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THE PROPOSAL FOR DARWINIAN MORALITY OFFERED
BY MICHAEL RUSE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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THE PROPOSAL FOR DARWINIAN MORALITY OFFERED
BY MICHAEL RUSE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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I dedicate this dissertation to Amanda, my wife and best friend, and to our three boys:

Micah, Caleb, and Silas.

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PREFACE

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My family also supported and encouraged me throughout this project. My parents and sister and brother-in-law have always believed in me and encouraged me, and they have supported me in this work even when it meant less time together. My in-laws have also been a wonderful source of support to me before and throughout this degree.

I cannot express enough gratitude, appreciation, and love for my wife, Amanda, for her encouragement throughout our pursuit of this degree and beyond. She sacrificed often in allowing me to pursue this degree, yet she never complained. She constantly encouraged me when the program was a struggle, and she celebrated with me throughout the milestones. I could not ask for a better wife, helpmate, and friend. I love her more now than when this degree started, and I know I will, somehow, love her even more in the future. I am also thankful for the three best little boys in the world, our sons Micah, Caleb, and Silas. I love being daddy to these boys and am truly the blessed man of

Psalm 127:3-5.

Finally, I continue to stand amazed at the grace, strength, and mercy that God provides me on a daily basis and has provided throughout my pursuit of this degree. The mercy and power of Christ alone allows me to do anything for his Kingdom. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Tim 1:17).

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CHAPTER 1

THE DARWINIAN WORLDVIEW OF MICHAEL RUSE

Introduction

This foundational chapter provides material that is critical to the argument contained in the dissertation. One benefits from understanding the specifics of Professor Ruse's Darwinian worldview before describing and critiquing the single category of morality contained within his worldview. Ruse's worldview underlies his moral proposal. In succeeding chapters, the dissertation presents an assessment of Ruse's moral anti-realism, subjectivism of a distinct kind, epigenetic rules, justificatory reasons versus explanatory causes, and his depiction of the illusory nature of objectivity in morality. However, his entirely Darwinian worldview undergirds all these varying elements.

The conclusion argues that Christianity's moral argument better accounts for morality than does Ruse's subjectivism of a distinct kind; however, fundamentally, the debate is one over worldviews. Which worldview better accounts for the data of the phenomenal world around us, Christian theism or Darwinism? Morality represents an important area in this debate, but the worldview context is pertinent to the discussion. Therefore, a basic examination and critique of Ruse's Darwinian worldview necessarily ensues before turning to the specific category of morality.

Ruse's Background

Michael Ruse has distinguished himself as one of the outstanding philosophers of his generation. He taught at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada for thirty-five years, and since retiring from there has taught at Florida State University since the year

2000. He currently serves as the Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor of Philosophy at FSU. He has authored more than twenty books and numerous journal articles. His work has focused primarily on the philosophy of biology, though in this latter part of his career he has added an interesting nuance to his work by investigating the relationship between Darwinism and Christianity. In 1981, Ruse argued as a key witness for the plaintiff that creation science was not true science in the Arkansas case of McLean vs. Arkansas, though the state did continue to allow the teaching of creation science. Perhaps Ruse's most exemplary work is that of historian of Charles Darwin and Darwinism in general. Ruse exhaustively documents the history of Darwinism, and he has distinguished himself as an excellent resource from which to learn about the history of the movement.

Ruse is a naturalist; more precisely, Ruse is a Darwinian. Ruse certainly possesses no doubts that Darwinism is true and beyond refutation.

I think that evolution is a fact and that Darwinism rules triumphant. Natural selection is not simply an important mechanism. It is the only significant cause of permanent organic change. I stand somewhere to the right of Archdeacon Paley on adaptation and design. I see purpose and function everywhere. I am an ardent naturalist and an enthusiastic reductionist, and those who disagree with me are wimps. I think that everything applies to humans, thought and action, and that sociobiology is the best thing to happen to the social sciences in the last century. The kindest thing that can be said for those who disagree – Marxists, feminists, constructivists, and fellow travelers – is that they speak from ignorance. Perhaps their genes make them do it.¹

Ruse certainly understates nothing here, and he unquestionably throws down the gauntlet for critics of Darwinism. Ruse obviously utilizes humor in calling opponents “wimps,” but he also illustrates a certainty about his worldview and fervently rejects any conflicting explanation for life as it exists (or ever has existed). As if one could doubt Ruse's belief in the veracity of the theory of evolution, he contests the idea that evolution is only a theory:

Indeed, I suggest that this wise-sounding statement is confused to the point of

¹Michael Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ix.

falsity: it almost certainly is if, without regard for cause, one means no more by “evolution” than the claim that all organisms developed naturally from primitive beginnings. Evolution is a fact, *fact*, *FACT*!²

The key word in the quote is “naturally.” Ruse permits no place for a supernatural Being to intervene in the cosmos; evolution³ and world processes are thoroughly naturalistic.

Ruse’s adamant stance makes his continuing dialogue with Christianity uniquely interesting. When Ruse labels his opponents “wimps,” he immediately follows with the statement: “Yet, all of this said, I cannot for the life of me see why so many – Darwinians and Christians alike – think that such a position as mine implies an immediate and emphatically negative response to the question I have posed in my title [*Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*].”⁴ Ruse exhibits respect, even appreciation, for Christianity that rankles some of his fellow naturalists, including and especially the so-called New Atheists. Ruse places himself in the crosshairs of critics on both sides of the fence: Christians who reject his Darwinian position and atheists who want him to be much more atheistic and critical of Christianity. Ruse courageously maintains his stance even in the face of such biting criticisms. While Ruse’s work deserves critical assessment, his willingness to stand his ground earns appreciation.⁵

²Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1982), 58. This position entails certain implications for human dignity.

³“Evolution” is certainly an ambiguous term, meaning many different things to different people. Ruse generally means by the term the purely natural process of change in organisms. In what I believe is his most crucial work in the areas of epistemology and ethics, he explains from the outset how he uses the term: Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 1, says, “By ‘evolution’ I mean the natural unfolding and change of organisms down through the generations, from earlier forms, widely different Some, including most scientists today, would extend the term to cover the natural development of life from non-life . . . I am happy to do this, although such initial events do not really interest me here. For the purposes of this book, I shall understand the term to refer to development from common ancestors.”

⁴Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, ix.

⁵Michael Ruse, “Making Room for Faith in an Age of Science: A Response to David Wisdo,” *Zygon* 46 (2011): 659 responds to the criticism he receives: “Also we have had the rise of the so-called New Atheists, hating religion and the religious with a passion. Expectedly, I have drawn the scorn both of the religious extremists—see for example the treatment of me by the journalist Ben Stein in the movie *Expelled*—and of the atheists—they contemptuously refer to people like me as ‘accommodationists’ or (more hurtfully) as ‘appeasers.’ A middle way showing that one can accept science—real science, not

Ruse's family background invites understanding of and appreciation for his interaction with a Christian faith he rejects. He is not ignorant of Christianity; in fact, he describes it as one of the profound influences of his life.

I was born in Birmingham in the British Midlands in 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War. My father was a conscientious objector, and this brought him into contact with members of the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers. After the war, he and my mother joined the society, and it was within this group that my sister and I were raised until 1953, when our mother died and the family that had been was no more. That was all long ago and far away, but every day I am aware that the deepest influence on my life was that loving Christian atmosphere created by my parents and their coreligionists in the Warwickshire Monthly Meeting, with which our local group was affiliated.⁶

This description provides insight into why Ruse eschews spiteful or even demeaning responses toward Christianity. Childhood influences die hard. Unlike E. O. Wilson⁷, Ruse did not experience a seminal moment when he rejected Christianity; instead, he less dramatically drifted away from his childhood beliefs. Interestingly, he recognizes that something significant is lost in such a case, unlike the New Atheists who view a rejection of faith as actual enhancement. Ruse simply does not join them in this assessment, and, in fact, only hesitantly embraces the label "atheist."

It was really a rather sad parting of the ways in a sense, although I really don't find myself drawn strongly to become a Christian again. I would not describe myself as an atheist. I suppose if you wanted a term, I'm an agnostic or skeptic or something like that. But one thing I always do say, and this does separate me from people like Dan Dennett or Richard Dawkins, is that if you grow up as a Quaker, it's very hard to hate Christianity, even if you give it up. It's just not part of my nature.⁸

science gelded to make it less threatening—and genuine religion is needed desperately. One may not convince the fanatics at the ends, but there needs to be a large place where people can perhaps disagree on ideas but nevertheless continue to respect opponents."

⁶Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, xi.

⁷E. O. Wilson is a Harvard biologist and a naturalist. He rejected his childhood Christian faith upon learning of Darwinism. He provided the seminal work in sociobiology (though the term has existed much longer) with his book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975).

⁸William A. Dembski and Michael Ruse, "Intelligent Design: A Dialogue," in *Intelligent Design: William A. Dembski & Michael Ruse in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 23. This admission does not imply that Ruse is not an atheist, however. Michael Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL:

Indeed, while Ruse is a thoroughgoing philosophical naturalist, he appreciates the Christian faith. “I don’t hate Christianity in the way that Huxley did. I don’t believe in it, but it makes sense that there has to be something more. If somebody tells me of their belief in God, I envy their faith. I’m not just being snarky, but I don’t have it.”⁹ While Ruse professes atheism and certainly agnosticism (though not in an “uncaring” way about religion; rather he is very interested in such matters), he displays respect for the Christian faith. Thus, Ruse distinguishes himself from the antagonistic New Atheists who hate religion. Dawkins believes Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist almost in a way that *requires* one to be an atheist. Ruse rejects this position; Darwin may have made it possible to be atheistic, but he certainly did not make it obligatory.¹⁰

Should one then expect Ruse to convert to theism? While one holds out hope for such a response, the reality does not seem highly plausible. Ruse is fully convinced of his Darwinism, and it defines his worldview. “Worldview” is an important term that will, in many ways, drive the dissertation. Ruse acknowledges that naturalism is not necessarily true, but he personally possesses no doubts about a naturalistic universe:

The truth of evolution is not a logical necessity; as in law, new evidence could lead one to reconsider even a verdict decided as “beyond reasonable doubt.” But it is going to take a lot of evidence of a very strong nature. I am not holding my breath in anticipation. I would put the chances of my being wrong on this point about on a par with my favorite tabloid being right that Elvis is indeed alive and well and living in retirement in Florida.¹¹

InterVarsity Press, 2012), 53, says, “I am a nonbeliever. I describe myself as an agnostic or a skeptic, but in truth I am pretty atheistic about the basic claims of Christianity.” Also Michael Ruse, “Interview by Gordy Slack,” in *Science and the Spiritual Quest: New Essays by Leading Scientists*, ed. W. Mark Richardson et al. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137, recognizes in the New Atheists something of an evangelical fervor: “At the age of twenty-one or twenty-two, by which time I had started doing philosophy, I had a strong reaction against it all and ended up on the atheistic end of the spectrum. Like a lot of people, I’ve been swinging back much more toward the middle. My natural inclinations are away from extremism of any kind. I feel uncomfortable about evangelicals who are either for or against God.”

⁹Ruse, “Interview by Gordy Slack,” 138-39.

¹⁰Dembski and Ruse, “Intelligent Design,” 25.

¹¹Michael Ruse, “Darwinism: Philosophical Preference, Scientific Inference, and Good Research Strategy,” in *Darwinism: Science or Philosophy?* ed. Jon Buell and Virginia Hearn (Richardson,

Worldview influences loom large. Ruse's rejection of Christianity may not result from pure intellectual reasoning; a volitional component is also expressed: "Many English public school boys have found that, having had one headmaster in this life, they would prefer not to have another in the next. (This last sentence has intentional autobiographical undertones.)"¹² To speak of worldview implies that Ruse holds to some basic beliefs *a priori*. Discussion about the following comment occupies the remainder of this section and introduces the theme of the next: evolution is *not* merely a scientific theory resulting from following the evidence where it most naturally leads; Darwinism is a worldview, even a faith commitment. Ruse concedes that Darwinism is much more than a theory pertaining to science: "I've always said that naturalism is an act of faith, if you want to use that sort of language. . . . I would be more comfortable saying it's a metaphysical commitment of some kind. Of course it is. I don't think metaphysical commitments are stupid."¹³ This admission circles back to his statement that began this chapter: "Evolution is a fact, *fact*, *FACT*!" Ruse's statement expresses much more than a mere scientific claim. Indeed, the worldview of Darwinism requires a faith commitment and affects all the categories of life: epistemology, morality, human nature, human reason, etc. Since Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, debate has ensued over the implications of a Darwinian position, and it becomes increasingly clear that these implications affect the entire scope of human existence. Does the empirical evidence necessarily require conversion to Darwinism? Ruse himself allows a negative response to this question through his admission that naturalism is a faith commitment, but he also believes the evidence leads to his conclusion. The dissertation assesses one specific area

TX: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 1994), 25.

¹²Michael Ruse, "Atheism, Naturalism, and Science: Three in One?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236.

¹³Dembski and Ruse, "Intelligent Design," 37.

of the evidence: morality. Since Ruse claims a robust Darwinism, can Darwinism account for genuine morality? The data may suggest that the area of morality may cause doubts about the acceptance of Darwinism.¹⁴ A philosophy of life based on evolution certainly encounters many obstacles; yet since Darwin published the *Origin* in 1859, people have consistently utilized evolution for far more than a simple scientific theory.

Darwinism: Science, Worldview, or Religion?

Though Ruse is sympathetic toward Christianity and has authored such books as *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* and *Evolution and Religion* wherein he explores the topic of the coexistence of Christianity and Darwinism, one should not confuse this with vacillating over his worldview commitments. He adheres to Darwinism and recognizes that a Darwinian worldview radically affects every aspect of how one sees the world.

As I said before: the fact that we are the contingent end-products of a natural process of evolution, rather than the special creation of a good God, in His own image, has to be just about the most profound thing we humans have discovered about ourselves. This has to be significant, both for epistemology and ethics. The details of my book may be wrong. The approach may be wrong. But the idea has to be right.¹⁵

Ruse rejects the suggestion that Darwinism is wrong and that God created humans. The consequences of this view result in an entirely different account of human origins, purpose, consciousness, morality, and epistemology. All facets of life are at stake in a worldview. While this dissertation critically assesses Ruse's depiction of morality, the heart of the debate reflects a clash of conflicting worldviews that rejects reconciliation:

¹⁴Phillip E. Johnson, "Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 24, says that "what the science educators propose to teach as 'evolution,' and label as fact, is based not upon any incontrovertible empirical evidence, but upon a highly controversial philosophical presupposition. The controversy over evolution is therefore not going to go away as people become better educated on the subject. On the contrary, the more people learn about the philosophical content of what scientists are calling the 'fact of evolution,' the less they are going to like it."

¹⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, xi. Also Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 55, says, "I believe the most important thing we can know about human beings is that we are not the creation of a good God on the sixth day but the end product of a long, slow process of natural selection."

evangelical Christianity and Darwinism. The worldview that is true to reality and better explains the phenomena of the world engenders belief.

Darwinism may be more than just a worldview, but it is certainly never less. Proponents often view it as a secular religion, but even if they are unwilling to go that far, most willingly admit that it represents much more than a mere isolated scientific theory. Ruse, a capable historian of Darwinism, discloses this reality.

For all that the past fifty years have seen a major move toward professional science, evolution has always been more than just a scientific theory – it has ever been a philosophy, a metaphysics, a weltanschauung, a secular religion (not so secular at times), even, indeed, an eschatology.¹⁶

Early Darwinians searched for a rival worldview permitting their naturalistic ideologies and countering Christianity's supernatural claims. Many of the early Darwinians were biological progressionists (Ruse adamantly refutes the progressive nature of evolution) and viewed Darwinism as a secular religion that could compete with Christianity.¹⁷

Herbert Spencer, an early progressionist, proposed Darwinism as an all-encompassing worldview, and Ruse notes that for him, "evolution was always more than mere science: it was a world picture, something that held uniformly throughout creation, and a substitute for the supposed moribund religions of the past."¹⁸ Another early Darwinian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, wanted to make evolution into a nonsecular religion.¹⁹ Ernst Haeckel, Germany's leading advocate for evolution, used Darwinism to create a religion of materialism. Indeed, he describes his initial reading of *The Origin* in terms of religious

¹⁶Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics in the Twentieth Century: Julian Sorell Huxley and George Gaylord Simpson," in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 199. Also Michael Ruse, *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 530, says, "Not only has evolution functioned as an ideology, as a secular religion, but for many professional biologists that has been its primary role."

¹⁷Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn from the Past?" *Zygon* 34 (1999): 436-37.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 439.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 444.

experience: it was as if “scales fell from my eyes.”²⁰

The conception of Darwinism as a worldview continues in modern times, and the sort of religious awakening expressed by Haeckel resounds in the testimony of one of today’s leading naturalists, the founder of sociobiology, E. O. Wilson.

Suddenly – that is not too strong a word – I saw the world in a wholly new way A tumbler fell somewhere in my mind, and a door opened to a new world. I was enthralled, couldn’t stop thinking about the implications evolution has for classification and for the rest of biology. And for philosophy. And for just about everything.²¹

This sort of religious lingo sounds more native to Christian mysticism than to a scientific theory. Thus, one should recognize a leap to metaphysics here and understand that Darwinians also seek to answer life’s ultimate questions through their worldview, even its paramount question: “Evolutionary theory answers one of the most profound and fundamental questions human beings have ever asked themselves, a question that has plagued reflective minds for as long as reflective minds have existed in the universe: why are we here?”²² Many objections arise at this point, including and perhaps especially, if Darwinism is correct and humans are ontologically no different than other animals, or even the inanimate world, then the logical answer to the question, “why are we here?” asserts that humans are here by chance, and life holds no innate purpose or meaning. If this logic accurately reflects a Darwinian position, then Darwinism as a worldview contains significant challenges to human dignity, purpose, and morality. However, due to the admission that evolution is a worldview, Darwinians are right in exploring solutions to these issues based on their theory. Competing worldviews offer very different answers to life’s ultimate questions, and, for this reason, strong debate continues to exist between

²⁰Quoted in Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 257.

²¹E. O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 4. Also Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 516, says, “Explicitly, Wilson sees his evolutionism as a secular faith. As a myth.”

²²Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

Christian theists and Darwinians. Competing worldview solutions also result in disparate implications for the different categories of life, including morality. Proponents of each hold divergent basic presuppositions about both the nature of the world and the nature of man. Plantinga summarizes the discussion well:

So why all the furor? The answer is obvious: evolution has deep religious connections; deep connections with how we understand ourselves at the most fundamental level. Many evangelicals and fundamentalists see in it a threat to the Faith; they don't want it taught to their children, at any rate as scientifically established fact, and they see acceptance of it as corroding proper acceptance of the Bible. On the other side, among the secularists, evolution functions as a *myth*, in a technical sense of that term; a shared way of understanding ourselves at the deep level of religion, a deep interpretation of ourselves to ourselves, a way of telling us why we are here, where we come from, and where we are going.²³

Darwinism functions minimally as a worldview; some boldly even label it a secular religion. Ruse treads carefully here, even hedging somewhat about the religious nature of evolution. He cautiously advises against going forward too quickly, urging fellow Darwinians to proceed thoughtfully in pursuing evolution as religion:

But do remember that the very diversity reinforces the second point, about the secular religious nature of much evolutionary thought. I do not say that this is necessarily a bad thing, but it is certainly something to be recognized. Moreover, those of us who have found traditional religions unsatisfactory for one reason or another might want to ask ourselves, Do we want to substitute another religion, even a secular one, for the religion we may have relinquished?²⁴

Ruse does not deny that Darwinism represents more than mere scientific theory and acknowledges that it operates at least as a worldview. He cares about ultimate questions and proposes evolutionary-based answers to them. He does not endorse a Darwinian religion for himself, proved by the quote above where he rejects such language. However, he does utilize religious terms when speaking of a turn to Darwinism:

It is probably because I do have an intensely religious nature— using this term in a secular sense, as one might apply it to other nonbelievers like Thomas Henry Huxley—that I was attracted toward evolution. Speaking in an entirely secular

²³Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," in *The Philosophy of Biology*, ed. David L. Hull and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 682.

²⁴Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?," 448.

manner, I do not believe that people come to evolution by chance. From Herbert Spencer (1892) to Edward O. Wilson (1978), it has functioned as a kind of *Weltanschauung*, a world picture which gives meaning to life. It is something that acts as a foundation for the big questions which we humans face.²⁵

As an historian of Darwinism, Ruse often sidesteps stating his own position when it is unnecessary to do so, but when he asserts that he does not “believe that people come to evolution by chance,” he minimally means that Darwinians search for a way by which to make sense of the world. While he rejects the use of evolution as religion personally, he assuredly allows that it is a possible, though not a necessary, practice for Darwinians:

If you buy the chief message of this book, you are going to accept a naturalistic account of both epistemology and ethics. If, like me, you are a sceptic, not knowing if anything lies beyond, then that is all you are going to get. You do not have a religion, but you have something instead. If you have a religion as well, then so be it. You can fuse your Darwinism onto it. . . . Most especially, a “Darwinist religion”, in the sense that Darwinism is the religion, does not have to be part of one’s package.²⁶

In order to avoid overstating the case, one may judge that evolution functions as a worldview for Ruse, not a religion. He concedes that many Darwinians hold to evolution as religion, but it is not his position. He may speak of evolution in religious terms, but in order to avoid needless debate, the most that is stated here is that evolution functions as a worldview for him.²⁷ The section illustrates that, for virtually all Darwinians, evolution

²⁵Michael Ruse, “From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back,” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 26.

²⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 294.

²⁷To illustrate this point: Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 281, says, “The critics argue that whatever evolution may be, it is more than mere science: it is a philosophy, a guide to life and explanation of the ultimate questions, a secular religion. I do not believe that this charge is necessarily true. Evolution, including Darwinian evolutionary theory, does not have to be a philosophy, a form of religion. But I believe also that as a matter of contingent and historical fact the charge often is true; evolution does become something more than disinterested objective science.” However, Alvin Plantinga, “The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism,” in *Science and Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Melville Y. Stewart (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 1:324, says, “Naturalism is presumably not, as it stands, a religion. Nevertheless it performs one of the most important functions of a religion: it provides its adherents with a worldview. It tells us what the world is fundamentally like, what is most deep and important in the world, what our place in the world is, how we are related to other creatures, what (if anything) we can expect after death, and so on.” Furthermore, Dorothy Nelkin, “Less Selfish than Sacred? Genes and the Religious Impulse in Evolutionary Biology,” in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Hilary Rose and Steve Rose (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 30, says, “Geneticists and evolutionary psychologists are borrowing the compelling concepts of one belief system to meet the needs of another, in an effort to attract converts – to convince the public and skeptics from other disciplines

functions as much more than scientific theory. For Ruse in particular, evolution provides a philosophy of life, a way to see the world and make sense of it, and a system by which to answer life's ultimate questions.²⁸

Recognizing that evolution functions as a philosophy of life for Ruse, does even this stance invoke a “faith” commitment of some kind? Because a foundational Darwinian belief holds that evolution is a scientific fact, many Darwinians assume that those who deny a purely naturalistic explanation of the universe are ignorant of scientific knowledge. However, the previous section demonstrates that Darwinism functions as more than mere science, definitely worldview, maybe religion. Yet, neither metaphysical nor methodological naturalism seems to warrant a “faith” commitment as so described. Scientific knowledge comes through the scientific method. While Ruse is a philosopher and not committed to the scientific method as the sole means of epistemology, he is first a philosopher of evolutionary science which places the highest value on proofs, and specifically the empirical results of the scientific method: “My approach to philosophy is that of the naturalist. My interest in limits does not belie my belief that the highest form of knowledge is scientific knowledge.”²⁹ Thus, whereas theism, by its nature, allows for a

of the centrality and power of their ideas.” Also Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash,” 681, says, “I shall argue that the theory of evolution is by no means religiously or theologically neutral.” Finally, James Barnham, “Why I am not a Darwinist,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 181, says, “Darwinists hate it when their critics point out that their belief system amounts to a religious faith in its own right. . . . Religion is many things, but if there is one characteristic that all religions have in common, surely it is faith. What is faith? This itself is a highly disputed matter, but perhaps we may define it as a strong emotional attachment to an all-encompassing worldview that outstrips the available empirical evidence. By this definition, at least, there is little doubt that metaphysical Darwinism functions as a religion for a great many people today.”

²⁸Michael Ruse, “From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back,” 28, says, “The prospects for an evolution-based philosophy of life did not seem promising. Fortunately, however, I was not alone in my quest. Other people were also looking for ways to bring the biology of human nature to bear fruitfully on the great problems of philosophy: epistemology—What do I know?—and ethics—What should I do? (Particularly influential were the writings of the philosopher, the late John Mackie [1978, 1979] . . .).”

²⁹Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

reasonable faith, those same faith commitments from Darwinians relying on empirical proofs and results appear alien to a Darwinian worldview.³⁰

Thus, if Darwinism is more than scientific theory, can a Darwinian be true to his worldview by asserting that evolution is a worldview? Admittedly, a Darwinian would reject the question out of hand because either an affirmative or negative answer renders his system self-refuting. Yet, even an “out of bounds” question such as this one demonstrates the reality that a worldview so highly dependent upon scientific knowledge does not escape philosophical presuppositions. This discussion illustrates that Darwinians are just as dogmatic in their faith commitments as evangelical Christians, and often their dogmatism is based on presuppositional commitments rather than empirical proof.³¹

Philip Johnson’s full quote on this issue is worth including:

The “overwhelming evidence for naturalistic evolution” no longer overwhelms when the naturalistic worldview is itself called into question, and that worldview is as problematical as any other set of metaphysical assumptions when it is placed on the table for examination rather than being taken for granted as “the way we think today.” The problem with scientific naturalism as a worldview is that it takes a sound methodological premise of natural science and transforms it into a dogmatic statement about the nature of the universe. Science is committed by definition to empiricism, by which I mean that scientists seek to find truth by observation, experiment, and calculation rather than by studying sacred books or achieving mystical states of mind. It may well be, however, that there are certain questions – important questions, ones to which we desperately want to know the answers – that cannot be answered by the methods available to our science. These may include not only broad philosophical issues such as whether the universe has a purpose, but also questions we have become accustomed to think of as empirical, such as how life first began or how complex biological systems were put together.³²

Darwinian appeals for support reflect an increasingly less scientific and more

³⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 4, says, “Evolution may be almost entirely unseen. But it is a fact, and a well-established fact, no less than that Henry VIII’s daughter Elizabeth was Queen of England, and that a heart beats within my breast.” One is struck by the similarity to the words of Hebrews 11:1 (ESV): “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

³¹William A. Dembski, “The Myths of Darwinism,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), xxxiii, says, “Darwinism has achieved the status of inviolable science, combining the dogmatism of religion with the entitlement of science. This is an unhappy combination. In consequence, critics encounter a ruthless dogmatism when challenging Darwin’s theory.”

³²Johnson, “Evolution as Dogma,” 36.

dogmatic tone. This reality is unsurprising in that worldview engenders passionate commitment; the problem that entails is that Darwinism is purportedly a scientific theory stemming from evidence and proofs. If the facts are wrong and proofs are false, the entire worldview crumbles. Thomas Nagel recently published a book where the title makes the very claim represented here: *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. In the opening pages, Nagel states:

The more details we learn about the chemical basis of life and the intricacy of the genetic code, the more unbelievable the standard historical account becomes. . . . But it seems to me that, as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense.³³

Nagel, a naturalist, reports this concession because the lack of empirical data caused him to rethink Darwinism. The debate over this issue persists. Darwinian proponents refuse to surrender their commitment to a naturalistic worldview, but when a scientific theory becomes a comprehensive philosophical theory about the nature of reality, serious and reflective critique ensues. Regardless of outcome, both theists and naturalists recognize that Darwinians answer life's ultimate questions based on worldview commitments.³⁴

If the Darwinian worldview deserves critique, the fundamental tenets of a Darwinian worldview must be stated: the universe consists of purely natural processes, life arose from inorganic material, and little to no room exists for a supernatural being.

³³Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

³⁴Nelkin, "Less Selfish than Sacred?," 27, says that evolutionary theory is capable of merely recognizing currently existing social categories; it is impotent to prescribe behaviors. In some ways, evolutionary psychology has taken something of a religious bent and is used to provide answers concerning moral responsibility. "While represented as a scientific theory, evolutionary psychology is rooted in a religious impulse to explain the meaning of life." Also Alex Rosenberg, "Darwinism in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 310, says, "Among philosophers, naturalism is the view that contemporary scientific theory is the source of solutions to philosophical problems." Finally, Johnson, "Evolution as Dogma," 24, says, "The important claim of 'evolution,' however, is not that limited changes occur in populations because of differences in survival rates. It is that we can extrapolate from the very modest amount of evolution that can actually be observed to a grand theory that explains how moths, trees, and scientific observers came to exist in the first place."

Disagreement may arise as to whether the first element is *the* primary one, but it must at least be *a* central one. By nature Christian theism and Darwinism represent competing worldviews describing mutually exclusive and contradictory fundamental beliefs. Ruse's Darwinism clearly embraces the initial foundational doctrine expressed here:

Taking Darwin Seriously is a work of philosophy, but because it is a work of naturalistic philosophy it presupposes the truth of those parts of science on which it is based. To the working scientist, and not just the biologist, it is simply ludicrous to think that there is any question about the natural origin of organisms from forms very different than those they now bear – ultimately, from inorganic materials. This is as much a fact of nature as that the earth goes around the sun or that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen. But it is certainly not a fact to many non-scientists, especially not to those influenced by North American evangelical Christianity.³⁵

Ruse addresses the disparity of fundamental beliefs held by Darwinian proponents and “North American evangelical Christianity.” His philosophy presupposes the truth of naturalism, reflecting the truth that all worldviews possess certain a priori commitments. Darwinians often refuse to allow the possibility of God's existence and thereby prohibit following the evidence where it may most plausibly lead if that end is theism. Dawkins' famous comment about the Darwinian position certainly proves that Darwinians cling tightly to a priori worldview assumptions stating, “even if there were not actual evidence in favour of the Darwinian theory (there is, of course) we should still be justified in preferring it over all rival theories.”³⁶ This statement entails stunning implications: no competing theory could ever disprove Darwinism. Inarguably, this statement expresses a faith commitment and fails to report empirical proof. This central premise of naturalism, the existence of only natural properties and processes, tolerates no discussion or dissent.

For the non-theist, evolution is the only game in town; it is an essential part of any reasonably complete non-theistic way of thinking; hence the devotion to it, the suggestions that it shouldn't be discussed in public, and the venom, the theological

³⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 280.

³⁶Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986), 287.

odium, with which dissent is greeted.³⁷

This foundational chapter expresses the impossibility of investigating Ruse's morality, one component of his worldview, apart from understanding the entire scope of his worldview commitment. His basic beliefs entail far-reaching implications for all strata of life, including the social, moral life of humans. Ruse holds unswervingly to Darwinism, possessing no doubts of its truth ("evolution is a fact *fact FACT*") and finding his bedrock belief concerning human life therein: the "fact" that humans are not created by a good God but are the end-products of natural selection. Important implications follow from beliefs concerning the origin and purpose of human life. Ruse's belief about human nature clearly affects his epistemology and ethics. His worldview commitment produces unique and difficult consequences for his moral proposal.

An ongoing debate continues between Christian theists and naturalists concerning the truth of worldviews. Ultimately, the one that best explains the data of the world, corresponds to reality, and is consistent with its foundational beliefs is trustworthy. Certain "recalcitrant" facts present serious obstacles to Darwinism.

A theory may explain some facts quite nicely, but there are recalcitrant facts that doggedly resist explanation by a theory. No matter what a theory's advocate does, the recalcitrant fact just sits there and is not easily incorporated into the theory. In this case, the recalcitrant fact provides falsifying evidence for the theory and some degree of confirmation for its rivals.³⁸

The debate hinges on which worldview better explains the world as people know it; Christian theists and Darwinians ascribe to divergent positions. As C. S. Lewis said, "The

³⁷Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash," 683. Also Dembski, "The Myths of Darwinism," xviii, says, "The proponents of 'Darwinian liberalism' tolerate no dissent and regard all criticism of Darwinism's fundamental tenets as false and reprehensible." Also John Polkinghorne, "God and Physics," in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 65, says, "Every worldview involves a commitment to a foundational belief, which is not itself to be explained but which will provide the basis on which all subsequent forms of explanation will ultimately have to rest. No worldview can be free from such an initial commitment, for nothing comes of nothing."

³⁸J. P. Moreland, "The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism," in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 33.

Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can't both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn't fit the real universe."³⁹ The next section investigates whether Darwinism can account for certain "recalcitrant" aspects of the world and present a complete, coherent, and satisfying worldview. Before exploring that topic, the conclusion arrived at by one former Darwinian seems worthy of inclusion. James Barnham, a long-time Darwinian who, upon becoming an independent scholar, followed the evidence where it led and departed from Darwinism saying, "Metaphysical Darwinism simply does not live up to its billing. It claims to explain everything about life, but in fact explains almost nothing – certainly nothing about the nature of purpose and value, and how they fit into the natural order. That is why I am not a Darwinist."⁴⁰

Areas of Difficulty for Darwinism

This section presents a discussion of significant challenges to the Darwinian worldview. The investigation is crucial because Ruse argues for Darwinism based on the idea of consilience, by which he means a unification of data and evidence from many different fields leading to a conclusion about the whole. Ruse believes evolution is a "fact, *fact*, *FACT*" so convincingly because he regards a consilience of evidence from the many categories of life leads to his verdict. He possesses tremendous respect for Darwin and opines that publication of *The Origin of Species* changed evolution from creative speculation to undisputed fact.⁴¹ Ruse traces the idea of "consilience" back to *The Origin* where Darwin argued for naturalism and common descent through the term: "*Origin* offers a textbook example of a consilience. There are many different areas in biology. . . .

³⁹C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 110.

⁴⁰Barnham, "Why I am not a Darwinist," 191.

⁴¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 2, says, "It was the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859 which changed evolution from fanciful speculation to established fact."

It was Darwin's genius to show that knotty problems in all of these areas of biology fall away before the explanatory hypothesis of evolution."⁴² Darwin utilized geology, biology, geography, etc. to formulate his sweeping theory of evolution. Ruse appropriates consilience in arguing for the truth of evolution.

I think that the fact of evolution is beyond reasonable doubt. There is no need for the student of biology to take seriously, say, the hypothesis of spontaneous generation (of whole forms). Ideas like that have been considered and discredited. You will recognize that here I am appealing to a consilience of inductions. My claim is that evolution brings many disparate parts of biological science together and unites them beneath one all-embracing hypothesis. It is not reasonable to go on questioning.⁴³

His penultimate sentence looms large; based on consilience, one lacks reason in even questioning the reality of evolution. This mammoth assertion deserves thorough investigation. The following section evaluates the data of several different aspects of human experience to illustrate major obstacles for Ruse's verdict in light of consilience. If one argues for a decision based on the consilience of evidence in the cosmos, then one should follow the evidence where it most naturally leads. Thus, a consilience could produce proofs for the Christian worldview and erect obstacles for a Darwinian one:

We could similarly speak of theism's preferable explanatory power over naturalism with regard to the emergence of first life or consciousness or the existence of rationality and the correspondence of our minds to the external world. The *worldview context* is clearly an important feature in adjudicating between competing hypotheses.⁴⁴

This section does not argue for Christian theism but assesses whether it is,

⁴²Ibid., 3-4.

⁴³Ruse, "Darwinism," 25. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 4, says, "The fact of evolution is distinctively established by *all* the evidence.

⁴⁴Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (New York: Routledge, 2003), 154. Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 4, has become something of the theist's friend in this latest work, not because he argues *for* theism but that he argues *against* naturalism: "My target is a comprehensive, speculative world picture that is reached by extrapolation from some of the discoveries of biology, chemistry, and physics – a particular naturalistic *Weltanschauung* that postulates a hierarchical relation among the subjects of those sciences, and the completeness in principle of an explanation of everything in the universe through their unification. . . . But among the scientists and philosophers who do express views about the natural order as a whole, reductive materialism is widely assumed to be the only serious possibility."

indeed, unreasonable to question the truth of Darwinism. Neither the categories nor argumentation are meant to be exhaustive. Other resources exist to more exhaustively explore these problems for Darwinism; the discussion here attempts to discredit Ruse's ultimate premise for his Darwinian morality: a fundamental presupposition that the universe consists of solely natural properties and processes.

Abiogenesis: The Origin of Species Everything!

The first major hurdle the Darwinian encounters is accounting for how life arose initially. Life rising from non-life seems to describe something of a miraculous episode.⁴⁵ Recall that Ruse believes that "it is simply ludicrous to think that there is any question about the natural origin of organisms . . . ultimately, from inorganic materials. This is as much a fact of nature as that the earth goes around the sun or that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen." Ruse purports that a basic feature of the Darwinian world requires that one accept the rise of life from non-life. One anticipates such a move as no other option is available to a Darwinian. However, this step is an improper one, as it assumes what needs to be proved. His assessment invites critique in that life resulting from non-life is unprecedented and without empirical proof. The proposal that life rose from non-life suggests intervention from an outside agent(s) to those who fail to envision this possibility arising from a purely naturalistic approach, but a considerable problem entails here as Ruse's Darwinism bars such a possibility from the outset. One common Darwinian proposal for resolving the dilemma suggests that life spontaneously generated;

⁴⁵Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 123-24, critiques a naturalist as "decorated" as Francis Crick, for this very idea. "Although scientists continue to seek a purely chemical explanation of the origin of life, there are also card-carrying scientific naturalists like Francis Crick who say that it seems almost a miracle. Crick is led by his reflection on the probabilities to the hypothesis of 'directed panspermia' – that Earth was seeded with unicellular life sent from an advanced civilization elsewhere in our galaxy where life had evolved earlier. This depends on the supposition that there were other planets of other stars whose physical environment made the accidental formation of life less unlikely. But Crick acknowledges that there is no basis for confidence about any of these likelihoods."

however, though their hypothesis evidences little scientific support, proponents insist that the event must have occurred once, invoking an improper “just so” argument:

Thus, we now know that spontaneous generation does not happen, at least not in the way it was once thought to. However, anyone who accepts that the emergence of life can be understood in purely naturalistic terms is committed to the view that the spontaneous generation of life from non-life happened at least once.⁴⁶

Furthermore,

Although the exact details of the evolution of life from non-life may always remain a mystery, research in this area shows at least that there is no need to think it was anything but a natural process. It is only reasonable to assume that life developed from non-living matter through a completely natural process, a process in which chemistry slowly evolved into biology.⁴⁷

In terms of critique, the author asks his reader to “assume” (by a seemingly prior and tightly held presupposition that naturalism must surely be correct) that though Darwinism cannot provide any credible answer to this problem, a purely naturalistic answer must exist. This explanation is dangerously close to a science-of-the-gaps solution, similar to a God-of-the-gaps response that Darwinians find so contemptuous among theists.

Darwinians produce wildly divergent arguments for abiogenesis, including directed panspermia, spontaneous generation, and the existence of intermediate forms that are neither living nor non-living.⁴⁸ However, none of these explanations do real justice to the enormous difficulty of non-life eventually and ultimately producing life. Perhaps, the best Darwinian explanation admits that abiogenesis was merely a fluke;

⁴⁶Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 76. Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 89, says, "If physics alone or even a nonmaterialist monism can't account for the later stages of our evolutionary history, we shouldn't assume that it can account for the earlier stages. Indeed, when we go back far enough, to the origin of life – of self-replicating systems capable of supporting evolution by natural selection – those actually engaged in research in the subject recognize that they are very far from even formulating a viable explanatory hypothesis of the traditional materialist kind. Yet they assume that there must be such an explanation, since life cannot have arisen purely by chance."

⁴⁷Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 79-80.

⁴⁸Stewart-Williams says that three steps had to occur: first, a stock of organic molecules necessarily came about and accumulated; second, they had to unify into long chains (polymers); and third, they had to organize into some self-replicating structure. The first two steps are conceivable, but the final one seems impossible. He proposes an option for this third step is to allow the possibility that intermediate forms existed that were neither non-living nor living. *Ibid.*, 76-79.

somehow things aligned in just the right way for the cosmos to somehow produce life:

But it turns out that if in imagination we change any of these values by just the tiniest amount, we thereby posit a universe in which none of this could have happened, and indeed in which apparently nothing life-like could have ever emerged. . . . So isn't it a wonderful fact that the laws are just right for us to exist? Indeed, one might want to add, we almost didn't make it!⁴⁹

These descriptions of fluke, mystery, and good fortune represent a grasping at straws and, furthermore, appear foreign to an evolutionary worldview so committed to scientific explanation. Indeed, a scathing critique of this idea follows:

If the universe is for reasons of sheer dumb luck committed ultimately to a state of cosmic listlessness, it is *also* by sheer dumb luck that life first emerged on earth, the chemicals in the pre-biotic seas or soup illuminated and then invigorated by a fateful flash of lighting. It is again by sheer dumb luck that the first self-reproducing systems were created. . . . It is sheer dumb luck that alters the genetic message so that, from infernal nonsense, meaning for a moment emerges; and sheer dumb luck again that endows life with its *opportunities*, the space of possibilities over which natural selection plays, sheer dumb luck creating the mammalian eye and the marsupial pouch, sheer dumb luck again endowing the elephant's sensitive nose with nerves and the orchid's translucent petal with blush. Amazing. *Sheer dumb luck*.⁵⁰

Remove some of the hard language, and he and Dennett essentially arrive at the same conclusion: humans are lucky everything aligned the way it did to so that life could arise from non-life.

One of the major problems with abiogenesis is the necessary theory that value, meaning, and purpose eventually emerge from purely naturalistic origins. Even if life did rise from non-life as purported, a further problem results from how or why these aspects eventually appeared in a naturalistic universe. These features seem necessary at the beginning of the process rather than as later additions. No matter the multitude of non-valuable or meaningless components in the universe, value or meaning spontaneously surfacing in a meaningless system is absurd. "From valuelessness, valuelessness

⁴⁹Daniel C. Dennett, "Atheism and Evolution," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144.

⁵⁰David Berlinski, "The Deniable Darwin," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 269-70.

comes.”⁵¹ Darwinians may respond that Occam’s razor suggests that a much simpler construction supposes that life arose naturally rather than introduce a Creating Agent. By postulating a Designer, a new entity is added, further complicating the issue. However, while it may be true that Darwinism is simpler, Occam’s razor does not always apply. Here the simpler explanation is insufficient. The Darwinian account is simply inadequate, and the Occam razor defense distracts from the crucial problems of life arising from non-life and value arising from valuelessness.⁵²

Proponents of a Darwinian worldview typically evidence commitments excluding God *a priori* and must describe the origin of life through natural means. If the best assumption based on the best available data suggests that life arose through an intervening Agent, the Darwinian’s presupposition prevents him from embracing this position. Many Darwinians allow that life rising from non-life seems highly unlikely, but they further believe that it is much more unlikely that God exists and created life.⁵³ Nevertheless, this claim is a metaphysical, not a methodological, one. No scientific evidence proves that life spontaneously arose from non-life, and it suggests that it did not.

Finally, there is the fifth thesis, the Naturalistic Origins Thesis, the claim that life arose by naturalistic means. This seems to me to be for the most part mere arrogant bluster; given our present state of knowledge, I believe it is vastly less probable, on our present evidence, than is its denial. Darwin thought this claim very chancy; discoveries since Darwin, and in particular recent discoveries in molecular biology,

⁵¹Paul Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” in *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 223.

⁵²Copan says, “To claim, as some naturalists do, that naturalism is the simpler explanation just because it invokes fewer entities . . . is not much help here. Spontaneous generation or abiogenesis is quite a simple explanation (no intermediate mechanism between life and nonlife), but it is clearly inadequate. Something more is obviously needed.” *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵³Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 77-79, produces this very proposal. Also Roger White, “Does Origins of Life Research Rest on a Mistake?” *Nous* 41 (2003): 475, says, “So the line of reasoning if made more explicit is something like the following. That molecular replicating systems appear to be designed by an agent is sufficient to convince us that they didn’t arise by chance. But in scientific reasoning, non-intentional explanations are to be preferred, if possible (some would say at all costs), to intentional ones – hence the motivation to find a non-intentional explanation of life.”

make it much less likely than it was in Darwin's day.⁵⁴

This section commenced with Ruse's assertion that it is ludicrous to even question the natural origins of organisms and ends with Nagel contesting this very idea of the natural origins of organisms:

Many people think it will be very difficult to come up with a reductionist explanation of the origin of life. . . . My skepticism is not based on religious belief, or on a belief in any definite alternative. It is just a belief that the available scientific evidence, in spite of the consensus of scientific opinion, does not in this matter rationally require us to subordinate the incredulity of common sense. That is especially true with regard to the origin of life.⁵⁵

Rationality

Highly distinguished Darwinians have struggled to grasp how a naturalistic process like evolution could produce intelligent and rational minds. This incontrovertible aspect of human beings led Antony Flew to reject atheism and embrace (an albeit

⁵⁴Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash," 685. For example, Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), x, says, "Science has made enormous progress in understanding how the chemistry of life works, but the elegance and complexity of biological systems at the molecular level have paralyzed science's attempt to explain their origins. There has been virtually no attempt to account for the origin of specific, complex biomolecular systems, much less any progress. Many scientists have gamely asserted that explanations are already in hand, or will be sooner or later, but no support for such assertions can be found in the professional science literature. More importantly, there are compelling reasons – based on the structure of the systems themselves – to think that a Darwinian explanation for the mechanisms of life will forever prove elusive." Behe lists some major obstacles for the naturalistic origin of life at the level of the cell including DNA and RNA because these characteristics beg for design: "Any undergraduate can read the instruction manual and produce a long piece of DNA – perhaps the gene coding for a known protein in a day or two. Most readers will quickly see the problem. There were no chemists four billion years ago. Neither were there any chemical supply houses, distillation flasks, nor any of the many other devices that the modern chemist uses daily in his or her laboratory, and which are necessary to get good results. A convincing origin-of-life scenario requires that intelligent direction of the chemical reactions be minimized as far as possible. Nonetheless, the involvement of some intelligence is unavoidable." (ibid., 168). Also Klaus Dose, "The Origin of Life: More Questions than Answers," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 13 (1998): 348, says, "More than 30 years of experimentation on the origin of life in the fields of chemical and molecular evolution have led to a better perception of the immensity of the problem of the origin of life on Earth rather than to its solution. At present all discussions on principal theories and experiments in the field either end in stalemate or in a confession of ignorance." Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 9-10, says, "With regard to the origin of life, the problem is much harder, since the option of natural selection as an explanation is not available. And the coming into existence of the genetic code – an arbitrary mapping of nucleotide sequences into amino acids, together with mechanisms that can read the code and carry out its instructions – seems particularly resistant to being revealed as probable given physical law alone."

⁵⁵Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 6-7.

generic) theism: “the existence of the rationality that we unmistakably experience – ranging from the laws of nature to our capacity for rational thought – cannot be explained if it does not have an ultimate ground, which can be nothing less than an infinite Mind.”⁵⁶ No less than Darwin himself struggled with this issue as reflected in his horrid doubt: “With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”⁵⁷ These two glaring declarations from such significant contributors to Darwinism demonstrate how problematic rationality is for the Darwinian worldview.

Ruse undeniably wrestles with this issue of rationality. He first admits that Darwinism provides no assurance that intelligence might evolve: “On the Darwinian picture, there is simply no guarantee that human or humanlike creatures – creatures with intelligence and a moral sense and so forth – would evolve. Indeed, the chances seem slim indeed.”⁵⁸ His admission reveals brutal honesty in that it weakens the case for Darwinism. Furthermore, Ruse concedes that minds consist of some non-material properties; this depiction of mind seems at odds with Darwinism in significant ways, since everything supposedly reduces to material substances, though Ruse says,

And I too see no reason at all why one should not be a Darwinian evolutionist and think that in some sense minds involve the non-material in some sort of way. Not a mysterious non-material substance akin to a life-force or vitalistic entelechy or *élan vital*, and certainly not necessarily a supernatural non-material substance, but more than just material physical objects.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Antony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese, *There is a God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 167.

⁵⁷Charles Darwin, “Letter to William Graham Down, 3 July 1881,” in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, 1887), 315-16.

⁵⁸Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, 84.

⁵⁹Michael Ruse, “Darwinism and Atheism: A Marriage Made in Heaven?” in *Science and the Spiritual Quest: New Essays by Leading Scientists*, ed. W. Mark Richardson et al. (New York: Routledge,

Ruse interestingly allows for a non-material substance, but, due to his Darwinism, rules out any hypothesis that this substance stems from the supernatural. The quote begs the question, exactly what kind of non-material substance is it? While many challenges emerge for a naturalistic grounding of rationality, intelligence, and mind, discussion and critique follows for only the most conspicuous problem.

The predominant problem stems from the nature of the evolutionary process, a process geared toward survival and reproduction: why would persons trust rational processes that are survival-conducive, not truth-conducive? Evolution may cause persons to believe certain things because they aid survival, but these beliefs may be patently false.⁶⁰ Alvin Plantinga focused on this topic in his article entitled, “An Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism,” and Ruse provides an accurate summary of it:

If naturalism is true, then we should be evolutionists. If we are evolutionists, then this must extend to our reasoning and cognitive powers. But, we know that evolution (especially Darwinian evolution) cares nothing for truth, only for survival and reproductive success. Hence, there is really no reason why our reasoning and cognitive powers should tell us the truth about the world – they just tell us what we need to believe to survive and reproduce, which information (although effective) could as easily be quite false. So everything we believe about evolution could be false, and if that is not a *reductio* of naturalism, nothing is! The only way out of this nasty little loop is to bring in something which guarantees real truth, which is precisely what you get with theism.⁶¹

Ruse then introduces a distinction which he feels undermines Plantinga’s argument.

2002), 151.

⁶⁰Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 161, says of this topic, “Can we trust our minds if we are nothing more than the products of naturalistic evolution trying to fight, feed, flee, and reproduce? Perhaps we have come to believe certain ideas – moral and non-moral – simply because they help us *survive* and not by virtue of their being *true*. Naturalistic moral realism suffers from the same defects found within the naturalistic philosophy of mind: although naturalism may offer some basis for *holding moral beliefs*, it furnishes no basis for claiming they are *true*. . . . Theism gives us no reason to be skeptical about our general capacity to think rationally, about the reliability of our sense perceptions, and about a general capacity to move towards the truth. Naturalism, on the other hand, does not inspire confidence in our belief-forming mechanisms.” Also Paul Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath & Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 154, says, “If our beliefs – moral or epistemic – are survival-enhancing by-products of Darwinistic evolution, why think that we actually have dignity, rights, and obligations – or that we are thinking rationally?”

⁶¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 295.

I think we need to make a division which Plantinga fudges: a division which has been shown crucial. . . . Recognizing that our senses can mislead or deceive us about the world, we must distinguish between the world as we can in some sense discover (common sense reality) and the world in some absolute sense (metaphysical reality): the tree in the forest which we know is there even though it is dark and rainy and we have had a few beers and are seeing double, and the tree in the forest when no one is around. Once this distinction is made, Plantinga's refutation of naturalism no longer seems threatening. . . . It is certainly the case that organisms are sometimes deceived about the world of appearances and that this includes humans being deceived. Sometimes we are systematically deceived, as instructors in elementary psychology classes delight in demonstrating. Moreover, evolution can often give good reasons why we are deceived. . . . The point rather is that the deceptions of natural selection, no less than the non-deceptions, work for good reasons. If there are no good reasons to suspect deception, then it should not be assumed.⁶²

This admission opens Ruse up to a new set of problems altogether. He concedes that evolution fools us some of the time, but how can we know it does not fool us at all times?

I reply that it may be the case that we will never know the whole story and may be mistaken about any detail, but that we cannot be mistaken about all of the details, all of the time. . . . We can never get beyond the world of common sense to the world of metaphysical reality to check the one against the other.⁶³

Ruse uses the very rationality that he says is susceptible to deception to propose his argument that we are not deceived at all times. Who knows but that his very rationality is deceiving him at this point? Drawing lines of distinction about when we are deceived and when we are not appear arbitrary if we only have access to our own rational minds. If the argument is convincing, its power only obtains by trusting our rationality, something undercut by this very argument.⁶⁴ If we cannot step into the world of metaphysical

⁶²Ibid., 295-96.

⁶³Ibid., 296.

⁶⁴Plantinga, "The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism," 1:331, says, "Naturalistic evolution gives its adherents a reason for doubting that our beliefs are mostly true; perhaps they are mostly mistaken. But then it won't help to *argue* that they cannot be mostly mistaken; for the very reason for mistrusting our cognitive faculties *generally*, will be a reason for mistrusting the faculties that produce belief in the goodness of the argument." Also Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1995, 63, says, "Little did I realize that in a few years I would encounter an idea – Darwin's idea – bearing an unmistakable likeness to universal acid: it eats through just about every traditional concept, and leaves in its wake a revolutionized world-view, with most of the old landmarks still recognizable, but transformed in fundamental ways." Mary Midgley, "Why Memes," in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Hilary Rose and Steve Rose (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 86, replies, "This is, however, evidently a selective acid, trained to eat only other people's views while leaving Dennett's own ambitious project untouched."

reality, then no good reason exists to trust our rationality at any time. Ruse's only available option for escaping this dilemma plunges him deeper into the problem of rationality. Persons are sometimes, but not always deceived, and they utilize the non-deceived instances to determine when they are, indeed, deceived.

Basically Plantinga's argument depends on the claim that evolutionary theory, Darwinian evolutionary theory centring on natural selection in particular, does not guarantee truth. At most, it guarantees that we can get through life successfully. But it is quite compatible with success that we are totally mistaken about everything, including evolutionary theory itself obviously. Hence, everything degenerates into paradox. Of course, we think that our senses and powers of reason as produced by natural selection lead us to the right order of things. But we would think that, wouldn't we?! . . . I doubt any Darwinian evolutionist is going to find this argument very convincing. Evolution just does not work that way. It is true that sometimes we are systematically deceived (or open to being deceived) by our biology. . . . But we only know about evolution's deceptions because we are not deceived all of the time – we use the non-deceived instances as touchstones to judge difficult or problematic cases.⁶⁵

Ruse's skepticism surfaces here, and his moral anti-realism eventually produces his belief that humans are deceived about an objective ground for morality. Darwinism in general supplies no ultimate place to truth in that the theory is geared toward survival. Ruse confesses that Darwinism cannot ground a correspondence theory of truth and concedes that he must settle for a coherence theory of truth. Though Ruse identifies this as an exercise in circular reasoning, he hopes that the circularity is not vicious.⁶⁶

Theism presents a much more robust explanation for rationality. Whereas naturalism produces no solid footing for reason and the explanations seem contrived,

⁶⁵Ruse, "Atheism, Naturalism, and Science," 237-38.

