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Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About

Sharon Street
New York University

1. Introduction

I am grateful for the opportunity to reply to David Copp's thoughtful discussion of the Darwinian Dilemma. I regret that there is not space to do justice to all of the points Copp's piece raises. Instead I will try to move quickly to what I take to be the heart of our disagreement, and to the larger issues this disagreement raises.[1]

The heart of the disagreement, as I understand it, is this. There is a striking coincidence between the normative judgments we human beings think are true, and the normative judgments that evolutionary forces pushed us in the direction of making. I claim that the realist about normativity owes us an explanation of this striking fact, but has none; Copp agrees that an explanation is owed, but argues that the moral realist has a good one. Copp argues, in particular, that his own society-centered version of moral realism illustrates the right strategy. I will argue that either Copp's proposed explanation fails, or else his view is not, as it purports to be, a version of realism about *normativity*.

More generally, I will suggest that naturalist versions of moral realism, of which Copp's view is a prominent example, face the following problem. Either they fall victim to the Darwinian Dilemma, or else they escape it, but only at the expense of failing to vindicate the objective bindingness of morality. I'll begin with a brief recap of the Darwinian Dilemma, spend most of the paper examining Copp's response to it, and then close with some more general comments.

2. Recap of the Darwinian Dilemma

The Darwinian Dilemma begins with the observation that evolutionary forces have played a tremendous role in shaping the content of human evaluative attitudes.[2] For example, we tend to view our survival as good, our children's lives as valuable, and the fact that someone has helped us as a reason to help that person in return. From an evolutionary point of view, these and many other of our basic evaluative tendencies are no accident. It is fairly obvious why, other things being equal, ancestors with these evaluative tendencies would have left more descendants than counterparts who, for example, viewed their survival as bad, their children's lives as worthless, or the fact that someone has helped them as a reason to hurt that person in return.

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[1] One important question Copp raises, but which there is not space to discuss here, is why, in my view, constructivism escapes the Darwinian Dilemma in ways not available to a naturalist realist view like his own. For relevant discussion, see Street 2006 (section 10 and note 57), 2007a, 2007b, and 2008.

[2] The following argument is developed in much greater detail in Street 2006.

The fact of this evolutionary influence raises a puzzle for the realist about normativity. According to the normative realist, there are normative truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes.[3] Moreover, as a purely conceptual matter, these independent normative truths might be anything. In other words, for all our bare normative concepts tell us, survival might be bad, our children's lives might be worthless, and the fact that someone has helped us might be a reason to hurt that person in return. Of course we think these claims are false—perhaps even necessarily false—but the point is that if they are false, it's not our bare normative concepts that tell us so. Noting this sense in which the normative truth might be anything, and noting the role of evolutionary forces in shaping the content of our basic evaluative tendencies, we may wonder whether there is any reason to think these forces would have led us to be capable of grasping the independent normative truth posited by the realist. More specifically, we may ask the normative realist: what is the relation, if any, between the independent normative truth, on the one hand, and the evolutionary influences that shaped our evaluative attitudes, on the other? In response, the realist may either affirm or deny a relation.

Suppose first that the realist *denies* any relation between evolutionary influences and the independent normative truth (where I'm understanding "denying a relation" to be a matter of regarding the influence of evolutionary forces on our evaluative attitudes as no better than random with respect to the truth). Given how saturated with evolutionary influence our systems of normative judgment are, denying a relation leads the realist into trouble in one of two ways. Either the realist is forced to embrace a skeptical conclusion—acknowledging that our normative judgments are in all likelihood hopelessly off track, having been fundamentally shaped in their content by forces that bear no relation to the independent normative truth—or else the realist must hold that an astonishing coincidence took place—claiming that as a matter of sheer luck, evolutionary pressures affected our evaluative attitudes in such a way that they just happened to land on or near the true normative views among all the conceptually possible ones. Both of these claims are implausible, however.

Turning to the other horn of the dilemma, suppose the realist maintains that there *is* a relation between the evolutionary influences on our evaluative attitudes and the independent normative truth.[4] Importantly, the realist owes us an account of what this relation is. To insist that there is a relation while failing to offer any account of what that relation might be is no more satisfactory than positing that evolutionary forces landed us on or near the truth by sheer coincidence.

What account of the relation might the realist offer? There is one obvious candidate. According to what we may call the *tracking account*, it somehow promoted reproductive success to grasp the independent normative truth, and so creatures with an ability to do so were selected for. Unfortunately for the realist, however, the tracking account is scientifically indefensible. To explain why human beings tend to make the normative judgments we do, we do not need to suppose that these judgments are *true*, and that grasping the independent normative truth promoted reproductive success. Rather, all we need to suppose is that making these normative judgments (or rather "proto" versions of them) got us to act in ways that tended to promote reproductive success. For example, the best explanation of why we tend to value our survival is not that it's independently true that our survival is valuable, and that it somehow promoted

[3] I say more about how I'm understanding normative realism below, in section 9, as well as in Street 2006 and 2007b. *Evaluative attitudes* I am understanding to include desires, attitudes of approval and disapproval, unreflective evaluative tendencies, and consciously or unconsciously held normative judgments about what practical reasons we have, what we should or ought to do, what is good, valuable, and worthwhile, what is morally right and wrong, and so on.

[4] The assumption, of course, is that the realist will say that the relation is positive rather than negative—in other words, that evolutionary forces tended to push our normative judgments toward the truth rather than away from it.

reproductive success to recognize this, but rather, much more simply, that creatures who valued their survival tended to do what promoted it, and therefore left more descendants. The tracking account is untenable. Moreover, I claim, no other acceptable account of the relation is available to the realist.

3. Copp's Defense of Realism

Before undertaking to show how a realist may escape the Darwinian Dilemma, Copp modifies the dilemma's original presentation in two main ways.

