

2011: A Metaethical DIY

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The best way to understand the resolution to a problem is to wrestle with the problem and come to see the resolution oneself. The best way to understand a terrain is to walk it—or better yet, to crawl over it. The best way to appreciate a soufflé: make it!

In other words, DIY: *Discover It Yourself*.

Hence my approach in this paper: I begin by briefly introducing the constellation of issues at issue, all having to do with human morality from a secular standpoint, *is* and *ought*, human reason, and the grounded foundation of a moral philosophy that integrates scientific understanding and excellent reasoning in a way that addresses key philosophical issues. Next, I identify the chief considerations that, taken together, define and illuminate the solution space, provide the meat to resolve the issues, and help the interested audience understand *that* and *why* the issues *are* resolvable. Then I step aside in the hope that curious, problem-solving philosopher-scientists will wrestle with the matter and come to understand how the puzzle-pieces fit together. Along the way I provide some hopefully helpful notes. I also include a few excerpts from earlier materials. Finally, at the end, I refer to other materials that are much more explicit and that describe the arguments and conclusions in a range of ways.

Important issues at stake include:

- The is-ought problem: the “gap” between *is* and *ought*—often claimed to be “insurmountable”—and the question of whether any foundational *oughts* can be derived from an understanding of the way the world works: Put another way, the differences and relationships between *is* and *ought*, and between *fact* and *value*
- The relevance of scientific understanding to an understanding of morality and to moral philosophy in the *normative* sense, as well as in the descriptive and explanatory senses

- The relationships between the science of the matter and the reasoning (or philosophy) of the matter — “the matter” being that of human morality
- The foundation of an understanding of morality — of a moral philosophy — that is scientifically informed and deeply grounded *and* that addresses and satisfies important philosophical concerns: i.e., the foundation for a moral philosophy that respects and integrates both “science” and “reasoning” and that addresses the subject in the descriptive, explanatory, and normative senses. One way of putting this is that the issue at hand involves the “foundational bridge”, “foundational intersection”, “common ground”, “connective matter”, “integrative platform”, or “thing pointed-to in common”, between science and reasoning, having to do with human morality
- The relationship between morality and sustainability — and the robust moral case for sustainability, a timely issue in itself
- An important aspect of the relationship between the relevant sciences and moral philosophy *as quests and disciplines*

These are immensely important and worthwhile issues, of course. They’re also intimately interrelated. They have to do with *foundations* as well as with influential paradigms, among other things. The solution space governing these issues, along with the resolutions themselves, have important implications for many related problems in moral philosophy. Indeed, the resolutions to these issues are relevant to nearly every important question in moral philosophy. Thus, and even more importantly, they are ultimately relevant to the immense social/moral/ethical issues facing humankind today.

(Appendix 4 contains a selection of quotes that illustrate a couple of these foundational issues, and their importance, from different perspectives.)

There is method to the madness. I’ve adopted this “DIY” approach—for purposes of this paper—for several reasons: The first is the reason mentioned at the top, that the best way to understand the resolution to a problem is to wrestle with the problem and discover the resolution oneself.

The second is that once the chief considerations relevant to a problem are understood, the arguments themselves can be put in numerous ways and styles to suit different audiences, just as there are more ways than one to get from San Francisco to New York, just as there are a number of ways to explain evolution or

relativity, and just as—if a resolution to a problem is genuine—there are usually numerous ways to explain and illustrate it. In contrast, any single particular form of argument (to support a conclusion that can be supported in numerous ways) risks being too-easily dismissed by folks who dislike, or don't understand, that particular form; and more importantly in the case of subjects under consideration here, it seems that some conventional forms of analysis and argumentation contain assumptions that are themselves incorrect (with respect to the issues at hand), *presume* answers to the questions at issue, or tend to confuse or ignore highly relevant considerations. For these reasons and others, it's ultimately more effective, and less risky, to identify and shine light on the chief considerations and let diverse audiences discover for themselves the solution space and resolutions in ways that suit their own preferred forms of argument and semantics. This is the "from scratch" approach. This is the approach that's less likely to cause the resolutions to be overlooked, or gotten wrong, as a result of being confused or misled by incorrect assumptions already inherent in some conventional techniques. Indeed, as far as I can tell, given the degrees of confusion (and hidden assumptions) historically involved with some of these matters, this approach is apparently *necessary* at this point, to help clear up a few important things.

The third reason is that philosophy, in my view, should involve deep curiosity as well as warranted skepticism. These elements play different roles and should be applied in the most productive sequences, *led by curiosity*. A philosopher can't very well apply her skepticism until she first understands, at least to a reasonably good degree, what she's attempting to be skeptical about. Skepticism that's applied prematurely and thus blindly (not to mention defensively)—i.e., before curiosity has led the philosopher to understand the premises and conclusions being advanced—tends to dull curiosity if not demolish it completely. Such premature skepticism frequently blocks understanding and progress. Often such committed, proactive skeptics think that they've refuted arguments that they haven't even begun to understand—or even tried to understand. The DIY (Discover-It-Yourself) approach is a way of addressing, engaging with, or screening out premature skepticism, depending of course on whether the skeptic himself accepts the invitation to *think* or, instead, chooses to decline it.

So, by providing the chief considerations and claiming (I believe correctly) that they define the solution space and resolutions, I hope two things will happen: First, those philosophers who are curious, who are deeply interested in these problems, and who understand that understanding is best when it's arrived at

oneself, will appreciate and engage with this approach. They'll consider the matter carefully, wrestle with the problem, and gain. Most will ultimately "get it" or at least get it enough that they'll pursue the matter further. Second, and in contrast, any philosophers who want the solution completely laid-out will find reasons not to embark on the task. They probably won't want to take time to consider the considerations carefully, to try to understand their interrelationships, to try to understand their implications, and to try to understand as much of the solution space and resolution they can understand *before* offering objections they think they've found. Such philosophers won't be interested in anything more than a cursory reading, if that, and they may even be put-off by the very thought of this approach. Be that as it may. The philosopher-scientists I most want to engage are those who are most interested in these problems, most curious, most in love with problem-solving, and most interested in the general advancement of philosophy. Put simply: curiosity first.

The good news is this: Readers need only read the first section, **Chief Considerations**—pages 7-11, including the notes—in order to engage with the issue at hand. The Chief Considerations themselves contain most of the meat necessary to eventually see the solution space and resolutions. Most of the rest is detail.

Not every ingredient is provided and explained *explicitly* herein. The Chief Considerations are identified. Some other considerations are inherent in the Chief Considerations, follow from them, or follow from the intersections among them. Still other secondary factors can be figured out, are mentioned in notes or in other sections herein, or can be found in my more detailed materials. Any philosophers who don't want to have to do some reasonably careful thinking on their own, including some connecting-of-dots, probably won't want to proceed.

When an important problem has been understood and resolved, the remaining challenge becomes one of mere communication. Yet when many people want a problem resolved *but don't really want it resolved*—somehow at the same time—the challenge of communication is sometimes not so "mere" after all. In such situations, one must try different communication approaches that engage audiences or, at least, that *offer* to engage them. One approach involves setting the stage, putting props in place, providing the preamble, identifying and characterizing the chief characters, shining spotlights on them, shouting *Action!*, lifting the curtain, and letting the problem-solving drama and resolutions express themselves.

I'm a Californian of late-Baby-Boom vintage. Like many people, I have deep concerns about the present state of affairs in the world today. These include concerns about the state of philosophical progress, the state of the public's understanding of morality, and the deeply inadequate state of human wisdom. Also, however, I find it hard to write something without injecting at least a bit of the fun culture of my own place and times. So I offer these lyrics from an early Beach Boys song to put a ribbon around the present paper and other work—my own, and the helpful work of others—that supports it:

*And if that ain't enough to make you flip your lid
There's one more thing: I got the pink slip daddy!*

- *Little Deuce Coupe*, The Beach Boys, by Brian Wilson and Roger Christian

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Thanks in advance for your interest and consideration.

Jeff

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Chief Considerations (and a few related notes)

Consider these Seven Chief Considerations ...

- **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⁾
- **Sociality** — The ultimate point—as in *effective function*—of sociality is enhancing fitness.^(2,3)

For example, Carol Boggs; a paraphrase

- **Cognition** — The ultimate effective function of human cognitive faculties is enhancing fitness. Human cognitive faculties are, in effect, a bundle of interrelated adaptations, the details and workings of which we are only beginning to figure out.⁽⁴⁾ Furthermore, human ‘reason’ is a capacity, ability, and tool of human cognition, made possible by human cognitive faculties.⁽⁵⁾ If human life ceases to exist, then human cognitive faculties will cease to actively exist, and human ‘reason’ will cease to actively exist.⁽⁶⁾

For example, Paul Griffiths, Richard Boyd, etc. ⁽⁶⁾

- **Choice Within Context** — The scope and possibilities of human choice exist within a context involving human abilities and limits, the possibilities allowed by the universe’s fundamental laws, and the situations we face.⁽⁷⁾
- **Awareness of Time** — We humans are aware of the dimension (or at least phenomenon) of time.⁽⁸⁾
- **Human Interdependence, Relationship, and ‘Equality’** — We humans are members of an interdependent social species. We are conceptually and physically aware of this interdependence as well as increasingly aware of many of its dynamics, details, and ramifications. Also, by way of the origins of life and the processes of evolution, we humans are all related to each other—indeed, extremely closely related in the overall biological scheme of things: We all share common recent ancestors. And we are aware of our relationship to each other. Furthermore, via a range of scientific, theoretical, practical, cultural, and other considerations—as

well as so-called agreements—we have come to the modern understanding and agreement that we are all *equally human* in important senses. In sum, humans are members of an interdependent social species, closely related, and equally human in fundamental senses.⁽⁹⁾

- **Human Relationship and Interdependence With Natural World** — We humans are part of the broader natural world and interdependent with it. Our existence is interdependent with that of the broader community of life. We are conceptually aware of this interdependence and increasingly aware of many of its dynamics and details. Via the origins of life and the processes of evolution, we humans are related to the rest of the living world.

These Chief Considerations—properly understood (including the basic understanding that supports them, of which they act as short summaries) and *taken together*—define, shape and illuminate a “solution space” and resolutions to some foundational problems in moral philosophy. The Discover-It-Yourself task, or challenge if you like, is to see and understand the solution space and to discover and understand the resolutions.

Begin with a fresh and curious mind.

If you have doubts at some point, you may want to ask yourself: Which, if any, of these seven Chief Considerations are incorrect?

Then ask yourself: If they are all correct, how would it be possible for the conclusions of my work—(which I invite you, the reader, to discover via the DIY approach)—to be *incorrect*?

(Of course, almost anything is “possible”, so I should put that last question a different way: If they are all correct, what reasons would there be, if any, for thinking that the conclusions of my work might be incorrect? Here, my use of the words ‘correct’, ‘incorrect’, and so forth should all be understood in terms of degrees of likelihood. In other words, my work does not claim certainty. I generally consider things in terms of degrees of likelihood, confidence levels, and so forth—and as understanding held tentatively—as in the sciences.)

Finally, there is nothing magical about the number seven, of course. (At least, I don’t think there is!) The substance contained in, and represented by, the seven Chief Considerations I list here could be organized differently into six Chief Considerations, or eight, or fourteen. Although organizing matters into the

seven buckets shown above seems to *fit* the matter quite well from the standpoints of communication and understanding, the considerations are interrelated in important ways, and the fact that I've organized the substance into seven is neither vital nor very relevant. It's the *substance* that matters.

Notes to Chief Considerations

General Note: For purposes of the DIY intent of this paper, the list of Chief Considerations, along with the nine notes below, should suffice to get readers far down the path. That said, there are other items in this paper, and notes to those, that provide additional information, explanation, signposts, and other helpful information. My other materials, many of which are listed in Appendix 5, address and resolve the questions and issues much more explicitly.

- (1) Whether with self-awareness or not—usually not—life normally has a strong tendency to seek to do, try to do, or simply 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. The science writer Natalie Angier puts this simply by referring to “The inherent tautology of the definition of life—that which lives and seeks to perpetuate itself—...”. The central point intended here is nothing more, or less, than the fact that life involves and exhibits the tendency to replicate, and that this is an inherent part of what we call life, biologically speaking. Life has been doing this since it began, as far as we presently understand several billion years ago.
- (2) The terms in this point, including ‘ultimate’, are all meant in their scientific senses.
- (3) As another example, in their book *Wild Justice*, M. Bekoff and J. Pierce put a closely related point this way: “Morality is an evolutionary adaptation to social living.” I sometimes 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.

