This article is from
Journal of Creation **36**(2):116–123, August 2022

What's wrong with being wrong: a closer look at evolutionary ethics—part 1

by Marc Kay

Ethics is one of several disciplines within philosophy. Evolutionists have long grappled with the problem of how morality first arose. Suggested solutions are many, though all share a belief that morality (or a proto-morality) began in a non-human ancestor. Initially, this paper examines the major theories and explains why these attempts are pseudo-explanations and ultimately fail. What empirical data exist have been misused or question-begged into relevance. Subsequent parts focus on metaethics, neuroscience, logical fallacies generated by evolutionary metaethics, and finally a creationist model of metaethics. This first part throws a spotlight upon the intractable problems a naturalistic worldview generates accounting for morality.[1]

"The secret of success is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake those, you've got it made." (Groucho Marx)

In a canny Chip Dunham cartoon, a dog's master, pictured leaving his house, tells the canine that if it's good while he's away, on his return it will get some sausages, seen cooking on the stove in the background. With the master now absent, the next frame has the dog perched on top of

Figure 1. Can evolution deliver any rock-solid certainty or is morality, at best, wishful thinking, a deceitful

several well-balanced objects, leaning over the stove and munching away. The dog's thought bubble says, "Oh, I'm good, pal." While the master in the cartoon is intending an ethical good, his pet interprets it as an instrumental one.

> survival apparatus that ultimately places oneself ahead of others?

Dunham's quirky sketch soundly captures the problem ethical philosophers have struggled with throughout this discipline's lengthy history. As Mark Rowlands points out, there is often, though not necessarily, a great distance between what someone wants because they have interests which require satisfying and acts which are the ethically right (or wrong) thing to do.[2] As the cartoonist humorously highlighted, people regularly conflate *prudential* and *instrumental* reasons with *ethical* considerations for doing one thing rather than another.[3] This difference will become sharply evident as the evolutionary explanations for acting morally are explored.

My multi-part paper will evaluate epistemologies, the 'how-and-what-we-know' metaphysics science, drawn from, or dependent on, an evolutionary worldview. This dovetails with an appraisal of the metaethical[4,5] explanations which rely on an evolutionary aetiology, or, better still, ontology. Although operating within definitionally distinct realms, the ontological and epistemological will inevitably overlap as both share a common origins worldview.

Moral philosophers (and evolutionary scientists!) are divided over the source, the final ontological grounding of the ethical. Is it a brute fact, non-naturalistically 'existing' in its own world, not all that dissimilar from Plato's ideas? Is it an ultimate 'something' we cannot explain and must just accept? Or can the ethical be reduced to some non-ethical natural fact, like more effective survival or structures producing a more harmonious community?

One question which I will frequently return to is whether evolution could be a guide to moral difficulties. Attention will initially be focused upon altruism, a phenomenon counterintuitive to the marrow of evolution. I will examine the 'solutions' the evolutionary biologist and philosopher propose to deal with this extraordinary enigma.

As a coda I will point out that a creationist explanation will obviate the inherent complications and contradictions of an ethics steeped in evolutionary materialism. My proposed model, taking metaethics in a direction grounded in the far more secure ontology of God's revealed nature, should be taken as a work in progress and not the final word.

My hope is that it will initiate discussion, either developing it further or critiquing it. As I've mentioned elsewhere,[6] creationist ethical theory is urgently wanted and needs something more substantial, and acutely more apposite, than some reformulation of the hackneyed and woefully inadequate Divine Command Theory.[7,8]

Evolutionists are saying *what*?

Image: Name / Wikipedia, CC BY 3.0 [modified]

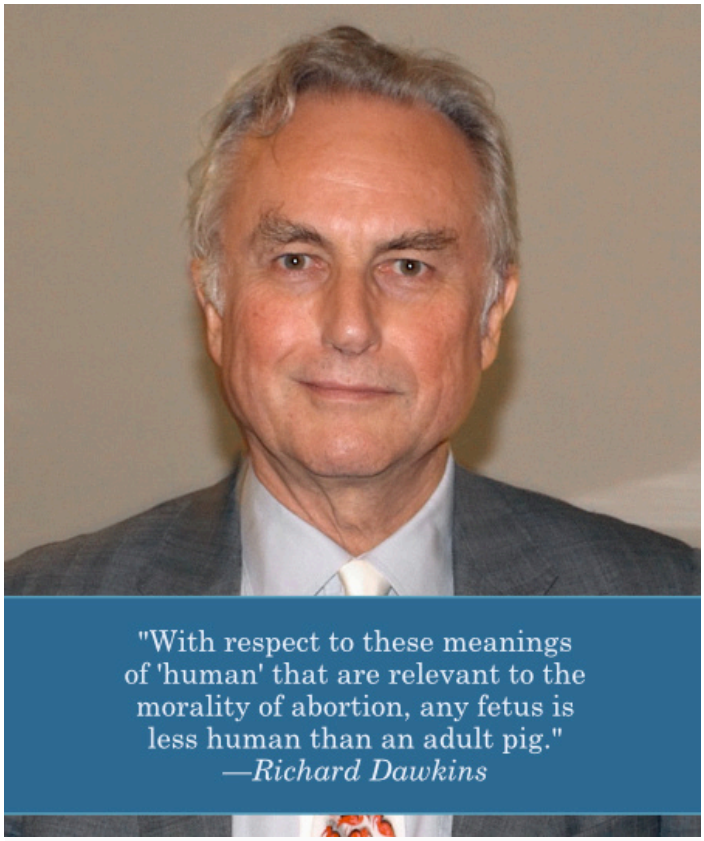

Figure 2. Dawkins' 'moral' compass can only lead to the dehumanisation of humans, as per his own words.

