

The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense

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*Presented at the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society
(HBES), June 16-20, 2010, at the University of Oregon*

Welcome, and thanks for your interest and consideration.

This document contains the text of my presentation titled “The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense”, presented as a “poster” at the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES) in June, 2010 at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

The text is presented in full, along with contextual information about the presentation and the Annual Meeting.

In order to maintain fidelity to the presentation itself—as well as for ease of reading and ease of production—I’ve kept the font sizes the same as they were in the original poster presentation.

Please refer to the Table of Contents on the next page, and thanks again for your interest and consideration.

Be Well!

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June 26, 2010

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The Poster Presentation:

The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense

Illustrations of The Problems

A longstanding and immensely consequential issue is that of the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in the normative sense. A resolution that is both scientifically grounded and soundly reasoned is found in the solution space informed by the foundational considerations covered herein, illustrated by quotes throughout the presentation.

To begin, the following quotes help illustrate a number of related problems and, in so doing, provide a broad “statement of the problem”, so to speak:

From *Nature*

Consider this passage from an editorial summary by the journal *Nature*, titled “Evolution and the brain”, which appeared in the 14 June 2007 issue:

Moral philosophers often put great store by their rejection of the ‘naturalistic fallacy’, the belief that because something is a particular way, it ought to be that way. Now we learn that untutored beliefs about ‘what ought to be’ do, in fact, reflect an ‘is’: the state of the human mind as an evolved entity. Accepting this represents a challenge that few as yet have really grappled with.

From *The New York Times*

Consider these passages from a feature article in the *Science* section of *The New York Times* regarding the work of primatologist Frans de Waal, titled “Scientist Finds the Beginnings of Morality in Primate Behavior”, by science reporter Nicholas Wade (March 20, 2007):

Philosophers have another reason biologists cannot, in their view, reach to the heart of morality, and that is that biological analyses cannot cross the gap between “is” and “ought,” between the description of some behavior and the issue of why it is right or wrong. “You can identify some value we hold, and tell an evolutionary story about why we hold it, but there is always that radically different question of whether we ought to hold it,” said Sharon Street, a moral philosopher at New York University. “That’s not to discount the importance of what biologists are doing, but it does show why centuries of moral philosophy are incredibly relevant, too.”

Biologists are allowed an even smaller piece of the action by Jesse Prinz, a philosopher at the University of North Carolina. He believes morality developed after human evolution was finished and that moral sentiments are shaped by culture, not genetics.

From David Hume

For context, consider this original, highly influential passage by David Hume— from his *Treatise of Human Nature*— who was a brilliant thinker but who wrote this more than a century before Darwin illuminated important matters in his *On The Origin of Species* and well before most other modern scientific understanding:

I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprized to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.

From Peter Railton

Consider the following helpful comment from noted philosopher Peter Railton:

[The] ‘is’/‘ought’ gap, and the naturalistic fallacy are perhaps better seen as warnings than as outright barriers, reminding us of ways in which the project can fail, and indeed often has failed. But they should not warn us off the project altogether, since the need to ask how morality fits with our best empirical understanding of ourselves and our place in nature and history arises from within normative moral thought itself.

And More

There are also some very helpful quotes—that illustrate different aspects of these and related problems—in a helpful paper by Oliver Curry, titled “Who’s Afraid of the Naturalistic Fallacy?”, which ran in *Evolutionary Psychology*, Vol. 4, 2006.

The Foundational Bridge

The Nature of Life \longleftrightarrow Scopes of Consideration & Complementary Correspondences \longleftrightarrow The Nature of "Reason"

The Nature of Life

- A foundational part of the nature of life is that life values its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next. ⁽¹⁾

- The ultimate point—as in, effective function—of sociality is enhancing fitness.

C. Boggs; a paraphrase

- “Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living.” ⁽²⁾

M. Bekoff and J. Pierce, *Wild Justice*

fitness *reproductive success* *“the currency of life”*
survival-plus-reproduction
adaptation and adaptations

“The inherent tautology of the definition of life—that which lives and seeks to perpetuate itself— . . .”

Natalie Angier, *The Canon: A Whirligig Tour of the Beautiful Basics of Science*

“However life got started, one thing is clear. Life so loved being alive that it has never, since its sputtering start, for a moment ceased to live.”

Natalie Angier, *The Canon: A Whirligig Tour of the Beautiful Basics of Science*

“They [biologists] have pointed out, for example, that the two fundamental functions of any living thing are that it must have some form of genetic code, the ability to pass on information from one generation to the next, and it must be able to perform chemical reactions, to break down food, for example. These are, respectively, the functions of genes and enzymes.”