- (4) The terms in this point, including ‘ultimate’, are all meant in their scientific senses. Also, the point here is not intended to make any claim about, or depend on, the actual biological structure and internal workings of our cognitive faculties—for example, their degrees of so-called “modularity”, interrelatedness, overlap, generality, and so forth. We have our human cognitive faculties today because of their significant contribution to fitness. If they hadn’t contributed to fitness, we wouldn’t have them, and we might not even exist today.
- (5) This particular statement is included in order to put human ‘reason’ into a contextual relationship with our human ‘cognitive faculties’, given that discussing and resolving the philosophical-scientific problem at hand will be facilitated by an ability to refer to ‘reason’ as a, or the, principal tool of philosophy. The basic point is this: Thinking is done by embodied brains, not by disembodied engines of ‘pure reason’ that somehow exist apart from brains, i.e., without biological human cognitive faculties. The simplified wording I’ve chosen here, involving ‘reason’ and ‘cognitive faculties’, is *not* intended to make any claim about the nature of the interrelationships among ‘thinking’, ‘reason’, ‘emotion’, and etc. Depending on where one chooses to try to draw definitional/semantic lines, and depending on how our scientific understanding advances, the interrelationship between what we call ‘thinking’ and ‘emotion’ will be what it may. Scientific understanding already suggests, of course, that human judgment and thinking are influenced by factors and ingredients that might be referred to as relevance and sentiment/emotion. The present point is merely that ‘reason’ is a capacity, ability, and tool of human cognition, *broadly speaking*, acting in the context of other human adaptations and their influences. The important point is not dependent on any particular view regarding the interrelationships between ‘cognition’ and ‘emotion’ as they result in what we call ‘reason’.
- (6) The last statement in this section is not part of the point made explicitly by Griffiths, Boyd, and etc., of course. Instead, it’s an obvious point—from the scientific and secular standpoints anyhow—and is included here because it helps the discussion to recognize the linked coexistence of human life, human cognitive faculties, and human ‘reason’. Without human life, human cognitive faculties would not exist. Without human cognitive faculties, human ‘reason’ would not exist, at least in any active

form. Artifacts, writings, recordings, and computer programs might still exist for some time after human life ceases, but *active* human reasoning will cease to exist if/when human life ceases to exist. (That said, human life could possibly exist, in some form, without extensive human cognitive faculties, if it could manage to survive and reproduce without such faculties—i.e., on the basis of some other strengthened adaptive abilities. However, such an existence would require a change in our definition of ‘human’, or it would not be referred to as ‘human life’. In other words, our present definition of ‘human’—*Homo sapiens*—is intimately connected to our view of our human cognitive faculties, of course.)

- (7) Putting the matter in a way that reflected his religious context, Reinhold Niebuhr stated in The Serenity Prayer: “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.” 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.
- (8) This is not to say that we have a complete understanding of what time is, how it works, and so forth. We certainly don’t have certain knowledge, or perfect knowledge, regarding time. But we humans are aware of the dimension or the phenomenon of time. And there is the point that “with understanding (or awareness) comes responsibility”, to a degree.
- (9) My work refers and defers to the immense volume of work and thinking regarding ‘human equality’, the senses in which we consider (and should consider) each other as equals, and so forth. I don’t make any particular new or unique claim regarding ‘human equality’. Nor does my work depend on any particular, narrow, or precise understanding of ‘human equality’. It encompasses the broad scope of understandings and issues related to ‘equality’ without attempting to make a new or unique point.

Additional Context to Consider

Secular Scope of My Work (and of this DIY)

Topics are approached from a secular standpoint. In other words, the questions are: What can we understand about these matters from a secular standpoint? What understanding and conclusions can be supported from a secular standpoint? What can scientific understanding and secular reasoning tell us about the topics at hand, primarily human sociality, foundational values, social-moral dynamics, and human morality?

To be clear, the work doesn't make a claim, one way or the other, about the existence or non-existence of God or of other supernatural beings, forces, or dimensions. Thus the reader can understand the work in one of two ways: He/she can interpret it as *assuming* that God and other supernatural entities don't exist, without claiming to prove the matter one way or another. Or he/she can interpret the work as an argument that seeks only to involve and admit secular considerations and reasoning, thus excluding appeals to supernatural authority or considerations by choice.

Given that the work and claims do not appeal to, nor admit any appeal to, supernatural considerations or authorities, the context of the work (and the DIY) include this: That we humans (in this context) can't expect an authority independent of ourselves—i.e., a supernatural authority—to “justify” human life *to us and for us*. In other words, we can't expect a supernatural authority to tell us, or inform us in some convincing way, that “I hereby certify that human existence is justified” or that “I certify that human life is good” or that “I hereby affirm human life”. We humans must draw on, appeal to, and work with the best observations, scientific understanding, and secular reasoning we can bring to bear on the questions at hand. The task involves using the best possible *combination* of evidence and reasoning we can muster, in order to discover the understanding (or if you like, the solutions to the problems) that is best-reasoned, most consistent with reason, and most supported by reason in light of the evidence and reasoning available to us. Simply put: We can't look to a supernatural authority for “The Answer”. Instead, we must discover the best possible understanding, and tentative answers, available to us by way of observation, scientific understanding, and secular reasoning.

A Thought Regarding Choice and Understanding

In this context, it helps to understand the difference between choice and understanding. Individual humans make choices all the time, for a wide range of reasons—sometimes based on understanding, sometimes based on misunderstanding, sometimes based on whim, and sometimes without any consideration whatsoever. An individual human can “believe” that the world is flat, can “choose to believe” that the world is flat, can have no strongly-held opinion on the matter, can believe that the world is spherical based on incorrect reasoning, or can believe that the world is spherical based on sound evidence and reasoning. Human choices can be *informed* choices, based on excellent understanding. Or, choices can be *misinformed*, made in the absence of understanding, or adopted in spite of understanding. At the same time, advances in understanding don’t eliminate human choice. For example, a person can understand that, biologically speaking, life is that which lives, takes in energy, has a tendency to replicate, and so forth, and yet still choose to commit suicide in the context of his own circumstances. As another example, a person can understand that murder is wrong but still choose to commit murder. Understanding the difference between choice and understanding is important, of course, for a number of reasons: One of them, relevant here, is this: People often reject *understanding* because they feel that it somehow contradicts or infringes on human *choice*. This is common in all fields, including philosophy. For present purposes, there are several things to keep in mind: Understanding and choice are not the same. Understanding doesn’t automatically infringe on choice (unless of course the proposed understanding is that choice itself doesn’t exist or that it exists to a lesser degree than we think it does). Choices can be made in a full context of relevant understanding—or at least as much as is available based on considered exploration. Choices can be made within a wide range of *degrees* of understanding, from almost nil to an overabundance. And choices can be made in a way that ignores relevant understanding, and (to that degree anyhow) they may be said to have been made out of ignorance.

‘Reason’: Understand the Tool

In order to use ‘reason’ as a tool, one should understand ‘reason’. Put another way, the use of ‘reason’ as a tool should be informed by an understanding of ‘reason’ itself. Of course, this was one of Kant’s central points: to understand the credible abilities and the limitations of reason.

'Reason' is not whatever one might imagine or want it to be. Our understanding of 'reason' itself should, and must, be informed by understanding— understanding of ourselves (humans), nature, the human brain-mind, and so forth. What is the nature of reason? What are its abilities? Limits? Why does it exist? How did it come about in the first place? What does it depend on, for its own existence, if anything? What can a use of reason, in light of evidence, tell us about reason itself? If 'reason' were imagined as a being- or thing-in-itself, what would reason's self-understanding (i.e., understanding of itself) look like? I list these questions here not because my work considers and addresses all of them exhaustively—it doesn't—but because important parts of the matter inform our understanding of 'reason' in ways that are relevant to the question at hand.

Consider a surgeon with a scalpel, his chief tool. One day he gets hit by lightning, forgets his own name, and forgets what his scalpel *is* and *is for*. He also forgets about the sign on his door, which reads "Excellent Plastic Surgeon". So potential patients continue to call on him. What credibility will he have if he tries to use his scalpel to light the candles, if he sits on it and cuts himself, and if he picks up a chainsaw when the time comes to actually work on a patient's face? Such a surgeon has lost track of his chief tool, doesn't understand what it is, and doesn't understand what it can and can't do.

The point can also be illustrated by comparing the concept and word 'God' to the concept and word 'Reason'. Of course, the reason that an appeal to 'God' is not allowed in a discussion that's intended to be based on scientific understanding and secular reasoning, while an appeal to 'Reason' *is* allowed and necessary to such a discussion, is not that 'God' is spelled G-o-d while 'Reason' is spelled R-e-a-s-o-n. Instead, it's because an appeal to 'God' can't be grounded in scientific understanding and thinking that's strictly limited to secular understanding, while an appeal to 'reason' can be, presumably. Appeals to 'God' appeal to the supernatural, while appeals to 'reason' (and the use of 'reason') don't, or at least shouldn't. Thus, one must not merely imagine or invent the qualities of the tool one uses, at least not if the tool is to be used credibly.

For example, one person's understanding of 'God' might cause him to claim that God insists that we should all stand on our heads instead of on our feet. A different person's understanding of 'Reason' might cause him to claim that Reason recommends or compels us to stand on our heads instead of on our feet. The latter claim is no more (or less) credible than the former claim, in the sense that's important here anyhow. 'Reason' is not a magical word, with automatic credibility, and it is more easily misused than used in ways that can be explained, defended, and deeply grounded based on an understanding of reason

itself. The nature, abilities, and limits of reason (as a human capacity, ability, and tool) must themselves be understood, explained, and defended, to the best of our ability, in the broader context of human understanding, itself based on observation, scientific understanding, and any light that the use of reason can shed—one conservative step at a time—on its own nature, abilities, and limits. One might well say that our understanding of the tool of ‘human reason’ should be based on crawling before walking, and walking before running. One might also say that our understanding of ‘reason’ should be built from the ground, boots, and bootstraps up—from empirical evidence and secular understanding based on that evidence—rather than by working downward from an imagined or assumed high-principle, at least if we’re talking about a version of ‘reason’ that itself will be used as a chief tool in a discussion intended to be based in scientific understanding and secular reasoning instead of in an appeal to supernatural authority or (for that matter) to an assumed or imagined conception of ‘reason’.

To provide an example that brings together some of the points made so far: A person can choose to murder other people—i.e., we humans can choose our actions, to a degree. A person can also choose to think or believe that murdering other people is moral—i.e., we humans can choose what to believe, or at least what we want to think we believe, to a degree. But a person can’t choose *that* a correct argument, based on an informed understanding of relevant considerations and an informed understanding of reason itself, does in fact lead to the conclusion that murder is moral. As the saying roughly goes, people are entitled to their own opinions, and to the existence of human choice, but not to their own facts or correct arguments. Just as a person is entitled to have his own opinions but not to invent his own facts, so too a person is entitled to have his own (assumed or imagined, or correct) version of ‘reason’ but not to define, by mere whim or fiat, what we should consider to be an informed, supportable, explainable, defensible, and credible understanding of reason. Again, reason is not whatever one might wish or imagine it to be: The tool of reason itself must be subject to explanation, defense, and so forth, all in light of what we can understand about the world and ourselves. An assumed or imagined or undefended version of ‘reason’ has no more credible, or less credible, claim than an assumed or imagined or undefended appeal to a supernatural authority.

Human thinking faculties and human thinking itself would not exist, in the first place, if it weren’t for the tendency of life (living organisms and their fundamental components) to value survival and reproduction (continuance from one generation to the next), or to value those activities that result in survival and reproduction, or/and to strongly tend to strive to do, and to do, those activities

that result in survival and reproduction. (Even if one ignores the importance of being born as it relates to one's ability to have thinking faculties and to eventually put them to use, and perhaps ignores the fact that one's own existence as a person depended on an uninterrupted string of reproduction going back in time, one still has this fact to contend with: The existence of a "mature" human brain, capable of mature thinking and philosophy, depends on the reproduction, growth, and development of brain cells *after birth*, as the brain develops and grows. In other words, cells in the newborn brain must continue to reproduce, grow, and develop. And, in order for her or his brain to accomplish these tasks, the human must partake of food in order to gain the energy and nutrients necessary to brain development. Yet the existence of the food itself is dependent on cellular reproduction in the plants and/or animals, and so forth. So, human thinking is dependent in numerous foundational ways on life's tendency to survive and reproduce.) It should go without saying, of course, that a person must be alive in order to think—in other words, that human life is a prerequisite to human thinking, and that human thinking is dependent on the existence of human life. (At least, this is so, as far as we can tell, from a secular standpoint.) Furthermore, the *ongoing* existence of active human thinking faculties, and of active human thinking, depends (as far as we can tell) on the ongoing existence of human life. In other words, if human life goes extinct, human thinking will go extinct, in the sense of ceasing to be active. (In other words, old books, artifacts, computer programs, and perhaps robots may continue to exist for some time, but active human thinking will cease to exist if active living humans cease to exist.) These relationships among the existence of thinking faculties, the existence of thinking itself, life, reproduction, and etc.—and their implications—may discomfort those philosophers who may think about thinking as though thinking just *is*—i.e., as if each person's mature brain and thinking abilities just magically appear from thin air—or who may prefer to define their conception and understanding of what constitutes 'excellent thinking' in narrow, incomplete, and thus incorrect ways, including only what they want to include, and excluding whatever seems disagreeable relative to their preconceived notions.

A Few Additional Thoughts of Context

It's interesting and helpful to note that all seven of the points in the "Chief Considerations (and a few related notes)" section are descriptive and explanatory in nature. In other words, they are basically points of scientific understanding—although some aspects of some of them are so obvious that the word 'science' would not normally be attached to them. Of course, as brief

summary statements, they don't provide lengthy explicit explanations of themselves or of the supporting scientific evidence and understanding. However, each of the statements is supported by scientific understanding that is itself both wide and deep. The point is that none of the statements are statements that have been (or have been claimed to be) "justified" or affirmed in a normative sense. At the risk of oversimplification and confusion, one could say that they are *is*-statements, not *ought*-statements. There is no claim in these statements that the world *ought* to exist, that the world *ought* to work this way, that the objects of these statements *ought* to be as they are described in the statements, that human life *ought* to exist according to some independent definition of 'ought', and so forth.

But interestingly, two of the statements are *is*-statements—that is, descriptive and explanatory statements—*about* matters such as values, and sociality, and thus also about human social-moral dynamics. To be clear, again, they aren't statements that say, "This is the way things *ought* to be." But they are *is*-statements (so to speak) *about* a foundational value of life and about one aspect of the nature of sociality.