Richard Dawkins has rhetorically asked: "So why not just take the modern moral compass as it is, [it] having been worked out by moral philosophers and by a sort of discourse that takes place all the time as the centuries go by."[9] Despite his and many others' belief that philosophers have competently handled the ethics question, at least one notable evolutionist claims there is sufficient warrant "for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized."[10] E.O. Wilson's sometime collaborator, Michael Ruse, has concurred. In a partial washing-his-hands-of-it gesture, Ruse writes: "Frankly, I think there is only so far that a philosopher like myself can take the discussion. A naturalistic approach [to normative ethics] means … one puts oneself in the hands of the scientists."[11]

Stuart Kauffman boasted "Evolution is not the enemy of ethics but its first source."[12] Despite Kauffman's crow, for the evolutionary materialist, the origin and, especially, the justification of the ethical are insuperable problems. This quandary, ironically, also forms its trade secret; for, as the evolutionary biologist Michael Rose has written, "Darwinian theories of human nature are agreed that the ultimate foundation for human values is Darwinian fitness."[13] However 'fitness' is cashed out, the quagmire remains.

In opposition to Stephen Jay Gould's insistence that evolution has no adverse implications for religion, as laid out in his Nonoverlapping Magisteria essay,[14] it is clear from others that

evolution attacks and then removes the very foundations of theism and traditional morality. One commentator, understanding that there is no peaceful coexistence, put it this way:

> "Darwinism undermines both the idea that man is made in the image of God and the idea that man is a uniquely rational being. Furthermore, if Darwinism is correct, it is unlikely that any other support for the idea of human dignity will be found. The idea of human dignity turns out, therefore, to be the moral effluvium of a discredited metaphysics."[15]

After listing a number of, as he called them, indisputable 'facts', Darwin laid an axe at the root of this idea, something Gould apparently could not grasp:

> "The great principle of evolution stands up clear and firm ... . He who is not content to look, like a savage, at the phenomena of nature as disconnected, cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation ... . I am aware that the assumed instinctive belief in God has been used by many persons as an argument for His existence. But this is a rash argument [and] I am aware that the conclusions arrived at in this work will be denounced by some as highly irreligious ... . The birth both of the species and of the individual are equally parts of that grand sequence of events, which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance."[16]

The problem explained

The initial difficulty may be summed up roughly like this: how can something so suprasensible as morality, yet unquestionably real,[17] be explained on the basis of a purely naturalistic worldview, the very metaphysical presumption that evolution is bound by? Indeed, this apparent incommensurability led Guy Kahane to note that "The worry that the theory of evolution is incompatible with morality and value is as old as the theory itself."[18]

The paradox has not gone unnoticed by evolutionists, notwithstanding the overconfident trust placed in their worldview.[19] Sharon Street sees the challenge as "explain[ing] the relation between these evolutionary influences on our evaluative attitudes ... [and] independent evaluative truths."[20] Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober economically underscore the matter:

> "How, given that there are strong scientific reasons to suppose that selfishness (at least at the genetic level) is a primary mechanism of natural selection, did we humans come to be so strongly attached to the value of goodness? Or, to put it a bit differently, why

> don't we think it is good to be bad? For those who believe that morality is real, but that it cannot be explained or justified simply by resort to the theological assumption that a unique human propensity to goodness is a product of a divine grace, this is a hard problem, and an important one."[21]

Another commentator unintentionally reveals just how epistemologically challenging it is when an evolutionary worldview and the existence of morality are brought together:

> "I account for morality as an accidental capability produced, in its boundless stupidity, by a biological process which is normally opposed to the expression of such a capability."[22]

Charles Darwin understood how qualitatively special morality is, writing that it is the most important element that delineated man from beast.[23] Despite this, Darwin diminished morality's 'queerness'[24] by claiming that

> "… any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man."[25]

Indeed, nothing has changed: Darwin's words are the bedrock mantra for contemporary belief. In a *Nature* opinion piece, the following was claimed:

> "Morality is a product of evolutionary pressures that have shaped social cognitive and motivational mechanisms, which had already developed in human ancestors, into uniquely human forms of experience and behaviour. Non-human primates have a vast repertoire of social behaviours that can be interpreted as genuine forerunners of human morality."[26]

For anyone unfamiliar with the subject, the often quite abstruse and particularized discourse concerning the wished-for connect between evolution and morality buries and hides from public gaze an alarming issue. It's not just a polemic axe for the creationist; even strident atheists are alerted to the parlous gravity involved:

> "The recognition that our cognitive and motivational architecture is the product of natural selection raises the possibility that our moral concepts, moral intuitions, and moral sentiments might themselves be reflections of the evolutionary process. Indeed, this conclusion seems difficult to escape, given how natural selection works … . Natural selection favours designs on the basis of how well they promote their own reproduction, not on how well they promote moral behaviour."[27]

If our moral reactions are reduced to, and expressed by, the evolutionary process, there is a very real risk that evaluative vocabulary and meaning would be eliminated. For some, this is either inevitable or a very seductive alternative because it (at first blush) evades many of the problematic features associated with a naturalistic and material metaphysic. As one observer noted:

... if our goodness and values are ultimately predicated upon what serves our (very much non-moral) best interests, then morality is a sham.