First, Copp considers the dilemma only as it applies to *moral* realism, and not as it applies to realism about practical normativity in general. While I agree with Copp that one may restrict one's attention to this more limited version of the dilemma, doing so introduces crucial complexities having to do with morality/reasons internalism.[5] These complexities will be a focal point in what follows.

Second, rather than presenting the dilemma as giving the realist a choice between denying and affirming "a relation" between evolutionary influences and the independent moral truth, Copp presents it as giving the realist a choice between denying and affirming what Copp calls the *quasi-tracking thesis*. According to this thesis, "Darwinian forces caused our moral beliefs to quasi-track the moral facts" (p. NN), where "quasi-tracking" is a matter of tracking the moral facts to "an epistemically sufficient degree"—such that our moral beliefs "tend to do *well enough* in tracking the moral truth that rational reflection can in principle correct sufficiently for any distorting influence so as to undermine the skeptical worry" (p. NN, Copp's emphasis).[6]

Note that what Copp calls the (quasi-) tracking *thesis* is not to be confused with what I call the tracking *account*. The (quasi-) tracking *thesis* simply asserts that evolutionary forces shaped our moral beliefs in such a way that they track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree; it does not offer any *explanation* of why or how this happened. For all the tracking thesis says, our ability to track the independent normative truth could be a mere fluke—the byproduct of a chance alignment between the independent normative truth and the evaluative directions in which evolutionary forces pushed us. This is what distinguishes the (quasi-) tracking thesis from what I call the tracking *account*; the tracking *account* goes farther than the "thesis" and offers a (scientifically unacceptable) *explanation* of why the "thesis" holds, claiming in particular that an ability to grasp the independent normative truth tended to promote reproductive success and so was selected for.

Regarding this second modification, while I have reservations about Copp's way of formulating the dilemma, the core disagreement between me and Copp lies elsewhere. In order to get to that core as quickly as possible, I'll simply work with Copp's preferred presentation of the Darwinian Dilemma.

On Copp's formulation, the realist may either deny or affirm that evolutionary forces caused our moral beliefs to track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree. Suppose first that the realist *denies* that evolutionary forces caused our moral beliefs to track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree. I will set aside this horn of the dilemma, since Copp and I agree that it is an unpromising avenue for the realist. Copp is willing to concede that this route leads to an unacceptable skeptical conclusion for any realist who accepts (as Copp does for the sake of argument) that evolutionary forces have strongly influenced the content of our moral beliefs.

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[5] The term is Stephen Darwall's in Darwall 1997.

[6] Unless otherwise noted, all page references in the text are to Copp's "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism" (this volume).

So let us turn to the other horn of the dilemma as Copp formulates it. On this horn, the realist *affirms* that evolutionary forces caused our moral beliefs to track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree. This is the horn of the dilemma that Copp thinks the realist can safely grasp (p. NN). In brief, Copp's argument is that one can consistently reject what I have argued is the scientifically unacceptable tracking *account* while still affirming the tracking *thesis* (pp. NN-NN). In brief, my reply to this is that of course one can consistently reject the tracking *account* while still affirming the tracking *thesis*: the Darwinian Dilemma in its original formulation does not deny this. All the tracking *thesis* says is that evolutionary forces caused our moral beliefs to track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree, and the realist is welcome to insist upon this. But the point of the Darwinian Dilemma is that the realist owes us some *explanation* of this fact. Is our ability to track the moral facts just a fluke? (I have argued this is implausible.) Does the tracking *account* provide an adequate explanation? (I have argued that it does not.) Is there some other good explanation? (I have argued that there is not, so long as one remains a realist about normativity.)

As I understand our exchange, this part of the disagreement between me and Copp is superficial, and he and I are ultimately in agreement on three important points. First, Copp agrees that the realist owes us an *explanation* of why the tracking thesis holds; indeed, this is exactly what Copp goes on to discuss in the remainder of his paper. Second, he agrees that the realist cannot plausibly maintain that it was *mere chance* that natural selection caused our moral beliefs to align with the independent moral facts. And third, at least as I read him, Copp does not want to defend the tracking *account* as laid out in Street 2006 as (at least by itself) an adequate explanation of why the tracking thesis holds.[7]

This is not to say we don't disagree, of course. On the contrary, the important core of our disagreement, as I understand it, centers on whether the moral realist has some *other* good explanation of the fact that evolutionary forces caused our moral beliefs to track the independent moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree. Copp thinks the realist does; I think the realist doesn't. In other words, as I have argued, and as Copp seems to agree, "[the] degree of overlap between the content of [moral] truth and the content of the judgments that natural selection pushed us in the direction of making begs for an explanation" (Street 2006, p. 125). Copp thinks the realist *has* a satisfactory explanation—and, more specifically, that his own society-centered realist view illustrates this. I disagree. In what follows, I'll examine the explanation Copp offers, and argue that either the explanation fails, or else his metaethical theory is not genuinely realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma—a sense that I will argue is crucial. In particular, either the explanation Copp offers fails, or else his theory doesn't construe morality as objectively binding in the way one might have thought a realist theory aspires to, or indeed in any way that wouldn't be perfectly acceptable to an antirealist about normativity, who holds that things are required ultimately because we take them to be.

4. Copp's Proposed Explanation

First, however, we need to get Copp's proposed explanation on the table. The explanandum in question is the striking degree of overlap between the content of the normative truth and the evaluative directions in which evolutionary forces pushed us—or, to put it in Copp's language, and to focus on the moral case as

[7] Here I gloss over important complexities in Copp's discussion. In section 4, Copp writes that "It appears…that the tracking account, or at least a close relative of the tracking account, is actually compatible with the adaptive link account" (p. NN). He also writes that "…realists can combine the adaptive link account with a near relative of the quasi-tracking account to explain why the quasi-tracking thesis holds" (p. NN). These suggestions are a red herring, in my view, but for reasons of space, I cannot address them here.

he wishes, the fact that evolutionary forces shaped our moral beliefs to track the independent moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree.

