robust realist, the first option is untenable as the moral truths are acausal by nature and cannot therefore cause anything. The second option is also untenable for the moral realist as to take this approach is to admit that moral truths are made by moral judgements in some manner, a non-realist position. Instead what Enoch seeks to do is to posit C-facts that serve as the common cause of both the A-facts and the B-facts explaining the correlation without resorting to admitting that one of these facts caused the other (Enoch 2010, 430).

If we assume that survival is good, that it is by-and-large better than the alternative and note that the evolutionary forces that shaped our moral judgements will, approximately, favour survival of the organism making the moral judgements, we can get our common C-facts that are responsible for both the A-facts and B-facts (Enoch 2010, 430). If we assume that survival is good we can use this as the C-fact that explain the indirect relationship between moral judgements and moral truths. Moral judgements will, through the influence of natural selection, tend toward the content that promotes the survival of the host organism. Moral truth will, due to the fact that survival is good, tend toward propositions that promote this good. Therefore, even though there will not be a perfect match, our moral judgements will tend toward moral truths as I have established a harmony between the two phenomena.

While Enoch’s account does nicely bring together A-facts and B-facts without relying on a direct relationship between them, it ultimately fails because it relies on the unjustified assumption that survival is a moral good. Survival may be a prudential good and certainly seems to fit the preferences of the organism in question in most cases, however, this does not

give it the status of an objective moral good. Enoch does try to justify survival's status as a moral good by appealing to the fact that it is necessary for the fulfilment of one's interest, however, exactly the same argument still applies to this, the fulfilment of one's interests may be a prudential good but that does not mean it is a moral good (Enoch 2010, 433). To put it formally Enoch argues that:

- 1) One's survival allows the fulfilment of ones interests
- 3) Therefore one's survival is morally good

However, this relies on the missing assumption

- 2) The fulfilment of one's interest is a moral good

And this new premise is susceptible to the EDA. Although a prudential good, the fulfilment of ones interests is not a moral good for we can still apply Street's, or the general epistemological, challenge to it. Organisms that valued their survival or the fulfilment of their interests are clearly more likely to survive and reproduce than organisms that do the opposite, valuing survival is in fact one of Street's key examples of a moral judgement we would expect natural selection to push us toward. Given this, a better explanation of this belief is the adaptive link account rather than the tracking account as I explained earlier (Street 2006, 129). Alternatively, within the epistemological challenge, how do we have access to this supposedly acausal, independent truth that survival is a moral truth?

What Enoch has proven then, is that, if survival is a moral good, then we can use rational reflection to expand this idea into a wider moral system, not a completely uninteresting thesis. However, without justifying the belief that survival is an acausal, objective moral belief this is not a thesis that has any bearing on the EDA. This is made clear when we remember what the EDA is challenging. Street explicitly says that proving a single mind-independent moral proposition to be true would defeat the EDA and justify moral realism (Street 2006, 111). Enoch's challenge, that if we have a single moral proposition we can develop a complex moral code from this, does not answer any of Street's worries and will fail as a challenge to the EDA.

4.5 Asserting a Relation: Moral Naturalism

I started this chapter by looking at the possibility of the realist denying any relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth and found that this lead to the sceptical conclusion that our moral judgements are hopelessly off track. I then looked at the possibility of a robust realism which posits objective acausal properties and found that we can have no epistemic access to such properties and therefore we also encounter the sceptical conclusion. But what about varieties of realism which do not posit acausal moral properties, in particular,

can varieties of moral naturalism that argue moral properties are identical to certain natural properties avoid this sceptical conclusion? At first glance this seems more likely than the acausal properties of robust realism, but as I will show, this method too encounters problems.

David Copp argues that Street slightly misrepresents her argument when she says that our moral beliefs need to track moral truths for moral realism to be epistemically justified (Copp 2008, 194). Instead, our moral beliefs only need to track truth closely enough that the other factors, such as culture and rational reflection, can account for any difference. Therefore, moral beliefs only need to roughly line up with the moral truths and then the influence of other factors will correct any possible mistakes. Copp calls this new relation that quasi-tracking account and it helps moral naturalism solve the problem of how our moral beliefs can track moral truths as now we only need moral truth to loosely align with the expected moral beliefs generated by the forces of natural selection (Copp 2008, 195).