> "If materialism is true, then human beings are large collections of small physical objects, and ontologically nothing more than that. It follows that any human being could be described, and described completely, in purely scientific terms."[28]

And so, the *moral* problem for the existence of morality is at last revealed: if our goodness and values are ultimately predicated upon what serves our (very much non-moral) best interests, then morality is a sham.[29]

The blurring of boundaries: ethics and evolution [dis]connected

In its most pared-back form, the current naturalistic[30] view sculptures a somewhat romantic tale. Relying on that intellectual operation known as fog displacement, unnoticed and unrecorded in the temporally distant past, among a subgroup of non-human creatures or prehumans, proto-moral inheritable behaviours appeared. These were as a result of genetic mutation, presenting those creatures with a survival advantage over their contemporaries. Obviously convinced a liberal application of Ockham's Razor will do the trick, the raconteur Daniel Dennett supplies the following exhaustive details for this event: "And then, one fine day, a mutation happened to arise."[31]

With respect to early humans as the progenitor of morality,

> "The received view among evolutionary theorists who believe that human morality can be given a selectionist explanation goes roughly like this. Morality developed and spread among small, scattered hunter-gatherer groups in the middle-to-late Pleistocene, where it was selected for the effect of managing patterns of interaction that resulted in costly intragroup conflicts. In particular, morality helped solve collective action problems by reducing free-riding, enabling individuals to resist temptations to act selfishly, and preventing dominant individuals from monopolizing the fruits of cooperation—generating an evolutionary return that was greater for each individual

than would have been possible if each had acted alone or as part of a group that did not cooperate effectively. The fruits of cooperation included (*inter alia*) higher foraging yields, enhanced warfare capabilities, territorial acquisition, the efficient management of common resources, and the resolution of internal disputes."[32]

Despite stressing the importance of empirically-based data to secure their argument, the appeal to a just-so story is given preference over evidence:

> "There is, however, broad agreement on the basic Darwinian logic: in a population of competing cultural groups subject to the climatic upheavals of the late Pleistocene, those that developed effective moralities, that is, moralities that were capable of avoiding the costs associated with cooperation failures, were more likely to pump hominins into the next generation, to persist as groups, to sustain and transmit their social structures, and/or to give rise to offspring groups. These ecological conditions, so the argument goes, conferred a reasonably high probability on the evolution of morality in broad strokes, and go some way toward explaining its more specific contours, such as our evaluative attitudes toward kin, kith, strangers, patriots, nonreciprocators, gluttons, cheats, murderers, and the like."[33]

"Moral attitudes, and structures within animals which make them possible", Donald Broom writes,

> "… have not persisted in populations by chance but because those individuals which had them gained selective advantage from having them. The basis for this is that certain genes would promote moral acts and those genes which interact with the environment to produce beneficial characters in the phenotype of the animal are more likely to persist in the population."[34]

In other words, there must be a statistical bias in favour of this mutation's survival and spread throughout the population. The appearance in primates of a brain with sufficiently complex emotional and/or ratiocination faculties permitted these initial survival advantages to be eventually expanded and transformed to a fully-functioning moral capacity.[35]

Quite often the knotty naturalistic processes of how morality came to be are simply question-begged into existence.[36] For example, Mary Maxwell writes:

> "Our moral sensibility is a 'given', and because of it we can construct moral opinions. Later in time, rule-making and the formulation of ethical principle become established as cultural institutions, but in the first instance they are based on human nature. [A] sense of morality is also instinctive."[37]

Likewise, Catherine Wilson assumes

> "... morality is a naturally occurring phenomenon that has a foundation in native human dispositions and in the exigencies of our lives as social animals, both of which are subjects for naturalistic inquiry. [M]orality [is to be understood] in terms of a biologically determined proto-moral core and an ideational hypermoral periphery."[38]

> "The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random among the profusion of the earth and the galaxy of the stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness." (Malraux, A., *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, Fielding AW (trans.), John Lehman, NY, p. 74, 1919.)

Despite the declarations of certitude, examination of the supporting evolutionary arguments leaves no doubt that gaping lacunae exist and are the best verbal legerdemain.

Altruism[39]—a self-refuting concept

According to evolutionary theory, fitness, properly conceived, is measured by the reproductive success of how well an individual's genes are passed on to subsequent generations.[40] If, on average, there was a net fitness cost to an individual bearing the hypothesized altruistic genotype, compared to others in the population, then altruism could never spread. Yet, population genetics maintains that only if the mean fitness of an encoded altruistic trait is higher can it increase in numbers in the greater population. And herein lies the puzzling nature of the existence of altruism. Altruism, understood biologically, must then come at a cost to the benefactor while enhancing the fitness of another.

With respect to this enigma, Edward O. Wilson raises the following query: "Altruism is ordinarily defined as self-destructive behaviour performed for the benefit of others ... . How can altruism, which by definition reduces personal fitness, possibly evolve by natural selection?"[41] Lauren Wispé likewise probes, "How can genes that lead to less of me (the altruist) lead to more of us (altruists)?"[42]

> *The paradox is clear: any individual carrying a gene or genes for altruism would work against its own reproductive success, contradicting evolution's criterion of fitness.*

The paradox is clear: any individual carrying a gene or genes for altruism would work against its own reproductive success, contradicting evolution's criterion of fitness. Oren Harman bluntly exposes the self-refuting dilemma for evolutionary theory by asking, "If altruism evolved over time in nature, it surely must have served some utilitarian purpose, and if it serves an ulterior purpose it is never what

it seems."[43] In other words, the altruistic 'good' is not irreducibly good but becomes something other than good for good's sake.[44]

Divide and conquer

In order to explain altruism's rise and subsequent spread, evolutionists distinguish between psychological and biological altruism.[45] Psychological altruism is the commonplace understanding of an unselfish regard for others, the type that motivates to "not even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing". The biological variety is "behaviour which is likely to increase the reproductive output of another member of the same species. ... and which at least in the short term is likely also to reduce the number of the actor's own descendants."[46]

> "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean —neither more nor less." (Lewis Carroll, *Though the Looking-Glass*, as spoken by Humpty Dumpty.)

Figure 3. "And he grinned almost from ear to ear". Illustration by Peter Newell to *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Lewis Carroll, 1902).