The basic strategy of Copp's proposed explanation is this: Copp first offers a metaethical account that tells us the nature of morality and the truth conditions of moral beliefs, and then he sketches an evolutionary account that tells us why natural and cultural evolution could be expected to shape our moral beliefs so as to "quasi-track" the moral truth so understood. In more detail, his explanation is as follows.

According to Copp's "society-centered" metaethical account, morality has "the function of enabling a society to meet its needs" (p. NN). The needs of a society include, for example, the need to ensure that its population continues to exist, the need to ensure a system of cooperation among its members, and the need to maintain peaceful and cooperative relationships with neighboring societies (p. NN). On Copp's account, a basic moral proposition is true only if the moral code that would best serve the function of enabling society to meet its needs included or entailed a corresponding norm. For instance, the proposition that torture is wrong is true only if the moral code that would best serve the function of enabling society to meet its needs included or entailed a norm prohibiting torture (p. NN).

Copp next gives an account of why natural and cultural evolution would have tended to favor moral codes the currency of which in a society would enhance the society's ability to meet its needs (pp. NN-NN). He sketches a four-stage process by which norms promoting social stability, peacefulness, and cooperation might gradually have evolved. The details of this account may be set aside here, since I agree with Copp that something in the ballpark of the evolutionary account he sketches is probably correct, and will accept this for the sake of argument here.

With this evolutionary explanation in hand, Copp believes he has what he needs to explain the fact that evolutionary influences shaped our moral beliefs in such a way that they track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree. On the one hand, he has offered a metaethical account according to which the true moral beliefs are those which correspond to moral codes the currency of which in a society would best serve the society's needs. On the other hand, he has given an evolutionary account according to which natural and cultural evolution would have influenced our moral beliefs in ways that tended to favor this same type of moral code—in other words, moral codes the currency of which in a society would best serve the society's needs. Thus, according to Copp, once we couple our best evolutionary account with the society-centered theory's account of the nature of morality and the truth conditions of moral judgments, we have a satisfactory explanation of why evolutionary forces influenced our moral beliefs in such a way that they track the moral facts to an epistemically sufficient degree.

5. Reply to Copp: Overview

But as I'll now try to show, this explanation is not satisfactory; it does not answer the Darwinian Dilemma. In outline, I'll argue as follows. We must distinguish two readings of Copp's society-centered theory. On the first reading, the theory has normative implications. In other words—to employ "reasons language" as my language of choice for talking about normativity—the society-centered theory takes a position on how we have reason to live.[8] On the second reading, the theory has no normative

[8] Nothing hinges on the specific choice of "reasons language": the reader should feel free to substitute his or her own language of choice for talking about normativity, whether it be the language of *should*, *ought*, *the thing to do* (Gibbard 2003), or something else. Copp has reservations about invoking the idea of a reason to "explicate normativity" (Copp 2007b, p. 256). There is not space to examine his discussion here—in particular, there is not space to address his claim that there are "three grades of normativity" (Copp 2007b)—but note that I am not using the idea of a reason to *explicate* normativity; I'm just using it to *talk* about it, and one is free to substitute one's own term. As I explain elsewhere (Street 2008, section

implications. In other words, it takes no position on how we have reason to live. On either reading, the Darwinian Dilemma's challenge to realism about normativity stands. If, in accordance with the first reading, the society-centered theory has normative implications, then Copp's purported explanation fails to answer the dilemma; it merely reasserts, without in any way explaining, the coincidence between the independent normative truth and what evolutionary causes led us to believe. If, on the other hand, in accordance with the second reading, the theory has no normative implications, then the theory is not realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma—for in that case it makes no claim to the effect that there are at least some reasons that we have independently of all our evaluative attitudes. In other words, the view is not a version of realism about *normativity*. In this and the following two sections, I set aside the textual question of how to read Copp, and concentrate instead on laying out these two readings and their consequences. In section 8, I return to the question of how to read Copp. Doing so will help to shed further light on normative realism in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma and why that sense is not arbitrary or idiosyncratic but rather the one we should be keeping our eyes on.

According to Copp's society-centered theory, "the moral facts are identical to certain ordinary natural facts having to do with the needs of societies" (p. NN). More specifically, on Copp's view, the moral facts are identical to certain ordinary natural facts having to do with which moral codes would best meet society's needs. Call these ordinary natural facts *natural facts N*. According to the society-centered theory, the moral facts are identical to natural facts *N*.

But what is the exact nature of this theory? In particular, we need to know: Does Copp's identity claim have normative implications or not? Suppose the society-centered theory is correct and the moral facts are identical to natural facts *N*. What does this identity claim tell us, if anything, about how we have reason to conduct our lives? Each morning when we wake up, we face the question of what to do. Does the society-centered theory give us any guidance with respect to this question? Does it tell us, for instance, that as we go about our day, we have reason to conduct ourselves in accordance with codes such that their currency in society would enhance society's ability to meet its needs? Or does it say nothing at all on this score, perhaps telling us what moral behavior consists in, but taking no position on whether we have reason to engage in such behavior? In the former case, Copp's view is a version of *morality/reasons internalism*, according to which if *S* morally ought to do *A*, then necessarily there is reason for *S* to do *A* (consisting either in the fact that *S* morally ought so to act, or in considerations that ground that fact). In the latter case, Copp's view is a version of *morality/reasons externalism*, according to which we do not necessarily have reason to do what we morally ought; on this view, moral reasons are not necessarily, in themselves, reasons for acting (Darwall 1997). Since the textual evidence of Copp's "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism" is inconclusive on whether to read the society-centered theory as internalist or externalist in this sense, I will consider both possibilities before taking a closer look at the particulars of Copp's view as developed in other writings.