⁶⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 297, says, "One simply has to pull back from a correspondence theory of truth, and go with coherence at this point. . . . Plantinga knows these moves and argues against them. For him, coherence is circular, and a circular argument is still circular even if your premises take you all round the universe before you end up back here with the conclusion. Here, I will simply deny that the circularity of coherence is vicious." Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 80-81, says, "It is not possible to think, 'Reliance on my reason, including my reliance on *this very judgment*, is reasonable because it is consistent with its having an evolutionary explanation.' Therefore any evolutionary account of the place of reason presupposes reason's validity and cannot confirm it without circularity." Also Nancy R. Pearcey, "Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears: Evolution as a Total Worldview," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 61, says, "When ideas are reduced to survival strategies, thus ruling out the very possibility of objective truth, then the idea of Darwinian evolution itself can hardly be regarded as objectively true."

theism holds that our rationality stems from an ultimately rational God who created humans in his image with an innate ability to reason.⁶⁷ Darwinism allows no place for non-physical entities so any explanation of the mental is spurious; however, in theism a non-physical entity – God – exists and acts. Theism provides a place for the mental. The nature of God himself serves as the ground for rationality in the universe:

But God is also, crucially, an *intellectual* or *intellecting* being. He apprehends concepts, believes truth, has knowledge. In setting out to create human beings in his image, then, God set out to create *rational* creatures: creatures with reason or *ratio*; creatures that reflect his capacity to grasp concepts, entertain propositions, hold beliefs, envision ends, and act to accomplish them. . . . From this perspective it is easy enough to say what it is for our faculties to be working properly: they are working properly when they are working in the way they were intended to work by the being who designed and created both them and us.⁶⁸

Ruse illustrates the enormity of the problem in his somewhat facetious comment: “So let me conclude by praising a nonexistent God for the gift of rational thought. . . . There are times when I think that there might almost be something to it all, after all!”⁶⁹

Consciousness

The closely related phenomenon of consciousness presents another major impediment to the Darwinian worldview. While Darwinians may be tempted to downplay

⁶⁷Moreland, “The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism,” 41, says, “According to Christianity, God – the fundamental being – is rational and created his image-bearers with the mental equipment to exhibit rationality and be apt for truth gathering in their various environments. But rationality is an odd entity in a scientific naturalist world.”

⁶⁸Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197. Also Polkinghorne, “God and Physics,” 67, says, “In a word, one could say that physics explores a universe that is shot through with signs of mind. Thus the laws of physics seem to point beyond themselves, calling for an explanation of why they have this rational character.” Also Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75, says, “The problem then will be not how, if we engage in it, reason can be valid, but how, if it is universally valid we can engage in it. . . . Probably the most popular nonsubjectivist answer nowadays is an evolutionary naturalism: We can reason in these ways because it is a consequence of a more primitive capacity of belief formation that had survival value during the period when the human brain was evolving. This explanation has always seemed to me to be laughably inadequate. . . . The other well-known answer is the religious one: The universe is intelligible to us because it and our minds were made for each other.”

⁶⁹Michael Ruse, “Gaps in the Argument: A Discussion of Certain Aspects of Cosmology,” *Zygon* 45 (2010): 227.

the notion of consciousness, Ruse adamantly refuses to do so. He upholds the reality of consciousness and declares it an enormous problem for Darwinism:

The evolution of the brain and of consciousness is a massive problem and no one could pretend that Darwinians now have a full and canonical answer. But one thing should be emphasised: although Darwinians are seeking a natural explanation, this is not at the expense of denying or downgrading consciousness. No one is claiming that it does not exist or is not important. The very opposite in fact.⁷⁰

Ruse punctuates the importance of consciousness by recognizing that it is an indelible feature of human nature. Even though he believes it must in some way result from natural selection and emerges from the brain, he asserts that it possesses a biological standing of its own. Though this proposal invites accusations of a “just so” argument, it, nevertheless, fails to explain the reason for, and nature and purpose of, consciousness:

Consciousness gives us a power and flexibility not possessed by those who do not have it. None of this of course explains consciousness as such, the reason for and nature of ‘sentience,’ as we might call it. Why should a bunch of atoms have thinking ability? Why should I, even as I write now, be able to reflect on what I am doing, and why should you, even as you read now, be able to ponder my points, agreeing or disagreeing, with pleasure or with pain, deciding to refute me or deciding that I am just not worth the effort? No one, certainly not the Darwinian as such, seems to have any answer. . . . The point is that there is no scientific answer.⁷¹

Again, recall that Ruse, unlike many Darwinians, does not adhere to scientism.

Nevertheless, his admission is striking in that he believes science possesses the ability to provide answers for much of life; here he concedes that science gives no insight into the phenomenon of consciousness. While the confession may threaten his worldview, he recognizes that science provides no link to connect the physical to the mental, and any scientific explanation seems contrived or question-begging. One can easily explain the physical in terms of the physical, but to bridge the physical to the mental, or even explain

⁷⁰Michael Ruse, “Belief in God in a Darwinian Age,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 343. Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 35, says, “Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science. . . . If we take this problem seriously, and follow out its implications, it threatens to unravel the entire naturalistic world picture.”

⁷¹Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, 73.

the mental introduces an enormous challenge.⁷² Many Darwinians reduce all entities to the material or physical (though Ruse does not); however, consciousness is so radically different an entity that no obvious means arises to reduce consciousness to a merely physical phenomenon. In fact, the nature of consciousness is so different that Darwinians often use terms like “mysterious” or even “miraculous” to describe it.⁷³

Ruse admits that consciousness is a real, prevalent, and imperative aspect of human existence, but he cannot posit a scientific ground for consciousness. If this fact is indisputably true, then it would seem the next logical step is to examine one’s worldview

⁷²Ruse, *Science and Spirituality*, 140, says, “We can explain the physical in terms of the physical. The question is about explaining the mental. And while the dream work does at one level explain aspects about the mental, it does not explain why we have the mental or what the mental really is. Perhaps things will change down the road. But for now, the mental remains. I conclude, therefore, that although it may be possible that machines could think, a machine-based science of the mind leaves the hard question untouched.”

⁷³Charles Taliaferro, “Naturalism and the Mind,” in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2000), 133, says, “Some philosophers contend that the existence of consciousness is itself an entity, quality or relation of a very strange sort, a reality that seems utterly different from anything else in the universe. While the universe is fundamentally physical in its origin and constitution, consciousness seems so radically different that we are disposed to think of it as something deeply mysterious, perhaps even something non-physical. Given a general physicalist outlook, contemporary philosophers are reluctant to posit consciousness as some elusive, immaterial object. An overriding physicalist framework leads philosophers either to eliminate consciousness and the mental, lest these entities become untamed emergent items, or it leads philosophers to acknowledge consciousness and related mental states, but to treat these as physical.” Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness: Essays Towards a Resolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 10-11 asks, “How is it possible for conscious states to depend upon brain states? . . . How could the aggregation of millions of individually insentient neurons generate subjective awareness? We know that brains are the *de facto* causal basis of consciousness, but we have, it seems, no understanding whatever of how this can be so. It strikes us as miraculous, eerie, even faintly comic.” Also Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 30, says, “I should have found intellectual satisfaction in becoming a materialist, but on grounds almost identical with those of Descartes . . . I came to the conclusion that consciousness is an undeniable datum, and therefore pure materialism is impossible.” Also Geoffrey Madell, *Mind and Materialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 141, says, “the emergence of consciousness, then is a mystery, and one to which materialism signally fails to provide an answer.” Also Johnson, “Evolution as Dogma,” 35, says, “What is truly a miracle, in the pejorative sense of an event having no rational connection with what has gone before, is the emergence of a being with consciousness, free will, and a capacity to understand the laws of nature in a universe which in the beginning contained only matter in mindless motion.” Also Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, 73-74, says, “The point is that consciousness is real, whether or not it is a separate thing, and it is something that seems open to the forces of evolution. More we cannot and need not say. We have to take it as a given, as of course we (as Darwinians) take the physical world as a given. Wonderful, mysterious, familiar, all of those things and more: the unexplained starting point of our inquiry.”

commitments.⁷⁴ Consciousness from a Darwinian depiction is at least an awkward ad hoc addition; one directly accounts for consciousness in theism through the *imago dei* where humans are created in the image of the ultimate conscious Being. J. P. Moreland produced a theistic argument from consciousness; here is his deductive version of AC:

1. Genuinely nonphysical mental states exist.
2. There is an explanation for the existence of mental states.
3. Personal explanation is different from natural scientific explanation.
4. The explanation for the existence of mental states is either a personal or natural scientific explanation.
5. The explanation is not a natural scientific one.
6. Therefore, the explanation is a personal one.
7. If the explanation is person, then it is theistic.
8. Therefore, the explanation is theistic.⁷⁵

Theism grounds consciousness whereas no naturalistic justification exists; Darwinians recognize this obstacle as one of their great difficulties. Consciousness presents a powerful apologetic for the existence of God in the Christian worldview. In a world existing of conscious beings, consciousness is best explained as deriving from God, for “from consciousness, consciousness comes.”⁷⁶ Darwinism cannot explain consciousness, but it also most certainly cannot explain it away.

Design or Merely “As If” Designed?

Teleology also presents a difficult topic for Darwinism. Design is essentially contradictory to Darwinism, but design continually creeps back into the discussion. Darwinians disallow design as it implies a Designer, but they recognize the appearance of design throughout the cosmos. Design is a vast problem for those who believe “evolution

⁷⁴Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 96, says, “If a whole system of phenomena that are *prima facie* not among basic physical phenomena resists physical explanation, and especially if we do not even know where or how to begin, it would be time to reexamine one’s physicalist commitments.”

⁷⁵J. P. Moreland, “The Argument from Consciousness,” in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (New York: Routledge, 2003), 206. Naturalists critique his argument, but I do not discuss them. Moreland’s argument illustrates that theism provides a foundation for consciousness.

⁷⁶Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 147.

is a directionless process, going nowhere rather slowly.”⁷⁷ If evolution is undirected and non-purposive, why does the cosmos evidence signs of design? Ruse admits throughout his work that the world appears “as if” designed, though it is not, but most of us treat it as if it is designed because the evidence suggests this conclusion.⁷⁸ With such glaring evidence, what keeps Ruse and other Darwinians from admitting design in the universe that appears so obvious? The answer seems to be a prior commitment to Darwinism.

Darwinism does make it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist, or some such thing. I agree that before Darwin conceptually it was difficult to see how design could be explained naturally and that design certainly did need an explanation. I agree with Dawkins – and of course with Darwin and Paley – that the design-like nature of the organic world is a major problem standing in need of explanation. I agree incidentally that Hume saw this as an insuperable objection and this . . . is why he equivocated after providing so many devastating arguments against the teleological argument. . . . Darwin’s point in this debate seems to be that, although the world is indeed design-like, the mechanism of natural selection precludes any kind of God except in a distant sort of way.⁷⁹

Ruse explicitly admits that the universe does not appear to result from random processes but appears designed and moving toward some definite end. However, the Darwinian remains committed to the view that the apparently conspicuous design in the universe is the result of natural processes blindly acting without purpose.⁸⁰ Ruse and William Dembski debated this topic in *Intelligent Design: William A. Dembski & Michael Ruse in Dialogue*. Ruse does not dismiss out of hand the idea of a designer, but he believes it is a separate issue; he asserts that natural selection is the proximate cause of the appearance of design while the existence of an ultimate cause is a different topic. Furthermore, he believes that no need exists for intelligent design in that everything results from the

⁷⁷Michael Ruse, “Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible (And If It Is, Is It Well Taken)?” in *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, ed. Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele de Anna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

⁷⁸Ruse, “A Naturalist Moral Nonrealism Response,” 37, says, “I think that we see the world ‘as if’ designed and go from there. It is not designed – at least it is not designed as far as science is concerned – but we treat it as if it were.”

⁷⁹Ruse, “Darwinism and Atheism,” 147.

⁸⁰Ruse, “Belief in God in a Darwinian Age,” 335.

working of blind law. Ruse argues that from the scientific position no need persists to invoke non-natural causes. Their possible existence fails to concern him because science rules out their possibility. From the outset he bars any non-natural causes due to scientific reasons (which could lead one to assert that this position results not from a scientific, but a metaphysical, commitment).⁸¹

Ruse readily admits that he is not the first to prohibit non-natural causes for scientific reasons; he traces this lineage back to Darwin himself.

When Charles Darwin's American Christian friend Asa Gray suggested that the mutations on which selection works must be directed in some way, Darwin responded savagely that this took the whole discussion out of the range of science (Ruse 1979). That is also the problem with so-called intelligent-design (ID) theory. Its supporters want to bring God into the scientific process, and that is interventionism—which is a no-no.⁸²

Ruse believes that all such solutions devolve into God-of-the-gaps arguments, though one could maintain that throughout the scientific age, many scientists believed they were discovering aspects of the world God created. The main point remains that both Darwinians and theists make sense of the data from the confines of their own worldview and assume certain brute facts. For the Darwinian, no place exists for a Designing Agent so the “as if” designed appearance in the universe *must* have a naturalistic explanation. Ruse expresses contempt for Intelligent Design science, asserting that it is not science at all. However, invoking natural selection as a substitute, though unguided, “designer” reflects worldview commitments and not scientific observation. If the issue is over scientific evidence, no observable tests can be performed to prove natural selection accounts for design in the universe; in essence, Darwinians may promote “just so” stories

⁸¹See Dembski and Ruse, “Intelligent Design,” 12-43, for their full discussion on intelligent design. Also Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 11, says, “Whatever one may think about the possibility of a designer, the prevailing doctrine – that the appearance of life from dead matter and its evolution through accidental mutation and natural selection to its present forms has involved nothing but the operation of physical law – cannot be regarded as unassailable. It is an assumption governing the scientific project rather than a well-confirmed scientific hypothesis.”

⁸²Ruse, “Gaps in the Argument,” 224-25.

due to worldview commitments: the cosmos appears designed so it occurred through natural selection.⁸³ This, too, is unconvincing science. Only two options exist for the overwhelming appearance of design: blind, purposeless chance or an Intelligent Designer.

The Intelligent Design movement, led by Michael Behe, Philip Johnson, et. al., draws the ire of many Darwinians who castigate those who accept it as practitioners of non-science. Ruse condemns the theory on such grounds: “Plantinga’s idea of science includes so-called Intelligent Design Theory—the claim that some organic features are so irreducibly complex that they cannot be explained naturally and demand the intervention of a designer—and this idea has been firmly rejected by the conventional scientific community.”⁸⁴ The critical term in the quote is “conventional,” which seems to mean all who presume Darwinism to be true. If that is the case, then, logically, “conventional” scientists do reject ID; they have a metaphysical presupposition barring it from the outset.

A very brief discussion of ID includes the concept of irreducible complexity. Darwin himself said, “To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances . . . could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.”⁸⁵ To retain the illustration of the eye, science has since proved it is a highly complex entity and involves the entire visual system, including certain parts of the brain.

⁸³Dembski, “The Myths of Darwinism,” xxi-xxii. He adds that the reason naturalism continues to attract so much attention is that it offers a materialist creation account, which excludes religion and morality. Also Del Ratzsch, *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 68, says, “When a value is produced by a long, tricky, precarious process, when it is generated and preserved by some breathtaking complexity, when it is realized against all odds, then intent – even design – suddenly becomes a live and reasonable question.”

⁸⁴Michael Ruse, “Science and Religion Today,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 70 (2011): 168. However, Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 10, says, “Even though writers like Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer are motivated at least in part by their religious beliefs, the empirical arguments they offer against the likelihood that the origin of life and its evolutionary history can be fully explained by physics and chemistry are of great interest in themselves. . . . Even if one is not drawn to the alternative of an explanation by the actions of a designer, the problems that these iconoclasts pose for the orthodox scientific consensus should be taken seriously. They do not deserve the scorn with which they are commonly met. It is manifestly unfair.”

⁸⁵Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1999), 186.

Several of these organs had to develop together, and “it is hard to envisage a series of mutations which is such that each member of the series has adaptive value, is also a step on the way to the eye, and is such that the last member is an animal with such an eye.”⁸⁶

The co-development of so many disparate parts having no adaptive value seems to debunk natural selection as responsible for producing such designed elements.

Furthermore, Darwin states, “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case.”⁸⁷ At this point, Behe describes the cell as just such a complex organ. Science shows that the cell is of immense complexity, and gradual processes could produce almost none of the cell’s various parts.

Rather, like the comparatively simple machines of our everyday lives – mousetraps, ballpoint pens, electric lights and so forth – the machines of the cell contain separate components needed for them to work. I have termed this property “irreducible complexity,” and it is a severe practical barrier to Darwinian explanations of life. The problem is that such systems don’t work as the modern systems we have discovered do until they are pretty much all put together. So natural selection had little to select, or is struck selecting a property that has little or nothing to do with the final system.⁸⁸

Darwinians condemn his theory outright and offer many suggestions as to how natural selection resolves this problem. Ruse advocates that Darwinians do not believe all the parts have to be in place at once nor must each part be used for its original function. Currently existing material may be used for new purposes, and so the irreducible complexity argument fails to hold.⁸⁹ This deeply simplifies his argument, but it advances the main point: Darwinians heartily dispute ID, including irreducible complexity, because

⁸⁶Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash,” 690.

⁸⁷Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 189.

⁸⁸Michael Behe, “God and Evolution,” in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 84.

⁸⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 287.

the notion of design introduces the idea of a Designer, an illicit entity. However, ID arguments offer reasons to believe that design is a part of the universe and contests the idea that it only appears “as if” designed. Because this discussion could not be exhaustive, many important topics (e.g., fine-tuning) were eliminated. However, the issue of design is prominent in Ruse’s work, especially his belief in the non-progressive nature of evolution which deeply affects his view of morality. This brief exploration of the topic of design prepares for much of the discussion that follows.

Conclusion

This section serves two main purposes: to show that Darwinism faces many obstacles and is conspicuously not invincible⁹⁰ and to suggest that these obstacles relate to Ruse’s moral proposal. The areas just investigated are difficult components of Ruse’s Darwinian worldview, and out of this worldview comes his moral proposal. The next section provides discussion concerning the nature of evolution: progressive or non-progressive. Ruse argues that it cannot be progressive because that would imply ends, intimating design, and suggesting a Designer. All are barred in a Darwinian worldview. Eventually, this position (along with other issues) leads him to embrace a moral skepticism and reject moral objectivism. This stance of moral skepticism ultimately leads him to view any objective foundation for morality as an illusion.

One conclusion to draw from this brief study of the Darwinian worldview is that, if true, life can have no meaning. Darwinians often argue that meaning is somehow infused into the process at some point, but that explanation is ad hoc. Fundamentally, if design and a Designer vanish, then purpose and meaning also disappear. No less an ardent naturalist than Dawkins concedes that “nature is not cruel, only pitilessly

⁹⁰Dembski, “The Myths of Darwinism,” xvii, says, “Immodest ideas have a way of gathering mythologies, and Darwinism is no exception. Darwinism’s primary myth is the myth of invincibility; all of Darwinism’s other myths follow in this myth’s train.”

indifferent. This is one of the hardest lessons to learn. We cannot admit that things might be neither good nor evil, neither cruel nor kind, but simply callous – indifferent to all suffering, lacking all purpose.”⁹¹ Few people live as if life is meaningless, and the theistic worldview better grounds meaning than Darwinism. Certain “recalcitrant” facts about the world exist that are expected based on a theistic worldview but are doggedly resistant to Darwinian explanations. Areas such as consciousness, rationality, morality, free will, unified selves, and humans as valuable, dignified beings are some “recalcitrant” factors.⁹² The Darwinian has difficulty accounting for any, much less all, of these realities:

There is exactly one overriding question in contemporary philosophy. . . . How do we fit in? . . . How can we square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles?⁹³

In conclusion, good reason exists, even from the consilience paradigm that Ruse promotes as such good evidence for Darwinism, to seriously doubt the veracity of the Darwinian worldview. Challenges to the Darwinian worldview come from external competitors like Christianity; however, Darwinians find internal problems as well in accounting for the issues investigated above. Ruse accepts only a coherence theory of truth, rejecting a correspondence theory of truth, and this admission has real implications.

⁹¹Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 96. Also William Provine, “Scientists, Face It! Science and Religion are Incompatible,” *Scientist* 2 (1988): 10, says, “No purposive principles exist in nature. . . . No inherent moral or ethical laws exist, nor are there absolute guiding principles for human society. The universe cares nothing for us and we have no ultimate meaning in life.” Also Bruce Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than without It* (New York: Alpha Books, 2009), 17, says, “As an atheist, I accept what science says about the universe, but it unfortunately does not convey any meaning for my life. . . . It is true that we know more, but we understand less, from which we derive even less meaning.”

⁹²Moreland, “The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism,” 37-38.

⁹³John Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4-5. Also, J. J. C. Smart, “Laws of Nature and Cosmic Coincidences,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 276, “If the theist can show the atheist that postulating God actually reduces the complexity of one’s total world view, then the atheist should become a theist.”

Evolution: Progressive or Non-Progressive?

A monolithic Darwinism does not exist. This statement is not meant pejoratively as Christianity cannot make such a boast either. The observation recognizes that real debates exist between Darwinians, and the outcome of these debates greatly affect various components of their worldview. One of the most fundamental, but controversial, topics is the nature of evolution: is it progressive or not? Does it result in improvement? Is it going somewhere? Ruse believes one's verdict here results in significant implications, and he maintains that, whatever evolution may be, it certainly *cannot* be progressive. Ruse says that making a threefold division when discussing evolution proves helpful: the fact of evolution, the path of evolution, and the mechanism of evolution. By fact he means that all organisms result from natural causes from much simpler forms and ultimately from nonliving substances. By paths, or phylogenies, he means the tracks that lines of organisms took when they evolved. Finally, by mechanism he means the forces that produced the evolutionary process.⁹⁴ Ruse believes in the fact of evolution, and his mechanism is unquestionably natural selection. The debate over progress most directly relates to the second area of paths. Organisms appear to go from simple to complex; thus one may readily assume that evolution is progressive.

Ultimately a Darwinian's belief about progress shapes the rest of his worldview, including and especially, morality. If one believes that evolution moves toward an end and is improving, then it displays purpose. Ruse denies this position is true Darwinism for two reasons: it opens the door for design and a Designer,⁹⁵ and natural selection must be completely relativistic and purposeless.⁹⁶ The reason the debate is both so divided and so divisive is that the consequences of the Darwinian's position are

⁹⁴Ruse, *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?*, 12.

⁹⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 11, asks, to where is all this supposed progression leading?

⁹⁶Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?" *Zygon* 34 (1999): 449.

pervasive, affecting life at every level. In recent years, Stephen Jay Gould presented a scathing critique of Darwinians who promote progress in evolution, while E. O. Wilson, a Darwinian as prominent as Gould, endorses the idea that evolution represents an upward climb of progress. “Evolutionists, including Darwinian evolutionists, are badly split on the question of whether or not the path of evolution is progressive, from simple to complex, from the blob to the human.”⁹⁷

How did the idea of progress in evolution arise, and why does it continue to carry so much weight? Ruse suggests that organic evolution possesses no sign of genuine progress, the fossil record does not illustrate progress, and the very notion of progress is contrary to the Darwinian worldview. Yet he admits a “quasi-progress: microbe to man” that serves as the basis for the continued acceptance of this belief.⁹⁸ Even prior to Darwin, the notion of progress became very popular in that it served as something of a rival to Christianity. Progress was traditionally a philosophical teaching that human beings possessed the ability to raise themselves up contra Christianity which emphasized that it is only through God’s Providence that we ascend.⁹⁹ From the beginning of the debate, worldview presuppositions and implications loomed large.

The most prominent early proponent of progress in evolution was Herbert Spencer; in fact, Ruse refers to all progressionist thinking as “Spencerianism,” so far-reaching were his ideas. Spencer observed in all of nature a “law of progress” where complexity arose from simplicity.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*, 88. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 7, says, “One question is asked again and again about the course of evolution. Is it progressive? Do things, in some way, get better? This is hardly a silly question. Non-evolutionists were quite convinced that the fossil record shows progression. And evolutionists have usually allowed that . . . the record certainly seems this way. . . . Given only simplicity at the start of the fossil record and complexity evolving out of it, what more natural than to suppose that the simple is in some way ‘primitive’, and that the complex ‘advanced’?”

⁹⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 49.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 37.

Now, we propose in the first place to show, that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress. Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout. From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilization, we shall find that the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, is that in which Progress essentially consists.¹⁰¹

Ruse finds Spencer's view of the path and mechanism of evolution problematic, not belief in the fact of evolution itself. Spencer believed the path was simplicity developing into complexity all the way up to the pinnacle of human beings. However, his mechanism was not natural selection but a form of Lamarckism.¹⁰² Darwin's natural selection made evolution into a branching path whereas Lamarck was in the Chain of Being tradition wherein evolution brought about a direct climb in an upward path, from monad to man. Spencer took this notion of progress so far as to believe that the human race would eventually progress to a state of happy, peaceful, non-militaristic unity. Ruse assesses that Spencer arrived at this view based on his flawed pathway and read the upward development into, not out of, biology. Ultimately, his progressive view was bound to social ideas rather than the biological record.¹⁰³ Spencer's progressionist views were certainly *not* the minority opinion among early Darwinians; Darwin himself was a progressionist. Progress was the philosophy of his day, he was immersed in it, and it leaked into, "more precisely, flooded – into his science."¹⁰⁴

The debate over progress in Darwinian thinking clearly continues today. Two prominent Darwinians, E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins, serve as exemplars of progressionist thinking. Wilson and Ruse have co-authored books and articles, yet they

¹⁰¹Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," in *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1868), 1:3.

¹⁰²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 75.

¹⁰³Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 189-91.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 158.

deeply divide over this issue. Wilson believes: “Progress, then, is a property of the evolution of life as a whole by almost any conceivable intuitive standard, including the acquisition of goals and intentions in the behavior of animals.”¹⁰⁵ Ruse notes that even in Wilson’s greatest work *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Wilson confirms progress even through his chapter titles wherein micro-organisms come first and man appears last. Likewise, Dawkins argues for “the evolution of evolvability” where the process of evolution attains more power and ultimately leads to humans. Ruse must acknowledge that there exists no clear verdict among Darwinians on the role of progress in evolution.¹⁰⁶ So deeply imbedded is the idea of progress that Ruse uses “Progress” for talk of cultural progress and “progress” for biological notions. He recognizes that humans are certainly more complex than amoebas, but he rejects that this fact carries notions of “better.” Evolution simply does not allow that type of judgment.

Quite simply, there is absolutely no reason why a heterogeneous state should be considered morally better than a homogeneous state, or a complex state morally preferable to a simple one. In fact . . . scientists value and seek simplicity. This is what a consilience is all about, making unity and order out of the complex. Thus, at one level of value, a simple state is often preferred over a complex state, although admittedly this is more an aesthetical preference than any other.¹⁰⁷

Darwinians like Spencer, Wilson, and Dawkins all believe that evolution is purposive and moving to an end, even if it is non-guided. Ruse judges this contrary to the very nature of evolution; it simply cannot be ends-driven. The position that Progress results in an improved state reveals a metaphysical, perhaps even a theological, notion

¹⁰⁵Edward O. Wilson. *The Diversity of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 187.

¹⁰⁶Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?,” 449, says, “I do not pretend that ours is a unanimous opinion. Obviously, someone like Wilson not only believes in progress but believes that it can be justified and has written extensively on this matter. Likewise, ultra-Darwinians like Richard Dawkins, who has written eloquently that progress is something that is brought about through a notion that he calls “the evolution of evolvability,” argue that the processes of evolution get ever more powerful and fixed in a kind of ratchet process and that this has led ultimately to humans.”

¹⁰⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 77.

that is opposed to the biological conception of progress.¹⁰⁸ Ruse concludes that while the idea of progress has been eliminated in many ways from professional evolution, Darwinians remain divided over the issue of P/progress.¹⁰⁹ Yet, progress and evolution are often synonymous today. Ruse invokes three reasons why the idea of progress persists: (1) the anthropic principle where humans focus on self and man's knowledge seems limitless (2) science itself is believed to be progressive and (3) people are looking for more than just science in evolution; they want a way to explain life.¹¹⁰

Recall Ruse's quote, "evolution is a directionless process, going nowhere rather slowly." Ruse incontrovertibly believes that evolution is non-progressive. The following quote expresses this opinion, but it further illustrates the deep impact this position has on ethics: "Darwinism is the epitome of non-progressionism. Evolving organisms are simply not going anywhere. There is no higher or lower, better or worse, truer or falser."¹¹¹ Ruse's influences are non-progressives and the acknowledged consequence of their stance results in the disappearance of all metaethical foundations for morality. One early Darwinian influence of Ruse is George Gaylord Simpson who, though a progressionist in a certain sense, recognized that progress is something read into the record, not out of it. He acknowledged that no moral prescriptions could descend simply from the fact of evolution; Simpson, like Ruse, accepted that evolution provides no metaethical foundations.¹¹² Ruse also returns to Charles Darwin; he formerly admitted that Darwin accepted progress, but he also provides boundaries for Darwin's progress.

¹⁰⁸Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 19-21.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 484. Ruse further states, "Evolutionary thought is the child of Progress, and for its first hundred years was but a pseudo-science, supported and justified by its cultural content. Charles Darwin changed its standing. . . . But the price was the expulsion of progress, no small sum to people still firmly committed to Progress." Ibid., 526.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 537.

¹¹¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 149.

¹¹²Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn from the Past?," 445-46.

Darwin struggled with the idea, and, even though he affirmed it, was not exactly sure what he affirmed about progress. Nevertheless, Ruse says one thing is certain: Darwin did not promote a “unilinear, monad-to-man progressionism.”¹¹³ Finally, and most fully, Ruse identifies himself with David Hume in the areas of design and progress. Referring to Hume’s view of progress in evolution is anachronistic as he died long before the *Origin* was published; however, Hume rejected the idea of design and God as Designer, and Ruse’s views often stem from Hume’s work. Ruse believes that whereas Hume saw the problems with God as Designer but could not provide an alternative, Darwinism forever solved that difficulty.¹¹⁴

Thus, though the debate rages in Darwinian circles over progress, Ruse fully disavows progress in evolutionary theory as a truly Darwinian position. A Darwinian’s verdict on progress deeply impacts his ethical theory.

So let me make it absolutely clear: I am an ardent evolutionary ethicist. However, I reject absolutely the traditional justification offered by evolutionary ethicists, namely, the progressive nature of the evolutionary process. I am not sure whether in any meaningful sense one can talk about evolution as ‘progressive.’ Even if one can, though, I do not think that this can be a progress which leads us to increased moral value. As it happens, I value humans over (let us say) the AIDS virus, warthogs and even chimpanzees. But this valuation does not come from my understanding or acceptance of the Darwinian evolutionary process. Apart from anything else, the AIDS virus is more successful, from an evolutionary perspective, than the higher apes. My point simply is that whatever one means by success in this context, one can hardly mean “of greater moral worth.”¹¹⁵

Ruse illustrates that he values humans over any other organism, and a discussion soon ensues over whether he can do so consistently or arbitrarily. This position also carries implications for the notion of human dignity. Pertinent to the immediate discussion, however, Ruse believes progress to be a philosophical theory that overemphasizes human

¹¹³Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 147.

¹¹⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 30. Also Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 74, says, “I do think that I am writing very much in the spirit of David Hume. Hume was not an evolutionist, so I’m certainly going beyond his thinking. I am adding in the science of the nineteenth century, but in essence the very last thing I am arguing is that my position is all that radical.”

¹¹⁵Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 64-65.

beings and ignores the rest of the biological world. In fact, he asserts that evolution necessarily needed freeing from its progressionist shackles to develop into mature science. Progress limits its domain to human beings (where human beings are distinct from all other organisms), but biology is concerned about all organisms: plants, animals, viruses, and humans “whether last or least.”¹¹⁶

One can reasonably conclude that Ruse’s rejection of progress looms so large in his theory that it serves as a foundation to his beliefs on epistemology and ethics. He posits that the error most progressionists make is reading progress into the *fact* of evolution instead of disallowing progress based on the *path* or *mechanism* of evolution. He maintains that Darwinians must explain the universe’s apparent design by natural law acting blindly and in a non-purposive manner. Even though the cosmos’ apparent design-like features are abundant, they are due entirely to non-directed natural selection. He views progress and Darwinism as mutually exclusive positions beyond reconciliation.

In fact, we can now see that you cannot be a true Darwinian and a biological progressionist of any genuine kind whatsoever. The building blocks of evolution are functionally random, and the essentially non-directed nature of the process is in no way affected by selection gathering variations within groups. . . . Moreover, there is nothing in selection itself which encourages progressionism. What counts is reproduction, here and now and in the immediate future. If the simpler, less intelligent form can do it better – and it often can – then so be it. . . . Darwinism is antithetical to progressionism.¹¹⁷

Ruse is so deeply committed to his non-progressionist beliefs that he regards the phrase “Darwinian progressionist” as incoherent, denying that it represents true Darwinism. He recognizes that consequences arise in denying progress and accepting evolution as non-purposive, and he willingly accepts them. First, he understands that life possesses no true meaning. He says evolutionary progressionists are merely secular natural theologians who attempt to find meaning in life; Ruse squarely faces the only logical ends to his non-

¹¹⁶Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 38.

¹¹⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 19-20.

progressionist beliefs concerning evolution: the world is meaningless.¹¹⁸ The second consequence Ruse accepts is that his non-progressive stance so deeply impacts his moral theory as to make the metaethical foundations for morality disappear. Ruse traces the issue: if one believes in progress, then humans are naturally the pinnacle of evolution, the highest being in the chain. As a result, humans have evolved to cooperate with our fellow men, overcome our selfish genes, and unite in moral duties. The problem with this theory, as Ruse observes, is that these beliefs are not Darwinian. If natural selection is truly non-purposive, which, from a Darwinian's position it must be, then ideas like "higher" or "better" are disallowed. There just *is*. To endorse progress and value human beings just because of the fact of evolution ignores the path and mechanism of evolution, demanding an "ought" that natural selection is impotent to produce.¹¹⁹ Ruse is particularly aware of the is/ought problem in the history of naturalistic morality and refuses to avoid the issue. As a proper Humean, he diagnoses the downfall of traditional evolutionary ethics based on progress, deriving moral (ought) claims from the process of evolution which can deliver only descriptive (is) claims.

Thus Hume's law is violated in an unacceptable way. . . . If we are to take Darwin seriously, believing that somewhere evolution through natural selection impinges fruitfully on ethics, then we must start again. . . . Here in order to accommodate *value*, and our striving after it, we had to bring in an illegitimate sense of progress, something quite alien to Darwinism. In both cases we have been Spencerians, still thinking essentially in pre-Darwinian ways.¹²⁰

The Christian theist may reject in full Ruse's Darwinian worldview; the progressive Darwinian may completely disagree with his assessment of the nature of evolution. Both, however, may admire that he accepts the only logical conclusion of his non-progressive Darwinism in morality: metaethical foundations disappear, and he must espouse moral

¹¹⁸Ruse, "Interview by Gordy Slack," 138.

¹¹⁹Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 517.

¹²⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 101.

skepticism.¹²¹ Despite his courage to embrace these conclusions, many challenges emerge from his position. When all metaethical foundations disappear, difficult challenges occur in making morality obligatory. Ruse attempts to provide an alternative by arguing that morality appears objective even if it is merely an illusion put in place by natural selection to get humans to cooperate. This view will be critically assessed later in the dissertation; here, Ruse's critical assessment of traditional evolutionary ethics is examined.

Social Darwinism: Legitimate Evolutionary Ethics?

Social Darwinism engenders much criticism from opponents, revision from proponents, and outright rejection by many Darwinians. Ruse falls into the last camp. One may question which came first: Ruse envisioning the logical conclusion of social Darwinism and embracing non-progression in evolution or vice versa. Ultimately it does not matter. Ruse is adamantly non-progressive and just as adamant in rejecting Social Darwinism as legitimate Darwinian ethical theory. Furthermore, recall Ruse's three-fold division of evolution: fact, path, cause. Ruse suggests that Social Darwinians proposed their ethical theory based on the fact of evolution and misinterpreted the path and cause, and this error led to its horrific implications and ultimate demise. Because it violates the is/ought barrier, the fact of evolution alone cannot produce Darwinian ethical theory; instead, Ruse asserts that it must be grounded in the mechanism of evolution, nothing other than unguided natural selection. Social Darwinians who endorsed natural selection made a further mistake by assuming it led to progress and required human aid.¹²²

¹²¹Mark D. Linville, "A Moral Particularism Response," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 93-94, says, "Professor Ruse claims that his skeptical conclusions follow from the denial that evolution is 'progressive' in any way. I agree. Unguided evolution has no prevision of the ends that it achieves, including humanity. . . . Professor Ruse values people over penguins and pigs, but he does not suppose them to be of greater moral worth. . . . In order to speak of evolutionary progress in any meaningful sense one would require a teleology that has no place within Ruse's version of naturalism. The theist, on the other hand, offers a different reckoning of things. Theism – or something like theism – provides the metaphysical underpinnings that would support a robust version of moral realism."

¹²²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 84-87.

What is Social Darwinism and why all the fuss over it? Ruse defines the theory and illustrates why it is so dangerous:

This then leaves us with what I take to be the heart of Social Darwinism – a heart where it really is evolution which dictates and stands behind values. In life's struggles for existence, without active interference, some humans will succeed and others will fall by the wayside and probably die. The Social Darwinian claims that it is right and proper that this should happen. Furthermore, we ourselves should allow (perhaps aiding) such struggle to happen, because this is the way of nature. The end result justifies the means. All answers are to be found in the evolution of organisms, especially the evolution of humans.¹²³

One quickly ascertains the danger of Social Darwinism; morality devolves into survival of the fittest. Furthermore, the metaethical foundation of such a morality is progress, and if natural selection implies improvement, leading to morally and biologically superior beings, then humans are morally required to aid the process. Ruse insists on another way: he denies that evolution can even produce qualities like “better” or morally “superior.”¹²⁴ Before delving into that issue more fully, the gravity of survival-of-the-fittest ethical theory requires explanation. Richard Weikart wrote a fascinating book whose title alone demonstrates the dangerous depths to which Social Darwinism can sink: *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany*. He asked, “Did Hitler hijack Darwinism and hold it hostage to his own malevolent political philosophy, or did

¹²³Ibid., 82. Also, Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 237, says, “The Social Darwinists held that society should be run in accordance with the principle of the survival of the fittest. . . . They attempted to ground their recommendations in facts about evolution. Although it wasn't always spelt out, the rationale for a sink-or-swim society went something like this. Conflict and competition between individuals, groups, and nations produce progress. Therefore, if society is set up so that everyone competes against everyone else, the best competitors will prevail and there will be ongoing societal improvement. Because natural selection is inherently progressive (or so it was claimed), a sink-or-swim society would automatically and inevitably produce progress. . . . To remove this struggle would quash progress and foster degeneration. We therefore have a moral obligation not to interfere with the course of natural selection, or even have an active obligation to help the evolutionary process on its merry way.”

¹²⁴Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 96. Also, Michael Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Francisco Ayala and Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 305, says, “To a person, Social Darwinians – call them traditional evolutionary ethicists, if you prefer – are progressionists. They think that the course of evolution is upwards, from the bad or the non-moral to the good and the moral and the worthy of value. Hence, to keep this progress going is in itself a good thing.”

he merely climb on board and follow it to its destination?” While he allowed that no one single cause led to Hitler’s horrific acts, he did state, “No matter how crooked the road was from Darwin to Hitler, clearly Darwinism and eugenics smoothed the path for Nazi ideology, especially for the Nazi stress on expansion, war, racial struggle, and racial extermination.”¹²⁵ One issue upon which a theist and Darwinian agree is that any time Hitler is mentioned in the same sentence as one’s chosen ethical program, the system deserves evaluation. To conclude Weikart’s assessment: “In philosophical terms, Darwinism was a necessary, but not a sufficient, cause for Nazi ideology. But however logical or illogical the connections are between Darwinism and Nazism, historically the connections are there and they cannot be wished away.”¹²⁶ Many scholars connect the horrific consequences of Social Darwinism to one man in particular, Herbert Spencer, a thoroughgoing progressionist, due to the fact that survival-of-the-fittest ethical theory seems to logically entail an obligation to weed out the weak and help the strong.¹²⁷

Social Darwinism is patently false and morally reprehensible. Fellow Darwinians find a number of inherent problems. First, the theory violates the is/ought fallacy by deriving ought from is. Second, the possibility of ethics requires free will, but this theory is highly deterministic (an obstacle for all evolutionary ethics). Third, social policies arising from the foundation of Social Darwinism are clearly immoral.¹²⁸ Ruse

¹²⁵Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 6.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁷Paul Thompson, “Evolutionary Ethics: Its Origins and Contemporary Face,” *Zygon* 34 (1999): 477, says, “Far from promoting altruism, Spencer is regarded as the cruel advocate of ‘survival of the fittest,’ which justified the social abandonment of the poor and disabled (the unfit) and the introduction of programs to reduce their reproduction. Such programs included a rejection of welfare for the poor and disabled. This view of Spencer, however, is simplistic and inaccurate.”

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 473. Also Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 96-97, says, “Social Darwinism (and, so many concluded, any kind of evolutionary ethics) is wrong—not just mistaken but fundamentally misguided. Why? The answer was pinpointed by such philosophers as David Hume (in the eighteenth century) and G. E. Moore (in the twentieth century). Hume (1978) noted that you simply cannot go straight from talk of facts (like evolution) to talk of morals and obligations, from ‘is’ language to ‘ought’

does not shy away from the is/ought barrier; he quickly condemns fellow naturalists for failing to account for it and views Social Darwinians as guilty of breaking it. He accuses them of moving from the fact of evolution to the language of ought, improperly connecting the reality of natural selection with a moral responsibility to help it along. Ruse argues that once Darwinians understand this inaccurate and unseemly link, then Social Darwinism should collapse permanently.¹²⁹ The vast majority of Darwinians distance themselves from Social Darwinism, and Ruse announces that whatever his evolutionary ethics may be, they are certainly not Social Darwinism.¹³⁰

One can readily observe that an ethic of survival of the fittest is fundamentally misguided due to the immorality of its content. Ruse says that whatever survives and thrives must not be assumed to be morally superior; many venereal diseases thrive and resist extinction while the number of great apes dwindle. “Is gonorrhea really superior to the chimpanzee?”¹³¹ Furthermore, Ruse maintains that commonsense would cause one to naturally reject the system outright: “Morality does not consist in walking over the weak and the sick, the very young and the very old. Someone who tells you otherwise is an ethical cretin.”¹³² Ruse is absolutely correct here, and this comment receives no critique. The question remains whether any Darwinian ethic can avoid similar (not the same) accusations if natural selection’s “goal” is individual fitness, survival, and reproduction.

While Ruse finds many flaws with Social Darwinism, he primarily complains that it inaccurately represents genuine Darwinian ethics. Ruse desires that Darwinians take Darwinism seriously (hence *Taking Darwin Seriously*), and any ethical system built

language.”

¹²⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 87.

¹³⁰Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 55, says, “As it happens, although I do not think that the position I endorse is particularly new, it is certainly not identical with Social Darwinism.”

¹³¹Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 96.

¹³²*Ibid.*

on the foundation of progress is simply not Darwinian ethics. The metaethical claim of Social Darwinism is progress, but Darwinism likely cannot support progress or affirm that it even occurs.¹³³ When the metaethical notion of progress disappears, then so does a metaethical backbone for Darwinian ethics; one must either accept this consequence or propose new metaethical justification. However, when one disqualifies progress because natural selection is purposeless, it seems useless to infuse a purposive metaethical grounding for morality. The consequence results that there can be no ought, only is.

Ruse believes that for Darwinian ethics to be truly Darwinian they must possess a non-progressive foundation. Ruse discusses his absolute rejection of progress based on Darwinism, but he also admits the problematic consequence of such a negation:

Darwinism turns its back on biological progressionism, which is surely the keystone of any attempt to find values in nature, especially evolutionary nature. Progression says that things are getting better – certainly morally better and perhaps better in other senses as well. How can you possibly get values from something which says that the building blocks of nature are blind, random variations? . . . The point about values is that you are dealing with standards. You are talking about things on an absolute scale. Forget your feelings. Forget my feelings. Find out the truth. Is it right? Is it wrong? Is it good? Is it bad? Without progress, the search for morality vanishes. And Darwinism denies progress.¹³⁴

The search for morality vanishes. Ruse does not mean we are now in a moral free-for-all where anything goes. He firmly believes that substantive morality remains in place even when the metaethical foundations disappear. Natural selection is blind, purposeless, directionless, and “the mechanisms of evolution (notably natural selection) are relativistic, implying no direction at all, and this is confirmed when one looks at the history of life. For us, therefore, the whole metaethical foundation of traditional evolutionary ethics collapses under its rotten core.”¹³⁵ A deep divide exists between

¹³³Ruse, “Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible?,” 19. Also Ruse, “Belief in God in a Darwinian Age,” 339, says, “Interestingly, today there is much support amongst unimpeachably orthodox Darwinians (including those with little sympathy for religion) for a progressivist reading of evolutionary history, with selection playing a key role.”

¹³⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 93.

¹³⁵Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?,” 449.

progressives and non-progressives; Social Darwinians envision an upward climb in evolution from unworthy to worthy (“monad to man” in nineteenth-century terms). This progress serves as the foundation for morality and obligates humans against interfering with this progress and perhaps even helping it along.¹³⁶ However, biological progress is illegitimate for Darwinism, and the effects for morality are radical. Justification disappears and seems impossible to replace. In that case, morality is not a truthful account of what is good and right; the true Darwinian must accept the consequences of his system: morality is nothing more than an adaptation to aid fitness. No deep place for “truth” exists for Darwinian ethical claims; Darwinians retain only morality as an adaptation where natural selection produces an illusory metaethical justification.

It is argued that, in fact, there is much more to be said for Social Darwinism than many think. In respects, it could be and was an enlightened position to take; but it flounders on the matter of justification. Universally, the appeal is to progress—evolution is progressive and, hence, morally we should aid its success. I argue, however, that this progressive nature of evolution is far from obvious and, hence, traditional social Darwinism fails. There is another way to do things. This is to argue that the search for justification is mistaken. Ethics just is. It is an adaptation for humans living socially and has exactly the same status as other adaptations, like hands and teeth and genitalia. As such, ethics is something with no standing beyond what it is. However, if we all thought that this was so, we would stop being moral. So part of the experience of ethics is that it is more than it is. We think that it has an objective referent. In short, ethics is an illusion put in place by our genes to make us good social cooperators.¹³⁷

Ruse’s most disputatious ethical claim is that justification for morality is an illusion, but that this illusion is enough for genuine morality. This claim deserves assessment, but it must first be understood in terms of context. Apart from recognizing how Ruse arrived at his conclusion through his Darwinian worldview resists a complete understanding of his position. Only now can one offer a fair critical assessment of his moral system. Ruse’s

¹³⁶Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 63. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 78, says, “Thus, the unfettered success of the successful is taken to be a morally good thing. Analogously, the disastrous consequences of life for its losers is considered, at worst, a necessary evil and, at best, a healthy cleansing of the human species. And all is made right in the name of evolution, especially its present state and future prospects.”

¹³⁷Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” 297.

position causes him to endorse ethical skepticism and puts him in the difficult position of affirming normative morality apart from any true objective justification for it.

Conclusion: The Disappearance of Human Dignity

Ruse is right: evolution simply cannot be progressive based on a Darwinian worldview. One of naturalism's fundamental claims is that all organisms arose through natural processes and evolved by natural selection; in such a system of purposeless, valueless, blind processes, no place exists for judgments of "valuable" or "morally superior." While Ruse accepts this position, disturbing conclusions follow, including the most dangerous one that no place remains for human dignity. The conclusion of this chapter addresses what Ruse's non-progressive evolution means for human dignity.

The progressionist view toward value and morality says that

as we go higher and higher, things get better and better. The ultimate culmination is humankind, the very apex of the evolutionary process. It is the existence of humans which makes all worthwhile. Thus it follows naturally that, at the substantive level, morality must be directed towards the production and cherishing of these, the 'highest' kind of beings. It is progress which makes all possible and it is progress which confers all value.¹³⁸

Ruse bars both progress and metaethical justification. The conclusion obtains that nothing deserves judgments of superior or better, including human persons.

It is far from obvious either that natural selection promotes progress or that progress actually occurs, at least in any clear definable and quantifiable way. One can, of course, label humans as the pinnacle of being – I myself am inclined to do just this – but such an act is arbitrary, at least as applied to evolution. Why not label a dog the pinnacle of being or a buttercup? From a biological point of view, the AIDS virus is far more successful than the gorilla, but does anyone truly want to say that the former is superior in a moral or other value sense to the latter?¹³⁹

¹³⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 75. But Ruse, *Monad to Man*, 38, argues, "The main point to grasp right now is the most obvious. Whatever else we might find in the world of organisms, or rather in the domain of biology . . . we shall not find Progress. At least, we shall not find Progress in any direct or central way. The theory or philosophy of Progress is a theory or philosophy about human beings: about their achievements and capacities and hopes for improvement. Biology is all about organisms: plants, animals, fish, dogs, trees, viruses, and (whether last or least) humans. The sphere of Progress is part of the sphere of biology, but only part."

¹³⁹Ruse, "The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics," 306.

Ruse does not wish to replace humans as the pinnacle of organisms; he actually allows that humans occupy this position. However, he does not do so because he feels that it is right; Ruse admittedly values humans above all organisms through a purely arbitrary decision. He allows that from our own human vantage point, we confer special status upon ourselves, but this declaration is nothing more than an example of the naturalistic anthropocentric fable which upon Darwinism is false; human beings are not the crowning aspect of the cosmos. Further, part of Ruse's condemnation of progress in evolution stems from placing humans at the top of the upward climb, a notion Ruse labels illicit. Ruse does not contradict himself; he takes Darwin seriously. He is aware that the path of evolution allows no special status to humans among organisms.

If you take Darwin seriously – accepting evolution through natural selection and not merely some Spencerian bastard version of evolution – then the special status of *Homo sapiens* is gone for ever. Any powers we have are no more than those brought through the crucible of the evolutionary struggle and consequent reproductive success. It is true that, as a species, we are unique, with our own special combination of powers and abilities. But then, so also is *Drosophila melanogaster* (a species of fruit-fly).¹⁴⁰

Ruse acknowledges the logical consequence: "If you are prepared to accept a natural explanation of human origins, you just cannot deny that we are animals, and that we share a common origin with the rest of the organic world."¹⁴¹ Again, this conclusion is

¹⁴⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 104. Also Rosenberg, "Darwinism in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory," 314, says, "There is no reason to think that the survival of any particular social group, individual, or *Homo sapiens* in general for that matter, is intrinsically good or morally required. There is in a naturalistic worldview no scope for grounding such claims of intrinsic value." Also James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 171-72, says, "We may now draw the conclusion that the traditional supports for the idea of human dignity are gone. They have not survived the colossal shift of perspective brought about by Darwin's theory. . . . The doctrine of human dignity says that humans merit a level of moral concern wholly different from that accorded to mere animals; for this to be true, there would have to be some big, morally significant difference between them. Therefore, any adequate defence of human dignity would require some conception of human beings as radically different from other animals. But that is precisely what evolutionary theory calls into question. It makes us suspicious of any doctrine that sees large gaps of any sort between humans and all other creatures. This being so, a Darwinian may conclude that a successful defense of human dignity is most unlikely." Also Paul Copan, "Morality and Meaning without God: Another Failed Attempt, a Review Essay on Atheism, Morality and Meaning," *Philosophia Christi* 6 (2004): 299, says that Darwinism provides no foundation for human life being intrinsically valuable.

¹⁴¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 108. Also Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 5, says, "Human

the logical one, but Ruse refuses to live by it. He actually assigns higher value to humans, but he knowingly does so based not on what he reads out of evolution, but on what he reads into it. In other words, he *a priori* holds to the value of human beings, even if he knows Darwinism allows no such move.

Darwin and his theory forever changed the place of human dignity and the value of human life. If humans arise naturally from animals, no longer does a special place remain for human beings in the world. E. O. Wilson argues that beings which exhibit sociality and cooperation must be morally valuable, but Ruse disagrees that even beings that evidence sociality and cooperation possess greater value than other beings. “Most especially, even if humans more than most pursue the strategy, the science does not tell us to cherish humans above all others.”¹⁴² These statements reflect the belief that humans are not distinct from other organisms. However, many Darwinians go further and conclude from this premise that not even all human life is equally valuable.¹⁴³ A post-Darwinian world certainly cannot resolve, and appears to exacerbate, issues of debate concerning human dignity: the sanctity of human life, abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and infanticide. The result is no coincidence; Darwin’s theory cannot give justificatory ground to human dignity.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, arguments making the case that humans deserve a place of superiority among the organisms often results in charges of speciesism. When human dignity dissipates, the consequences are disturbing. Humans are

life will no longer be regarded with the kind of superstitious awe which it is accorded in traditional thought, and the lives of non-humans will no longer be a matter of indifference. This means that human life will, in a sense, be devalued, while the value granted to non-human life will be increased.”

¹⁴²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 97-99.

¹⁴³Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 16-17.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 75. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 86, says, “Tay-Sachs disease is caused by having a certain sort of gene homozygously. . . . Children with the disease develop at first in a normal manner. Then at six months they start to collapse into zombies, and die by the age of four . . . I see nothing immoral about detecting and aborting such children. In fact, I believe we have a positively moral obligation to do so.”

no longer intrinsically valuable but can only be considered instrumentally valuable. This ideology opens up disastrous implications, particularly for humans whose sociality and rationality are not as developed as others, or for those who are less healthy or educated than others. James Rachels illustrates the possibility of horrific implications:

Some unfortunate humans – perhaps because they have suffered brain damage – are not rational agents. What are we to say about them? The natural conclusion, according to the doctrine we are considering, would be that their status is that of mere animals. And perhaps we should go on to conclude that they may be used as non-human animals are used – perhaps as laboratory subjects, or as food? Of course, traditional moralists do not accept any such conclusion.¹⁴⁵

No, they do not. (Ruse, too, would outright reject and find Rachels' suggestion appalling. He does assign high value to humans, though he admits he does so arbitrarily and reads that judgment into his evolution, not out of it.)

Ruse demonstrates that Darwinians often do continue to treat humans as if they possess more value, even if it departs from the natural conclusions of Darwinism. This reality allows the theist to introduce the reason of the *imago dei* embedded in each person demonstrating the ontological value of human beings even apart from an epistemological understanding of why they are valuable. While Ruse correctly admits that retaining human dignity is purely arbitrary from a Darwinian vantage point, some Darwinians want to affirm human dignity but deny any grounding for it.

