

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

By Jeff Huggins

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Welcome, and thanks very much in advance for your interest.

The present message covers a few key matters, in my view, and refers to other materials that provide considerably more detail.

Roughly stated, the present topic involves the formation of an integrated and coherent understanding of human morality that is, at once, grounded in science, consistent with science, and excellently reasoned, AND that addresses central questions and issues that moral philosophers have been correctly pointing out for ages. It (the topic) involves the “bridge” between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ regarding the central connective matter of morality. And it (the topic) involves the differences between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, and ‘fact’ and ‘value’, AND my claim that the relevant aspects of all three matters (is-ought, fact-value, and the naturalistic fallacy) can indeed be respected, and that the irrelevant or invalid aspects can indeed be overcome, such that an integrated and coherent view of morality, as mentioned above, CAN be formed.

(I probably don’t need to point out that my aim in the present message is not eloquence. Sorry!)

With that said, some of what I mention below will be more contextual, and some is even written with other audiences in mind, e.g., some audiences who might not understand some points that are already well-known in philosophy. So, please forgive me for (in part) stating the obvious.

## The Naturalistic Fallacy

Of course . . .

The fact that something—e.g., an event, an outcome, an action, a tendency, a behavior, a concept, a natural quality, a dynamic, a goal, etc.—is natural doesn't mean that it's "good".

It's a fallacy to assume that something is "good" just because it's natural.

## *Is and Ought, and Fact and Value*

Context —

'Is' and 'ought' are not identical, of course. Nor are 'fact' and 'value'.

There are very important differences between 'is' and 'ought', and between 'fact' and 'value'. And those differences matter, of course.

That said, it's also very important to note that 'is' and 'ought' occupy the same universe with each other, and are both part of our human lives, as are 'fact' and 'value'. 'Is' and 'ought' are NOT entirely unrelated, nor are they entirely unrelatable. And the same goes for 'fact' and 'value'.

Of course, the answer to any question depends on what the question is in the first place. The matters of 'is' and 'ought', and 'fact' and 'value', are important in many different ways, to many different questions. I'm mainly interested in several of them, as they relate to our overall understanding of morality at a "meta" level.

Just one of those ways—albeit an important one—has to do with the relevance and role of "science" in relation to our human understanding of morality in a holistic sense—that is, in a sense that covers the explanatory, descriptive, AND normative dimensions of the matter.

As brief context . . .

Sometimes it is said, or at least implied, that the gap (or other such term) between 'is' and 'ought', or between 'fact' and 'value', is insurmountable to a degree that prevents science (i.e., scientific understanding, the scientific quest, etc.) from addressing—and from telling us much about—morality in a normative sense. As some of this thinking goes, science can, of course, describe and explain

things. For example, it can (to a degree anyhow, as “work in progress”) describe and explain how our human social-moral tendencies came about, why, and how they currently work. Much can be described and explained, and science continues to work on the rest, reexamine earlier work, examine itself, and so forth. And (again, as “work in progress”) science can describe and explain how our human concept ‘ought’ came about, why, and roughly how it works. (See Note 1.)

But, as some of this thinking goes, the following falls outside of, and beyond, the scope and ability of scientific understanding: the ability to affirm a normative ought in a normative sense. Of course, there are many ways of stating this “task” that is (supposedly) beyond the ability of scientific understanding to accomplish or even to help us accomplish. For example, according to this view, science can help us understand what the human concept ‘ought’ means, and how it came about, and why, but science can’t affirm any specific “ought” as something that we really actually ought to do or to aim for. Science can describe and explain, but can’t normatively affirm, and can’t help us normatively affirm. Or so the thinking goes.

To be more clear, the version of this view that I’m addressing here is one that says, or at least implies, that a combination of empirical evidence and excellent reasoning, well-related to that evidence, can’t affirm a normative ought.

Why do I address that particular view? Well, for this reason: Of course it’s correct to say that individual data-points, of individual experiments, and absent any additional reasoning whatsoever, can’t affirm—or even consider or comprehend—a normative ought. But, the scientific quest—and scientific understanding—are much more than a mere collection of individual data-points from individual experiments, of course. Scientific understanding necessarily involves a combination of empirical evidence AND excellent reasoning based on (and not inconsistent with) that evidence.

Science doesn't only include individual data-points and (at the same time) exclude reasoning, of course. Science considers and reflects (or at least can consider and reflect) a combination of empirical evidence AND excellent reasoning (when it's done well) based upon that evidence and not inconsistent with the evidence. Put another way, the enterprise of science doesn't exclude excellent reasoning acting upon excellent evidence. Instead, what it excludes (or sets aside, after examination) is reasoning that has been shown to be substantially inconsistent with evidence. And, it doesn't concern itself with reasoning that (in all likelihood) may never be subject to verification or

falsification on the basis of evidence combined with reasoning closely associated with such evidence.

(My initial university-level education was in some of the physical sciences and engineering. I can't remember ever getting an excellent mark on any paper or test by merely listing the experimental data.)