6. The Internalist Reading

First let us focus on the morality/reasons internalist reading. Suppose the society-centered theory *does* have implications about how we have reason to live. More specifically, suppose that it is part of the theory to tell us that we have reason to live in accordance with codes such that their currency in society would enhance society's ability meet its needs. If the view is a version of normative *realism*, as we are

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8), I believe there is a sense in which we must take normative concepts as primitive, and cannot "explicate" them; in that sense, my view is not a version of naturalistic reductionism, as Copp suggests (this volume, p. 8). And as I argue below in section 8, Copp himself has a language for talking about normativity, although he would object to my characterizing it as such. It's the language of "reasons *simpliciter*."

supposing it is, then it says that we have this reason independently of all our evaluative attitudes. When coupled with non-normative assumptions about what enhances a society's ability to meet its needs, then, the society-centered theory implies a broad range of substantive normative claims. It tells us, for instance, that we have reason not to lie, cheat, steal, or kill innocents, presumably, and that we have these reasons independently of all our evaluative attitudes.

But if this is the view, then Copp's appeal to the society-centered theory fails to answer the Darwinian Dilemma. The dilemma notes the striking coincidence between the independent normative truths posited by the realist and the normative views that evolutionary forces pushed us toward, and challenges the realist to explain this coincidence. It is no answer to this challenge simply to assume a large swath of substantive views on how we have reason to live, as the society-centered theory does on the internalist interpretation, and then note that these are the very views evolutionary forces pushed us toward. Such an account merely trivially reasserts the coincidence between the independent normative truth and what the evolutionary causes pushed us to think; it does nothing to explain that coincidence.

A comparison is useful here. Suppose you hold certain views about the planet Jupiter—about its size, surface, number of moons, and so on. Then one day you learn that you acquired these views about Jupiter by having them implanted in you by a hypnotist who picked them out of a hat. You're concerned that this might not have been a reliable method for arriving at them. In answer to that concern, it is no help to repeat your views about Jupiter and then point out that those are the very same ones that the hypnotist picked out of the hat and implanted in you. No method of arriving at your views about Jupiter—no matter how bizarre and unreliable—could fail this test, since if having led you to your actual views is the test of a method's reliability, then whatever method you actually used will come out as reliable.

Similarly, suppose you hold certain views about how you have reason to live (and you think there are independent truths about such matters). Then one day you learn that you acquired these normative views in large part by having had them shaped by evolutionary forces. You're concerned that this might not have been a reliable method for arriving at them. In answer to that concern, it is no help to repeat your views about how you have reason to live and then point out that those are the very same ones that evolutionary forces shaped you to have. No method of arriving at your views about how you have reason to live—no matter how bizarre and unreliable—could fail this test, since if having led you to your actual views is the test of a method's reliability, then whatever method you actually used will come out as reliable.

One might object that Copp's view does not merely repeat our views about the independent normative truth. And of course this is so: the society-centered theory is not just a list of our currently held views on how we have reason to live. Instead, the theory offers an analysis of the function of morality (pp. NN-NN); it proposes what Copp calls a *standard-based account* of the semantics of normative judgment (pp. NN-NN); and it brings a subset of our currently held normative views into reflective equilibrium in a certain way—pruning and distilling them into a general view according to which (on the internalist reading) we have reason to live in accordance with codes that would best serve society's needs.

These are important features of the view, but they should not distract us from what is fundamentally going on. In particular, our substantive normative views on how we have reason to live are (on the internalist reading of the theory) merely being taken for granted as at least roughly correct. These views are then gathered together, pruned and systematized, yielding a general claim to the effect that we have reason to act in accordance with codes that would best serve society's needs. But merely gathering together, pruning and systematizing our substantive normative views does nothing to save the alleged explanation from being trivially question-begging—any more so than gathering together, pruning and systematizing one's substantive views about Jupiter's size, surface, number of moons, and so on saves the analogous explanation from being trivially question-begging in the case where one has learned that those

views were implanted in one by a hypnotist who drew them out of a hat. As before, no matter how bizarre and unreliable one's method of arriving at one's beliefs about the independent normative truth (or about Jupiter), there is no way this approach to vindicating one's method could fail. By definition, one's starting set of views is going to be within reach of a pruned and systematized version of those very same views. So by definition, whatever method one actually used to arrive at one's starting set of views is going to have landed one within reach of a pruned and systematized version of those views. But it obviously doesn't follow from this that one's method was a good one that is likely to have landed one on the independent normative truth or the truth about Jupiter's size, surface, and so on. On the internalist reading, then, the society-centered theory has failed to give any satisfactory explanation of why evolutionary forces influenced our views on how we have reason to live in such a way that they track the independent normative truth to an epistemically sufficient degree; it merely trivially assumes that they did.