Michael J. Benton, *The History of Life*, part of OUP’s *A Very Short Introduction* series

“Impersonal, blind to the future, it [natural selection] has no goals, only results. Its sole standards of valuation are survival and reproductive success. From scattershot variations, culled and accreted, it produces pragmatic forms of order. . . . its products and byproducts are adaptation, complexity, and diversity.”

David Quammen, *The Reluctant Mr. Darwin: An Intimate Portrait of Charles Darwin and the Making of His Theory of Evolution*

“Current mechanisms of mind are the end products of a selective process, a sieve through which features passed because they contributed, either directly or indirectly, to reproductive success. All living humans are evolutionary success stories. They each have inherited the mechanisms of mind and body that led to their ancestors’ achievements in producing descendants. If any one of their ancestors had failed along the way to survive, mate, reproduce, and solve a host of tributary adaptive problems, they would not have become ancestors. As their descendants, people hold in their possession magical keys—the adaptive mechanisms that led to their ancestors’ success.”

David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Happiness* (*American Psychologist*, January 2000)

“The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable—namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man.”

Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

Scopes of Consideration & Complementary Correspondences

- “In ethics as in optics, we need stereoscopy to see the world in all its dimensions.”

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics*

- “The unexamined life is not worth living.”⁽³⁾

Socrates; a common paraphrase

- “[E]thical philosophers intuit the deontological canons of morality by consulting the emotive centers of their own hypothalamic-limbic systems.”⁽⁴⁾

E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*

- “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”⁽⁵⁾

Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Serenity Prayer”

- “To identify with a given desire is to affirm through reflection the normative content that the desire presents, in ways that would remain stable if subjected to further critical scrutiny.” (6)

R. Jay Wallace, *Normativity & the Will*

Relationships

The natures of the relationships between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, between fact and value, between an understanding of “how the world works” and the normative ‘ought’, and between scientific understanding and reason—as well as the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in the normative sense—are best understood by recognizing and understanding the interrelationships, correspondences, and common matter between the nature of *life* and the nature of *reason*.

If life naturally (by its nature) values something (call it **X**) ...

And *If*—upon examination, all things considered—an excellent combination of evidence and reasoning shows that it makes more sense for life *to* value **X** than it does for life to value *Opposite X* or something else (e.g., **Y** or **Z**) that substantially contradicts **X** ...

Then an important relationship has been identified, understood, and affirmed (in those important senses).

And, if **X** is something of foundational importance, then that important relationship is, in essence, an important “common foundation” or “bridge” between the scientific understanding of life and the results of an appeal to reason regarding the relevant matter.

foundational bridge mutual correspondence
connective bridge “conclusion pointed to in common”
common ground common matter
complementary ingredients in the marvelous mousse

Every Day—But How Well?

We humans do it every day—but usually with insufficient understanding, often with misunderstanding, and almost always within the context of our human blind spots. The real question is not whether the considerations highlighted herein are relevant or related, or whether they illuminate a foundational “bridge”. *They are, and they do.* Instead, the real question is how well we recognize and respond to them in order to live life well, healthfully, responsibly, ethically, and sustainably. (See also below.)

The Nature of “Reason”

- “Reason” can either affirm these foundational values of life or be indifferent to them, in which case it must defer to other criteria and judges and permit affirmation. It cannot negate these foundational values of life.

“Reason” can either support the affirmation of these foundational values of life (existence and continuance), upon examination and in a *meta* sense, or it can be considered indifferent to the matter—depending on one’s conception of “reason” and what considerations such conception acknowledges. “Reason” cannot reject—in the sense of *negate*—these values. A conception of “reason” defined to be indifferent to this matter can only reasonably defer to other criteria and judges on the matter. (After all, it is contradictory and *unreasonable* to insist on being the final judge of a matter while also claiming to *not* be able to judge the same matter.) One way or the other, the ultimate result is *affirmation*. Of course, “reason” is an ability and tool that helps us as we seek to live successfully, to understand things, and to avoid mistakes of thinking as we pursue those ends. Our reasoning faculties and abilities are ultimately products of our evolutionary development, and we have them *because* they have enhanced fitness, so far anyhow.

- “The fundamental question” . . .

“To be, or not to be, that is the question – ”

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer. And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of that reply, for it will precede the definitive act. These are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect.”

Albert Camus, from the opening paragraph of the first essay of *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*

- . . . Considered in relation to an interdependent social group—e.g., *the lifeboat question*

Posed by members of an interdependent social group (e.g., the human species) with respect to the existence and continuing existence of the group’s members and of the life that the group represents.