For the most part, the seven statements, or considerations, are highly interrelated as well. For example, in light of the nature of life, the processes of evolution, and the fact that humans are a social species, the first two considerations are intimately interrelated. In light of these same factors, the second and third considerations on the list are also intimately interrelated. Indeed, all seven of the considerations are intimately interrelated. They also relate to key aspects or dimensions of the situation and matters at hand: life itself, sociality, cognition and reason, human choice, time, human interdependence and relatedness, and our human interdependence with the broader natural environment and biotic community.

It's also interesting to note what the considerations do *not* depend on or appeal to: They don't depend on or appeal to "certain knowledge". They don't depend on or appeal to comprehensive knowledge, i.e., to an understanding of "all there is to know or understand". For example, one needn't understand whether the universe is contracting or expanding, or whether parallel universes exist, unavailable to us. Also, the considerations don't depend on or appeal to a supernatural authority. Nor do the essential points they convey depend on or appeal to particularities of language. The same points could be conveyed in any language. Indeed, the correctness and relevance of the points probably don't even depend on the *existence* of language, except of course to the degree that the actual substance of one of the points would be different if human language itself

didn't exist. (For example, if it were true that we humans wouldn't have our awareness of time if it weren't for the existence of human language, then the fifth Chief Consideration listed, regarding our awareness of time, would be incorrect, or would have to be changed accordingly, to describe the actual situation.)

Happiness?

Happiness. A fine thing! I like it too! But readers may have noticed that the seven Chief Considerations don't explicitly mention 'happiness'. Why not?

I could have written the Chief Considerations in ways that explicitly indicate how 'happiness' fits into, and relates to, the points made in each of them. Indeed, any expanded discussions of most of the points—for example, if an essay were written about each one—would explain where and how happiness relates to the matter at hand. The human *quest for happiness*, and human *states and degrees of happiness*, are intimately interrelated with each Chief Consideration in various ways. The quest for happiness, and states of happiness, both play important functions related to survival and reproduction (the first Chief Consideration listed) and human sociality (the second). In other words, the quest for happiness, and happiness itself, both play important roles, and higher degrees of happiness also serve as the experiential "icing on the cake" of life.

Yet one must be alive—living—in order to be happy or sad. In thinking about human sociality and morality, it helps to keep in mind the differences and relationships among life itself, health (in various senses and degrees), reproduction, the quest for happiness, and happiness itself (in various senses and degrees). My materials discuss these matters in some detail.

Regarding happiness, please also read the statement (in bold) and the notes on pages 24-25 in the next section, "A Few Hopefully Helpful Excerpts".

It might also help, as context, if I explain the following: There is no real significance to the fact that I haven't included 'happiness' explicitly in the short summary statements of the Chief Considerations, and readers will hopefully understand this point better after reading the next section and, if helpful, my other materials that explicitly deal with happiness. The same goes for 'pain', 'pleasure', and so forth. My claim or aim is *not*, of course, to suggest that these are not vitally important aspects of life and of living, or of ethics. As you may imagine, I appreciate happiness and pleasure, and dislike pain, as much as the next person. Also, the sciences are helping us understand the roles of these

things (e.g., pleasure, pain, the quest for happiness, and happiness itself) in general and, importantly, as they relate to survival, health, reproduction, sociality, and so forth. None of my work is meant to ignore, or diminish the importance of, these vital facets of life. Instead, part of the point I'm making, in my work, is that it helps to understand the roles of and interrelationships among these various things and reflect those roles and relationships well in our understanding of morality and in our best-possible theories of morality. Some historic confusions have resulted from the fact that we jumped to some conclusions before understanding these interrelationships. For example, the human quest for happiness is (and has long been) a fairly obvious thing, of course, and thus 'happiness' was put at the deep foundation and high pinnacle of some moral theories, beginning long, long ago. This occurred before we understood much of anything about the relationship between sociality (in the scientific sense) and life itself, the relationship between sociality and the continuation of life from generation to generation, the roles of the human quest for happiness in relation to these other matters, and so forth. So, in any case, far from ignoring 'happiness', or diminishing it, my work aims to help place things in their contexts and relationships, the "things" being: life itself, survival, health, reproduction, the continuance of life from one generation to the next, the quest for happiness, 'happiness' itself (which is a multifaceted thing, of course), sociality, and related matters.

Perhaps one way to illustrate the matter, and to ease any concerns that someone might have over the absence of the word 'happiness' in the brief list of Chief Considerations, is this: Consider the following five quotes or statements:

"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."

"So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law."

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

"You cannot be considered an ethical company if you do not follow sustainability principles. Nor can you apply sustainability concepts if you

do not have a strong foundation of ethical principles. The two are intrinsically intertwined ...”

The first statement is a great statement by the Dalai Lama, from his book *Ethics for the New Millennium*. The second is Kant’s Categorical Imperative, of course. The third is one version of the Golden Rule. The fourth is Aldo Leopold’s so-called Land Ethic. And the fifth is a statement by Perry Minnis, the Global Director of Ethics & Compliance at Alcoa.

Of course, and almost needless to say, these statements are not-at-all mutually exclusive. They share immense common ground. As brief summarizing statements, they place emphases on various aspects of (what is substantially) very similar ground. This is not to say, of course, that they are identical. Depending on how their authors, and interpreters, interpret them, they may be very different in some ways. And yet they also share immense common ground in important ways, even as some of them use very different terms to describe different aspects of the situation.

My point here is not to make any claims about these particular statements or about what they are meant to represent. Nor does my own work “depend on” these statements. Instead, my point is, by way of illustration, that not every statement about morality or ethics explicitly mentions ‘happiness’ or puts ‘happiness’ at the utmost pinnacle, as the final measure. The only statement in the collection above that explicitly mentions ‘happiness’ is the one from the Dalai Lama, which is a great statement covering a very important aspect of the matter. (And I don’t disagree with the Dalai Lama’s statement; indeed, I think it’s a great one.) Nor does the Dalai Lama’s statement indicate that he thinks that an individual’s personal ‘happiness’ is the be-all-and-end-all of ethics. (I imagine that he would not be in favor of someone killing another person in order to increase his own level of happiness.) It’s also important to note that the statements that *don’t* mention happiness explicitly, do *not* exclude happiness from life or from being relevant and deeply important. The quest for happiness, and happiness itself, play important roles in all of the statements listed above, at least as far as I understand them.

Another way to illustrate a related point is this: Consider these two options:

1. In this option, a person living today, who is already healthy and somewhat happy, increases his “level of happiness” by 25 percent, at the cost that a different person living 50 years from now will die prematurely, at the age of 10, as a result.

2. In this option, the person living today maintains his level of happiness but foregoes the action that would result in the 25 percent increase (in his happiness), and as a result the other person, living 50 years from now, does not die prematurely and lives a long life.

How do (or shall) we consider and compare these two options? My point here is not to go into the matter, of course, but instead to merely point out that happiness is a factor but not the only one, and often not the most important one. One must be alive in order to be happy (or sad), and informed moral theories should not treat “life itself” and “an increment of happiness” as one and the same, or even of the same currency, so to speak. The solution space that is available for discovery, via the DIY exercise and in light of the Chief Considerations, sheds a great deal of light on all this, as it should.

The solution space and resolutions to the issues at hand also help contextualize, relate, support, qualify, and inform each of the five statements listed above, helping to relate each one to the other, and all to all else, having to do with human morality. The question is not whether ‘happiness’ is or isn’t sought, or nice, or important, or whether it does or doesn’t play a role. Instead, it’s how should we understand morality—and in particular *the most foundational aspects of morality*—in light of all considerations, including happiness, understanding each aspect of life in its various roles and in relation to life itself.

Cooperation

It might also help to offer a quick comment or two about cooperation, along the following lines: Some people suggest that morality is largely, or perhaps even solely, about “cooperation”. Some even seem to *equate* morality and cooperation. Of course, depending on what one means by ‘cooperation’, and the scopes assigned to each of the terms ‘morality’ and ‘cooperation’, there is a great deal of sense in observations that note the very large overlap between the two concepts and their dynamics. Yet apart from that question, often such observations only deal with part of one side of the coin, so to speak. By that I mean this: By itself, the observation doesn’t address the question, “Cooperation to what end?” In other words, whatever the degrees of overlap or equivalence between ‘morality’ and ‘cooperation’ may be, depending on one’s definition of terms, if morality is largely or mainly about cooperation, there remains the question, “Cooperation to what end?”

My point here is not to try to get into a discussion of the relationships between ‘morality’ and ‘cooperation’ as real things, as concepts, or as terms. That discussion is not at all necessary to the present task, and much of any such discussion largely boils down to semantics and how one chooses to define, and scope, the terms. That’s not my interest. Instead, my point here is to raise the question, to those who prefer to discuss the matter in terms of cooperation, of “Cooperation to what end?”

Groups of people can cooperate to murder other groups of people, of course. The entire population of the world could, in theory anyhow, “cooperate” to commit mass suicide and bring an end to the human species. Or instead, the world’s population could cooperate, in theory anyhow, to achieve reasonably high degrees of human health, sustainability, and justice for all. Cooperation to commit mass suicide is not the same as cooperation to achieve health and sustainability for humankind, of course. The outcomes are dramatically different. The “To what end?” question is an important one. Those who claim that morality is mainly or entirely about cooperation have only addressed part of the matter unless they’ve addressed that question. And indeed, if they don’t address that question, they haven’t said all that much.

When talking about human morality, I sometimes find it helpful to employ the phrase *conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality*. (By ‘responsible’ here, I mean something like “mutually beneficial, or at least not detrimental”.) In doing so, I mean the term ‘sociality’ in its full scientific sense, also encompassing an appreciation of why social species are social in the first place, and of the roles that sociality plays in facilitating the continuing existence of life from one generation to the next. Thus, in this phrase—*conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality*—there are two words (‘responsible’ and ‘sociality’) that shed light on the matter of foundational ends.

The brief discussion here (in this section) is not intended to make precise claims, of course, but rather to provide additional context and food-for-thought to readers who consider the Chief Considerations and engage in the DIY exercise for themselves.

A Few Hopefully Helpful Excerpts

The following are a few hopefully helpful excerpts from a few of my earlier materials. They are included here to help readers as they consider the Chief Considerations and explore the questions at hand. They are explained in detail in my other materials.

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.

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:

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. (For example, consider Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic”.) 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

* 'Responsible' here is taken to mean mutually beneficial, or at least not detrimental

Because these two facts and considerations exist (among others)...

1. We humans have our human brains, cognitive faculties, cognitive abilities, “reasoning skills”, and related abilities because they have enhanced fitness during the formative periods of our evolutionary development. They are adaptations, combinations of adaptations, and adaptive abilities. They facilitate survival and reproduction from one generation to the next, albeit far from perfectly, “on average”, on a net basis. (Here, I’m not taking pains to be precise in my wording, but I’m not trying to say anything other than what a basic understanding of evolution tells us is very likely the case.)
2. If the human species goes extinct in the future, then our brains, cognitive faculties, cognitive abilities, and so forth will also cease to exist, or at least they’ll cease to be alive and active. As we go, so go our brains.

... **there exists** an aspect of, component of, or characteristic of what constitutes “an excellent application of healthy and excellent human thinking”, properly understood, **such that** our use of it would be incorrect (i.e., would be considered incorrect, misunderstood and mistaken, in contradiction to itself, inconsistent, self-defeating, or etc.) if we used it to support a choice of non-existence over one of continuing existence, or to support a choice of indifference between continuing existence and non-existence/extinction.

Some Quick Thoughts on Reason's 'Response to Life'

Consider the first of the Seven Chief Considerations listed earlier, having to do with the nature of life:

- **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⁾

(In the interest of brevity in this section, I won't explain, detail, and appropriately qualify what I mean by the above statement here. Readers interested in such detail, or who have questions, should consider Note 1 in the **Chief Considerations** section of this paper; **Appendix 3**, including the notes at the end; the quotes on page 11 of my HBES presentation, 'The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense'; and other materials listed at the end of this paper, in **Appendix 5**.)

Humans are living organisms and beings, of course. We are "conscious" and self-aware beings, we have an ability to examine matters (to a degree), and we have the capacity and ability of 'human reason'. We can ask, and try to address, questions to the best of our abilities.

So, what happens if we subject the statement about the Nature of Life (from above) to human examination, seeking a reasoned human response? In other words, what happens if we "put the matter" to healthy, excellent-thinking humans for examination and response along the following lines: Does it make sense for life to value its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next? Does it make *more* sense for life to value its survival and continuance than for life to value its own cessation/extinction, or for life to be indifferent between the outcomes of continuance and non-existence? Of the options—survival and continuance (i.e., continuing existence), cessation (i.e., non-existence), or indifference—what value or stance (on life's part) is most consistent with 'reason', best reasoned, and most reasonable?

To be clear, I'm not asking, here, the scientific question of whether the statement about the Nature of Life is correct in a scientific sense, i.e., the question of whether it *describes* an important aspect of the nature of life. Instead, imagine that the statement is placed "on the table" as being correct (when understood

correctly, of course) in the scientific and factual sense. Then imagine subjecting that fact to philosophical examination, so to speak, along the lines just mentioned. If it were “up to ‘reason’”, all things considered, would ‘reason’ have life value its own survival and continuance (reproduction) from the present generation to the next? Here, we are not asking the question about a particular person, at a particular point in life, in particular circumstances, taking account of all of that person’s circumstances, options, feelings, capacities, and so forth. Instead, we are asking the general or *meta* question having to do with whether ‘human reason’, properly understood, would vote to affirm, negate, or be indifferent to the fundamental tendency of life to value survival and continuance. (The question is described in more detail, put in different ways, and illustrated, in a number of my other materials, but hopefully the present description will suffice for present purposes.)