Copp argues that to successfully respond to the Darwinian hypothesis moral naturalists needs to do three things. They need to accept the quasi-tracking thesis, they need to accept the adaptive link account and they need to explain why if our moral psychology was formed in accord with the adaptive link account it is likely that our moral beliefs tend to quasi-track the truth (Copp 2008, 198). Copp's society-centered theory does all of these things.

The society centered view is a kind of moral functionalism that argues that we need to live in societies because we have different talents and interests and without a functioning society these differences would cause human interactions to break down and social interactions would fall apart (Copp 2008, 198). For a society to be successful we need to have a set of shared norms, a social moral code, which provides us with a set of rules governing our societal interactions. Because different moral codes will have differing abilities to achieve the goal we want, the successful functioning of society, we also have distinct moral prescriptions. A moral proposition will be true if and only if a corresponding moral standard has the relevant truth-grounding standard. The moral code that would best serve the basic needs of a society, if it were to serve as the societal moral code in that society becomes our moral truth (Copp 2008, 199).

How then does this theory help the moral naturalist avoid the Darwinian hypothesis? Copp argues that the moral prescriptions that result from his society-centered view will roughly match up with the moral prescriptions that we would expect to result from the forces of natural selection as both have a shared purpose in maintaining the functioning of society (Copp 2008, 202). Given the nature of human circumstances, we are social creatures and societies benefit our reproductive fitness. Further, as I have explored having a shared moral

code is also of a benefit in regulating behaviour. Therefore, moral beliefs generated from Copp's society-centered view will have many overlaps and similarities with moral beliefs generated from the forces and natural selection. Any remaining differences will be adjusted by the other factors that go into the creation of our moral beliefs, cultural, rational reflection or whatever, and the society-centered view can be seen as quasi-tracking the moral truths.

But how can we justify the society-centered view as the best guide to moral truth? Importantly, is any belief in the society centered view simply the result of our moral intuitions which are susceptible to the Darwinian hypothesis? Here Copp has one final point to make in defence of his society-centered view. Although the society-centered view may indeed be implausible if it contradicted our moral intuitions after appropriate deliberation, we still have good reasons, independent of our moral intuitions to believe in it (Copp 2008, 203). Copp argues that if a Martian philosopher with completely different intuitions were to come to Earth and observe the workings of humans they too may very well come to the belief that the society-centered view is the correct account of morality (Copp 2008, 203). Therefore, the justification of Copp's society centered-view is not dependent upon our evolutionarily influenced moral intuitions.

This time however, it is Copp who is guilty of misrepresenting an argument. In particular he is guilty of not clarifying whether his theory has normative implications or not. Either the society-centered theory is normatively prescriptive, in which case it is still susceptible to the Darwinian hypothesis, or it is not normatively prescriptive and is not therefore a moral realist position (Street 2008, 213).

If we take the reading that the society-centered view does have normative prescriptions, it does make claims about how to live, then we have the broad range of substantive normative claims that we require from moral realism. As I covered in chapter two, the literal construal of moral discourse requires that moral judgements have a prescriptive element to them. But this reading is incapable of accounting for the striking coincidence between the independent normative truth realism posits and the normative beliefs we would expect natural selection to push us toward. Instead the society-centered view simply assumes a large number of substantive views and then notes that these coincide with the view evolutionary forces would push us toward. While this view does refine and prune certain moral beliefs it does not actually answer the question posed by the Darwinian hypothesis but simply reasserts the coincidence that we want explained (Street 2008, 213). To best understand this point it is worth going back and looking at Street's original criticism of moral naturalism.

On the face of it moral naturalism seems a plausible counter to the Darwinian dilemma, moral facts are natural facts just like those about cliffs, predators and food. Surely then, as we have evolved to track these natural facts we could also have evolved to track the natural moral facts. However, the difficulties arise when I consider how we can discover the natural-normative identities that link the natural and moral facts (Street 2006, 139). To discover these identities we need to look at our best moral theories and our best theories about the world and combine them ensuring there are no inconsistencies and the natural facts that best match our moral intuitions and theories are posited as part of the independent natural-normative identities that make up moral naturalism. However, this process relies on our existing moral intuitions that are susceptible to the Darwinian hypothesis. Again Hume's No Ought From Is thesis comes into play here as we cannot get moral facts from natural facts alone and so will need to already assume some moral facts that are generated by moral intuitions. But these moral intuitions are "thoroughly saturated by evolutionary forces" and the realist now faces the dilemma all over again (Street 2006, 114).