- Three possible responses at the *meta* level:
 - Affirmative (life-affirming) response
 - Negative (life-negating, self-defeating) response
 - Avoidant response—not genuinely a response

- It's Our Choice—and up to us humans to determine the best response, the best reasoned response, the response most consistent with reason, the most reasonable response given the best combination of evidence, understanding, and reasoning available to us

- Reason supports the choice of the *affirmative response* as being better reasoned, more consistent with reason, and more reasonable than the other possible responses

One conception of “reason” directly supports a choice of the affirmative response, and that conception is the most whole and reasonable conception. A narrower conception of “reason” can be defined to be indifferent to the matter, but that conception would in turn defer to other criteria and judges and, ultimately, permit the affirmative response. The only conception of “reason” that would *not* directly support, or ultimately permit, the affirmative response is itself an entirely unreasonable and contradictory conception of “reason” that can be soundly refuted. Thus, one way or the other, the result is the affirmative response.

A number of considerations and types of considerations are relevant, in various ways, to this particular question. The relevance of some depends upon one’s conception of “reason”. Some conceptions might exclude, by definition, the relevance of some considerations, but that itself has implications that ultimately lead to the affirmative response on the broader matter. The following are types and examples of considerations that have varying degrees of relevance to this particular question and/or to the *process* of considering the issue:

Considerations having to do with the nature of reason itself, and with the question of the continuance of human reason itself — For example, we have our brains, minds, and thinking in the first place *because* they have helped us (humans) survive and reproduce. The faculties that enable our thinking are products of our evolutionary development. And, if the human species were to go extinct, the ability for humans to reason would go extinct, and human reasoning along with it. The most “whole”, scientifically informed, and sensible conception of “reason” recognizes these as relevant considerations. Narrower conceptions of reason may not. But that in itself has implications, as mentioned.

Considerations having to do with the integrity and coherence of philosophical reasoning and views, and with the consistency between one’s basic views and one’s defining behaviors — For example, if a certain conception of “reason” would support the life-negating response over the life-affirming response, that would have immense implications for nearly all other aspects of any philosophy based on that conception. And there is the point that Camus makes via Nietzsche (see above). Even in the case of the

conception of “reason” that is indifferent to this matter, problems arise. These are not themselves deciding factors, or perhaps even relevant factors to the immediate individual question of life vs. death. They don’t answer the question. But these considerations have implications in relation to the social question and in relation to the integrity of our views and behaviors if we continue to live. There is also the matter of time and the fact that we can choose a response to hold until evidence and reasoning surface that would cause us to alter our choice. This, of course, is an obvious point against the “avoidant” response, which actually is not a coherent response at all.

Considerations that provide context and help set the stage — I discuss these in other materials, so I’ll just list a few as keywords or phrases: It’s our choice. Who or what says “no”? What evidence could possibly “tell us”, or cause us to conclude, to choose the life-negating response, at the *meta* level, to the question posed with respect to the entire human species or to all of life?

Considerations having to do with the “burden of proof”, relevant to the *process* of consideration.

Considerations having to do with the basic scientific understanding of the nature of life — *If* these have any relevance to this *particular* part of the argument, in *isolation*, *other than in the ways mentioned above*, that relevance would be *contextual* rather than *deciding*. That said, in some senses, “all is related to all else”, so one might risk seeing things narrowly by ignoring these considerations, even as context, even in this particular part of the argument.

Considerations having to do with recognizing different senses and uses of the word ‘reason’ — For example, we often use ‘reason’ in the sense of, e.g., “the pain we feel when touching a hot coal is, or provides us with, a reason to avoid touching hot coals”. This usage is different from that involved in asking what “reason” itself is capable or not capable of judging, or of recommending, according to its own measuring-stick and nature, all other factors considered neutral and less important.

Building On The Bridge: Forming The Larger Picture

Considering all of the considerations and conclusions in this and other columns of the poster (including the understanding on which they are based) ...

plus the fact that we humans are aware of the dimension (or at least phenomenon) of time ...

plus the facts of our interdependence with the natural world, and with the broad life community, and of our awareness of that interdependence ...

plus the facts of our existence as an interdependent social species, our awareness of that interdependence, our awareness of our relationship to each other as humans, and our understanding and agreement that we are all equal in important senses ...

... and you have ...

Morality is most foundationally “about” the sustainable and healthy survival of the human species, along with ample and healthy biological diversity, along with the sustainable health of our home, Earth, all accomplished in ways that respect human equality (in important senses) and embrace a living and somewhat fragile ecosystem.