Indeed, humans are special in pretty much the way that theists themselves claim. . . . You don't need to add that humans were made in God's image or that we are His favorite species or anything religious. The reason we have moral duties is simply because of our special abilities that even atheists and agnostics can recognize.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 186. Also Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 15, says, "The thread knitting the chapter together is an important trend in moral thinking known as *the doctrine of human dignity*. This refers to the view that human life is infinitely valuable, whereas the lives of non-human animals have little value or even none at all. We'll see that the universal acid of Darwinism dissolves this ancient dogma, and that this in turn leads us to some unsettling conclusions. It suggests, for example, that the notion that human life is supremely valuable is a mere superstition; that there may be circumstances in which it is morally acceptable to take an innocent life; and that there may be circumstances in which it is completely *immoral* and unethical to keep a person alive."

¹⁴⁶Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 70.

This stance is fundamentally misguided and represents a limping between two positions. One must either admit that human dignity finds no authentic home in Darwinism or accept that one affirms it arbitrarily or presuppositionally. Christian theists possess a much firmer, direct, and non-arbitrary grounding for human dignity through the *imago dei*. “The best, perhaps only way to justify the belief that all humans have equal, direct moral standing, equal and unique, high, intrinsic value simply as such is in light of the metaphysical grounding of the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the image of God.”¹⁴⁷ Such a foundation is not ad hoc; our goodness as persons is grounded in the personhood of God. God, in whose image humans are created, is a personal being, thus “*human* personal dignity, though intrinsic, is derivative.”¹⁴⁸ Christian theism provides an obvious ground for human dignity whereas Darwinians typically deny human dignity outright or hold to it arbitrarily. In terms of ethical theory, Darwinians face an immense obstacle from the outset in that they are formulating moral norms for the human person, a person who, based on such a worldview, is not necessarily worthy of values, rights, and altruism.

This chapter presents an outline of aspects of Michael Ruse’s Darwinian worldview and depicts some challenges to Darwinism as a whole. Furthermore, the chapter describes links between Ruse’s conception of the world and his ethical theory, and Ruse’s moral construction demonstrates an inseparable connection to his Darwinian worldview. First, his worldview disallows any consent to design in that he rejects a Designer based on a priori worldview presuppositions. Second, since there are no ends or

¹⁴⁷Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, 159. Also Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 197, acknowledges from a naturalist’s viewpoint that Darwinism struggles to affirm human dignity: “The big issue in all this is the value of human life. Darwin’s early readers . . . worried that, if they were to abandon the traditional conception of humans as exalted beings, they could no longer justify the traditional belief in the value of human life. They were right to see this as a serious problem. The difficulty is that Darwinism leaves us with fewer resources from which to construct an account of the value of life.”

¹⁴⁸Mark D. Linville, “Moral Particularism,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 157-58. Also Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 160, says, “Without *personhood*, there would be no moral properties instantiated. Thus God is necessary to ground the instantiation of moral properties.”

goals within his worldview, evolution certainly cannot be progressive but is a directionless, purposeless process. Therefore, traditional evolutionary ethics like Social Darwinism are inaccurate depictions of Darwinian morality since they rest on the metaethical justification of progress in evolution. Thus, Ruse must forge a new way, and he argues that because evolution is non-progressive, no metaethical justification for morality remains. The non-progressive nature of Ruse's worldview underlies his morality and leads him to embrace moral anti-realism, eventually causing him to propose the appearance of objective morality but with the distinctive caveat that it is merely illusory.

CHAPTER 2

THE MORAL ANTIREALISM OF MICHAEL RUSE

Michael Ruse is a moral antirealist; more precisely, he is an ethical skeptic. The main purpose of this chapter is to discover the reason(s) for his moral skepticism and then critically assess his position. In one sense, Ruse's skepticism is straightforward: he rejects all notions of progress and, consequently, denies that any metaethical foundations for morality exist. This lack of metaethical justification for morality presents serious obstacles to the idea that morality remains obligatory, yet Ruse never denies and explicitly affirms throughout his writing that morality contains a sense of obligation. However, a Darwinian scheme for morality precludes a true ontological ground for objective morality and, thus, genuine obligation. Ruse endorses moral skepticism as the consequence of his evolutionary beliefs. However, Ruse's program is more complicated in terms of his skepticism and deserves more detailed discussion and analysis.

The Challenge of Morality for Darwinism

A prior discussion of the problem of morality for Darwinism in general prepares the way for an examination of the details of Ruse's skepticism. When one thinks of the mechanism of natural selection that promotes individual fitness (survival and reproduction), the suggestion of "other-care" and self-sacrifice involved in morality seems counterintuitive from the outset. Social Darwinism, the ethical theory Ruse rejects because of its progressive foundation, reflects the horrific consequences that result from traditional evolutionary ethics: (in the weak sense) members of society should stand idly by as the weak suffer or (in the strong sense) may be morally required to aid the

destruction of the weak. This “ethic” is deeply unsatisfying and outright false. However, proponents of Darwinism struggle to proffer a satisfying ethical theory, because, in a system of survival and reproduction, why be moral and risk one’s own fitness?

Ruse accepts the challenge and actually delights in proposing ethical theory from a Darwinian scheme. He often refers to John Rawls and his “justice as fairness” philosophy as a model for substantival ethics. He applauds Rawls’ scheme because it maximizes liberty and freedom and distributes rewards to the maximum benefit of all. He argues that the scheme meshes well with evolutionary theory in that it shows how right actions result from people who “naturally” look out for self. “In both cases the answer is found in a form of enlightened self-interest. We behave morally because, ultimately, there is more in it for us than if we do not.”¹ This statement reflects a genuine Darwinian moral position but also admits its major problem: Darwinian morality must entail self-interest to be genuinely Darwinian. The charge that follows is that morality is only pseudo-morality, and that response is surely unsatisfying to Darwinians; however, they confront major obstacles in attempts to elude it. A system of blind, purposeless chance faces innate difficulty in grounding notions such as meaning and morality.²

Consequently, one may assume that a system devoid of purpose and meaning permits no place for morality. Evolution is geared toward survival and reproduction; thus, what is moral should be self-interest and self-preservation. To the question, “Why should I be moral?” a Darwinian finds no easy answers:

Different answers have been given to the question, but the two most prominent have the egoistic and theistic replies. Naturalism cannot give a satisfying answer to the question, and the most fitting naturalist response is the egoist one. Roughly, the egoistic response says that one ought to be moral just in case it is in one’s best interests to be so. But this answer is inadequate because it really says that one should fake caring about morality as long as such faking pays off; otherwise, one

¹Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” *Zygon* 21 (1986): 101.

²Gregory R. Peterson, “A Hard Problem Indeed,” *Zygon* 44 (2009): 19, concedes that “finding meaning in a natural universe *is* a really hard problem.”

should just set morality aside when that pays off.³

Few Darwinians accept that genuine morality comprises faking care for others. Probably the majority of Darwinians seek to be genuinely moral; however, while they possess an epistemological awareness of genuine morality, they face unique challenges in locating an ontological ground for morality. Some impediments to morality on a naturalistic scheme are: a correspondence theory of truth, the nature of obligation, the idea of matter producing morality, and the place of human dignity.

First, Darwinians who write on ethical theory generally concede that their system prohibits the concepts of a correspondence theory of truth or objective goodness. These areas of epistemology and ethics must be accounted for in one's system, and Ruse invests a great deal of time in both. The issue here is whether a Darwinian moral proposal is genuinely true and corresponds to reality. A "correspondence theory of truth says that a proposition . . . is true just in case it corresponds to reality, when what it asserts to be the case is the case."⁴ Most pertinent to this discussion, can Darwinism supply a theory of morality that corresponds to reality, grounding and justifying morality in a satisfactory fashion. Whereas Christianity provides a direct ontological grounding for the good in God's nature, Darwinism evokes no easy solution. The search for causal sources of morality continue, and guesswork abounds:

We know that evolution occurred, that it was Darwinian in nature, and that humans are part of the natural order. Therefore, in something as important to us as our morality, there is a strong presumption that natural selection will have had a causal

³J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 156. Also Peter Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 478, says, "Much as we regret it, most human beings lack a general feeling of benevolence for the strangers we pass in the street. . . . There is no evolutionary advantage in concern for others simply because they are members of our species."

⁴J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135. Moreland and Craig also describe a coherence theory: "a belief . . . is true if and only if it coheres well with the entire set of one's beliefs, assuming that the set is itself a strongly coherent one. Thus the truth or falsity of a belief is not a matter of its match with a real, external world. Rather, it is a function of the belief's relationship with other beliefs within one's web of beliefs." *Ibid.*, 142.

influence. Such a presumption may ultimately prove wrong. I doubt anyone expects a definitive case.⁵

Ruse here presumes a satisfactory answer that is actually up for debate, but his belief that natural selection must have had a causal influence reiterates the problem: natural selection is survival-conducive, not truth-conducive. Because of the nature of natural selection, even if one assumes philosophical naturalism, the fact that people possess certain moral beliefs is epistemically independent of the grounds or reasons that those beliefs are true.⁶ An apparently universal human feature is to make judgments about right and wrong, good and bad. However, standards for making these judgments are not readily evident in a Darwinian system as moral valuations report non-natural facts.⁷ One reasonably doubts the morality of a system geared toward fitness, not truth.

Another problematic tenet of Darwinian moral theory is the belief that only

⁵Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1998), 224.

⁶Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, 157. Even Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 181-82, says, "Relativists and pragmatists believe that truth is just a matter of consensus. I think it is clear, however, that while consensus among like minds may be the final arbiter of truth, it cannot *constitute* it." His source for absolute truth is, "Respect for *diversity* in our ethical views is, at best, an intellectual holding pattern until more of the facts are in."

⁷Alex Rosenberg, "Darwinism in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 311, says, "Taken together, the ubiquitous human practices of making judgements of right and wrong, declaring moral goodness and badness, imposing standards of fairness and justice, attributing moral duties and responsibility, and according autonomy to other humans constitute one of the most difficult challenges to naturalism. The problem is that the truth or falsehood of statements expressing these judgements, standards and assumptions does not appear to depend on facts accessible to scientific discovery. These statements appear to report non-natural facts, which are not amenable to evidential support by the employment of scientific methods, and cannot be accommodated within a naturalistic metaphysics." Also Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism," in *Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 58, says, "Darwin's account of the origins of human morality is at once elegant, ingenious, and woefully inadequate. In particular, that account, on its standard interpretation, does not *explain* morality but, rather, explains it *away*. We learn from Darwin not how there could *be* objective moral facts but how we could have come to *believe*, perhaps erroneously, that there are. Further, the naturalist, who does not believe that there is such a personal being as God, is in principle committed to Darwinism, including a Darwinian account of the basic contours of human moral psychology. I'll use the term *evolutionary naturalism* to refer to this combination of naturalism and Darwinism. And so the naturalist is saddled with a view that explains morality away. Whatever reason we have for believing in moral facts is also a reason for thinking naturalism is false."

material objects exist. If the universe consists of only natural properties, and if morality appears to be a non-natural phenomenon, then the existence of morality constitutes a major hurdle. J. L. Mackie's famous rebuttal to the existence of moral properties expresses that they are odd and unlike physical objects, "objective intrinsically prescriptive features, supervening upon natural ones, constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."⁸ Mackie regards the existence of God as far more unlikely so he rejects the obligatory nature of morality. He argues that moral entities appear alien in a world of purely physical properties:

This has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. These points were recognized by Moore when he spoke of non-natural qualities, and by the intuitionists in their talk about a 'faculty of moral intuition.'⁹

One may attempt to solve the problem by asserting that our moral faculties must have evolved from a biological, genetic base; in other words, morality is indeed a natural property.¹⁰ However, this most direct Darwinian solution produces great difficulties. First, scientific evidence does not suggest that the universal existence of morality results

⁸J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115.

⁹J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 111. However, Singer, "Ethics and Intuition, 479, says, "Morality is a natural phenomenon. No myths are required to explain its existence." Also Paul Copan, "Morality and Meaning without God: Another Failed Attempt, a Review Essay on Atheism, Morality and Meaning," *Philosophia Christi* 6 (2004): 298, says that Michael Martin believes that objective moral values could be made up of matter, but Copan was quick to state that no publisher of scientific textbooks would print such a belief.

¹⁰Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Fulfillment* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 16, says that our moral sense must be genetic because of the evidence that the vast majority of people possess a moral sense. However, this is nothing more than a "just so" argument and provides nothing in terms of evidence for the genetic basis of morality. Also Peter Singer and Marc Hauser, "Why Morality Doesn't Need Religion," in *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists*, ed. Russell Blackford and Udo Schuklenk (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 2009, 290, estimate that "consistent with the facts of biology and geology . . . we have evolved, over millions of years, a moral faculty that generates intuitions about right and wrong."

from unguided natural selection; at best, it is merely a worldview presupposition. Second, moral values and obligations could not be very deep in a world consisting of only energy, matter, natural laws, and chance. The evolved moral values would exist only at a superficial level and as a surface phenomenon.¹¹ Ruse agrees that morality cannot be explained by purely physical process.¹² In rejecting this explanation, he seeks to forge a new way and cautions fellow Darwinians with Dawkins' previously stated reminder of the amoral nature of natural selection: "nature is not cruel, only pitilessly indifferent. This is one of the hardest lessons to learn. We cannot admit that things might be neither good nor evil, neither cruel nor kind, but simply callous – indifferent to all suffering, lacking all purpose."¹³

The nature of obligation presents one of the most formidable problems a Darwinian moralist encounters, and much of Ruse's system, including his prominent feature of the illusion of objectivity, attempts to resolve it. In fact, his ethical skepticism

¹¹George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 491. Also Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 97-98, says, "The problem of the place of value in the natural world includes but goes beyond the problems of the place of consciousness and of cognition in general, because it has to do specifically with the practical domain – the control and assessment of conduct. It is clear that the existence of value and our response to it depend on consciousness and cognition, since so much of what is valuable consists in or involves conscious experience, and the appropriate responses to what is good and bad, right and wrong, depend on the cognitive recognition of the things that give us reasons for and against. . . . I believe that value presents a further problem for scientific naturalism. Even against the background of a world view in which consciousness and cognition are somehow given a place in the natural order, value is something in addition, and it has consequences that are comparably pervasive." Also Bruce Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than without It* (New York: Alpha Books, 2009), 40-41, says, "In fact, allowing science to determine ethics may lead to some very disappointing consequences. With no transcendent and objective claim to moral standards, scientific materialism has no claim to the moral high ground. Imagine the moral philosophy that might naturally flow out of such images as selfish genes, survival of the strongest and smartest, and the view that humans are a dispensable offshoot of blind evolutionary processes, not the pinnacle of anything. How Sam Harris or Richard Dawkins can believe that from reason and science alone we can derive truly humanistic values escapes me."

¹²Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133, says, "What is relevant is that morality cannot be derived from the physical facts of the matter."

¹³Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 96.

and resulting illusion of objectivity result from accounting for the universal feeling that morality is binding. Christian theism holds to the straightforward idea that humans are created in God's image with certain obligations flowing from our Creator. However, Darwinism produces no simple or direct reason for obligation, and Darwinians must produce some ground for it. Even if one allows that morality exists in a purely physical world because cooperating with others may enhance personal fitness, moral obligations seem absurd in that morality is not always in one's best interests.¹⁴ Furthermore, if morality is part of a purely material universe, questions of when, why, and how obligation arose (and to whom are we obligated?) are particularly difficult to answer.¹⁵ This issue occupies a prominent theme throughout the remainder of the chapter so no more time will be allocated to it here; it is sufficient to state that the existence of moral obligation presents one of the most conspicuous impediments to Darwinian morality.

Because the problem of human dignity was discussed in the previous chapter, no time will be spent here arguing that it presents a problem for Darwinian morality. However, this issue continues to reappear throughout any critique of Darwinian ethics. The problems for morality based on a Darwinian worldview are numerous. A Darwinian may ultimately have to settle for the notion that morality must ultimately enhance

¹⁴Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," 488-89.

¹⁵Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (New York: Routledge, 2003), 153, says, "Did human dignity and moral obligation just emerge through the course of naturalistic evolution? I suggest that the answer is no. Rather, it is *theism* that furnishes the metaphysical resources to make sense of the instantiation of moral properties in the form of objective moral values, human dignity, human rights, and obligations. Theism actually offers us a more suitable environment and thus a more plausible explanation for the existence of objective moral values (i.e. the instantiation of moral properties)." Also Richard Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," *Biology and Philosophy* 15 (2000): 714-15, says, "Desires, after all, are unreliable things: after a long day, a parent might not particularly *want* to care for the children, and this is where a sense of *requirement* kicks in. Since the desire is absent – since the long-term satisfactions of child-rearing are being under-appreciated due to distraction, weakness of will, or simple exhaustion – it is important that the requirement is not conceived of in hypothetical terms." Also Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207, says, "Among evolutionary biologists, however, the important question is not why people sometimes fail to help, but rather why people (and other animals) *ever* help one another."

individual fitness for his system to cohere. In fact, Ruse often seems to speak in these very terms: “Often one can get more out of life by cooperating rather than by fighting. . . . Two rivals might well do much better by deciding to share the booty than fighting over it. There’s probably enough for both of them, and by sharing there is no risk of losing a battle and thus incurring physical harm.”¹⁶ Ruse offers much more sophisticated reasoning for obligation and other-care, but a significant position of self-benefit persists throughout his writings. The problems of truth, morality in a physical world, obligation, and human dignity challenge a Darwinian ethical system. These problems are foreign to the Christian position wherein the ontological ground is the character of God, from which humans derive their moral sense through the *imago dei*.¹⁷

The Vocabulary of the Discussion

Ruse distinguishes between substantive ethics and metaethics. The former contains prescriptions about what one ought to do, or the content of morality, and the latter presents justification for these norms of conduct, or the basis for one’s moral claims.¹⁸ Ruse asserts that people generally agree about the norms of conduct but disagree over metaethics. His metaethical stance is his most controversial aspect and occupies the bulk of his attention. He adopts the position of ethical skepticism or an interchangeable term: moral antirealism. The following discussion defines some positions and terms used in metaethics and distinguishes between realism and antirealism.

¹⁶Michael Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 58.

¹⁷Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 2, says, “The difference between the religious person and the secular is that devout Christians . . . are able to derive the values of their lives from the highest source that humans can conceive: the transcendentally good, eternal, and omnipotent.”

¹⁸Michael Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 489. Also James Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001), iii, says, “metaethical theories – try to explain where morality comes from and what psychologically takes place when we make moral judgments.”

Cognitivism posits that “moral statements make truth claims because they are indicative statements that convey descriptive factual information: the statement ‘x is right’ can be either true or false.”¹⁹ However, non-cognitivism “denies that moral statements . . . are indicative statements that can be either true or false.”²⁰ The majority of Darwinian metaethical theories endorse a non-cognitivist position, presuming that moral judgments are not true or false reports about the world.²¹ One non-cognitivist ethical theory is emotivism where moral claims merely express feelings of emotions. Clearly, no justification for a moral statement is possible because one cannot justify an emotional expression; it is neither true nor false.²² Thus a statement like, “‘X is right,’ really means ‘Hurrah for x!’ Statements like ‘X is wrong’ really mean ‘Ugh! x!’”²³ Emotivism rules out objective right and wrong and dismisses obligation. One can argue that non-cognitive ethical theories diminish genuine morality. Two objections to non-cognitivist positions are: moral judgments can and do occur in the absence of emotions or commands, and positions like emotivism and imperativism deny the need for and reality of moral education. Non-cognitivist proponents of emotivism and imperativism cannot account for moral disagreements as no objective right and wrong exists within their positions.²⁴

Objectivist theories regard moral statements as statements of fact and are either true or false. Objectivism holds that no subjective state of an agent determines right and wrong, but moral truths exist independently and objectively.²⁵ Moral norms are not

¹⁹Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 400.

²⁰Ibid., 398.

²¹Rosenberg, “Darwinism in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory,” 316.

²²Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 396.

²³Ibid., 398. Also Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 227, says, “According to the theory of **emotivism**, the fundamental meaning of moral utterances is that they express our feelings.”

²⁴Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 398.

²⁵Ibid., 400.

determined by the whims of humans at either an individual or group level, nor are they invented. Rather, they are discovered; they exist “out there” in some sense. Ruse himself acknowledges the powerful feeling that objective moral norms exist independently of human emotions.²⁶ Proponents of objectivism suppose that an absolute sense of moral norms exist, and they do so for at least a couple of reasons. First, the objective sense of moral values are such that people discover them, they do not invent them. Second, these moral values and principles are universalizable; they are binding on all people at all times. “In sum, the second view of a moral absolute implies that it is a true, universally valid and exceptionless principle binding on all people at all times in circumstances similar in a morally relevant way.”²⁷ One can directly ground objectivism in a theistic model where God, a morally excellent and worship-worthy Being, serves as the metaphysical basis for human dignity and rights. However, Darwinism does not lend itself to an objective moral position, and Darwinians rarely endorse objectivism.²⁸ Many Darwinians deny the supernatural, and objectivist positions generally rely on supernatural grounding. Thus, Darwinians generally deny objectively grounded standards because these do not arise unforced in a naturalistic, impersonal, chance scheme.²⁹ Difficult

²⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 214.

²⁷Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 416-18. Also Paul Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath & Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 143, says, “Basic moral principles are *discovered*, not *invented*.” Also Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “Introduction: The Many Moral Realisms,” in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 19, says, “Objectivists hold that the appropriate truth-conditions make no reference to anyone’s subjective states.”

²⁸Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 142, says, “A moral universe and human dignity are best explained in the context of a morally excellent, worship-worthy Being as their metaphysical foundation. . . . If objective moral values and human dignity and rights are a reality (and there is very good reason to think they are), then it is extremely likely that some intrinsically valuable Being and Creator exists.”

²⁹Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 168, says, “Ontologically, then, objective moral values would not exist if God did not. But if they exist, then we have a very good reason to think God exists.” However John Collier and Michael Stingl, “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality,” *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 47, say, “We propose an objective and justifiable ethics that is contingent

scenarios follow for those who deny objectivity at the meta-ethical level, including whether to embrace moral norms and prescriptions while realizing that no justification can be provided for such beliefs or to deny what seems intuitively true, that motivations and actions are generally judged either right or wrong, not as mere sentiment or feeling.

How, then, do we know that our moral beliefs are objectively true? More to the point, how do we know that *any* moral beliefs are objectively true? The verdict . . . is that we *don't* know that they're true, and that in fact they're not. In the final analysis, there is no such thing as right or wrong. This does not imply, however, that we can or should dispense with morality.³⁰

But why not? This “solution” raises more questions than it answers. When moral beliefs are *not* true and are *not* right or wrong, why *not* dispense with morality? Darwinians work hard to answer that question, and the primary solution is some form of subjectivism.

Subjectivism is the position where moral statements reveal the subjective position of the speaker and make no claims concerning objective morality. Individual subjectivism holds that moral statements present the psychological state of the speaker. In broad terms, one may compare objectivism with absolutism and subjectivism with relativism, though a subjectivist like Ruse strenuously rejects the label of relativist.

Subjectivism contains significant challenges as a metaethical theory.

The main reason is that they make moral statements into nonmoral statements. The statement “x is right” appears to be a moral statement that makes a normative claim about right and wrong, and it implies a statement about what one ought to do. But the psychological and sociological translations of this statement, “I like x” . . . make no normative claims whatever. They assert what people happen to like. So they do not translate moral statements; they transform them inappropriately into nonmoral statements.³¹

on the truth of evolutionary theory.” However Gary R. Habermas, “The Plight of the New Atheism, A Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51 (2008): 822, says, “In discussions of ethical theory, one will almost never find philosophical atheists who argue for absolute ethical standards. The chief reason they deny intrinsically grounded, absolute ethical standards seems to be rather obvious: objective moral standards cannot be expected to result from an atheistic, evolutionary system grounded in the impersonal principles of the improbable but chance development of life. . . . But on atheism, no ethical principle is intrinsically right or wrong, and morality is not objective.”

³⁰Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 17.

³¹Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 400.

This quote alludes to G. E. Moore's naturalistic fallacy, a thorny issue for Darwinian ethics which basically states that a non-natural property like "good" cannot apply to natural states. (Many Darwinian moral theories succumb to this fallacy, and it will be examined below; Ruse pays careful attention to it). Subjectivism is a popular Darwinian position, and Ruse endorses it with an explicit caveat. Ruse claims to be a subjectivist of a distinct kind, and his condition is the focus of this and the following chapter. This introduction differentiates between a general objectivism and a general subjectivism.

What separates objectivist, intersubjectivist, and subjectivist accounts of the disputed claims is whether and how people figure in the truth-conditions for the claims. Truth-conditions are 'subjectivist' (as I use the term) if they make essential reference to an individual; 'intersubjectivist' if they make essential reference to the capacities, conventions, or practices of groups of people; and 'objectivist' if they need make no reference at all to people.³²

One other position worthy of note here is that of nihilism: "The view that there is no such thing as moral rightness and wrongness, or good and evil."³³ Ruse sometimes refers to himself as a "skeptic" or "nihilist," using the terms interchangeably.

Understanding the general positions of objectivism and subjectivism provides a framework to differentiate between moral realism and anti-realism (or non-realism or ethical skepticism). A moral realist generally accepts the following premises: (1) Moral statements are the kind of propositions that are either true or false. (2) The truth or falsity of these moral statements are independent of our opinions and theories. (3) Our ordinary methods of moral reasoning provide a reliable method of obtaining moral knowledge.³⁴

³²Sayre-McCord, "Introduction," 14-15.

³³Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Walden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 190. Also Peterson, "A Hard Problem Indeed," 25, says, "The problem is not simply that God is dead, the phrase so famously associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, but that without God our spiritual and ethical boat seems set adrift. Indeed, much of the development of existential philosophy can be understood as an effort to develop a response to this implication that in a purely naturalistic universe there can be no standards of right and wrong, no meaning or purpose to life. Naturalism forces us to confront the possibility of ethical and existential nihilism, that our lives are absurd affairs over which we have no control and that will end as pointlessly as they begin."

³⁴Richard N. Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 182. Also Sayre-McCord, "Introduction," 5,

An anti-realist denies these premises and generally accepts a position of non-cognitivism. One critical element of moral realism that must be upheld is that moral truths or facts exist independently of a person or people.³⁵ Realism generally coincides with objectivism whereas anti-realism corresponds with subjectivism.

On the one hand, moral realists conceive of moral principles as objective – that is to say, moral principles are universally valid for all people at all times (regardless of what anyone happens to think). Moral nonrealists, on the other hand, generally conceive of moral principles as relative (or subjective) – that is to say, instead of being objective, moral principles are dependent upon circumstances or what people think.³⁶

Realism does not necessarily imply theism, and some Darwinians do argue for moral realism.³⁷ However, realism fits in well with theism and is more ad hoc in a Darwinian model. From theistic moral realism, one expects moral intuition and obligation, the trustworthiness of our moral reasoning process, and feelings of human dignity and

provides two premises: moral claims are either true or false and some of those claims are true.

³⁵For example, Knut Olav Skarsaune, “Darwin and Moral Realism: Survival of the Fittest,” *Philosophical Studies* 152 (2011): 230, says, “A more useful definition of ‘realism,’ I suggest, is that the evaluative facts are independent of our *beliefs* or *judgments*.” Also Sharon Street, “Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 156, says, “The defining claim of realism about value, as I will be understanding it is that there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes.” Also Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 190-91, says that a moral skeptic “does not affirm or deny objective moral codes and values, but withholds judgment about their status. A moral skeptic is like the agnostic who neither affirms nor denies theism.”

³⁶R. Keith Loftin, “Introduction,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 9. Also Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 191, says, “In contrast with nihilism and relativism there are different forms of moral realism according to which there are bona fide moral facts. Moral realists hold that certain acts are truly wrong (such as torturing the innocent) and truly right (such as acting courageously to protect the innocent) regardless of social conventions, or individual approval or disapproval. Moral realism is sometimes referred to as moral or ethical objectivism. I am using the term ‘moral realism’ very broadly to encompass *any* view that upholds objective moral values.”

³⁷For example, Evan Fales, “Naturalist Moral Realism,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 13, says, “You and I have our differences: you have your personality, ambitions, and idiosyncrasies; I have mine. We also share something important: a common human nature. That nature, so I will argue, provides the basis for morality. The moral norms in question are perfectly objective – just as human nature is an objective feature of our existence. These norms are norms for human behavior. If human nature were different in certain ways, the norms would be different, and they might differ for intelligent species (if there are any in the universe) whose natures differ importantly from our own. . . . But this in no way offers support for moral relativism or nihilism. It just means that what is right and good is so always *for* beings of a certain kind.”

value.³⁸ These do not directly result from a Darwinian scheme. The realist debate entails significant implications for both metaethics and substantive ethics:

What distinguishes realists from anti-realists about morals has disappointingly little to do with the particular moral claims each willingly endorses. In fact, moral anti-realists expend a great deal of energy trying to show that their views about the *status* of moral claims are perfectly compatible with saying all the same things any decent, wholesome, respectable person would. . . . In spite of the anti-realists' conciliatory attitude toward much of what we say, the debate between realists and anti-realists is deep and important. It affects our ontology, epistemology, and semantics.³⁹

Because Ruse endorses anti-realism in opposition to realism, arguments against moral realism matter. Opponents argue that if moral realism were true: first, far more moral agreement would exist across cultures; second, a clear methodology would exist to discover objective moral values; and, third, from Mackie, moral values make up very strange entities.⁴⁰ In response to the first, many, including Ruse, believe that more agreement than disagreement exists across cultures concerning moral values: "Many moral disagreements seem to rest on differences about nonmoral matters."⁴¹ In response to the second objection, while a universally and completely agreed upon method of knowing these values may not exist, people seem to possess essential conditions for moral reflection.⁴² Finally, in response to Mackie's oddness argument for moral entities:

³⁸Paul Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," in *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 207. However, Edward O. Wilson, "The Biological Basis of Morality," *The Atlantic Monthly* 281 (1998) [journal on-line] accessed July 28, 2013, available from <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/98apr/biomoral.htm>; Internet, says, "But the split is not, as popularly supposed, between religious believers and secularists. It is between transcendentalists, who think that moral guidelines exist outside the human mind, and empiricists, who think them contrivances of the mind. In simplest terms, the options are as follows: I believe in the independence of moral values, whether from God or not, and I believe that moral values come from human beings alone, whether or not God exists."

³⁹Sayre-McCord, "Introduction," 2.

⁴⁰Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 193-94.

⁴¹Ibid., 194-95. Also Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," 214, agrees that common moral standards are routinely evidenced across cultures suggesting that moral principles are discovered, not invented. Obvious ambiguities exist, but he asserts that far more is morally obvious and agreed upon, and people should begin with the clear before moving to the ambiguous.

⁴²Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 197.

But why should anyone agree with Mackie about this? If morals do exist, why would anyone expect them to be like other kinds of things? Mackie appears to be faulting moral values for not behaving like physical objects. But this is an absurd example of fault-finding. If moral values are not physical objects, then why should people expect them to be like physical objects. . . . Mackie's objection is a mere assertion of bias in favor of naturalism.⁴³

Moral realism provides a necessary justification for the objectivity of values and our obligation to perform right actions. To abandon moral realism is to give up something of great importance. Many Darwinians embrace the position of anti-realism based upon their worldview, but they must either surrender justification for morality or forge a new way. In either case, moral realism and Darwinism seem deeply antithetical.

In essence, I agree with Sharon Street's position that moral realism is incompatible with a Darwinian account of the evolutionary influence on our faculties of moral and evaluative judgment. Street holds that a Darwinian account is strongly supported by contemporary science, so she concludes that moral realism is false. I follow the same inference in the opposite direction: since moral realism is true, a Darwinian account of the motives underlying moral judgment must be false, in spite of the scientific consensus in its favor.⁴⁴

Ruse holds to anti-realism in spite of the difficulties and implications therein because he believes that a true Darwinian simply cannot endorse objectivism, and, therefore, realism. To do so is to accept what he has already rejected outright: progress in evolution.

Thus, we must conclude that not only is Darwinian ethics a subjectivist ethics, it is one which positively excludes the objectivist approach. . . . To suppose that evolution will seek out the true morality is to revert right back to Spencerian progressionism. For the Darwinian, what works is what counts. Had evolution taken

⁴³Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 402. Also Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 197-98, says, "Moral rightness and wrongness may be no more strange or 'queer' than other items that make up plausible accounts of the world. . . . If one acknowledges that there are objective, normative constraints about what ought and ought not to be believed, why think these are any less odd than thinking there are objective, normative constraints about who one ought and ought not to do."

⁴⁴Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 105. In terms of something important being sacrificed for anti-realism, Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 182, says, "It follows from moral realism that such moral terms as 'good', 'fair', 'just', 'obligatory' usually correspond to real properties or relations and that our ordinary standards for moral reasoning and moral disputation – together with reliable standards for scientific and everyday reasoning – constitute a fairly reliable way of finding out which events, persons, policies . . . have these properties and enter into these relations." Also Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," 95, obviously concurs, "The claim that values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world, is meant to include not only moral goodness, which might be most naturally equated with moral value, but also other things that could be more loosely called moral values or disvalues – rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, an action's being rotten and contemptible, and so on."

us down another path, we might well think moral that which we now find horrific, and conversely. This is not a conclusion acceptable to the traditional objectivist.⁴⁵

Ruse regards the is/ought barrier⁴⁶ as the greatest impediment to Darwinian morality. Moral statements prescribe how things ought to be; factual statements can only describe how things are. Whereas moral statements prescribe, factual statements do not.

We are therefore plunged straight into the biggest dilemma of meta-ethics. What is the ultimate justification of morality? If the sources of right and wrong are not just out there, part of the physical world, for the asking or grabbing, where then are they? And if we do not see or otherwise physically sense morality, how do we become aware of it?⁴⁷

Ruse provides the two answers: objectivism and subjectivism, and says of objectivism:

By this is meant that moral norms exist independently of humans – at least, independent of human emotions – in some non-physical way. It is usually also claimed that we humans intuit or otherwise rationally grasp morality. . . . The point is that moral norms, like mathematical truths, are (at a minimum) conditions laid upon us, independent of our contingent nature.⁴⁸

He gives credence to objective morality in that it intuitively seems correct: “Objectivism captures our strong conviction . . . that morality is just not a personal matter. It is not merely a question of your choice or my choice. It is bigger than the both of us.”⁴⁹ He further discusses the second option for moral justification, subjectivism, and distinguishes between different versions of subjectivism:

Here, you quite openly argue that morality is a function of human nature, and that without humans there is no right and wrong. There is no independent source of morality. It all depends on human feelings, thoughts, and inclinations. Probably the most popular version of subjectivism, in this century, has been so-called “emotivism”. . . . According to this doctrine, morality is a function of likes and dislikes, backed up by gut emotions. Thus, if I say “Killing is wrong,” basically what I am saying is: “I don’t like killing – Boo to those that do!” An off-branch of emotivism is “prescriptivism,” which explicitly brings in the sense of command underlying moral claims. “Killing is wrong” translates into “I don’t like killing – don’t you or anybody else do it.” The key here is the already noted sense of

⁴⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 254.

⁴⁶Also known as Hume’s Law: *is* does not imply *ought*. This barrier will be examined below.

⁴⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 214.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 215.

universality which goes into a moral claim.⁵⁰

Ruse refuses to endorse these typical versions of subjectivism, recognizing inherent and insurmountable problems for these common subjectivist positions:

The subjectivist steers away from the Scylla of a disembodied objective morality. But can he/she ever avoid the Charbydis of reducing ethics to mere likes, dislikes, and feelings? Can he/she escape the relativism which goes with all of this? For the subjectivist, is morality ever really any more than irrational hot air, lacking the binding and reasonable nature which we think is the essence of a moral claim? I like spinach. You do not like spinach. So, who cares?⁵¹

Is Ruse thus trapped in an irresolvable dilemma where he must embrace a realism that is antithetical to his worldview or accept a hopeless anti-realism with all its inherent difficulties? For Ruse, neither a general objectivism nor a general subjectivism will suffice. “But the queries do suggest that traditional subjectivism, unreformed, will not do – any more than will traditional objectivism, unreformed.”⁵² Ruse seeks to forge a new way that he believes is not just consistent with his Darwinism but necessarily results from it. The remainder of the chapter unpacks Ruse’s position and assesses whether he creates a successful subjectivism of a distinct kind or if he simply limps between two positions.

Ruse’s “Subjectivism of a Distinct Kind”

Ruse endorses an indisputably anti-realist position, but he says that evolution causes us to believe in a form of moral realism. Morality possesses no true justification, but normative morality endures because we humans believe justification does, indeed, exist. Thus, humans have an illusion of realism but with the epistemological foundation of moral anti-realism.⁵³ Whereas some Darwinians may reject morality altogether, Ruse completely dismisses this position. He is not skeptical about the existence of substantive

⁵⁰Ibid., 216.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 217.

⁵³Michael Ruse, “Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible (And If It Is, Is It Well Taken)?” in *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, ed. Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele de Anna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22.

morality; instead, he balks at an actual meta-ethical justification for substantive ethics:

So how then do I justify my substantive ethical beliefs? I claim simply that there is no justification! I think the substantive ethics, claims like “love your neighbor as yourself,” are simply psychological beliefs put in place by natural selection in order to maintain and improve our reproductive fitness. There is nothing more to them than that. They have no ultimate backing. I am therefore what is known by philosophers as an “ethical skeptic.” Sometimes my position is known as “moral nihilism.” Regardless of whatever term is used, I want to emphasize that my skepticism or nihilism is not about the *existence* of substantive ethics. It is about the *foundations* of substantive ethics. I am therefore a “moral nonrealist.”⁵⁴

Ruse often admits that the position he endorses is not original; his major influence is David Hume. In fact, he describes his position as Hume aided by Darwinism. Hume, too, believed morality was a subjective phenomenon but one that necessarily produced the psychological phenomenon of objectivism. Moreover, Hume serves as Ruse’s mentor because he provided a completely naturalistic theory of ethics.⁵⁵

The mention of Hume rarely produces a neutral response. Ruse willingly labels himself a Humean disciple whereas a critic of Hume may conclude that his is the most overrated name in the history of western philosophy. In fact, Hume’s greatest contemporary opponent, Thomas Reid, said that Hume’s approach “overturns all philosophy, all religion and virtue, and all common sense.”⁵⁶ Regardless of such controversy, Ruse endorses the naturalistic expression of Hume’s philosophy and his

⁵⁴Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 64-65.

⁵⁵Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 508. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 266, says, “The Darwinian meta-ethics . . . is almost exactly what one would expect from the pen of Hume, were he writing today.” Also Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 164, says, “Hume’s moral theory seems to be the first account of ethics since ancient Greece and Rome that doesn’t involve the existence of God.” Also James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, “Hume’s Legacy and Natural Theology,” in *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 9, say, “It is no exaggeration to say that, from his day to ours, the vast majority of philosophical attacks against the rationality of theism have borne an unmistakable Humean aroma.” Also Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors: Kant, Hume, and All the Way Back to Aristotle?” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 8 (1990): 70, says, “His is a naturalistic approach to ethics that the Darwinian understands and appreciates. Apart from anything else, his willingness to merge the animal and the human . . . strikes a note that is sweet music to the ears of today’s biologist.”

⁵⁶Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind: On the Principles of Common Sense*, 4th ed., ed. Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1997), 5.

consequence of skepticism: “I like to describe my position as ‘David Hume brought up-to-date by Charles Darwin,’ and I think this is correct both in intent and execution. I am Humean also in that, for me, it is the dog of ethics which wags the tail of epistemology. The former is my real passion.”⁵⁷ When Ruse connects the Humean and Darwinian approaches to morality, he observes that one of the deepest links between them is that both make morality completely a function of human nature and deny any supernatural grounding. The radical dimension of Hume’s theory is that he removed morality from the arena of reason and placed it within the emotions; thus, moral judgments are not rational ones but exist merely as feelings in the mind of the agent.⁵⁸ Human moral feelings possess no genuine objective component; they exist merely in the mind of the individual. Hume made such famous statements as “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions,”⁵⁹ and, “Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg’d of.”⁶⁰ Hume asserted that reason itself could never motivate one to action. Indeed, “It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.”⁶¹ This assertion engenders much rebuttal, including charges of an unwarranted reductionism: “While certain pleasant feelings, say, may accompany a virtuous judgment,

⁵⁷Michael Ruse, “From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back,” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 30.

⁵⁸Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 162. Also Ruse, *Science and Spirituality*, 91, says, “It is thought that Hume started with his ideas about moral behavior and then worked back to knowledge and its psychological backing to explain such behavior. There is no surprise, therefore, that Hume’s naturalistic way of thinking was tied in to his moral philosophy. For Hume, there is no will of God or any such thing standing behind moral beliefs. Rather, they are rooted in sentiments or emotions. This is not just a question of ‘if it feels ok, then it is ok,’ but rather of the feelings that stem from our human nature, which is designed to make us functioning members of family and society.”

⁵⁹David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 415.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 470.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 416. Also Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 70, rejects reason and embraces emotions as the center of morality: “Reason and the emotions (the passions) are separate and distinct things, and it is only the latter which can spur one to action. Reason can certainly help one to decide about actions . . . but ultimately it is motivationally impotent.”

it is a non sequitur to say the judgment is reducible to those feelings.”⁶² However, what is important here is the role of Hume for Ruse’s position. Ruse rejects a genuine objective morality and locates our moral sense in our human nature. Ethics are fully natural and are based on emotions that carry a sense of obligation. Ruse then divulges the Darwinian link that Hume was missing to make ethics binding: natural selection.

Hume’s ‘sentimentalist’ theory of morality is precisely that which one would expect as the precursor of Darwinism. The evolutionary approach carries us forward in crucial respects. Thanks to natural selection, we can sort out the true relationship between individual interests and virtues like justice. There is no need to think of us as all literally selfish. Nor (going beyond Hume) is there need to think of justice as artificial, implying that it required conscious decisions. Justice, like other aspects of morality, is linked to biological interests, and thus becomes as natural as any other part of us.⁶³

Ruse thus regards Humean morality completed by the mechanism of natural selection.

Hume’s Is/Ought Barrier and Moore’s Naturalistic Fallacy

Hume’s disregard of the rationality of moral judgments is evidenced in his is/ought problem. He asserts that all rationalistic discussions concerning morality begin with factual statements and move to moral statements, and one cannot logically deduce ought from is. Since facts cannot lead to value, value must stem from another source.⁶⁴ Of necessity, Hume rooted our moral nature in our emotions; reason cannot motivate us and encounters the dilemma of deducing ought from is. Ruse validates Hume’s premises, accepts his is/ought barrier, and asserts that morality is necessarily subjective.

Moral urges, therefore, being things which certainly do motivate us, must fall into the camp of the passions or sentiments. But what is the basis of such urges? Hume denies that they are sparked by intuitions of (anachronistically speaking) non-natural properties. Nor do they derive ultimately from the natural, empirical world "out there." This is the message of his famous identification of the is/ought dichotomy, now rightfully known as "Hume's law." The conclusion, therefore, is that morality

⁶²Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 210.

⁶³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 267.

⁶⁴Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 159.

has to be something which comes from within, perhaps sparked by external factors but not to be derived from them.⁶⁵

Ruse believes Hume's is/ought barrier and Moore's naturalistic fallacy present the ultimate challenges to Darwinian ethics. If a Darwinian theory is to flourish, a promising solution to these problems must arise. In its simplest form, the naturalistic fallacy occurs when one attempts to introduce values into evolution, a valueless process. Herein one transitions from statements of facts about nature to statements concerning moral obligation, or, more simply, "is" statements to "ought" statements. Hume was the first philosopher in centuries to introduce a theory of morality from a completely naturalistic scheme divorced from any divine justification. It was he who introduced the is/ought problem originally:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, 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 surpriz'd 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 shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; 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.⁶⁶

Ruse refuses to shy away from the is/ought barrier, affirming its power: "As David Hume pointed out in the eighteenth century, there is something illicit in this transition. Simply because something is the case, it does not follow that that something ought to be the case. . . . Trying to explain morality in terms of natural facts simply cannot be done."⁶⁷ A thorny dilemma entails for evolutionary ethics: "ought" statements prescribe how things

⁶⁵Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors," 71.

⁶⁶Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 469. Relating how important Hume's point is, Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 228, says, "As Hume noted, no collection of solely factual premises could entail any evaluative or moral conclusion. This principle is sometimes known as *Hume's law* or *Hume's guillotine*. If it were truly appreciated, Hume suggested, it would 'subvert all the vulgar systems of morality'."

⁶⁷Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 64.

should be, but Darwinian evolution can only describe how things are. Yet morality is an undeniable aspect of human life. So how does one justify it?

Hume's scheme eliminates any claim to moral realism; morality simply does not stem from reason and cannot exist objectively.⁶⁸ Because of the is/ought barrier, Hume necessarily embraced skepticism. Then G. E. Moore, much later, further expounded the problems that Hume introduced by way of his naturalistic fallacy.

Moore argued that all efforts to justify claims about good and bad, right and wrong, by reference to a natural, physical foundation are bound to fail. Although Moore does not mention Hume by name, his thoughts clearly run on the same lines. However, Moore's treatment has the virtue of spelling out in some detail precisely why he believes you cannot go from facts to values.⁶⁹

Moore studied all the primary ethical theories and assessed that they all made the same mistake of improperly equating moral goodness with a natural property; hence, the naturalistic fallacy.

Moore argues that the term "good," like the term "yellow," is a simple property, and thus can't be reduced to any constituent parts. Therefore, we can't define "good" as "pleasure," "highly evolved conduct," or any other property. If we try to define "good" by identifying it with another property, then we commit the naturalistic fallacy. . . . The term *naturalistic fallacy* implies that it is a fallacy to define "good" in terms of properties that we find in *nature*, such as pleasure.⁷⁰

When one thus speaks of "good," he implies ought, but nature cannot ground this ought; it provides only factual statements. For Moore, naturalistic morality attempts to define and analyze good in ways that nature simply does not allow. Ruse asserts that Hume and Moore identified this problem that hamstring Darwinian moral theories: one assumes

⁶⁸Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," 206, says, "Given Hume's gap between *is* and *ought*, moral realism is eliminated from his system; any argument for God's existence based upon objective morality or intrinsic human dignity is discounted by Hume."

⁶⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 88.

⁷⁰Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 215. Also Paul Thompson, "Evolutionary Ethics: Its Origins and Contemporary Face," *Zygon* 34 (1999): 477, says, "Moore's challenge has been crystallized in the expression 'naturalistic fallacy.' For Moore, *good* as an ethical term was a nonnatural property that was primitive (that is, not reducible to any other natural or nonnatural property). Hence, unlike *green*, which was a natural property of an object and whose true attribution to an object was empirically determinable, *good* was a property of an object or action that was not empirically determinable."

that since the world works in the fashion that it does, then this is the way the world should work, but this is a clear violation of the fallacy. “Whether Moore was right in thinking goodness an intuited non-natural property, he was surely right in seeing a fallacy in the equation of ‘that which has evolved’ with ‘that which is good’.”⁷¹ “Ought” simply cannot be derived from “is.” Darwinian theories provide only statements of the latter, not the former. Morality inspired by the fact of evolution often contradicts with what persons think of as moral. Ruse provides an illustration with the smallpox virus, a disease that the World Health Organization attempts to destroy. The attempt to destroy something evolution produced is an intentional means of frustrating the course of evolution. Yet commonsense tells us that any step to make smallpox extinct is not immoral. In fact, humans would call it “good” in that we benefit from the extinction of smallpox. “Thus, it cannot be that the course of unfettered evolution is a good thing, or that we ought to promote it.”⁷² This example illustrates the fallacy of ascribing value to what evolution

⁷¹Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 61. Also Thompson, “Evolutionary Ethics,” 477-78, says, “A similar point was made by David Hume in the mid-1700s. He claimed that ‘ought’ statements (moral statements) cannot be derived from ‘is’ statements (factual statements) alone. At least one ‘ought’ statement has to be assumed in deriving an ‘ought’ statement. Consider, for example, the claim, ‘one ought not to commit infanticide.’ If an advocate of this claim were to support it by pointing out that (1) newborns have the potential to develop into adults, (2) newborns are unable to protect themselves, and (3) killing a newborn means taking a life, she or he would have failed to justify the initial claim. None of these factual claims by themselves or together entails that one ought not to commit infanticide. In addition, one needs statements such as (4) one *ought* not to deny a newborn the potential to develop into an adult, (5) one *ought* to protect those who are unable to protect themselves, and (6) one *ought* not to take a life. The advocate of the original claim may well believe one or all of the statements (4–6), but in order to justify the original claim, one or more of them must be advocated as well, and it is by no means clear that vigorous discussion would not occur about the truth of each of them in a free and open society.” Also Linville, “The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism,” 63, accuses Darwin of guilt in this matter as well, “In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin asks, ‘Why should a man feel that he ought to obey one instinctive desire rather than another?’ His subsequent answer is that the stronger of the two conflicting impulses wins out. . . . What Darwin never asks, and thus never answers, is why a man *ought*, in fact, to obey the one rather than the other. The best he offers here is the observation that *if* instinct A is stronger than B, then one *will* obey A. What he does not and, I suggest, *cannot* say is that one *ought* to obey A or that one *ought* to feel the force of A over B. That is, whereas Darwin may be able to answer the *factual* question that he *does* ask – why people believe and behave as they do – this does nothing to answer the *normative* question of how one *ought* to behave or of what sets of instincts and feelings one *ought* to cultivate in order to be virtuous.”

⁷²Michael Ruse, *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 202.

produces. The naturalistic fallacy creates serious problems for Darwinian ethics.⁷³

Ruse's Anti-Realism Stemming from Naturalistic Fallacy

If it is the case that the naturalistic fallacy cripples Darwinian ethics, and if it is also the case that Darwinism is a worldview that is strongly held and fiercely defended, how do Darwinians reconcile ethical theory with the naturalistic fallacy? Ruse does exactly what Hume did: embrace ethical skepticism. Indeed, this step may be the only legitimate solution for a Darwinian. The debate concerning moral realism and moral anti-realism really materialized with the appearance of Moore's naturalistic fallacy, and it rages on to this day.⁷⁴ Ruse's commitment to skepticism, even with its myriad problems, stems from the challenges disseminated by Hume and Moore's naturalistic fallacies. Whereas some Darwinians downplay its significance,⁷⁵ Ruse tolerates no such step. He upholds the naturalistic fallacy as a major barrier for any Darwinian ethical theory.

In any case, does not every beginning philosophy student learn that the cardinal sin is to believe that one can derive morality from brute nature, evolutionary or no? There are certain moves almost unclean in their falsity, and at the top of the list comes the "naturalistic fallacy" generated when one tries to go from Darwinism to duty.⁷⁶

⁷³Thompson, "Evolutionary Ethics," 477-78, says, "The naturalistic fallacy in either form is widely accepted as the Achilles heel of evolutionary ethics, and Darwin and Spencer are both seen to have committed this fallacy."

⁷⁴Sayre-McCord, "Introduction," 3. Also Feiser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages*, 218-19, says, "Moral realism is the view that goodness is an independent and objective quality of the world – one that right actions possess intrinsically and that wrong actions lack. Whereas Moore endorses moral realism, Spencer doesn't, arguing instead that there is no objective quality of goodness intrinsic to right actions."

⁷⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 100, accuses E. O. Wilson precisely of such a move, saying that Wilson believes that our moral nature is a function of evolution, and moral claims are identical with evolutionary claims. He believes Wilson seeks to avoid the is/ought barrier by virtually asserting that no barrier exists. Also Wilson, "The Biological Basis of Morality," rejects outright the power of the naturalistic fallacy, "No, we do not have to put moral reasoning in a special category and use transcendental premises, because the posing of the naturalistic fallacy is itself a fallacy. For if ought is not is, what is? To translate is into ought makes sense if we attend to the objective meaning of ethical precepts. They are very unlikely to be ethereal messages awaiting revelation, or independent truths vibrating in a nonmaterial dimension of the mind. They are more likely to be products of the brain and the culture."

⁷⁶Ruse, "From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back," 28.

Ruse thus rejects the idea that Darwinism can ground moral obligation. The power of the naturalistic fallacy also provides an insurmountable obstacle to those committed to the idea of progress in evolution wherein Spencer and others improperly drew moral prescriptions from what can only be matters of description.⁷⁷ Since Ruse believes a true Darwinian cannot hold to progress in evolution, and the naturalistic fallacy undermines the idea of progress, Ruse upholds it as a true hindrance to the idea of progress in nature.

However, Ruse does not defend the is/ought distinction merely to spite progressionists; he is fully convinced of its veracity. Ruse is a self-confessed Humean, and he never abandons the weight of Hume's is/ought distinction. In fact, he allows that his allegiance to Hume is most clearly evidenced by his commitment to the barrier: "It comes out most clearly on the matter of the is-ought distinction. . . . For me, it is the starting point of my assault on the problems of morality."⁷⁸ Those theories that deny the is/ought barrier demonstrate an allegiance to a sense of obligation that simply cannot be deduced from nature. Ruse admits that evolution provides no justification for morality. This position results from his Humean belief that one cannot rationally deduce moral rules from the facts of nature combined with his Darwinism that appears so deeply geared toward self-interest. Morality is anything but self-interest; morality often contradicts self-interest. Whereas Ruse acknowledges that we are often self-centered because natural selection works toward reproductive fitness, else we would never survive and reproduce, he notes that we are also social and require a mechanism to overcome that self-centered

⁷⁷Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?," 442. Also Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 200, says, "In particular, when one argues (as for example the utilitarians did) that something like happiness is the supreme good, the thing which one ought to strive to maximize, one is identifying a non-natural property with a natural property: for Moore, happiness was a natural property which we sense, like blue or warm, whereas good is a non-natural property which we do not sense but intuit. Now, it is fairly clear that the evolutionary ethicist commits the naturalistic fallacy. One is going from 'This is the way that the world *is* (because of evolution)' to 'This is the way the world *ought* to be (and hence help evolution to keep up the good work)'"

⁷⁸Michael Ruse, "A Naturalist Moral Nonrealism Response," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 35.

nature. For Ruse, natural selection infuses a sense of “oughtness” to do precisely that.⁷⁹

However, before examining how Ruse seeks to solve the is/ought dilemma, the full force of its power must be delineated. Ruse always maintains the is/ought barrier and condemns traditional evolutionary ethicists because they perpetually disregard it.