Imagine that ‘human reason’ —or rather, an excellent-thinking person using human reason, properly understood—were to examine and assess the matter (i.e., the question and the possible responses) according to its own scale or measuring-stick, i.e., according to the scale or measuring-stick of human reason. Set aside particulars: a particular person, in particular circumstances, with particular options, at a particular point in life. Consider an application of “reason only”. Ask the *meta* question. What response would ‘reason’ support—an affirming response, a negating response, or an indifference to the matter? Assume, of course, that ‘reason’ would have an excellent degree of self-understanding, or assume that the person applying ‘reason’ as his tool would have a fully informed and proper understanding of ‘reason’ as his tool.

Three notes, before proceeding:

First, note that this question is *not* whether an authority independent of us (humans) can be found, or whether compelling authoritative evidence of some kind can be found, that somehow “justifies” the existence (and ongoing existence) of human life *to* us and *for* us. In keeping with the secular nature of the scope of my work, no such independent authority is assumed or expected—i.e., no appeal to supernatural authority allowed. We humans must face and address questions, the best that we can, ourselves. The present question has to do with how an informed and excellent application of ‘human reason’ would respond, if at all, upon examining the matter, to life’s tendency to value survival and continuation from one generation to the next, all things considered, given an informed and proper understanding of ‘human reason’ as the tool and measure. Put another way, in the absence of a supernatural authority to “justify” the existence of human life to us and for us, and in the likelihood that “certain

knowledge” may elude us humans, which response (to the matter in question) would, or does, human reason hold as being “better reasoned”, “more consistent with reason”, and “more reasonable” than the other possible responses? Which response is the “best-reasoned” response, the response most supported by reason, even though not supported with any “certain knowledge”?

Put another way, is ‘human reason’ pro-life, anti-life, or indifferent to life, taking ‘life’ here to mean human life? (Of course, these terms as used here are not intended in the specific narrow senses in which they are sometimes used in debates about abortion in the U.S.) The question should be asked, and answered, in the context of an informed understanding of ‘human reason’ —i.e., what it is, its nature, its abilities, its credible functions, its limits, and so forth. And again, the question should be addressed with the understanding that “certain knowledge” is not the relevant standard, and not likely attainable: Instead, the question is which response (on ‘reason’s’ part) is the best-reasoned response, the response most consistent with reason, and the most reasonable response?

Second, note that the question is not a “merely theoretical” and thus inconsequential question. The question of the “attitude” of ‘human reason’, properly understood, toward human life and life’s continuance (from a present generation to the next) is a vital one, involving immense implications, though its answer should be obvious. Be that as it may, the implications of the answer have apparently not been so obvious. Yet they are immense.

Third, in case my wording of the question here has left some readers confused, please refer to my other materials (see list in Appendix 5) for other statements of it, simple illustrations, and explanations. (As one example, refer to pages 17-21 of my presentation, ‘The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense’.) Or/also, consider this illustrative statement by R. Jay Wallace from his book, *Normativity & the Will*:

“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.”

The matter can also be understood, albeit somewhat playfully, by considering the following rough quotes (or paraphrases) from Socrates and Bertrand Russell:

Socrates (rough paraphrase): “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Bertrand Russell: “Some people would rather die than think; and many do.”

Regarding the rough paraphrase of Socrates, if there was an important point to be made by saying that “the unexamined life is not worth living”, this implies, perhaps, that in Socrates’ view the *examined* life *is* worth living. This in turn suggests the question of whether an excellent application of ‘human reason’, properly understood, would find that it is more consistent with reason for life to value survival and continuance than for life to value non-existence and extinction, within normal conditions anyhow.

Regarding the Bertrand Russell quote, if Russell’s point was intended as a (somewhat fun) criticism of those people who “would rather die than think”, this implies a positive relationship between excellent thinking and survival. (No surprise there, of course.) Did Russell mean that excellent thinking, or ‘reason’, suggests survival (life) as the best-reasoned *aim* of choice, in normal circumstances, in his view, or did he merely mean that thinking is a *means* to survival? I don’t know (I’m not a Russell scholar), nor does it matter. I merely point out the quote because a brief discussion of it can help “bring to life” the issue in question.

Another way to understand the question is to consider Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be, that is the question — “. Does ‘human reason’ have anything to say about the possible responses to that question? In other words, does ‘human reason’ support one response to that question as being a better-reasoned response, a response that’s more consistent with reason, than the other possible responses, when left to assess the matter according to its own measuring-stick, i.e., the measuring-stick of human reason?

Moving on ... my aim in this section is to offer some observations regarding what response (to the fact that 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) ‘human reason’ would judge to be the best-reasoned response, the response most consistent with itself, so to speak. My point here is not to establish, explain, and defend these observations. That would be beyond the scope of this section and is the point of my other materials. Instead, here I merely offer the observations as “hints” to those who have taken up the task of understanding the Seven Chief Considerations and the solution space and resolutions to which they lead.

Continued ...

There are four possible responses that 'human reason' could have regarding this aspect of the nature of life:

- 1) One conception and understanding of 'human reason' might hold that 'human reason', properly understood, would conclude that it is *contrary to reason* for life to value survival and continuance from a present generation to the next. In other words, such a view of 'human reason' holds that it doesn't make well-reasoned sense to value existence (and continuing existence) and, indeed, that it makes the most sense to value *non-existence*, annihilation, extinction, or whatever else one might call it. Such a view holds that 'reason' has a negative attitude towards life itself. Such a view holds that 'reason', upon examining and considering the matter, would reject the value that life tends to hold for its own survival and continuance from one generation to the next. This view holds that 'reason' would answer Hamlet's question with a clear "not to be!", completely apart from the situations of particular individuals. (Of course, this would be a very odd conception of 'human reason', but we shouldn't fail to consider it as one possibility.)
- 2) A different conception and understanding of 'human reason' holds that 'human reason', properly understood, is wholly indifferent to the matter. When Hamlet asks (as humankind in general), "To be, or not to be, that is the question —", 'human reason' answers with a response that is indifferent for one reason or another: 'Reason' might respond, "The question is irrelevant to me and I don't even recognize it." Or 'reason' might respond, "I don't care." Or 'reason' might respond, "Although I recognize the question, there are no responses to it that are any better-reasoned, or more consistent with reason, or more positive when weighed according to my own measuring-stick, than any other responses to the question." Such a view of 'reason' is, in essence, that 'reason' is indifferent to existence and to life.
- 3) A different conception and understanding of 'human reason' holds that 'human reason', properly understood, upon examining the matter, would judge that it makes more sense (i.e., is more consistent with reason, etc.) for life to value survival and continuance than for life to value non-existence or for life to be indifferent to existence. Such an understanding of 'reason' holds that reason affirms (or supports) the choice of existence (life and life's continuance) as being better reasoned, more supported by reason, and more consistent with reason, than the choice of non-existence or the choice of indifference to existence. According to this view, in response to Hamlet's question, 'reason' supports the choice to "Be!" This view of 'reason' is that reason's own measuring-stick holds that existence is more positive than non-

existence, in a *meta* sense, all else equal. There are two different conceptions and understandings of ‘reason’ that both fall under this broad head—and they are different in important ways—which are these: (Actually, for present purposes, it matters not whether we consider these as two different conceptions of ‘reason’ or, instead, whether we consider these as the same conception of ‘reason’ in relation to the question of existence or non-existence, but applied to different degrees—one correctly and one not—when additional considerations are considered.)

- a) One such conception and understanding of ‘reason’ holds that reason affirms (or supports) the choice to “Be!” as being better reasoned, more supported by reason, and more consistent with reason, than the choice of non-existence or the choice of indifference to existence; *but* it does so in a way that accepts, without further examination, all other natural aims, means, dynamics, and sometimes harmful idiosyncrasies of life as they have evolved up to today. It takes *all* aspects of life as “given”. It responds to the first Chief Consideration affirmatively, but it ignores other Chief Considerations and their implications.
- b) A different such conception and understanding of ‘reason’—or if you like, the same one, but applied more completely and correctly—holds that reason affirms (or supports) the choice to “Be!” as being better reasoned, more supported by reason, and more consistent with reason, than the choice of non-existence or the choice of indifference to existence; *and* it does so in a way that also considers, and reflects a respect for, the other Chief Considerations as well as other factors involved in allowing humans to gain the most benefit from ‘human reason’ and apply it (along with other human abilities) to its fullest potential. In other words, this conception and understanding of ‘human reason’ considers and respects all seven of the Chief Considerations, taken together, and does not merely affirm the first in ways that ignore or violate the others or their implications. This conception of ‘reason’ holds that ‘reason’ would not commit a naturalistic fallacy, of course; and it also holds that ‘reason’ would not ignore the understandings reflected in the seven Chief Considerations.

So then, what can be said, briefly, about these four conceptions and understandings of ‘human reason’—1, 2, 3a, and 3b—at least in relation to the matter under consideration here?

The first conception and understanding of ‘human reason’ listed above (i.e., 1) misunderstands ‘reason’ in a foundational way. It ignores important understanding that we humans do hold, at least on a tentative basis, and that’s most likely correct, at least as far as we can presently tell from a secular standpoint. It might also be worth mentioning that such a conception of ‘human reason’ would undermine a very great deal of what we presently think of as philosophy. It pits ‘reason’ against life itself: a hard argument to support except in the most contrived and unfounded ways.

To claim that ‘reason’—or rather, that an application of reason by a person claiming to use reason as his tool—would reject this value that life holds for its own survival and continuance, outright (i.e., would negate it, would refute it, would find it contradictory to ‘reason’, etc.), would be to misunderstand ‘reason’ itself. Such a claim would also invite, and require a compelling answer to, the question, What possible basis could there be for such a claim?

The second conception and understanding of ‘human reason’ listed above (i.e., 2) also misunderstands ‘reason’ in a foundational way, yet it’s more interesting than ‘1’ and certainly far more prevalent than ‘1’. Indeed, a conception of ‘reason’ that holds that reason is entirely indifferent between existence and non-existence, between life and non-life, between “to be” and “not to be”, is common among a fairly wide range of philosophers, it seems. Such a conception of ‘reason’ is confused, or at least *incorrectly narrow and incomplete*, and ignores important modern understanding. (See elsewhere in this paper, including the third Chief Consideration, titled ‘Cognition’, as well as the excerpt beginning with the word ‘Because’ in the section, ‘A Few Hopefully Helpful Excerpts’. See also pages 17-21 in my presentation, ‘The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense’.)

There is much to be said in critique of this “indifferent” conception and understanding of ‘reason’, but most of it is beyond the scope of this section. I’ll only mention two things here: First, if ‘reason’ were entirely indifferent between existence and non-existence, and thus aimless in that sense—serving only to help discover and assess means to achieve any aims given to it, with equal respect for any aim—it would be a remarkably aimless tool to serve as the supposed chief tool of philosophy. Be that as it may. It also helps to note this: If someone’s conception and understanding of ‘reason’ holds that ‘reason’ is entirely indifferent to a question and matter, and cannot possibly judge the matter one way or the other, then it would be inconsistent (and in a sense highly unreasonable) for that same person to insist that ‘reason’ is the only, or principal, tool that should be asked to assess and judge that matter. In other words, if

someone told you this—“I’m the one who should judge Question X, and I’m the one who should have final say on the answer or resolution, but I cannot possibly judge it, as my very nature and abilities make it impossible for me to do so” — you’d consider him to be inconsistent and/or unreasonable and/or a bit crazy. This point has implications that go beyond our present scope.

The conception and understanding of ‘reason’ as listed in ‘3’, Version ‘3a’, can be said to be correct on one count but to go astray on others. Version ‘3a’ correctly understands that ‘reason’ holds existence to be more positive than non-existence, as measured according to its own nature and scale. But Version ‘3a’, as described above, embraces all else uncritically, ignores the other Chief Considerations and their implications, and commits a naturalistic fallacy. For example, a version of ‘reason’ that ignores time, is fully satisfied to survive and reproduce without limit, ignores the limits of a finite Earth, and so forth, will ultimately find itself “in trouble” and possibly even defeat itself. One could say that ‘reason’ is not concerned only with means, nor is it concerned only with aims, but instead that it must consider “aims-and-means” in light of all relevant considerations.

The conception and understanding of ‘reason’ as listed in ‘3’, Version ‘3b’, is correct on all counts we’re dealing with presently. It understands and reflects reason’s posture, attitude, stance, and relationship with respect to existence itself—i.e., with respect to life, active biological existence. Yet it does so in a way that also understands and respects the other Chief Considerations and, indeed, other (and complementary) roles of ‘reason’ not even mentioned here. ‘Reason’ supports the choice to affirm, so to speak, life’s natural tendency to value survival and continuance, but it does so within the context of respecting all relevant considerations. In other words, as example, an excellent application of ‘reason’, properly understood, would not support overpopulating the planet to degrees, or in ways, that would ultimately implode, backfire, be self-defeating, or violate other considerations that, to appropriate degrees, reason also acknowledges.

Much of the discussion above begins to go beyond the scope intended here. For present purposes, suffice it to say that ‘3b’ is on track, ‘3a’ is not, and ‘2’ and ‘1’ are not.

Before we leave the discussion of ‘reason’ here, however, I’d like to mention one more thing that often helps people to examine their own conception and understanding of ‘reason’. Imagine a business meeting, consisting of ten people, called together to consider, understand, and address (as well as they can) a

business problem. (Or if you like, imagine a similar meeting in academia, in government, or in a neighborhood organization: Ten people called together to consider, understand, and address a problem relevant to them.)

