

The Foundational Bridge (An Abstract)

(also including *conscious, informed, responsible human sociality*)

By Jeff Huggins, March 27, 2010

Consider this comment from 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.”

Consider also this passage from a summary editorial by the highly respected scientific journal *Nature*, titled “Evolution and the brain” (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.”

A longstanding, consequential issue is that of the relevance of scientific understanding to our understanding and concept of morality in the *normative* sense—that is, to the moral *ought*. A resolution of this issue that is both scientifically grounded *and* solidly reasoned—and indeed *inescapable* (within the secular scope)—is found in the solution space shaped by, and interrelationships among, the foundational considerations illustrated by the following points:

(Note: The following are included as *illustrations* of the points they represent.

Conclusions are not dependent on any particular quote or author. What are important are the aspects of the matter that these statements attempt to convey, not particular quotes.)

- *Life* values its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next. This is one of the core dynamics of life, scientifically speaking.
- The ultimate point of sociality is enhancing fitness.
(e.g., C. Boggs, Stanford; a paraphrase; all terms meant in their scientific senses)
- “Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living.”
(Bekoff and Pierce, *Wild Justice*)
- “In ethics as in optics, we need stereoscopy to see the world in all its dimensions.” (Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics*)

- “[E]thical philosophers intuit the deontological canons of morality by consulting the emotive centers of their own hypothalamic-limbic systems.” (E. O. Wilson; illustrative of a broad point)
- “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*)
- “Nature does not go out of its way to befuddle us. If some phenomenon seems to make no sense no matter how we look at it, we are probably overlooking some deeper principle about how things work.”
(Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*)

The points above should be considered together and, also, in light of the following:

- If life naturally (by its nature) and substantially values something (call it X);
- And if—upon examination, all things considered—a combination of solid evidence and excellent 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 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 an appeal to reason regarding the relevant matter.

The paper explains how and why all these considerations fit together in a scientifically grounded and excellently reasoned way, resulting in consilience, and how they identify and explain a *foundational bridge* between the science of the matter and the reasoning (or moral philosophy) of the matter—“the matter” being that of human morality in the descriptive, explanatory, and *normative* senses. The paper also explains how many aspects of morality can be seen and understood better by thinking of ‘morality’ in terms of *conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality*.

* * *

Jeff Huggins
Los Gatos, California
March 27, 2010
www.thewindingriver.org
www.ObligationsOfReason.com