Biological altruism is predicated upon the assumed historical truth that the antecedents for human psychological altruism originate in the non-human realm. Evolutionary biologists and philosophers broadly agree that biological altruism is not unique to humans but rather can be detected in a kind of continuum which stretches through non-vertebrates to the higher life forms. Intention, an ostension of mind, does not have to be present in order for biological altruistic behaviour to be demonstrated. Instead, it's the means to a biological end that defines whether or not some action is altruistic or not. For example, E.O. Wilson describes how injured *Solenopsis invicta* worker ants, appearing more aggressive than their uninjured sisters, leave their nests to stave off invasion. Drawing a long, though veiled, anthropomorphic bow, he claims that "[these ants' action] may be no more than nonadaptive epiphenomena, but it is also likely that the responses are altruistic."[47]

Two things need to be kept in mind. Not all evolutionists agree that psychological altruism is real. However, all adhere to at least one, in some cases just about all, of many explanations (several of which I will address in subsequent parts) of how biological altruism obtained a foothold and how it then may have led to the rise of the psychological variety. Second, any proposal for the genesis of altruism is predicated on the imputed reliability of the model(s) that was chosen.[48]

Conclusion

Evolution-based explanations for morality serially circumvent the purely non-material quiddity of ethics. This failure has meant that ethicists are forced to reduce or redefine morality to a naturalistic something else, a something which clearly has nothing to do with what makes morality so metaphysically unique. Whether it's, *inter alia*, in terms of reproductive success, an accident of chance or a utilitarian by-product, all have failed to honestly deal with this purely human (and godly!) core truth. Furthermore, morality, which is best explained as seeking the best for others at the expense of yourself, contradicts evolution's keynote demand of putting genetically more of yourself into subsequent generations.

Evolution-based explanations for morality serially circumvent the purely non-material quiddity of ethics.

In the next part, I will examine the once-leading explanation for the rise of morality, group selection. Both Wallace and Darwin held it in high esteem. Despite its decline as an explanation since the 1960s, there have been a small number of contemporary philosophers and scientists who have revived it as a worthwhile account for morality's rise and continued existence.[49]

Posted on homepage: 11 August 2023

References and notes

1. Technically, there is a difference between 'morality' and 'ethics'. I won't be concerned with this here and will continue to use the two interchangeably. Return to text.

2. Rowlands, M., *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe: Philosophy explained through science fiction films*, Thomas Dunne Books, NY, pp. 158–159, 2004. Rowlands' book is delightfully clever and extremely humorous. It comes with high praise for being able to present philosophy in a very approachable manner. Return to text.

3. For an adequate, though lengthy, historical overview of early modern ethical philosophy and these problems, see Korsgaard, C.M., *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 7–48, 1996. Return to text.

4. Metaethical enquiries ask what is going on in ethical evaluation and focus on moral concepts (such as 'wrong', 'right', 'ought', 'good') and the structure of, and justification for, moral reasoning. Metaethics is in contradistinction to normative ethics, which enquires about what one should do and acts as a guide for behaviour. Return to text.

5. Regarding this, it is of significant interest to note Allen Buchanan's comment regarding human rights. He notes there is a "justification deficit, the disturbing fact that, while the

global culture and institutionalization of human rights are gaining considerable traction, the nature of the justification for claims about the existence of human rights remains obscure." Buchanan, A., The egalitarianism of human rights, *Ethics* **120**(4):679–680, July 2010. While an address of international human rights lies outside this paper's stated goals, it is conceivable that this deficiency may be as a result of the inability of evolution to provide a convincing metaethical justification for any ethical demand, let alone something so august as a global theory of justice. What's left—and this is amply illuminated in Buchanan's analysis—is a non-moral justification relying on instrumental reasons, question-begging equal status or equally circular personhood dignity claims grounded in a respect for a person's normative agency. Return to text.

6. Kay, M., Darwinian foundation of modern ethics, *J. Creation* **18**(1):41, 2004. One possibility I won't be addressing is explanations (are there any?) assuming a theistic evolution 'creation' account. As Wilder-Smith pointed out, God using evolution would mean that God put His wisdom in His pocket and worked by chance. How is it conceivable that the most intelligent Being would set aside His intellect and work by non-intelligence? This involves no less a contradiction for an evolutionary ethics in which a proponent of such a thesis requires a theodicy where death and suffering are a given, but also a deity who is loving and moral. It has been my experience that theistic evolutionists seldom discuss these problems, and, if they do, are far more supportive of the evolutionary component than the theistic one. Return to text.

7. The Divine Command Theory (DCT) is a metaethic system that states our moral duty is referenced to our obligations to God and His moral commands. Beginning with Plato's *Euthyphro*, there has been much criticism of the DCT, and more again responding to these criticisms, which attempt to rejuvenate the theory. (See, for example, Rooney, P., Divine commands and arbitrariness, *Religious Studies* **31**(2):149–165, June 1995; and Adams, R.M., *Finite and Infinite Goods: A framework for ethics*, Oxford University Press, NY, pp. 250–276, 1999.) In his *Euthyphro* dialogue, Plato put the Divine Command theorist on the horns of a dilemma: either God commands something because it is right, and thus God drops out of the picture because rightness is a given, or something is right because God commands it, making rightness seem arbitrary. One inadequate defence of the DCT arises from William Lane Craig's debate with the philosopher Erik Wielenberg. Craig argues we have an obligation to God to follow His commands because His commands should be followed. Something of being explanatorily short-changed can be understood from His response to being asked why we should obey God's commands, where this 'should' comes from and how this 'should' is grounded in God. His unsatisfying answer is that the DCT is the explanatory ultimate in as much as "the divine commands constitute our moral obligation" and the question of why one should obey God's commands doesn't even arise because this is just the theory the DC theorist is proposing. Worse still, Craig proposes that we should obey God's commands because God has commanded us to obey His commands. He not only denies this is a viciously circular proposition but determines it a brute fact. (William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg, "God & Morality", North Carolina State University, Feb 2018, youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw from c. 1 h 58 m mark. Last downloaded 11 Feb 2022.) Return to text.