Imagine that nine of the ten people in the meeting are experts in their own areas and have access to different sets of information, some of which might be relevant to the problem and some of which might not be relevant. Now consider the tenth person: Imagine two different versions of the meeting. In one version, the tenth person is merely a “process facilitator”. He or she facilitates the meeting, ensures that everyone shares information, and perhaps points out any inconsistencies that surface, but he or she doesn’t have the expertise to resolve the problem, nor the authority to decide the best resolution. She facilitates, but doesn’t have a vote. She facilitates, but is not “the decider”. Most of us understand, or can imagine, this “process facilitator” sort of role. Many of us have played such roles.

In a different version of the meeting, the tenth person is the decision-making authority. She can decide, based on her expertise, her own measuring-stick, and the information provided by all participants, what resolution to the problem will be adopted. In short, she’s the final expert and boss. Most of us understand, or can imagine, this sort of role. Many of us have played such roles.

Now here are some questions to consider: According to your own conception and understanding of ‘human reason’, does ‘human reason’ play *only* a “process facilitator” role? *Mainly* a process facilitator role? Does ‘human reason’ play a “decider” role when it comes to certain types of questions? If so, which types of questions? Does ‘human reason’ only point out inconsistencies in facts offered by, or statements made by, the other nine members in the meeting? Does ‘human reason’ have a vote, so to speak? Can it decide anything, even on a tentative best-attempt basis? Does it have a scale, a measuring-stick, of its own? And what if the matter at issue in the meeting—the question being considered—has to do with the nature, functions, abilities, and limits of ‘human reason’ itself? Or what if the question on the table has been addressed specifically *to* ‘human reason’?

I raise these questions, for the reader’s consideration, because some people seem to think of ‘reason’ as if it plays only a “process facilitator” role, without a vote or any authority of its own, save perhaps to point out inconsistencies in facts or arguments offered in other currencies. Many discussions confuse different senses of different words, or even the words themselves, that contain the letters r-e-a-s-o-n. For example, consider the statement, “A good reason to avoid

touching the stove is that it's hot and will burn your hand if you touch it." Then consider the statement, "Her reasoning made considerable sense, under the circumstances." Then consider the statement, "An informed and excellent application of human reason, properly understood, would support a choice that results in existence as being more consistent with reason, better reasoned, and more reasonable than a choice that results in non-existence, all else equal, in normal circumstances, and using the measuring-stick of reason itself as the means of assessment." These uses of the linked letters r-e-a-s-o-n are not identical, of course, and the differences are important when considering the matter presently at issue. Of course, noting these differences is nothing new. But, when considering the Chief Considerations and the solution space and resolutions they lead to, keeping these sorts of differences in mind, and not being confused by them, is helpful in a number of ways.

For more on 'reason', see (in addition to other materials already on my web site) the following items, also listed in the list of Items in Appendix 5: (The dates below are all from 2010.)

V – O Reason

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)

Reflections On Reason (CHORA, August 31)

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

What Are Turtles "For"? (CHORA, April 14)

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

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

Addendum: Some readers may find the following passage helpful. It puts some of the matters already covered in yet an additional way. Readers who already understand these points, and who would prefer to avoid redundancy, would do well to skip this addition:

'Human reason' is a capacity, ability, and tool of the human brain-mind, which itself is ultimately a product of human evolutionary development. (To be clear, my meaning in this statement is intended to include any aspect of, or influence

on, evolutionary development, e.g., the influence of cultural factors on evolution.) In order to use the tool of 'human reason' correctly—and to claim and rely on it as one's chief source of credibility and authority—one must first gain an informed understanding of what 'human reason' is, its nature, its functions, its credible uses, its limits and inabilities, and so forth. *In order to use a tool well, one should understand it.* What can human reason be credibly claimed to be capable of doing? What can it *not* be credibly claimed to be capable of doing? What are its origins, nature, natural functions, characteristics, abilities, limits, requisites and dependencies, and so forth? What would constitute an informed understanding of 'human reason'? What considerations are relevant to such understanding? What sorts of arguments would (presume to) involve 'human reason' in contradicting itself?

List of Important Considerations or Ingredients (from an earlier item: September, 2010)

The following is a list of “important considerations or ingredients” used as an attachment to the letter from September, 2010 shown in Appendix 2. It includes the Chief Considerations (although refers to them in a reduced level of detail) and also mentions other considerations that are helpful to understand, in no particular order.

Important Considerations or Ingredients

The enterprise involves understanding:

- the nature of life itself, scientifically speaking
- the nature, roles, and limits of human reason
- the fact that a *combination* of these understandings—i.e., that of the nature of *life*, and that of the nature of *reason*—is necessary to accomplish the task; in other words, that both parts of the picture are necessary to understand the picture
- the fact that understanding these two considerations, their combination, and the resulting picture necessarily involves understanding the *common solution space* formed by the considerations, the *connective* or *common matter* between them, the *complementarity* between them, the area of mutual affirmation, the *foundational bridge* between them, or whatever else one might like to call the connection; in other words, the fact that it’s not sufficient to merely note that two parts of a picture are necessary to form the picture, but that it’s also necessary to understand *how the two parts relate to, or connect to, each other in a complementary fashion*. (Merely thinking that two “parts” are necessary to form a picture is either incorrect, or insufficient, or not all that helpful, if those two “parts” have nothing in common, share no common theme, form no common solution space, admit of no connection, have no complementarity, and exist in entirely different “universes”, so to speak, and so forth.)

- the ultimate (in the scientific sense of the word) roles of *sociality, human sociality, human social-moral faculties and dynamics, and the brain itself* in the context of evolution, human evolutionary development, and our existence as products of evolutionary processes
- the difference between *probability* (likelihood, probabilistic understanding held tentatively, etc.) and *certainty* in the context of the nature and limits of human experience, understanding, and reason—including an acknowledgement of the likely limits associated with human understanding as well as the implications thereof to human morality
- the role of human *choice* (within the ranges allowed by nature's limits) in a secular philosophy informed by human experience, scientific understanding, and human reason all in a secular context—including understanding the difference between a well informed and excellently reasoned *choice*, and “certain knowledge”, including an understanding of what is “up to us”
- the difference between the sorts of things that probably can be changed (by humans) and those that probably can't be changed (by humans), as far as we can understand, and the *implications* of that difference; in other words, the “wisdom to know the difference” that Reinhold Niebuhr seeks in *The Serenity Prayer* (although my point here is the secular version of the point that Niebuhr himself makes in a religious context) and the *implications* of that difference
- the consequential role of recognizing, understanding, and *facing* a real *situation* (a real problem, a real question, etc.), and understanding the available *options*, and then making (or not making) informed *choices* in response to the situation faced
- the primary interrelationships among the roles of such things as happiness (in its various roles and senses), fairness and justice, cooperation, survival, reproduction, fitness (in the scientific sense), and other related matters
- the nature and roles of our human use of words—and using them as helpful tools, to facilitate communication and understanding, while not letting them confuse us and block understanding by pretending to substitute for “the things themselves” or by tempting us to think solely in terms of distinct and delineated digitized concepts even when trying to understand analog relationships

- the fact that we humans are aware of the dimension of time, or at least of the phenomenon of time, and the implications of that fact in light of the other considerations
- the fact of our human interdependence with the natural world, and with the broad life community, and the fact of our awareness of our interdependence with nature, including with other species, as imprecise as our awareness is; and, the fact (as far as we can tell) of our existence *in*, and *as part of*, the natural universe
- the facts of our human existence as interdependent members of a highly social species, our awareness of our human interdependence, our awareness of our relationship to each other as humans, and our understanding and agreement that we are all equal in our humanness, in important senses
- the *implications* of all of the above considerations when taken together

Most of the rest is simple problem-solving, understanding interrelationships, connecting dots, and detail.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Abstract of *The Relevance of Scientific Understanding to Morality in the Normative Sense*, Presentation at The Human Behavior and Evolution Society's (HBES) 22nd Annual Meeting (June, 2010)

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.

Appendix 2

A Letter With Some Context

The following is a cover letter that I provided, accompanying a manuscript consisting of a collection of my materials, to a few select publishers in late 2010. I include it here as helpful context. The notes to the letter are listed at the end of this section.

Jeff Huggins
4 September 2010

Dear XXXXXX,

I am happy to submit a draft manuscript of my *On Morality* for your consideration. I hope you will consider it both thoughtfully and critically.

It is, in my view, one of the most important philosophical works regarding human morality ever written—certainly within the last two centuries. One way to understand the nature and scope of the advances it offers is to imagine the “update” and resulting reconciliation, regarding long-standing issues in moral philosophy, that would likely take place if Hume, Kant, Camus, Darwin, a few modern evolutionary scientists, and a few related philosophers could spend two weeks together, in an auspicious location, with plenty of tea and biscuits, wine and chocolate. In any case, the work resolves foundational gaps and issues in moral philosophy and offers substantial advances that shed light on many others.

The work involves two complementary considerations, among others—the nature of life itself, scientifically speaking, and the nature, roles, and limits of human reason. (See *Important Considerations or Ingredients*, included below, for a brief list of these and others.) Although a number of other important considerations are also involved, I’ll briefly mention these two here: First, a foundational aspect of the nature of life is that life values its own survival and continuance (i.e., reproduction) from the present generation to the next generation. ^(Note 1) Second, it would be contradictory to the nature of reason for

reason to support a choice that would result in its own extinction (or substantial diminishment) as being a better-reasoned choice, a more reasonable choice, or a choice more consistent with reason than an alternative choice that would result in reason's own continuation, preservation, and integrity, on the basis of its own scale (i.e., the scale of reason) and considering other factors as less important or as balancing each other out. Put another way, it would be self-contradictory for reason to freely choose—on the basis of its own measuring-stick, i.e., the measuring-stick of reason—to commit its own suicide, so to speak: Doing so would constitute a mistake. ^(Note 2) These two considerations—which can be supported, explained, and illustrated in a number of solid ways—when considered together and combined with other relevant considerations, yield vitally important insights, resolve a number of long-standing issues, and have important positive implications. ^(Note 3)

The understanding and arguments in the work identify, explain, and establish the foundational connecting “bridge” between the scientific understanding of the matter and the philosophy, or reasoning, of the matter—the *matter* being human morality. In other words, the work identifies, explains, and establishes the *foundational correspondence, common matter, common ground, solution space, or foundational bridge*—choose your preferred term—between scientific understanding and reasoning having to do with human morality. ^(Note 4) It identifies and explains the foundational common theme that runs through the *science* and *reason* of the matter and forms their central intersection. It reveals and explains the relevance of scientific understanding to our understanding of morality in the normative sense. The work identifies and explains the solid relational bridge between *is* and *ought*, between *fact* and *value*, specifically regarding the matter of the ongoing—and ideally sustainable—survival of humankind. It identifies and provides necessary “stereoscopy”—to use the term Kwame Anthony Appiah used in his *Experiments in Ethics*.

The work identifies and explains the foundational ground of an integrated view of morality—a grounded, scientifically informed, excellently reasoned, and highly productive *moral science-philosophy*, so to speak. It identifies and explains the foundational bridge (or other term; see above) that forms the foundation of an integrated understanding of morality that encompasses the descriptive, explanatory, and normative dimensions of the matter. Along the way, it offers helpful explanations and informative terms to help convey understanding—e.g., *conscious, informed, and responsible human sociality*.

The resulting view—when understood—provides that feeling of consilience that E. O. Wilson identified and, to put it another way, that feeling associated with solving a crossword puzzle, to use the analogy identified by Susan Haack.

Importantly, the resulting understanding illuminates the foundational basis of a vital relationship between the relevant sciences and the *field* of moral philosophy. It sets the solid stage for—and provides meat for—a substantially improved and highly productive relationship between the relevant scientific disciplines and the discipline of secular moral philosophy. In addition to offering immediate insights, it sets a solid stage for advancements on many fronts.

In addition, the view sheds a great deal of light on the relationship between morality and sustainability and on *the moral case for sustainability*—a timely topic of immense importance, of course. Indeed, it provides the strongest moral case for sustainability possible from a secular standpoint. The view also assists in resolving—i.e., *it informs and places in new light*—long-standing debates between differing views in moral philosophy—e.g., that between consequentialist views and deontological views, etc. It also sheds light on so-called paradoxes and trolley problems.

(Refer to pages 26 to 29 of the item titled *The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense*, in the manuscript, for a list of many of the implications and benefits of the understanding.)

Central issues that the work resolves, in whole or in substantial part, have been in need of resolution for centuries. And, this lack of resolution has substantially hampered philosophical progress that would otherwise have been possible. What's more, this lack of resolution, as well as (frequently) a misunderstanding of the issues themselves, has hampered productive cooperation between the sciences and the field of moral philosophy. *Most importantly*, however, the unresolved state of these issues—along with the resulting limited cooperation between the sciences and philosophy, as well as the resulting persistently high degrees of fragmentation and disagreement among many moral philosophical views—has ultimately resulted in a dramatic *slowdown* in the advancement of moral understanding among the broader public, i.e., 6.8 billion of us. *We live today in a less wise and less moral world than would otherwise have been possible, in part because of the so-far unresolved state of the issues that understanding in the work resolves.* Thus, the work is both timely and vital.

Regarding the present manuscript: The present manuscript is a *draft*, although a fairly complete one. It consists of a collection of summaries, explanatory

materials, essays, presentations, exercises, and other items, including select messages I posted on the philosophy lists Philos-L and Chora over the past several years. I constructed and collated the work in this way for several reasons: The individual materials provide somewhat bite-sized and digestible summaries (in some cases), explanations, focused analyses, and illustrations of the various points involved. They also provide *variety*. They consider the argument in whole, or various smaller parts of it, from a number of standpoints. Sometimes they explain certain key matters in different, though complementary, ways. And they contain the material as I originally presented it, or made it public, via various in-person presentations, via my website (in some cases), via correspondences (in some cases), or as Philos-L or Chora messages (in still others). ^(Notes 5, 6) Thus, they preserve the original focuses, points, and arguments as originally made. This approach also *allows* readers to easily jump back and forth, read the same arguments in different ways, and enjoy other benefits of flexibility and variety. It also allows readers to easily *skip* materials that don't seem interesting or relevant to them.