Here one might raise another objection.[9] One might acknowledge that our substantive normative views are being taken for granted as roughly correct (on the internalist reading of Copp's position), and that this makes the proposed explanation trivial in a certain sense. But then one might argue that this is true in all domains. One might argue that it is true even in science, for example, that if one is prohibited from taking one's substantive views for granted as at least roughly correct—for instance, if one is prohibited from assuming that one's measurement devices aren't systematically in error, that one isn't constantly suffering from delusions, and so on—then we will never be able to provide reason for thinking our methods in that domain are reliable either.[10] Thus, one might argue, to the extent the Darwinian Dilemma succeeds against normative realism, normative realism has distinguished "companions in the guilt."[11] Indeed, one might argue, to the extent the Darwinian Dilemma succeeds, it is merely a routine, general skeptical worry deployed selectively, and therefore loses much if not all of its interest.[12]

But this is mistaken. The Darwinian Dilemma is not a routine, general skeptical worry deployed selectively. Let us grant for the sake of argument—as I find entirely plausible—that explanations of our reliability in all domains, including science, must be "internal" in the sense that they must work from within what we already accept and ultimately merely assume that we are not completely off base with our currently accepted views. But we can embrace that point and then insist—indeed, we *must* insist on pain of accepting that all explanations are equal—that there nevertheless remains a distinction between internal explanations of reliability that provide *good (internal) reason* to think that we are reliable, and internal explanations of reliability that provide *no good reason whatsoever* to think that we are reliable.[13]

As an illustration, compare the following two accounts of our reliability when it comes to midsized objects in our immediate environment:

> *Account A*: There are six chairs, a laptop and a table in my immediate environment. But evolutionary forces gave rise to the capacity I used to make this very judgment. This gives me reason to think my capacity to make judgments about midsized objects in my immediate environment is reliable.

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[9] To raise this objection is to abandon what Copp calls the "aggressive strategy" and adopt a "defensive strategy" for replying to the Darwinian Dilemma (p. NN). As such, it constitutes an abandonment of the strategy Copp wishes to pursue (p. NN).

[10] Copp cites Boyd 1988 making just this point (p. NN).

[11] The phrase is Mackie's in his 1977.

[12] The objection here is analogous to the one Sturgeon 1985 raises against Harman 1977.

[13] For related discussion, see Gibbard 2003, chapter 13. I have been influenced by Gibbard's treatment.

> *Account B*: Midsized objects in our immediate environment are the kinds of things one can run into, be injured by, eat, and be eaten by. Other things being equal, then, creatures with an ability accurately to detect midsized objects in their immediate environment tended to survive and reproduce in greater numbers than creatures who lacked this ability. I am a product of this evolutionary process. This gives me reason to think my capacity to make judgments about midsized objects in my immediate environment is reliable.

Account *A* provides no good reason whatsoever to think we are reliable, as shown by the fact that one could just as well argue:

> *Account C*: There are six chairs, a laptop and a table in my immediate environment. But a malevolent god implanted me with the capacity I used to make this very judgment. This gives me reason to think my capacity to make judgments about midsized objects in my immediate environment is reliable.

Account *B*, on the other hand, provides what is, if correct, a good internal reason to think we are reliable. While the account ultimately merely assumes that our substantive views about the world are at least roughly correct, and so of course provides no guarantee that we are reliable, it does not, the way account *A* does, merely immediately beg the question of our reliability in a way that could be used to justify any method whatsoever of arriving at our judgments about midsized objects in our immediate surroundings.

These issues deserve a more thorough discussion than is possible here,[14] but I take it to be obvious that there is an important difference between accounts *A* and *B*. Thus, even if we grant for the sake of argument that all explanations of reliability must ultimately assume that we are at least roughly on track with our current set of views, there is nevertheless a vital distinction between accounts that provide good internal reason to think we are reliable and accounts that provide no good reason at all. Moreover, on the internalist reading of the society-centered theory, Copp's proposed explanation of our moral reliability falls into the latter category: it is of the same basic form as accounts *A* and *C*, and the additional complexities involved in the society-centered view do not change that, although they make it less obvious.

On the internalist reading of the society-centered theory, then, the explanatory burden that Copp agrees needs to be met has not been met. No satisfactory explanation has been given of why evolutionary forces could be expected to influence our normative beliefs in such a way that they are likely to track the independent normative facts to an epistemically sufficient degree.

7. The Externalist Reading

So let us turn to the externalist reading. Suppose that the society-centered theory does *not* have normative implications; suppose, in other words, that it takes *no* position on how we have reason to live. On this interpretation, the theory tells us "the nature of morality and the truth conditions of moral propositions," as Copp puts it (p. NN), but leaves it entirely open whether we have any reason to do what is morally required. On this reading, the society-centered theory explains the function of morality in the same way one might explain the function of apartheid, table manners, Jim Crow laws, or contact sports: an informative enterprise, but of course not necessarily implying that we have any reason to take part in the institution or practice whose function is being described. Similarly, on this reading, the society-centered theory explains the truth conditions of claims about right and wrong in the same way one might explain the truth conditions of claims about what is polite and impolite in a foreign culture: again, a legitimate

[14] I discuss them further in Street 2007b.

explanatory undertaking, but not by itself implying that we have any reason to pay heed to these concepts in our own behavior.

If we read the society-centered theory in this externalist way, then the view is not realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma. Normative realism, in the sense targeted, is the claim that there are at least some reasons that we have independently of all our evaluative attitudes. If the society-centered theory says nothing about how we have reason to live, then *a fortiori* it doesn't say that we have certain reasons independently of all our evaluative attitudes. The target of the Darwinian Dilemma, in other words, is *normative* realism, and so its target includes *moral* realism only if morality is understood according to a morality/reasons internalist model. If morality is understood according to an externalist model, then the Darwinian Dilemma is no more directed at the society-centered theory than it is at an anthropologist's or historian's analytical theory about the function of Jim Crow laws in the American South. Such theories may be correct, but they do not by themselves speak to the question of how to live or whether there are any truths about this question that hold apart from our evaluative attitudes.

8. Copp's Actual View

Having distinguished these two readings of the society-centered theory, let us return to the question of how to read Copp's actual view. In "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism," there is textual evidence in favor of both readings.