8. While a footnote would insufficiently cover the scope of Adams' lengthy argument's shortcomings, a brief excursus is appropriate. My challenge to Robert Adams' and others' attempted vindication of DCT is not that God's commands are understood as arbitrary, one half of the customary criticism. Rather, the salient problem arising out of a metaethics conceived from the DCT is that its proponents inadequately, if ever, solicit

God's *revealed* and *biblical* ontological grounding or nature. They tend to play on a pagan field, and Adams makes no attempt to disguise his theory's real epistemological and ontological source. He proudly admits, "my framework is broadly Platonic as well as theistic. … On my theistic adaption of Plato" (ref. 7, p. 4). He slams the door shut on any apologetic for God's existence ("I will not attempt anything I would call a 'proof' of the existence of God", p. 28), but instead opts for a question-begging reformulation of God's ontology as the Platonic 'supreme Good' or the pleonastic 'Excellence' (p. 28 and *passim*). Presupposing the theory and eschewing any explanation of God's nature, he fails to build an epistemological bridge between the commands of God and God's nature. At best, all that can be squeezed from this non-Christian spirit is "a God who is supremely excellent in being, in commanding, and more generally in relating to us, whose commands can plausibly be regarded as constituting moral obligation" (p. 255). This lifeless, cold something is what has come to be expected from a theory so heavily dependent upon paganism generally and Platonic idealism more specifically. Such a good appears far too impersonal, yet ethics inextricably involves the personal. Building on this syncretism, Adams, rather than making 'love' the ontological identification of God, as per 1 John 4:8, 16, attenuates revelation by merely giving "God's love *a part* to play in explaining the nature of excellence [emphasis added]". Here he prioritizes the Platonic and subordinates the revelatory 'love'. What connection, he asks, is there between this mooted excellence and God's now circumscribed and resituated love? The thread is that it is "excellent to value the excellent", which seems as illuminating as the tautological 'red roses are red'. 'Excellence' obtains a 'primary place' in his metaethical theory, not only lying at the "heart of Platonic conceptions" but central to his theism (p. 83). I will have more to say regarding Adams and the DCT in the final part to my paper. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this deficient explanation in the paper's introduction. Return to text.

9. Quoted from Robinson, P., You don't get your moral compass from religion, creation.com/moral-compass-religion. Originally sourced from Richard Dawkins' interview, Morality has nothing to do with religion, 14 October 2015, found at businessinsider.com/richard-dawkins-religion-morality-2015-10. Return to text.

10. Wilson, E.O., *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 562, 2000. Wilson is not a lone voice calling for this project. Philosopher William Casebeer writes that "useful interactions between [evolutionary biology] and ethics is the critical issue facing the sciences [in order] to cast about for a post-Enlightenment normative anchor … to prevent backsliding into dogmatic supernatural and non-naturalistic conceptions of the moral life." (Casebeer, W., *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, connectionism, and moral cognition*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, p. 1, 2003.) Return to text.

11. Ruse, M., Is Darwinian metaethics possible (and if it is, is it well taken)?; in: Boniolo, G. and De Anna, G. (Eds.), *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 14, 2006. Return to text.

12. Kauffman, S.A., *Reinventing the Sacred: A new view of science, reason and religion*, Basic Books, NY, p. 260, 2008. Return to text.

13. Rose, M.R., *Darwin's Spectre: Evolutionary biology in the modern world*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p. 185, 1998. Return to text.

14. Gould, S.J., Nonoverlapping magisteria, *Natural History* **106**(2):16–22, March 1997. Return to text.

15. Rachels, J., *Created From Animals: The moral implications of Darwinism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 5, 1991. This non-uniqueness was also an important axiom of Darwin's theory. He opined that "there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties." Darwin, C., *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Penguin Books, London, p. 86, 2004. It is obvious that if, as the actual facts clearly highlight, humans and higher mammals were poles apart in their mental dispositions, evolution would have an extra and insurmountable burden to overcome. By axiomatizing the unmistakable gap out of existence, a considerable part of the appearance of morality can be avoided. Herbert Spencer was quick to jump on the bandwagon. He saw in Darwin's grand scheme a way of eliminating Christian morality: "Now that moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their sacred origin the securalization of morals is becoming imperative." Spencer, H., *The Data of Ethics*, Williams and Norgate, London, p. 5 (p. iv in original), 1879. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/331/Spencer_0622_EBk_v6.0.pdf, accessed 20 Sep, 2021. Return to text.

16. Darwin, C., ref. 15, pp. 676, 682–683. Return to text.

17. The realness of ethics, I suggest, is discovered in their normative force and not in their descriptive quality. As Christine Korsgaard notes, "They make *claims* on us; they command, oblige, recommend, or guide [and] when we invoke them, we make claims on one another." Korsgaard, C.M., *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 8, 1996. Return to text.

18. Kahane, G., Evolutionary Debunking Arguments, *Noûs* **45**(1):103–125, March 2011; p. 103. Return to text.

19. In case you have overlooked just how pivotal the materialist ideology is to the discipline of ethics, consider the following remark. Two principal commentators, rejecting any 'extrasomatic' or divine source for morality, claim "Everything human, including the mind and culture, has a material base and originated during the evolution of the human genetic constitution and its interaction with the environment [and] the human condition can eventually be understood to its foundations, including the sources of moral reasoning." (Ruse, M. and Wilson, E.O., Moral philosophy as applied science, *Philosophy* **61**(236):173–174, April 1986.) Yet, there is also a view of the mind's appearance which in just about any other setting would be viewed as magical. I claim 'magical' as a kind of *quid pro quo* rebuke for evolutionists' similar responses to creationist explanations. For example, "We believe that the secret of the mind's emergence lies in the activation of a mechanism both obedient to physical laws and unique to the human species. Somehow the evolving species kindled a Promethean fire, a self-sustaining reaction that carried humanity beyond the previous limits of biology. This largely unknown evolutionary process … ." (Lumsden, C.J. and Wilson, E.O., *Promethean Fire: Reflections on the Origin of Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MS, p. 19, 1983.) Hey, if God doesn't quite intellectually do it for you, why not call down a demi-god! The book's drawings should be an embarrassing reminder to any fair-minded evolutionist that their ideological family hatches some fairly absurd material from time to time. The authors' attempts of 'historical' construction are a farrago of overactive artistic fantasy and downright risible nonsense. My favourite is a Cro-Magnon woman, mouth closed, yet representing the sound of 'em' because her hand mirrors the act of clasping an object. It took me a while to get it, but I think her thumb, forefinger, and object held between them form the three-pronged shape of an 'm'. The wonderfully accurate drawing, however, does come with a rider: "This example is based on the speculative reconstruction of the early evolution of language." As I said, risible. Return to text.