Of course, I wrote the materials as individual materials, at first. At this point, given the scope of the subject and volume of work, it would be quite a task to rewrite the entire work as a standard six-chapter narrative work. More importantly, I think that the work's readability and understandability might not be as good in conventional chapter form. And, for reasons already mentioned, timeliness is an important factor.

In any case, given the immense importance of the topics themselves, I hope you will consider the *substance* of the matter as being of far greater importance than the particular narrative approach.

Aside from this cover note, the draft manuscript is roughly 380 pages long. It is as thick as it is because the pages are only printed on one side. Also, some of the pages, as presently printed, are only partial pages, and some contain redundancies, so the actual length of the work is probably more like 330-340 pages (on the basis of the present page size), which would translate to yet a different number with pages and font sizes suitable for publication. All in all, it is not a very long work considering the importance of its substance.

The final edited and published work would surely benefit by including an excellent general introduction as well as brief introductions to each item (which I could write alone or with a colleague or editor of your choice). ^(Note 7) In order to improve flow and understanding, we might also find it helpful to reorder some of the items or eliminate some. (The present collection involves some

redundancy in some areas.) Of course, all items would be subject to editing and polishing to meet the highest standards.

I would be happy to answer any questions, explain the work to you, explain the understanding and arguments in more detail, and do whatever it takes to help you understand the work and consider it thoughtfully. I also have a helpful PowerPoint presentation, and I'd be happy to present it to you in person or over the phone, with the presentation on your computer. ^(Note 8) I'd be happy to do whatever I can to optimize the chances that the work will be published by XXXX and that XXXX does not miss the opportunity.

Finally, I have included the following as additional background and context (see below):

- Important Considerations or Ingredients (that go into the argument and understanding, among others, as mentioned earlier)
- Personal Background and Brief Project History

Thank you *very much* for your consideration.

Be Well,

Jeff Huggins

Los Gatos, California, US

4 September 2010

jeff@thewindingriver.org

(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Notes

Note 1 — Whether with self-awareness or not—though usually not—life normally has a strong tendency to seek to do, try to do, or simply 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, of course.

Note 2 — This particular point and related points, and their implications, are discussed in a number of the items, including (in various ways): *The Foundational Bridge (An Abstract)*; *Inquiring Minds Want To Know (revised)*; *The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense* (in particular on pages 17-21 and 14); *The Nature and Aim of "Reason"?*; *Yea, Nay, or Can't Say?—and Implications*; *Reflections On Reason*; and, *O Reason, Reason, what for art thou Reason?*. The points' substantial implications arise, and can best be seen, in the context of, and in relation to, other key points in the argument. Other ways to put the matter include: Reason, using its own scale and considering other factors irrelevant or indecisive, cannot assess a choice that would result in its own annihilation as being more consistent with reason, better reasoned, or more reasonable than a choice that would preserve its own ongoing existence and integrity. Or: Reason can't conclude, using its own scale—i.e., using itself as the measure—that the absence of reason is more reasonable than the presence of reason. It cannot conclude that the annihilation of reason is more positive, measured in terms of the scale of reason, than reason's preservation. These points can be readily explained, supported, and illustrated.

Note 3 — The *implications* of the understanding and arguments are substantial and positive, and some of them are not easy to grasp via a superficial understanding of summary statements of the view. Some people readily agree with simplified summary statements of the view but, seeing the main ingredients in such statements as "obvious", ask "so what?", before considering the arguments, developing a more thorough understanding, and grasping the positive implications. The implications are important, and some of them can only be understood and appreciated after the view itself is sufficiently understood.

Note 4 — As Shakespeare wrote in *Romeo and Juliet*, "What's in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". Different terms can be used to refer to a very important finding of the work. I often use one or more of the italicized phrases shown in this passage, especially *foundational bridge* and *common solution space*. A leading philosopher in the Western U.S., after an abbreviated presentation of the view and upon considering the terms, suggested thinking of this particular conclusion as a "conclusion pointed to in common", meaning that the relevant conclusion was supported by, or "pointed to" by, both scientific understanding and reason. In any case, the best descriptor or metaphor may well depend on the specific question being explored, or task attempted, in particular situations. The nature, qualities, appropriate uses, and invalid uses of what I call the *foundational bridge* are important, and should be understood, and a metaphor that may convey appropriate understanding in one case may confuse matters if applied inappropriately to different matters.

Note 5 — Many, though not all, of the individual items included in the manuscript have been made public in one form or another, with appropriate copyright protection of course. Links to many of them have been posted on my website, which I don't "market" (except for periodic mentions on Philos-L and Chora) and is lightly visited. Other items

have been messages on Philos-L or Chora, or parts of presentations that I've given to individual philosophers and scientists. All of these items can be edited and polished, of course.

Note 6 — Two of the items are particularly “old” in the sense that they were written just after I published the earlier book, and they do not present many of the key arguments presented in more recent materials. Those two items are: *The Nature of Morality*; and, *The Nature of the Relationship Between Is and Ought*. Nevertheless, I included them in the draft manuscript for the sake of completeness and to capture the progress of my thinking over time. And, they do contain some helpful material, I believe. In any case, they could be included in the final work as appendix material, or they could be omitted. For now, I left them in.

Note 7 — XXXXX

Note 8 — XXXXX

Appendix 3

Excerpts From an Earlier Material, *On Morality*, From February, 2009

The following are excerpts from an earlier item that may be helpful, to some readers, as part of the DIY exercise. The earlier item is available in its complete form on my website, www.ObligationsOfReason.com. The sixteen premises listed in this item, along with the notes thereto, and along with corresponding arguments, should be helpful to readers who want a more detailed understanding.

On Morality

Jeff Huggins

Welcome. And thanks for visiting!

The purpose of this note is to cover several aspects of my understanding of morality, focusing primarily on central elements of one form of the supporting argument. In the interest of brevity, I cover only a few aspects of the topic here. Other materials are available elsewhere on my web site, and my book—*The Obligations Of Reason*—covers more context and detail in some areas, although there is much the book doesn't cover. In particular, the book doesn't cover some forms and aspects of the argument that *are* covered here and in some of my other papers.

To this end, I've organized this note as follows:

- Overview statement, and path of one form of the argument
- Brief comments regarding precision and probability
- The premises (in support of *Statements C*)
- Other elements of the case, briefly mentioned

- Heraclitus' "character is destiny"
- Some thought-exercises: *A DIY exploration of the relationship between morality and sustainability*
- A few illustrative quotes
- Several movie suggestions
- A few words on "justification" and limits
- Other materials
- A few additional comments regarding the justificatory dimension
- Notes to the premises
- Concluding remarks

My aim in this particular note is to convey *substance* in a fairly stripped-down fashion. You'll see that I haven't paid much attention, if any, to eloquence. I apologize in advance, and thank you again for coming!

It's also important to note that the same argument can be put in a number of forms and illustrated in a number of ways. And, it can be grounded in deep bedrock and illuminated and explained in additional ways (than those contained herein), including ways that relate it to foundational and inevitable questions such as that raised so eloquently by Shakespeare's Hamlet and highlighted by Camus.

Overview Statement, and Path of One Form of the Argument

Arguments in support of the understanding of morality I hold can be made—and very soundly defended—in a number of forms. This note presents the skeletal structure, and some of the detail, of *one* of those forms. It also contains some illustrative quotes, movie suggestions, and thought-exercises to help readers understand and consider the matter.

Consider the following statement about morality. Call this *Statement A*:

- A. Morality is most foundationally “about” the sustainable and healthy survival of the human species, along with ample biological diversity, along with the sustainable health of our home, Earth, all accomplished in a way that respects human equality (in important senses) and embraces a living and somewhat fragile planet.**

Statement A fairly expresses the *foundational core* of the understanding of morality I hold and suggest. That said, it doesn’t convey the full view. And, as with any overarching statement on such a large subject, it is certainly subject to misunderstanding. Nevertheless, *Statement A* is a fair statement of the view that can be supported as follows (among other ways) . . .

Consider the following statement, which, in essence, is the central and foundational *core* of *Statement A*. Call this statement, *Statement B*:

- B. Morality is most foundationally “about” the sustainable survival of the human species . . .**

Finally, consider the following set of statements. Let’s call them *Statements C*. These three statements are mainly different ways of phrasing the assertion that establishes most—though not all—of the more simplified (in some senses) and expanded (in another sense) *Statement B*.

C. Three versions of *Statements C*:

- i. Morality is, first and foremost (i.e., most foundationally), “about” survival from one generation to the next, and so on.
- ii. Put another way, the “effective” function—i.e., the *effective reason-for-being*—of human morality itself is to facilitate the survival of humans in one generation long enough and well enough to produce a “next generation” (i.e., children) who in turn can succeed

in surviving long enough and well enough to produce a “next generation” of their own, and so on.

- iii. **Put yet another way, we can reasonably conclude—at least tentatively, unless and until compelling evidence to the contrary is found—that we humans ought to survive as a species, or, more accurately, that we are justified in our view that we ought to try to survive as a species, based on all evidence available to us.**

These three ways to think of *Statement C*—that is, versions *i*, *ii*, and *iii*—may appeal differently to the differing languages and sensibilities of different audiences. That said, I’d like to repeat one particular form of the statement (with a couple added words for clarification), which is perhaps the most technically appropriate form for certain philosophical audiences, that is, the phrase at the end of version *iii*:

We humans are justified in holding a view that we ought to try to survive as a species, sustainably, based on all evidence and sound reasoning available to us.

In order to clarify several aspects of this statement (*Statement C*) for present purposes, I’ll briefly pause to point out five things:

First, to some people—and perhaps to many—some of these statements may seem intuitively obvious. For example, isn’t it “common sense” that we humans should aim and try to survive from generation to generation? And, isn’t it just a small logical step from there to realize that we should try to achieve *sustainability* in that endeavor? Well, perhaps so. Indeed, in a very real sense, the answer is *yes*, of course. However, many people don’t consider the intimate and grounded connection between *morality* and survival in a *species* sense or in a *generation-to-generation* sense. This connection is not made very explicit by—or well understood by—common schools of philosophical thought. And, perhaps most importantly, as society sails forward in ways that are most likely *unsustainable*, many people don’t see the unsustainable behaviors as contrary to morality, that is, as *immoral* in any sense. Some people might well think that a *personal freedom* to act in *unsustainable* ways is of higher moral import, or value, than the (moral) aim of sustainability. For these and other reasons, understanding the various relationships, and finding those that rest on solid ground, is very important.

Second, and in order to clarify the path of the argument, *Statements C*—and in particular, version *iii*—are established, supported, and justified via the set of premises described later herein. (I’ll identify and briefly discuss the premises below.) Put another way, *Statements C* *aren’t* assumptions or merely intuited. They aren’t merely asserted premises. Instead, they can be established, supported, and justified from the “bottom up” via a number of premises and basic reasoning applied to those premises.

Third, although I inserted the word “sustainably” into the statement above, the aim of sustainability is not actually part of *Statements C* (though it could be, depending merely on how one would like to sequence different steps in the argument) as listed earlier but is, instead, supported more strongly by another aspect of the argument, mentioned in a later section. That said, this aim can also be derived from, and supported by, the premises themselves. In any case, I included the word “sustainably” in the above statement to provide a preview of where the argument leads.

Fourth, in order to communicate the eventual result and the so-called “big picture” up front, I’ve listed the *Statements A, B, and C*, above, in the reverse order of their derivation, or role, in the argument. This hopefully allows readers to “see where we end up” —that is, with *Statement A*. The actual path of the argument is mentioned below.

Fifth, several of the premises (all premises are listed in a later section) themselves include justificatory elements and/or together establish the justification of the conclusion. Put another way, the question of “justification” is addressed via a combination of the premises. That said, depending on what one means by ‘justification’, there are a few identifiable limits to the justification of the conclusion or, put another way, there are certain sorts of objections (e.g., “what if *nothing* is real in the universe?”) that the present argument doesn’t attempt to address. These limits are mentioned, briefly, in a later section. Nevertheless, aside from these limited limits, the present claim is *more justified than any incompatible contradictory claim*, I believe. And, the limits are those that would apply to any claim. Or, put another way, within the realistic and wide range within which the argument applies—wherein the limited objections are irrelevant or moot—the present conclusion can be *much more soundly established and justified than any incompatible contradictory conclusion*.

In sum then, and looking in the other direction now (that is, from the premises to *C* to *B* to *A*), the path of the argument is this: A set of premises (identified in a later section) establishes and supports *Statements C*. In turn, *Statements C*, when

combined with certain additional facts and reasoning, together support *Statement B*. In turn, *Statement B*, when combined with other facts and reasoning, together support *Statement A*. *Statement A* is the summary statement—although, as with any statement regarding such topic, it's certainly subject to misinterpretation. (One way for the audience to guard against misinterpretation, or to minimize it, is to realize that *Statement A*'s meaning is meant to encompass all the premises, facts, and reasoning that lead to it. Put another way, a great way to understand *Statement A* is to understand the premises themselves, the science behind them, the role of each premise in the matter, the other statements—i.e., *C* and *B*—and so forth.) My hope is that interested parties will understand what *Statement A* is *intended* to mean and what it's *not* intended to mean, by reading this and other materials.