But, what of foundations? Here the philosopher will fear (more likely, joyfully anticipate) trouble. Even if one agrees that one ought to be altruistic, no justification is in the fact that nature makes us altruistic for us to be effective “altruists”. The is/ought barrier looms as large as ever. Of course, one way one might get around (or, rather, through) the barrier is by denying that there is all that sharp a division between “is” and “ought.” But whatever the merits of this as a general strategy, in the evolutionary case it seems a bad tack. As a general proposition “has evolved” is clearly not equivalent to “is good” or “should be taken seriously.” Specifically, “We think that we ought to do *x* because our evolution has made us this way” does not logically entail “We ought to do *x*”.⁸⁰

Ruse announces the problem of the is/ought barrier, illustrates the improper step of denying it, and essentially proves that Darwinism allows no place for an “ought.” As if this admission were not catastrophic enough, he further asserts that if we do not possess a sense of obligation, morality folds in upon itself:

Moreover, the Darwinian especially wants to keep up the is/ought barrier: the whole point about moral altruism is to get us to do something we would not otherwise do. Struggle and selection obviously incline one towards selfishness - the primate who feeds him- or herself is generally fitter than the primate who feeds others. However, sometimes biological altruism is a good tactic, and so we need an extra push. This is to be found in the peculiar nature of moral altruism: obligation. Without a feeling of obligation, we are all going to start to cheat, and biological altruism will collapse. The distinctiveness of the “ought” must be maintained.⁸¹

With all these concessions, Ruse seems to leave no room for escape. In fact, from a realist position he would have none. Here is where Ruse proclaims that due to the power

⁷⁹Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 502. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 101, says, “What distinguishes moral claims is that they lay upon us – they prescribe – obligations, which seem as if objectively, universally binding. They are not matters of personal whim, and indeed apparently are not factual claims at all. Herein lies the downfall of traditional evolutionary ethicizing, which tries simply to derive moral claims (‘ought’ claims), from the process and product of evolution (which yield only ‘is’ claims). Thus Hume’s law is violated in an unacceptable way. . . . My presumption from now on is that Hume’s law has real bite.”

⁸⁰Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 65.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

of the is/ought barrier, any true moral foundations are illusory. “It is for this reason that although I think evolution can explain why we are moral, it cannot justify it.”⁸²

Ruse makes a mammoth statement by admitting that evolution cannot justify morality; yet, he sneaks in the norm that humans *feel* we ought to perform certain acts and ought not perform others. Does he not contradict himself by claiming “ought” with no reasonable justification? How does such an admission resolve the is/ought barrier that has caused the fall of virtually all traditional evolutionary ethical theories?

The solution is to go around rather than through. Recognizing that evolution gives no justification of (substantive) morality, the evolutionist argues that neither does anything else. Furthermore, the evolutionist argues that Darwinian evolution shows that the search for foundations is mistaken, even though there are good biological reasons why we believe in them. In other words, at the metaethical level the Darwinian urges skepticism. There is indeed a difference between “is” and “ought,” but no derivation of one from the other is being attempted. Rather, claims about the world are used to explain away the apparent objective referent of morality. Substantive morality is a collective illusion of our genes. (But no less real than many other things without an objective referent, like the rules of baseball.)⁸³

When Ruse acknowledges the weight of the is/ought barrier, the only logical step left for a Darwinian like himself is to deny any justification for ethics and assert that objective grounds for morality are merely an illusion. He agrees that the naturalistic fallacy undoubtedly occurs when one attempts to deduce moral claims from factual claims, but he rejects the notion that because evolution produces something, it must be good. Rather, he seeks to *explain* moral awareness based on the factual theory while also *explaining away* any objective foundation for morality that provides its sense of obligation. He thus believes he does an “end-run” around the is/ought barrier. Whereas he cannot go through it, he seeks to go around it.⁸⁴

⁸²Ruse, “A Naturalist Moral Nonrealism Response,” 36.

⁸³Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 65.

⁸⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 256. Also Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 67, says, “I am not now justifying my substantive ethics. I’m not even justifying my substantive ethics in a kind of negative way by saying that it has no justification. I am rather explaining away the foundations of substantive ethics.” Again, this position allows him to fully endorse Hume’s is/ought dichotomy but get around it as well as he continues, “I think one can explain morality, but not justify it. However, I think that

The most controversial claim Ruse makes in his ethical theory declares that objectivity is an illusion, yet it is only at this point that the topic is fully introduced in the dissertation. Only after understanding Ruse's Darwinian worldview, his rejection of progress and traditional Darwinian ethics, and his fidelity to the power of the is/ought barrier can one fully grasp what Ruse means when he calls morality a "collective illusion." He does not espouse ridding humanity of substantive morality; he desperately wants to retain it, but Darwinism simply disallows any objective foundation. And just as important and controversial, he does not feel Darwinian morality needs justification. Ruse's controversial system generates critique from theists and Darwinians alike. Both camps assert that Ruse's "end-run" sacrifices more than it achieves for morality. The next chapter focuses on Ruse's illusion of objectivity. For now, one may argue that when Ruse contends for morality and self-sacrificing other-care, he is violating the primary demand of his worldview: an emphasis upon individual fitness. One still finds reason to doubt the truth of our moral beliefs based on a Darwinian model.⁸⁵ However, one may also argue that Ruse seeks to retain morality where Darwinism seems to provide no basis for it. Fellow Darwinians critique Ruse for not pushing the boundaries even more, either by dismissing objectivity altogether or believing objectivity can be retained by locating it

after one has given an explanation, one sees that calls for justification are out of place." Also William A. Rottschaefer and David Martinsen, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously: An Alternative to Michael Ruse's Darwinian Metaethics," *Biology and Philosophy* 5 (1990): 150, say, "Ruse contends that the nature of morality is best grasped by examining what he calls our biologically based 'moral sentiments'. These sentiments prescribe altruistic actions of us all. By freely following their dictates, we not only act morally but increase our evolutionary prospects. However, Ruse contends that since the values toward which these sentiments incline us are illusory, Darwinian ethicists need not fear committing the naturalistic fallacy (NF), thus avoiding the nemesis of all TEE [Traditional Evolutionary Ethics]. Darwinian ethicists do not mistakenly identify facts with values, the definitional form of the fallacy, since, in Ruse's view, there are no objective values. Nor do they attempt to justify normative claims on the basis of factual evolutionary assertions, the derivational form of the fallacy, because, in Ruse's view, Darwinian metaethics (DME) can only provide a causal explanation of morality, not a justification."

⁸⁵Linville, "The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism," 70, says, "But this strongly suggests that we *would* have had *whatever* beliefs were ultimately fitness producing given the circumstances of survival. Given the background belief of naturalism, there appears to be no plausible Darwinian reason for thinking that the fitness-producing predispositions that set the parameters for moral reflection have anything whatsoever to do with the truth of the resulting moral beliefs."

within Darwinism.

Finally, we shall examine Ruse's concerns about avoiding NF [naturalistic fallacy]. We argue that Ruse, by abandoning the objectivity of values and denying the possibility of ethical justification, has needlessly cast aside both a robust naturalism and Darwinism in order to avoid that fallacy. . . . In sum, we shall contend that Ruse fails to take Darwin seriously enough and that by taking Darwin more seriously, our proposal leads to more adequate answers than does Ruse's to the questions about morality's nature and justification.⁸⁶

Ruse surely bristles at the charge that he surrenders a robust Darwinism. They continue:

This blunt rejection of objective moral properties seems to put the philosophical cart before the scientific horse. A Darwinian naturalist ethicist, it seems to us, has prior commitments to naturalism and Darwinism. If these commitments lead her to claim, for instance, that food, shelter, and companionship have objectively valuable properties, then she must face Hume's Law straightforwardly. Ruse believes that he can do an "end run around Hume's Law" He seems rather to be running away from the line of scrimmage toward his own goal line. He avoids NF by giving up a robust Darwinian naturalism.⁸⁷

However, from a strictly Darwinian position, their stance opposes the anti-realist position that seems necessary based on Darwinism. One cannot have their cake and eat it too; Darwinism entails skepticism. Ruse expresses authentic Darwinism in his ethics, and he faces the seemingly inevitable corner into which his worldview paints his moral position. His only escape is embracing anti-realism but asserting that ethics seem objective to us. In short, his illusion of objectivity allows him to remain truly Darwinian while also contending for binding ethics. Can his illusion of objectivity provide a satisfactory ethical system? Further exposition of Ruse's system is needed before delving into that question.

In order to fully appreciate Ruse's subjectivism of a distinct kind one must understand his deep commitment to Hume's is/ought barrier and Hume's locating morality in the emotions, separate from rationality. Ruse condemns other ethical theories because they are founded upon reason:

Although I am arguing that morality does exist, if without foundations, do note that my position has a real bite that other positions do not have. . . . Emotion is involved

⁸⁶Rottschaefer and Martinsen, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously," 150-51.

⁸⁷Ibid., 159.

and not just some disinterested reason. . . . But the point I want to make is clear. As a moral skeptic, I argue that there is no higher court of appeal than the emotions. . . . This is what right and wrong is all about. At this point the descriptive and prescriptive come together. Not because the former justifies the latter, but because the former leads us causally to have the latter and there is nothing more.⁸⁸

Ruse's position of skepticism relates morality integrally to the emotions. Feelings lead to our moral choices; without these feelings and the resulting actions, life would be chaos. Thus, our morality is subjective in this sense, but Ruse argues that evolution produced in us a biological belief that morality is objective. Thus, the illusion settles on the entire human race; no individual or cultural subjectivism exists, but a species-wide one does.⁸⁹

Ruse's illusion fits into the category of moral error theory. Hume was not the only influence on Ruse's ethical theory; J. L. Mackie also deeply impacted Ruse's views. Mackie believed objective moral values were odd entities, and, if they existed, then the only way we could know them was by some special faculty utterly different from our common ways of knowledge.⁹⁰ Mackie, also an ethical skeptic, thus formulated the view that, though objective values appear to be real, this belief is false:

I have maintained that there is a real issue about the status of values, including moral values. Moral scepticism, the denial of objective moral values, is not to be confused with any one of several first order normative views, or with any linguistic or conceptual analysis. Indeed, ordinary moral judgements involve a claim to objectivity which both non-cognitive and naturalist analyses fail to capture. Moral scepticism must, therefore, take the form of an error theory, admitting that a belief in objective values is built into ordinary moral thought and language, but holding that this ingrained belief is false. As such, it needs arguments to support it against "common sense."⁹¹

⁸⁸Michael Ruse, "The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Francisco Ayala and Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 308. Also Michael Ruse, "The Morality of the Gene" *Monist* 67 (1984): 189, says, "The ultimate premises of substantive ethics are a-reasonable: they do not come from reason at all; therefore, they neither affirm it nor deny it."

⁸⁹Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?," 447.

⁹⁰J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 38.

⁹¹Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," 118. Also Sayre-McCord, "Introduction," 11, says, "Error theories . . . typically involve more than just the view that none of the disputed claims are true. Since such theories almost always go against 'common sense' by denying assumptions built into the disputed language, their acceptability depends on having some account of why people have gone wrong."

Ruse does not use the language of error theory, but he utilizes the doctrine in a similar fashion as Mackie. One readily observes the influence of Mackie, who also recognized a universal belief in objective values. These objective values appear to persons as true since regarding them as false contradicts common sense. If Mackie and Ruse are correct, then humans are equipped with an ingrained error. We are fooled and cannot perceive the illusion. Ruse has encountered great challenge throughout his career precisely because his position is counterintuitive. *Prima facie*, one finds great difficulty in believing that he can be so convincingly fooled. Yet Ruse maintains his belief in illusion as a shared human attribute even in the face of biting criticism. He refuses to exchange his error theory for an evolutionary success theory that argues for morally good actions based on the fact of evolution; to do so compromises the is/ought barrier and progress in evolution.⁹² Thus, Ruse is left with his error theory and must defend the illusory nature of his ethical beliefs.

Ruse's Subjectivism of a Distinct Kind: Subjective but Appears Objective

Ruse argues that a Darwinian cannot offer, nor does he need, a justification for morality. "True insight comes only after one appreciates that, once one has made a commitment to naturalism, the call for justification is itself mistaken. One must rather be a philosophical skeptic—not in the sense of denying knowledge or morality, but in the sense of denying the usual foundations."⁹³ Ruse exercises precision here with his language: he absolutely wants to retain substantive morality, but as a moral skeptic, he must jettison any justification for substantive morality. This effects a precarious position,

⁹²Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," 716, says, "Since there is a plausible case to be made that certain types of action and psychological traits have been naturally selected for, there is a plausible case to be made that certain actions and traits are morally good. The error theory disappears, to be replaced with an evolutionary *success* theory! Ruse will have none of this, and is particularly sensitive to the concern that any such theory will fall foul of the *naturalistic fallacy*. . . . An *evolutionary* success theory shall hold that the kind of fact in virtue of which such judgments are true is, in some manner, a fact about human evolution."

⁹³Ruse, "From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back," 28.

and he realizes that “those who take such a skeptical approach have the obligation to show just why, when we think morally, we believe we are dealing with something which has a universal prescriptive force, independent of individual whims and wishes.”⁹⁴ This great barrier opposes his moral theory.

If it is the case that substantive morality remains in place when justification vanishes (and this possibility is up for debate), then how do persons gain this sense of substantive ethics in the first place? Why are humans equipped with the overwhelming belief that they possess moral obligations? Recall that by dismissing justification, Ruse believes natural selection provides the answer: “I think the substantive ethics, claims like ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ are simply psychological beliefs put in place by natural selection in order to maintain and improve our reproductive fitness. There is nothing more to them than that. They have no ultimate backing.”⁹⁵ Ruse meshes the existence of our moral beliefs with our now improved capacity for survival and reproduction. This interpretation seems counterintuitive; helping others does not always or often directly result in self-benefit. Ruse maintains his anti-realist position by combining Humean skepticism with natural selection, but this does not necessarily result in morality as traditionally understood.

Criticisms arise quickly, especially the accusation that dismissing justification for morality necessarily effects a total breakdown in morality; anything is permitted. Ruse continually repudiates such a position, and he argues that his scheme does not lead to this conclusion. Objective morality alleviates any such conclusion, and Ruse, though a moral anti-realist who dismisses justification for objective morality, retains the belief that human nature exists in such a way that we believe objective morality remains. Ruse admits that if we do *not* believe that morality is objective, it most certainly will not work.

⁹⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 70.

⁹⁵Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 64-65.

Indeed, if people became convinced that the objective grounds for morality were an illusion, then, in fact, the whole system collapses because everyone would cheat for their own benefit. Morality and altruism would disappear. These are harsh realities, but they are the logical consequences to the disappearance of binding ethical norms. Ruse can only escape the troubling dilemma by asserting that our biology fools us: “Hence, our biology leads us to 'objectify' morality. Ethical skepticism may be the correct philosophy, but our genes are working flat-out to make such a conclusion counterintuitive.”⁹⁶

Ruse knows he treads on thin philosophical ice here: his position requires him to objectify ethics that are actually illusory, but human nature produces the overwhelming belief that objective values are true and real. His strategy runs counterintuitive to human nature. Yet Ruse continually asserts that morality is nothing more than an adaptation. Our biology makes us this way, thus, we must disregard reason and accept a view that contradicts rational belief. “The Darwinian’s important contribution is to pick up on Hume’s astute psychological observations. . . . We are animals, and have adaptations to protect us from the worries of our reason. . . . I do not mean to be cynical, but at a certain level philosophy does not matter.”⁹⁷ And this statement from a philosopher! He asks us to bracket reason, embrace the counterintuitive reality that our morality is an adaptation producing an illusion, and buy into it part and parcel. Based on what? Philosophy? No. Science? No. Faith? Perhaps. He knows his position is difficult to defend, but he believes it is the only genuine option left for him in order to remain truly Darwinian by rejecting progress, respecting the naturalistic fallacy, and retaining morality.

Ruse recognizes his system encounters great obstacles due to its deeply

⁹⁶Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 66-67. Also Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” 308, says, “What kind of metaethical justification can one give for such claims as that one ought to be kind to children, and that one ought to favor one’s own family over those of others? I would argue, paradoxically but truthfully, that ultimately there is no justification which can be given!”

⁹⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 188-89.

counterintuitive nature. He must essentially argue that while all persons should be moral anti-realists, their biology causes them to believe in a form of moral realism that is simply illusory: “Substantive morality stays in place as an effective illusion because we think that it is no illusion but the real thing. Thus, I am arguing that the epistemological foundation of evolutionary ethics is a kind of moral non-realism, but that it is an important part of evolutionary ethics that we think it is a kind of moral realism.”⁹⁸ Again, Ruse has his own predecessors, and he takes his cue here from Mackie who also argued that humans must objectify ethics. He dismissed the idea of ethical foundations but knew that we must believe such foundations exist. Both had good reason for doing so: if the appearance of objective morality vanishes, then seemingly everything is permitted.

There is a good biological reason why we do this. If, with the emotivists, we thought that morality was just simply a question of emotions without any sanction or justification behind them, then pretty quickly morality would collapse into futility. I might dislike you stealing my money, but ultimately why should you not do so? It is just a question of feelings. But in actual fact, the reason why I dislike you stealing my money is not simply because I do not like to see my money go, but because I think that you have done wrong.⁹⁹

One should not dismiss Ruse’s argument too quickly or take it too lightly. He seeks to remain truly Darwinian, rid morality of its objective (and, one can argue, divine) foundation, refer all our moral impulses to biology, and retain the innate desire in humans to behave morally.¹⁰⁰ If one seeks a truly Darwinian ethic, Ruse provides it. However, the obvious question remains: is it true? To admit that, “Our biology is working hard to make

⁹⁸Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” 310.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality,” 50, comment on this very topic, “Ruse’s epistemic argument against transcendent objectivism cannot be dismissed lightly. On the one hand he undermines claims that we can know what is objectively moral, while on the other hand he argues that biology can explain everything there is to explain about morality, including our most fundamental moral intuitions, especially the intuition that we ought to act morally. The facts of our moral system, including our sense of moral objectivity, can be explained on Ruse’s account without assuming transcendent objective moral values, or indeed, anything more than practical values that we have an innate propensity to think of as moral.”

the evolutionist's position seem implausible"¹⁰¹ reveals an inherent incredulity he must overcome. What challenges threaten Ruse's system of anti-realism and illusion?

Challenges to Ruse's Skepticism

Ruse adopts skepticism, rejects objectivism, and accepts all the implications of such a move: "What we have in the case of Darwinian ethics is a denial of objectivity, which is surely a denial of metaphysical reality by another name, and an affirmation of subjectivity, which is no less a commitment to common sense, in which the moral subject plays an active creative part."¹⁰² He is Humean in that he believes moral judgments do not originate in reason but are located in the feelings and mind of the agent. Because the sense of obligation is a collective human feeling, he calls it common sense. No objective grounds for it exists, but the sense of obligation is an adaptation put in place by natural selection. Now that Ruse's anti-realist position is expounded, what are the challenges to his anti-realist proposal and subjectivism of a distinct kind?

The Nature of Skepticism

Ruse's Humean skepticism encompasses both his epistemology and ethics, and, while he may enjoy the benefits of identifying with Hume, he must also endure all the criticisms that accompany Hume's skepticism: "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Problems for the Humean are problems for the Darwinian."¹⁰³ The following discussion relates more closely to Ruse's epistemological skepticism, but it applies to his ethical skepticism as well. Ruse expresses skepticism about foundations for morality; thus, morality must be subjective. No objective morality truly exists mind-independently; all morality is subject to the agent. However, all people share this sense of objectified

¹⁰¹Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 110.

¹⁰²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 269.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 185-86.

morality. In terms of epistemology, Ruse is also skeptical of the possibility of true knowledge because of metaphysical doubts. However, he believes humans possess a “common sense” view of what they know. Thus, his skepticism applies both to epistemology and ethics, yet he asserts that all humans possess a common sense of what they know and how to act. For him, morality is the dog that wags the tail of epistemology so critiques of his epistemological skepticism relate to his ethical skepticism.

The primary objection and criticism of Hume’s position, and thereby Ruse’s, is what Alvin Plantinga calls “the scandal of skepticism.” “If I *argue* to skepticism, then of course I rely on the very cognitive faculties whose unreliability is the conclusion of my skeptical argument.”¹⁰⁴ Epistemological skepticism finds itself in something of a no-win situation. If the ethical skeptic rationally convinces his opponent of his skepticism, he proves to be “unskeptical” of his own theory. One could actually argue that the true skeptic becomes self-refuting if he makes any argument for his position; his only recourse is to say nothing at all. Ruse anticipates objections of this sort and responds:

If metaphysical skepticism is something which can be avoided only by invoking such problematic notions as the thing-in-itself or the Christian God, can it really be quite the devastating critique it appears to be? My hunch is that for all its prima-facie reasonableness, there is something radically flawed about the sceptic’s attack. One is raising the ante until no answer is possible, and then demanding an answer –

¹⁰⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 219n. Also Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 154, says, “And, again, if one takes the skeptical route, one still relies on the very cognitive faculties whose unreliability is the conclusion of one’s skeptical argument. One assumes a trustworthy reasoning process to arrive, ironically, at the conclusion that reasoning cannot be trusted.” Also Keith Yandell, “David Hume on Meaning, Verification, and Natural Theology,” in *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 61, says, “The skepticism that puts commonsense belief outside the range of knowledge and evidence puts the data the explanation endeavors to account for and the assumptions that the explanation makes also outside the range of knowledge and evidence. This is a deep and, so far as I can see, unsolvable difficulty in Hume’s philosophy for which there is no remedy other than to grant that the explanation, as it stands, is a failure.” Also Sennett and Groothuis, “Hume’s Legacy and Natural Theology,” 16, say, “This Hume-inspired quasi-skepticism called into question many of the great ideas of Western thought, relegating to the philosophical scrap heap such venerable notions as substance, the self, moral realism and all things religious. However, time and scrutiny proved this philosophical clean sweep to be implausible, equivocal, necessarily inconsistent in application and referentially incoherent. In its wake has arisen a general philosophical demeanor much more charitable and generous to traditional philosophical and even commonsense concepts, often assuming that such are coherent and referential unless proved otherwise.”

an answer which went with the old rationalist ways of thinking.¹⁰⁵

Ruse identifies the fundamental problems with this Humean skeptical position and refuses to shy away from them. In fact, he admits that the problem is quite serious:

Since the Darwinian stands with Hume on the propensities, the inescapable conclusion seems to be that he/she – likewise – has to be a sceptic of this fundamental, metaphysical kind. Indeed, if anything, the problems seem even greater than Hume acknowledges. The metaphysical sceptic pounces at the point where we humans simply cannot peer or enter.¹⁰⁶

If Ruse left his critics with only this defense, they would rightly pounce, claiming that such a response is insufficient. To assert that humans cannot peer or enter into a solution merely perpetuates the problem. However, Ruse provides another response through the only remaining avenue available to him, by asserting, like Hume, that this problem is a philosophical one and does not affect us at all in real life. Hume also struggled with this philosophical problem but “solved” it through his “backgammon escape:”

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour’s amusement, I wou’d return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.¹⁰⁷

Ruse makes no allusion to backgammon, but he affirms a similar explanation, only one updated by the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection. Ruse allows that Hume had the correct answer, but he preceded Darwin and could not resolve it. The “answer” lies in the fact that this philosophical problem does nothing to enhance our reproductive fitness, and reproduction is the only job of natural selection. Natural selection does not formulate satisfactory philosophical theories; it only enhances fitness.

But, in any case, as we know already, Hume brilliantly put his finger right on the

¹⁰⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 195.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 192-93.

¹⁰⁷Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 483-84.

only solution that a naturalist like the Darwinian cares about anyway. What philosophy opens up, psychology closes. Once we leave the classroom or the study, we have a total inability to remain worried by any kind of skepticism. We have an innate tendency to believe in the continued and continuous reality of objects, and this is backed up by our experience. We do not have things popping in and out of existence. They exist only in so far as they are perceived; but when they are perceived (which is what matters to us), they do exist. If you persist in finding metaphysical skepticism upsetting . . . all I can do is remind you that natural selection is not in the business of satisfying philosophers. Natural selection has seen to it that we flesh out experience, assuming that objects continue to be, all of the time, and in all dimensions. That is enough for its purposes. If Socrates is not satisfied, he will simply have to go away puzzled.¹⁰⁸

Ruse's description is not without problems. He appears to beg the question by presuming what he wants to prove; skepticism is the correct course, and if we cannot understand why, it simply makes no difference since natural selection enhances fitness and does not solve philosophical problems. However, Ruse's subjectivism is not areasonable; he carefully and systematically argues his position. Here he appears to accept a skepticism-of-the-gaps approach that affirms that if skepticism cannot now answer hard questions, skepticism remains the correct choice. The human mind does not willingly accept obvious contradictions, but Ruse proposes that in this situation the human mind must, indeed, do so. One can object that Ruse seems to embrace his skepticism necessarily through commitment to his Darwinian worldview. The problems inherent with skepticism are acceptable to him because he is committed to his Darwinism. Yet, "it often happens that the philosophical reasons that motivate ethical skepticism in the first place turn out to be self-refuting."¹⁰⁹

Problems with epistemological skepticism abound and are nearly inseparable from moral skepticism. The link between the two consists in assuming one's own position unskeptically while denying that same realist position to objectivity in morals. "Hume *unskeptically* presumes that his cognitive faculties are trustworthy as he works toward his skeptical conclusions. . . . As Reid would argue, our capacity to reason

¹⁰⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 196.

¹⁰⁹Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 414.

properly is a first principle; to deny it as a *first principle* is to utilize it.”¹¹⁰ One can argue that first principles exist in morality as well, perhaps the most basic being that certain motivations and actions are objectively good and certain others are objectively evil. For example, virtually everyone agrees that mercy as a virtue is objectively right whereas rape is objectively wrong. The skeptic may reply that this assumption is question begging, but the realist may respond that persons need no criterion to tell them how to know these claims are true in order to rationally believe them.¹¹¹ In other words, certain moral facts exist in such a way that we simply cannot *not* know. We know them regardless of our theory of knowledge. Kai Nielsen, no friend to theism, admits the impossibility of reckoning child abuse and wife beating as anything but evil: “It is more reasonable to believe such elemental things to be evil than to believe any skeptical theory that tells us we cannot know or reasonably believe any of these things to be evil.”¹¹²

Ruse fully affirms the existence of substantive morality and would, inarguably, label child abuse and wife beating as evil. However, while he believes substantive morality appears binding upon us, he dismisses the notion that morality is authentically objective. One may reasonably object that this effectively saws off the branch upon which he sits. He demands that morality feels objective for all intents and purposes, but he states that it simply is not so in reality. Nothing is actually there. If the branch upon which one sits (objective morality) is sawn off, then one does not float in midair (ethical skepticism); he must come crashing down (nihilism). Ethical skepticism often assumes what it outright denies: objective good and evil. These notions are expelled from the outset, but they seem to exist as a universal part of human nature. Yet Ruse himself never

¹¹⁰Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 209.

¹¹¹Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 413. They continue, “Further, we have more grounds for believing that mercy as such is a virtue than we have for believing that ethical skepticism is true.”

¹¹²Kai Nielsen, *Ethics without God*, rev. ed. (Buffalo: Prometheus books, 1990), 10.

dismisses the idea that assessments of objective good and evil seem innate to human beings. He assesses that we are simply fooled into thinking that they really exist. This reality betrays the inherent problems with moral skepticism. A moral anti-realist must presume a baseline of objective goodness before he can even express skepticism about objective goodness. C. S. Lewis experienced a similar crisis while contemplating why the universe consisted of evil and was “unjust.” He realized that to even utilize concepts like “just” and “unjust” required the existence of objective standards: “A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”¹¹³ Ruse runs into a considerable problem by assuming objective standards to reach his skeptical conclusion, similar to Hume. “*Hume’s skeptical methodology, which bears upon his moral theory, is an epistemic tar baby; Hume must first bracket or deny skepticism in order to generate his skeptical conclusions.*”¹¹⁴ This claim relates to the “no-win” situation described above. If one is an ethical skeptic, he can only illicitly recommend his own system to others: “One cannot deny the existence or knowability of moral ‘oughts’ in one breath and affirm a moral ‘ought’ in the next breath; at least one cannot do this and remain consistent.”¹¹⁵

The Appeal to Human Nature

Ruse declares that natural selection “objectifies” morality for the entire human race, but morality is actually subjective to its core. Ruse admits that his proposal is not necessarily new as he follows in the steps of Mackie. Ruse’s program necessitates such a position as he discards any possible actual metaphysical grounds for ethics. He claims that the illusion of objective morality is shared collectively by the human race, else it fails to work. This belief eliminates, Ruse feels, any charges that his moral proposal results in

¹¹³C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 38.

¹¹⁴Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 208.

¹¹⁵Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 414.

relativism.

Finally, in this section, reverting again to general problems with subjectivism, note that the Darwinian's position does not plunge him/her into wholesale ethical relativism. If morality is just a question of feelings (albeit of a special kind), why should I not simply have one moral insight and you have another, and the one be as good as the other? . . . For the Darwinian, the very essence of morality is that it is shared and not relative. It does not work as a biological adaptation, unless we all join in. Unless there is this joint participation, the illusion of (objective) morality will not keep afloat. It is only in my biological interests to have moral sentiments if you likewise have such sentiments. Otherwise, I will be moral; you will cheat; and I shall be left a loser.¹¹⁶

(Ruse here introduces the problem of cheaters. The topic is postponed for now, but the next chapter discloses that this problem is a significant one for Ruse's theory). Herein lies the premise by which Ruse proclaims himself a "subjectivist of a distinct kind," as well as his means of escaping charges that anything goes in morality. Morality is an evolutionary adaptation but one shared by the entire human race. If one person alone is moral, and morality is not a shared social phenomenon, that person will quickly be eliminated, and morality completely fails.¹¹⁷

Ruse declares the belief in objectivity a universally shared human disposition and rejects relativism as a moral theory in that it possesses insurmountable difficulties. He arrives at an "objectified" ethics that is binding and universal. Yet, he must retain an aspect of relativism, that of species relativism, that banishes an objective foundation:

For the Christian moralist, relativism is anathema. One can certainly accept that different societies may well have different customs, but there has to be an underlying universality to morality. We are all made in God's image, and there cannot be one rule for one set of people and another rule for another set. . . . The sociobiological account of morality is in agreement about relativity here on Earth with respect to our species. Morality has to be something shared or it will not function, and inasmuch as it is biologically based, since we are all the same species there probably is not much variation. But we do now seem to be faced with an

¹¹⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 255-56.

¹¹⁷Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," 506-07. Also Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 110, says, "The evolutionist concludes, against the constructivist, that our morality is a function of our actual human nature and that it cannot be divorced from the contingencies of our evolution. Morality, as we know it, cannot have the necessity of objectivity."

intergalactic relativism.¹¹⁸

Ruse safeguards his “objectified” moral position by rendering morality a species-wide subjectivism. The position affords him an opportunity to discard any metaphysical justification by claiming that morality is an adaptation produced by evolution, just one that is shared by the entire human race.

In the quote above, Ruse introduces the competing explanation that his position seeks to eliminate: the dignity and value humans possess because a good God created us in his image. Ruse envisions a shared human morality resulting from a blind, purposeless process. The question is whether this indisputable feature of a common human morality squares better with the worldview of theism or Ruse’s Darwinism. This query relates to the question introduced at the close of the previous section: is Ruse’s proposal true? One troubling issue for Ruse’s approach is this shared nature of morality by all humans, seeming to indicate greater value or dignity for humankind. This admission seems to honor human beings as distinct and different from all other organisms which is inconsistent with Darwinian theory. The problem becomes magnified for Ruse in that he vigorously rejects Spencer’s and the progressionists’ view of the gradual upward climb of organisms with human beings at the top. This subtle, but logical, step of equating humanity’s distinctiveness with greater inherent value contradicts Darwinian theory because (1) everything evolves from one or a small number of organisms including humans which makes us equal in dignity to all other organisms and (2) the introduction of value represents hierarchy among organisms entailing progress in evolution. Ruse may reject these implications out of hand because they are not necessarily implied by his position. However, even if they are not necessary conclusions,

¹¹⁸Michael Ruse, “Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues,” *Zygon* 35 (2000): 314-15. Also Ruse, “From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back,” 32, says, “As proto-humans, we needed ethics, not a solution to the problem of induction. I think it very naive to think our logic and our mathematics and our science is all that there is or all that there could be—although there are good biological reasons why we would think them unique and totally binding. (I am therefore an intergalactic relativist, even if I am not a relativist about relations between humans.)”

they are probable inferences. Ruse previously ascribed a greater place to humans, but he admits this assignment is purely arbitrary:

One can of course label humans as the pinnacle of being – I myself am inclined to do just this – but such an act is arbitrary, at least as applied to evolution. Why not label a dog the pinnacle of being or a buttercup? From a biological point of view, the AIDS virus is far more successful than the gorilla, but does anyone truly want to say that the former is superior in a moral or other value sense than the latter?¹¹⁹

However, if humans alone share this improved moral code, then the admission once again implies biological progressionism. Ruse's Darwinism bars such a conclusion from the outset because of common descent and the nature of natural selection.

Ruse's skepticism displays his belief that humans share a common morality simply by being human; does Darwinism permit this appeal to a distinct human nature to justify commonsense morality? An intriguing moral theory related to this discussion is that of the "ideal observer." "On this view, what is morally right should be identified with the judgments of an 'ideal observer,' an observer who knows all the relevant facts about a situation, is truly impartial, and cares about the good."¹²⁰ One can infer from this thesis the deep sense that morality is binding, and that Darwinism fails to supply this binding component because no "ideal observer" exists therein. The ideal observer thesis indicates that people must do more to overcome temptation to immoral action than resist a feeling; they act in accord to something they believe is truly right. They will act altruistically if they believe it is commanded of them, regardless of whether it is enforced by God or karma.¹²¹ A common thread runs through these ideal or hypothetical observer accounts: they all seem variations of Christianity's moral argument wherein an omniscient agent

¹¹⁹Ruse, "Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible?," 19. Also Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 41, says, "In the traditional evolutionary view, there is no difference between humans and animals, since both are driven by the same survival and gene-replication imperatives."

¹²⁰C. Stephen Evans, "Is There a Basis for Loving All People?" *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 34 (2006): 83.

¹²¹Peter G. Woolcock, "The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today," in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 280-81, discusses the topic of whether evolutionary ethics need the sense of obligation.

who possesses knowledge of all the facts infuses a prescriptive element into morality:

It is widely acknowledged in moral theory that moral objectivity requires some sort of ideal observer who is not always tendentiously pulled by selfish desire or partiality of influence. Utilitarianism's ideal spectator (who would know what courses of action really do produce the greatest good for the greatest number), Kant's ideal moral agent (who would flawlessly perform the universalization of subjective maxims), and Rawls's ideal rational contractor in the original position are all secularized versions of a divine point of view understood as omnibenevolent and omniscient.¹²²

Ruse obviously spurns the need for an ideal observer; in fact, he purposely eliminates this metaphysical position. However, teleology continues to reappear as a problem for the Darwinian. Ruse concedes that natural selection became the substitute designer and remains the reason that persons objectify morality. He thus provides a prescriptive, albeit illusory, component to morality. However, if one removes an authentic objective agent from morality, why should anyone remain moral? The following quote concerns the “hypothetical” observer but it also applies well to Ruse’s illusory objective referent:

On this theory the ideal observer is only hypothetical, and thus the demands of morality are equated to what such an observer would will or require if there were such a being. Such a theory has strengths, but a major weakness, in my view, lies in its psychology. Since the hypothetical observer is only hypothetical, why should an actual moral agent care about what such an observer would will or command? Why should I identify with a nonexistent person?¹²³

The question of normative morality remaining in place if metaethical justification disappears occupies the next chapter, but for now it is suggested that a better explanation for morality than a hypothetical observer or an impersonal process like natural selection producing an illusion is that of a personal Observer who created human persons in his image. Moral values are better accounted for by appeal to Mind rather than

¹²²Daniel A. Dombrowski, “Objective Morality and Perfect Being Theology: Three Views,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 29 (2008): 217.

¹²³Evans, “Is There a Basis for Loving All People?,” 83. Also Keith E. Yandell, “A Moral Essentialism Response,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 83, says, “But a Rusean can make no appeal to intrinsic or inherent value. The discourse of his theory remains entirely descriptive. No ‘is-ought’ gap here – the claims are descriptive, not normative. Thus for Ruse there is only the groundless *feeling* of obligation without any corresponding reality.”

impersonal, valueless processes like natural selection.¹²⁴ While theists may agree with Ruse that common moral values are integral to what it means to be human, disagreement arises over the origin of this shared common morality. For Ruse, the shared morality has nothing to do with an ideal observer or personhood; instead it is merely an adaptation produced by natural selection. His account of human nature pales in comparison to theism's explanation that our moral status resides in this aspect of personhood.

Personhood is alien to Darwinism but flows directly from theism.

I would argue that a *personal* Creator, who made human *persons* in his image, serves as the ontological basis for the existence of objective moral values, moral obligation, human dignity and rights. Without the existence of a personal God, there would be no persons at all; and if no persons existed, then no moral properties would be instantiated in our world.¹²⁵

Thus, whereas Darwinism struggles to directly account for this shared human morality, theism possesses no such challenges in that the *imago dei* is part of our shared human nature. Theism actually claims that humans created in God's image are the pinnacle of the created order and should evidence a distinct and universal morality. In summary, if Ruse argues for a shared morality based on certain characteristics of human nature, those attributes seem ad hoc in a Darwinian world and much more at home in a theistic one.

Problem of an Irresolvable Subjectivism

Ruse's ethical skepticism faces the ongoing challenge of not dissolving into an irresolvable subjectivism. Specifically, Ruse's critics declare him guilty of relativism, emotivism, and egoism. These challenges confront any Darwinian ethical theory, even more so a moral anti-realist theory based on Hume's rejection of rationality and

¹²⁴J. P. Moreland, "Reflections on Meaning in Life without God," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 12-17. Also Copan, "The Moral Argument," 167, says, "Truly, the *supernatural* is necessary to ground morality. While objective morality appears *logical* and obvious to some naturalists, the more fundamental question is *metaphysical*: can there be persons possessing *inherent* right and dignity apart from a good God, in whose image they have been made?"

¹²⁵Copan, "The Moral Argument," 159.

confirmation of feelings as grounds for ethics. Part of the difficulty is definitional. A subjectivist like Ruse wants to distinguish himself from any charges of relativism, emotivism, or egoism; however, the terms are closely related and often used interchangeably. Ruse faces difficulty in avoiding these charges.

Perhaps the most significant charge against a Darwinian subjectivism is ethical relativism. Ruse, a subjectivist, desperately wants to distance himself from relativism, but the terms are similar. The general subjectivist bases his morality on subjective feelings which can seemingly change from person to person, implying relativism. “An *individual relativist* claims that judgments of moral rightness and wrongness are relative to the individual making the judgment.”¹²⁶ Ethical relativism regards moral propositions as neither true nor false; truth values are relative to either a culture or the individual. No way exists to improve one’s morality because no objective standard is sought; thus, moral values can only be different, not better or worse.¹²⁷ No room exists for moral reform because that implies improvement; only horizontal change occurs because categories like “better” or “worse” are barred. Ruse is aware of relativism’s instability and vehemently rejects it: “I am a subjectivist, not a relativist. I argue that certain adaptations do not work unless they are fairly standard and shared by the group. . . . If our moralities differ at the basic level, then dialogue and sociality break down. I reject relativism.”¹²⁸

Ruse’s position is an interesting one in that he draws distinct lines between subjectivism and relativism, and he rejects relativism based on a common morality shared by all humans. Herein Ruse displays commitment to an “intergalactic” relativism. Ruse attempts to avoid the problems of individual or cultural relativism, specifically the Reformer’s dilemma of cultural relativism. If cultural ethical relativism is true, no place

¹²⁶Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 191.

¹²⁷Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 410-11.

¹²⁸Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 71.

exists for moral reformers like Christ, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.

Moral reformers are members of a society who stand outside that society's code and pronounce a need for reform and change in that code. However, if an act is right if and only if it is in keeping with a given society's code, then the moral reformer is by definition an immoral person, for his views are at odds with those of his society. Moral reformers must always be wrong because they go against the code of their society. But any view that implies moral reformers are impossible is defective.¹²⁹

Ruse attempts to sidestep this dilemma by rejecting cultural relativism and upholding the universally shared human morality across cultures and times. However, a problem arises as far as objectivity goes; by rejecting relativism Ruse must basically accept objective moral rights and wrongs. He always rejects the ontological existence of an objective referent by arguing that natural selection causes humans to "objectify" ethics. Our biology fools us into thinking morality is objective, exists "out there," and is binding. However, with no true point of objective reference concerning right and wrong, why believe the morality that the entire human race shares to be better than any other morality? A Darwinian approach such as this one does not seem to allow judgments of better about which possible moralities may have evolved, or for that matter, to think morality evolving as superior to immorality evolving.¹³⁰ Ruse supports the position that the morality we humans possess is not necessarily superior to that which might have evolved; after all, natural selection is concerned with what works, not with what is true or right. "Had evolution taken us down another path, we might well think moral that which we now find horrific, and conversely."¹³¹ But herein seems to be an admission to a form of relativism: the morality we possess is not objectively right, it is only relatively right for

¹²⁹Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 412. Also Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 45, says, "The biggest realization for me is that we cannot put our faith in a *relative* truth. . . . We look for that *one* thing that all other things are dependent on. Call it first cause or the cause of causes. This imperative permeates all human strivings, but only religion offers it in a systematic and structured way. If moral imperatives are not instilled as part of God's will, and if they are not in some sense *absolute*, then moral relativism is the norm."

¹³⁰Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 229.

¹³¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 254.

this species at this particular epoch in human history as natural selection has equipped us. In a million years, morality may be the complete opposite as it is now if such a change improves human reproductive fitness. So while Ruse completely rejects relativism at the micro-level of human nature at this period of time, he seems to allow that it could completely change if it serves to advance humanity's fitness. The quote above introduces horrific possibilities; it seems to allow that natural selection could have made us think it moral to murder for fun. One intuitively recoils from such a notion (as Ruse surely does), demonstrating that morality may very well be more objective than Professor Ruse admits.

The second charge Ruse wishes to avoid is that of emotivism. This accusation is particularly difficult for Ruse because, like Hume, he rejects rationality as the tool used in moral judgment and locates morality purely in the emotions. Emotivism is the view that moral statements are merely expressions of emotion that lack any true sense of right and wrong; they are simply a matter of feeling:

There is no independent source of morality. It all depends on human feelings, thoughts, and inclinations. Probably the most popular version of subjectivism, in this century, has been so-called 'emotivism.' . . . According to this doctrine, morality is a function of likes and dislikes, backed up by gut emotions. Thus, if I say 'Killing is wrong,' basically what I am saying is: 'I don't like killing – Boo to those that do!'¹³²

This program contains significant problems. Emotivists cannot reasonably supply justification for any moral statements as they simply reflect expressions of emotion.¹³³

The emotivist cannot condemn the moral actions of another as inherently wrong; he merely dislikes them as opposed to rationally declaring them immoral. The emotivist cannot affirm actions as praiseworthy; he merely expresses his approval of them. Ruse recognizes that people do not really think in such ways; instead, when someone says, "killing is wrong," they are not merely expressing their feelings but believe killing is

¹³²Ibid., 216.

¹³³Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 396.

wrong in an objective fashion. He admits that moral judgment cannot solely depend on human feelings. “This is why emotivism seems not merely implausible but downright immoral. Murder, rape, and theft are not merely matters of emotion and preference (or so it seems). They are matters of right and wrong!”¹³⁴

Ruse zealously distances himself from the view of emotivism because of its unfavorable implications. Serious criticisms arise against emotivism. The emotivist believes that moral statements are simply expressions of feeling, but people make moral judgments often in the absence of emotions. Also, an emotivist cannot justify the need for moral education since no ultimate standards exist, only emotional expressions. True disagreements cannot actually occur as no objective right and wrong is expressed.¹³⁵ The position of emotivism is laden with difficulties, and Ruse consistently declares his distaste for it. How does Ruse then escape charges of emotivism? He views Darwinism progressing beyond the Humean position, even completing it:

The problem with emotivism lies in being incomplete to the point of immoral implausibility. Darwinism advances beyond emotivism by showing why we have our special kinds of moral feelings. Also, Darwinism makes absolutely crucial what is often not fully stressed by emotivists, and what – by its omission – thus makes emotivism so wrong in the eyes of so many. Darwinism shows that, although morality may be all a question of feelings or sentiments, we humans project it into a prescriptively binding, supposedly objective status. We ‘objectify’ morality. And because – and only because – we do this, morality functions as an efficient social facilitating mechanism.¹³⁶

Ruse again retreats to his claim that humans objectify morality, but a criticism entails.

Ruse goes to great lengths to avoid charges of relativism, emotivism, and egoism by reverting to his illusion of objectivity. According to Ockham’s razor, affirming genuine

¹³⁴Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 66.

¹³⁵Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 398-99. Also Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 205, says, “The emotivist, in fact, entirely side-steps the difficulties that the sociobiologists think that evolutionary theory raises for the ethicist. When the emotivist says that one ought to do *x*, what he or she thinks one is saying is that he or she approves of doing *x* and ‘Do thou likewise’. . . . And, for the emotivist, the rest of a moral claim is exhortation, which is neither true nor false.”

¹³⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 277.

objective morality appears less contrived than an illusion. Ruse's worldview allows him no room to do so, however. Thus, he remains true to his Darwinism. Ruse promotes a position of moral action based on the feeling of obligation, a "groundless" feeling of obligation, distinct from any genuine objective reality.¹³⁷ Again, if a true, objective ground for morality disappears and leaves no objective right and wrong, can one truly escape charges of emotivism by postulating an illusion? Indeed, in response to Ruse's admission that killing is absolutely, objectively wrong, "I agree. But how can a professed moral nihilist say with a straight face that, despite the fact that he believes that nothing is objectively right or wrong, he also believes that some things are objectively right or wrong?"¹³⁸

The final position Ruse's subjectivism must elude is ethical egoism, the thesis that one should seek only goods that promote his own well-being. This life is motivated by self-love wherein if one helps another, that help must positively affect his own well-being.¹³⁹ This position denies genuine altruism, sees other people only as means and not ends, and solely promotes self. Obviously such a system has little to do with morality as most people understand it and can only attain to the status of pseudo-morality. Egoism faces enormous challenges as an ethical position, including the "Publicity Objection." This objection states that our moral life is in the public arena and affect those within our community. Moral principles should be taught publicly and practiced by all. However, the ethical egoist would be immoral in teaching his position. His desire is his own well-being; if he teaches others to act in the same manner, then he diminishes his own well-being. Others will begin to act egoistically, and he desires that they act altruistically

¹³⁷Yandell, "A Moral Essentialism Response," 83.

¹³⁸Mark D. Linville, "A Moral Particularism Response," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 91.

¹³⁹Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 4-5.

toward him. Thus, ethical egoism should not be advanced in public.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, if the egoist's position were known by others, he could never be trusted because his every act consists of the ulterior motive of benefiting self, even at the harm of others.¹⁴¹ If all in society became egoists, society would break down due to lack of trust and cooperation. This leads to another problem for egoism: things like friendship, altruism, and sacrificial love are universally prized; however, they are contrary to ethical egoism. Thus, egoism essentially eliminates these virtues that everyone regards as valuable. Interestingly, these virtues lead to personal happiness, the very thing the egoist pursues, yet they are excluded because they are inconsistent with his position. The egoist must be altruistic in love and friendship to attain the ends he desires, but these are improper means to arrive there.¹⁴²

One is not hard-pressed to see why Ruse distances himself from such a position. Egoism has nothing to do with true morality or altruism; one merely uses others to pursue his own selfish ends. Why bring up egoism in this discussion? The nature of Darwinian theory suggests that one advance his own ends above all other concerns. Every Darwinian theory must overcome this seemingly innate difficulty: why be moral when the goal is one's own survival and reproduction?

Every moral theory faces the question, Why be moral? Ethical egoism provides a ready answer: do just what serves my self-interest; goals that benefit me are inherently reason-giving for me, and those that don't aren't. For the ethical naturalist who rejects egoism, the question is especially pressing: evolutionary theory suggests that the primary unit of selection is the individual, and one ought therefore to expect that an individual's *telos* includes, above all, self-preservation.¹⁴³

A fundamental tenet of Darwinism expresses that natural selection fosters individual

¹⁴⁰Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 428-29.

¹⁴¹Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument, 205-06, says, "The theory of ethical egoism, of course, suffers from many a problem: it is unable to universalize itself as a principle, it leads others to doubt constantly the advice of the egoist; it arbitrarily limits *all* ethical considerations to an isolated individual's concerns; and so on. Thus egoism should be rejected."

¹⁴²Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 429.

¹⁴³Fales, "Naturalist Moral Realism," 20.

fitness, but morality is generally other than self-benefit. While all Darwinians have to respond to this dilemma, the important concern is how Ruse escapes it. One is not surprised to learn that it is through his “objectifying” of morality. Since natural selection caused our moral adaptations, we feel the binding nature of moving beyond ourselves and acting morally to those around us. One of the primary issues counting against Ruse’s stance that will be further expounded in the next chapter is introduced here: for the person as enlightened as Ruse concerning the illusory nature of objective morality, why not cheat the system for one’s own benefit? If one knows that objective morality is illusory, his interests are best served by rebelling against the illusion and hoping everyone else continues believing in it. Thus, egoism presents a real problem to all Darwinians, including Ruse, because the possibility of it continues to raise its ugly head.

Truth and Falsifiability

Ruse has consistently invoked his illusion of objectivity to retain the binding nature of morality, and through it he remains consistent with his Darwinian worldview. He cannot reference purpose or design because Darwinism disallows such ends; evolution is a valueless, purposeless process. Natural selection can only produce “as if” designed aspects of the universe. Ruse’s illusion suggests that natural selection placed in human nature the adaptation of morality whereby it is in our best interests to cooperate. No true objective morality exists “out there;” natural selection only “tricks” us in believing that it does. Natural selection “cares” only about reproductive fitness. Thus, the morality Ruse describes is an adaptation put in place to advance our fitness. This description is Ruse’s position, but the problematic question remains: is it true? Not only must one question the truthfulness of Ruse’s theory, but one must also question whether this description of morality is truth-conducive. Indeed, the above summary illustrates that Darwinian morality is survival-conducive, not truth-conducive. Ruse sketches the problem of truth for his Darwinian skepticism.

But can we not – should we not – turn the argument back on itself? Are not the very claims about Darwinian evolution themselves infected with the same subjectivity? . . . If our understanding of the world is a function of our evolution, have we any answer to the person who refuses to take us seriously? Are we not now caught in the paradox of the person who says that everything is relative?¹⁴⁴

Ruse thus asserts that a critic has *prima facie* grounds to accuse him of relativism, and that his position implies a type of circularity. He then acknowledges that his theory of natural selection that tricks us through the illusion of objectivity invites critique:

Perhaps the critic's worry can be put into concrete form by focusing in on natural selection, the concept right at the heart of Darwinism. How does an epistemologist like myself counter the following line of argument? 'We know that natural selection can "deceive" organisms for their own (biological) good. The belief of primitive people in spirits and the like is a clear case in point. Obviously, the sun does not have a mind of its own. Yet people believe precisely this, and the reason why they believe it is because such beliefs have adaptive value. Clearly, therefore, such beliefs are illusions, fostered upon us for reproductive purposes. . . . Perhaps, therefore, the deceit of natural selection extends much further than we dream. Perhaps many of our basic principles of methodology are illusory. Possibly the illusion extends right to natural selection itself, the very basis of your case! If it sounds somewhat crazy to suggest that natural selection might be deceiving us about the true nature of natural selection, for our own good, remember it was you who undermined the principles of logic, by lumping them in with your general naturalistic approach.'¹⁴⁵

Ruse introduces a strong critique against his position; he may underestimate the lengths to which natural selection's illusion deceives. Humans may be deceived, not just about objectivity in morality, but about everything. If one embraces skepticism, perhaps there exists no true knowledge of anything. In fact, Ruse confesses that, at his proposal's worst, this inference concerning truthfulness may ensue from his position:

The real point, the critic will say, is that the very thought processes themselves are at issue – particularly those leading to Darwinian theory. At the least, the Darwinian approach – with its fundamental commitment to non-progressionism – has to lay itself open to radically different interpretations of the world, where nothing we hold as intuitively true or obvious holds. *At the extreme, the Darwinian approach has to admit that everything we believe may simply be false, even unto the very principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory.*¹⁴⁶ (italics mine)

¹⁴⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 199.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 201.

Ruse proves his commitment to his worldview, clinging to his skepticism even at great cost. His admission, while honest, weakens his proposal. Can a theory geared toward survival and reproduction supply an ultimate place for truth? The answer seems to be that it cannot. Ruse acknowledges that Darwinism can only go so far with the notion of truth:

This point certainly brings forward an important conclusion . . . in some ultimate sense, the Darwinian rejects a correspondence theory of truth. That is to say, he/she rejects the idea that his/her thought corresponds to true reality, where ‘reality’ in this context is some sort of absolute entity, like the thing-in-itself. Obviously, working within the common-sense level, the Darwinian is just as much of a correspondence thinker as anyone else. . . . But at the final level, defending common-sense reality, as we have had to accept, the Darwinian subscribes to a coherence theory of truth, believing that the best you can do is to get everything to hang together. . . . However, within these coherence terms the Darwinian really is untroubled by the critic’s objection. As far as we are concerned, different ways of thinking are (literally) unimaginable.¹⁴⁷

This discussion obviously has to do with Darwinian epistemology, but the implications apply to Darwinian moral theory as well. A Darwinian account of morality may cohere with the Darwinian worldview, but does it correspond to the way people envision morality? Can it provide the origins for morality and its binding component? “In particular, that account, on its standard interpretation, does not *explain* morality but, rather, explains it *away*. We learn from Darwin not how there could *be* objective moral facts but how we could have come to *believe*, perhaps erroneously, that there are.”¹⁴⁸ If the only remaining explanation for morality is that natural selection produced it to move persons toward survival and reproduction, then one has legitimate reason to question the truthfulness of moral beliefs generated by such a process. Can the adaptation of morality that arose only to ultimately benefit self legitimately be labeled “morality” in a genuine sense? At best, this depicts merely a pseudo-morality put in place by natural selection to enhance our fitness. The ends of morality matter: if morality is reproduction-conducive, then seemingly insurmountable challenges obtain.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 202

¹⁴⁸Linville, “The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism,” 58.

For it would appear that the human moral sense and the moral beliefs that arise from it are ultimately the result of natural selection, and their value is thus found in the *adaptive behavior* they encourage. But then it seems that the process responsible for our having the moral beliefs that we do are ultimately *fitness aimed* rather than *truth aimed*. That is to say that in such a case *the best explanation for our having the moral beliefs we do makes no essential reference to their being true*.¹⁴⁹

Another problem with Ruse's moral skepticism is that it is unfalsifiable.