20. Street, S., A Darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value, *Philosophical Studies* **127**(1):109, January 2006. Although her criticism is directed toward realist theories, the problem is no less relevant for the non-realist, as she herself admits and grapples with. Despite her rejection of relativism, the apparent logical consequence of being both an evolutionist and a non-realist, it's awfully difficult to see any other choices available apart from this or some form of moral nihilism. Return to text.

21. Macedo, S. and Ober, J. (Eds.), Introduction to de Waal, F.; in: *Primates and Philosophers: How morality evolved*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, pp. x–xi, 2006. Return to text.

22. Williams, G.C., Reply to comments on 'Huxley's evolution and ethics in sociobiological perspective', *Zygon* **23**(4):437–438, December 1988, as cited in Broom, D.M., *The Evolution of Morality and Religion*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 12, 2003. Return to text.

23. Darwin, ref. 15, p. 120. Just to put the reader on notice, I almost completely avoid reference to Darwin's writing on the matter. While contemporary discussion is far more nuanced and sophisticated than Darwin's, there is no genuine advance on his ideas. Despite repositioning ethics to the world of genetics, a world that Darwin had no idea about, contemporary explanations are still beholden to all the inescapable errors and fallacies that he was. Darwin's explanation for the rise of morality is principally located in his fourth chapter of *The Descent*. A summary of this can be read in Tim Lewens' *Darwin*, Routledge, London, pp. 162–171, 2007. Return to text.

24. John Mackie coined the expression due to his not, for various reasons, holding to an objective realist metaethic. See Mackie, J.L., *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong*, Penguin Books, NY, 1977. For further understanding of Mackie's argument for an antirealist morality from its perceived 'queerness', see plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-anti-realism/#ErrThe, accessed 20 September 2021. Return to text.

25. Darwin, ref. 15, pp. 120–121. Darwin appears to have left no clue as to whether or not he was fully aware of the difficulty of producing a believable account of how morality could have arisen de novo. It's not unreasonable, then, to argue that the following statement in the concluding pages of his *Descent* contains a well-masked form of bait-and-switch to 'bridge' the gap: "For the moral qualities are advanced, either directly or indirectly, much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instruction, religion, &., than through natural selection; though this latter agency may be safely attributed to the social instincts, which afforded the basis for the development of the moral sense." Darwin, ref. 15, pp. 688–689. Return to text.

26. Moll, J. *et al.*, The neural basis of human moral cognition, *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* **6**(10):799, October 2005; pp. 799–809. The extent to which evolution must be held up as a totalizing worldview is clearly comprehended from the following: "In attempting to understand adult human sexual behaviour with children and adolescents, the researcher must realize that although human beings tend to associate sex with love, sex without love or tenderness also exists in humans as part of the archaic vertebrate heritage of the species." Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I., Dominance, submission, and love: sexual pathologies from the perspective of ethology; in: Feierman, J.R. (Ed.), *Pedophilia: Biosocial dimensions*, Springer-Verlag, NY p. 150, 1990. Return to text.

27. Cosmides, L. and Tooby, J., Can a general deontic logic capture the facts of human moral reasoning? How the mind interprets social exchange rules and detects cheaters; in:

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (Ed.), *Moral Psychology,* vol. 1, *The Evolution of Morality: Adaptions and innateness*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MS, pp. 53–54, 2008. Return to text.

28. Lycan, W.G., What is the 'subjectivity' of the mental? *Philosophical Perspectives* **4**:109, 1990; pp. 109–130. Return to text.

29. Any attempt to reduce or define the moral in terms of the non-moral is what G.E. Moore labelled 'the Naturalistic Fallacy'. For materialism generally, and evolution specifically, this has proved a very difficult logical obstacle to overcome. Nearly all philosophers recognize the problem and try all manner of escapes, none of which solves the dilemma. I will address this important issue in detail in a subsequent part. Return to text.

30. Naturalism, apropos ethics, maintains that "the complete warrant for any norm or value must be cashed out without invoking the views or commands of a divinity, [that it] should not employ a distinctive a priori method of yielding substantive, self-evident and foundational truths from pure conceptual analysis. The claims of ethical naturalism cannot be shielded from empirical testing … . In other words, ethical science must be continuous with other sciences." (Flanagan, O., Sarkissian, H. and Wong, D., Naturalizing ethics; in: Sinnott-Armstrong, W., ref. 27, pp. 2, 5.) It's no carping dressing-down to point out that these three authors' rejection of an a priori analysis in order to derive first-order principles appears to be a disingenuous, partial reintroduction of the now much maligned early 20th century's Vienna Circle's Logical Positivism. The Vienna Circle's epistemological Principle of Verification's inability to meet its own criterion is ably demonstrated in Naturalism's philosophical stand. At the very least, it self-refutingly commences with an "a priori method of yielding substantive, self-evident and foundational truths from pure conceptual analysis". Oops! For a more detailed exploration of the Positivists' failed enterprise, see the wonderful debate between Terry Miethe and a 'pre-converted' Antony Flew in *Does God Exist?: A believer and an atheist debate*, HarperCollins, NY, 1991. Alex Rosenberg has also so plainly stated, "Among philosophers, naturalism is the view that contemporary scientific theory is the source of solutions to philosophical problems." (Rosenberg, A., Darwinism in moral philosophy and social theory, in: Hodge J. and Radick, G. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 310, 2003.) Return to text.