(Put another way, any failure or weakness in the clarity of communication on my part should not be confused, of course, with the actual conclusion that the premises and associated reasoning *can* indeed establish, explain, and justify. There are very likely to be clearer ways to express that conclusion than in my wording of *Statement A*, especially if *Statement A* is interpreted in isolation and out of the context conveyed by the supporting premises and reasoning. That said, the clearest way to express the conclusion will likely vary depending on the audience and depending on the meaning of individual terms to each audience as well as on the existing paradigms of each audience. In other words, there is probably no single universal way to express *Statement A* in a way that would be perfectly clear to all audiences.)

Brief Comments Regarding Precision and Probability

The “way of thinking” and degree of precision intended in this paper are best represented by those expressed by Aristotle and Cicero long ago, as follows:

In *Ethics*, Aristotle wrote, “... for it is a mark of the trained mind never to expect more precision in the treatment of any subject than the nature of that subject permits ...”. When it comes to the broad subject of human morality, and human social-moral dynamics, and the many problems facing humanity, the appropriate degree of precision, of course, depends not only on the nature of the subject, but also on the question one is trying to address. In addressing some questions, a very high degree of precision can be achieved and might well be warranted. In this note, however, we need accuracy (at the appropriate level) but not precision

in a “detail” sense of that word. In other words, this note does not address the particular details of a particular human social-moral dynamic or a particular social-moral question such as, When is it right to tell a lie, if at all?

And in *On Duties II*, Cicero wrote, “Other schools of philosophy maintain that some things are certain, and others uncertain. We adopt a special view of our own. What we say is that some things are probable, and others improbable. I cannot see what there is to prevent me from accepting what seems to be probable, and rejecting what does not. Such an approach avoids the presumption of dogmatism, and keeps clear of irrationality, which is the negation of all accurate thinking.”

To ensure that his view was not misinterpreted—for example, as complete moral randomness or relativism—Cicero followed with, “For in spite of our negative attitude towards the certainty of knowledge we are very far from being just intellectual drifters who flounder about without any idea what we are looking for. To be quite without any sort of principles to base our discussions and our lives upon would totally rule out any intellectual life, or indeed any life at all.”

The Premises (In Support of *Statements C*)

I’ve mentioned that a set of premises can establish, support, and justify (within the limits discussed later) *Statements C*. Then, *Statements C*, when combined with a few other points, can ultimately establish, support, and justify the conclusion conveyed in *Statement A*.

What are these premises? How many are there? What is each premise’s nature and role in the overall argument? How are they interrelated?

A complete discussion is beyond our present scope. That said, the premises are listed below, and explanatory notes (for some premises) are included near the end of this note.

For present purposes, and as hopefully helpful context, I’ll mention several important points before listing the premises themselves:

First, there are 16 premises in total. Of course, there’s nothing magical about the number 16. Many of the premises are interrelated, and some are highly interrelated. Some are, to a degree, just different ways of stating the same core

matter. I can readily imagine that there are more distilled, efficient, and eloquent ways to present the same essential material in fewer premises, perhaps considerably fewer. Or, on the other hand, some audiences might need or want the detail that would only come from breaking certain premises into component parts, and providing more detail, thus resulting in a greater number of premises. In any case, of course, the number of premises is *not* the important matter, and I'm not claiming that there is any magic to the number 16. Indeed, once the essence of the matter and paradigm is understood, the mind can think of the whole thing as a *single paradigm* that makes sense, is grounded, and is justified, and the role of individual premises becomes that of explaining the matter to others.

Second, many of the premises are interrelated. And, many of them could be written in different ways, using different terminology, to convey the same substance. My aim in writing the premises has been substance, not eloquence.

Third, the natures of the premises vary, but they are all scientific, and/or observational, or (in a few cases) definitional or semantic in nature. None of them are mere assumptions. None of them are solely grounded in intuition. None of them are theological or rely on an authority beyond human science and human reason.

Fourth, a few of the premises are definitional or substantially semantic, and several others are readily apparent and, indeed, obvious. The six premises that are accompanied by bold asterisks — (*) — in the list of premises below are based in relevant science and may not be as obvious (as some of the others) to those not familiar with the science. These six premises have all been reviewed and affirmed by a relevant expert in the field. And, they've been quadruple-checked by me, based on many relevant readings. If there is a problem with one of these premises, it's much more likely to be related to lack of clarity in my wording (to a particular audience) than to my intended meaning, the actual role of each premise in the argument, and the conclusion itself.

Fifth, the terminologies used in some of the premises may be more familiar to some readers than to others, and readers with some backgrounds may more readily understand some of the premises. In particular, an understanding of the basic dynamics of evolution will help readers better understand some of the premises.

Sixth, in the list below, I've grouped and presented the 16 premises in three groups—*Group 1*, *Group 2*, and *Group 3*. This grouping is *not* necessary, nor does

it play a role in the argument, nor does it influence the relevant role of each premise, nor is it particularly precise. Instead, the grouping can be helpful in explaining and illustrating the argument in some forms, at a “higher level” than in terms of individual premises. For current purposes, suffice it to say that the premises can be grouped according to similarities and differences along the dimension of time (i.e., as they seem to focus primarily on past, present, or future); along the dimension of type/nature (i.e., into those premises that seem more related to “science”, or to “reasoning”, or to semantics and “definition”); along a dimension that can be divided into “top-down” or “bottom-up”; and along other dimensions. Various groupings of the premises can help readers explore and understand the premises themselves, their differing roles in the argument, the nature of the argument, and the nature of the conclusion. They can also help readers understand the justificatory dimension of the argument and conclusion. But, as mentioned, the grouping is *not* essential to the argument or to the conclusion.

Seventh, for some purposes, it helps to understand the nature of the roles of each premise in the argument as well as the nature of the argument (in support of *Statements C*) itself. Various premises play different roles in the argument. And, to a degree, though perhaps not entirely, the relationship between the different premises and the overall argument and conclusion, is a bit like that when, in facing a mathematics problem, one has N equations in N unknowns. Each premise plays a different role in delineating and defining the solution set of the problem. In the case of these 16 premises, some of them are somewhat overlapping and play similar roles, at least to a degree, and, as mentioned, the set of premises could probably be distilled and presented more eloquently. That said, much like a mathematics problem of N equations and N unknowns, the essential information represented (currently) in the 16 premises is vital: For example, in mathematics, a mathematician can’t solve for N unknowns if she has only $N-1$ equations.

Eighth, and finally, some of the premises have key justificatory roles, that is, key roles in justifying the “ought” and moral force of the conclusion. Several portions of the present paper either point to, or discuss key aspects of, the justificatory font of the matter. In particular, several points within the DIY exercise (in a following section), as well as the section titled “A Few Additional Comments Regarding The Justificatory Dimension”, address the matter of justification at an introductory level of detail. I’ll write more, and more explicitly, on the justificatory dimension of the premises and argument in a future paper.

With that context, the 16 premises are listed below, numbered 1 through 16, and organized into three groups. **Notes to the premises are at the end of the paper.**

Premises — Group 1 (of three)

1. Human social-moral faculties (in a biological sense) and biological enabling mechanisms are products of our evolutionary development. (*)

2. Human social-moral behavioral dynamics—and human morality—arise from, depend upon, and are intimately interrelated to human social-moral faculties (in a biological sense) and biological enabling mechanisms. (Note that this *doesn't* mean that these faculties and mechanisms are *all* of the factors involved in human morality, nor that other factors are not also involved in influencing specific human social behaviors.) (*)

3. Humans have social-moral faculties and biological enabling mechanisms, as well as the corresponding social-moral behavioral dynamics, *because of* their past effectiveness in contributing substantially to continuing human survival, to reproduction and the passing of genes from generation to generation, to our evolution, and to our continuing *existence*, all in the face of pressures that ultimately lead to death for individuals. This contribution has been, and is, a *substantial* one. (*)

4. Evolution effectively occurs and continues (in part) by way of reproduction and the passing of genes successfully from one generation to the next in a way that the receiving generation may also be successful at creating a “next generation”, and so on, all in a way that “effectively” serves the “end” of continuing survival from generation to generation (although the process of evolution is *not* conscious or purposeful, of course). (*)

5. Death is the “screening-out mechanism” or “test” by which natural selection—the defining limiting mechanism in evolution—works. (*)

Premises — Group 2 (of three)

6. *Existence*, in an alive state, is a *prerequisite* for having social-moral faculties (in a working biological sense) and biological enabling mechanisms. Moreover, it is a *prerequisite* for enacting moral, immoral, and other behaviors.
7. Reproduction and the successful passing of genes from generation to generation during current generations—and through successive generations—is the only means by which a future person can come to exist.
8. Human social-moral faculties (in a biological sense) and biological enabling mechanisms do not and cannot continue over substantial periods of time (i.e., over many generations) *unless* human reproduction and the successful passing of relevant genes from generation to generation continue over the same substantial periods. Put another way, *continuing* human existence is a prerequisite for the *continuation of* human social-moral faculties, corresponding behaviors, and morality.

Premises — Group 3 (of three)

9. Existence is what nature “acknowledges” and “rewards.” For biological beings, existence equals life.

10. Relatively speaking, the contributions of human social-moral faculties and biological enabling mechanisms, and of the behavioral dynamics they support, to human *survival from generation to generation* (i.e., to continuing human existence) are more foundational and necessary than the contributions of these things to human happiness, fairness, justice, love, and so forth. Put more accurately, the contributions of our social-moral faculties and social-moral behavioral dynamics to ongoing human survival are more foundational and necessary than their contributions to the *particular aspects of* (and *degrees of*) human happiness, fairness, justice, love, and so forth that go *beyond* serving our survival needs and act as “icing on the cake” of life. Of course, these other aspects of life can’t even exist without survival as a *prerequisite* and *platform*. (*)

11. A person must first exist, in an alive state, in order to pursue happiness, act fairly, act justly, contribute to peace, love, or act in any way. Similarly, a person must exist, in an alive state, in order to be happy or to experience fairness, justice, peace, love, and so forth. Put another way, existence is a *prerequisite* for experiencing happiness, pursuing happiness, experiencing fairness, acting fairly, experiencing justice, acting justly, experiencing peace, acting peacefully, experiencing love, feeling love, providing love, and so forth.

12. Death is the cessation of existence (that is, of an *alive* state of existence) for living biological beings.

13. Death marks the cessation of the active biological, emotional, mental, and social life of any given person as far as direct observation and current science can tell.

14. Morality is the subject that (among other things) has to do with questions of “ought.”

15. Fairness and justice are (among other things) components and dynamics of the subject of morality—i.e., important *subsets, ingredients, and/or aspects of* morality—rather than the other way around. In other words, morality is *not* understood (or defined) as being a component or subset of fairness and/or justice.

16. There is a semantic-logical linkage between an criterion often associated, either explicitly or implicitly, with the human concepts of “morality” and “moral system” and with other key points herein, from a scientific standpoint. This linkage may be very important to some people and less relevant to others. Refer to pages 48-62 in chapter 1 of my book, *The Obligations Of Reason: Exploring the existence, nature, dynamics and implications of the Natural Moral System*.

Other Elements of the Case, Briefly Mentioned

Once *Statements C* are established (in particular, version *iii* of *Statements C*), the balance of the argument—to derive and support *Statement B* and then *Statement A*—rests primarily on several important pillars, none of which are particularly controversial (in themselves) and at least one of which has been acknowledged and explored in most schools of philosophy:

- Our human *awareness* of the dimension of *time* (though this is admittedly an imperfect awareness);
- Our real and progressing understanding of our substantial interrelationships with—and dependence on—the environment and the biological community;
- Our core philosophical ideals of human equality (in the relevant senses).

Continued ...

* * *

Notes to the Premises

(The number of each note corresponds to the number of the relevant premise.)

1. NA / Self-explanatory.
2. NA / Self-explanatory.
3. Here, in using the phrase “continuing human survival”, I’m not speaking of an un-ending, continuing survival of specific *individual* humans. Instead, I’m speaking of survival (and sufficient reproduction) from one generation to the next. I’m speaking of the continuation of—and passing forward of—survival from one generation to the next.

For example, consider that it’s *not* immoral—or contradictory to the effective function of morality—to eventually “let die” from natural causes an individual human. *Individuals* eventually die, even as the species (hopefully) continues from generation to generation.

The abbreviated terminology ‘survival’ can sometimes be confusing here unless one understands the term in this way and unless one understands evolutionary basics. The way to understand the accomplishment of “survival” intended here is to understand it as that accomplishment which facilitates the continuation of the species from one generation to the next. In other words, the mere “survival”, in a narrow sense, of a human individual from birth to age five is not sufficient. Nor is “reproduction”, in a narrow sense, sufficient if the offspring of such reproduction die (i.e., don’t survive) two days after birth. The accomplishment that facilitates the continuation, in time, from generation to generation, is that combination of “survival-plus-reproduction” that consists of people (on average) living long enough to have children successfully, who in turn live long enough to have children successfully, and so forth.

(Of course, this does *not* mean or even suggest that it’s immoral for individuals to *not* have children. People contribute to society in many different ways. Movement from generation to generation is an “on average” thing and can even—and in some conditions should—actually

result in population reduction over time. Too much population growth can pose all sorts of problems and undercut sustainability. And, of course, people can have a *neutral* impact on population. That said, knowingly and substantially detracting from the ongoing sustainable survival of the human species, and knowingly diminishing sustainability, are two of the many ways of contradicting morality itself. Put another way, as the overall argument establishes, they are two of the many ways of acting immorally.)