Just to be clear, please note: (see following page) ...

This is a highly simplified statement about what morality is *most foundationally* about or, if you prefer, what we should consider it to be *most foundationally* about, after bridging the science and reasoning of the matter. The word 'foundationally' is very important here. The statement is *not* a claim about the *whole* of morality, including all factors and degrees. Instead, it aims to capture and express the "foundation" of the matter, as in the grounded foundation of a building. It expresses foundational aspects of the matter that are "necessary" to the whole but are not sufficient in describing the whole. And, importantly, the statement is *not at all* intended to represent all that is important in life, "meaning", and so forth.

The statement is meant to represent an integrated view encompassing the matters that it represents in the descriptive, explanatory, and normative dimensions. Of course, it's only a simplified summary statement, and doesn't explicitly express the understanding it embraces. In order to understand the statement well, one should understand as much as possible of the science of the matter and, also, the reasoned framework, or superstructure, upon which the view is based.

The statement, as presented here, doesn't explicitly include the word 'happiness', although it could easily be written to do so. The absence of the word has no real meaning and should not be taken to suggest that happiness isn't of immense importance, of course. Our human *quest for* happiness is, of course, a central motivating factor in our survival and reproduction. And, happiness plays a number of important and wonderful roles in life. Too, there are some degrees of happiness that are instrumental to items included in the statement, and there are "higher heights" of happiness that could be considered as "icing on the cake" of life. One of my favorite quotes, that complements the summary statement above, is from the Dalai Lama: "And because, as we have seen, our interests are inextricably linked, we are compelled to accept ethics as the indispensable interface between my desire to be happy and yours." I understand this point as being completely complementary to the foundational dynamics explicitly mentioned in the statement above, not contradictory to them.

Finally, the statement above is about *human* morality and includes and respects the vital importance of the full life community because of the interdependencies of life. It does not consider matters "from the standpoint of" other life or include (or exclude) some excellent arguments from others having to do with how we should understand our moral responsibilities in relation to other life. My work has focused on the dimensions of human morality discussed herein but remains fully compatible with other scientifically informed, well-reasoned arguments that

would have us better embrace the broader life community within our moral circle of concern, in various degrees for reasons beyond those mentioned above. Of course, the work embraces and reflects our evolutionary and biological relationship to other animals, and to the entire life community, and it embraces the fact that we are not the only social animals, and so forth. So, because of its scientific foundation, the work embraces the relationships (more than one) among human beings, "human morality", the life community, and "evolved sociality", broadly speaking.

*Conscious,
informed, and
responsible**
human sociality

*What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.*

- William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet

* Mutually beneficial, or at least not detrimental

Implications

In conjunction with the combination of scientific understanding and reason upon which it draws, as well as with the whole of scientific understanding and with relevant excellent reasoning, and in a way that embraces scientific understanding as it progresses, this understanding and view ...

- Reveals and explains the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in the *normative* (as well as descriptive and explanatory) senses.
- Identifies and explains the foundational grounds of an integrated view of morality—a grounded, scientifically informed, excellently reasoned, and highly productive moral “science-philosophy”, so to speak. The understanding identifies and explains the “foundational bridge”, “connective bridge”, “common matter”, “conclusions pointed to in common”, or so forth, that forms the foundation of a better integrated understanding of morality that encompasses all three of the descriptive, explanatory, and normative dimensions of the matter.
- Provides a greatly improved understanding of the interrelationships and complementarities between empirical evidence and “reason” as we combine them to inform our understanding of morality in all senses. It informs our understanding of the interrelationships among empirical evidence, understanding based on that evidence, and additional reasoning and “reason”. It helps us better see that “the ways of the universe”—nature’s laws and dynamics—provide the context within which, and the matter upon which, we humans exist and make use of our human “reason”.
- Helps scientists and moral philosophers better understand the naturalistic fallacy, the “is-ought problem”, the “fact-value distinction”, and related matters, distinguishing the correct implications of those issues from

incorrect interpretations and (supposed) implications of those issues. The understanding embraces and respects correct implications of these issues, and identifies and overcomes incorrect conclusions, historically held by many. Very pragmatically, it helps scientists respond accurately and effectively to these and related philosophical questions, clearing the way for informed progress.