31. Dennett, D.C., *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the meanings of life*, Touchstone, NY, p. 454, 1995. At first blush such would seem a self-parody of evolutionary speculation. However, Dennett's comment is intended to be taken as a historical fact. For a more realistic analysis of the problematic nature of mutation fixation and fitness acquisition see Basener, W.F. and Sanford, J.C., The fundamental theorem of natural selection with mutations, *J. Mathematical Biology* **76**(7):1589–1622, June 2018. Return to text.

32. Buchanan, A. and Powell, R., The limits of evolutionary explanations of morality and their implications for moral progress, *Ethics* **126**(1):39–40, October 2015; pp. 37–67. A far less redacted 'history' is unfurled by Frederick Rauscher. He proposes a combination of necessary and sufficient primary and secondary mechanisms and behaviours which form an explanation for our morally significant dispositions. See his 'How a Kantian can accept evolutionary metaethics', *Biology and Philosophy* **12**(3):303–326, July 1997; esp. pp. 305–306. Rauscher, as seen by the title of his paper, attempts to wed the Kantian categorical imperative (i.e. the universalization of ethics generally and actual commands more specifically) to biology and a hypothetical set of genes. All this becomes far too ethereal to have much of a bite. For instance: "Kantian metaethics would thus identify

the command which causes humans to behave in cooperative or altruistic ways as the primary phenotypic mechanism. What might such a command be? How might it be encoded in a genotype or expressed as a primary phenotypic mechanism? I can only speculate here … . Like universal grammar, the structure of actions might be formulizable as a rule or a series of rules which would be encoded in human brain structure" (p. 319). His reference to grammar piggybacks on Chomsky's work; however, Chomsky has no idea how evolution could create the necessary hardware for grammar and language. On this last issue I recall Wilder-Smith mentioning a letter he wrote to Chomsky asking him where the ultimate source of information lies. Chomsky replied that his mind could not come to grips with the question for the origin of all information. As a metaphysical naturalist, this is not surprising. Return to text.

33. Buchanan and Powell, ref. 32, pp. 40–41. It needs pointing out that the authors are specifically attacking political conservatives' use of evolution to underwrite their social policies and moral philosophy. Return to text.

34. Broom, ref. 22, pp. 22–23. For an alternative vision, though no less fanciful, see Ayala, F., The biological roots of morality, *Biology and Philosophy* **2**(3):235–252, July 1987. According to Ayala, it was as a consequence of his developing intellectual capacity, and not because of direct evolutionary adaptive value, that early man gained a moral faculty. However, more frequently than one would expect, evolutionists slip up and present an explanation having all the hallmarks of teleology, anathema to the materialist worldview. For example, "Morality evolved and developed in order to coordinate and harmonize the interests (both self- and other-regarding) of humans living in mutually dependent communities [it] evolved to shape character and specify worthwhile lives and ideals of behaviour to which to strive." (Flanagan, Sarkissian, and Wong, ref. 30, p. 10.) Return to text.

35. This large brain presents a further chicken-and-egg problem. Some commentators argue that the brain's rapid emergence gave rise to complex social interactions, such as altruism. Others propose the opposite: humans have big brains because cooperation came first. See, for example, Masters, R.D., Of marmots and men: animal behaviour and human altruism; in: Wispé, L. (Ed.), *Altruism, Sympathy, and Helping: Psychological and sociological principles*, Academic Press, NY, pp. 73–74, 1978. Return to text.

36. Lance Rips aptly diagnoses question-begging or circular reasoning as a "defect in reasoning [and this i]nability to detect or to break out of circles in one's own thinking may lead to narrow-mindedness, or even delusions, in which one's beliefs about a topic are self-authenticating, sealed off from evidence that might cast doubt upon them." Rips, L., Circular reasoning, *Cognitive Science* **26**(6):768, November 2002. Return to text.

37. Maxwell, M., *Morality among Nations: An evolutionary view*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, p.6, 1990. Return to text.

38. Wilson, C., The biological basis and ideational superstructure of morality; in: Campbell, R. and Hunter, B. (Eds.), Moral epistemology naturalized, *Canadian J. Philosophy*, supp. vol. 26, University of Calgary Press, Calgary, pp. 214–215, 2000. These are by no means isolated examples. Owen Flanagan, defending his Humean explanation for the rise of human morality against the one portrayed by Hobbes' 'war of everyone against everyone', begs morality into existence by writing that our "social instincts and proto-moral emotions are there from the start, and thus morality has on its agenda, from the beginning, concern for the welfare of (some) others, as well as for oneself … . Humans, thanks largely to the possession of a cognitive-conative economy that was passed on

from ancestors, have moral or, at least, proto-moral dispositions from the start." Flanagan, O., Ethical expressions: why moralists scowl, frown and smile; in: Hodge, J. and Radick, G. (Eds.), p. 386, ref. 30. Return to text.