Also, the intended meaning of this premise and related premises is entirely consistent with evolutionary theory, that is, with the broad and specific mechanisms of evolution as we understand them based on the work of Charles Darwin and many others, including (just as a couple examples) Richard Dawkins, E. O. Wilson, and others. Indeed, the evolution-related premises in the list of 16 premises, and in the broader argument, are dependent only on the broadest nature and mechanisms of evolution and are quite flexible and accommodating when it comes to specific questions and balances that exist regarding evolution's particulars. (A full discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this note.)

Finally, the last sentence in this premise—that is, that “This contribution has been, and is, a *substantial* one.”—is an important point that is sometimes not stated explicitly or acknowledged outside of the relevant scientific communities. Our human social faculties and dynamics are *not* ancillary and unnecessary aspects of our human-ness, and they have played immensely important roles in our survival from generation to generation to this point. Indeed, the social dynamics of other social species (ants, bees, dolphins, etc.) are also integral to “who they are” and to their survival.

4. See Note 3 (above).

Also, when I use the term ‘effectively’ here, I *don't* mean “perfectly”, i.e., with perfect effectiveness and efficiency, i.e., without mistake or waste or exception.

And, when I use the term ‘end’ here, I don't mean that evolution is conscious, is aware of any purpose, has a “purpose”, or is even a singular thing (rather than a term to name a combination of processes).

5. In one of my discussions with a relevant scientist, it was mentioned that death is *a* screening-out mechanism or test by which natural selection works, rather than *the* (i.e., only) screening-out mechanism or test by which natural selection works.

In relation to the intent and role of this particular premise, and to what I mean by the various concepts in this premise, the question of whether death is “a” or “the” screening-out mechanism by which natural selection works depends on the “level” of consideration and the intended meaning of the premise. In keeping with the role this premise plays in the argument, and in conjunction with the other premises, the term ‘death’ here means what it normally means and is, indeed, the ultimate “stopper” and screening-out mechanism.

For example, differential rates of reproduction among members of a given generation of individuals, or among individuals living at roughly the same time, also play a substantial role in the evolution of a population and of traits within the population. But, this all occurs within the context of life, of course. Life is the *prerequisite*. An individual can die before or after having children, and this difference *makes a difference*. Or, some or all of the children can die, and they can die before or after having their own children.

What I’m trying to say is this (and it may already be obvious to most people): Although *survival rates of individuals*, combined with *differential birth rates*, both play important and interrelated roles in the overall evolution of a population and its traits, nevertheless, death (of an individual prior to reproduction, or of a child, or of anyone) is the ultimate stopper and “screen”, in any case. In this “big picture” sense, death as the screen encompasses all else. Put another way, ‘death’ here is meant, of course, in the sense of “not surviving” – and it is the all-encompassing antithesis of the continuation of survival discussed elsewhere.

Considering relative rates of reproduction, one can *in a sense* say that a parent of one child who later dies (the parent, that is) has passed on her/his genes into the next generation to a certain degree, and thus that parent “survived” (and did not “die”) to that degree, while a parent of four children who later dies (the parent, that is) has passed on her/his genes into the next generation to a larger degree, and thus that parent “survived” (and did not “die”) to a larger degree. Of course, here we are

getting unnecessarily into semantics. The main point here is that, for purposes of this premise, the term 'death' is used in its big-picture sense, and given the role of this premise in the argument, death is ultimately *the*, not *a*, final limiting mechanism. This is true at the individual adult level (e.g., adults die), at the child level (e.g., children sometimes die), and at the gene level (e.g., individual genes can die, and unsuccessful genetic material can, over time, die out in the population, become screened out of existence, or become passive and inactive).

6. NA / Self-explanatory.
7. Much of the context here is explained via other premises and in the notes to other premises. That said, one particular point should be added: Depending on how one chooses to interpret certain terms in this premise, it could be argued that it might be possible, some day, to bring a future person into existence via means that aren't covered (in someone's interpretation) by the phrasing of this premise. My intention is that the premise does cover all of those possible means, or at least any that we can realistically imagine. Also, any means that falls beyond this premise, if any, would nevertheless not diminish the overall argument. The argument does not hinge on whether, in the future, a person can be brought into existence without genetic material or with completely synthesized genetic material.
8. NA / Self-explanatory.
9. By saying that existence is what nature "acknowledges", I'm simply saying that, in physical terms (or mass-energy terms), what is, *is*, and what doesn't exist, *doesn't exist*, at any given point in time. And, what doesn't exist at a given point in time can't enter into the Newtonian " $F = m \times a$ " dance or the Einstein-ian " $e = mc^2$ " dance. By saying that existence is what nature "rewards", I'm simply saying that, in order to bring something else into existence, something must first exist itself. For example, babies don't just appear from thin air: Their arrivals require a mother or at least some laboratory apparatus and chemicals. This terminology and point are not necessary for the argument, but they are helpful in some ways to understand the comparison of the present matter to some of the ways we humans think of other moral systems. The details of this point are beyond our present scope, but interested audiences can find the matter covered as part of Chapter 1 in my book, *The Obligations Of Reason*.

10. The matter of this premise should be clear and self-explanatory. Key words include “relatively speaking”, “foundational”, and “necessary”. This premise has a lot to do with the form of the conclusions (that is, *Statements C, B, and A*). It has much to do with the “necessary but not necessarily sufficient” aspect of the conclusion, that is, of ongoing survival: In other words, ongoing survival, and ongoing sustainable survival, are *necessary*, but the conclusions do *not* indicate that these are *sufficient* or that we should not strive for higher degrees of happiness as “icing on the cake” of life. For the most part, the central themes of the eventual conclusion (i.e., *Statement A*) identify necessities but do not preclude, or even encourage against, extras. In fact, although my online materials don’t go into the dynamics of “happiness” much, it is an important theme in my book, and my view accommodates and encourages healthy happiness and the ability to achieve whatever degrees of happiness one might be able to achieve, as long as doing so doesn’t conflict with the requirements of morality as they relate to others. Finally, the word ‘foundational’ plays an important role in this premise, or, rather, what I mean by ‘foundational’ takes its meaning from this premise and related premises, as well as from the dictionary, of course. The word ‘foundational’, appearing here, carries its meaning and implications through to the conclusion. I don’t use the word in any unique way, of course. The “foundation” of a building is the bottom part, and the grounding part, and the part that connects the building to the rest of “reality”, and the part that allows the building to stand and enjoy structural integrity, but it’s *not* the *only* part of the building. Buildings have, and contain, much more than their “foundations”, of course.

This said, here I’ll make a point that not only applies to this word ‘foundation’, but also applies throughout my view and work. The meanings of specific words I’ve used, or their intended meanings to convey the substance of the view of morality I hold, are not the important matters, of course. Or, put more accurately, the *substance* of the matter matters, not the words I’ve chosen to use to try to convey it, in some cases clumsily. The best way to understand the *substance* of the matter is via all of my materials as well as via the scientific materials, and other materials, to which I refer (not to mention all of the many other materials that describe the underlying knowledge itself).

11. NA / Self-explanatory.

12. NA / Self-explanatory.

13. NA / Self-explanatory.
14. This premise is an important one but plays mainly a definitional and semantic role. As Shakespeare has written, in essence, a rose is still a rose by any other name.
15. This premise is largely self-explanatory. Its role has to do both with real relationships (between real things, dynamics, etc.) and with definitions and semantics.
16. This premise is not necessary to the argument but can play a very helpful role in relating the matter to the way we humans think about common moral systems and about morality itself. A discussion is beyond our present scope, but a more complete discussion can be found on pages 48-62 in Chapter 1 of my book, as the premise notes.

END OF NOTES TO PREMISES

Appendix 4

Sample Problem Illustrations: Some illustrations (via quotes) of the interrelated problems, as well as some views regarding whether the issues are resolvable

The following are quotes that illustrate some of the questions, issues, and problems at stake, from a number of standpoints, and (in some cases) include views about the same issues. The first five quotes (those under bold subheads) are excerpted from my presentation, 'The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense', and the remaining quotes offer perspectives on the same issues from a limited set of philosophers, scientists, and other authors. I include these quotes for illustrative and contextual purposes, to illustrate the questions and some perspectives on them, in order to provide context.

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.

* * *

Additional illustrative quotes (repeating some of those above, but including numerous others as well) ...

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

[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.

- Peter Railton

However, Hume's is/ought distinction has always had its detractors (e.g., Searle, 1964); here is Dennett:

If "ought" cannot be derived from "is," just what *can* it be derived from? ... ethics must be *somehow* based on an appreciation of human nature—on a sense of what a human being is or might be, and on what a human being might want to have or want to be. If *that* is naturalism, then naturalism is no fallacy (Dennett, p. 468).

- From the book, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, by Sam Harris, referring to a quote from Daniel Dennett

Can ethics be derived from evolution by natural selection?

Given that human beings have evolved by natural selection (with genetic drift and some other factors perhaps assisting), and are ethical creatures, it follows *ab esse ad posse* that ethics can be derived from evolution by natural selection. That, though, might not be to answer the purport of the question, which asks: would natural selection be sufficient to produce creatures with a consciousness of ethical principles and a tendency to wish to observe them and see them observed? The idea might be that whereas other social animals have evolved behaviours that subserve the interests of their sociality—dominance orderings, co-operation in hunting and watching for predators—this does not amount to ethics, the idea of which at least premises an awareness of the demands and responsibilities ethics involves, and the possibility of their non-observance, not least deliberately. Among other animals the evolved social behaviours are largely invariant and automatic; a putative "ethics" that is choicelessly a result of hard-wiring could not be ethics. Immediately one says this, one has begged what is possibly the hardest question known to metaphysics and moral philosophy: that of free will.

- A. C. Grayling

My goal is to convince you that human knowledge and human values can no longer be kept apart. (p 10) ...

The categorical distinction between facts and values has opened a sinkhole beneath secular liberalism—leading to moral relativism and masochistic depths of political correctness. (p 46) ...

Most scientists treat facts and values as though they were distinct and irreconcilable in principle. I have argued that they cannot be, as anything of value must be valuable *to* someone (whether actually or potentially)—and, therefore, its value should be attributable to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures. (p 180)

- Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape*

There is no doubt something importantly right about the distinction between fact and value on which these approaches [*] rely. It is one thing to ask what people are like, quite another to consider how they ought to behave. While acknowledging the distinction between these questions, however, I myself do not believe that they can effectively be addressed in isolation from each other.

[*] That is, moral psychology treated as a “largely empirical domain”, and (separately) normativity as “taken to constitute an autonomous intellectual realm” that “can be studied largely in abstraction from questions about human psychology”

- R. Jay Wallace, *Normativity & the Will*

All of the papers [contained in *Normativity & the Will*] reflect my commitment to the general idea that normativity and moral psychology are best pursued together. They might be thought of as advertisements for this idea, attempts to explore the interpretation of the normative and the psychological in a series of debates that lie at the heart of moral philosophy.

- R. Jay Wallace, *Normativity & the Will*

The gap between facts and values exists because while we do not choose the way the world is, we do choose what we are going to do. If this choice were totally subjective, the gap between facts and values would open very wide.

Emphasizing the rational element in ethical choice, however, narrows the gap between facts and values. Rational criticism of an ethical choice becomes possible, and facts may be relevant to this ethical process.

- Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle*, p. 150 (as quoted by Ronnie Hawkins)

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

- Edward O. Wilson

The challenge is that if we no longer hold traditional religious beliefs it is illegitimate for us to go on embracing a morality and values that derive their justification from those beliefs. Our whole position, if we do that, is phony, false. We are under an obligation to, as Nietzsche puts it, reevaluate our values. In other words we need, from the bottom up, to carry out a radical reappraisal of our morals and our values on the basis of beliefs that we do really genuinely hold. This is a hair-raising challenge, and one of fundamental urgency in an increasingly irreligious world. Ever since Nietzsche put it before us, it has remained the supreme ethical challenge confronting not only the West but people everywhere who no longer have faith in a religion. It set the moral agenda for the existentialist philosophies of the 20th century. And it remains unanswered in the minds of most people who have given it their serious consideration. Indeed, in the opinion of many it is the most important philosophical question that confronts us today.

- Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy: A Concise Introduction to the World's Greatest Thinkers and Their Ideas*

Appendix 5

Other Materials: Explanations, Arguments, Details, Context, Illustrations, and etc.

The following is a list of items that I included in a collection of my materials late in 2010. Most of the items are available in full on my website, www.ObligationsOfReason.com. Others can be found in the archives of PHILOS-L or CHORA.

Items

I – Background Bits

To Scientifically Informed Philosophers and Philosophically Minded Scientists

If you're going to San Francisco ...

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

II – Entrances & Essences

The Foundational Bridge (An Abstract)

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

Inquiring Minds Want To Know (revised)

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

III — Elaborations, Explanations, Explorations, & Foundations

The Relevance Of Scientific Understanding To Morality In The Normative Sense

On Morality: Key Considerations and a Bridge

What good am I?

On Morality

Portions of the Supporting Argument In Additional Forms

Regarding ‘Directional Dynamics’ and ‘Normative Facts’

Some Roots and Relations, Noted

A Framework and Paradigm Of Morality

IV — Etc.

“The Bridge: A-QED”

Speaking of Hands, and Adaptations, and . . .

WHY and WHY and WHY

Life, The Bridge, and Coming Together

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

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

V — O Reason

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)

Reflections On Reason (CHORA, August 31)

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

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

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

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

VI — Exercises

The Morality of Sustainability: *A DIY Exploration*

Morality, The Kids, and Sustainability: Helpful Illustrations (CHORA, August 7)

Robot Revelations

“Robot Revelations”: An Opportunity

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

VII — Etc. Etc. / Appendix

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

The Nature of Morality

Illustrative Quotes