What about if we take the alternative reading of Copp, if we do not suppose that the society-centered view has normative prescriptions and is instead simply an account of our moral practices? The society-centered view in this reading becomes an account of the nature and truth-conditions of the social phenomena of morality and leaves it at that. There is no information given about how we ought to act or if we ought to follow the precepts of the society-centered view. Such an account then becomes similar to an explanation of the laws of Apartheid or the rules of Tennis (Street 2008, 217). The Martian philosopher can certainly understand this aspect but the prescriptions of morality will not be applied to him. I believe this is where some of the misrepresentation of Copp's argument becomes most obvious. The Martian philosopher can understand the anthropological account of human moral judgements that the non-normative reading of the society-centered view gives. Copp then uses this fact to give an account of how the Martian philosopher feels the prescriptions of the normative reading of the society-centered view. However, this second move fails as the addition of normative prescriptions will rely on the particular moral intuitions of the observer, particular moral intuitions that are the result of our evolutionary past and will not be applicable to the Martian philosopher. The non-normative society-centered view is not realist in the way we have been talking about, it is instead an anthropological account, and is not the target of the Darwinian dilemma.

While this may defeat one brand of moral naturalism, defeating each brand of moral naturalism one-by-one is not an attractive option for the proponent of the EDA. Instead I need to provide a general schema for how we can respond to such theories. The best way we can

counter moral naturalism in general and rule it out is a move I have already explored, my response to Enoch's third factor account.

Enoch's third factor account postulated that both evolutionary influences and moral truth had a third factor that linked the two together and therefore, even though they were not directly linked, we still had reason to believe that our moral judgements reflected moral truths (Enoch 2010, 430). However, this third factor, the idea that survival was a moral good, was unjustified because it relied on an existing moral intuition that was itself susceptible to the Darwinian hypothesis. Copp's argument can be seen in the same light. Copp is arguing that maintaining the functioning of society is a moral good, however, this claim relies on our existing moral intuition which is the product of natural selection and therefore is also susceptible to the EDA in the way that Enoch's third factor is (Copp 2008, 203). In fact, all accounts of synthetic moral naturalism that seek to ground moral truths in natural facts will run into this problem. The particular natural facts that the moral facts are identified with will need to be justified. This justification will rely on our existing moral intuitions as natural facts cannot give us moral facts alone; Hume's No Ought From Is thesis. However these existing moral intuitions are themselves still susceptible to the Darwinian dilemma. Therefore moral naturalism cannot avoid the epistemological premise of the EDA. To put it formally:

- 1) Synthetic moral naturalism relies on identifying the moral facts with certain natural facts
- 2) This identity will need to be justified,
- 3) We cannot justify this identity with other natural facts alone; some existing moral intuitions will be needed.
- 4) But any existing moral intuitions will be susceptible to the Darwinian dilemma in the same way that any moral intuitions are.
- 5) Therefore moral naturalism cannot avoid the Darwinian dilemma.

The moral realist could posit a theory of analytic moral naturalism to avoid having to justify their natural-normative identities. However, as I covered in the second chapter, we have good reasons to believe that such a plan is unlikely to be successful as it will run into some form of the Open Question Argument. Unless the moral realist can give us such an analytic identity or defeat the arguments I have already given against the possibility of such an identity, we may continue to assume that such an analytic identity does not exist.

At first glance moral naturalism seems a more attractive option for the moral realist to take as a response to the Darwinian dilemma posed by Street. It may be possible to explain our ability to track moral facts in the same way that we can track other natural facts about the world. However, this turns out not to be the case. Ultimately, synthetic moral naturalist

explanations will at some stage have to justify the particular natural-normative identities they posit and will have to do so with reference to existing moral intuitions which are themselves susceptible to the Darwinian dilemma. All synthetic moral naturalism does is push the Darwinian dilemma back from the immediate moral judgements we make to the natural-normative identities that justify these judgements. Analytic moral naturalism is also unlikely to save moral naturalism as it will run into the Open Question Argument all over again.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to justify the causal premise of the EDA. If successful, this justification would result in the EDA being a sound argument that any theory of objective moral facts will have to respond to before it can be taken seriously. Looking at the work of Sharon Street and various responses from moral realists I found that the epistemic premise of the EDA fits with our best current theories about the nature of natural selection and objective moral principles. As such, unless the realist can provide an argument about why our assumptions about these theories are incorrect, the realist cannot disprove the epistemic premise of the EDA.

