

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

By Jeff Huggins March 12, 2009

Upon being born—i.e., entering the living world—each person eventually and ultimately, in effect, faces what I'll call the *self-question*—i.e., the question Shakespeare's Hamlet stated as "to be, or not to be" and that (as example) Camus captured so well in the opening paragraph of "An Absurd Reasoning" in his *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*.

Also, in effect and essence, we humans face the direct parallel of this question on a *species* level—that is, in regards to the *human species*. Put another way, the self-question can be understood—and is indeed presented to us, by our very existence in *the world*—as it relates to the human species: To be, or not to be? When we do so for present purposes, let's call the resulting question the *life-question*.

At a *meta* level, there are only three possible responses to this life-question: One can respond affirmatively, i.e., in a way that *affirms* life. Or, one can respond negatively, i.e., in a *life-negating* and *self-defeating* way. Or, one can attempt to ignore and avoid the question, although (as Camus points out) even as one's

mind might try to avoid or delay, one's feet nevertheless do the walking. In other words, this life-question is not one that can be avoided: One way or another, we answer it.

The real question is whether we face and address the life-question explicitly, coherently, consistent with our habit of getting up mornings, and "wisely".

Too, there is something else very important to realize: If we want (for present purposes) to avoid assuming the existence of—or relying upon—a supernatural authority independent of humanity, then it follows, I suggest, that we must form our views and make our decisions based upon the best combination of empirical evidence (including observation) and human thinking we can muster: We must *reason* based on a combination of *human-gathered, human-interpreted evidence* and *human thinking*. Of course, as philosophers, we don't assume that an independent supernatural voice will *tell us* the answer, "justify" our human existence *to us* and *for us*, tell us precisely what to *do*, bless us, or tuck us in at night.

The combination of these considerations presents a very interesting picture—an *essential* picture to *acknowledge*, tentatively at least, unless or until we somehow, someday come across compelling evidence to the contrary.

These factors, when combined with sound and solid modern-day science, simple and basic reasoning, and a few additional obvious facts (that are so large they are often overlooked), together provide a sound, grounded, integrated, and robust meta-ethical understanding. The resulting picture effectively addresses the matters of 'is' and 'ought'. It effectively reveals and reflects the intimate interrelationship between morality itself and the continuance of human survival from generation to generation—and indeed, that between morality and the aim of sustainability. And, it effectively illuminates a positive, grounded, and wise context for very much else in moral philosophy.

The above can all be demonstrated and explained in a number of robust ways—including via the use of a DIY (do-it-yourself) exercise, straightforward and robust premises, a range of illustrations, various checks, and so forth. No magic required.

The resulting understanding—or *view*, if you like—is grounded, is sound, has traction, is practical and positive, and reflects (and is fully consistent with) relevant science. Helpfully—and as one should expect—it also reflects, contextualizes, and explains key moral dynamics and principles that are, for the most part, seen as universals by major meta-ethical schools of thought.

The resulting view provides a high degree of reasoned confidence, generating the sort of confidence that solving a crossword puzzle provides (see Susan Haack) or, as others might describe, that strong “consilience” among multiple lines of evidence and reasoning provides. The view is also supported by central themes and reasoning in works such as Appiah’s *Experiments in Ethics*, Maxwell’s *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, and others.

In the paper and presentation, I propose to present the simple, clear reasoning of the matter as well as the DIY exercise for others to consider. Of course, I’ll be happy to provide all materials in advance.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Be Well.

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