

# *If you're going to San Francisco ...*

By Jeff Huggins

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## **If you're going to San Francisco ...**

As many of us know, the American Philosophical Association's Pacific Division is holding its Annual Meeting next week, from March 31 to April 3, in San Francisco.

The program looks great and can be found on the APA Pacific Division's website.

To those who will be attending, I'd be interested to meet with anyone whose focus or significant interest involves understanding human morality from the standpoint of a coherent combination of science and reasoning; the relevance of scientific understanding to morality in the normative sense (that is, to the moral *ought*); related philosophical matters (e.g., the is-ought problem, the fact-value distinction, the naturalistic fallacy, etc.); the relationship between morality and sustainability; and the grounded moral case for sustainability.

I'm looking for people who share those interests and missions, possible collaborators, and "partners in crime", so to speak.

I've included some brief material below, as context. Ideally, I'd like to share my work (briefly), learn about yours, and identify points of connection and shared interest.

If you are coming to San Francisco—for the conference or at any other time—and would be interested in meeting, please do let me know, **off-list please**.

I understand that flowers in your hair are encouraged (referring to the 1967 song)! That said, I don't recall seeing any at the conferences in Vancouver, Los Angeles, and etc.

Thanks for your consideration, and Be Well,

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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:

(Please Note: These quotes and statements are included as *illustrations* of the points they represent. The resulting conclusions are not dependent on any particular quote or author. What are important are the aspects and dynamics of the matter itself that these statements attempt to convey, not the particular quotes. The following are just examples.)

- Life values its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next.
- The ultimate point of sociality is enhancing fitness. (terms used here 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)
- “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*)
- “Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.” (Albert Einstein)
- “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: Language as a Window into Human Nature*)

## And ...

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

And if—upon examination, all things considered—a combination of evidence and reasoning shows that it makes more sense for life *to* value **X** than 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.