On the one hand, in favor of the morality/reasons externalist reading, there is Copp's claim that the society-centered theory "rests largely…on second-order philosophical intuitions" (p. NN), coupled with his comment that these second-order views "do not have the direct connection to behavior that first-order moral beliefs have" and "are philosophical views rather than normative moral views that speak to how to behave" (p. NN). The second-order views in question include the idea that morality has the function of making society possible and the standard-based account of the semantics of normative judgment. These remarks by Copp suggest that the society-centered view is a non-normative position that does not by itself tell us anything about how to live. In that case, as explained in the previous section, the society-centered theory is not among the intended targets of the Darwinian Dilemma.

On the other hand, in favor of the morality/reasons internalist reading, there is Copp's claim that *first-order* moral beliefs *do* have a direct connection to behavior (p. NN), coupled with his comment that the society-centered theory has implications for our first-order moral beliefs and wouldn't be plausible if its implications conflicted dramatically with those beliefs (p. NN). This suggests that the society-centered theory *does* in the end take a normative stand on (in Copp's words) "how to behave" (p. NN)—telling us that we have reason to live in accordance with moral codes the currency of which in society would best serve society's needs. In that case, as I argued in section 6, the society-centered view does ultimately rest on our normative intuitions and so fails to answer the Darwinian Dilemma.

One might think—and it is possible to read Copp as thinking, in a third possible reading of his view—that one can start with purely second-order, non-normative views about the function of morality and the standard-based account of the semantics of normative judgment, and from these *derive* (directly, without implicitly relying on substantive normative premises) substantive normative conclusions concerning how we have reason to live. But this thought is a mistake. The standard-based account of the semantics of normative judgment by itself clearly has no substantive implications about how we should live.[15] Nor

[15] According to this account, a moral proposition is true just in case a corresponding moral standard has the relevant truth-grounding status (p. NN). By itself, this tells us nothing substantive about how to live. Substantive questions about how to live do not arise until (in a separate part of Copp's theory) one starts asking which standards have the "relevant truth-grounding status."

does it follow from an analysis of the function of morality that we have reason to be moral—any more than it follows from an analysis of the function of Jim Crow laws that we have reason to abide by them.

How then should we read Copp's view? It is helpful to consider his discussion of a certain example. In *Morality in a Natural World*, Copp writes:

> Imagine a group of mountain climbers who, after weeks of struggle, are within a day's climb of the summit of Everest. They will have to turn back tomorrow. Just after they begin their final push for the summit, they come across a small party of climbers who are huddled together, clearly in terrible need of help. These people, 'the victims,' are in their predicament as a result of an extraordinary combination of circumstances, including unusually extreme weather. They need to be helped down to a lower elevation, and their needs are immediate and life-threatening. The first group might realize that, morally, they ought to help. Yet they are indifferent to moral considerations; they do not care whether they are doing what they morally ought to do. They hurry on to the summit. In doing so they are being extremely selfish and callous, but, intuitively, this is compatible with their being entirely *rational*. (2007d, pp. 311-312)

Copp argues that this example supports the intuitive plausibility of what he calls *reasons pluralism*—"the view that there are different kinds of reasons, including moral reasons, self-grounded reasons, reasons of etiquette, and so on" (2007d, p. 312). *Self-grounded reasons* "are (roughly) facts about the impact the agent's alternatives would have on what she values" (2007d, p. 312). On Copp's view, given the climbers' values, they have self-grounded reason to press on to the summit. But they have moral reason to stop and help the victims.

Next Copp writes:

> Intuitively, just as there are different kinds of reasons, there are different kinds of "ought." This raises the question of what the climbers ought to do *simpliciter*. I have argued elsewhere that there is not a highest-order normative standard or kind of reason relative to which there is in general something that ought to be done *simpliciter*. If I am correct, there is no answer to what the climbers ought to do *simpliciter*. (2007d, p. 313)

Elsewhere he elaborates:

> When we are trying to decide how to act, we do sometimes manifestly have the thought that there is something that it would be best to choose, period. This thought commits us to the existence of a standard that determines the proper weight of all the reasons that bear on a decision and that therefore determines what would be best or right *simpliciter*. If I am correct, this thought is false. There are only the various reasons of the various special kinds, and in weighing them we are simply deciding which to act on. Our decision may be *guided* by the reasons there are, but it is not *determined* by the reasons. That is, again, the reasons do not balance out from a standpoint that determines their correct weight and the right choice, period and without qualification. (2007c, pp. 303-304)

Copp's view on these matters explains why, in "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism," it is hard to get a read on where Copp's view falls with respect to the morality/reasons internalism/externalism distinction. On the one hand, as Copp would put it, the society-centered theory *does* tell us what reasons we have; it *does* speak to how to live. This is what makes the view sometimes sound like a version of morality/reasons internalism. But now we see that there is an utterly crucial qualification at work in the background. Really what the society-centered theory tells us is what *moral* reasons we have; really what it speaks to is how *morally* to live. But if one wants to know how one has reason to live *simpliciter*—in

other words, if one is asking how to live *period*—then the society-centered theory has nothing to say in answer to this question. In Copp's view, there *is* no answer to this question.

Copp offers a careful defense of his view on these matters (see Copp 2007). It is impossible to give his arguments adequate consideration here. But I submit that Copp's view that there is no answer to the question "how to live *period*" constitutes a total abandonment of everything one might have thought a normative realist aspired to preserve. After all, what is a normative claim except a claim that offers an answer to the agent in the heat of action who is asking for guidance about what to do? If one is feeling torn between pushing on to the summit and helping others at the expense of losing one's one shot ever at achieving a lifelong dream, the question one is struggling with is what to do *period*. To say, in answer to the climber, that "You have *moral* reason to stop, but *self-grounded* reason to press on" utterly fails to answer her question. She already knew *that*.[16]