So, it seems to me, a relevant and important question is this: Can an excellent combination of human-discovered empirical evidence and human thinking (reason) affirm an "ought" in a normative sense, in a way consistent with science and based in science? This is one way of asking whether the scientific quest—broadly understood, and including a high degree of excellent reasoning—can "reach to the heart of morality" and tell us much about that "heart". Or another way: Is there a substantial bridge between 'is' and 'ought', between 'fact' and 'value'? And a related question: Can scientific understanding provide "wisdom" in the sense of the concept 'wisdom' that means considerably more than just "a bunch of un-weighted knowledge about whatever makes us curious"? Or put another way: Can science love and pursue wisdom as much as philosophy loves and pursues wisdom, in the sense of the word 'wisdom' that considers a value component to be within its scope to aim to understand?

And so, a related question: Is there a "real" difference, as a matter of real "first principles", between science and philosophy in relation to the matter of human morality? If so, does the difference necessitate a mutually exclusive or substantially exclusive relationship between science and philosophy with respect to matters of central importance to our understanding of human morality? In other words, is there such an insurmountable "gap" between 'is' and 'ought', and between 'fact' and 'value', that it acts as a defining chasm between the philosophical and scientific quests as they relate to core questions of human morality? OR instead, is the difference between "moral philosophy" and "science" (having to do with human morality) mainly one resulting from traditional boundaries between human professional disciplines that have arisen during recent centuries?

Comments —

The central and substantive cause-and-effect relationships that link what we mean by 'ought' to "what is" are described and explained by science. Put another way, the bridge linking "what is" to 'ought'—in descriptive and explanatory senses—is described and explained by scientific understanding.

The core and essential matter of the bridge involves the continuance of life from generation to generation.

And (very importantly) the normative dimension of the bridge between 'is' and 'ought' regarding the matter of the continuance of life from generation to generation, CAN be established and supported via use of a combination of excellent reasoning and the best empirical evidence we humans can (most likely) muster.

Put another way, a combination of excellent reasoning and empirical evidence can indeed establish the normative dimension of the bridge.

In other words, when it comes to the central bridge between 'is' and 'ought', regarding the matter of the continuation of life itself, what scientific understanding tells us, excellent reasoning can affirm. Here, I'm talking about all three dimensions of the matter—i.e., the descriptive and explanatory dimensions, AND the normative dimension.

One outcome of this is that an integrated and coherent view of morality can be constructed that is, at once, grounded in science, consistent with science, and excellently reasoned, AND that addresses central questions and issues that philosophers have been correctly pointing out for ages.

Another outcome is this: In my view, both (relevant) scientists and moral philosophers should become aware of—and understand—how scientific understanding can address the relevant aspects of the is-ought and fact-value matter(s). There is nothing about the naturalistic fallacy or about a considered understanding of the differences between 'is' and 'ought', and 'fact' and 'value', that prevents, or should prevent, a careful application of scientific understanding to the subject of morality in its holistic sense—in other words, to morality's normative dimension in addition to the descriptive and explanatory dimensions. Familiarity (with the relevant reasoning) on the part of scientists and moral philosophers will help the philosophical and scientific communities work ever-more-closely together and move beyond some of the mistaken assumptions of recent centuries. At least, "it should do so, in theory."

## More Information and Materials

For more context and information, and detail, please refer to my other recent messages on CHORA and PHILOS-L (in the following list) as well as to materials on my website, also listed below:

My message, ""The Bridge: A-QED"", CHORA (June 27).

My message, "WHY and WHY and WHY", CHORA (July 1).

My message, "Moral Beings, Is-Ought, Fact-Value, and Other (Big) Stuff", CHORA (July 4).

My message, "Darwin, Camus, and Hamlet went into a bar, AND . . .", CHORA (June 13).

My message, "Speaking of Hands, and Adaptations, and . . .", CHORA (June 28).

My message, ""Robot Revelations": An Opportunity", PHILOS-L (June 22).

My message, "To Scientifically Informed Philosophers and Philosophically Minded Scientists", PHILOS-L (June 9).

For additional detail and explanation, you can refer to materials on my website, [www.ObligationsOfReason.com](http://www.ObligationsOfReason.com) . I'd suggest the following materials, all included on the "Additional Material From The Author" page of the site:

"On Morality: Key Considerations and a Bridge"

"What good am I?"

"On Morality"

"Regarding 'Directional Dynamics' and 'Normative Facts'"

"The Morality of Sustainability: A DIY Exploration"

"A Framework and Paradigm Of Morality"

Thank you very much for your attention and consideration.

Be Well,

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[www.ObligationsOfReason.com](http://www.ObligationsOfReason.com)

Note 1 — Here, I'm not talking about in a simplistic sense, or in a sense that's meant to cover some factors but not others. For example, there are genetic factors, environmental factors, and cultural factors, and there are intimate interrelationships between these factors. For example, one can consider the works of Darwin, W. D. Hamilton, E. O. Wilson, Robert Trivers, Robert Axelrod, Richard Dawkins, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, Frans de Waal, and etc.; along with works relating considerably more to the interactions among genes and their proximate environments; and along with works that focus on the intimate interactions between genetic factors and cultural factors, all in the context of how populations change (e.g., "Not By Genes Alone", by Richerson and Boyd). Nothing in what I'm suggesting is meant to exclude, or be inconsistent with, any of these vitally important factors.