I started this justification by looking at the options available for the moral realist if they do not assert a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. The realist who goes down this route runs into the problem of explaining how our moral judgements could be accurate representations of moral truth given the large distorting influence of evolutionary forces (Street 2006). While the realist could propose a theory where moral truths are self-evident and therefore we may stumble across moral truth despite the distorting influence of natural selection, I showed that this idea was problematic (White 2010). The moral sceptic can also account for the supposed self-evidence of moral truths without postulating that moral facts exist. The causal story of the origins of moral belief argued that it is beneficial from a reproductive standpoint for moral beliefs to act as external, conversation stoppers and one way they can achieve this standard is if they appear to us as self-evident. The idea of self-evident moral truths will then turn into inference to the best explanation, and the best explanation will be the one that does not need to posit the extra entity of moral facts. For the moral realist to successfully use the self-evident defence they will need to provide extra reasons why moral propositions are in fact self-evident such that this is a better explanation than the evolutionary account of why we would think they are self-evident.

From here I looked at the possibility of the moral realist asserting a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. Street argued that such an account must be a tracking account and that the tracking account fails on scientific grounds (Street 2006). To avoid the

sceptical conclusion that evolutionary forces have had a distorting effect on our moral judgements, the realist must assert there is a positive relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth; that evolutionary forces have pushed us to evolve to track moral truth. However, this tracking account fails on scientific grounds when compared to the adaptive link account. The adaptive link account argues that we formed moral beliefs because they influenced us to act in ways that benefited our reproductive success. This account is more parsimonious, clearer and better explains the content of our moral beliefs than the tracking account and therefore Street concludes, the realist ought not assert a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth to avoid the epistemic premise of the EDA (Street 2006). However, as I showed this conclusion was a bit premature.

David Enoch's third factor account argues that, while evolutionary forces and moral truth do not have a direct relation, they share a common third factor that will guide their output (Enoch 2010). If survival is a moral good then moral judgements that aim toward survival will be generally true. Evolutionary forces will also trend toward promoting the survival of their host organism. For this reason we will have a harmony between evolutionarily produced moral judgements and objective moral truth despite the lack of a direct relation between them. However, as I showed, Enoch's third factor fails as a response to the EDA as it already assumes the truth of a moral intuition. The EDA argues that all our moral intuitions are the product of our evolutionary past and have no reference to moral truth, importantly this includes the moral intuition that survival is a moral good. Enoch's third factor account cannot stand as an objection to the EDA as it relies on a moral intuition that is susceptible to the EDA.

From here I went on to look at moral naturalism as a response to the EDA and, in particular, David Copp's society-centered view. Copp argued that a theory of moral naturalism where the moral truths align roughly with the moral judgements we would expect natural selection to favour is capable of avoiding the EDA (Copp 2008). In such theories we will have a harmony between evolutionarily produced moral judgements and moral truth similar to Enoch's third factor account. However, Street argued that all such naturalistic theories achieve is to push the EDA back to the level of the natural-normative identities the particular brand of moral naturalism posits (Street 2008). If the identity between the natural facts and the moral facts is synthetic then it will rely on existing moral intuitions. However, these moral intuitions are susceptible to the EDA. This is similar to my argument against Enoch's third factor account. Moral naturalism must either posit an analytic or synthetic link between natural facts and moral facts. An analytic link seems unlikely as I addressed in the second chapter. A synthetic link is also problematic as such synthetic links will rely on

existing moral intuitions that are susceptible to the EDA. Therefore moral naturalism is unlikely to successfully defeat the causal premise of the EDA.

The only way we can save the idea that objective moral truths and evolutionary forces have no relation yet moral judgements accurately reflect moral truths is by arguing that moral facts are self-evident. However, this approach runs into the problem of explaining this belief in self-evidence better than our evolutionary explanation that does not posit moral facts. Alternatively the moral realist may assert a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth. The best avenue for such a relation will rely on a naturalistic conception of the moral facts. However, as I showed, both a synthetic identity and an analytic identity are problematic approaches. Therefore, unless the moral realist can give us some alternate reasons why we should believe moral truths are self-evident or can explain how we can have an analytic or synthetic link between evolutionary forces and moral truth our epistemic premise will stand.

