**Please provide feedback, thank you!**

**Moral realism’s respond to the Darwinian Dilemma**

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In Street’s article “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”, she challenges moral realism in the form of a dilemma. Street claims that some realists may face trouble in explaining the relationship between *the force of natural selection* and *independent moral facts*. Street presents two options for them to explain the relationship between *the force of natural selection* and *independent moral facts*. (Street, 2006)

1. There is no relationship between *the force of natural selection* and *independent moral facts*. The evolutionary biological principles are insensitive to independent moral facts whatsoever.
2. There is a relationship between *the force of natural selection* and *independent moral facts*. Certain capacities were selected for so that our judgments would track the moral facts.

According to Street, (b) leads to bad science, because it is a specific hypothesis of how natural selection proceeded with moral facts and such hypothesis fares quite poorly in comparison with all other scientific hypotheses. (a) leads to a reliability issue on human’s evolutionarily-shaped moral beliefs, together with independent moral facts, it leaves realists with skepticism. Concluded by Street, either of the above options is detrimental to moral realism, hence, the dilemma (Street, 2006). In this paper, I will explain why moral realism may embrace option (a) and cast doubt on the reliability issue. That is, even if moral realism embraces that there is no relationship between *the force of natural selection* and the *independent moral facts*, it does not necessarily lead to a reliability issue on human’s evolutionarily-shaped moral beliefs.

There are different brands of realism about value. According to Street, it is not the case that all brands of realism about value are vulnerable to the Darwinian Dilemma she sketches (Street, 2006). To be specific, the targets of Street’s Darwinian Dilemma are:

1. Moral realism, which includes any form of ethical non-naturalism, and
2. Some forms of ethical naturalism.

In the case of (1), it is the view that evaluative facts are held independently to all our evaluative attitudes, and evaluative facts are not reducible to any kind of natural fact (Street, 2006). In the case of (2), Street addresses them as genuinely realist versions of value naturalism. Such a version takes the view that facts about natural-normative identities are independent of our evaluative attitudes (Street, 2006). In conclusion, the targets of Street’s Darwinian Dilemma should always have the characteristics that evaluative facts must not have any connection regarding our evaluative attitudes. Note that some forms of ethical naturalism do not consider as the targets of Street’s Darwinian Dilemma. However, I will not explain them, because they are irrelevant to the purpose of this paper.

When it comes to reproductive success, evaluative attitudes and moral judgments are subjects of acceptance and rejection based on the costs and benefits that come with it (Street, 2006). Consider the evaluative attitude that “the fact doing X would endanger one’s life is a reason to do it.” Notice that accepting such evaluative attitudes would be detrimental to reproductive success. In comparison, consider the evaluative attitude that “the fact doing Y would be helpful to one’s survival is a reason to do it.” Also notice that accepting such evaluative attitudes would be conducive to reproductive success. Moreover, I think it is going to be true for any attitude and judgment. There is going to be some evolutionary advantages and disadvantage of holding attitudes and judgments about the world. For example, if an individual believes that he/she can fly, then it would be detrimental to his/her reproductive success. According to Street, it is reasonable to expect that throughout evolutionary history, there has been relentless selective pressure on the content of our evaluative attitudes and moral judgments (Street, 2006). Thus, the premise comes with a form of adaptive inference and it suggests that evolutionary forces or we can call it, *the force of natural selection* has played a tremendous role in shaping the contents of our evaluative attitudes and moral judgments. At this point, I think moral realists would agree with this premise because it is a convincing explanation of how our evaluative attitudes and moral judgments were formed.