39. Apparently, it was Auguste Comte (1798–1857) who coined the term 'altruism' to indicate an unselfish desire to live for others. However, it's pointed out by Robert Mackintosh that in Comte "The definition of Altruism is never formulated; it is never supported by argument; it is merely taken for granted. None the less it exerts an immense influence in Comte's own system and has spread from it far and wide. Innumerable writers, Christian as well as non-Christian, have come to employ the term 'Altruism' as a synonym for goodness." (Mackintosh, R., *From Comte to Benjamin Kidd: The appeal to biology or evolution for human guidance*, MacMillan and Co., NY, p. 45, 1899.) The term arose as a consequence of his analysis of the underlying tendencies of history and human social evolution. Comte's use is, in itself, one of the great ironies of history as Comte's *raison d'être* was to reject divine agency as an explanation for reality and jettison surrogate explanations based on metaphysical or abstract principles, the latter being a partial reaction to some of Hegel's philosophy. His replacement was pure scientism and humanism. Other writers have described Comte's altruism as "an odd alloy of phrenology, conditioning principles, assumptions about emotional contagion, and utopian moralizing." (Batson, C.D. and Shaw, L.L., Evidence for altruism: toward a pluralism of prosocial motives, *Psychological Inquiry* **2**(2):108, 1991.) Will Durant noted that Comte, in his twilight years, was led from his intellectualism to an elevation of feeling by a woman whose husband was spending life in jail. As a result, Comte devised a system of priesthood, prayers, and sacraments: "Comte offered the world all of Catholicism except Christianity." (Durant, W., *The Story of Philosophy: The lives and opinions of the greater philosophers*, Ernest Benn Ltd, London, p. 383, 1927.) Also note Comte's influence on Herbert Spencer, and thus on social Darwinism, as set out in Hovenkamp, H., Evolutionary models in jurisprudence, *Texas Law Review* **64**(4):664–671, December 1985; pp. 645–685. Return to text.

40. Counting numbers of individuals as a measurement of success, and hence fitness, doesn't obviate inherent problems. See Williams, G., *Adaptation and Natural Selection: a critique of some current evolutionary thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p. 103ff, 1966. Williams lists a number of problems associated with mere numbering and the alternatives utilized by investigators measuring 'success'. These include mass, the rate of change of size of populations, the counter-intuitive population shrinkage as a regulative response to environmental pressure as proposed by Wynne-Edwards, ecological versatility and numerical stability assessed by the amplitude of fluctuation about a long-term mean. One biologist admits that measuring fitness "isn't an absolute mathematical truth, but is often true, in theory." Rose, M.R., *Darwin's Spectre: Evolutionary biology in the modern world*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p. 70, 1998. Return to text.

41. Wilson, ref. 10, p. 3. Return to text.

42. Wispé, ref. 35, Wispé, L., Toward an integration, p. 308. Return to text.

43. Harman, O., *The Price of Altruism: George Price and the search for the origins of kindness*, Vintage Books, London, p. 5, 2011. Alternatively, and certainly from out-of-left-field, comes the suggestion that "altruism is a nonadaptive strategy or an 'error' that is still with us because it has not been sufficiently selected against." The author, apparently, has only a luke-warm attachment to this 'solution'. He half-heartedly dismisses it by claiming that it's analogous to the human appendix's being "not evolutionarily useful"

but "Still, most of us have an appendix, because its cost has not been sufficient enough for it to be selected against." (Nanay, B., Group selection and our obsession with the meaning of life, *The Monist* **93**(1):77, January 2010; pp. 76–95.) It's relatively easy to imagine living in a world without an appendix (I can—I lost mine at age 15!), but a world without altruism and still be a human? Even before this most modern period of explanations for altruism, there were early misgivings to the extent that "there is *somewhere* a biological limit to altruism, even for man". (Pearl, R., Biology and human progress, *Harper's Magazine* **172**:225, January 1936.) Return to text.

44. This encapsulates the much misunderstood problem of the Naturalistic Fallacy. I address this in some detail in a subsequent part. Return to text.

45. However, it should be noted that the distinction is not conceptually final, as can be seen from Alexander's description of altruism as "phenotypically (or self) sacrificing but genotypically selfish." (Alexander, R.D., Natural selection and the analysis of human sociality; in: Goulden, C.E (Ed)., *Changing Scenes in the Natural Sciences*, 1776–1976, The Academy, Philadelphia, p. 294, 1977, as cited in Bertram, B.C.R., Problems with altruism; in: King's College Sociobiology Group (Ed.), *Current Problems in Sociobiology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 255, 1982.) Also, Michael Ruse's cynical, though accurate, depiction of altruism, sociobiologically speaking, as 'enlightened self-interest' follows a similar trajectory. (Ruse, M., Sociobiology: a philosophical analysis; in: Caplan, A.L. (Ed.), *The Sociobiology Debate*, Harper & Row, NY, p. 358, 1978.) Return to text.

46. Bertram, ref. 45, p. 252. This is an abridged version of Bertram's remark. I've omitted the words "who is not a descendant of the actor", which follow "the same species", as some evolutionists have pointed out that kin selection, to be discussed in an upcoming part, is an important explanation for altruism. Furthermore, preferential treatment in one's offspring does occur and some have used this, albeit rather tendentiously and tenuously, as yet another aid to explain altruism. Whatever the case may be, excluding relatives would not accurately represent the full description of biological altruism. The whole of Bertram's contribution identifies a number of problems with various definitions and is valuable for this alone. Return to text.

47. Wilson, ref. 10, p. 121. However, since publishing his major work, Wilson has had a change of mind regarding the efficacy of kin selection to explain altruism. See Nowak, M.A., Tarnita, C.E., and Wilson, E.O., The evolution of eusociality, *Nature* **466**:1057–1062, 26 August 2010. Also, note the danger of relying on nature in order to locate explanation (and possibly justification) for human nature. This is perhaps no better evinced than in the remarkable discovery of slave ants. This occurred at the same time the 19th-century Abolitionist movement was underway, and the observation that servants tended to be black lent considerable support to the pro-slavery argument and unsettled the emancipists. See Desmond, A. and Moore, J., *Darwin's Sacred Cause: How a hatred of slavery shaped Darwin's views on human evolution*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, MA, pp. 222–224, 301–304, 2009. Return to text.

48. On this point see Shavit, A., Shifting values partly explain the debate over group selection, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* **35**(4):697–720, December 2004. Return to text.

49. I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers and David Green for their input and valuable corrections. Return to text.

View All