Skepticism, by definition, incurs difficulty in being either confirmed or falsified. The entirety of evolutionary theory encounters this same charge of unfalsifiability. Evolution is often a theory used to explain everything;¹⁵⁰ Darwinians use it to affirm both altruism and selfishness. They proclaim that whatever comes about is a product of natural selection. But a theory that explains everything really explains nothing. If evolution produces both a thing (altruism) and its opposite (narcissism), then it is a logical fallacy. A barrage of similar indictments undermine a naturalistic theory of evolution wherein natural selection is credited with producing opposite effects:

Yet evolutionary psychology proves to be so elastic that it can explain just about anything. On one hand, evolution is said to account for mothers who kill their newborn babies. But, of course, if you were to ask why most mothers do *not* kill their babies, why, evolution accounts for that too. A theory that explains any phenomenon and its opposite, too, in reality explains nothing. It is so flexible that it can be twisted to say whatever proponents want it to say.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 62. Also Michael Ruse, "A Few Last Words-Until the Next Time," *Zygon* 29 (1994): 76, says, "There is one thing that I do want to say, as much a cautionary note to myself . . . that we must be careful with the claim that selection cares only about reproductive success and not at all for fidelity to the truth. If you push this argument to the limit, then you end up with one of those nasty self-referential problems, where you have undermined your reasons for believing that selection itself is an effective mechanism, the very force on which you are basing your skepticism! I think you can get out of this problem, but only by dropping thoughts of some absolute correspondence theory of truth. . . . You must work from a coherence position, recognizing that the best one can achieve is some sort of overall consistency."

¹⁵⁰Dorothy Nelkin, "Less Selfish than Sacred? Genes and the Religious Impulse in Evolutionary Biology," in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Hilary Rose and Steve Rose (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 19-21, includes a section with the title "A Theory of Everything."

¹⁵¹Nancy R. Pearcey, "Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears: Evolution as a Total Worldview," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 58. Also J. Budziszewski, "Accept No Limitations: The Rivalry of Naturalism and Natural Law," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 104, says, "You can 'explain' fidelity and you can 'explain' infidelity. You can 'explain' monogamy, and you can 'explain' polygamy. Best of all (for

This problem of accounting for the varying effects of natural selection is a difficult one for Darwinians that suggests that the theory is unfalsifiable. Ruse addressed this problem in his book *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense*, prior to his conversion to sociobiology. In the book he was sympathetic to sociobiology, but he was not yet convinced of it. Herein he allowed that the major charge against sociobiology was that it was not genuine science. It does not lay itself open to empirical experiment; thus, it cannot, in principle, be falsified, and if it is not falsifiable, then it is not genuine science.¹⁵² Ruse directed this criticism toward sociobiology, and he related it to empirical proof required by science, especially for a Darwinian philosopher. He next addressed the issue of falsifiability in terms of evolutionary theory as a whole and responded to the objections:

Surely in arguing for adaptations, evolutionists show that their theory is unfalsifiable: if the adaptive advantage can be shown then evolutionists are right, and if it cannot be shown then they assume it is there anyway! . . . A number of comments are in order here. First, it is just not true that evolutionists believe that all characteristics are adaptive. . . . Second . . . there are good scientific reasons why evolutionists are justified in assuming adaptive advantage even where they might not be able to tell what it is. . . . Third . . . I suspect in any case that examples can be created which would give evolutionists pause for thought: where they really might think that their theory would demand at least some kind of revision.¹⁵³

Herein Ruse admitted that examples may exist that count against the theory of evolution.

What is pertinent for the current discussion is the falsifiability of Ruse's moral theory.

Can any evidence be presented that would overturn Ruse's illusion? There seemingly

those who devise them), none of your explanations can be disconfirmed – because all of the data about what actually happened are lost in the mists of prehistory. In the truest sense of the word, they are myths.” Also David Berlinski, “The Deniable Darwin,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 268, says, “The theory of evolution, by contrast, is incapable of ruling *anything* out of court. That job must be done by nature. But a theory that can confront any contingency with unflagging success cannot be falsified. Its control of the facts is an illusion.” Also Phillip Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 114, says, “If mothers protect and nurture their infants, that behavior exemplifies the maternal instinct that is produced by natural selection. If they kill their infants, then that behavior illustrates the neonaticidal instinct – which is also produced by natural selection. . . a theory that explains everything explains nothing.”

¹⁵²Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 111.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 114-15.

exists no avenue for confirming or disconfirming the existence of an illusion of objectivity for Darwinian ethics. Human biology causes persons to believe in the illusion so strongly that even a philosopher as accomplished as Ruse has difficulty convincing us of the illusion. Based on this reality, one finds difficulty in affirming or disavowing Ruse's theory empirically, and one finds greater challenge in believing it theoretically.

Conclusion

This chapter depicted Ruse's version of moral anti-realism, both in its origins and exposition. All forms of moral anti-realism face significant challenges, specifically concerning charges of subjectivism: relativism, emotivism, and egoism. Ruse recognizes these hindrances and presents his version of anti-realism in terms of a subjectivism of a distinct kind. He retains substantive ethics enforced by an apparent binding component but dismisses the objective metaethical referent as illusory. Ruse promotes a skepticism that he concedes is controversial from the outset but believes a coherence theory of truth, as opposed to a correspondence theory, suffices as an explanation:

Like the Darwinian, Hume emphasized that our knowledge of the world is based on propensities of the mind. This means that, with Hume, the Darwinian has to wrestle with the problem of scepticism. There is no guarantee that a philosophically satisfying answer will emerge. Fortunately, in real life this does not matter, for we have the world of common-sense reality. Moreover, natural selection has seen to it that we are psychologically inured against the torments of metaphysical doubt. In any case, the Darwinian epistemologist need not really fear even the deepest barbs of skepticism. Total deception of the kind that the metaphysical sceptic threatens is a far-from-plausible notion. So long as one recognizes that, ultimately, truth rests in coherence, not correspondence, all is well.¹⁵⁴

One must determine if a coherence theory is satisfactory for epistemology but, more importantly here, can a system that fails to provide a primary place for truth be trusted to supply warrant for our moral beliefs? Specifically, can a theory that describes moral objectivity as an illusion and the goal as survival and reproduction provide an ultimate

¹⁵⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 206.

place for truth in either our epistemology or ethics? The argument here is that it cannot.¹⁵⁵

Human nature produces a desire to know that our moral prescriptions and beliefs correspond to reality. Ruse asserts that there are some beliefs we can explain phenomenologically that lack philosophical explanation. On the surface, this seems like a clever escape for him, but it ultimately proves shaky as a satisfactory explanation:

Nor do I see how the distinction between phenomenological and philosophical beliefs is of any help. Were you to enter my office to find me hanging from a chandelier, you would think it odd for me to explain that I *believe*, phenomenologically, that there is a man-eating crocodile that I *know*, philosophically, is not there.¹⁵⁶

This chapter attempts an honest summary of Ruse's subjectivism and elucidates some serious problems contained therein. An anti-realist must affirm an illusion that his biology simply cannot accept, even after learning of the illusion. Ruse concedes that his position is counterintuitive. The dissertation presents an argument that Christianity affirms a moral grounding that is not counterintuitive or ad hoc; Christians ground their moral beliefs in the nature of a good God who created humans in His image. Prior to fully arguing this position, however, a deeper discussion of Ruse's illusion is necessary. The subsequent chapter critically assesses Ruse's illusion of objectivity and analyzes whether substantive ethics can, indeed, remain in place if metaethical grounds prove illusory.

¹⁵⁵Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 271, says, "Natural selection is interested in adaptive behavior, behavior that conduces to survival and reproduction; it has no interest in our having true beliefs."

¹⁵⁶Linville, "A Moral Particularism Response," 93.

CHAPTER 3

RUSE'S ILLUSION OF OBJECTIVITY: RUSE OR REALITY?

Introduction

This chapter investigates the most controversial issue in Ruse's Darwinian ethics, his illusion of objectivity, discusses whether the illusion describes genuine morality, and delineates some of the major problems in rendering objectivity an illusion. The dissertation moves from a macro-level study of Ruse's worldview and his overall moral anti-realist position to, here, the micro-level central component of his moral proposal. The chapter explores some of the necessary constituent parts of his morality: epigenetic rules, the illusion of objectivity, and his substitution of explanatory causes for justificatory reasons. Each category effects difficult problems for Ruse, and each must obtain for his proposal's success.

Whereas some Darwinians dismiss the prescriptive force of morality altogether, thereby weakening any proposal for substantive morality, Ruse desperately attempts to retain substantive morality. He does not wish to jettison his Darwinism either, believing that Darwinian theory informs moral discussions:

Can modern evolutionary theory tell us nothing about morality, at either the substantive or metaethical level? A totally negative answer to these questions would be surprising, if only because the past thirty years have seen major advances in the Darwinian understanding of the evolution of social behavior. That area where morality most comes into play, the interactions between individuals in a cooperative or social manner, has been the subject of intense scrutiny by Darwinians, who think that they have completely transformed our thinking on the question.¹

¹Michael Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 300.

Not only does Ruse believe Darwinism can preserve substantive ethics, he further holds that it accounts for a binding, prescriptive sense of morality:

I have been stressing that an inherent aspect of morality . . . is that it applies to all people. . . . Morality is about what we *ought* or *should* or *may* do, and about what we ought or should or may not do. Morality, in other words, is about desired or permitted or required behavior, or about unwanted or forbidden behavior. Morality is about ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Hence, there is a certain *prescriptive*, as opposed to merely descriptive, air to morality. . . . Another way of putting all of this, given the universality of morality, is to say that what distinguishes a moral claim is that it is set against some universal standard of required thought or behavior.²

While this prescriptive element is common in theistic depictions of morality, Darwinians do not always claim it is necessary due to Darwinism’s inherent challenges in grounding it. Many Darwinian versions of morality are strictly relativistic, but the last chapter illustrated Ruse’s rejection of relativistic morality and characterization of himself as a subjectivist of a distinct kind. Some Darwinian moral proposals even expel any idea of substantive morality remaining in place. Ruse accuses E. O. Wilson of this very position; whereas Ruse dismisses a metaethical basis for substantive ethics, Wilson denies even the existence of substantive ethics, and morality becomes nothing more than a “selfish yearning predicated on our evolutionary self-interest.”³ Ruse believes this step is improper as it dismisses altogether any hope for authentic morality. Nevertheless, the existence of morality in a worldview that not only implies selfishness, but outright insists on it, proves difficult to explain. Ruse insists that humans must be selfish to some degree or we would “never get a square meal, let alone a mate.” However, since we are social, we needed something to move us beyond our selfish desires, some force that pushes us beyond our selfish tendencies in order to help others. “This is where morality comes in.”⁴

²Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 69.

³*Ibid.*, 95.

⁴Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131.

The question remains, based on a Darwinian scheme, what causes morality to obtain at all? Ruse never distances himself from his Darwinism so he must find justification within his worldview. Recall that Ruse rejects traditional evolutionary ethics, particularly Social Darwinism, precisely because they were not truly Darwinian:

There, the foundational appeal is to the very fact of evolution. People like Herbert Spencer and Edward O. Wilson argue that one ought to do certain things because, by so doing, one is promoting the welfare of evolution itself. Specifically, one is promoting human beings as the apotheosis of the evolutionary process – a move condemned by philosophers as a gross instance of the naturalistic fallacy. . . . My kind of evolutionary metaethics agrees with the philosopher that the naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy and so also is the violation of Hume's Law. My kind of evolutionary metaethics also agrees that social Darwinism is guilty as charged. But my kind of evolutionary metaethics takes this failure as a springboard of strength to its own position. The Darwinian metaethics . . . avoids fallacy, not so much by denying that fallacy is a fallacy, but by doing an end run around it, as it were. There is no fallacious appeal to evolution as foundations because there are no foundations to appeal to!⁵

This argument represents Ruse's "end run" in order to avoid breaking the naturalistic fallacy. His end run consists of denying that Darwinism supplies any true metethical foundation for substantive ethics. This admission seemingly leaves him in the same position as Wilson, denying any authentic substantive morality altogether. However, Ruse predicates his substantive ethics, not on the theory of evolution itself (the fact of it) which is the mistake made by Social Darwinians, but on the mechanism of evolution: natural selection producing the adaptation of morality. He thus argues that any search for justification is mistaken because justification is unnecessary. Because he believes morality is an adaptation possessed by all humans, he argues that we believe morality is more than a mere adaptation; morality *seems* binding. Genuine morality requires an objective foundation for it to remain prescriptive; Ruse presents objectivity as an illusion put in place by natural selection causing humans to cooperate who normally would resist doing so.

⁵Michael Ruse, "Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible (And If It Is, Is It Well Taken)?" in *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, ed. Giovanni Boniolo and Gabriele de Anna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 21.

This is to argue that the search for justification is mistaken. Ethics just is. It is an adaptation for humans living socially and has exactly the same status as other adaptations, like hands and teeth and genitalia. As such, ethics is something with no standing beyond what it is. However, if we all thought that this was so, we would stop being moral. So part of the experience of ethics is that it is more than it is. We think that it has an objective referent. In short, ethics is an illusion put in place by our genes to make us good social cooperators.⁶

On the surface, this reasoning appears to be a cop-out in order to avoid the naturalistic fallacy: “So how then do I justify my substantive ethical beliefs? I claim simply that there is no justification!”⁷ However, deeper inquiry reveals Ruse’s attempt to resolve the fallacy through the only Darwinian means available to him: the illusion of objectivity. Darwinian ethics provide no solid footing for objective morality, but Ruse cannot deny that people live as if morality is binding. He thus locates this apparent binding nature of morality in biological adaptation, attempting to retain his Darwinism but also preserve the obvious human intuition that morality is objective. However, even Ruse allows that this adaptation, like all others, is imperfect, noting that we possess moral problems with no apparent solutions. He argues that the Darwinian should expect just this situation because adaptations are not perfect; we do the best we can with what natural selection supplies. Ethics is a good adaptation that sometimes breaks down, and we should expect this result rather than being surprised by it.⁸ One should critique Ruse’s depiction of morality as an adaptation where objective morality is only an illusion; however, describing his illusion of objectivity as backpedaling from a full Darwinian proposal is illegitimate.

⁶Michael Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Francisco Ayala and Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 297.

⁷Michael Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 64.

⁸Michael Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 503. Also Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), 269, says, “Morality is an ephemeral product of the evolutionary process, just as are other adaptations. It has no existence or being beyond this, and any deeper meaning is illusory (although put on us for good biological reasons).”

Before delving into the specifics of Ruse's strategy, a preliminary statement concerning sociobiology is necessary. Recall this highly controversial branch of scientific study promoted by E. O. Wilson in his 1975 book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. The debate over the validity of sociobiology ever since this publication has continued, and Ruse (now) fully affirms the place of sociobiology:

It is fair to say that, in the two decades subsequent to *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*—and to *The Selfish Gene*, a sparkling popularization by Richard Dawkins (1976)—sociobiology has come into its own as a full member of the Darwinian areas of scientific inquiry. . . . Controversial though it may be, let there be no mistake that human sociobiology—something today often hidden under innocuous-sounding names like "evolutionary psychology"—is part of the general Darwinian picture: selection working on features powered by the genes.⁹

As alluded to above, Ruse was not always a proponent of sociobiology. In fact, he often refers to "his former self" concerning his skepticism, if not rejection of, sociobiology. In fact, his book, *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense*, explored the validity of sociobiology as a legitimate field of study. He was often more sympathetic than most to the sociobiologists, but he was certainly not convinced of their position at the time:

Perhaps one thing, more than anything, distinguishes both the claims and the style of sociobiologists from previous writers about the biological bases of human social behaviour, namely the way in which the sociobiologists believe that they are the first to approach human behaviour backed by a solid foundation of tested biological theory. Of course, we may conclude later that the links the sociobiologists see both between their work on social behavior in the non-human world and the rest of biology and between their work in the non-human world and social behaviour in the human world are nothing like as tight as they themselves suppose.¹⁰

His skepticism toward sociobiology eventually switched to full endorsement. "I think that everything applies to humans, thought and action, and that sociobiology is the best thing to happen to the social sciences in the last century."¹¹ Ruse's conversion to sociobiology may be described as a "Copernican Revolution;" the impact of it on his thought is broad

⁹Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," 302.

¹⁰Michael Ruse, *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 5.

¹¹Michael Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ix.

and deep. This conversion inspired much of the work throughout the rest of his career and led to his suggestion that objectivity is an illusion. The role of sociobiology in the work of Michael Ruse cannot be underestimated as will be demonstrated through a primary feature of his moral thought, the epigenetic rules. The following section describes and critiques this crucial element of Ruse's moral proposal. Before moving to that discussion, one must recall a critical position in Ruse's work: he never seeks to jettison substantive morality; instead, he seeks to explain it from his Darwinian worldview.

I think the substantive ethics, claims like 'love your neighbor as yourself,' are simply psychological beliefs put in place by natural selection in order to maintain and improve our reproductive fitness. There is nothing more to them than that. They have no ultimate backing. I am therefore what is known by philosophers as an "ethical skeptic." Sometimes my position is known as 'moral nihilism.' Regardless of whatever term is used, I want to emphasize that my skepticism or nihilism is not about the *existence* of substantive ethics. It is about the *foundations* of substantive ethics. I am therefore a "moral nonrealist."¹²

Epigenetic Rules

Morality: Genetic or Cultural?

Sociobiology is the field of study based on the premise that our social behavior results from evolutionary processes, or as Ruse summarized it above: "selection working on features powered by the genes." Thus, in some important sense our biology is responsible for our social interactions, but then culture does not remain static either; it, too, continues to evolve. Much debate occurs in Darwinian moral theory over whether morality is biologically-based or culturally-based. Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson published, *Genes, Mind and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process*, in 1981, and the aspect of epigenetic rules expressed therein transformed Ruse's thinking on the nature of ethics. The authors argued for a coevolution of genes and culture, which they admitted on first glance seems an unlikely combination of processes.¹³ Recall that when Ruse

¹²Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 64-65.

¹³Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture: The Coevolutionary*

assessed sociobiology in 1979, he was fairly critical of its veracity, asserting that, “what I am suggesting is that culture could not itself be a cause of morality as such . . . because culture in some sense presupposes morality – unless people can work together in a giving and sharing manner there is no culture.”¹⁴ His transformation was a Copernican revolution in that he later came to believe sociobiology was the most important scientific advancement of the century. Previously he considered philosophy as the only legitimate basis for ethics; however, in taking Darwin seriously, he realized that describing ethics apart from biology was inconsistent: “Only by setting normative beliefs and behavior against an evolutionary background can we hope to achieve a full understanding of morality. This is not a position I enjoy taking. Indeed, it goes against my training and my inclinations. It puts me apart from those I love most. But I believe it is true.”¹⁵

Thus, in the debate over the extreme positions for the underpinnings of morality, biology or culture, Ruse recognizes the need for a balance between the two. Some Darwinians believe culture alone explains our moral inclinations whereas others allow biology primacy of place. Ruse vies for a middle ground position:

With clear limits articulated, perhaps we can avoid those dreary misunderstandings which frequently drag out discussions of the biology-culture relationship. First, as is so often the case with powerful, misleading arguments, there is an important kernel of truth in the culture-as-all-important argument. This holds particularly if you understand ‘culture’ not so much as denying biology as transcending it. Not even the greatest enthusiast for Darwinian biology could pretend that every last element of culture is tied to biology, as tightly as are (for instance) hands and eyes.¹⁶

Ruse allows that culture does in some way “transcend” our biology and supplies what natural selection was never meant to provide. However, the crucial need for biological

Process (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1.

¹⁴Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 197.

¹⁵Michael Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” *Monist* 67 (1984): 168.

¹⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 124. He allows, “For all of my criticism of the evolutionary ethicists, I do most fervently agree that we must not turn our backs on biology. The question is not whether we are to fuse morality with biology, but how.” *Ibid.*, 95.

origins balances his argument:

The second general point about biology and culture is as important as the first. Notwithstanding the obvious new elements introduced by culture, nothing as yet denies the importance of biology in a full understanding of culture. On the one hand, let us not dismiss too readily the fact that culture, taken as a whole, does indubitably have a broad adaptive value. . . . On the other hand, in defending the importance of biology for a full understanding of culture, as always, we should not pretend that we come to the evolution of a new organ or capacity – including even culture – with no background knowledge.¹⁷

Wilson allows that “the genes have given away much of their sovereignty,” yet he also holds that “the genes hold culture on a leash,” explicating the balanced position between genes and culture.¹⁸ Ruse embraces this balanced position as well because problems result from extremes in either direction. First, if our moral impulses are entirely cultural, then our minds are *tabula rasa*, and we would be forced to consider every moral option before making a decision, similar to the early generations of chess computers that became bogged down at every turn.¹⁹ Second, if our biology alone controls every move, like the ant hard-wired to perform certain tasks, no genuine freedom exists, and we are left with genetic determinism. Thus Ruse labels both positions as false extremes and endorses a middle course approach where morality results from evolution and is adaptive.²⁰ Herein, morality is hardwired into us but is mediated through culture. Natural

¹⁷Ibid. 125. Also Ruse, “Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible?,” 16, says, “Morality is an adaptation like hands and teeth and penises and vaginas. Obviously biology does not play the only role, and we must certainly allow culture some significant part also. How significant we can leave more or less open, between two false extremes – that everything is basically cultural . . . and that everything is basically biological. . . . The point is that morality has come through human evolution and it is adaptive.”

¹⁸E. O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 176.

¹⁹Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics: Are They in Harmony?” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 13.

²⁰Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” 307. Also David C. Lahti, “Parting with Illusions in Evolutionary Ethics,” *Biology and Philosophy* 18 (2003): 650, says, “Although there may have been some genetic change in adaptation to the new social situation, modern aspects of morality may largely function as a cultural surrogate for genetic adaptation, analogous to parental instructions that children not eat too much candy. Much of what is distinctive about the morality of modern humans may enhance individual fitness by modifying behavior appropriately for the novel social environments we have created for ourselves.”

selection generates the morality within us so that we will cooperate with others which is an inherent aspect of our evolved human nature.²¹

Ruse admits that his position engenders critique, for either not giving enough credit to culture²² or to biology. However, Ruse adopted his middle way approach after becoming convinced of the necessary balance between the two. But what causes such a balance, what does it look like, and how does it remain in place? The answer for Ruse to all of these questions is that crucial element introduced by Lumsden and Wilson: the epigenetic rules that mediate the relationship between genetic and cultural evolution:

In the light of Darwinian evolutionary theory, the humans-as-beyond-biology thesis was never that plausible. Now, I suggest, is the time to leave it entirely. Human culture, meaning human thought and action, is informed and structured by biological factors. Natural selection and adaptive advantage reach through to the very core of our being. And the link between our genes and our culture is the epigenetic rule. . . . Culture is the flesh on a biological skeleton, and the bones are epigenetic rules, controlled by the genes and fashioned by selection.²³

If the rules perform a task as enormous as linking our genes and culture for adaptive advantage and form a central component of Ruse's moral scheme, then they deserve careful study and critique.

The Epigenetic Rules

Upon Ruse's conversion to sociobiology, he grasped that Darwinism informs the entirety of human experience, including and especially, the cultural dimension.

Culture can and will take humans beyond the mere biological aspect of Darwinism, but it

²¹Ruse, "Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible?," 20.

²²Philip Hefner, "Entrusting the Life that has Evolved: A Response to Michael Ruse's Ruse," *Zygon* 29 (1994): 71-72, says, "I am arguing that Ruse does not give full attention to culture, its nature, its functions, and what it accomplishes in tandem with genes. Rather than setting up a potential 'nature versus nurture' controversy, however, I would put it in the terms I have already suggested: Ruse's outlook seems to be one that is backward-looking, insisting that we are what our biology has been, whereas I am urging that the quintessential human stance is forward-looking, asking what this genes-culture symbiosis can become and what it ought to become."

²³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 147. Also Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 11, say, "*Gene-culture coevolution* is correspondingly defined as any change in the epigenetic rules due to shifts in gene frequency, or in culturigen frequencies due to the epigenetic rules, or in both jointly."

cannot contradict it. Culture does not reign sovereign. At the same time, culture does not merely exist alongside our genetics with no interaction.

And yet, from a general Darwinian perspective, to suppose that culture sits in isolation on top of the genes makes for both inefficiency and danger. A *tabula rasa* mind demands a brain with a great deal of useless capacity. . . . We would need the ability to believe all sorts of things which are, biologically speaking, completely crazy, and which one would hope we never would believe. Such total receptivity probably requires a cranial capacity several times larger than the one we now possess. This requirement makes the hypothesis highly improbable. Natural selection is inefficient, but it tends not to be this profligate.²⁴

Thus, somehow interaction must occur between genes and culture resulting in a coevolution, but the missing component piece was a necessary mechanism making it possible. Ruse believes Lumsden and Wilson discovered this mechanism, the epigenetic rule, “a constraint which obtains on some facet of human development, having its origin in evolutionary needs, and channeling the way in which the growing or grown human thinks and acts.”²⁵ The “epigenetic rules” hypothesis occupies a primary and crucial position in Ruse’s moral theory; in fact, much of his theory relies on the factuality and function of such rules. Thus, a discussion ensues providing a description and critique of the epigenetic rules.

The theory of epigenetic rules originated with Lumsden and Wilson, and a detailed description follows from them. For introductory purposes they state:

In recent years the present authors have come to appreciate the probable existence of some form of coupling between genetic and cultural evolution, and we have undertaken our effort with the conviction that the time is ripe for the discovery of its nature. The key, we feel, lies in the ontogenetic development of mental activity and behavior and particularly the form of epigenetic rules, which can be treated as ‘molecular units’ that assemble the mind midway along the developmental path between genes and culture.²⁶

This quote portrays the discovery of the epigenetic rules as a link between genes and

²⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 141-42.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 143.

²⁶Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, ix.

culture. However, one may wonder whether the authors empirically discovered the rules or philosophically proposed them due to their system's need for such an entity. Without the rules, Darwinians possess no solid link between biology and culture. They introduce the rules in a more detailed and technical manner:

In this book we propose a very different view in which the genes prescribe a set of biological processes, which we call epigenetic rules, that direct the assembly of the mind. This assembly is context dependent, with the epigenetic rules feeding on information derived from culture and physical environment. Such information is forged into cognitive schemata that are the raw materials of thought and decision. Emitted behavior is just one product of the dynamics of the mind, and culture is the translation of the epigenetic rules into mass patterns of mental activity and behavior. . . . Genes are indeed linked to culture, but in a deep and subtle manner.²⁷

Now that their general hypothesis is elucidated, a definition of key terms they utilize aids in grasping their theory. "The basic unit of culture,"²⁸ is called a culturgen. "Epigenesis is defined as the total process of interaction between genes and the environment during development, with the genes being expressed through epigenetic rules."²⁹ Finally, the authors exhaustively define the epigenetic rule:

Any regularity during epigenesis that channels the development of an anatomical, physiological, cognitive, or behavioral trait in a particular direction. Epigenetic rules are ultimately genetic in basis, in the sense that their particular nature depends on the DNA development blueprint. They occur at all stages of development, from protein assembly through the complex events of organ construction to learning. Some epigenetic rules are inflexible, with the final phenotype being buffered from all but the most drastic environmental changes. Others permit a flexible response to the environment; yet even these may be invariant, in the sense that each possible response in the array is matched to one environmental cue or a set of cues through the operation of special control mechanisms. In cognitive development, the epigenetic rules are expressed in any one of the many processes of perception and cognition to influence the form of learning and the transmission of culturgens.³⁰

A layman's definition consists of the epigenetic rules mediating the relation between genetic and cultural evolution, or as Ruse states, "epigenetic rules, those intermediaries

²⁷Ibid., 2.

²⁸Ibid., 368.

²⁹Ibid., 36.

³⁰Ibid., 370.

between the genes and human thought and action.”³¹

Now that the terms are defined, how do these epigenetic rules work?

[Culturgens] are processed through a sequence of *epigenetic rules*, which are the genetically determined procedures that direct the assembly of the mind, including the screening of stimuli by peripheral sensory filters, the internuncial cellular organizing processes, and the deeper processes of directed cognition. The rules comprise the restraints that the genes place on development (hence the expression ‘epigenetic’), and they affect the probability of using one culturgen as opposed to another.³²

This description is fairly technical, and Ruse clarifies with his analogy that compares the epigenetic rules originating our thought processes with the new breed of chess computers.

In fact humans seem to have taken a middle course, and the new, much more successful generation of chess computers tells us about this course. Now, such computers are programmed to follow certain proven-successful strategies, reacting according to their human opponents' moves and abilities. The computers sometimes lose; but more often than not they win. Similarly with humans. Our minds are not *tabulae rasae*. Rather, they are structured according to various innate dispositions, which have proven their worth in the past struggles of proto-humans. These dispositions do not yield fully explicit, innate ideas . . . but, as we grow, triggered and informed by life's experiences, the dispositions incline us to think and act in various tried and trustworthy patterns. Such dispositions or propensities are known, technically, as ‘epigenetic rules’ (Lumsden and Wilson 1981). There is growing empirical evidence both as to their nature and of their widespread importance.³³

Ruse believes these epigenetic rules secure our sense of moral objectivity that his skepticism endorses. We have certain feelings that we should perform right actions and avoid wrong ones. These Humean propensities stood incomplete and non-binding on their own, but the epigenetic rules provide the formerly lacking origin for this sense of obligation in substantive ethics: “We have evolved epigenetic rules which make us do things because they are right, and abstain from other things because they are wrong. These rules drive us into social action, above and beyond and perhaps despite our inclinations.”³⁴ Ruse believes these rules provide the necessary constraints for our

³¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 221.

³²Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 7.

³³Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 13.

³⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 251. Also Michael Ruse, “Genesis Revisited: Can We Do

thought and, contrary to the general nature of skepticism, supply a clear understanding of the real world: “Through them, we progress towards a greater understanding of the real world – the world that no person of common sense would ever dream of denying. . . . What we produce has a meaning of its own, transcending biology, as we push our tools of understanding to produce ever better pictures of the world.”³⁵ This quote illustrates the deep commitment Ruse has to the epigenetic rules, entities which he believes solidify his Humean skepticism and produce a sense of moral obligation for all of humanity. They are crucial to the success of his moral proposal; an insurmountable problem with the rules debunks his theory and leaves his Darwinian ethics wanting.

The discussion of epigenetic rules requires not only a description of their nature but also their function. Our understanding of their function will aid in grasping their form. One must not minimize the exalted status of the epigenetic rules for Ruse’s epistemology and morality; these categories depend on the veracity of these rules: “Once we grasp the full import of the epigenetic rules – innate constraints rooted in the genes and put in place by natural selection – powerful light is thrown on human knowledge and morality.”³⁶ Ruse consistently discusses these two areas of worldview, so he clearly

Better than God?” *Zygon* 19 (1984): 309, says, “These are the categories dealing with the ways in which we humans process and interpret the data of our senses and our emotions. They speak of what neo-Kantians call ‘regulative principles’ and what sociobiologists have dubbed ‘epigenetic rules.’” Also Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 173, says, “In other words, supposedly, information from without and emotions from within are, as it were, processed by the mind, along or according to certain patterns or rules, whose existence and nature have been determined by natural selection.”

³⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 206. Also Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors: Kant, Hume, and All the Way Back to Aristotle?” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 8 (1990): 83-84, says, “Hume also helps the evolutionist with the metaethical questions about ‘objectification.’ The critic is right: something more does need be said about this process than just a bare assertion about its existence. Hume invites us to see that the activity might not be confined exclusively to morality, but might be part of a more general human propensity which extends to our awareness of physical properties, such as colors and the like (and, no doubt given Hume’s analysis, to causation also). In fact, this stimulating suggestion has been anticipated by the sociobiologist, especially by Wilson. He argues that our thinking is structured by what he terms ‘epigenetic rules’, that through these we project ideas onto reality, and that these rules cover both thought about the nature of objects (including colors) and thought about relationships (including morality).”

³⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 273.

considers them two critical aspects of human experience. Further, he understands that Darwinism must account for them; his strategy for doing so lies in the epigenetic rules.

So what, exactly, do these epigenetic rules do and how do they work? First, they must be fully Darwinian so natural selection must account for them. Second, if they are Darwinian, then these rules function to enhance our fitness. Ruse argues in just this way: these rules are prior to the science, even undergirding science, and provide the maximum selective value for us. These rules appear so powerful that one may conclude that they are hardwired into us for our reproductive fitness, thus Ruse says, “if selection is going to make anything innate, it would do well to start here.”³⁷ Ruse argues that the epigenetic rules are properly basic, and our evolved human nature depends on this aspect of epigenetic rules.

Now, how does one package together this notion of an epigenetic rule with an understanding of ethics and of moral decision-making? As before, Wilson believes that the genes do have an important causal input; but, he no longer writes as if the genes more or less program humans to behave as they do. Rather, because of the epigenetic rules, given to us by selection, as thinking beings we accept certain moral premises or directives as basic, and these influence our actions.³⁸

In fact, Ruse so strongly believes that the epigenetic rules direct our collective human thought processes that only extraterrestrial beings could possibly exercise divergent epigenetic thought processes: “Ignorance and arrogance alone deny the possibility of living beings which are subject to epigenetic thought processes foreign to us. Somewhere in the universe, such beings may well exist.”³⁹ However, if one is human, he possesses common epigenetic rules that cause persons to think and believe as they do.

Ruse, following Lumsden and Wilson, believe the epigenetic rules are divided into two categories, labeled simply enough as primary and secondary rules. A very basic

³⁷Ibid., 163.

³⁸Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 173.

³⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 204.

description of the primary rules is that they automatically process the raw data of sense and emotions. The secondary rules then allow persons to more consciously process this data, draw conclusions about the information, and then formulate plans of action.⁴⁰

Lumsden and Wilson differentiate the two categories more exhaustively and technically:

Primary epigenetic rules are the more automatic processes that lead from sensory filtering to perception. Their consequences are the least subject to variation due to learning and other higher cortical processes. For example, the cones of the retina and the internuncial neurons of the lateral geniculate nucleus are constructed so as to facilitate a perception of four basic colors. The *secondary epigenetic rules* act on color and all other information displayed in the perceptual fields. They include the evaluation of perception through the processes of memory, emotional response, and decision making through which individuals are predisposed to use certain culturgenes in preference to others.⁴¹

Perhaps Ruse clarifies the general functions of the primary and secondary rules in less technical fashion: “The former are at the receiving end, as raw information comes into the human organism. The latter then go on to process this information, in ways that are adaptively useful to us as biological beings.”⁴² Thus, both categories are important, the primary more at the unconscious level and the secondary more at the conscious level.

The roles each category of the epigenetic rules performs are important to this discussion, and Ruse provides examples to illustrate the seemingly all-encompassing power of these rules. The primary rules are more difficult to simplify. Ruse asserts that the primary rules are in use when we classify colors. Science proves that the wave-length of light continually fluctuates, but we fail to apprehend it continuously. However, starting as infants and continuing through adulthood, we break colors into four basic categories:

⁴⁰Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 173. Also Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 36, locate these epigenetic rules in the nervous system: “Existing information on cognition is most efficiently organized with reference to gene-culture theory by classifying the epigenetic rules into two classes that occur sequentially within the nervous system.”

⁴¹Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 36.

⁴²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 143. Also Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 370, say, “The *primary epigenetic rules* of mental development are based upon the more automatic processes that lead from sensory filtering to perception. . . . The *secondary epigenetic rules* affect information displayed in the perceptual fields and include the channeling of memory, emotional response, decision making, and ultimately the *usage bias curves*.”

blue, green, yellow, and red. Ruse argues that it is a primary epigenetic rule that is at work here, transforming the continual perception of luminance into these four basic categories of color. “What evidence is there that the genes play a role in the perception of colour just described? The species-wide nature of the phenomenon hints at genetic control.”⁴³ However, before becoming too enamored with the analogy, one must not forget the purpose of the epigenetic rules which is to maximize our reproductive fitness. How does transforming our perception of luminance into these colors enhance our fitness? The verdict is still out as to whether a successful answer to this question exists; Ruse offers justification from the animal world where many birds display their bright plumages in hopes of gaining a mate.⁴⁴ The Darwinian allows the applicability of this illustration from the animal world because of common descent; however, his hypothesis must account for *human* fitness, not the fitness of certain birds, and no easy resolution appears: “Colour perception is probably part of this adaptive complex, although the precise details and uses have not yet been fully established. Whatever is the complete truth, the human perception of colour may well be primarily a legacy of our primate past, rather than something of immediate adaptive value.”⁴⁵ One intuitively questions the legitimacy of his ultimate illustration for the primary genetic rules if it endures only as a vestigial adaptation from the past serving no significant value today.

Recognizing his explanation’s inherent weakness to account for the adaptive significance of color for humans, Ruse transitions to another metaphor to explain the power of the primary epigenetic rules: taste. Humans prove to enjoy sweet tastes over sour ones. Ruse notes that many of the healthy food choices for human survival are comprised of sweet tastes, such as ripe fruits or honey, whereas sour tastes are found in

⁴³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 143-44.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 144-45.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 145.

acidic products. “The last thing you want is a being which is quite indifferent as to what enters its mouth.”⁴⁶ This last sentence is incontrovertible; however the statement by no means proves his hypothesis that the primary epigenetic rules differentiate our tastes. Admittedly, no analogy definitively proves a theory, but Ruse (and formerly Lumsden and Wilson) places much stock in these illustrations and seems to assume what needs to be proved, the genuine existence and function of the epigenetic rules.

The primary epigenetic rules purportedly stand at the receiving end of information from the senses and genes whereas the secondary epigenetic rules process the information and apply it for maximum adaptive value. His illustration for the secondary epigenetic rules is much clearer and direct:

The much-discussed phenomenon of human incest barriers, particularly those between siblings, provides us with a good instance of a secondary epigenetic rule. . . . Human beings, with rare exceptions, put up barriers between those who have the greatest opportunities to copulate and reproduce: close relatives. . . . There are very good evolutionary reasons why close inbreeding is a very bad thing. Progeny from closer unions tends to be horrendously physically handicapped. . . . Hence, there has been massive selection against close inbreeding. Thus, we now have a secondary epigenetic rule against incestuous links with close relatives, especially siblings. The incest example shows beautifully how the biology/culture relationship being sketched here does not necessarily suppose ‘hard wiring’ throughout by the genes. . . . There is no automatic genetic mechanism which makes us repulse on sight the sexual advances of siblings, simply because they are siblings. . . . The action of the genes is indirect.⁴⁷

Ruse continues his argument for the “indirectness” of the work of the genes in such a situation. Even when our nature is fooled, the secondary rules are so powerful that we abstain from sexual relationships. His example demonstrating this power is children raised in a kibbutzim who are not biologically related but raised as one big family. Sexual relationships do not ensue even in a case where no biological relatedness exists; Ruse attributes this work to the indirect but potent function of the secondary epigenetic rules.

⁴⁶Ibid., 144.

⁴⁷Ibid., 145-46. Also Michael Ruse, “Darwinism and Determinism,” *Zygon* 22 (1987): 423, says, “It is in our biological interests that we do not breed with those with whom we have the greatest opportunity—and natural selection has seen to it that we positively do not want to.”

These secondary epigenetic rules cause persons to believe there are certain actions they ought to perform and others they ought not to perform. A Darwinian account of human nature must allow that humans possess selfish motivations; natural selection gears us toward individual reproductive fitness. Nevertheless, one recognizes an almost universal component of altruism in human interactions. Why and how, based on a Darwinian scheme, could altruistic motivation and action ever arise? Ruse proclaims that these altruistic affinities are explained by the epigenetic rules; the secondary rules in particular most crucially affect our social interactions.⁴⁸ This hypothesis represents a substantial component of Ruse's moral proposal. One can envision where his use of epigenetic rules leads. Morality is difficult to ground in a Darwinian system, yet the universal evidence for it is inarguable. Thus, morality obviously exists as a component of human nature. Because of Ruse's desire to remain true to Darwinism, he has embraced a position of moral anti-realism where he expels meta-ethical foundations. However, Ruse is keenly aware that morality is nothing if it is not binding and obligatory. Without this binding sense of morality, no one would remain truly moral or altruistic. Ruse needs a mechanism to account for the binding sense of morality that seems to contradict Darwinism. He believes the epigenetic rules provide precisely this function, trick us into believing morality is objective, and allow his Darwinism to survive.

This is the (empirical) Darwinian case for morality, and for its biological underpinnings. Epigenetic rules giving us a sense of obligation have been put in place by selection, because of their adaptive value. Of course, as with scientific knowledge, no one is claiming that every last moral twitch is tightly controlled by the genes. . . . In the case of ethics, the Darwinian urges a similar position. Human moral thought has constraints, as manifested through the epigenetic rules, and the application of these leads to moral codes, soaring from biology into culture.⁴⁹

Thus, the epigenetic rules provide the link between the genes and culture whereby he can argue for the appearance of objective morality but also proclaim objectivity is illusory.

⁴⁸Ruse, "Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics," 14.

⁴⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 223.

Critique of Epigenetic Rules

The notion of the epigenetic rules constitutes a highly disputable aspect of Ruse's entire moral theory; the primary place that they occupy in his position demands a firm empirical account for their existence, but they seem only a philosophical proposal. Ruse bases his moral theory on a concept with little empirical proof, placing it in a precarious position. The Darwinian worldview, a self-described scientific worldview, honors empirical evidence as a primary source of knowledge, and the empirical case for the epigenetic rules is sparse.

Lumsden and Wilson harbor no doubts about the existence and scope of the epigenetic rules. Concerning the former they assert that, "it must be shown that nonuniform epigenetic rules exist, that they are commonplace if not universal, and that they can be analyzed in such a way as to test the details of gene-culture coevolutionary theory. We shall demonstrate . . . that this . . . requirement is fully met."⁵⁰ Concerning the latter, the scope and power of the rules, the boundaries seem limitless:

The actual case histories to be examined next illustrate the diversity of the primary epigenetic rules and their effects on the development of social behavior. These examples also reveal that this domain of psychology, though experimentally tractable, is still in a very early stage of exploration. Its further pursuit can be expected to produce additional results important to social theory. The development of many, perhaps most, of the categories of behavior will prove to be channeled by combinations of primary and secondary rules.⁵¹

The preceding quote discloses the impact they believed the epigenetic rules would make on social theory; however, it also contains an important admission about this crucial area: it is in a "very early stage of exploration." One can infer from such a confession that the data may not point so convincingly to Lumsden and Wilson's conclusion. Since they introduce the concept into the field, the burden of proof rests with them and fellow proponents. While their hypothesis is an intriguing one, one can argue that it is more of a

⁵⁰Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 16.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 37-38.

philosophical proposal than proven scientific fact. They admit: “In spite of the relative sophistication of the field of developmental psychology, the epigenetic rules have never been systematically described, and the data concerning them have remained scattered and unconnected to evolutionary theory.”⁵²

As much as Lumsden and Wilson (and Ruse) believe in the existence and scope of the epigenetic rules, and as central a place it occupies in Ruse’s moral theory, both their existence and function may be exaggerated. Ruse fully endorses the validity of the epigenetic rules, but he produces a telling caveat as well: “We are pushing beyond the bounds of proven knowledge; but there is positive evidence favouring the claim that scientific methodology is grounded in epigenetic rules, brought into existence by natural selection.”⁵³ This admission is an interesting one, even if it stood alone. However, a similar confession to this “pushing beyond the bounds” of scientific knowledge is made no less than three times in his primary work on Darwinian morality, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. The above quote related more to the mere existence of the epigenetic rules, but he provides a more direct statement concerning the dearth of evidence linking them to morality: “We are going beyond the evidence as we argue that (in the human case) the way in which selection spurs us into biologically advantageous social action is by infusing our pertinent innate dispositions, our epigenetic rules, with a sense of moral obligation.”⁵⁴ Ruse is a philosopher (an excellent one at that), not a scientist, but his work primarily focuses on philosophy of science, evolution, and, particularly, Darwinism. These admissions concerning the lack of evidence and pushing beyond the limits of

⁵²Ibid., 35.

⁵³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 168.

⁵⁴Ibid., 235. He similarly states, “The claim is that modern Darwinian evolutionary theory is pertinent to the problems of morality. I have allowed that we are pushing empirical science to the limit and beyond. Yet, as in the case of epistemology, you are entitled to some support for the basic thesis that epigenetic rules influence human thought and behavior – this time, in the social, moral realm.” Ibid., 223. Also Lumsden and Wilson, *Genes, Mind and Culture*, 26, admit, “Most of these rules remain unstudied, and their role in the channeling of cultural evolution is only beginning to be understood.”

science do not follow the rules of empirical proof. The epigenetic rules are, at best, an unproved philosophical proposal; at worst, they represent expressions of faith. Ruse and other Darwinians allow no place for theistic god-of-the-gaps explanations. Playing by their own rules, the epigenetic rules, a philosophy-of-the-gaps, should receive no free pass either. Rottschaefer and Martinsen critique Ruse's Darwinian metaethics from the vantage point of Darwinism. The title of their article, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously: An Alternative to Michael Ruse's Darwinian Metaethics," illustrates their desire to push Darwinism further than Ruse. These fully convinced Darwinians offer a disparaging comment concerning his use of the epigenetic rules:

However, we realize that it was not Ruse's intention simply to describe Darwin's views but to use the hypothesis of moral sentiments, explicated by Wilson in terms of epigenetic rules, to develop a Darwinian account of ethics. . . . Although we are not as confident about the empirical support for human sociobiology as Ruse is . . . , we shall for the most part grant Ruse his empirical case for the existence of genetically based dispositions to act altruistically.⁵⁵

These fellow Darwinians express their doubts about the empirical proof for sociobiology, which must surely include the epigenetic rules in that they occupy such a prominent position. They grant the case of the epigenetic rule, not because they are convinced that the empirical evidence supports their existence, but in order to critique the remainder of Ruse's program. While they may grant the case, they choose to reserve judgment on the rules. This admission is telling. The final piece of evidence that the rules lack empirical proof and are hopeful philosophical inventions lies in Ruse encouraging readers to accept the rules because they help explain their phenomenological experience: "Unfortunately for philosophy (but fortunately for real life), this work of the mind is normally concealed from us, for the success of the epigenetic rules lies in our taking them at face value."⁵⁶ Herein, a faith statement is elucidated. How do we take the epigenetic rules at face value

⁵⁵William A. Rottschaefer and David Martinsen, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously: An Alternative to Michael Ruse's Darwinian Metaethics," *Biology and Philosophy* 5 (1990): 151.

⁵⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 191.

when their attributes and even existence remain controversial?

The falsifiability critique applies to the area of epigenetic rules as much as it did to Ruse's general anti-realism. Seemingly no evidence could arise that is strong enough to falsify the account of epigenetic rules; they function as a priori entities for Ruse. Properly basic beliefs are not readily disconfirmed. Proponents of the epigenetic rules promote them as scientific entities that are empirically verifiable; however, the argument advanced here is that they represent a philosophical presupposition formulated to supply a necessary ingredient for Darwinian morality. Ruse admits that the epigenetic rules need greater empirical proof, and that they comprise an area of philosophical speculation: "I look upon the philosopher as being, in a sense, an applied scientist. . . . The task of identifying the epigenetic rules falls as much to the philosopher as to the scientist. Effort is required from the theoretical end of knowledge and morality."⁵⁷ This admission is important, allowing that the epigenetic rules are a matter of philosophical speculation and argumentation.

The argument advanced here is that the epigenetic rules are an example of reification, transforming abstract concepts into concrete entities, and then presuming that they really exist. The description of the epigenetic rules provided illustrates their ability to supply a sense of obligation that is otherwise missing in a Darwinian moral scheme. Ruse's entire moral proposal requires this sense of obligation, and the epigenetic rules cause the human species to believe in the authenticity of our objective moral sense, essentially tricking us to enhance our fitness. These a priori rules hardwire us to believe in an illusory binding morality for personal benefit. The epigenetic rules seem on par with Richard Dawkins' concept of memes. In *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins proffered the term meme to describe units of culture. A "meme" is less an entity of empirical investigation and more one laden with philosophical presuppositions, an invention to

⁵⁷Ibid., 279.

satisfy his proposal. Similarly, the epigenetic rules hypothesis, one laden with philosophical assumptions, provides a sense of obligation for morality.

Ruse envisions his Darwinian morality advancing upon Hume's and supplying what was lacking in Hume's skepticism. Hume could not provide a sense of obligation for morality in that he located moral judgments entirely in the feelings or sentiments. Ruse completes Hume's position by conceding that our moral decisions are mere propensities; however, they certainly *feel* like more. The reason? The epigenetic rules. Furthermore, the epigenetic rules also solidify Humean skepticism about the existence of the real world; we do not question its existence because of an epigenetic rule:

The advance of the Darwinian on Hume is the giving of an evolutionary interpretation to the propensities, thus converting them into epigenetic rules. However, the propensities do seem to have the contingency which I have earlier identified as an essential mark of epigenetic rules (or the products of such rules), and which distinguish the Darwinian from the Kantian. For Kant, causal thinking stems from the way we must be. This is to introduce a factor alien to Darwinian non-progressionism. For Hume causal thinking stems from the way we are, and that is that. This is the position of the Darwinian. . . . Given the Hume-Darwin connection just established, we must presumably allow a related epigenetic rule, which leads us to believe in that real world, towards a fuller knowledge of which science is supposedly progressing.⁵⁸

The hypothesis may provide a solution to "theoretical" skepticism, but does it supply truth corresponding to reality? Ruse asks questions along these lines: "It may be true that we are governed by the epigenetic rules, but what does this tell us about real truth? What is to counter the skeptic who agrees that we use epigenetic rules, but who denies that we know anything about truth or reality or whatever?"⁵⁹ He answers by arguing that we simply could not live if we constantly wondered about the existence of real objects. We must assume the real (common sense realism) existence of objects; otherwise life itself is self-refuting. Ruse allows that the questions may not have satisfying philosophical answers, but our propensities are basically correct and, ultimately, that is what counts.

⁵⁸Ibid., 184-85.

⁵⁹Ibid., 186.

In response, note that, even if there is some sort of effective skepticism at the deepest root, the Darwinian epistemologist no less than the Humean can (and does) run his life in an ordinary common-sense sort of way, distinguishing ‘true’ from ‘false’, ‘reality’ from ‘illusion’, and asserting the existence of an external world. Through coherence, consistency, and the like, we can distinguish fictions like Macbeth’s dagger from the real thing, like the daggers which killed Caesar. The epigenetic rules, no less than the Humean propensities, justify our ordinary ways of doing things. That is the whole point. *The ordinary way is the way of propensities or rules*. For this reason, the last thing one intends to do in identifying the propensities or rules is to make ordinary life dissolve into paradox. Hume was explicit in his commitment to a common-sense realism.⁶⁰

Ruse concludes that one must not ultimately seek to satisfy philosophy; the epigenetic rules permit our normal propensities. This problem of truth does not haunt the Darwinian as much as it should; Ruse concedes that “there is no hot line to total truth,” and survival and reproduction really matter, not truth.

The Darwinian recognizes that philosophical failure to avoid skepticism is quite irrelevant when it comes to the questions which truly count – getting on with survival and reproduction. . . . Epigenetic rules, like Humean propensities, not only let us do these really important things, but help us to do them rather well. . . . As human beings, we all believe in the reality of causality and of the external world . . . , whatever philosophy might prove. And that is what counts.⁶¹

One is free to judge the merits of Ruse’s interjection of the epigenetic rules to provide a satisfactory alternative to the issues that plague skepticism. Certainly at the core of his thinking, the epigenetic rules provide a means of enhancing individual fitness, the truly important factor in Darwinian epistemology and morality. In terms of his moral thought, these epigenetic rules supply a sense of obligation to morality that is otherwise missing. In their absence, morality disappears and anything is permitted. Substantive ethics must be more than desires and wishes, but evolutionary ethics fail to provide an obligatory ground.⁶² Ruse argues that the inevitable resulting moral chaos would fail to

⁶⁰Ibid., 187.

⁶¹Ibid., 188.

⁶²Ruse says, “If substantive ethics were no more than desires, hopes, and so forth, then the identification of it with evolutionary-fuelled beliefs and behaviours might make sense. But the trouble, of course, is that substantive ethics is much more than this. Moral desires and wishes take us to the level of obligations and duties. That is what we saw in our initial section, and that is what is underlined by the abject failure of evolutionary ethicists to smash their way through Hume’s law.” Ibid., 96.

benefit our fitness; thus, the epigenetic rules provide an illusory foundation to get us to cooperate so that we have a better chance at survival and reproduction. The argument here is that the epigenetic rules are an example of reification. Ruse proposes them as a necessary means to explain morality, but they are merely a hypothesis requiring more empirical proof. Dawkins' memes and Lumsden and Wilson's epigenetic rules are brilliant inventions, but they seem to be just that. They are replete with philosophical assumptions and worldview commitments. If neuroscience ultimately proves these rules are realities with the power Ruse attributes to them, then they represent a giant step forward for Ruse's moral proposal; however, as it stands now, they represent dubious and unsteady ground upon which his moral theory is based.

The Illusion of Objectivity

At the heart of Ruse's moral theory stands the idea that natural selection causes us to believe that morality has a binding component ensuring substantive ethics, but that no authentic objective foundations exist. This most central and controversial element of his moral proposal he terms the illusion of objectivity. This hypothesis, introduced in the previous chapter, requires further clarification.

Description of the Illusion

Succinctly expressed, Ruse believes in the absence of any genuine foundation for ethics combined with the incontrovertible human feeling that foundations do, indeed, exist. Morality is nothing more than an adaptation of natural selection, but the adaptation is so successful that all humans believe in authentic obligation. People behave morally because they believe their acts are truly proper and right, not because they reflect mere sentiments. Apart from this belief, social systems crumble, and chaos rules. Morality can get us to work together only through our shared belief that it is objective. Otherwise we all cheat, society breaks down, and anarchy ensues. Thus, morality requires a "collective

illusion of human beings,” spurring us toward social cooperation.⁶³

Ruse, a subjectivist of a distinct kind, recognizes the failure of traditional subjectivism to account for this collective feeling of objectivism. Morality is necessarily binding, greater than mere individual choice or feeling.⁶⁴ People evidence a genuine belief in “ought” that surpasses mere emotivism for or against certain actions. Unlike traditional subjectivists, Ruse never discards his belief in the appearance of objectivity. However, Darwinism and objectivity are not easily compatible, and he concedes that genuine objectivity cannot obtain in a truly Darwinian scheme that dismisses metaethical foundations. Natural selection comes to the rescue by providing this sense of objectivity:

The Darwinian argues that morality simply does not work (from a biological perspective), unless we believe that it is objective. Darwinian theory shows that, in fact, morality is a function of (subjective) feelings; but it shows also that we have (and must have) the illusion of objectivity. . . . The point about morality (says the Darwinian) is that it is an adaptation to get us to go beyond regular wishes, desires and fears, and to interact socially with people. How does it get us to do this? By filling us full of thoughts about obligations and duties, and so forth. And the key to what is going on is that we are then moved to action, precisely because we think morality is something laid upon us. We may have choice about whether to do right and wrong, but we have no choice about right and wrong in themselves. If morality did not have this air of externality of objectivity, it would not be morality and (from a biological perspective) would fail to do what it is intended to do.⁶⁵

Ruse unfailingly states that substantive morality is no illusion and professes that it remains secure; however, he is equally certain that a true objective ground for morality is illusory. Recall Ruse’s rejection of emotivism earlier; he recognizes that feelings could never sustain morality, but he argues for “special kinds of moral feelings.” Even if morality *actually* is only feelings and sentiments, “we humans project it into a prescriptively binding, supposedly objective status.” This “objectifying” of morality is

⁶³Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Past?,” 447.