Having all the ingredients ready, moral realists can start to investigate Street’s two options to determine the existence of Darwinian Dilemma. Starting with the option (b), that there is a relationship between the force of natural selection and the independent moral facts. Certain capacities were selected for so that our judgments would track the moral facts. Suppose it is true, then the hypothesis is that through the process of natural selection in evolutionary time, it provides the ability to track moral facts and grants us certain advantages in terms of reproductive success. Street addressed such a hypothesis as the tracking account, and it is offered as a scientific explanation of the relationship between natural selection and moral judgments (Street, 2006). When we have a competing hypothesis as an explanation of a phenomenon, scientists would determine which hypothesis is better in various standards. According to Street, the tracking account is susceptible to three scientific evaluation:

1. Parsimony
2. Clarity
3. Explanatory power

Street also claims that there is another scientific explanation that serves the same purpose as the tracking account does, but it is more parsimonious, clearer, and has more explanatory power compared to the tracking account. That is the adaptive link account. It follows that the kind of judgment that forged a particular link between our ancestors’ circumstances and their responses to these circumstances, and getting them to act, feel, and believe in ways that turned out to be reproductively advantageous (Street, 2006). Here we have two competing accounts. According to Street, the adaptive link account is superior in terms of the three scientific evaluation, because it does not have to rely on the existence of moral truth to explain the relationship between natural selection and moral judgments, rather it directly explains why some moral judgments are reproductively more advantageous. At this point, I think moral realists would have agreed with Street’s evaluation. Especially for ethical non-naturalist, because it is not clear why appealing to moral facts would explain some moral judgments rather than others that are reproductively more advantageous. Thus, moral realists should discard option (b) to explain the relationship between *the force of natural selection* and the *independent moral facts*.

Moral realists must then, investigate option (a) offered by Street that there is no relationship between *the force of natural selection* and the *independent moral facts*. The evolutionary biological principles are insensitive to independent moral facts whatsoever. Street investigates this option in a form of analogy (Street, 2006), suggests that imagining we are in a sailboat and trying to sail our way to Bermuda. However, just letting ourselves be guided by whichever the wind blows is not going to get us in the right direction in most cases. Moreover, even if we get to Bermuda, it is going to be pure luck. Analogically speaking, if there is no relationship between *the force of natural selection* and the *independent moral facts*then it can be concluded that we have every reason to believe that most of our moral judgments are mostly off track and if they are true, then it is due to pure cosmic coincidence (Street, 2006). Since moral realists want to think that for many of our moral judgments are at least approximately true. According to Street, this conclusion turns out to be unfortunate for moral realists. Street recognizes that *the force of natural selection* may not be the only thing that guides us towards *independent moral facts*. There is another thing called rational reflection that plays an important role in reaching the *independent moral facts*. According to Street, moral realists may want to respond to Street’s point of view by saying that *the force of natural selection*itself is not guiding us in the right direction. However, notice that *the force of natural selection* is not the only thing that affects our moral judgments. There is also another thing that affects our moral judgments. That is, our ability to rationally reflect. Back to the boat analogy, it serves as a compass and steers us in the right direction while the wind blows. At this point, Street notes that even still, it will not be a reasonable response, because rational reflection always starts with evaluative judgments. It is always the case that we are holding some of our evaluative judgments fixed to achieve the ability of rational reflection. This contradicts moral realism’s fundamental view that evaluative facts are held independently to all our evaluative attitudes. Concluded by Street, option (a) neither is a good choice for moral realists. Hence, the dilemma

But is that so? First, I want to clarify Street’s boat analogy. The way she puts our ability to rationally reflect that serves as a compass in her boat analogy is not completely accurate. Instead, it is more accurate to say that our ability to rationally reflect serves as a map in her boat analogy. Because the way a compass works is that it points towards north. However, it is inaccurate to suggest rational reflection guides *independent moral facts*. Analogically speaking, a map would be a better choice of word. Imagine that we are lost at sea, along with a map that does not help us to reach the destination, because we do not know the direction that we are pointing at. If I am right about this, can moral realists say a little bit more? Since we are talking about*the force of natural selection* in evolutionary time. A map, perhaps with a few resources, we may reach our destination eventually. My point is that rational reflection can hold independently to our evaluative judgments. At the very least, it serves as a good starting point, and that is all we need to reach our *independent moral facts*.

**Reference**

Street, S. (2006). A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value. *Philosophical Studies,* *127*(1), 109-166. DOI:10.1007/s11098-005-1726-6