- Breaks the logjam in a grounded, scientifically informed, valid, and productive way. The understanding will enable the relevant disciplines to move forward more productively to inform vast improvements in the public understanding of morality, ethics, or (if you prefer) conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality.
- Grounds understanding as deeply as possible from a secular standpoint, going to the deep roots of “the nature of life” and “the nature of ‘reason’” as they relate to morality. (Actually, one can go “deeper” to explain and illustrate certain parts of the matters presented herein, but doing so would get too detailed for present purposes.) The depth of grounding not only provides a strong factual and intellectual foundation but, importantly, also provides benefits that could be called emotional, motivational, and (even) in some ways “spiritual”.
- Provides the strongest possible “moral case for sustainability” from a secular standpoint. There is no scientifically informed and excellently reasoned way to escape the moral case for sustainability that this understanding provides.
- Grounds, informs, and expands the relevance of scientific understanding and of well-reasoned moral philosophy to real-world problems in the descriptive, explanatory, and normative senses. It substantially expands the relevance of related sciences to modern-day problems. (It also places greater responsibility on some sciences to help improve the human condition.)
- Illuminates and informs the foundational bases of the interrelationship between the relevant sciences and moral philosophy. It sets the stage for—and provides support for—a substantially improved and highly productive relationship between science and secular moral philosophy.
- Provides more clarity, grounding, and scientific rigor than are offered via terms such as ‘flourishing’, well being, ‘eudemonia’, and happiness—while it also sees beauty in those terms, finds them very useful in ways,

and certainly embraces a great many of the central insights of views that highlight such terms. Also, it contextualizes, explains, and informs such important insights as The Golden Rule, The Categorical Imperative, and etc.

- Embraces, understands, and reflects the interrelationships among, and different roles of, interrelated components of the matter—e.g., survival, reproduction, the quest for happiness, the various roles and senses of happiness, health, fairness, equality, justice, and so forth. It utilizes scientific understanding to understand these interrelationships as correctly as possible.
- Sheds light on a grounded, rich, contextualized understanding and “solution space” within which all of these important considerations interrelate. It *embraces* science rather than presuming to contradict science.
- Informs the way we understand the individual, individuals, and the social group in interrelationship with each other in relation to issues of morality. (To be clear, I’m not talking about a claim regarding the various levels at which selection takes place. The view fully embraces science and scientific advances, whatever they may be. Instead, by this comment, I’m simply addressing some moral philosophies that seem to get the balance between “individual freedom” and “responsible morality” not quite right.)
- Assists in resolving—i.e., informs—longstanding debates between various differing views in moral philosophy, e.g., between consequentialism and deontological views, etc. It also sheds light on so-called paradoxes and trolley problems.
- Relates well to, and is entirely compatible with, considerations and advances having to do with our relationships with, and responsibilities to, other species. Because it is based upon a combination of scientific understanding and informed reasoning, it naturally embraces advances in understanding that are also based in scientific understanding and informed reasoning. So, for example, it doesn’t require contrived or superficial patches in order to embrace new understanding as such understanding becomes available.
- Sheds additional grounded light on the phrase “life is good”, with ‘good’ taken here in the moral sense.

- Provides consilience (E. O. Wilson's concept) and that high degree of confidence that one gets when one has solved a crossword puzzle (philosopher Susan Haack's way of putting the concept).
- Offers immediate insights and sets a very solid stage for informed advancements on all fronts. Indeed, unless we ultimately discover that it is somehow *not* life's nature to "value" its survival and reproduction, on average, or unless we discover something dramatically new and very surprising about the nature of "reason" itself, it is quite hard to imagine that there can be any better-grounded foundation for secular views of morality.

Notes

(1) Whether with self-awareness or not—usually not—life normally has a strong tendency to seek to do, try to do, or do, those things that serve to facilitate its survival and reproduction from the present generation to the next, on average—though sometimes in ways that prove ineffective.

(2) I use this quote simply for illustrative purposes. Of course, our sociality and social-moral dynamics are intimately interrelated, evolved together, and in important senses are different terms for the same things, or are heavily overlapping terms, depending on how one chooses to use them. The point is: This particular quote could have been put in a way that more accurately conveys the relationships among these matters. This quote is also one of description and explanation and thus (I take it) does not claim to examine and justify, in the present, particular moral norms.

(3) According to one translation, a more complete version of what Socrates is reported to have said is: “If ... I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is, gentlemen, as I maintain ...”. (Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, translation by Tredennick and Tarrant)

(4) I include this quote to illustrate the broad point that our intuitions are themselves products of our evolved biological faculties, not to make or repeat any precise biological claim, nor to suggest that cultural influences don't also influence intuitions. Steven Pinker makes an important point: “As with so many aspects of the mind, a danger we face is the temptation to explain a puzzle by appealing to intuitions that feel thoroughly natural but that themselves need an explanation.”