⁶⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 252, says, “It is greater than and above any of us. In other words, it has all of the features that we associate with objectivity.”

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 253.

the reason, and the *only* reason, that humans function morally together in society.⁶⁶

Ruse investigates ethical systems of the past and argues that the illusion of objectivity fulfills them by Darwinian means. Inarguably, he regards his system as Hume completed by Darwinism, resulting in a legitimate model for moral skepticism. However, he also identifies a Kantian influence. Kant promoted the Categorical Imperative which demands that humans be treated as ends, not means, with certain individual rights. Intuitively, this model seems at odds with an implied Darwinian selfishness, but Ruse believes Darwinian epigenetic rules supply the dignity ascribed to our fellow man. “We have the Categorical Imperative, or something very much like it, embedded in an epigenetic rule. We feel we ought to treat others as ends. They feel the same way about us. Hence, Darwinism and Kantianism are each satisfied.”⁶⁷ Ruse also highly regards the “justice as fairness” model formulated by John Rawls who argued for a social contract theory where each person in society was treated with optimal fairness. His theory rests on a hypothetical contract entered into by each person in society to promote fairness. Ruse believes the Darwinian position explains why the sense of fairness arises. A purely hypothetical contract cannot sustain morality in that nobody consciously signed it, and it possesses no binding element. A hypothetical contract is thus impotent, but natural selection comes to the rescue and provides the motivation: morality stems from our human nature, not an external source. “Darwinism gives us the answer. The contract was not made consciously. But it is simulated by natural selection – burned into our souls – because that is the way to maximize an individual’s interests, in a group where everyone is trying to do the same.”⁶⁸ None of us signed the contract, but it is “burned into our

⁶⁶Ibid., 277. Also Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” *Zygon* 21 (1986): 102-03, says, “What is really important to the evolutionist’s case is the claim that ethics is illusory inasmuch as it persuades us that it has an objective reference. This is the crux of the biological position. Once it is grasped everything falls into place.”

⁶⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 244.

⁶⁸Ibid., 246.

souls” due to this apparently prescriptive nature of morality. Thus, one must not minimize the critical place the illusion of objectivity occupies in Ruse’s moral theory; he credits the illusion for the ability to retain substantive ethics while he also remains fully Darwinian by rejecting genuine objectivity.

Ruse argues that no other path exists for the Darwinian except to embrace the illusion of objectivity if he accepts a naturalistic account of morality evolving through natural selection. Darwinism prevents a true objective base because morality would then exist independently of human beings, “out there,” and Darwinism categorically denies this possibility. Morality must, therefore, be subjective, but of a variety where feelings are not mere wishes and desires, but feelings and sentiments of a distinct kind.

The naturalistic approach, locating morality in the dispositions produced by the epigenetic rules, makes our sense of obligation a direct function of human nature. We feel that we ought to help others and to co-operate with them, because of the way that we are. That is the complete answer to the origins and status of morality. There is no need to invoke (and much against invoking) some Platonic world of values. Morality has neither meaning nor justification, outside the human context. Morality is subjective.⁶⁹

Ruse draws the ire both of those who reject his proposal that our genes could fool us so effectively and those who believe no need for objectivity exists. He finds criticism from both traditional objectivists and traditional subjectivists with his illusion of objectivity.⁷⁰ Why does Ruse continue in his quest to “objectify” morality in the face of biting criticism and the counterintuitive explanation of our biology fooling us?

Ruse believes the illusion of objectivity is the perfect combination of the truths of biology and philosophy; a common human adaptation has evolved to convince us that morality is objectively grounded. Darwinism cannot produce authentic objective grounds, but if persons think morality is subjective, they will cheat the system. Therefore,

⁶⁹Ibid., 252.

⁷⁰For example, Rottschaefer and Martinsen, “Really Taking Darwin Seriously,” 153, say, “We believe that Ruse has overextended his Darwinian bases by attributing to moral sentiments the full-fledged moral modalities of prescriptivity and universality.”

Darwinian morality is genuinely subjective, but it must feel objective to ensure social cooperation. Ruse determines that the epigenetic rules produce common human dispositions through natural selection to assure the status of our moral propensities for the purpose of enhancing our individual fitness. Ruse may concede that morality is a biological adaptation where substantive ethics are an illusion, but he insists that they are a collective illusion shared by the entire human race.

When it comes to general shared moral principles, the Darwinian stands firm. Humans share a common moral understanding. This universality is guaranteed by the shared genetic background of every member of *Homo sapiens*. The differences between us are far outweighed by the similarities. We (virtually) all have hands, eyes, ears, noses, and the same ultimate awareness. That is part of being human. There is, therefore, absolutely nothing arbitrary about morality, considered from the human perspective.⁷¹

Ruse credits Hume, who also believed morality is entirely a function of our human nature. However, the propensities we possess are different from mere feelings; they bear a sense of moral obligation. Ruse believes he avoids charges of relativism because of the shared human illusion where we all possess the same moral norms because of the epigenetic rules. Ruse thus credits our human nature for our moral propensities.⁷²

⁷¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 255. However, the bad news of such a situation is morality could have evolved completely differently, “We are what we are because we are recently evolved from savannah-dwelling primates. Suppose that we had evolved from cave-dwellers, or some such thing. We might have as our highest principle of moral obligation the imperative eat each others’ faeces. Not simply the desire, but the obligation. Before you dismiss this as a rather disgusting fancy, remember that faeces eating is far from uncommon in the animal world.” Ibid., 263.

⁷²Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 176. Also Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 110, says, “The evolutionist concludes, against the constructivist, that our morality is a function of our actual human nature and that it cannot be divorced from the contingencies of our evolution. Morality, as we know it, cannot have the necessity or objectivity sought by the Kantian and Rawlsian.” However, Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 205, objects saying, “If humans shared a common moral psychology, there would presumably be little debate on ethical issues. Why, then, do we constantly wrangle over what’s right and wrong?” But Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 176-77, says that E. O. Wilson is a subjectivist, but he is not an ethical relativist because of the epigenetic rules: everyone follows the same ones because of the common human nature. Also J. L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 114, says, “On a subjectivist view, the supposedly objective values will be based in fact upon attitudes which the person has who takes himself to be recognizing and responding to those values. If we admit what Hume calls the mind’s ‘propensity to spread itself on external objects’, we can understand the supposed objectivity of moral qualities as arising from what we can call the projection or

Reasoning that our biology fools us is more contrived than simply embracing genuine objective morality; however, Ruse's worldview allows no such step. He finds himself in the difficult position of affirming an innate feeling of moral obligation that is nothing more than an illusion because truly grounding ethics is barred. The only step remaining for Ruse to avoid charges of relativism is to assert that our biology made us this way in order to enhance our fitness. We need to cooperate, and we would not do so apart from the "objectifying" of morality. Thus, Ruse must depict morality as a shared human disposition resulting from an adaptation of natural selection. He does so because he is unwilling to dispense with morality altogether, retaining it but only as an adaptation:

I am not saying that morality does not exist; nor am I preaching subjectivity and relativism. Morality is part of the makeup of ourselves and of our fellow humans. If there were not a shared morality that is binding, then some of us would be suckers and soon selected out of existence. Yet I do say that the moral capacity is no more than an adaptation like hands and teeth and penises and vaginas. I recognize that the human tendency is to think that morality is more than a mere adaptation—that it is an insight into objective reality; but I recognize also that we are practically bound to think this, otherwise we would not be altruists, and hence not "altruists."⁷³

Ruse here distinguishes altruists in a biological sense from "altruists" in a genuine sense. The next chapter covers this topic; for now it is enough to recognize that he regards the illusion of objective morality as an inherently counterintuitive adaptation.

This illusory biological construct contradicts our normal intuitions about morality, yet Ruse retains his theory of biological adaptation regardless. To dismiss it results in moral anarchy, and he regards the illusion as his only recourse to promote a moral society. The only means to avoid the mayhem that surely results from removing all moral prescriptivity in a Darwinian scheme is through "objectifying" morality.⁷⁴ Ruse

objectification of moral attitudes. This would be analogous to what is called the 'pathetic fallacy', the tendency to read our feelings into their objects."

⁷³Ruse, "Darwinism and Determinism," 427-28.

⁷⁴Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 68, says, "Just as for Hume and his skepticism about the world, there are obvious Darwinian reasons why we should thus 'objectivize' morality. If we knew that morality was subjective and that we could ignore it, then very quickly morality would break down and

knows that he opens himself up to charges that anything is permitted if one removes all metaethical grounds for morality. No reasons exist to remain moral unless morality is an illusion shared by the *entire* human race. Otherwise, morality disappears.

The evolutionary ethicist is sensitive to the seeming objectivity of (substantive) ethics, expecting and explaining it. The simple point is that unless we believe morality to be objective, in the sense just characterized, it will not work. If everyone recognized the illusory nature of morality (and could escape from their biology sufficiently to take advantage of this recognition), then very soon people would start to cheat and the whole social system would collapse. Moral altruism would go, and with it would go biological altruism. Hence, our biology leads us to 'objectify' morality.⁷⁵

Even though morality is genuinely subjective, Ruse "objectifies" it, else morality fails.

The conclusion of Ruse's biological adaptation argument is that morality is ultimately put in place by natural selection to get us to cooperate with fellow humans, something that we are naturally disinclined to do, in order to enhance our reproductive fitness. Ruse describes it as a "cost-effective" means of assuring that we cooperate:

This, then, is the modern (Darwinian) biologist's case for the evolution of morality. Our moral sense, our altruistic nature, is an adaptation—a feature helping us in the struggle for existence and reproduction—no less than hands and eyes, teeth and feet. It is a cost-effective way of getting us to cooperate, which avoids both the pitfalls of blind action and the expense of a superbrain of pure rationality.⁷⁶

people would start cheating and before long there would be general mayhem. But because we think that morality is objective, we all obey it more or less. In other words, I'm saying it is a Darwinian adaptation that we should be deceived about the justificatory status of morality. Morality may have no foundation, but it is in our biological interests that we should think that it has. Hence we do think that it has." Also Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors," 67, says, "Even though there may not be an objective foundation to morality, it is part of its phenomenology that we think that there is."

⁷⁵Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors," 66-67. Also Ruse, "The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics," 308, says, "But the point is that, although humans are produced by selfish genes, selfish genes do not necessarily produce selfish people. In fact, selfish people in the literal sense tend to get pushed out of the group or ostracized pretty quickly. They are simply not playing the game." Also Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," 506-07, says, "Morality (in the sense of normative ethics) is a social phenomenon, and unless we all have it, it fails."

⁷⁶Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 99. Also Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 54, says, "Organic features will be design-like, aimed at helping survival and reproduction. Thus, in the language of biologists, this means, I believe, that the most important and pervasive aspect of the organic world is that it is adapted. The parts of organisms serve the ends of survival and reproduction. In the context of this discussion, therefore, I argue that human features are adaptations – this includes both physical features like hands and eyes and the genitalia, and psychological and mental features like beliefs, emotions, and moral sentiments."

Natural selection “selected” morality to make us altruistic. One caveat remains for this adaptation; Ruse allows that natural selection does not produce perfect adaptations, even in morality. He denies a foundation so he allows that some moral problems do not have solutions. Ethics is an adaptation, and like all others, they fail at some point. He asserts that we should expect this occurrence rather than be surprised by it.⁷⁷

Thus, a basic summary of Ruse’s illusion of objectivity maintains that the epigenetic rules produce dispositions in us that cause us to believe morality is objective. Morality is certainly subjective, but natural selection causes us to believe it is objective. Hence, objective morality is an illusion. The illusion fails to work unless we all believe in it; if the illusion was not species-wide, then anarchy results. The “goal” of the illusion is to maximize fitness, making cooperators out of normally selfish organisms. Ruse presents a bold and counterintuitive theory, and his hypothesis generates critique.

Critique of Ruse’s Illusion

Can humans be so effectively and exhaustively fooled by their own biology as to believe in a nonexistent objectivity in morality? Ruse admits the counterintuitive nature of such a proposal, and this aspect of his scheme immediately strikes the reader as anti-reasonable. Morality as a biological deception to counteract our normal selfish inclinations for the purpose of self-benefit simply does not sound like genuine morality. Ruse concedes that selection inclines us toward selfishness, and we needed an “extra push” to get us to act morally for our best interest, and his “push” is the feeling of obligation that precludes us from cheating.⁷⁸ The fact that this push fosters a sense of prescriptivity that is ultimately illusory challenges our most basic intuitions. Critics sometimes label this argument “mischievous” in that persons cannot trust these moral

⁷⁷Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach,” 503.

⁷⁸Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 65.

dispositions since they represent illusions about the objective foundations of morality.⁷⁹

Our ability to believe “mischievous” arguments seems greatly overestimated.

Our intuitions matter, and Darwinism encounters difficulty in accounting for them.

Supplying such a counterintuitive position requires great convincing. J. L. Mackie

introduced an error theory prior to Ruse and noted the inherent challenges involved:

The claim to objectivity, however ingrained in our language and thought, is not self-validating. It can and should be questioned. But the denial of objective values will have to be put forward not as the result of an analytic approach, but as an ‘error theory’, a theory that although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false. It is this that makes the name ‘moral scepticism’ appropriate. But since this is an error theory, since it goes against assumptions ingrained in our thought and built into some of the ways in which language is used, since it conflicts with what is sometimes called common sense, it needs very solid support. It is not something we can accept lightly or casually and then quietly pass on. If we are to adopt this view, we must argue explicitly for it.⁸⁰

Ruse certainly argues vigorously for it (as did Mackie), yet even noble arguments cannot displace our common sense moral intuitions. The credulity principle stands against Ruse’s illusion, stating that one should reasonably believe what seems obvious in the absence of overriding reasons contradicting it. Ruse assuredly believes he provides such overriding reasons. However, “the *credulity principle* . . . is appropriate with regard to our *sense* perceptions, our *reasoning* faculty and our *moral* intuitions. They are innocent until proved guilty.”⁸¹ Even with Ruse’s reasoned argument, the inherent feeling of moral

⁷⁹John Collier and Michael Stingl, “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality,” *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 49-50, say, “Ruse offers a mischievous argument that we have nevertheless been selected for a propensity to believe that morality is objective. . . . Since our moral instincts are adaptive, and their function is stronger and more secure if we believe our morality is objective, Ruse proposes that we will develop adaptations leading us to believe our morality is objective. . . . These arguments tell us that we cannot rely solely on our intuitions about the truth of moral statements. They are mischievous because they question the need for an objective justification of morality. Anyone who wants objective justification must show not only that satisfying the demand is epistemically possible, but also that the criteria that must be satisfied are not equally illusory. . . . Without the mischievous argument, there is, no doubt, a *prima facie* case for relying on our moral intuitions.”

⁸⁰Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” 109.

⁸¹Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 216. Also Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110, says, “Indeed, the disposition to ascribe an illusory objectivity to plainly

obligation is better explained as genuine objectivity and obligation, not an illusion enacted by our genes. A Darwinian explanation cannot ground these objective moral inclinations, however, so Ruse must depict them as illusory to remain consistent with his worldview. If our intuitions are correct about objective moral values, and if Darwinism cannot account for them, then perhaps one should search for answers in another worldview. In Christian theism, God created our noetic structure and our moral intuitions, and persons can readily trust these faculties as part of the *imago dei* rather than portraying them as “mischievous” dispositions.⁸²

Furthermore, the question arises as to how humans declare certain actions as morally right or wrong apart from genuine objectivity. If subjectivism is truly right, and persons are only biologically equipped with objective sensibilities, what causes the generally universal agreement in moral prescriptions apart from an external standard? Certainly Ruse would respond that it is our shared human nature, but he concedes that we humans could have evolved a completely antithetical morality than we did.

In particular, we might well have evolved as beings with what I like to call the “John Foster Dulles system of morality,” so named after Eisenhower’s secretary of State during the Cold War in the 1950s. Dulles hated the Russians, and he knew that the Russians hated him. He felt he had a moral obligation to hate the Russians because if he did not, everything would come tumbling down. But because there was this mutual dislike, of a real obligation-based kind, there was in fact a level of cooperation and harmony. The world did not break down into war and destruction. As a Darwinian, it is plausible to suggest that humans might have evolved with the John Foster Dulles kind of morality, where the highest ethical calling would not be

contingent, response-dependent norms, of language and custom for example, seems to be typical of humans, and quite useful. However, in my case the scientific credentials of Darwinism, and these other examples, are not enough to dislodge the immediate conviction that objectivity is not an illusion with respect to basic judgments of value.”

⁸²Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 217. Also Mark D. Linville, “The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism,” in *Contending with Christianity’s Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 65, says, “Nothing in Darwin’s own account indicates that the ensuing sense of guilt, a guilty *feeling*, is indicative of *actual* moral guilt resulting from the violation of an objective moral law.” Also Lahti, “Parting with Illusions in Evolutionary Ethics,” 647, says, “Evolutionary ethicists in favor of the error theory must misuse the self-other distinction, and underestimate the persuasive powers of our nervous and endocrine systems, in order to provide a case that morality’s ultimate function is to curb our selfishness and ensure that we cooperate.”

love your neighbor, but hate your neighbor. But remember that your neighbor hates you and, so, you had better not harm him or her because they are going to come straight back at you and do the same.⁸³

This argument seems to push Ruse right back into relativism; we may possess a shared human morality that seems objective, but ultimately it degenerates into a species-wide relativism within which an alternate morality could have evolved. Ruse allows this possibility but feels his skepticism allows him this step. The most striking problem with the above argument is that it depicts morality as completely contrary to our conception of morality. Ruse exacerbates this problem with the counterintuitive nature of his proposal, conceding that this morality seems counterfeit: “Obviously, this is a sheer contradiction to what most people mean by objective morality. . . . We might be completely deceived, and since objective morality could never allow this, it cannot exist. For this reason, I argue strongly that Darwinian evolutionary theory leads one to a moral skepticism, a kind of moral non-realism.”⁸⁴ This retreat seems like a too-easy escape from a real problem.

Even if one assumes an illusion in objectivity, the illusion fails to provide justification for our categories of right and wrong. Ruse desires to combine his theory of the illusory nature of objectivity with a substantive ethics where some actions are categorized as good and obligatory and others as evil and prohibited.⁸⁵ Ruse, even with his allusion to illusion, still faces significant challenge in avoiding charges that morality is arbitrary or that persons should not be skeptical about living morally at all.⁸⁶ He may allow the arbitrariness of morality so long as the illusion causes us to believe morality is real, but he certainly rejects that persons can live as if morality does not matter. However, the problem remains that if humans are aware of the illusion, what prevents us from

⁸³Ruse, “The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics,” 311.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵Peter G. Woolcock, “Objectivity and Illusion in Evolutionary Ethics: Comments on Waller.” *Biology and Philosophy* 15 (2000): 59.

⁸⁶Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 152.

disregarding it and rejecting morality altogether? An analogous account to Ruse's illusion is a person watching a virtual reality film wearing 3-D glasses but ultimately sitting still and going nowhere. The virtual reality produces feelings of nausea and fear, even when one intellectually knows he is sitting still.⁸⁷ Yet, the person knows he remains still. Ruse believes his position differs in that nobody knows they are in a "moral virtual reality" world; everything about it appears real. Nevertheless, even in the virtual reality world one considers actions either right or wrong, reflecting an allusion to objective morality. If this world is merely an illusion, objective right and wrong has no ontological ground.

Ruse encounters critique over the illusion even from fellow Darwinians. Some believe he attributes too much power to our adaptation. Morality evolved as it did through an adaptation, seemingly producing our greatest possible moral instincts. Thus, we need not question our evolved nature or doubt that it works to our advantage. The problem is that adaptations are rarely so "fine-tuned" and cannot produce such elegant moral inclinations or intuitions. Recognizing the "fine-tuning" of our morality, some argue for genuine objective justification.⁸⁸ Indeed, dissenters argue that Ruse weakens the Darwinian position by proclaiming that objectivity is an illusion, stating that there are good Darwinian reasons for morality to be objective even within a Darwinian scheme.⁸⁹ One powerful critique accuses Ruse of resorting to inference to the best explanation.

To pick one of his favorite examples of alleged objective justification, suppose it is claimed that the belief that gratuitous cruelty is wrong is objectively justified because the belief is self-evidently true. Here it appears we have two competing explanations for why a person might believe this. On the one hand, there is a biological explanation and, on the other, an appeal to self-evidence. One explanation implies that the belief has no truth value and that the semblance of objectivity is "an

⁸⁷Richmond Campbell, "Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?" *Biology and Philosophy* 11 (1996): 23-24.

⁸⁸Collier and Stingl, "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality," 52.

⁸⁹Rottschaefer and Martinsen, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously," 160-61. Also David O. Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 150, says, "The autonomy of ethics implies that the objectivity of ethics is not hostage to the truth of theism."

illusion fobbed off on us by our genes" (Ruse and Wilson 1989, 316); the other implies that the self-evident truth of the proposition that gratuitous cruelty is wrong explains why it is believed. But if the biological explanation gives the true story of why the belief is held, then, in explaining best why the belief is held, it undermines the imputation of objectivity implicit in the competing explanation.⁹⁰

These objections reveal the difficulty one faces in retaining judgments that certain acts and motivations are either morally praiseworthy or blame-worthy when objectivity is an illusion. The problem of disingenuous objectivity raises doubts about retaining categorization of genuine good and evil. Genuine objectivity offers much better grounds for our moral actions and judgments.⁹¹

The problems associated with the illusion are not limited to its counterintuitive nature or lack of justificatory grounding for genuine right and wrong; Ruse also faces trouble in justifying truth and meaning. If human morality is an adaptation instilled by natural selection, then morality is hardwired into us for survival with no necessary connection to truth.⁹² The Darwinian simply cannot escape the primary survival-conducive status of evolution which comes at the expense of a truth-conducive status. Richard Joyce, in coming to Ruse's defense, actually exacerbates this problem. He offers an analogy of Ruse's illusion with a need for exercise, saying that if he tells himself he must exercise an hour a day, every other day, for health benefits, then he is more likely to exercise. However, if he only runs fifty-five minutes one day or skips several days in a row, he will still achieve greater fitness by assuming his rule is true – his commitment to his rule keeps him in the gym regularly.

⁹⁰Campbell, "Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?," 29.

⁹¹Bruce Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than Without It* (New York: Alpha Books, 2009), 31, says, "Thus, while it is true that without religion people can certainly have a morality, it is problematic if that morality is not felt to be rooted in something objective and absolute. The paradox is that the moment we think that our moral precepts are man made, we immediately feel they are fallible and insubstantial. . . . We all have a strong need to feel that we believe in – from that facts of the universe to the principles of morality – is anchored in objective truth. . . . Religion thus becomes the most important cultural and institutional source of ethical principles precisely because it is felt to be above human caprice."

⁹²Paul Copan, *True For You But Not For Me: Overcoming Objections to the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 57-62.

However, I do not need to *believe* this rule for it to work – if someone questions me, suggesting that there's no harm in occasionally skipping a few days, I am not committed to arguing that this is mistaken – what's important is that I rehearse the rule in my mind, that I allow it to influence my actions, that I let it carry weight with me. I *accept* the rule, but I do not believe it. Indeed, if you were to press me seriously about its truth – in a critical context, not when I am actually running – then I would happily express my *disbelief* in it.⁹³

Joyce may clarify what Ruse means by his illusion, but he diminishes authentic morality in the process. His belief may get him in the gym, but he knows it is false. Nobody lives as if morality is completely false, obeying it while recognizing it is an illusion. People believe their moral notions are true, and this truth status motivates them to moral living. The Darwinian encounters difficulty accounting for the truthfulness of moral values, but he also faces hardship justifying meaning in life. Ruse concedes that life is essentially meaningless, a conspicuous option in a worldview committed so deeply to chance. However, the problems associated with introducing illusion into morals also entails similar problems in introducing illusion into the purpose of life: humans live as if life is meaningful. This position is closed unless people buy into an illusion. The illusion, thus, increasingly occupies greater space in a Darwinian worldview. Nevertheless, people remain generally dissatisfied where life is explicated as a grand deception:

Deception, however, is becoming a popular way of explaining (and therefore justifying) morality and the basic tendency to live "as if" nature were meaningful. The concept of deception thus enables skeptics to have their cake and eat it, too. As if to say, "I'm living as if life held meaning because I must do so in order to survive. Nature has programmed me to live thusly, but I'm sophisticated enough not to believe that it's really so."⁹⁴

Our shared human nature that Ruse vies for so strenuously exhibits attributes distinct from his illusion: people do not willingly embrace deception in life but instead desire authentic truth and meaning.

⁹³Richard Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," *Biology and Philosophy* 15 (2000): 729.

⁹⁴Hefner, "Entrusting the Life that has Evolved," 72. Also Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," 162, recognizes that without the autonomy of ethics, atheism would result in nihilism or relativism. The only option left in order to preserve meaning in life was to root morality into an objective stance wherein the end consequence was avoiding simply inventing moral theories.

A final critique here of the illusion of objectivity recognizes that if selection enacted morality for the purpose of enhancing fitness, a host of moral options could have evolved, many of which would now appear immoral to us. Ruse says that, “The person who helped another, consciously intending to promote his own biological advantage would not be moral. He would be crazy.”⁹⁵ He means that, apart from being deceived, humans would not rationally think that helping others could enhance their fitness. The thought is crazy for two reasons: (1) no link exists between one individual act of altruism and our reproductive success and (2) our goal of enhanced fitness precludes justifying any act of altruism.⁹⁶ The secondary epigenetic rules would not have evolved altruistic moral inclinations that contradict our fitness. Ruse’s “John Foster Dulles” approach to morality applies here as well. Our biology could have created an entirely different morality or it could have led us to believe that immorality was just as good as morality.

The counterintuitive nature of the illusion of objectivity introduces a host of problems for Ruse’s moral system. The illusion is central to his program, and if it fails, so does his entire theory. As with the epigenetic rules, the empirical proof for the illusion is lacking. Ruse energetically argues for his position, but his argument is a philosophical one, not one based on empirical proof that seems so crucial to Darwinian theories:

Ruse can plausibly claim that we have evolved to believe in objective requirements, but no investigation of the processes of natural selection, or the course of human evolution – no matter how subtle and empirically well-confirmed – will be sufficient to establish that we are victims of *an illusion*. For that we need philosophical argumentation.⁹⁷

Ruse’s argument is authentically Darwinian, but that does not mean it is true. Fellow Darwinians find it unsatisfactory and seek a ground for morality that is genuinely

⁹⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 222.

⁹⁶Peter G. Woolcock, “The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today,” in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 291.

⁹⁷Joyce, “Darwinian Ethics and Error,” 726.

objective. If Ruse is correct that the appearance of objectivity is nothing more than a sham to get us to cooperate and, thereby, produce more offspring, then “the field of metaethics is fundamentally misguided, since the history of our search for the foundation of morality and the meanings of moral concepts is the history of people investigating an illusion of their own (genetic and ontogenetic) creation.”⁹⁸ Ruse’s theory of illusion where our biology forces us to believe in moral objectivity may actually harm his intent.

He wants us to think that morals aren't objective on the basis of his premise that our genes *make* us think morals are objective. But, of course, if that premise is true, then we cannot believe his conclusion. Our genes will prevent us! It is perhaps best to politely ignore such overstatements, though obviously I wasn't able to resist mentioning this one.⁹⁹

This discussion does not complete investigation into Ruse’s hypothesis concerning the illusory nature of morality. An exploration remains of his thoughts concerning the justification of morality when any genuine justificatory grounds for morality vanishes.

Justificatory Reasons versus Explanatory Causes

Ruse’s illusion of objectivity dismisses metaethical foundations thereby necessitating a search for justification in morality. As illustrated above, the illusion banishes objective right and wrong and the resulting assurance that moral acts are praiseworthy or blame-worthy. In the absence of metaethical foundations, any justification for morality necessarily disappears as well. Recall that Ruse opposes traditional evolutionary ethics, specifically Social Darwinism with its commitment to progress, because they attempted to justify morality based on the fact of evolution, something Ruse regards as contrary to Darwinism. “Value finds no foundation of this kind within Darwinian theory.”¹⁰⁰ Ruse rejects the foundation supplied by traditional

⁹⁸Lahti, “Parting with Illusions in Evolutionary Ethics,” 640.

⁹⁹Campbell, “Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?,” 23.

¹⁰⁰Ruse, “Darwinism and Determinism,” 427.

evolutionary ethics so he must offer a solution within his Darwinian ethics.

Recognizing Ruse's acrimony to the justification introduced by Social Darwinians, how does he propose to justify morality? Not surprisingly, he concedes that no justification exists. This anticipated result follows directly from Ruse's dismissal of metaethical foundations for morality. Before the critic can sink his teeth into the glaring problem of lack of foundations, Ruse, now somewhat surprisingly, proffers that no need for justification exists. "I argue that evolution *explains* (not justifies) morality in the sense of showing where it came from. Furthermore, once such an explanation is given, one sees that the traditional call for justification is mistaken. There can be no ultimate support for morality in the sense of reasoned absolute foundations."¹⁰¹ This defense stems from his assessment that substantive ethics are an adaptation put in place by natural selection to enhance fitness. He argues that this causal account of our morality satisfies and renders inappropriate any search for justificatory reasons.¹⁰²

Ruse elucidates his proposal for only causal analysis with an illustration:

It will be claimed that it is one thing to give a causal analysis of how ethical thinking came about, and another to give a reasoned justification of why it should be believed. Causally, for instance, I might believe that one should not hurt small children, because I was thus trained when a child myself. But this is not to say that it is a reasoned justified belief that I should not hurt small children. It is not to say that it is *true* that I should not hurt small children. After all, I was taught that you ought to eat everything on your plate, and I still feel ire when my children leave food behind. But is it true that one ought to clean one's plate? Perhaps that which held for

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," 504. Also Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics in the Twentieth Century: Julian Sorell Huxley and George Gaylord Simpson," in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 218, says, "According to the 'ethical skeptic,' therefore, ethics – normative ethics – has evolved to make us good cooperators, because given the kinds of beings we humans are, cooperation is a good adaptive strategy in the struggle for existence. But there is nothing beyond this, and certainly no solid ground of proof. We have a moral sense because it is adaptively advantageous to have it, but ultimately (as in the case of the secondary qualities that appear so vividly to us) there is nothing that it is sensing! Hence, a causal explanation is all that we can give, and once it has been given, we see that it is impossible (although, thankfully, not necessary) to satisfy the call for a reasoned justification." Also Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 103, says, "We think morality has objective reference even though it does not. Because of this, a causal analysis of the type offered by the evolutionist is appropriate and adequate, whereas a justification of moral claims in terms of reasoned foundations is neither needed nor appropriate."

a small child in war-time England does not hold for an overweight, middle-aged professor in Canada today.¹⁰³

Dismissing justification comes with a price; while neither Ruse nor any other morally decent person would promote hurting small children, his system cannot categorize such an act as truly, objectively wrong. Nevertheless, one seems to possess an innate ability to recognize, even prior to epistemological consideration, the wrongness of such an act. This objective sense of inherent wrongness counts against Ruse's system. However, description must precede critique, and Ruse's quote illustrates his belief that while he may causally explain why humans have certain beliefs, we can never *justify* any of those beliefs. This proposal opens the door to endless possibilities, but Ruse clings to it necessarily because he expels all metaethical foundations. Therefore, a primary component of his moral theory is the proposition that no justification exists. He locates the causes or origins of morality in the epigenetic rules ("Causes are projected into the world by us, through our epigenetic rules."¹⁰⁴), but what is explicitly unavailable to him are justified reasons for morality. Again, the problem of truth for our moral obligations once more creeps back in when justification is absent.¹⁰⁵ However, Ruse, believes this problem never obtains because of our shared human nature through the epigenetic rules. Thus, he dismisses justification as both unnecessary and impossible.

Ruse vanquishes the need for justification in that he views it as redundant, saying that humans would believe what they do about right and wrong regardless of whether genuine right and wrong exist. He uses a "two worlds" argument for his thesis where the two worlds are identical except for one characteristic: in one world, objective

¹⁰³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 100.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁰⁵To this point, Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 101-02, asks, "Do I really, objectively, truly have moral obligations? To suppose that the story of origins tells of truth or falsity is to confuse causes with reasons. . . . It is indeed true that you cannot *deduce* moral claims from factual claims (about origins). However, using factual claims about origins, you can give moral claims the only foundational *explanation* that they might possibly have."

morality exists and in the other, it does not. No other difference exists in the two worlds. Ruse argues that in both worlds humans would think and act in the exact same ways, thus making objective morality redundant. Because subjective morality is “objectified,” any genuine objectivity is redundant.¹⁰⁶ The status of human nature remains the same in both worlds, and this feature is all Ruse needs to proclaim objective morality redundant. “Ethics is produced by evolution but is not justified by it because, like Macbeth’s dagger, it serves a powerful purpose without existing in substance. . . . Unlike Macbeth’s dagger, ethics is a *shared* illusion of the human race.”¹⁰⁷

Ruse’s offers several analogies for his redundancy argument, but the primary one he advances throughout his writings is his spiritualism example. Because of its centrality to his argument concerning justification, the illustration is given in its entirety.

During the First World War, many bereaved parents turned to spiritualism for solace. Down the Ouija board would come the messages: “It’s alright Mum. I’ve gone to a far better place. I’m just waiting for you and Dad.” I take it that these were not in fact the words of the late Private Higgins, speaking from beyond. Rather they were illusory—a function of people’s psychology as they projected their wishes. (We can, I think, discount universal fraud.) The moral to be drawn from this little story is that we do not need any further justificatory foundation for “It’s alright Mum” than that just given. At this point, we do not need a reasoned underpinning to the words of reassurance. (“Why is it alright?” “Because I’m sitting on a cloud, dressed in a bedsheet, playing a harp.”) What we need is a causal explanation of

¹⁰⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 254.

¹⁰⁷Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, “The Approach of Sociobiology: The Evolution of Ethics,” in *Religion and the Natural Sciences: The Range of Engagement*, ed. J.E. Huchingson (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 310. Ruse uses several illustrations to argue for his redundancy position, including, Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 21, “We see the moving train with our sense organs, which clearly show their adaptive value as we step smartly out of the train’s path. But no one would deny that the train genuinely exists, whether we see it or not. Perhaps, therefore, the same can and should be said of morality. It is true that our awareness of right and wrong depends on evolved organs, and that such awareness has adaptive value, but this is not to deny the independent existence of moral standards (Nozick 1981). Unfortunately, however, the analogy breaks down. Consider two separate worlds, identical except that one has an objective morality and the other does not. Humans could have evolved in both worlds to believe in exactly the same things! The two identical species could share thoughts about right and wrong. To suppose otherwise, that is, to suppose that only the world of objective morality could have humans believing in it, is to suppose an extrascientific channeling of events—a channeling which is quite antithetical to modern evolutionism. In short, therefore, in a sense, the objective morality is redundant. Its existence is irrelevant to human thought and action. (Things are quite otherwise with the moving train. I can imagine two worlds, different in that one of them does not contain large, fast-moving, life-threatening objects. Human evolution might have been quite different in the two cases.)”

why the bereaved "heard" what they did. The evolutionist's case is that something similar is very true of ethics. Ultimately, there is no reasoned justification for ethics in the sense of foundations to which one can appeal in reasoned argument. All one can offer is a causal argument to show why we hold ethical beliefs. But once such an argument is offered, we can see that this is all that is needed.¹⁰⁸

Ruse is a proficient philosopher and knows that all analogies breaks down at some point, but they serve as useful illustrations. He regularly utilizes the spiritualism analogy to illustrate his argument against the necessity of justificatory reasons. He holds that the difference between his spiritualism analogy and his ethical position is that in the former, people genuinely recognize its deceptive nature and deem it an accepted illusion. However, in the latter, all humans share a common morality and cannot step outside of it; therefore, we fail to perceive the illusion and believe objectivity is real. This argument displays the subtle but important differences between causes and reasons (he admits his "earlier self" was confused about this issue as well); no longer is a reasoned justification necessary, only a genetic causal analysis stemming from our shared human nature. "You must, as it were, step outside of morality itself, and then all you can do is give a causal analysis."¹⁰⁹ An immediate critique follows: if it is impossible for us to step outside of human morality, and if we are unaware of the deception, how is Ruse and others like him enlightened concerning this position? They, too, presumably share in this common human nature that informs us of a sense of objectivity and needed justification. If we all share the same nature, then we must all share in the illusion, including Ruse. Neither he nor anyone else is genuinely able to "step outside of morality." He believes that our biology relates similarly to the spiritualism analogy in terms of ultimate moral justification. The spiritualism case provided only causes for the beliefs, not justification. So, too, good biological reasons exist for us to cooperate, but we are naturally selfish people and would not do so; thus, our biology causes us to behave morally with no

¹⁰⁸Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 102.

¹⁰⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 257.

justification for doing so.¹¹⁰

Ruse believes his test-case proves more than it does. In the midst of emotional distress, people may willingly embrace deception through irrational measures; however, people look for justification for their moral beliefs and are discontent with an explanation that justification is illusory. Ruse's analogy does not provide one-to-one equivalency; surely mourners sought emotional healing in their deception; morality is a different entity altogether. Moral judgments are often made apart from emotional hardship. The analogy illustrates that we irrationally believe certain ideas like voices from the other world; Ruse argues that our belief in moral objectivity functions in the same way except that we are unaware of the illusion. However, these moral intuitions are so deeply ingrained that believing them illusory contradicts common sense more so than disbelieving Ruse's account. Ruse's analogy fails because he ultimately asks the reader to accept irrational beliefs which result in nihilism: "We could, however, break down the reason/cause distinction if we were able to show that all rational-belief causality had to be explained in terms of irrational-belief causality. No argument, however, has been offered for such a view. Anyway, it would land us in what I will call 'rational nihilism.'" The proposal further suffers from a self-defeating problem: "Any attempt to convince us of the truth of rational nihilism will be a case of offering us reasons to accept that there are no such things as reasons."¹¹¹ Ruse certainly utilizes rational argument against the theory that morality requires justification, and he must continually struggle to defend his position precisely because it appears deeply counterintuitive. Our unmistakable intuitions suggest

¹¹⁰Ruse, "The Biological Sciences Can Act as a Ground for Ethics," 311.

¹¹¹Peter G. Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics: A Critique." *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 434-35. He continues, "The Spiritualist Analogy Argument gets its force from the assumption that any causal explanation is also an irrational-belief causal explanation. We must go beyond Mr and Mrs Higgins' belief in the existence of the spirit of Private Higgins to an irrational-belief causal explanation because we cannot give a rational-belief justification of their belief in terms of the criteria of rational theory choice, even though there is as much a causal explanation available of the mechanism that enables rational belief as there is for malfunctions of that mechanism." Ibid., 436.

that morality needs justification; nevertheless, Ruse believes these intuitions are also illusory. However, the data seem to point to the conspicuous conclusion that the best explanation for our deeply held intuitions is that they are not the result of natural selection fooling us.

Recall that Ruse always acknowledges the “bite” of the naturalistic fallacy; the last thing he wants to do is dismiss it: “The way that things are, the objects of the world, cannot tell us about the way that things should be, the dictates of morality.”¹¹² Ruse also dismisses any objective morality, believing that our biology infuses us with a sense of our moral requirements. Because no genuine objective morality exists, and our biology supplies us with the sense that it does, objective morality in Ruse’s scheme is redundant. For Ruse, objective morality does not exist, is gratuitous, and, even if it did exist, remains epistemically unavailable to us: we have no way of knowing objective dictates.¹¹³ Thus, Ruse believes humans cannot rationally justify why they believe the moral right and wrong they do apart from the common human nature. Herein is Ruse’s mischievous argument that natural selection equipped humanity with an adaptation to render morality objective. “They are mischievous because they question the need for an objective justification of morality. Anyone who wants objective justification must show not only that satisfying the demand is epistemically possible, but also that the criteria that must be satisfied are not equally illusory.”¹¹⁴

Ruse understands that two mammoth obstacles confront any evolutionary-based ethics: transcending the is/ought barrier and satisfying the need for justification in

¹¹²Ruse, *Science and Spirituality*, 130.

¹¹³Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality,” 49.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 50. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 251, desires to maintain the naturalistic fallacy, causing him to reject justification because objective values cannot be derived from factual premises: “In this respect [epigenetic rules where our biology makes us be moral], the very last thing the Darwinian wants to do is break Hume’s law by denying that there is a genuine ‘is/ought’ distinction. *The distinction is fundamental to his/her analysis of morality*. You may object that the Darwinian accounts inadequately for the evolution of morality. That is a separate question.”

ethics. Ruse believes his theory allows him a gap between explanation and justification; the causes of morality possess an explanation, but justificatory reasons for those behaviors are unnecessary. However, his analysis devolves into merely deep preference for the behaviors that an individual or the species as a whole prefers. No true right and wrong exist. No motivations or acts genuinely fit into categories of good and evil; they are mere preferences if justification is absent. Ultimately on a Darwinian scheme, why should one care about his neighbor? “Justification, then, does not collapse into explanation, nor do reasons collapse into causes.”¹¹⁵ A causal explanation cannot rationally defend or condemn moral behaviors. Ruse allows that we often act altruistically rather than egoistically, but we never have justified true belief for such actions. That being true, the egoist, or even the immoral person is no more irrational in his morality (or lack thereof) than the altruistic individual.¹¹⁶ His actions cannot be condemned because no true justification for right behavior exists. If acts cannot be praised or condemned, what is morality really? Ruse would obviously respond that we are selected for morality in our shared human nature through the epigenetic rules, causing us to condemn actions due to the illusion that they are wrong. This explanation, however,

¹¹⁵Woolcock, “The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today,” 290-91. Also Jeffrie Murphy, *Evolution, Morality, and the Meaning of Life* (Totowa, NJ: Rowan and Littlefield, 1982), 112n21, says, “The sociobiologist may well agree . . . that value judgments are properly defended in terms of other value judgments until we reach some that are fundamental. All of this, in a sense, is the giving of *reasons*. However, suppose we seriously raise the question of why these fundamental judgments are regarded as fundamental. There may be only a *causal* explanation for this! We reject simplistic utilitarianism because it entails consequences that are morally *counterintuitive*, or we embrace a Rawlsian theory of justice because it systematizes . . . our *pretheoretical convictions*. But what is the status of those intuitions or convictions? Perhaps there is nothing more to be said for them than that they involve deep *preferences* (or patterns of preference) built into our biological nature. If this is so, then at a very fundamental point the reasons/causes (and the belief we ought/really ought) distinction breaks down, or the one transforms into the other.” Also Campbell, “Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?,” 21, says, “A familiar position regarding the evolution of ethics is that biology can explain the origin of morals but that in doing so it removes the possibility of their having objective justification. This position is set forth in detail in the writings of Michael Ruse. . . . I argue the contrary view that biology provides a justification of the existence of morals which is objective in the sense of being independent of people’s moral views and their particular desires and preferences. Ironically, my argument builds on the very premises which are supposed to undermine the objectivity of morals.”

¹¹⁶Woolcock, “The Case against evolutionary Ethics Today,” 301.

disregards any actual right and wrong motivations or behaviors and lands one, logically, in nihilism concerning authentic morality. A nihilistic end resigns the illusion of objectivity to pseudo-morality and pseudo-altruism; morality is not about genuine right and wrong but survival and reproduction. Darwinian morality struggles to free itself of this charge, as proponents concede that the goal of natural selection is fitness.

Ruse's position capably explains moral motivations resulting from a Darwinian worldview, but it cannot ultimately justify moral behavior. The gap here is important and bigger than Ruse allows. Ruse argues that the illusion of objective morality is so hardwired in us that we cannot possibly recognize its illusory nature, but this shared human disposition is enough to ensure morality. He believes that demonstrating the causal origins is sufficient; the position advanced here is that if no true justification exists, and people realize it, then anything is permitted. Simply put, we humans need authentic justification for our moral beliefs; illusion is inadequate. Both fellow Darwinians and theists agree that justification is necessary:

Ruse argues for a sociobiologically based account of moral sentiments, and an evolutionarily based causal explanation of their function, rejecting the possibility of ultimate ethical justification. We find that Ruse's proposal distorts, overextends and weakens both Darwinism and naturalism. So we propose an alternative Darwinian metaethics that both remedies the problems in Ruse's proposal and shows how a Darwinian naturalistic account of the moral good in terms of human fitness avoids the naturalistic fallacy and can provide genuine, even if limited, justifications for substantive ethical claims. Thus, we propose to really take Darwin seriously.¹¹⁷

The quote above illustrates how even fellow Darwinians express dissatisfaction with the expulsion of justification and argue that it weakens Darwinian ethics. The argument clarifies the fundamental human need of justification for moral beliefs. Ruse himself expounds the Christian position for justification: "Most obviously and most centrally, the Christian puts his or her faith in God as revealed to us through Jesus Christ – in his love

¹¹⁷Rottschaefer and Martinsen, "Really Taking Darwin Seriously," 149.

and care for us – and finds the justification for substantive ethics in God’s will.”¹¹⁸ This position fully accounts for our feeling of obligation, our intuitions about morality, and the moral agreement that Ruse assesses often exists across human cultures. In short, Christianity more directly accounts for the shared human disposition that morality is objective and obligatory whereas Ruse’s explication is more ad hoc.

Problems with Illusory Objectivity

Retaining Substantive Morality in the Absence of Metaethical Justification

The following critique analyzes some problems resulting from Ruse’s illusion of objectivity, and the first is the challenge of retaining even substantive ethics when all metaethical justification disappears. Some Darwinians concede that morality essentially vanishes in their scheme, a logical assumption when no Lawgiver exists to demand accountability. Ruse, admirably, considers this stance morally bankrupt and simply contrary to the way all humans live; they generally seek to be moral. Thus, whereas some Darwinians abandon morality altogether, Ruse works hard to preserve it.¹¹⁹

Does he succeed? Serious challenges stand in his way. Ruse argues that our morality consists of only feelings of right and wrong produced by the epigenetic rules through natural selection into our common human nature. This sentiment presumes much with hypotheses like epigenetic rules, illusory objectivity, and nonessential justification. Ruse remains true to his Darwinism by stripping his system of any metaethical grounding, but does this position not also strip his system of substantive morality?¹²⁰ The

¹¹⁸Michael Ruse, “Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Ethical Issues,” *Zygon* 35 (2000): 295.

¹¹⁹Woolcock, “Objectivity and Illusion in Evolutionary Ethics,” 43, credits Ruse saying, “As it happens, most of us reject the non-altruistic alternatives and often behave in an other-benefiting way. Why is this so? It is this question, I suggest, that Ruse seeks to answer with his theory that natural selection evolved in us an inclination to see moral claims as objectively true or false. I do not think that his answer is the correct one but it is certainly correct of him to see that there is a question there to be answered.”

¹²⁰Fellow naturalist Evan Fales, “A Naturalist Moral Realism Response,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 79-80, elucidates two

proposal that people act merely on propensities or feelings, even strong propensities and feelings, is not a view favoring substantive ethics. In fact, critics argue that Ruse's theory degenerates into a position of mores which vanquishes substantive ethics as surely as it does metaethics in that morality is only propensities and feelings.

Put differently, he offers a theory of *mores* – of behavioral rules and practices which people have adopted. He endeavors to give an evolutionary (biological) account of how these rules and practices arose. What he explains, anthropologists also describe: empirically discoverable rules that one finds in the cultures they study. Anthropologists study mores, not ethics. Ethics is inherently a normative discipline, trading in goodness, badness, rightness, wrongness and the like. To reduce it to a purely descriptive discipline is to *replace* it, not explain it.¹²¹

Ruse would surely respond that his propensities and feelings are common to all humans and, thus, do not regress into cultural mores or individual relativism. However, he constantly needs to defend against this accusation, evidencing the inherent problem therein. Ruse recognizes immoral actions that are wrong objectively for all people at all times, a right position. "If a moral system simply comes out wrong, right down the line – asking you to rape little girls, stamp on babies, and blackmail your friends – this is surely the best of all possible reasons for rejecting it."¹²² The truth of this sentiment, in one sense, counts against Ruse's position rather than for it. He offers situations requiring authentic objective morality and resulting judgments, but this authentic objectivity is absolutely absent in his theory. While he is perfectly correct in assessing the inherent wrongness, even evil, of these actions, he finds no ground in his system to judge these

mammoth problems stemming from Ruse's account, "What comes naturally to us is determined, so Ruse would have it, *inter alia* by the instincts and moral feelings that we find ourselves with. I have two questions right away. What does 'enjoying things fully' amount to? . . . And what moral role, if any beyond the calculation of means-ends relations, does Ruse envision for rational reflection? Both these questions, which are far too large to pursue further here, reflect what I think will be a central concern for the theist, namely, whether Ruse's account of morality, and indeed of the nature of our moral feelings, is adequate even at the normative level."

¹²¹Keith E. Yandell, "A Moral Essentialism Response," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 85.

¹²²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 76.

actions as truly, inherently evil in every situation or world.¹²³ Recall that Ruse deems objective ethics redundant through his analogy of two worlds where the only difference is that one contains objective ethics and the other does not. He asserts that in both worlds caring for the sick would be morally good. However, this statement assumes much more than it proves; he argued previously that our evolved morality could have been just the opposite depending on the epigenetic rules and our survival needs. Thus, the substantive morality that Ruse wants to retain in his system could have been completely different, but here arises a definitional problem. The idea of objective morality causes people to consider something true in every possible world based on an external agent, or morality “out there,” in an outside source. However, the idea of an external agent is disallowed on a Darwinian scheme, leaving us with only propensities and feelings. From these propensities one cannot seek to retain moral good and evil in every possible world, including our own. Thus, his moral judgments about definitive situations such as rape and baby-stomping, while right, finds no ground or justification in Darwinian morality.¹²⁴

Genuine morality boosts the rights and value of others to a same or greater level of our own self-interest. In a Darwinian scheme where natural selection advances individual fitness, this position seems implausible, if not impossible. Morality requires prescriptivity for effectiveness, and Ruse dismisses any true obligation; he sustains only

¹²³C. Stephen Evans, “Is There a Basis for Loving All People?” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 34 (2006): 86, says that we may desire that education, proper nurture, and social engineering might produce truly altruistic acts in people, but these means do not provide a universal morality for all people. Many people may behave in ways considered morally right, but Darwinism does not provide a foundation for objective morality. Also Yandell, “A Moral Essentialism Response,” 86, says that if Ruse’s view is only mores, then no prescriptive options exist to call acts good or evil. Things could only be bad or good depending on current given mores in a culture, since mores are “propensity relative.”

¹²⁴Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 107, depicts this two-worlds argument then states, “The evolutionist argues that, in both situations, we would have evolved in such a way as to think that, morally, we ought to care for the sick. To suppose otherwise, to suppose that only the world of objective ethics has us caring about the sick, is to suppose that there are extrascientific forces at work, directing and guiding the course of evolution. And this is a supposition which is an anathema to the modern biologist.”

feelings and propensities which cannot justify selfless or self-sacrificing actions.¹²⁵ Ruse dismisses the need for authentic obligation, believing that the propensities adequately motivate persons to action. Recall his position: “*The ordinary way is the way of propensities or rules*. For this reason, the last thing one intends to do in identifying the propensities or rules is to make ordinary life dissolve into paradox.”¹²⁶ Nevertheless, in this scheme ordinary life does dissolve into paradox. He asks readers to act on feelings of moral obligations that are so innate that they cannot possibly envision them as illusory, yet at the same time discern that these obligations are illusory but inescapable. That is paradox. One thus believes certain behaviors are true or false, right or wrong (in his phenomenological experience), but these judgments are fully subjective and not actually objectively true or false (in terms of philosophical justification). When our phenomenological experience contradicts our philosophical justification, not simply varies from it, but outright contradicts it, then life is pure paradox. If objective morality disappears, and obligation is nothing more than an illusion from our biology, then moral obligations also vanish. Substantive morality fails to endure. The result is moral nihilism.

So far I have assumed that the kind of obligation being talked about here is “moral obligation” in the sense of a requirement to at least sometimes give the interests of other people an equal or superior weighting to one's own interests. If Ruse is right, however, there are no such requirements, only feelings that we are required sometimes to act this way. . . . Ruse's position, then, seems to lead to moral nihilism, to the view that there is no real morality, that there are no literal obligations. Moreover, as the practice of “morality” on his own thesis depends on our believing that it has objective reference, his letting the cat out of the bag seems to threaten the whole evolutionary mechanism that he has used the objectivity of morality to explain, namely, our behaving cooperatively in ways that enhance our reproductive success.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Woolcock, “Ruse’s Darwinian Meta-Ethics,” 424-25.

¹²⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 187.

¹²⁷Woolcock, “Ruse’s Darwinian Meta-Ethics,” 424-25. Also Rottschaefer and Martinsen, “Really Taking Darwin Seriously,” 162, say, “Ruse claims that both the actions based on moral sentiments and the moral sentiments themselves are generally morally right even though ultimately they lack justification. Ruse, then, must show what natural, but subjective, property of the agent constitutes moral rightness. Otherwise, he is forced to deny that even the moral sentiments and the actions they inspire are morally right.”

The problem elucidated above undermines Ruse's entire scheme. He fights desperately to retain substantive morality, but he remains true to Darwinism which expels all metaethical justification. As much as he seeks to save substantive morality, dislodging it from metaethical justification makes doing so implausible. If ethics requires justification (and the "if" is crucial), neither Ruse's theory nor any truly Darwinian theory can offer a satisfactory moral scheme. Moral nihilism becomes a prominent option. Ruse acknowledges his disguised (in terms of the illusion of objectivity) nihilism but considers that his notion of the shared human propensities allows him to avoid charges of relativism. Ruse presumes that everyone believes morality is objective; once people learn of the illusion, no rational reason persists for a person to remain moral. This position is moral nihilism but of a different type. "His moral nihilism, however, means that his claim not to be committed to ethical relativism, while strictly speaking correct, is somewhat misleading." Ruse discusses the divergent moral judgments over female circumcision: some African tribes approve of it while those in the West strongly disapprove of it. Ruse asserts that both cannot be right and rejects cultural relativism. However, what he cannot do is proclaim, truly and objectively, that one position is right and the other is wrong. "Unfortunately, his theory is committed to either both claims being false or neither being true nor false."¹²⁸ Substantive ethics requires making moral judgments that people believe are universally binding; when mutually exclusive moral claims are either both false or neither are true or false, substantive ethics hangs by a thread.