To motivate the point a bit differently, suppose you're a parent and your teenage child has asked you whether to confess that he is the one behind a prank at school or permit a wrongly accused friend to take the blame and get suspended. Suppose you answer, "Morally, you should confess, but from a self-interested point of view you shouldn't." "I know, I know," the teen says impatiently—"but Mom (Dad), I'm asking you what I should do." Your child's impatient response seems entirely in order: he has asked a clear-cut question, and you are evading it. If, in reply, you merely repeat your point about morality and self-interest, your child can justly accuse you of failing to answer him, of failing to offer guidance. Suppose, on the other hand, you say, "Oh, you're asking what you should do *period*? There's no answer to this question." If your puzzled child replies "Oh, so do you think I should just flip a coin?" it's hard to see how you can deny this. If you insist that his coin-flipping conclusion is confused because it invokes the concept of "should *simpliciter*," this sounds like an error theory rather than a version of moral realism: are you really telling your child that whenever he (or anyone else) asks what he should do *period*, the question is confused? And if your child goes ahead and lets the other student take the blame, surely you cannot reproach him for ignoring your advice; you didn't *give* any. (Or rather, to the extent you did, you told him that it didn't matter (*simpliciter*) what he did, since there is no reason (*simpliciter*) to cleave to the reasons of morality over the reasons of self-interest.)

Nor is any of this special to extreme moments of decision. On the contrary, every moment one is alive and giving it any thought, one faces the question of what to do *period*. A normative claim is a claim that takes a stand on *that* question.

Assuming the society-centered theory takes no position on what we have reason *simpliciter* to do, then, it has no normative implications. One might protest that Copp's theory still tells us what we have *moral* reason to do; it still tells us how *morally* to live; and in that way provides us with guidance. Thus it has normative implications after all, one might argue. But this isn't right. Assuming it takes no stand on how to live *period*, the theory has no more normative implications than does an analysis of the function of Jim Crow laws or the rules of tiddlywinks. One could equally well say of these analyses that they tell us what we have *Jim Crow* or *tiddlywinks* reason to do—that they tell us how *in a Jim Crow* or *tiddlywinks way* to live.[17] Such theories provide "guidance" only in a trivial sense that is analogous to the sense in which a descriptive statement of means to an end provides guidance. Clearly the claim 'The fastest, least expensive way to make your air conditioner bark like a dog is to do X' is not a normative claim, but rather a statement of descriptive fact. Statements about "how in a *moral*, *Jim Crow*, or *tiddlywinks* way to live" are no more normative than this.

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[16] Copp considers this objection (see his 2007d, p. 350). The reply he offers is not convincing, in my view, but there is not space to discuss this here.

[17] The point is a familiar one. See, for example, Darwall 1997, p. 306.

Assuming that it says nothing about how we have reason *simpliciter* to live, then, the society-centered view is a version of morality/reasons *externalism* in the sense that's of interest. With Copp's distinction between what one has *moral reason* to do and what one has *reason simpliciter* to do in hand, we may reformulate the internalism/externalism distinction as follows:

> *Morality/reasons internalism*: If *S* morally ought to do *A*, then necessarily there is a reason *simpliciter* for *S* to do *A* (consisting either in the fact that *S* morally ought so to act, or in considerations that ground that fact).
>
> *Morality/reasons externalism*: We do not necessarily have any reason *simpliciter* to do what we morally ought; on this view, moral reasons are not necessarily, in themselves, reasons *simpliciter*.

My arguments in sections 5, 6 and 7 presuppose this understanding (which I take to be the natural one[18]) of the internalism/externalism distinction. Since Copp's view is best interpreted as externalist in this sense, it turns out that his view is not normative realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma, although it often sounds as though it is, and seems intended to be.

9. The Varieties of Normative Realism Worth Worrying About

I have concluded that Copp's view is not normative realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma. One might worry that this sense of realism is *ad hoc*—that it might just trivially amount to "realist in the sense vulnerable to the Darwinian Dilemma," for example. Moreover, one might worry, no one really holds this view.

But this is not so. Normative realism in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma is of central importance, and a great number of contemporary theorists hold it. Just as importantly, a great many theorists (Copp among them) very much *appear* to hold it—calling themselves *moral realists* (sometimes even "stark, raving" moral realists[19]) and conveying the strong impression of having vindicated moral requirements as objectively binding—until one looks more closely at the view in question and realizes that it does *not* vindicate moral requirements as objectively binding.

Normative realism in the sense I'm interested in, and in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma—for lack of a better term, call it *uncompromising normative realism*—is fundamentally quite simple. In essence, it just says that normativity is mind-independent. Formulated more precisely, it says that there are at least some normative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes, such that an agent can have normative reason (*simpliciter*) to do *Y* even though the conclusion that she has this reason in no way follows from within her own practical point of view, understood roughly as her own set of evaluative attitudes. On this view, for example, an ideally coherent Caligula has reason (*simpliciter*) not to torture others, even if the opposite conclusion follows perfectly from within his own practical point of view.[20] The whole point of uncompromising normative realism is that it *vindicates* morality if correct: it establishes that every agent has some reasons (presumably including reasons to be moral) independently of his or her evaluative attitudes, such that someone like an ideally coherent Caligula is making a *mistake*, is *missing something*, if he fails to recognize that he has reason (*simpliciter*) not to torture others.

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[18] When Darwall 1997 presents the distinction, for example, he makes it clear that he is talking about "reasons unqualifiedly, or with the qualifier removed" (p. 306).

[19] Railton 1986.

[20] The example is from Gibbard 1999.

While the idea behind uncompromising normative realism is straightforward, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a given theory is a version of it. Naturalist versions of moral realism are a case in point. These theories sometimes give the impression of being versions of uncompromising normative realism. But a close look often reveals otherwise. Here and in Street 2006 I have assembled some criteria that a version of naturalist realism must meet if it is to be uncompromisingly normative realist. In summary, the criteria are as follows.