(5) I include this quote to illustrate Niebuhr's central point regarding the wisdom of knowing the difference between things that can be changed and things that cannot be changed, not to introduce religious considerations or concepts. And, of course, the facts that humans enjoy various degrees of choice regarding many matters, and that humans can change many things in ways that are in keeping with nature's most fundamental principles and dynamics, are themselves subject to scientific exploration and understanding, and fall within the scope of the scientific quest.

(6) I include this quote for illustrative purposes. The point that I'm trying to illustrate by it has been made by many others, in many ways. It's not dependent on any particular quote or author.

Appendix Materials

The Human Behavior and Evolution Society

22nd Annual Meeting



University of Oregon, Eugene

June 16 – 20, 2010

family residential clusters, and the flow of resources within those clusters.

Sponsor: NBDNIA, HOEMI

Poster Number: 30

Sex differences in language use and deference behavior: Evolutionary foundations and implications for the workplace

Hopcroft, R

Linguists have shown that there are sex differences in language style, while sociologists and psychologists have shown that there are sex differences in deference patterns in interaction. In this paper, I argue that these differences are likely based in evolved, sexually-selected psychological predispositions rather than the result of culture-specific sex roles and socialization patterns. These sex differences in language styles and deference patterns can cause misunderstandings in the workplace, and can particularly create difficulties for women in positions of authority.

Presentation: Sun, 10:20 Lillis 182

The nature of disgust

Hubbard, D

Disgust as measured via the Fazio disgust scale (Fazio et al, 1994) consists of three dimensions: core disgust, animal reminder disgust and (possibly) contamination disgust (Ohtani et al 2007). A sample of 160 respondents answered questions from Turiel's (1983) moral-conventional distinction about various disgust problems. They were asked whether the behavior was OK, how severe the transgression was, if the behavior was not OK, and how severe the transgression was with permission from an authority figure or when being alone. The answers differed considerably even to questions from the same disgust dimension. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the three dimensions of disgust refer to three separate functions with a specific evolutionary history. A possible explanation for the current findings is that the emotion disgust as such has not been selected for but avoidance of infections has (Curtis et al 2004) together with avoidance of harm in self or others.

Presentation: Sat, 3:20 Lillis 112

Marriage Transactions from a Darwinian Perspective

Huber, BR

This paper presents the results of cross-cultural research on marriage transactions (e.g., bride wealth, dowry) from a Darwinian perspective. Since females are a valuable reproductive resource for which males are willing to compete, it is predicted that the level of material resource investments at the time of marriage is generally higher for grooms and their kin than for brides and their relatives. In addition, brides, grooms, and their kin are expected to adjust their reproductive strategies and marriage

investments depending upon the local conditions in which they live. Adjustments will be made according to factors such as the percentage of polygynously married men, degree of social stratification, type of descent and post-marital residence, and median age at time of marriage. These predictions are tested with data from the sixty culture Probability Sample of the Human Relations Area Files.

Sponsor: College of Charleston

Poster Number: 51

The Relevance of Scientific Understanding to Morality in a Normative Sense

Huggins, J

A longstanding, consequential issue is that of the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in a normative sense. A resolution that is both scientifically grounded and soundly reasoned is found in the solution space illustrated by these foundational considerations: 1) Life values its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next. 2) "The ultimate point of sociality is enhancing fitness." (C. Boggs, a paraphrase). 3) "Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living." (M. Bekoff and J. Pierce, *Wild Justice*). 4) "[E]thical philosophers intuit the deontological canons of morality by consulting the emotive centers of their own hypothalamic-limbic systems." (E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*). 5) "In ethics as in optics, we need stereoscopy to see the world in all its dimensions." (Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics*). 6) "To identify with a given desire is to affirm through reflection the normative content that the desire presents, in ways that would remain stable if subjected to further critical scrutiny." (R. Jay Wallace, *Normativity & the Will*).

Poster Number: 22

Self-Assessment of Vocal Mate Value

Hughes, SM, Harrison, MM

This study examined whether humans could accurately assess their own mate value based on voice by asking if participants rate the attractiveness of their own voices similarly to that of independent raters. Previous research has shown that voice attractiveness is related to certain morphological markers of genetic quality and is an important factor in mate selection. Therefore, vocal attractiveness may be an important cue to mate value, and humans would need to accurately assess their own mate value before seeking a mate. Ninety-three participants rated the attractiveness of voice recordings of persons counting from one to ten without being given any information about the voice they were rating. Participants' rated their own voices, unbeknownst to them, as significantly more attractive than independent raters. These findings demonstrate that humans may not