The illusory status of objective morality in Ruse's scheme makes substantive

¹²⁸Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 430-31. Also James A. Ryan, "Taking the 'Error' Out of Ruse's Error Theory," *Biology and Philosophy* 12 (1997): 385, says, "He argues that the evolutionary story should be taken as an error theory, i.e., as a theory which explains the belief that there are obligations as arising from non-rational causes, rather than from inference or evidential reasons. Woolcock quite rightly objects that this position entails moral nihilism. However, I argue here that people generally have justified true beliefs about which acts promote their most coherent set of moral values, and hence, by definition, about which acts are right. What the evolutionary story explains is the existence of these values, but it is not an error theory for moral beliefs."

morality subject only to human feelings, casting moral judgments into a suspect position. One cannot ensure that persons will act properly based only on feelings apart from genuine obligation.¹²⁹ Ruse evidences great belief in human dignity, a questionable dignity in a Darwinian world where humans are no more dignified than animals or plants, by proclaiming that people will remain moral apart from genuine obligation. He considers the shared propensities sufficient to prevent persons from rejecting morality.

Nor would I have those of us who see the illusory nature of morality's objectivity throw over moral thought, as suggested by Plato's Thrasymachus or Nietzsche's Superman. Morality is part of human nature, and (subject to reservations to be made later) an effective adaptation. Why should we forego morality any more than we should put out our eyes? I would not say that we could not escape morality – presumably we could get into wholesale, anti-morality, genetic engineering – but I strongly suspect that a simple attempt to ignore it will fail.¹³⁰

He must advocate our inability to forego morality or his system crumbles. If persons recognize morality as illusory with no true justification, then it is only a dubious adaptation that keeps all of morality in place. This notion leads to a related significant problem: how would substantive morality endure if the illusion were public knowledge?

Cat-out-of-the-bag Problem

Ruse demonstrates ultimate trust in our shared human nature resulting from the epigenetic rules to keep morality in place apart from any obligatory justification. This chapter depicts that trust as resting on an already shaky foundation, but a further critique awaits. Ruse is aware of the illusion, which is difficult to explain since our biology creates a seemingly insurmountable feeling that objective morality is true. However, if Ruse and other enlightened souls like him are cognizant of the illusory nature of

¹²⁹Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 437, says, "All that his own theory allows him to say is that we feel, think, believe that we have obligations so the only action-guidingness we can gain from his theory is whatever is contained in the fact that we feel we have certain obligations. However, the object of such feelings, as we have seen, is just as illusory as our belief that a witch caused the hut to burn down so, if we wish to act only on true beliefs, we will not act on the belief that we are under any obligations whatsoever."

¹³⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 253.

objectivity, then all persons (shared human nature) possess the capacity to comprehend the illusion. (Nevertheless the only way to attain such awareness is through philosophical investigation since our biology deceives us, and empirical evidence is lacking). Even if one were to concede to Ruse the points of his system to this point, the paramount question remains: if persons recognize that justification and obligation is illusory, why should they continue being moral? Why not cheat the system for one's own benefit?

Ruse places so much confidence in our genetic disposition to “objectify” ethics that he believes even if persons are cognizant of the illusion they will continue obeying the dictates of morality. “That is why I am fairly confident that my having told you of this fact will not now mean that you will go off and rape and pillage, because you now know that there is no objective morality. The truth does not always set you free.”¹³¹ Ruse must express this confidence because he has dismissed any other means of retaining morality; all justification disappears, and Ruse desperately wants morality to persist. Yet, he considers that persons will now live irrationally and continue being moral even when they know it is all a sham. Ruse desires a middle ground position avoiding two radical extremes. The first represents the moral nihilistic Nietzschean position where anything goes, and the second portrays the equally dangerous Social Darwinism where persons need not care for the weak or helpless; in fact, they may aid evolution in terms of survival of the fittest. He dismisses both options outright. “On the one hand, I would remind you that we all have moral sentiments, and simply breaking with them would cause great internal tensions. Moreover, I really cannot see any point to wholesale proposals for change. Are we to stop living socially?”¹³² Ruse rightly rejects both positions as they present a morality that is no morality at all. Yet his concluding statement assumes what he must prove based on his scheme; certainly humans are social, but that does not mean

¹³¹Ruse, “Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible?,” 23.

¹³²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 271.

they will remain moral upon learning that morality is an illusion.

Ruse grounds his position of humans persisting in morality after recognizing the illusion in our shared moral psychology, ascribing a seeming omnipotence to it: “My point simply is that our psychology is very strong. We may know that morality has no objective foundation, but this does not mean that we can simply go out and ignore it.”¹³³ This confidence seems to ignore the data so prevalent in society; humans will and do cheat the system for their own benefit if they believe they can advance their position and avoid getting caught. Woolcock disagrees that Ruse established his moral proposal as either naturalistic or subjective, but his primary criticism states that if Ruse’s “theory is true, then the objectivity of morality can only play the evolutionary role he accords it if we remain ignorant of his theory. Once he lets the cat out of the bag, once he convinces us that morality has no objective referent, then we have lost the rational basis that he himself proposes as necessary to avoid rampant egoism.”¹³⁴ Ruse’s scheme seems to rationally land him in the position that he ultimately wants to avoid: an individual egoism that Darwinism seems to promote.

Ruse’s moral system cannot enforce moral obligation; he believes morality is a shared human adaptation where everyone plays the game “with perhaps one or two cheaters.”¹³⁵ This numerical estimate on cheaters seems vastly conservative. In Ruse’s system, once persons become aware of the sham that morality is, why would not everyone ditch morality for self-benefit? Or why would a person not hypocritically teach objective morality to others and practice egoism for himself? The problem of cheaters

¹³³Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” 67-68. However, Mark D. Linville, “A Moral Particularism Response,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 93, says of Ruse’s belief, “He trusts that human psychology is strong enough to ensure that people will *not* ignore the voice of conscience, even if they have come to believe that morality is groundless. I do not share his confidence.”

¹³⁴Woolcock, “Ruse’s Darwinian Meta-Ethics,” 423.

¹³⁵Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 104.

undermines Ruse's moral theory. Ruse's admits that the binding system of morality depends upon our believing it is real. Once persons recognize the illusion and the cat is out of the bag, then not even illusory justification remains. No effective obligation remains in place to keep persons from cheating the system if they can avoid detection. "As a consequence, we will only continue to behave morally as long as we remain ignorant of Ruse's theory, that is, as long as the cat is not let out of the bag."¹³⁶ Since even Ruse believes human biology prevents our awareness of the illusion, the cat out of the bag critique arises only by assuming a hypothetical situation where a culture exists that recognizes the illusion as such. In such a culture, it seems that once one is aware of the illusion and sees it for the sham it is, his best and most rational bet is to dump the whole system and act for his own fitness. Ruse seems to envision something of a utopian society where each member continues to treat others with respect, dignity, and other-care, even upon realizing the false nature of objectivity; why instead would not a Hobbesian state of nature arise where everyone is at war with one another?¹³⁷ Ruse provides a two-fold response: first, we could not act differently if we tried due to our genetic dispositions and, second, our morality is an evolutionary adaptation with usefulness similar to that of our eyes.¹³⁸ The first response fails in that certainly humans could train themselves to avoid altruistic behavior, similar to how atheists trained themselves to reject religious feelings from their childhood. The second argument also fails because our eyes are useful regardless of our goals; morality is useful for an egoist only insofar as it leads to egoistic goals where everyone else remains altruistic while he is a hypocrite, cheating the system to benefit self.¹³⁹ Machiavelli's advice to appear moral but break the rules when it is to

¹³⁶Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 423.

¹³⁷Woolcock, "The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today," 288.

¹³⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 253.

¹³⁹Woolcock, "The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today," 288. Also Ryan, "Taking the 'Error' Out of Ruse's Error Theory," 386, says, "It would be more rational to cheat when one can get away

one's advantage seems appropriate once Ruse's cat is out of the bag. Ruse's system does not simply crack the door open for this type of egoism, it busts down such a door.

Ruse believes humans simply cannot rebel against their genes (though he wants to avoid complete determinism), believing that our common human dispositions prevent such cheating. However, according to a Darwinian scheme, our adaptations arise according to reproductive benefit. If persons thought reproductive fitness improved by cheating, then they seemingly would disregard the illusion and act for self-benefit.¹⁴⁰

Were one to remain altruistic after realizing the illusory nature of objective morality, his moral beliefs and behavior may be commendable but irrational.¹⁴¹ One may argue that if humans continue to act morally even with the knowledge that obligation is an illusion, then instead of the redundancy of objectivity, Ruse's theory is redundant. No good exists in learning of the illusion if one continues to act as if ignorant of it. To utilize his two

with it and to enjoy most of the fruits of cooperation by cooperating only as much as is necessary to keep the chance of being punished acceptably low. Now that one knows morality is a ruse, one rationally ought to try to keep the cat in the bag, play along with the charade by which others are fooled into acting morally, and steal when one is sure one won't get caught." Also Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God, and the Meaning of Life*, 210 says, "There's a complication, though, and it's called *the problem of cheating*. Even when mutual exchanges of help are more advantageous than directly self-interested behavior, it is more advantageous still to receive help but not return the favour. Individual adopting this strategy are called *free riders*. Free riders will always do better than unconditional altruists, and thus if there were ever a population of unconditional altruists . . . a mutant gene for free riding would spread like wildfire and ultimately displace the tendency to be altruistic." Also Collier and Stingl, "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality," 52-53, say, "As noted above, Ruse's invocation of the naturalistic fallacy involves a problem about cheaters and free-riders, to which his mischievous argument responds. . . . On Ruse's view we are obliged to be moral only insofar as we believe ourselves to be obliged; if there are members of society who do not believe themselves to be so obliged, the social system threatens to break down. It is doubtful whether sanctions would be sufficient to meet this problem." Also Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 427 responds to Ruse's assertion that we could not stop acting morally even if we wanted with, "The second objection interprets the kind of morality under consideration as an 'unendorsed' morality. While it may well still be rational of us to retain an unendorsed morality even if our goals are entirely egoistical (for the reasons given earlier) this is of no help to Ruse in overcoming the 'cat out of the bag' objection because there is no cat in the bag in the case of an unendorsed morality. Obedience to such a morality requires effective policing of the rules not personal commitment to them."

¹⁴⁰Woolcock, "Objectivity and Illusion in Evolutionary Ethics," 43.

¹⁴¹Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," 726-27, says, "Thus, if a person has evidence of this fact – once 'the cat is out of the bag' (as Woolcock puts it) – to have such a belief is irrational. Thus, if we read Ruse's . . . book and justifiably believe it . . . , it becomes *irrational* for us to hold moral beliefs. I do not see that Ruse can avoid this conclusion without revising his basic position."

worlds analogy, if the only difference between the two worlds were one in which the illusory nature of morality were known in one and in the other it remains an illusion, and in both people acted exactly the same, then the illusion argument is redundant. Woolcock relates Ruse's moral theory to Plato's story of Gyges' ring, noting that people willingly break the rules if they are sure they can do so undetected.

Ruse's theory is out to explain why we follow the social rules even when it is not in our interest to do so and we can get away with it, that is, the Gyges' ring case. It is precisely because many of us desire to break such rules in such circumstances that he has postulated both that we regard morality as objectively true and that we have a genetic tendency to do so. If we would continue to obey these rules under these circumstances even when we don't believe morality to be objective, then what work does his theory do? Admittedly, were we to continue to act morally even when we had the protection of Gyges' ring, this would strongly suggest an irresistible genetic tendency, but one that had nothing to do with believing morality to be objective. As it happens, there are only far too many people willing to break the social rules when they can get away with it, so there seems to be no case for this kind of genetic tendency either.¹⁴²

Ruse's theory faces difficulty in dismissing the reality of ubiquitous cheating once the cat is out of the bag. The hub of Darwinian theory depicts natural selection producing adaptations for individual benefit. If one acts contrary to self-benefit by remaining moral even if he knows no true obligations exist, he fails to act in a Darwinian fashion. Thus, in the cat-out-of-the-bag situation, Ruse's Darwinian moral theory seems to function in opposition to Darwinian theory in general.

Once Ruse's cat is out of the bag, only certain options are available in terms of morality. One of the most conspicuous options is overthrowing morality altogether and embracing moral nihilism.

Once we realise this, the rational course would seem to be to train ourselves out of any residual tendencies to obey moral laws where we can get away with breaking them. We should deprogramme ourselves out of any inclinations to feel guilt, or to want redemption. Contrary to Ruse's denial Nietzsche and Thrasymachus were right – moral thought is overthrown.¹⁴³

¹⁴²Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 427.

¹⁴³Ibid., 428.

Nihilistic morality presents an unattractive option, but for a Darwinian it may be the most obvious remaining choice. This quote states that the rational course is to rid ourselves of the peskiness of morality and embrace nihilism. A second option is accepting the irrationality of remaining moral after acknowledging that morality is ultimately a sham.

One way to proceed (that I don't favour) would be to argue, seemingly paradoxically, that it may sometimes be rational to be irrational. . . . The 'post-Ruseian' moralist may be in the same situation. His ongoing belief in moral obligation is irrational, yet his having that belief may be to his practical advantage, may serve his ends, and therefore if there are actions he can perform to encourage such beliefs, those actions are rational. As I say, I do not favour this kind of defence, encouraging, as it apparently does, a kind of schizophrenia, or self-deception, in the agent.¹⁴⁴

Few people can or will intentionally live irrationally, yet Darwinian theory must leave open this option. A third option assesses that cheating is never a good option because of the likelihood of getting caught. Those who wish to break with convention and cheat the system for their own benefit may miscalculate, get caught, and face serious consequences as a result. One may reasonably determine that cheating is the right strategy, but he may also lack the courage to risk capture and punishment so he fails to cheat.¹⁴⁵ This solution, however, seems to ignore the apparent data; many people often take great risks for self-benefit if they feel they have a chance of success. The problems associated inherently with all these positions could drive Darwinians to a fourth option, once again searching

¹⁴⁴Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," 727.

¹⁴⁵Joyce notes that Hume dealt with the problem of cheaters or 'free-riders' as well. First, he argues that free-riders miss out on important values like dealing fairly and honestly with others and participating in a trusting community. Second, free-riders are often unwilling to take risks. "Those looking to defect secretly are likely to miscalculate, get caught, and pay a serious price; if they are also weak of will then the likelihood increases. It might be argued that what follows from Hume's observation is that clear-headed calculations of expected self-gain will suffice to regulate cooperative behaviour, with no troublesome *moral duties* or *categorical imperatives* entering into the picture at all. The 'sensible knave' would break a promise if she could be sure of getting away with it, but she is sensible enough to know that she is rarely sure of getting away with it, and the price of detection is too great to risk it." Ibid., 728. Also Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 211, says "Guilt dissuades us from taking more than we give, thereby avoiding the possible negative consequences of being caught free riding; additionally, it motivate us to make reparations for free riding in the past." This argument, however, seems highly idealistic; most thieves fail to make reparations. Furthermore, guilt is difficult to explain on a Darwinian scheme; if nothing is objectively right or wrong, then guilt itself would have to be an adaptation of natural selection to make us cooperate.

for authentic objective morality. Darwinian commitments encounter great difficulty in grounding objective morality and justifying ethics, but even with the challenges, this option may appeal in light of the overwhelming problems with the other options.¹⁴⁶

None of the above options appeals to many people, but once the Darwinian cat is out of the bag, retaining substantive morality becomes a very difficult endeavor. One cannot foresee how, in a system devoted to individual fitness, moral behavior remains a logical choice upon recognizing the illusion of objectivity. Ruse asserts that human biology prevents persons from rebelling against the illusion, even when cognizant of it, but his solution dissolves into either complete determinism where persons are essentially programmed to act in certain ways or into an irrational life where they live contrary to the truth they know. Neither option is attractive.¹⁴⁷ Even if Ruse were correct about his illusion, he still faces hardship in accounting for dilemmas in moral judgments. Often he must resort to the rationale that our biology simply has not equipped us for answers that we desperately need.

I suspect that most of us find highly repugnant the Chinese policy of insisting that married couples restrict their off-spring number to one, particularly when the policy is backed by forcible (or near-forcible) abortions. This is a gross violation of our sense of liberty. However, given present conditions, there are also good reasons – including good moral reasons – for such a policy. Are we all to die in a few years, from disease and starvation? . . . We are not abandoning our moral sentiments, but we can see how the Chinese dilemma pushes us to limits for which our biology has not prepared us.¹⁴⁸

In summary, Ruse's illusion of objectivity introduces as many problems into Darwinian moral theory as it resolves. Ruse attempts to remain true to Darwinism, but a Darwinian

¹⁴⁶Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," 149, indeed believes this choice is the proper one. He asserts that an atheistic commitment actually favors an objective ethics, stating that moral truths are independent of one's beliefs about them. Also Ryan, "Taking the 'Error' Out of Ruse's Error Theory," 387, says that there exists this option for a Darwinian position: "It involves taking the 'error' out of the error theory by denying that ordinary, moral people generally make the error of accepting objectivism."

¹⁴⁷Joyce, "Darwinian Ethics and Error," 729, admits, "to believe things the evidence of whose falsehood is available to us is irrational, and is likely to have serious detrimental consequences if adopted as a doxastic policy."

¹⁴⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 271.

construction of morality is infused with inherent difficulties. A system predicated on survival and reproduction does not easily account for self-sacrificing other-care.

The Irrationality of Moral Discourse

The final problem elucidated here concerning Ruse's illusion is that of the irrationality of moral discourse. Ruse acknowledges that philosophers are neither preachers nor moralists who prescribe moral codes. However, in the same paragraph he mentions some moral endorsements from philosophers that he describes as good: John Stuart Mill's campaign for women's rights and Bertrand Russell's opposition to nuclear weapons.¹⁴⁹ Herein Ruse labels their stances as "good," implying an objective standard of goodness. The vast majority of people agree with these stances. However, a wide variety of issues engender great moral discourse: abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and war, just to name a few. Where in Ruse's position does room exist for genuine moral discourse if objective morality is illusory and we share common genetic dispositions?

Ruse's system already struggles to distinguish moral judgments from mere preferences; he believes persons are predisposed to believe their preferences are genuinely factual. Ruse knows that apart from this sense of objectivity, then no way exists to make a final judgment about something as awful as Nazism; one's abhorrence towards it could be no more morally right than another person's preference for it.¹⁵⁰ Common sense disregards this option; Ruse's morality may simply *be* preference, but it must not *feel* like it is only preference. Ruse's moral proposal consists of genuine arbitrariness in our moral beliefs: obligation feels real but it is illusory. Similarly, our genetic dispositions instilled a morality within us, but the morality that evolved could have turned out completely opposite than it did. Arbitrariness in morality opens up doors

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 207.

¹⁵⁰Woolcock, "The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today," 289.

the Darwinian prefers remained closed: rape could be affirmed in biological terms where a male wants to reproduce his genes. Nobody believes rape should find approval.

“However, if the rape impulse happens to be embedded into human nature from antiquity and if it confers biological advantage, how can the authors suggest that this behavior *ought* to be ended?”¹⁵¹ Herein lies a major difficulty for Ruse: *ought*. Certain motivations and actions are morally required and others morally banned. This truth is central to moral discourse, but Ruse’s system accounts for it only in terms of illusion. Joyce understands the logical conclusion to this reality but refuses to accept it: “If morality is an illusion, it appears to follow that we should, upon discovering this, abolish moral discourse on pain of irrationality. I argue that this conclusion is too hasty, and that we may be able usefully to employ a moral discourse, warts and all, without believing in it.”¹⁵² This conclusion is absurd; people do not engage in passionate moral discourse without genuinely believing in it. They believe the issues are of great importance and that moral resolutions are of great importance. Moral discourse is no mere theoretical exercise where people deliberate about inconsequential matters; moral discourse is passionate and pervasive. On Ruse’s

¹⁵¹Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 152. Also Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors,” 66, responds to emotivism saying, “This is why emotivism seems not merely implausible but downright immoral. Murder, rape, and theft are not merely matters of emotion and preference (or so it seems). They are matters of right and wrong!” The four words in parentheses, “or so it seems,” make all the difference. At heart, these issues, on Ruse’s scheme, ultimately are matters of emotion and preference.

¹⁵²Joyce, “Darwinian Ethics and Error,” 713. Also Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 14, says, “If morality were a direct product of evolution, why would people constantly argue about what’s right and wrong? Why would we have to teach our children to be good? Why would we experience inner conflict between what we think is morally right and what we really want to do? You might expect that, as an evolutionary psychologist, I’d have snappy comebacks for each of these questions. But I don’t; I think they represent important criticisms and I don’t think that morality is a direct product of evolution.” Also Linville, “The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism,” 62, says, “This suggests that there are no objective moral facts, though we have been programmed to believe in them. A more modest conclusion might be that we are not in a position to *know* whether there are such facts because our moral beliefs are undercut by the Darwinian story of their genesis. This is because that story makes no essential reference to any such alleged facts. Thus, our moral beliefs are without warrant. But if our moral beliefs are unwarranted, then there can be no such thing as moral knowledge. And this amounts to moral skepticism.”

scheme, little room seems available for the rationality of moral discourse. Ruse's moral theory thus finds another impediment.

Conclusion

Ruse's illusion lies at the core of his moral proposal, but, while he seeks to remain true to his Darwinism in proffering it, it seems implausible as a satisfactory explanation for our deeply held moral beliefs. His proposal's counterintuitive nature disregards our common sentiments; his hypothesis opposes our common sense beliefs that morality is genuinely binding and obligatory. Also, awareness of the illusion should logically result in moral chaos where people abandon morality and seek to cheat the system to maximize self-benefit. Ruse believes this position does not result because our biology is so strong, but this stance seems highly optimistic in that people often do cheat when they believe they will be successful. These problems do not produce a utopian society where everyone behaves morally regardless of the truth of moral beliefs; if the cat is out of the bag, a Hobbesian state of nature seems more plausible than one in which morality continues unperturbed and uninterrupted.

Ruse confuses the differences between epistemology and ontology in our moral awareness.¹⁵³ Certainly Ruse acknowledges a substantive ethics to which most everyone seeks to adhere. For Ruse, ethics is an adaptation produced by natural selection to make us cooperate ultimately for our greater benefit. There exists no metaethical justification for it. Nothing is behind it. There exists no ontological ground for ethics. The Christian theist maintains that one can *know* substantive ethics apart from knowledge of God; this innate nature stems from the *imago dei*. The problem for the Darwinian is not in knowing, but grounding, substantive ethics:

I describe myself as an agnostic or a skeptic, but in truth I am pretty atheistic about

¹⁵³Copan, "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality," 142 says that theists anticipate everyone acknowledging similar moral values since God created all humans in his image.

the basic claims of Christianity. Many of my good Christian friends think, therefore, that either I have no morality at all or if I do I am being insincere to my more basic beliefs. I find this somewhat surprising and a little discomfiting, because I have never thought of myself as a moral madman. Just like other people, I love my family and my children. I am friendly toward babies and other small animals. I help little old ladies cross the road. When somebody comes around with the collecting box, my hand goes straight into my pocket to find my spare change. What then is my morality really, and how do I justify it?¹⁵⁴

Herein one observes that Ruse knows the dictates of substantive morality and pursues a moral life. However, he asks the really pertinent question; how does he justify his moral beliefs and actions? This chapter reveals that he cannot justify morality and, further, he does not believe morality requires justification. The judgment expressed is that he vastly underestimates the need for justification and, in dismissing justification, dismisses substantive ethics as well. Thus, Ruse's illusion is the real illusion, and morality does, indeed, require justification.

¹⁵⁴Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," 53.

CHAPTER 4

ALTRUISM OR PSEUDO-ALTRUISM

Altruism: Darwinism's Difficult Problem

Thus far, the dissertation has demonstrated the challenges Ruse encounters in his Darwinian proposal for morality; however, a further significant obstacle requires critique. This chapter explores this heretofore unmentioned but prominent dilemma for Darwinian morality: explaining, accounting for, and grounding altruism. Darwinism faces unique difficulty in justifying altruism, and Ruse must account for this formidable subject within his proposal. A Darwinian system ultimately geared to promoting individual fitness cannot readily ground self-sacrificing other-care that increases another's fitness by incurring a cost to the agent's own fitness. Altruism seems *prima facie* self-refuting in the Darwinian worldview. How does Ruse both justify the prevalent and inarguable altruism appearing among humans and explain why altruism is universally judged a "good?"

Prior to depicting Ruse's proposal, the chapter requires a clear description of altruism and an argument demonstrating altruism's antithetical nature to Darwinism. Altruism is something that benefits the recipient at some cost to the donor, representing a sacrificial "other-concern" in morality. In Darwinian terms, altruism is any behavior that lowers the fitness of the agent while raising the fitness of another individual. Stated succinctly, altruism is "*a motivational state with the goal of increasing another's welfare.*"¹ However, a caveat often introduced by Darwinians illustrates that altruism

¹C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social-Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 6. He also defines egoism as "*a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing one's own welfare.*" Ibid., 7. Defining egoism is important as the argument advanced proposes that Darwinism more directly relates to egoism than altruism. Another Darwinian, Steve

applies only to fitness and expresses little to nothing about the psychological states of the individuals involved; in other words, altruism does not imply a conscious or intentional motive.² This caveat introduces a distinct difference in altruism's definition than is generally understood; the person who dives into freezing water to rescue a child or the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his platoon demonstrates intentional, conscious, and self-sacrificing actions. Ruse portrays very distinct uses of the term:

Cooperation for biological ends (which, in the terms of modern biology, cashes out as increasing one's genetic contribution to the composition of future generations) is known technically as 'altruism'. Note that this is yet another biological metaphor – there is certainly no suggestion that such cooperation always demands deliberate subjection to the Categorical Imperative or some such thing. (This latter disinterested help – requiring Mother-Theresa-type thoughts and actions – we can refer to as unadorned, literal altruism.)³

One recognizes the Darwinian necessity of distinguishing between biological and genuine altruism; Darwinism presents natural selection as a “brutal individual struggle for survival against the external other” where cooperation occurs at times but always for the long-term selective advantage of the individual.⁴ Biological altruism finds a more direct and simple explanation in Darwinism; an analysis of genuine altruism is more contrived. The paradox of altruism obtains for the Darwinian in that his system promotes individual survival and reproduction, and other-oriented motives at one's own expense appear alien in a worldview geared toward selfishness. Regardless of the biological definition of altruism, humans admire and practice genuine altruism. Ruse

Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207, says, “Typically, an altruistic act is defined as any act that involves a personal fitness cost to the actor but which enhances the fitness of the recipient.”

²Zach Ernst, “Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 464.

³Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors: Kant, Hume, and All the Way Back to Aristotle?” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 8 (1990): 62.

⁴R. Paul Thompson, “An Evolutionary Account of Evil,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 533.

himself offers, “If morality means anything, it means being prepared to hold out a helping hand to others.”⁵ While this statement is incontrovertible, a Darwinian must account for the kind of altruism where agents practice self-sacrificing behavior for the good of others.

Altruism is consistently prized in human interactions and is often normative in human practice, regardless of one’s worldview. Ruse describes altruism as an outstanding characteristic of human beings, even asserting that our willing cooperation is the reason we survive and reproduce. He says that even with all of our wars, humans still rank fairly low on any carnage meter: “The murder rate in a pride of lions is far higher than that in the slums of Detroit.”⁶ Ruse describes the high praise given to genuine altruistic actions: “Generosity without reciprocation is the rarest and most cherished of human behaviors, subtle and difficult to define, distributed in a highly selective pattern, surrounded by ritual and circumstance, and honored by medallions and emotional orations. We sanctify true altruism.”⁷ Little doubt exists concerning the goodness of altruism; nevertheless, epistemologically knowing it is good and ontologically grounding it are two different matters. Darwinians can affirm the goodness of altruism and proceed to live altruistically; the real issue concerns grounding altruism in a Darwinian scheme.⁸ The difficulty occurs

⁵Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 217.

⁶Michael Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 496-97. Also D. M. Wonderly, *The Selfish Gene Pool: An Evolutionarily Stable System* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), xxviii, notes that everyone agrees that altruism is universally considered a good but argued that it is something we learn. He does not believe it is a biological disposition, but “as the intellect developed, a countervailing force – a moral sense – emerged that has the effect of maintaining the fitness of groups. A model will be proposed that identifies gene pools as evolutionarily stable systems, in the interest of which altruistic behavior has evolved. . . . It will be perhaps hundreds of years before an understanding of the genetic process is sufficiently complete for a definitive explanation to be provided.” His final sentence is nothing more than a science-of-the-gaps explanation where he evades explaining altruism from a Darwinian worldview.

⁷Michael Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 151.

⁸Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: First Mariner Books, 2008), 259,

not in epistemology but in ontology. Christians ground altruism in a good God; Darwinians who fail to believe in God understand altruism is good and often act accordingly, but the challenge occurs in ontologically grounding altruism. As God's image bearers, humans cannot help but label altruism as good; however, the metaphysical challenge for a Darwinian lies in explaining how, if God does not exist, a value like altruism arises in a valueless process like evolution.⁹ No easy answer to this crucial question is forthcoming. Recognizing altruism as good does not alleviate the daunting challenge of grounding this good in a system geared toward individual fitness. Thus, one must distinguish between the moral beliefs the Darwinian possesses and the moral beliefs Darwinian theory actually supports. The two may diverge.¹⁰ A Darwinian may be forced to accept the logical conclusion of his worldview and admit that, while altruism is prevalent and good, Darwinism fails to adequately account for and ground altruism.

It is not uncommon for people to help individuals who are unrelated to them and who could never possibly reciprocate, and nor is it uncommon for people to help in situations that could not enhance their reputations or boost their value on the mating market. Evolutionary theory cannot explain this. Nor can it explain extreme cases of altruism.¹¹

This concession reveals the significant problem of altruism for a Darwinian; Darwinism fails to support giving apart from expectations of return.

misunderstands the distinction of believing in God and God existing and creating each person in His image, "It seems to me to require quite a low self-regard to think that, should belief in God suddenly vanish from the world, we would all become callous and selfish hedonists, with no kindness, no charity, no generosity, nothing that would deserve the name of goodness."

⁹Paul Copan, "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality," in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 142. Also J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 157, says, "The central problem is that, given evolutionary naturalism, the fact that people have certain moral dispositions/beliefs and the reason they have them are epistemically independent from whatever would make the beliefs true. Our moral dispositions are survival-conducive, not truth-conducive."

¹⁰Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 296-97.

¹¹Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*, 212-13.

A “Thorny” Problem Indeed

Darwinism seems to imply narcissism, not altruism. Altruism is a fundamental problem for Darwinism where natural selection produces gains for individual fitness, and altruism lowers the fitness level of the acting agent. Natural selection would seemingly eliminate altruistic behavior just as it does anything else disfavoring individual fitness. Herein the continued existence of altruism seems contrary to the Darwinian worldview. Natural selection should select against altruism because it lowers the agent’s fitness. Thus, the problem of altruism for the Darwinian consists of explaining altruism’s origin and continued existence.¹² Ruse is nothing if not Darwinian, and he, too, recognizes the problematic nature of altruism in a worldview so apparently devoted to selfishness.

The problem . . . is that natural selection and its products are *prima facie* the very antithesis of help and cooperation. We start with a struggle for existence, and go on to find that winning alone counts from an evolutionary perspective. Because of this, virtually all of our features, physical and mental, are directed to personal success. Selfishness personified!¹³

Ruse facetiously sketches the extreme selfishness, not altruism, that Darwinism may produce, and he eventually responds to it. This chapter discusses and critiques his solution, but first it illustrates how problematic altruism is for Darwinism. Ruse often mentions Mother Teresa as a prime example of literal altruism, holding in high regard her acts for the poor and diseased of Calcutta. Whereas he validates her altruism to society’s poor, Haeckel proposed a different Darwinian idea in such a case: “What good does it do to humanity to . . . rear the thousands of cripples, deaf-mutes, idiots, etc., who are born every year with an hereditary burden of incurable disease?”¹⁴ Certainly his position rejects altruism as a good; Ruse surely regards his statement as stemming from Social Darwinism and rejects it explicitly in his scheme. Granted that Ruse would outright

¹²Ernst, “Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology,” 464.

¹³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 218.

¹⁴Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, trans. E. Ray Lankester (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 1:175-76.

disavow Haeckel's statement, it presents an ideal that is often germane to Darwinism: survival of the fittest implies selfishness, not altruism.

This initial discussion explores the origin of altruism in a Darwinian proposal. *If* natural selection functions as a substitute designer, individual selfishness precludes the individual from controlling his inherent selfish impulses and acting altruistically. One may propose that societal or political institutions are capable of restricting individual selfishness. Ruse offers a theory akin to this suggestion, noting that individuals did not simply wake up and decide to be altruistic; instead, they received evolutionary feedback suggesting that more benefits stem from cooperating with others rather than acting alone. He submits that humans were probably once scavengers who stole food killed by larger and stronger animals, and they were forced to band together against these animals or even fellow roving bands of humans to survive, thereby initiating altruism in social contexts where one could benefit.¹⁵ Ruse here does not directly promote that societal or political institutions govern the inherent selfish motivations of individuals, but others endorse the strategy. The logic, however, fails in that these institutions are still comprised of individuals governed by Darwin's natural selection. In such a case, "How can a creature designed by a blind, random evolutionary process to pursue relentlessly whatever is best for its genes take action that is contrary to genetic interest?"¹⁶ This question is the preeminent one that Ruse must answer, and the answer and its critique consumes this discussion. The origin and continued existence of altruism are very real problems for Darwinians, and two conditions have been offered for the emergence of altruism in a Darwinian scheme: first, group selection must take precedence over individual selection

¹⁵Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," 497-98. By this concession Ruse does not promote group selection; in fact, he consistently argues that selection operates at the individual level.

¹⁶Melvin Konner, "Some Obstacles to Altruism," in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 207.

and, second, actions that benefit others must entail the least possible cost to the altruist.¹⁷

The first condition is out of bounds because natural selection operates at the individual level. The second condition fails in definitional terms; people do not define altruism in terms of least possible costs or self-benefit. These conditions are two of the many proposed by Darwinians, and the major theories will be elucidated and critiqued.

The origin of altruism is problematic for Darwinism but no less does its continued existence resist explanation in a system geared toward maximizing one's self-benefit. Even Richard Dawkins concedes that "if you look at the way natural selection works, it seems to follow that anything that has evolved by natural selection should be selfish."¹⁸ Since altruism and selfishness contradict one another, either altruism cannot exist or it must veil a genuine selfishness. The former option is certainly false, and the latter is problematic in that authentic altruism seeks the good of the other regardless of self-benefit. Herein lies the problem embedded in the chapter's title: can true altruism exist in a Darwinian scheme or does Darwinism promote only a pseudo-altruism? If genuine altruism obtains in Darwinism, it renders the Darwinian worldview self-defeating. The "puzzle" of altruism for Darwinism is that fitness improves for the person who is selfish; altruism favors the other person at the cost of the acting agent, making a system of survival and reproduction seemingly self-defeating.¹⁹ Few Darwinians deny

¹⁷David Sloan Wilson and Elliott Sober, "The Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise of Altruism in Evolutionary Biology," in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183.

¹⁸Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4. Also Wilson and Sober, "The Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise of Altruism in Evolutionary Biology," 182, say, "altruism is more difficult to explain than selfishness from an evolutionary perspective."

¹⁹Mark Van Vugt and Paul A. M. Van Lange, "The Altruism Puzzle: Psychological Adaptations for Prosocial Behavior," in *Evolution and Social Psychology*, ed. Mark Schaller, Jeffry A. Simpson, and Douglas T. Kenrick (New York: Psychology Press, 2006), 242. Also Nigel Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World: The Evolution of Altruism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 13, understands that altruism is threatened in a Darwinian scheme; too much altruism renders Darwinism unstable. Also Jeffery P. Schloss, "Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design," in *Mere Creation: Science, Faith, & Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,

that genuine altruism occurs in the world,²⁰ but they encounter difficulty in grounding altruism while staying consistent with their worldview. Even those unafraid of facing the moral implications of Darwinism admit that altruism's existence surprises:

The problem is that we would expect altruistic behavior to work against individual survival – the altruist increases the chances of others' surviving, by helping them, while at the same time decreasing the chances of his own survival, by giving something up. Therefore we would expect natural selection to eliminate any tendency towards altruism. Yet evidently it does not, for we find that not only humans but other animals behave altruistically all the time.²¹

The “surprise” of altruism is appropriate for Darwinians; yet, recognizing its frequency requires supplying reasons for its existence.

Whereas the Darwinian worldview fails to robustly account for genuine altruism, it finds a natural home in the Christian worldview. Humans created in the image of God exhibit sacrificial other-care because their Creator does. If humans are created in the image of a personal God, altruism is not contrived; however, if, as in Darwinism, human beings are the result of purposeless chance where natural selection works for self-benefit, altruism is much more ad hoc. When natural selection produces human behavior, self-sacrificing love is at least an aberration. However, if persons are designed for loving interaction, altruism is intrinsic.²² Rachels proposes a three step process for the possibility

1998), 238, believes performing essentially self-destructive behavior in order to benefit others is incompatible with Darwinism. If one practices altruism, it must not reduce his own personal fitness or he is acting against Darwin's theory.

²⁰Although Peter Singer, “Ethics and Intuitions,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 478, denies the prevalence of altruism in human nature, “Much as we may regret it, most human beings lack a general feeling of benevolence for the strangers we pass in the street . . . There is no evolutionary advantage in concern for others simply because they are members of our species.” Singer faces the logical results of his system, but he denies the overwhelming data where people often act altruistically, even to strangers.

²¹James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 77. Also Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 3, says, “If we are capable of altruism, then virtually all of our current ideas about individual psychology, social relations, economics, and politics are, in an important respect, wrong. Virtually all of our current ideas explicitly or implicitly deny the possibility of altruism; they are firmly founded on the assumption of universal egoism.”

²²Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 252-53. Also Stephen G. Post et. al., “General Introduction,” in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science,*

of altruism arising in Darwinism. In the first, only kin selection exists, but in the second, social instincts are extended outward beyond kin until finally, the behavior is so habitual that it is routinely practiced. Yet concluding his proposal, he asks, “Is this anything more than a suggestive fantasy?”²³ The skepticism evident in the question reveals the struggle involved for Darwinism to ground altruism; Christianity faces no such difficulties.

The topic of altruism incurs much work for Darwinians, and they propose several prospects for its solution in their scheme. These theories are the topic of the next section and provide a general overview of their work in the last fifty years. This overview necessarily precedes Ruse’s description of Darwinian altruism. Throughout the discourse, one must keep in mind the innate challenges Darwinism faces in defending altruism, as altruism’s existence seems to contradict the purposes of natural selection.

Against this background, tyranny, naked self-interest, brutality, etc. are often seen as quite compatible with – perhaps an inevitable consequence of – unfettered ‘survival of the fittest.’ As a result, the issue that has occupied evolutionary biologists for the last 40-50 years has been the explanation of the existence of altruism – an island of presumed self-sacrifice in a sea of presumed naked self-interest; a genuine act of goodness in a world shaped by a deep propensity for self-preservation.²⁴

Darwinian Altruism Proposals

Darwinians generally propose four major theories for the existence of altruism.

Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5, say, “There is no doubt that numerous entirely secular individuals have achieved high levels of other-regard. . . . Yet history is also filled with the accomplishments of those who perceived a relationship with a Supreme Being or Divine Love and who interpreted their altruism as a direct consequence. . . . We do not suggest that altruistic love in its embrace of all humanity absolutely requires a spiritual and religious foundation; yet we cannot ignore the narrative of human history and experience indicating that this formation is quite often present, even in modernity.”

²³Rachels, *Created from Animals*, 157. Also Ernst, “Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology,” 469 recognizes that Darwinian models suggest everyone should remain selfish, yet the rampant altruism in the world cannot be denied, thus he concedes that “there must be more to the story.” Also George Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 225-26, argues that moral values and obligations will not be deep and meaningful in a theory consisting only of physical objects, natural laws, and chance.

²⁴Thompson, “An Evolutionary Account of Evil,” 534.

The first, offered by William D. Hamilton in 1964, is kin selection where sacrificial care takes place among close relatives for the purpose of one's own reproductive benefits. The second theory of reciprocal altruism, proposed by Robert Trivers in 1971, holds that altruistic acts are performed with an expected return ("you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours"). The third strategy is game theory, developed by Robert Axelrod in 1984, and illustrated by the prisoners' dilemma. A fourth suggestion is group selection where group fitness takes precedent over individual fitness; group selection is the most controversial in that Darwinism entails the promotion of the individual. Darwinian proponents are not limited to one strategy and often endorse a combination approach.

Kin Selection

Nature is purportedly either "red in tooth and claw" or a utopian paradise where violence rarely interrupts the tranquility. The truth lies somewhere in between. Nature is fraught with violence and competition, and selfish agents in the animal world often procure more resources and produce more offspring. Human selfishness is expected; nevertheless, altruism remains widespread. Darwinians possessed no ground for defending this phenomenon until Hamilton proposed that altruism arises through natural selection among kin relationships where sacrificial care is directed toward close relatives in order to pass on genetic material.²⁵ A purely altruistic gene would necessarily die out. However, kin altruism arises through "inclusive fitness," where copies of our genes are transmitted into the next generation by reproduction through close relatives; when one sacrifices for her children it ensures that they will pass on her genes.²⁶ Kin

²⁵William D. Hamilton, "The Genetic Evolution of Social Behavior," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7 (1964): 1-2. Ruse fully appreciates the work of Hamilton in formulating this theory, but he also recognizes seminal kin selection thoughts in the work of both Darwin and Hume.

²⁶Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 25-27. Also Lee Alan Dugatkin, *The Altruism Equation: Seven Scientists Search for the Origins of Goodness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), x, speaking of the rule that bears Hamilton's name, "This rule's influence on evolutionary biology has been as great as the impact of Newton's laws of motion on physics."

altruism holds that blood relatives share many of the same genes, and when one helps his kin he indirectly advances his own reproduction. Kin selection allows that humans act altruistically toward relatives in order to increase their representation of genomes in the next generation. J. B. S. Haldane reportedly said facetiously, “I’ll gladly give my life for two brothers or eight cousins,”²⁷ meaning that since one share genes with those closest to him, care for relatives diminishes as genetic common ground decreases.

Hamilton’s theory was ground-breaking; kin selection was the initial possible Darwinian explanation for altruism. Prior, a Darwinian had no recourse as to why a person sacrificed their immediate self-interest (e.g. mom up at night with sick baby); the new theory stated that it produced long-term self-benefits (baby growing up and having kids who pass on mom’s genes). Ruse endorses both kin selection and reciprocal altruism as crucial Darwinian theories to explain altruism; both promote benefits for the acting agent, a feature necessarily integral to any Darwinian account. Kin selection is critically important because Darwinism emphasizes reproduction over survival, and kin selection guarantees that altruistic actions occur in order to reproduce one’s genetic material.²⁸ Hamilton’s theory expresses just this sentiment; a person appears to act sacrificially for his own family, but the selfish impulse of passing on one’s gene is embedded in this altruistic act. As Ruse states, “‘Charity begins at home’ is the motto of the evolutionary ethicist.”²⁹ Recall that Ruse views his moral position as Hume updated by Darwin, and Ruse traces seminal kin selection thoughts in Hume’s philosophy: “A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins

²⁷Recorded in Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 241.

²⁸Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 153, says, “Darwin himself drew attention to the fact that more organisms are born than can possibly survive and reproduce and that this leads to what Darwin . . . called a ‘struggle for existence.’ Truly, as Darwin recognized, it is more importantly a struggle for reproduction.” Also Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 22, agrees that Darwinism is less about survival and more about reproduction.

²⁹Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 504.

better than strangers, where every thing else is equal. Hence arise our common measures of duty, in preferring one to the other.”³⁰ Thus, one can readily envision Ruse’s delight in the theory of kin selection in that he remains fully Darwinian by stating that kin selection produces self-benefit, accounts for the widespread appearance of altruism, and persists as a Humean in doing so.

Already the reader recognizes a definitional change occurs in altruism for Darwinians, including Ruse, who endorse kin selection; biological altruism is different than literal altruism. In the former, self-benefit must obtain; the latter possesses no such requirement. Natural selection accounts for this first type of self-benefitting altruism. In kin selection, the individual who aids another benefits biologically through reproduction; thus, he benefits vicariously.³¹ Ruse believes that literal altruism is admirable and accounted for through the epigenetic rules, but it has no justification and is part of the illusion of objectivity. More on this area later; for now, one should recognize that Ruse regards kin selection as a Darwinian altruistic position in that it produces benefits to the “altruist.” “Likely the most powerful account is ‘kin selection,’ which is something that occurs between relatives and that comes about because help given to relatives rebounds on the helper simply because relatives share the same genes: when a relative reproduces, one is, as it were, reproducing oneself by proxy.”³²

The theory of kin selection evidences problems; the most conspicuous issue already alluded to is that it fails as genuine altruism and is merely a disguised selfishness.

³⁰David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 483-84.

³¹Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 496.

³²Michael Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 58-59. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 220, says similarly, “What this all means is that help given to relatives in itself rebounds to the favour of one’s own reproductive interests, even though these relatives may themselves reciprocate with little or no help. As a consequence, what you expect through this process, known as ‘kin selection,’ is the evolution of help-giving attributes, without necessarily having the parallel evolution of attributes, expecting or enforcing tangible returns.”

In terms of parents sacrificially caring for children, a more direct solution stems from theism where God created humans with this innate instinct. The image of God within causes persons to act apart from their own benefit at times. When a mother fails to care for her children, society does not judge her as failing to act for her own reproductive benefit; rather, she is regarded as doing what is objectively, morally wrong. Herein, Ruse again finds difficulty in making objective moral judgments if objectivity is illusory; the problem compounds when literal altruism is distinguished from biological altruism.

Furthermore, chinks in the armor of kin selection itself exist; a realistic appraisal of kin selection suggests that it provides not just a theory for the evolution of altruism but also a theory for the evolution of selfishness.³³ We only care instrumentally for those around us because our ultimate motive is the continuation of our genes; even if our motivations are not entirely self-centered, our biology hard-wires us such that our actions are ultimately selfish rather than altruistic. Furthermore, simple altruistic goods such as parents' willingness to adopt non-biological children are difficult to explain based on a theory where one only seeks to pass on genetic material. This action is "puzzling to evolutionists because it diverts parental investment away from biological kin,"³⁴ and when parents treat adopted children the same as biological ones, they seem to violate a key component of kin-selection. Despite the fact that it violates Darwinian expectation, "the capacity to nurture completely unrelated children is a fascinating example of universal human altruism."³⁵ This last incontrovertible statement presents a challenge for

³³Raghavendra Gadagkar, *Survival Strategies: Cooperation and Conflict in Animal Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 75, says, "At the risk of stating the obvious, let me stress that Hamilton's rule does not just provide a theory for the evolution of altruism. It simultaneously and automatically provides a theory for the evolution of selfishness." Also Alejandro Rosas, "Beyond the Sociobiological Dilemma: Social Emotions and the Evolution of Morality," *Zygon* 42 (2007): 686, says, "It takes altruism out of altruism, because altruism to kin is a gene's way of benefiting its copies in related organisms."

³⁴Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 222.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 226.

reconciling altruism in a Darwinian scheme. Granted, kin selection is not the only theory proposed, and Darwinians often opt for an approach that combines different explanations; nevertheless, altruism undoubtedly occurs among others besides relatives: donors give blood that is received by people they will never meet because donors feel it is the right thing to do. Acts like these provide no long-term genetic benefit to the donor and actually incur a short-term cost. Ruse argues we should expect just this situation due to the illusion of objectivity; people genuinely think this action is right and good. Darwinians allow that natural selection did not produce perfect adaptations; our supposedly evolved mechanisms do not always produce perfect rules for altruism. Sometimes our altruism “spills” over to non-kin in what is known as the “big mistake” hypothesis for altruism.³⁶ Describing altruism as a mistake seems a more troubling admission than helpful solution. This description does nothing to rescue kin altruism from implied selfishness; however, Darwinians are not looking for rescue from this position as it must obtain in their system. Religion grounds altruism by positing a God who created us in his image, rewards right acts, and punishes wrong ones. Since Darwinians generally evict God from the system, they must explain altruism through some physical process.³⁷ Kin selection was the first attempt, and it provided Darwinians a hopeful explanation for altruism. Problems exist, but the theory advanced Darwinian expectations immensely. Nevertheless, the solution is far from perfect, and caution is important:

If kin selection really happens, then it might explain the tendency to help out other

³⁶Van Vugt and Van Lange, “The Altruism Puzzle,” 243. Also Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 253, asserted that altruism was the result of a mistake, “I am suggesting that the same is true of the urge to kindness – to altruism, to generosity, to empathy, to pity. In ancestral times, we had the opportunity to be altruistic only towards close kin and potential reciprocators. Nowadays that restriction is no longer there, but the rule of thumb persists. Why would it not? It is just like sexual desire. We can no more help ourselves feeling pity when we see a weeping unfortunate (who is unrelated and unable to reciprocate) than we can help ourselves feeling lust for a member of the opposite sex (who may be infertile or otherwise unable to reproduce). Both are misfiring, Darwinian mistakes: blessed, precious mistakes.”

³⁷Peter G. Woolcock, “The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today,” in *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, ed. Jane Maienschein and Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 277.

people. It might even explain why we approve of the tendency. The problem is that it can't explain whether we *ought* to approve of it. After all, the fact that we developed one way rather than another is an accident. We might have turned out like guppies, who eat their young instead of helping them.³⁸

Reciprocal Altruism

The second major Darwinian proposal for altruism, introduced by Trivers, is reciprocal altruism, known simply as “tit for tat” or “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” altruism. This theory holds that altruistic behavior must eventually benefit the donor; the one who sacrifices now must profit later. Cooperative social behavior must reciprocally benefit the individual. Trivers argued that three conditions must obtain for reciprocal altruism to result from natural selection: frequent opportunities for altruism must arise, habitual interactions between prospective altruists must occur, and comparable costs and benefits must exist between altruists.³⁹ This proposal reflects a branching out of altruism beyond family members where societies developed beyond small clan structures, and Trivers’ conditions became reality. Ruse argues that reciprocal altruism provides a back-up to kin altruism, but one in which feelings for the other naturally decline.⁴⁰ The origins of reciprocal altruism purportedly trace back to hunter-gatherer societies where the hunter would share his kill with the tribe. He does so to maximize the system. When he does not make a kill, he will not starve. He operates on something of an ancient insurance system.⁴¹ The group insurance policy analogy of reciprocal altruism remains popular. Ruse himself utilizes the analogy, but he first anticipates the criticism reciprocal altruism engenders; reciprocal altruism is more of a

³⁸J. Budziszewski, “Accept No Limitations: The Rivalry of Naturalism and Natural Law,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 103.

³⁹Robert Trivers, “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism,” *Quarterly Review of Biology* 46 (1971): 37.

⁴⁰Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 503. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 58-59, believes that reciprocal altruism can be found in Darwin’s own writings.

⁴¹Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 48.

bargain where we gain something in return. In such a case, no true altruism exists because one expects payment. However, he believes the illusion of objectivity makes it not simply a bargain, but “objectively” right that one helps in this way:

Apart from anything else, morality is clearly more like a group insurance policy than a person-to-person transaction. I help you, but do not necessarily expect you personally to help me. Rather, my help is thrown into the general pool, as it were, and then I am free to draw on help as needed. Furthermore, enforcement of the system comes about through morality itself! I help you, and I can demand help in return, not because I have helped you or even because I want help, but because it is *right* that you help me. Reciprocation is kept in place by moral obligations.⁴²

Nevertheless, reciprocity seems to dismiss literal altruism; giving only with the expectation of receiving does not characterize genuine altruism. Most Darwinians acknowledge this criticism but understand that Darwinism rightly demands reciprocity. The benefits exist for the entire group; when one develops a positive reputation in the community, he thereby increases his attractiveness to others as an exchange partner.⁴³ The more positive exchange partners there are in society, the stronger, even more moral, that society becomes. The actor requires reciprocity to continue in his altruistic actions; the man who picks the lice out of another man’s hair expects this man to return the favor. The man is crazy who delouses many people, even the wrong people, without the favor performed in return. Darwinian altruism necessarily demands reciprocity.⁴⁴

Ruse is a proponent of both kin selection and reciprocal altruism, championing them as fully Darwinian. He believes they provide an adequate account of altruism, but he never disregards the reality that they imply benefits to the donor. In fact, he embraces

⁴²Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” *Zygon* 21 (1986): 105. Also Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 43, says that reciprocal altruism, or you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours, fascinates scientists. The altruist pays a cost now for an expected benefit in the future so that, ultimately, there is no net cost. Biologists criticize reciprocal altruism for dismissing altruism from altruism.

⁴³Van Vugt and Van Lange, “The Altruism Puzzle,” 244. Also Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 221, says of E. O. Wilson, “Summing up, Wilson labels the results of the mechanisms of help as ‘hard-core’ and ‘soft-core’ altruism. The former is the result of kin selection. It occurs between relatives, and there is no expectation of direct return. The latter is the result of reciprocal altruism. It occurs between non-relatives, and there is expectation of return, or at last of the potential for such return.”

⁴⁴Singer, “Ethics and Intuitions,” 479, provides the lice analogy.

the truth that Darwinian accounts of altruism necessarily imply self-benefit:

One must add that biological “altruism” rebounds to the benefit of the “altruist,” as for instance in situations involving the aptly named “reciprocal altruism,” in which I help you in return for your helping me. Because of the need for this addition, I find it easier simply to build into my understanding of biological “altruism” this expectation of reciprocation – this return of biological benefit – however caused and whatever form it takes.⁴⁵

This admission is both honest and significant. Darwinism produces just this response; a system of survival and reproduction cannot justify self-inflicted loss at another’s benefit. However, the response is significant because people do not think of literal altruism as resulting in self-benefit (in the above quote, Ruse uses quotation marks around “altruist” to illustrate that he means biological altruism, not genuine altruism). Ruse recognizes the existence of genuine altruism, but our naturally selfish motivations should prevent genuinely altruistic actions. How does Ruse solve this conundrum? Unsurprisingly, he believes the epigenetic rules cause persons to work in an altruistic fashion with others.

What sense of “altruism” results here – metaphorical or literal? Both! Biology demands that we be “altruistic” in its (metaphorical) sense. For ants, that is it. They are programmed to do what they do. In the case of humans, biology achieves its ends by making us altruistic in the literal sense. We are aware of dictates of morality – given through the epigenetic rules – which we should obey.⁴⁶

This distinction between metaphorical and literal altruism engenders discussion and critique later, but for now it is enough to show that Ruse believes reciprocity is inherent in Darwinian altruism. He does not expect immediate reciprocity, but he pushes his insurance model where one throws his help into the general pool and expects to draw on it as needed. Even when proposing his insurance model, he recognizes an impending critique that troubles Darwinian altruism: “Why not cheat? Why not take without giving? Because, if everyone behaved this way, the system would collapse. Nevertheless, because evolution is always looking for ways to get ahead, you expect a certain amount of

⁴⁵Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 154.