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

If our epistemic premise stands, and the moral realist cannot provide any further arguments against our other premises we are left with a completed EDA:

Revised Causal Premise: Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

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

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore,

Moral Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified.

Conclusion

I started this thesis by contrasting the Evolutionary Debunking Argument with historical attempts to derive metaethical conclusions from the theory of evolution. This contrast showed why the historical arguments failed and why the EDA avoids these problems.

The historical arguments of Social Darwinism involved deriving metaphysical conclusions about moral facts from natural facts about the world (Spencer 1857). However, as we saw this involved a move from an ought to an is and identified goodness with a naturalistic predicate. This meant Social Darwinism was vulnerable to David Hume's No Ought From Is and G. E. Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy (Hume 2006) (Moore 1980). By contrast, the EDA does not make metaphysical claims about moral facts. Instead Michael Ruse's argument used the facts of natural selection to derive facts about our moral sense (Ruse 1986).

I then looked at how this epistemological argument fits into other fields and if there was a companion in guilt that the moral realist could appeal to. John S. Wilkins and Paul E. Griffiths argued that any field where truth is linked to reproductive success will enjoy a Milvian Bridge that allows it to avoid the EDA (Wilkins and Griffiths 2013). Fields such as common-sense and scientific beliefs will use this Milvian Bridge to avoid the epistemic side of the EDA. However, I showed that moral and religious beliefs cannot provide this Milvian Bridge as there is no link from truth to reproductive success.

From here I turned to particular formulations of the EDA. Guy Kahane provided the framework for my subsequent analysis and raised some initial concerns with the premises (Kahane 2011). The biggest questions were can we establish whether all of our moral beliefs were the result of our evolutionary history? And is there a possible link from evolutionary forces to moral truth?

I then looked at Sharon Street's arguments to show how they fitted into the framework we used and how they could be used to address the concerns we had with the EDA. I showed that Street argued the nature of natural selection is such that it will always promote reproductive success not truth and will be pervasive enough to affect all our evaluative beliefs (Street 2006). However we also saw a problem with Street's argument.

Sharon Street moved beyond moral judgements to all evaluative beliefs. However, the EDA relies on a metaethical assumption of objectivism and this assumption is not present in evaluative discourse. This resulted in an epistemic link from truth to reproductive success in the wider field of evaluative discourse and defeats such an EDA.

The remainder of my first chapter outlined how we can tackle this problem for the moral EDA. Drawing from the work of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord I showed that we can answer the question of whether moral discourse contains an assumption of objectivism by answering whether the ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse requires an objective understanding of the moral properties to be ‘literally true’ (Sayre-McCord 1988).

In the second chapter I sought to answer this question and therefore justify the metaethical assumption:

Metaethical Assumption: Objectivism gives us the correct account of moral concepts and properties.

Having narrowed down the question to does the literal construal of moral discourse entail objectivism? I started this answer by looking at Christine Korsgaard’s argument that only objectivism can give us the normativity we expect from morality (Korsgaard 1996). Although this argument was far from conclusive, it did suggest that mind-dependent moral properties are not reflective of the ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse.

This led us to my main argument in favour of the metaethical assumption; reconstructing Moore’s Open Question Argument will lead us to believe that naturalistic accounts of morality (of which mind-dependent morality is one) are likely to be epistemologically untenable. The only way for moral naturalism to escape the OQA is by posing an analytic or synthetic identity between moral facts and natural facts. I showed that an analytic link was an unlikely avenue for the moral realist as it led back to the OQA. The alternative, a synthetic link, required an analytic account of the causal effects of goodness also an unlikely avenue. Therefore Charles Pigden’s reconstruction of the OQA led us to the conclusion that objectivism is likely to be the only epistemologically viable form of moral realism (Pigden 2011).

This however was a probabilistic claim based off one argument. To strengthen this claim I turned to the work of Gilbert Harman. Harman argued that, since moral facts do not play a causal role in our best scientific theories, we cannot give an empirical account of moral facts (Harman 1988). Although Cornell Realist such as Nicholas Sturgeon have criticised Harman, I showed that these criticisms contained an unjustified necessity claim that ensured they failed (Sturgeon 2012). As a synthetic identity would require an empirical account of the moral facts, we cannot provide a synthetic identity and the conclusions from the reconstructed OQA is strengthened.