The Relevance of Scientific Understanding to Morality in the Normative Sense

Jeff Huggins, HBES 2010

A longstanding and immensely consequential issue is that of the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in the normative sense. A resolution that is both scientifically grounded and soundly reasoned is found in the solution space informed by foundational considerations illustrated by the following quotes and points as well as a few others on the poster itself:

- A foundational part of the nature of life is that life values its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next.
- “The ultimate point of sociality is enhancing fitness.”
(C. Boggs; a paraphrase)
- “Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living.”
(M. Bekoff and J. Pierce, *Wild Justice*)
- “[E]thical philosophers intuit the deontological canons of morality by consulting the emotive centers of their own hypothalamic-limbic systems.” (E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*)
- “In ethics as in optics, we need stereoscopy to see the world in all its dimensions.” (Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics*)
- “To identify with a given desire is to affirm through reflection the normative content that the desire presents, in ways that would remain stable if subjected to further critical scrutiny.”
(R. Jay Wallace, *Normativity & the Will*)

For a copy of the entire poster (as a whole, or as text), please e-mail me at jeff@thewindingriver.org . Also, please visit my websites for more detailed explanatory materials, essays, and papers: www.ObligationsOfReason.com or www.thewindingriver.org . Thank you!

Please note: Quotes were chosen for illustrative purposes and, in some cases, could have been put better, or slightly differently, to capture and convey the underlying matters more clearly.

The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense

Illustrations of The Problems

A fragmenting and increasingly compartmentalized view of life in the absence of a widely understood scientific understanding of the human condition is a condition that is both scientifically grounded and morally untenable. It is a condition that is both scientifically grounded and morally untenable. It is a condition that is both scientifically grounded and morally untenable.

From Nature

Evolutionary biology shows that we are not just animals, but that we are animals with a unique capacity for self-reflection and moral reasoning. This capacity is a product of our evolutionary history, and it is this capacity that makes us uniquely human.

From The New York Times

The New York Times has published several articles that explore the intersection of science and morality. These articles highlight the challenges we face as a society as we grapple with the implications of scientific discovery.

From David Hume

David Hume's philosophy of science and morality provides a valuable perspective on the relationship between the two. He argued that morality is not based on reason, but on sentiment and habit. This view challenges the traditional view of morality as a set of rational principles.

From Peter Dinklage

Peter Dinklage's work explores the ethical implications of scientific research. He argues that we have a moral obligation to ensure that our scientific progress is used for the benefit of all humanity, and not just for the sake of knowledge.

From Hans Jonas

Hans Jonas's concept of the "imperative of responsibility" is a key element of his philosophy. He argues that we have a responsibility to future generations to ensure that our actions do not cause irreversible harm to the world.

From Hans Reichenbach

Hans Reichenbach's work on the philosophy of science and probability provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between science and morality. He argued that probability is a key concept in both fields, and that our understanding of probability is essential to our understanding of both.

From Hans Albert

Hans Albert's work on the philosophy of science and morality is another important contribution. He argued that we need to develop a new moral framework that is based on scientific understanding and that is capable of addressing the challenges of the modern world.

The Foundational Bridge

The Nature of Life

● A foundational part of the nature of life is that life values its own survival and continuation (reproduction) from the present generation to the next. ¹

● "The ultimate goal--as in, effective behavior--of morality is enhancing fitness." ² (Hug's conjecture)

● "Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living." ³ (as argued by Hans Jonas)

Scopes of Consideration & Complementary Correspondences

● "To ethics as in optics, we need telescopes to see the world as it is, not as we wish it to be." ⁴ (Hug's conjecture)

● "The unexamined life is not worth living." ⁵ (Socrates)

● "Ethical philosophy is not the denouement of morality by consulting the criteria of ethics, but the denouement of morality by consulting the criteria of ethics." ⁶ (Hug's conjecture)

● "God grant me the wisdom to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." ⁷ (Luther)

● "To identify with a given desire is to affirm through intention the normative content that the desire presents, in ways that would normally be subjected to further critical scrutiny." ⁸ (Hug's conjecture)

The Nature of "Reason"

● "Reason" can either affirm three foundational values of life or be indifferent to them, in which case it must defer to other criteria and judges and gives no affirmative. It cannot reject three foundational values of life.

● "The fundamental question" is "The best way to live is the question."⁹

● "The best way to live is the question" is a question that is both scientific and moral. It is a question that is both scientific and moral. It is a question that is both scientific and moral.

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Conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality

What's in a word? That which we call a word is but a sign, a sign of the thing which it signifies.

Implications

The implications of this work are far-reaching. They challenge the traditional view of morality as a set of rational principles and argue for a new moral framework that is based on scientific understanding. This framework is one that is capable of addressing the challenges of the modern world and that is capable of ensuring that our scientific progress is used for the benefit of all humanity.