The naturalist realist asserts that moral facts are identical to (or constituted by) certain ordinary natural facts *N*. Call this the *natural-normative identity*. In order to be a version of uncompromising normative realism:

(1) The view must claim that the natural-normative identity holds independently of our evaluative attitudes. In other words, according to the view, the normative facts are identical to *N*, and even if we'd had entirely different evaluative attitudes, such that those attitudes tended to track some completely different natural property *M*, say, the normative facts would *still* be identical to *N* and not *M*.[21]

(2) It must not achieve the result mentioned in (1) by "rigidifying." In other words, it must not claim that the natural-normative identity in question is fixed by our *actual* attitudes.[22]

(3) The natural-normative identity must have implications about how we have reason to live. In particular, if the view asserts an identity between *moral* facts and natural facts (as opposed to normative facts more generally and natural facts), it must be a version of morality/reasons internalism. In other words, the theory must claim that we have reason to be moral. Moreover—to clarify this criterion in the wake of our look at Copp's view—it must have implications about how we have reason *simpliciter* to live.

On superficial inspection, this list might appear cobbled together and arbitrary. It is not. We need to keep our eyes on the prize—on what it is that we're really worried about in the realism/antirealism debate in metaethics. I submit that it's whether or not there are truths about what we have reason (*simpliciter*) to do that hold independently of our evaluative attitudes—such that an ideally coherent Caligula among us is mistaken.[23]

To fail to meet any of these criteria is to abandon normative realism in any sense that *vindicates* morality. It is to compromise, and to acknowledge (either unintentionally or in a less than fully upfront way) the exact same conclusion that antirealists argue for, namely that there are no genuinely normative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes. In particular, a version of naturalist realism that fails to meet criterion (1) admits that if our evaluative attitudes were entirely different, then what we have reason to pursue would be identical to something entirely different. A version of naturalist realism that fails to meet criterion (2) entails that if we encounter another population and try to argue with them about what there is reason to pursue, we will be talking past one another, with the reference of our normative language fixed by our actual evaluative attitudes, and the reference of their normative language fixed by their actual evaluative attitudes—such that there is no single objective subject matter that we are

[21] See Street 2006, pp. 136-139 for further discussion and defense of this criterion and the next one.

[22] See Horgan and Timmons 1991 and 1992 for relevant discussion.

[23] Note that this question is actually a normative question in the view of those such as Blackburn 1984 and 1993, Dworkin 1996, and Gibbard 2003, as well as in my own view. This point obviously raises large questions about the distinction between normative ethics and metaethics. I say more about this in Street 2007a and 2007b.

disagreeing about. A version of naturalist realism that fails to meet criterion (3) is perhaps realist, but not *normative* realist: it vindicates the objective bindingness of morality in just the same way that an analysis of the function of Jim Crow laws vindicates the objective bindingness of segregation, which is to say not at all.

10. Conclusion

Does anyone actually hold a version of naturalist realism that meets these three criteria? The answer may well be no; there is not space to address this here. (Indeed, it may be that one *can't* meet these criteria without rather obviously becoming a non-naturalist—hence the sense one often gets with naturalist realist views that either there's something non-naturalist going on or else they don't really get us what we want.) But even assuming no one actually holds such a version of naturalist realism, this is no indication that what I've called *uncompromising normative realism* is uninteresting. On the contrary, I have tried to make it clear that uncompromising normative realism is normative realism in the sense we care about—the sense of realism such that if it can be defended, the objective bindingness of morality is vindicated. And of course there are still plenty of people who *are* uncompromising normative realists—namely the *non-naturalist* realists.[24] Moreover, what I have presented largely as a point of classification—that Copp's view and others like it are ultimately not realist in the sense targeted by the Darwinian Dilemma—could of course equally well be presented as a criticism—namely that these views fail to capture the objective bindingness of morality and are so are not versions of realism about *normativity* in the sense we care about.

This last point might prompt the response that if this is so, then the Darwinian Dilemma has nothing new to say about naturalist realist views; it just leads us back to the familiar complaint that they fail to capture the normativity of morality. As Copp concludes, "The argument against moral realism must rest on more familiar philosophical objections to the society-centered theory and other forms of realism rather than on the Darwinian Dilemma" (p. NN). But I think this downplays the significance of the dilemma. First, this statement obscures the point that the dilemma still stands as a challenge to *non-naturalist* versions of moral realism. But more to the point in the present context, it seems to me that pressing the Darwinian Dilemma helps us get clearer on a crucial ambiguity that is sometimes present in naturalist realist views. In a sense, we start by taking the naturalist realist at his or her word, assuming for the sake of argument that he or she has succeeded in capturing the normativity of morality. We then press the Darwinian Dilemma. If, in attempting to respond to it, the naturalist realist is forced to make moves that help reveal that the view has not succeeded in capturing the normativity of morality, then this is useful. The naturalist realist is then confronted with a more general challenge: either the view succeeds in capturing the objective bindingness of morality, in which case it falls victim to the Darwinian Dilemma, or else it fails to capture the objective bindingness of morality, in which case no doubt it escapes the Darwinian Dilemma, but at the expense of failing to be realist about *normativity*. In the latter case, the upshot is that there may be more unspoken consensus in metaethics than it seems. In particular, the naturalist realists and the antirealists may at some level agree that a naturalistic worldview is incompatible with an *uncompromising* normative realism—with antirealists just wearing this conclusion more openly on their sleeve. In either case, I would argue, the Darwinian Dilemma achieves its goal, which is to establish that things are good, valuable, and required ultimately because we take them to be.[25]

[24] See for example Dworkin 1996, Enoch 2007, Nagel 1986, Scanlon 1998, and Shafer-Landau 2003.

[25] For their very helpful comments, I am indebted to David Copp, Matt Evans, and David Velleman.

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