These arguments led us to the conclusion that objectivism is likely the only epistemologically viable ‘literal construal’ of moral discourse. Although it is possible the realist may be able to give an analytic or synthetic link between natural and moral facts, I

have given strong reasons why this is unlikely and the epistemological assumption is justified as likely to be true.

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

My third chapter addressed the causal premise of the EDA:

Causal Premise: Our evolutionary history explains why we have the moral beliefs we have (Kahane 2011).

I started by determining exactly what interpretation of the causal premise was needed to turn the EDA into a sound argument. The best interpretation of the causal premise was as the claim that all of our moral judgements have some evolutionary influence and that this influence is great enough that it cannot be overridden. I then turned to arguments to justify this claim.

Street argued that different moral beliefs would have vastly different effects on our reproductive fitness. Certain moral beliefs would simply be untenable due to the extreme negative effects such beliefs would have on an organism's reproductive fitness (Street 2006). In fact natural selection will favour organisms who possess even slight adaptations and therefore the part of our moral judgements that is the product of our evolutionary history will always push toward reproductive fitness not moral truth.

I then turned to Richard Joyce's arguments to explore the extent of the evolutionary influence of our moral judgements. Joyce argued that our moral sense is most likely an evolved capacity that manipulated existing emotional mechanisms to project moral properties onto the world (Joyce 2007). While not conclusive, Joyce's argument stands as an inference to the best explanation and, unless the moral realist can give us a superior explanation of the origins of our moral sense that does not entail it being an evolved capacity, this argument will hold.

I ended this chapter by turning back to Street and her argument that other factors cannot override the influence of evolutionary forces (Street 2006). I showed that rational reflection could not save the realist as it relies on existing moral intuition. Therefore our evolutionary produced moral sense is unavoidably the source of our moral judgements.

Revised Causal Premise: Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

My final chapter then turned to the epistemic premise of the EDA:

Epistemic Premise: Evolution is not a truth-tracking process with respect to moral truth. (Kahane 2011)

My justification for this premise was based around Street's argument that the realist may either assert or deny a relation between moral truth and evolutionary forces but that either option was problematic and would lead to a sceptical conclusion.

If the realist denies any relation they need an account of how our moral judgements are reflective of moral truth if they are the result of the off-track process of evolution (Street 2006). I looked at the idea that self-evident moral truths may solve this concern (White 2010). However I showed that the moral sceptic can also account for this supposed self-evidence without positing the existence of moral facts. Absent of any further evidence this sceptical explanation will be preferable as it does not feature the extra ontological commitment of moral facts.

I then turned to Street's arguments against the realist asserting a relation between evolutionary forces and moral truth (Street 2006). I showed that Street's proposed tracking account failed on scientific grounds compared to the adaptive link account. However, Street's argument that the realist is committed to the tracking account was premature.

David Enoch proposed a third factor account where moral truth and evolutionary forces are not directly linked but instead share a common third factor, survival (Enoch 2010). While this account nicely provided a harmony in expected judgements between the two forces, it ultimately failed because it was committed to already holding the assumption that survival is a moral good, precisely the sort of moral intuition the EDA targets.

I finished this chapter by looking at moral naturalism as a response to the EDA. David Copp argued that any naturalistic conception of morality that would result in moral truths that roughly aligned with the judgements we would expect evolutionary forces to promote could avoid the EDA (Copp 2008). However, I showed that this just pushed the EDA back to the level of the natural-normative identities moral naturalism posits (Street 2008). These identities will ultimately rely on our moral intuitions that are susceptible to the EDA and moral naturalism cannot escape the epistemic premise.

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

I have now constructed a fully justified EDA. The realist may try and propose an analytic or synthetic identity between natural and moral facts, provide a different causal story that does not directly link our moral sense to our evolutionary past, or give some account of how self-evident moral propositions are necessary. Such moves may be possible, I have not deductively ruled them out, however, I have given good evidence why they are unlikely to be productive avenues for the moral realist. My arguments have firmly put the burden of proof

back on the moral realist and, in absence of any successful counter arguments, the moral EDA holds.

Revised Causal Premise: Human moral judgements are unavoidably influenced by human evolutionary history.

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

Epistemological Assumption: Objectivism gives the only justifiable account of moral concepts and properties.

Therefore,

Moral Scepticism: None of our moral beliefs are justified.

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