Jeff Huggins / June 2010

Some Introductory Remarks (as context for some audiences)

There are about 350 presentations and posters at HBES this year.

Three hundred and forty-nine (349) of them address important questions having to do with . . .

- How *do* humans behave?
- *How* and *why* did such behavioral capacities and tendencies come about?
- How can we *explain* them?
- What influences what?

But here's another question . . .

- How *should* humans behave, when it comes to important social interactions and other actions that affect others?

Or put another way . . .

- What is it to be *moral*—or at least to be as moral as humanly possible, or at least to be mostly moral?

This is a *different* question, of course, but *not* an unrelated question. And that's an important point—i.e., that it's *not* an unrelated question. (Nor is scientific understanding irrelevant to addressing that question.)

We can ask—and we *should* ask—and we *must* ask—is scientific understanding relevant to *that* question?

Science can *describe* things and *explain* them, to a degree, and science can help us understand *how* to do the things we *choose* to do, but can scientific understanding help us understand what we *should* do—in other words, how (broadly speaking) we should and shouldn't behave, socially, as members of an interdependent social species?

Call it *responsible human sociality*: What is it? Can *you* describe what it is?

Do you know how understanding that's inherent in the work of HBES and its members, and in the work of related scientists, sheds a great deal of light on this?

Is scientific understanding relevant to helping us (humans) determine foundationally important moral *ends*—i.e., not just *means* to those ends, but *the ends themselves*?

Does it shed light on important aspects of how we ought to behave and how we ought not behave?

Is it relevant to what philosophers call *metaethics*?

If so, how? How much?

When it comes to foundational questions of morality, what's the *relationship* between scientific understanding—of how “the world” works, how life works, and why—and basic excellent reasoning applied to that understanding?

As it turns out, the answers are yes, yes, yes, etc. . . . and a lot . . . and the implications are immense, positive, and practical.

Before turning to the presentation itself, I'll offer five brief quotes to help set the context . . .

“Perfection of means and confusion of goals seem, in my opinion, to characterize our age.”

- Albert Einstein

“It is all too evident that our moral thinking simply has not been able to keep pace with the speed of scientific advancement.”

- Tenzin Gyatso, The Dalai Lama

“The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.”

- Omar Bradley

“Culture has become the main adaptive force in *homo sapiens*.”

- Kim Hill (from his Plenary Address this morning)

“ . . . and it has to be concluded that the greatest source of harm to man is man.”

- Cicero, *On Duties II*, 44 BC

Now to the presentation . . .

* * *

Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES)

Website: www.hbes.com

Explanatory Materials, Essays, Abstracts, and Papers

(all on my websites except the last eight, to be added soon)

To Scientifically Informed Philosophers and Philosophically Minded Scientists

On Morality: A View and Argument (one recent Abstract)

Life, The Bridge, and Coming Together

“The Bridge: A-QED”

WHY and WHY and WHY

The Morality of Sustainability: *A DIY Exploration*

On Morality: Key Considerations and a Bridge

What good am I?

On Morality

Robot Revelations

Darwin, Camus, and Hamlet went into a bar, AND . . .

A Framework and Paradigm Of Morality

Science and Philosophy (Regarding Morality), Context, The Bridge, and etc.

“Moral Beings”, Is-Ought, Fact-Value, and Other (Big) Stuff

Portions of the Supporting Argument In Additional Forms

Regarding ‘Directional Dynamics’ and ‘Normative Facts’

Speaking of Hands, and Adaptations, and . . .

The Nature of the Relationship Between *Is* and *Ought*

The Nature of Morality

Some Roots and Relations, Noted

“Robot Revelations”: An Opportunity

Illustrative Quotes

The Bridge, as you like it (with additional quotes)

More On The Bridge (adding to earlier)

Conscious, Informed, Responsible Human Sociality

Assorted Illustrations of The Problems

RESOLVED

Four Questions, The Differences Among Them, and The Implications of Those Differences

If you’re going to San Francisco (PHILOS-L, March 24)

The Nature and Aim of “Reason”? (CHORA, April 7)

Yea, Nay, or Can’t Say? – and Implications (CHORA, April 11)

Poor Poem, Immense Moral (revised) (CHORA, April 11)

What Are Turtles “For”? (CHORA, April 14)

The Nature of Life and The Nature of Reason (CHORA, April 14)

O Reason, Reason, what for art thou Reason? (CHORA, May 4)

The Same Problems, and The Broad Matrix (CHORA, January 17)