⁴⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 237.

cheating.”⁴⁷ Ruse expects a “certain amount” of cheating, but, once again, what limits a person’s cheating when he believes he can successfully cheat more than a “certain amount?” If one can withdraw from the general pool with no deposits, why not do so?

Reciprocal altruism engenders critique. When a donor’s ultimate goal is to benefit self, “altruism” again appears to be little more than a masked selfishness. The feature of selfishness is a problem that continually creeps into Darwinian altruistic proposals, and cooperative behavior for the ends of self-benefit produces more of a pseudo-altruism. Darwinians are often uncomfortable even with the phrase: “I have called it ‘reciprocal altruism’ in deference to a tradition of thirty years, but in fact I don’t like the term, and much prefer to call it ‘reciprocal exchanges’ or just ‘reciprocity.’”⁴⁸ This quote reveals the dearth of genuine altruism present in such a theory; however, this degree of altruism may be all that results from Darwinism. The most significant problem is the numerous observable behaviors in humans that kin or reciprocal altruism cannot resolve: Darwinian utilize the insurance analogy through the illustration of giving blood wherein donating functions as something of an insurance fund. People donate blood to strangers expecting to receive blood if disaster strikes. However, the problem arises in that nobody who needs blood is asked about their donation history, and everyone is aware of this fact, yet blood donation continues. People apparently donate blood because they believe it is objectively good to do so. This testifies to the true nature of altruism: giving with no expectation of return, such that one Darwinian admits: “Giving blood is one of the clearest examples of disinterested altruism.” However, following this admission, he

⁴⁷Ibid., 219.

⁴⁸Richard Joyce, “Is Human Morality Innate?” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 457-58. Also John Cartwright, *Evolution and Human Behavior: Darwinian Perspectives on Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 47, argues that a definitional problem occurs. Altruism is an action that causes a cost to a donor and benefit to a recipient, but reciprocal altruism necessarily makes both agents stand to increase; thus, it is not true altruism. Also Rosas, “Beyond the Sociobiological Dilemma,” 686, says, “Trivers’s model of reciprocal altruism takes altruism out of altruism by denying a net cost to the altruist.”

concedes, “an evolutionary approach to helping behavior is still in its infancy, it seems there are currently few answers to such fascinating and, in practicality, important questions.”⁴⁹ This admission is shocking in that he essentially confesses that Darwinians cannot explain altruistic behavior . . . for now. Ruse summarized the challenge of combining the terms “reciprocal” and “altruism:” “Morality means going out on a limb, because it is right to do so. Morality vanishes if you hope for payment.”⁵⁰

Proponents of reciprocal altruism promote that social cooperation and altruistic exchanges allow one to acquire a good reputation in the community which results in more exchanges. Dawkins stated that altruism was a way of “buying unfakeably authentic advertising.”⁵¹ This idea of reputation presents two extreme options. One may exhibit authentically altruistic behavior and receive net costs, while hoping benefits accrue. However, the hypocrite stands to gain the most. He appears to cooperate altruistically, but the more he fools genuine altruists, the more he benefits and the less he pays. Thus, if one is an egoist, he understands what is accepted publicly, appears to abide by it, but benefits more by cheating his way through the system. He thus pretends to be trustworthy and altruistic in order to benefit from such a reputation later.⁵² The system of reciprocity requires a system of punishment for cheaters and free riders whereas genuine altruism expects no payment and necessitates no such system. Reciprocal altruism could lead to a Machiavellian morality where one appears moral but breaks the rules when it is to his

⁴⁹Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 215-16. Also Schloss “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 242-43, says that the most significant problem for reciprocal altruism is the plenteous observable human behaviors that cannot be explained by either kin selection or reciprocal altruism: “Human behavior regularly exhibits noncompensatory sacrifice for nonkin. Explaining such phenomena constitutes one of the most controversial aspects of current evolutionary theory. Formulating an adequate explanation is widely regarded as the last roadblock to the theoretical completeness of evolutionary theory.”

⁵⁰Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 105.

⁵¹Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 251.

⁵²Woolcock, “The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today,” 301.

advantage. If cheaters and free riders arise, as they surely would, how are they identified and punished? One theory says that moral outrage from society combined with an internal sense of guilt provides some enforcement system to keep cheaters honest. This ability to feel guilt must provide some social advantage or else it would not have evolved. Without guilt persons would habitually cheat and eventually acquire a negative reputation, thereby diminishing opportunities to reproduce.⁵³ This Darwinian explanation seems fairly contrived, and the possibility of cheaters and free riders remains problematic for Darwinism. Changing the meaning of altruism also represents a major obstacle for the success of reciprocal altruism. A more direct and logical explanation is found within the Christian worldview with original sin (why we would cheat and free ride) and an inherent sense of justice (from being created in the image of God). Reciprocal altruism is only pseudo-altruism; Christianity holds that true altruism is self-sacrificing, not self-centered.

Game Theory

A fascinating Darwinian proposal for explaining altruism is that of game theory wherein puzzling or counterintuitive behavior is investigated. Game theory is perhaps easier to illustrate than define, and one common illustration is the Prisoner's Dilemma (several variations exist). Two bank robbers are arrested, but the police do not possess enough evidence to convict either of robbery so they place the alleged robbers in different cells and allow no communication between them. The police tell each suspect, "We know you robbed the bank, but we do not have enough evidence to convict you. If you will rat out your partner, and your partner does not rat you out, you go free and he gets ten years in prison. However, if he accuses you and you do not accuse him, you go to prison for ten years, and he goes free. If you both accuse the other, each of you receives a four year prison term. If neither of you rats out the other, we will trump up some charges

⁵³Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 59-61.

so you both get one year in prison.” What is the most rational solution? If Robber A accuses Robber B, Robber B is better served accusing Robber A because B then get four years in prison rather than ten. If A does not rat out B, B is still better off snitching on A because B then receives no prison time rather than one year. Nevertheless, the dilemma ensues because each robber experiences the same thought processes, accuses the other, and ends up with four years. However, if they both anticipated four years, they are each better off keeping quiet and receiving only a one year sentence.⁵⁴ Herein, according to Darwinians, lies the relationship between the Prisoner’s Dilemma and the problem of altruism. The strategy of snitching on the other, while apparently the best one, does not yield the most favorable results. “For if we have a sound argument in favor of ratting out one’s accomplice in the Prisoner’s Dilemma, then the same argument should favor selfishness in the problem of altruism.”⁵⁵ Selfishly, one desires no time in prison, but, in terms of social interaction, the best strategy is cooperation. In terms of altruism, selfishness seems the best strategy, but cooperation yields more favorable results.

Because Ruse is fairly apathetic toward game theory, generally utilizing kin selection and reciprocal altruism, little discussion ensues here. However, in terms of critique, even naturalists recognize that life does not consist of just one-shot interactions but repeated social interactions. Persons must thus take into account what others do; the best survival strategy consists in acting in accord with those around them. If others act selfishly, so should we; if they act altruistically, we can afford to as well.⁵⁶ In terms of (brief) critique, our social interactions are rarely as controlled or theoretical as game theory suggests. Furthermore, even if game theory is viable, the problem remains that this model of altruism evolving through repeated interactions does not present genuine

⁵⁴Ernst, “Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology,” 465-66, presented the Prisoner’s Dilemma.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Tom Siegfried, *A Beautiful Math: John Nash, Game Theory, and the Modern Quest for a Code of Nature* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2006), 83.

altruistic behavior but a more restricted form that ends up closely resembling reciprocal altruism.⁵⁷ Though the following critique is repetitious, it is nonetheless applicable: game theory, like the other theories, does not represent pure altruism but self-interest disguised as altruism. The cooperative strategies of game theory are nothing more than seeking one's own good with little care for the other. Sacrificial behavior results from seeking to maximize self-interest, not out of genuine other-care. Sacrificial behavior is merely a means to the end of egoistic good. Game theory ultimately devolves into selfishness.

Unfortunately, it turns out that the selfish strategy is favored by the replicator dynamics. . . . Clearly, it is better to be selfish – after all, selfish types get all the benefits of interacting with altruists, but never incur any costs. Thus, the replicator dynamics predicts that populations will move inexorably toward a state in which everyone is selfish. . . . So it begins to appear that the problem of altruism is a very thorny one, and that the game-theoretic tools suggest only what we knew already – namely, that we should expect individuals to be selfish.⁵⁸

Group Selection

The final Darwinian theory of altruism to appraise is group selection which holds that behaviors arise which benefit the group but ultimately harm the individual. Many Darwinians outright reject this controversial theory in that a central premise of Darwinism reveals that natural selection works only at the level of the individual, not the group. Ruse regards group selection as anti-Darwinian.

I should say that contemporary Darwinism argues also that one never gets selection working for the group, or at least only very rarely. . . . Social behavior or “altruism” must, in some sense, be looked upon as enlightened self-interest. One is never going to get organisms simply working altruistically, in a disinterested way, for the group. Working socially must always have some payoff for the individual, whatever the costs might be.⁵⁹

The controversy ensues because some Darwinians believe group selection alone makes sense of altruism in a Darwinian scheme. Whereas some naturalists reject

⁵⁷Ernst, “Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology,” 470-72. Note that the subheading of this section stems from Ernst’s characterization of altruism as a “thorny” problem for naturalists.

⁵⁸Ibid., 469.

⁵⁹Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 154.

group selection because natural selection works at the level of the individual, others recognize the inherent problems associated with the other Darwinian proposals in that they evidence a selfishness that conflicts with genuine altruism. This latter category of Darwinians are thus forced to place all their hopes in group selection; apart from it, Darwinism cannot account for altruism. “Evolutionarily selfish traits evolve if selection occurs exclusively at the individual level. Group selection makes the evolution of altruism possible.”⁶⁰ Thus, one understands why such heated debate ensues; in one corner is a genuinely Darwinian worldview, in the other a genuine account of altruism. The group selection advocate envisions no other way past the thorny problem of altruism.

Kin altruism and reciprocal altruism may retain their brand names, but they do not involve *biological* altruism. They evolve through natural selection operating at the individual level. Without GS, there is no real biological altruism in nature. Biological altruism shares a common fate with GS: They stand or fall together.⁶¹

While the in-house debate over the “Darwinian” nature of group selection is a primary challenge, another reality that troubles some naturalists concerning group selection theory is that while it may convey altruism to one group, it necessarily results in aggression against another group. If one is altruistic to his in-group, then by necessity he expresses hostility to the out-group.⁶² Thus, even if one is an authentic group altruist, in a

⁶⁰Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, “Unto Others,” in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 434.

⁶¹Rosas, “Beyond the Sociobiological Dilemma,” 686. Also Gadagkar, *Survival Strategies*, 79-80, says, “labeling all altruism toward relatives and all reciprocal altruism as selfishness would amount to reserving the term ‘altruism’ for anything that cannot evolve – because we really have no theory to explain altruism if it is not directed toward genetic relatives and if it is not reciprocal, unless of course we uncover genuine examples of the evolution of altruism by group selection.” However Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 218, says, “Any ‘group selection’ analysis of behavior, including human behaviour, falls before strong counter-evidence.”

⁶²Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 12. Also Van Vugt and Van Lange, “The Altruism Puzzle,” 245, say that group selection ensures that one’s own group is victorious over other groups. For this to obtain over individual altruism, the struggle between groups must take precedent over struggles between individuals within a group. Also Gregory R. Peterson, “A Hard Problem Indeed,” *Zygon* 44 (2009): 22, says, “Indeed, group selection theory would seem to suggest that although we might be programmed to act altruistically toward fellow members of our group, we also would be designed to compete, sometimes violently, with members of other groups, and there is plenty of evidence, both psychological and historical, to suggest that we often do precisely this.”

sense, altruism for his group is certainly selfishness against the opposing group. Also, for the agent's particular group to succeed, he must act altruistically and sacrificially for the good of the group, neglecting individual benefit. Ruse believes such action defies Darwinian theory: "The Darwinian insists that we stay with the individual. All help given must rebound ultimately to the individual's benefit. Any benefits which others receive should be seen as incidental, and might well be selected against. Nevertheless, even within these constraints, help and cooperation can evolve."⁶³ One quickly perceives the conflict that results among group selection proponents and their opponents. Individual fitness seems to preclude sacrifice for the group apart from a system of rewards for those who risk their own benefits for the group and punishments for those who do not.⁶⁴

Many proponents place all their altruistic eggs in the group selection basket in hopes of its success, but group selection, even if correct, closely resembles kin altruism stretched out to one's group instead of relatives. The theory faces great obstacles in a Darwinian system predicated on individual survival-of-the-fittest. The controversy rages, and Ruse firmly rejects group selection as an option for genuine Darwinian altruism.

Darwin realized that any adaptations favoring the group at the expense of the individual will prove highly unstable. They will always be at risk of crumbling under an individual-favoring alternative. Over the long run an adaptation might revert to individual benefit via the group; unfortunately, in the short term the individual who takes advantage of the efforts of others while not returning in kind will be at the greatest advantage.⁶⁵

⁶³Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 218.

⁶⁴Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions," 478, envisions self-sacrifice as a selective pressure for the group's benefit wherein the group may develop these rewards and punishments that result in altruism.

⁶⁵Michael Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 300. Also Paul Thompson, "Evolutionary Ethics: Its Origins and Contemporary Face," *Zygon* 34 (1999): 478, says, "Altruistic behavior might benefit the group (society) or a third party, but the altruistic individual would decrease his or her own fitness by acting altruistically." Also Ruse, "A Darwinian Naturalist's Perspective on Altruism," 155, says, "We survive as a species because we work together. But remember that survival is not for the benefit of the species: We survive as individuals because by working cooperatively together we do better as individuals than we would otherwise. . . . In other words, natural selection has made humans the masters of biological 'altruism.'"

A Brief Conclusion

These four major models represent the Darwinian case for altruism, and the two primary arguments are kin altruism and reciprocal altruism. Ruse rightly assesses that Darwinian theory leaves little room for a group selection proposal. Natural selection works at the level of the individual to promote his fitness and does nothing at the group level. Ruse adamantly rejects group selection because of its anti-Darwinian nature:

I am about as partisan for the hard-line individualistic perspective as it is possible to be. With virtually every active evolutionary biologist today, I believe that (except in certain very special instances) group selection simply will not work. The pressures of the short-term reward for the individual will always outweigh any long-term group benefits – and this holds even if everyone would benefit eventually from a long-term group perspective. Natural selection is blind: it does not think ahead. Hence, I think that selection promotes selfish genes through and through, and that therein lies all that you need to know to understand and explain social behavior, including human moral behavior and thinking. For me, morality is adaptation put in place by our biology to serve each one of us individually.⁶⁶

Ruse's strong dismissal of group selection and his apathy toward game theory leaves the two options of kin selection and reciprocal altruism, and he utilizes both theories.

Note carefully, however, the primary reason group selection is proposed; other Darwinian theories of altruism do not ground or promote genuine altruism. They describe only a pseudo-altruism where altruistic acts must eventually benefit the donor rather than incur a real cost. This altruism is certainly no pure altruism; at best it is a restricted form where both parties ultimately benefit.⁶⁷ To conclude this section and introduce the remainder of the chapter, one may concede that Darwinian theory could produce the type of altruism suggested by kin selection and reciprocal altruism; however one may also assert that altruism of this nature is really not altruism at all; at best it is a restricted form

⁶⁶Michael Ruse, Review of *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ed. Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Ethics* (2000): 444.

⁶⁷Ernst, "Game Theory in Evolutionary Biology," 472. Also Peterson, "A Hard Problem Indeed," 22, says, "Evolutionary theory suggests that kin altruism and, less commonly, reciprocal altruism are behavioral traits that nature may select for under the right conditions. . . . But this is well short of a universal concern for others."

of altruism, at worst it is only pseudo-altruism that promotes individual selfishness.

Ruse's Proposal: "Altruism" and Altruism

Professor Ruse does not dismiss altruism but upholds it; however, the question remains: can he ground it? Ruse believes objective morality is an illusion foisted on us by natural selection; altruism in such a model seems impossible to ground. What is Ruse's solution? Ruse argues that natural selection causes humans to practice genuine altruism to ensure biological altruism where they cooperate socially toward their own ends. Because he believes natural selection equipped us so well for biological altruism, he seeks to illustrate how the phenomenon succeeded. Ruse offers three possibilities for altruism arising among humans. The first is the method of the ants which are "hardwired" to work together. Cooperative behavior is certainly not learned or reasoned among the ants; the instructions are simply burned into their brains, thereby making altruism innate. Ruse supposes that this option possibly explains some human situations as he relates it to mothers caring for their children. However, he argues that human cooperation necessarily requires social learning which demands a freedom that ants lack. Human actions are not always instinctive and involve rational problem-solving in our potential altruistic interactions. This assumption leads to his second, almost contradictory, option of effecting altruism wherein cooperation requires introspection and is understood as the most rational path. Persons weigh out the benefits of social action, and, if it serves their biological self-interests, they act positively. Humans calculate their decisions toward the most beneficial payoff. This situation does not necessarily reflect moral decisions and judgments. Ruse argues these decisions are often value-neutral, neither moral nor immoral, and illustrates this neutrality through an example of buying bread. The social interaction that occurs between buyer and seller benefits both, but neither buyer nor seller performs a moral action for the other's good; the benefits accrue to self. Thus Ruse believes the solution is a third, middle-way, strategy which combines the innate sense

with the calculating sense. He relates this altruistic sense to that of the new breed of chess computers where “we have certain built-in strategies, hard-wired into our brains if you like, which we bring into play and which guide our actions when we are faced with certain social situations.”⁶⁸ Thus, morality is innate to a degree, but this aspect is insufficient alone and demands a calculating component ensuring that self-benefit results. His third option makes morality adaptive, but Ruse accepts that adaptations are not perfect. “I think that humans have in fact taken this third option. We are hard-wired in some sense to act socially together, but we are not hard-wired in such a way that we never make mistakes. The point is that we use this hard-wiring to apply to particular situations on a day-by-day basis.”⁶⁹

Unsurprisingly, Ruse alludes to none other than the epigenetic rules for this “hard-wiring,” and, equally unsurprising, the altruism he references ultimately leads to self-benefit. He retains his illusion wherein humans possess feelings of obligation combined with a biology that demands reproductive fitness. Or as Ruse says, “What excites the evolutionist is the fact that we have feelings of moral obligation laid over our brute biological nature, inclining us to be decent for altruistic reasons.”⁷⁰ Ruse, thus, explicitly endorses that this altruism is ultimately self-benefitting. Darwinian theory cannot support truly self-sacrificial behavior because the reproductive success of altruists would diminish, ultimately dropping the altruistic adaptation out of the gene pool.⁷¹ Ruse uses a divergence of meanings for the term altruism, and the central problem remains that biological altruism simply is not altruism as traditionally defined.

Darwinians do not hide the fact that they utilize a completely different

⁶⁸Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 498-99.

⁶⁹Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 157.

⁷⁰Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 99.

⁷¹Wonderly, *The Selfish Gene Pool*, xix.

meaning for altruism than the notion commonly endorsed. Ruse is completely forthcoming that he refers to social cooperation for self-benefit as altruism and clarifies at the outset that he distinguishes between two very different types of altruism.

Altruism when used in everyday language – as in “Mother Teresa’s altruism toward the poor of Calcutta was truly saintlike” – means giving and caring without thought of reward, acting and thinking in a certain way simply because it is good and right. Although I doubt that any evolutionist wants to deny the meaningfulness and validity of this term . . . , this is not the sense of the term as it occurs in biology. Here the use is metaphorical: It means acting or giving toward another because it furthers one’s own survival and/or reproductive ends. There is absolutely no implication of consciousness or intentionality, and often, of course, it is fully realized that the biological “altruist” is anything but a thinker or a free moral agent. Because we have a metaphor here at work, when speaking literally of Mother Teresa-type altruism, I refer to it simply, without quotation marks, and when speaking of biological “altruism,” I use quotation marks. I do this to keep the two notions separate, and in no sense do I imply . . . that the biological sense is illegitimate or second-rate.⁷²

This quote is fascinating in that Ruse explicitly admits that his two uses of the same term carry completely separate meanings. He concedes that the sense of biological altruism he endorses requires furthering one’s own survival or reproductive benefits. Furthermore, he considers biological “altruism” just as noble as literal altruism. “Altruism” is used metaphorically; no conscious intention functions here as it does in literal altruism. His “altruism” must produce benefits for the altruistic donor or “altruism” is not Darwinian. However, the paradox is that “altruism” for the sake of self-benefit is not genuine altruism as generally defined. The same term with distinct meanings allows Ruse to declare that, “‘Altruism’ to altruism has the same relation that the physicist’s notion of ‘work’ has to what we call work.”⁷³

⁷²Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 153.

⁷³Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics: Are They in Harmony?” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 14. Also Wilson and Sober, “The Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise of Altruism in Evolutionary Biology,” 184-85, distinguish evolutionary altruism which has nothing to do with the thoughts or feelings of actors from psychological altruism which deals entirely in the realm of the actor’s thoughts and feelings motivating behavior. Also David C. Lahti, “Parting with Illusions in Evolutionary Ethics,” *Biology and Philosophy* 18 2003: 642-43 calls actions performed at an apparent cost to the donor ostensible altruism. However, he distinguishes this notion from intentional altruism among humans where they are aware of the nature of intentionality: “The evolutionary ethics error theory holds that morality, with its peculiar attributes such as prescriptivity, universality, and non-subjectivity . . . evolved solely to maintain the edifice of adaptive cooperation. . . . Morality, on this view, functions as a motivation for

Ruse accepts that even if biological altruism is nothing more than pseudo-altruism, he must preserve this specific type of altruism to remain Darwinian. However, he does not regard biological altruism as an inferior form of altruism; it is the only type of altruism available to the Darwinian if natural selection works toward the individual's benefit. Nevertheless, Ruse believes that natural selection also makes persons genuine altruists as well in order to gear them toward cooperation that ultimately enhances self-fitness. Ruse recognizes that Darwinism cannot dismiss some measure of selfishness:

By nature, we are going to be selfish, or at least self-serving. If selection did not make us this way, we would die out immediately. The person who has no concern for food and drink and no interest in sex (or who willingly steps aside in favor of a rival) may be a saint, but he or she is going to be a Darwinian flop.⁷⁴

This position is fully Darwinian; natural selection requires selfishness so as to benefit the individual's reproductive chances. However, Ruse also understands that widespread altruism exists in the world and traces it back to natural selection's illusion of objectivity gearing us toward cooperation: "Yet, because we are social animals, we need something to break through this barrier, to make us interact with our fellow human beings, to make us biological "altruists." And this something is going to be the moral urge, the feeling that we ought to do certain things even though our nature is against it."⁷⁵

Ruse does not believe that the illusion of objectivity or the primacy of biological altruism over genuine altruism reduces persons to egoists where "we all spend our days like characters in a Spaghetti Western, forever grinding opponents into the dust." Instead, he believes that one can further his own ends by cooperating with others, something impossible to do apart from natural selection causing a person to believe in

ostensible altruism." Also Peter Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 56-57, agrees that it is possible for an action to be altruistic in the everyday sense but not in the evolutionary sense.

⁷⁴Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," 306-07.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 307.

objective morality and genuine altruism.⁷⁶ Thus, we humans are “forced” to act altruistically by our biology for the specific purpose of enhancing our biology. This strategy is certainly an interesting proposal, but the discord between biological altruism and genuine altruism remains. Ruse seeks to account for the former based on Darwinism, but can he account for the latter? Because Ruse’s altruistic proposal stems directly from his general moral theory, exploring his altruistic theory in the context of his overall scheme provides an answer to this question.

Recall that Ruse accepts that humans genuinely *feel* that their moral beliefs and judgments are objectively real, but he credits these feelings to natural selection’s illusion. These feelings are not ultimately justified, nor do they require justification. Ruse’s key component for natural selection so effectively fooling us is the epigenetic rules; thus, one is not surprised to learn that Ruse also believes that when humans need a push to get us to perform altruistic acts in light of our selfishness, epigenetic rules work toward that end.

In particular, it is argued that, in the case of humans, in order to make us perform “altruistically,” because we do indeed (for good biological reasons) have selfish feelings, we have laid over us (literal) altruistic inclinations. And, as you might imagine, given what we have just seen, the claim is that our altruistic dispositions are mediated through the epigenetic rules. Note that it is a crucial part of the biological explanation of morality that it exists in order to get us away from the literally selfish or otherwise unpleasant motives that we might have from the other epigenetic rules. There is therefore no simple identification of the good with that which has evolved as mediated through the rules.⁷⁷

The rules occupy a prominent spot in Ruse’s theory, appearing again in terms of altruism. However, here it appears that these rules can conflict with one another, and how one rule preempts another is not fully explained. Nevertheless, the epigenetic rules somehow mediate between our selfish impulses and our altruistic actions; apart from them humans would, indeed, resemble characters from spaghetti westerns. The discussion in the third

⁷⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 218.

⁷⁷Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 14. Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 163, says, “Being altruistic is an obligation. It is not an obligation that exists beyond human nature. (And although it is activated by human nature, it is not justified by human nature.)”

chapter casts doubt on both the existence and power of Ruse's epigenetic rules, and if that critique holds, it applies here. Similarly, Ruse dispenses with justification in morality, stating that it does not exist nor does it need to. He stipulates that altruism requires no justification either: "Altruism ultimately has no justificatory basis. . . . Altruism is a film show to make us 'altruists.' . . . As with the prisoners in Plato's cave, we think that what we see is what there is. We think that altruism is more than just a personal whim."⁷⁸

This description of altruism, while consistent with Darwinian theory, does not ultimately satisfy the reader who believes that genuine altruism exists and is critically important. Describing altruism as a "film show" to produce "altruism," while honest, certainly displeases the reader who intuitively recognizes that altruism must surely be more than "personal whim." At this point Ruse again is open to accusations of egoism, something he regularly, and strenuously denies.⁷⁹ Ruse must deny egoism because altruism and egoism are mutually exclusive. However, when one aids another for the ends of one's own self-benefit, egoism becomes a viable option. Ruse would argue that our altruistic acts seem intended for the good of others, but only because our biology causes us to believe our altruism is genuine. Nevertheless, a feeling of authenticity and genuine authenticity in altruism are still two very different notions. Ruse's presents something of a paradox; he affirms literal altruism, but only as a means to ensure that humans become "altruists;" however, literal altruism seems contrary to Darwinism. At the same time, it was natural selection that equipped humans to believe altruism was real

⁷⁸Ruse, "A Darwinian Naturalist's Perspective on Altruism," 163.

⁷⁹For instance, Ruse, says, "This is not a scientific position of pure ethical egoism, in the sense that we are all selfish people just simply calculating for our own ends. That is the second option given previously. We are, rather, people with a real moral sense, a feeling of right and wrong and obligation." Ibid., 158. However, Schloss, "Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design," 248-49 argues that sociobiology attempts to explain altruism as self-interest by another name, yet nobody accepts this idea because that is not how humans think about morality. In order to deceive others about morality, we would first need to deceive ourselves. Manipulation is a two way street in that "if we were good to others only in order to consciously manipulate them, then we would not be good enough to them to accomplish the manipulation!" Second, people would still recognize that we are manipulating them because each person is a manipulator.

and get us to cooperate for our eventual reproductive benefit. Genuine altruism remains ungrounded and without justification; Ruse believes no justification is necessary, but the convoluted nature of his explanation seems to make justification indispensable. Ruse asks the right question, “However, is this genuine altruism—true morality? Are we not rather scheming to achieve our own ends even though putting on a facade of niceness?” Ruse’s system begs just this end; altruism appears nothing more than pseudo-altruism. Ruse responds honestly, but somewhat paradoxically.

My response is that although we humans are undoubtedly hypocrites (some of us most of the time and most of us some of the time), we are also genuinely moral. In order for us to break out of our naturally selfish mode natural selection has imbued us with thoughts of right and wrong, good and bad. Stating the matter cynically, we work better when we do things because we think it is right to do such things than when we do things because we consciously see them to be in our evolutionary interests.⁸⁰

Ruse’s question about this being “true morality” remains a pertinent and pressing one.

Biological altruism requires further inspection: is it egoism, selfishness disguised, or a legitimate altruistic proposal? Recall that Ruse refuses to describe biological altruism as “second-rate” so he must suppose that it carries equal weight to genuine altruism. Is he right? Is biological altruism legitimate altruism or merely a way for humanity to be “selfish together”?⁸¹ One of the main obstacles counting against biological altruism is that it requires no intentionality or motivation.⁸² This description departs from genuine altruism which is praiseworthy specifically because of its

⁸⁰Michael Ruse, “Darwinism and Determinism,” *Zygon* 22 (1987): 425.

⁸¹Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 187, uses the following sentence in a different context, “We discover that we can be selfish together.”

⁸²Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 497, admits as much saying, “My point, then, is simply that we should remember that the biologists’ term ‘altruist’ is a technical term, with only a metaphorical connection to the literal human term. It speaks not of intentions or thinking or anything like that, but rather is used simply to designate social behavior which one has reason to think occurs because ultimately it benefits the biological ends of the performer.” Also Sober and Wilson, “Unto Others,” 433, assert, “A mindless organism can be an evolutionary altruist.” Also Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears* Rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 146-49, argues that evolutionary theory cannot tell us anything about motives for morality, and motives are crucial to morality and altruism.

intentionality and proper motivation. Biological altruism is not praiseworthy; working for one's own benefit seems to produce, at best, a value neutral position, and, at worst, a morally blame-worthy position. Ruse understands that the altruism his scheme allows fails to be morality as anyone thinks of it: "Needless to say, acts of biological altruism are not necessarily moral acts; simply going blindly through the motions is not the same as deliberately doing things because they are right and refraining from other things because they are wrong."⁸³ Here, Ruse falls back on his illusion of objectivity where natural selection causes humans to believe their actions are genuinely right and wrong. Nevertheless, the objections to the illusion remain pertinent to this discussion, and Ruse has trouble avoiding the charge that his altruism is only pseudo-altruism. Ruse anticipates this very critique: "No doubt, the critic will still worry that the Darwinian fails to do justice to morality. . . . When dealing with other people . . . certainly at times our thoughts and behaviors put us in active opposition to our moral sentiments. And it is selfishness which often wins." This concession is honest, and he follows by admitting, "Morality gets us to help and co-operate, and the rest of us ensures that morality does not get out of hand and prove biologically disadvantageous."⁸⁴ While one can appreciate Ruse's honest observation that Darwinism entails selfishness, he expresses the inherent problem for biological altruism in his final sentence. Morality cannot "get out of hand" in terms of proving biologically disadvantageous. Yet, genuine altruism does precisely that; one incurs cost in order to help another. Ruse's altruistic proposal must stay within the confines of Darwinism, but it is these confines that render his altruism only pseudo-altruism. The biological altruism that Ruse endorses is, quite frankly, nothing more than self-interest in disguise.⁸⁵

⁸³Michael Ruse, "Belief in God in a Darwinian Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 347.

⁸⁴Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 242.

⁸⁵Post et. al., "General Introduction," 8, argue that if the dominant theory of evolutionary

A Major Barrier: The Problem of Determinism

Ruse consistently describes morality as a shared human adaptation, thereby rooting morality in our biology. Natural selection produces an illusion of objectivity through the epigenetic rules requiring us to cooperate with others. If morality is rooted in our biology, an inherent problem seemingly entails: we are genetically conditioned to act morally. In other words, our choices are determined and little to no room exists for human freedom. Ruse recognizes this challenge and responds to it. Before exploring his account for human free will, the topic of selfish genes requires inquiry.

Do Selfish Genes Produce Selfish People?

Professor Ruse denies that selection occurs at the level of the group, insisting that it works almost exclusively at the individual level. Thus, a characteristic must serve the individual's genes rather than the group's collective genes.⁸⁶ This belief relocates the emphasis away from even the individual as a whole down to the level of his genes, reflecting Richard Dawkins' groundbreaking selfish gene theory. In *The Selfish Gene* he shifted the focus away from groups and even individuals and located it primarily at the unit of the gene. Individuals seek the survival and reproduction of their own genes, a proposal giving weight to the theory of kin altruism. A successful gene reproduces more copies into succeeding generations; thus, Darwinians proclaim that a gene is not selfish in our way of thinking but selfish in such a way as to make its own reproduction more likely than that of a competitor. Ruse latches on to the selfish gene idea to explain altruism:

Individual selectionists do indeed speak happily of selfishness ruling supreme. But

biology concerning altruism must necessarily increase the fitness of the genes passed on to relatives or the actor must receive benefits, then altruism is not genuinely benevolent. Also Philip Hefner, "Entrusting the Life that has Evolved: A Response to Michael Ruse's Ruse," *Zygon* 29 (1994): 71, says, "Ruse argues that since our biology allows only for kinship altruism and reciprocal altruism beyond the kin group, the strong version of the Love Command is rendered unacceptable. If so, forget about Americans and Europeans contributing to the welfare of the Somalians or to people living in the former Yugoslavia."

⁸⁶Michael Ruse, *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 15.

this is talk referring to action at the level of the units of heredity – hence, “selfish genes.” This is a metaphor. Genes are not literally selfish. It is humans who are literally selfish. Moreover, because the genes are metaphorically selfish all of the time, it does not in itself follow that the humans created by the genes are themselves literally selfish all of the time. Certainly we are selfish some of the time, but not all of the time.⁸⁷

Ruse responds to an obvious critique (selfish genes equal selfish people) by stating that selfish genes are metaphorical; however, if our genes are selfish, then they should result in organisms that are selfish. The individual’s behavior determines if selfish genes reproduce, thus implying that the individual should function selfishly to ensure his genes’ reproductive success.⁸⁸ Ruse never dismisses selfishness as a necessarily existing attribute of Darwinian human nature, but he does not believe selfishness is a “human” attribute of our genes; “selfish” therein metaphorically describes our genes seeking their reproduction. “Selfishness is a human attribute, something which results of thinking only of yourself and not of others.”⁸⁹ Dawkins’ shift from organisms to genes purportedly solved the problem of altruism for the Darwinian; in such a case, altruism becomes a left-over artifact of organism-centered life. When altruism moves to gene theory, the problem of altruism dissolves, but “needless to say, the price of this solution is higher than many biologists are willing to pay.”⁹⁰ Altruism is no longer an intentional and properly motivated action but an innate programming by and for the gene’s reproduction. Ruse endorses this idea of altruistic action apart from intentionality: “‘Altruism,’ like ‘selfishness,’ is a human term. It means not thinking of yourself but thinking of others.

⁸⁷Ruse, Review of *Unto Others*, 445.

⁸⁸John Teehan, *In the Name of God: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Ethics and Violence* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10-11 argues that people find that to be just the case in most species, but sometimes selfishness is found coinciding with cooperative behavior, and humans must explain that relationship of helping.

⁸⁹Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 496.

⁹⁰Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 246-47. Also Gabriel Dover, “Anti-Dawkins,” in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Hilary Rose and Steve Rose (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 57, says that making the gene the unit of selection was meant to solve the problem of altruism. He believes that Dawkins utilized several faulty assumptions to justify the gene as the unit of selection.

Mother Teresa is an altruist, as she bathes the brow of the dying poor of Calcutta. Just as I have no reason to think that ants are selfish, so in this sense I have no reason to think that ants are altruists.”⁹¹ The selfish gene theory describes genes, not human individuals, as selfish, but in doing so it also bars humans from true altruism because intentionality vanishes. Ruse acknowledges that if humans consciously act for the good of the other then insanity, not morality, ensues along Darwinian lines. Recall Ruse’s “insanity” objection: “The person who helped another, consciously intending to promote his own biological advantage, would not be moral. He would be crazy.”⁹² For this reason, Ruse believes morality is nothing more than an adaptation causing us to work together ultimately for our own genetic good. Charges of pseudo-altruism seem appropriate.

Even more problems ensue from Dawkins’ selfish gene theory. Prior to discussing, again, the problem of pseudo-altruism, the theory also evidences a coherence problem. Dawkins argues that for true altruism to occur in an individual governed by selfish genes, the individual must rebel against those very genes: “We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth . . . we are built as gene machines . . . we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.”⁹³ The obvious dilemma obtains in that, if humans are programmed by genes to act in certain ways, then how could the ability to rebel arise? How is it biologically possible to rebel against biological programming? Dawkins was not alone in believing humans possess the ability to defy their selfish genes; a fellow

⁹¹Ruse, “Evolution and Ethics,” 497. Alex Rosenberg, “Darwinism in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 330, says, “Darwinian social thinkers cannot deny the charge that, on Darwinian principles, cooperation is in the end a strategy . . . adaptive for fundamentally ‘selfish genes’, whose own fitness-maximising strategies are what organismal cooperation ultimately fosters.”

⁹²Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 222. Also Sober and Wilson, “Unto Others,” 434, also assert that evolutionary altruism is purely about fitness effects on behavior, not thoughts or feelings that produce the behaviors.

⁹³Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 215.

naturalist boldly proclaimed that “if my genes don’t like it, they can go jump in the lake.”⁹⁴ His statement reveals his fallacy; if the genes are in the lake, so is the individual. An ability to rebel against such genes seems a logical impossibility . . . or a leap of faith.

This is both scientifically absurd and morally naïve. How could natural selection favor the development of a capacity to *thwart* the interests of the ruling genes? Any tendency to pursue goals other than gene-copying would be self-extinguishing because by definition it would be less effective at spreading genetic copies. . . . If human nature is constructed by genes whose predominant quality is a ruthless selfishness, then pious lectures advocating qualities like generosity and altruism are probably just another strategy for spreading the selfish genes.⁹⁵

The verdict on the human capacity to rebel against genes produces important consequences for altruism; if this ability exists, then a certain level of human freedom entails. Apart from this capacity to rebel, determinism seems inevitable. Furthermore, another issue suggesting determinism and contesting selfish gene theory is the assessment that selfish gene morality is impotent to account for genuine right and wrong, moral judgment, and universally held values.

Now an obvious and glaring problem here is that this has very little to do with what we generally understand to be morality – with real right and wrong, good and evil. On Dawkins’s schema, one is kind to his neighbor *because* he’s been preprogrammed by his genes to do so . . . and he’s been so programmed *because* acting this way confers evolutionary advantage. It’s not that it is a universally binding moral value to be kind. We simply call it “morally good” because our genes have, through eons of evolutionary struggle, gotten us to believe that it is so.⁹⁶

These notions fail to provide a satisfactory morality, and, once again, pseudo-altruism

⁹⁴Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1997), 52.

⁹⁵Phillip Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 107-08. Also Budziszewski, “Accept No Limitations,” 101, says in response to Dawkins’ theory that we are robots blindly programmed to preserve our selfish genes, yet at the same time says we, as humans, alone can upset these selfish genes and go against their design: “It is all very stimulating, but of course if we really are ‘blindly programmed’ by our genes, then the call to revolt is worse than futile. One might as well expect a typewriter to revolt against the keys.”

⁹⁶Chad Meister, “God, Evil, and Morality,” in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 114. Also Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 15 asserts that altruism is analogous to physical fitness; the only way to grow in it is through training. However, this theory faces the similar problem of rebelling against selfish genes. If we are programmed in certain ways, no amount of “training” or “rebellion” can overcome our biology.

becomes a viable accusation. Furthermore, terms like “programmed” and “preprogrammed” present an inherent weakness of selfish gene theory: humans are determined automata with no free will. All these obstacles devalue human dignity and make persons nothing more than “gene-machines” operating selfishly for self-benefit.⁹⁷ The Darwinian worldview’s inability to account for human dignity generates problems.

The Problem of Determinism

The previous discussion concerning selfish genes foreshadows the challenge of an apparently inevitable determinism for Darwinians. Ruse recognizes that Darwinism produces no easy solutions here and delineates the problem quite well: “The Darwinian argues that the genes make a significant causal input to our moral awareness, and to our consequent decisions and actions. The implication, therefore, is that we do what we do because of our evolutionary heritage. But if this is so, then what place can there be for genuine morality?” Notice the implications arising from selfish gene theory; if our actions are determined, then little room exists for freedom of choice which serves as a necessary condition for genuine morality. Ruse continues this line of thought: “A major precondition for moral thought and action is that you have the freedom to choose between right and wrong. . . . Unfortunately, if we humans are mere genetic robots, then there seems little hope of making such choices. In which case, morality becomes a sham.” The argument presented here is that Darwinians introduced the selfish gene theory to alleviate the paradox of altruism, but as Ruse elucidates here, by so doing Darwinism results in strict determinism. Ruse does offer a proposal for determinism and free will, but he is careful to admit: “I am not going to pretend to solve here all of the problems to do with the will and its freedom, nor would I even claim that Darwinism unaided could solve

⁹⁷Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 217, says that if humans are only gene machines then they lose all dignity. When evolutionary proponents reach the point of dealing with the issue they propose something that contradicts their system, the demand that people act against their genetic programming.

them all. However, the approach being taken in this book . . . perhaps in some respects throws light on them.”⁹⁸ While Ruse postulates a solution, one must not minimize the concessions made here as they communicate the very real problem of determinism.

Recall that Ruse invariably argues that morality is an adaptation, requiring the position that humans possess no conscious choice concerning moral beliefs. He concedes that we possess a certain hard-wiring like the ants, but we also choose whether or not to obey the moral prescriptions of which we had no choice. He presents a position where humans are not blindly wired into performing actions like robots but are only inclined to behave morally.⁹⁹ Here Ruse seeks to swap predestination to act morally with a milder inclination to do so. This attempted switch may seem subtle but is crucially important; however, his distinction is one that Darwinian theory may not permit. Dawkins’ theory was that our biology programs us to sustain our self-replicating genes; if this is the case “then presumably the idea of revolt is merely another of the replicators. In this case he rails against blind destiny only because he is blindly destined so to rail.”¹⁰⁰ If a chance of revolt is also blindly determined, then Ruse’s “inclinations” may necessarily equal “predestination.” Ruse argues that matters are not quite so clear; in fact, he asserts that determinism and free will are not actually in opposition. Instead of determinism contradicting free will, he believes determinism actually serves as a precondition for the existence of free will.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 258. Also Wonderly, *The Selfish Gene Pool*, 6, says that individuals are “programmed” to feel that altruistic actions are gratifying. This illustrates and exacerbates the problem rather than solving it. Also Ruse, “Darwinism and Determinism,” 428, further clarifies the problem of free will by saying, “To state the matter mildly you might think that my biological approach to human nature exacerbates the problems of human freedom. Critics certainly think so and have argued the point loudly and at length! If everything about us is a function of the forces of evolution—the units of heredity (the genes) as gathered by natural selection—and if we are programed to survive and reproduce, then what hope is there of freedom?”

⁹⁹Ruse, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 99.

¹⁰⁰Budziszewski, “Accept No Limitations,” 101.

¹⁰¹Ruse, “Belief in God in a Darwinian Age,” 348. Also Thompson, “Evolutionary Ethics,”

How can Ruse make such a controversial proposal, one seemingly combining two mutually exclusive positions? How does he argue for a level of freedom necessitated by determinism? Ruse understands that he cannot dismiss determinism from a Darwinian scheme, but he seeks to eliminate an “offensive” determinism. He argues that the determinism he endorses does not remove the possibility of genuine morality.¹⁰² The only way Ruse can offer his proposal is by distinguishing between different types of determinism, and he argues for three different kinds. The first is causal determinism where the laws of nature produce cause and effect connections in the world, of which humans are a part. Herein humans are part of the whole system and stem from causes so in this type of determinism, no freedom exists and morality is a sham. Humans are a product of their biology, and natural selection causes us to accept morality and leads us to act “altruistically.” Ruse endorses this type of causal determinism, believing it is more of a metaphysical presupposition rather than a scientific one. As science progresses, however, it will prove the presupposition true. He acknowledges this stance is circular, but he rejects that it is viciously so. The main point he argues is that this determinism still does not threaten freedom and morality, rather it demands it.

Consider for a moment an unambiguously good act: Mother Teresa tending a dying man, and doing so (as we suppose she does) simply because it is right. . . . Ultimately she does because of factors in her past such as the moral training of her parents and her church. Whether this training is uniquely enough is, of course, where disputes come in. The point is that her past does play a role, and the more you understand Mother Teresa the more it looks like a determining role. All of this is starting to look very much like a causal situation, and it looks a lot more like one when you consider the alternative. Mother Teresa wipes the dying man's face but this action is the effect of nothing. Physically it just happened like the roll of the dice coming up six. (This roll is not uncaused but it gives the idea of an uncaused event.) You might perhaps say that although she wiped the face because of her

483, evidences a paradox of sorts where he argues for free will but admits a determinist worldview, saying, “Sociobiology, far from being incompatible with the kind of choices required for human morality, explains the very existence of choice within a deterministic framework. Indeed, within a deterministic worldview (the one most commonly held), sociobiology provides a basis for asserting volition, free action, and (hence) responsibility for action.”

¹⁰²Ruse, “Darwinism and Determinism,” 429.

beliefs, this provided "reasons" rather than "causes" of her actions. Yet unless you allow that in some sense reasons (or beliefs) can act as causes, you are left with the mysterious behavior of Mother Teresa—at the physical level, at least. . . . The result of all this is that morality positively presupposes a causal nexus, within which we all lie. Hence, in endorsing a causally deterministic view of humanity I am certainly not *per se* eliminating the possibility of freedom and morality. (This is not yet saying that my particular view leaves room for morality.)¹⁰³

One may find fault with Ruse's purely naturalistic approach here and argue that Mother Teresa's motivation was other than mere moral training; a more direct explanation obtains in that her freedom to choose such an act stems from her being created in the image of a good God. Ruse presupposes a closed universe where everything that exists does so through natural processes. This position, of course, is a worldview issue.

Ruse's second type of determinism is biological determinism. Are humans merely products of their genes? His answer is yes . . . and no. In one sense, humans are what they are because of their biology. He argues that we have a disposition towards morality just as we do toward being bipedal. However, he argues that in another sense, our biology combines with our environment to form our thoughts and behaviors. Herein he avoids the horrific notion of eugenics that plagued Darwinian proposals by allowing that education better produces social change.¹⁰⁴ His third type is that of control determinism. He presents the extreme charges that this type determinism often engenders:

The point at issue is that we all recognize the existence of internal constraints, which sometimes can be so powerful and overwhelming that the individual is not truly free. There is such a great compulsion that the person's actions are determined, and no moral fault (or praise) can be ascribed. We do not blame him or her, or punish him or her. This is something that can be properly done only to a free agent. Now the worry is that our biological approach pushes the psychological constraint problem to the limit. Thanks to evolution we are so bound by our emotions and feelings that we are truly free in nothing we do. We are automata or marionettes controlled by strings which lead, first to our genes, and then through them to the forces of natural selection working on our would-be ancestors. We are, in fact, little

¹⁰³Ibid., 430-31. Also Michael Ruse, "Science and Religion Today," *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 70 (2011): 171, says, "David Hume. His is the classic exposition of the 'compatibilist' possible, that not only is free will possible but it exists, and it could only exist if there were determinism!"

¹⁰⁴Ruse, "Darwinism and Determinism," 432-34.

more than large, white ants.¹⁰⁵

Ruse produces this argument in order to refute it. He reverts back to his conclusions about the evolution of morality wherein humans are not ant-like. Our genes do not determine that we perform actions machine-like without thought. Morality effects a flexibility in persons where they choose their actions in different situations. Here, in this tendency toward flexibility, Ruse locates all the freedom possible or necessary for humans. Humans possess the ability to submit their emotions to the service of superior aims and goals. Ruse distinguishes between first-order desires and second-order ones, using Plato's example of a first-order desire to quench thirst and a second-order desire to continue living. The free person uses the first-order desire to promote the second-order one. A pond may be poisoned; the free person chooses to deny his thirst in order to go on living. Ants cannot do so; they do not think through their choices. Humans do.

Freedom, therefore, does not lie in choice over our emotions or our goals in life. It may well be that these are thrust upon us. Indeed I accept that there is more than a hint of biological determinism about the fact that we are moral beings at all. The place where freedom enters—making it possible for us to be moral beings—lies in our ability to use our first-order feelings to achieve ends specified in our second-order desires. That is where control and responsibility come into our lives, and everything in the evolutionary account of morality affirms that humans, in this vital respect, are free, moral beings.¹⁰⁶

Ruse clarifies his argument through a missiles illustration that he often utilizes. Ants resemble missiles with the target built-in; their social behavior is genetically determined, and they are incapable of revising their targets. However, humans more closely resemble missiles constructed with internal homing devices wherein changes can be made according to target location. He argues that a certain freedom exists in our social behavior which renders charges of genetic control inaccurate. Our genes provide a moral sense where we are not blank slates; thus, like the missiles, some behaviors are “programmed.” However, humans are not blindly programmed, just programmed to

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 435.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 437.

choose different behaviors in life's varying situations.¹⁰⁷

Ruse's argument is sophisticated, brilliant, and appears fully Darwinian; however, he bases it off assumptions that (1) humans are the result of blind, purely natural processes (2) objective morality is an illusion and (3) the genes are programmed by the epigenetic rules. All these presuppositions are disputable. Further, one may question whether this level of freedom even obtains in a Darwinian scheme, especially if selfish genes truly and tightly control human thought and action. The chapter explored the difficulties of the selfish gene theory, producing an argument that it was nothing more than self-interest in disguise wherein selfish genes control the individual. To this point, no Darwinian argument overwhelmingly convinces that humans controlled by selfish genes experience genuine freedom. Furthermore, Ruse concedes that this level of freedom is enough to sustain the human notion of free will and contest charges of determinism. A simple response to his belief expresses that the freedom he describes is not genuine freedom, or freedom as people generally conceptualize it. To recall the charges of pseudo-altruism, his freedom may be labelled pseudo-freedom. This charge becomes more palpable when Ruse says, "As a function of our biology, our moral ideas are thrust upon us, rather than being things needing or allowing decision at the individual level. This is the claim. Just as we have no choice about having four limbs, so we have no choice about the nature of our moral awareness."¹⁰⁸ The tentative and diminished state of freedom Ruse allows simply leaves one feeling that Ruse's program lacks a robust account of freedom. Finally, this type of morality is, again, inconsistent with how persons

¹⁰⁷Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 261. Also Ruse, "Darwinism and Determinism," 437, reproduces concisely his missile analogy, "The analogy which springs to mind, distinguishing us from the ants, is that focusing on various types of missile. Ants are like missiles with fixed paths. If the goal is stationary, they work perfectly. We are like missiles with guidance systems. We are more difficult to produce but if the goal moves we can respond accordingly. This holds true even though our end remains unchanged."

¹⁰⁸Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 259.

genuinely define morality; no authentic right and wrong results from the system, only a blind determinism to follow our genes. Though Ruse rejects the charges that his freedom is also illusory, he only allows a “phenomenological awareness of ourselves as free beings.”¹⁰⁹ Persons do genuinely experience a phenomenological awareness of freedom, but recall that he also describes our sense of objectivity in morality as a phenomenological truth but concedes that philosophically it is nothing but an illusion. Similarly, on his proposal, humans experience a level of freedom in their moral awareness, but they possess no choice about the nature of that moral awareness. Ruse comes dangerously close to rendering his entire argument deficient when he concedes that “the aim of selection is not to give us ultimate insight, but to make us function efficiently. This is not to say that freedom is a total illusion, any more than is morality – only that it may not be quite all we think it is.”¹¹⁰ Ruse’s admission, while honest, is surprising in that it weakens his concept of freedom. Darwinism allows little other choice in that it inherently struggles with freedom, and Ruse’s position, necessarily on a Darwinian scheme, diminishes the status of freedom.

Darwinians must provide an argument for the possibility of free will precisely because humans have such a phenomenological experience of free will. Darwinism is a deterministic worldview, but Darwinians cannot dismiss the feeling of free will. Ruse

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 260. Ruse goes on to reject the argument that freedom is completely illusory in his system, however, and responds, “In an important sense there is nothing illusory about the personal awareness of freedom that we all have. Freedom lies in the fact that there is nothing in our external circumstances directly dictating between a number of routes from which we must each choose and take, and that there is nothing internal within us which rigidly predetermines that we must take one (or a limited option) of the routes come what may. A human’s choice and action is a function of that person, as he/she interacts with the environment. This is not non-caused freedom. Given all of the information from outside and given the way that we work, then our thoughts and actions will follow necessarily. But it is a freedom denied the (obviously unfree) bound prisoner, and it is a freedom denied the (equally obviously unfree) rigidly programmed ant. Morality gives us standards which we feel the demand to follow; but there is nothing within or without us that alone determines that we must or must not follow these moral demands. We can respond to morality, and depending on circumstances we may or may not follow it. This is our freedom.” Ibid., 260-61.

recognizes the existence and necessity of some free will, even in his worldview. Ruse's morality is the topic of this dissertation precisely because he seeks to remain Darwinian and never retreats from the hard topics. Determinism presents a difficult obstacle for a Darwinian, and Ruse proffers an interesting argument for free will. He recognizes that a robust free will is contrary to Darwinism, but he believes a Humean compatibilism is all that is necessary. "Free will is a matter of being beyond constraint, not of being outside the causal nexus."¹¹¹ The argument produced against Ruse is that he cannot genuinely ground free will in a Darwinian system, nor can he provide an explanation for a robust free will that is compatible with our human experience. John Searle conceded that "our conception of physical reality simply does not allow for radical freedom."¹¹² Concisely, Christianity provides a much more direct, simple, and immediate explanation for freedom; humans are created in the image of a free God. "According to a major understanding of Christianity, God has libertarian freedom and created his image-bearers to possess this freedom. By contrast, most philosophers are agreed that libertarian freedom and a theory of agency it entails are incompatible with the generally accepted depiction of naturalism."¹¹³ Occam's razor should not always be invoked; however, here it seems applicable. Darwinism's depiction of freedom seems contrived and ad hoc. Ruse

¹¹¹Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147. However, J. P. Moreland, "The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism," in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 40, presents an argument denying the compatibility of free will and naturalism: "There are many reasons why atheists admit that free will is incompatible with scientific naturalism. But here's a major one. All the particular things and their behavior in the naturalist order are lawlike and, so, subsumable under laws of nature. Further, a free act involves an exercise of active power by a first mover, an uncaused causer, and undetermined actor. By contrast, since all events in a naturalist ontology are passive happenings, they all are examples of moved movers. Something has to happen to an object first – an event that triggers and actualizes its passive causal powers – before it can cause something else to happen. In this sense, all naturalistic causation involves changed changers. But a first mover can actively produce change without having to change first to do so."

¹¹²John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 98.

¹¹³Moreland, "The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism," 40.

provides one of the best arguments against pure determinism from a Darwinian position, but both the nature of his worldview renders it inadequate and the illusion of objectivity possibly renders freedom illusory. Genetic programming is simply hard to escape in a Darwinian worldview; Christian theism provides a more robust and direct account of human freedom.

Altruism or Pseudo-Altruism?

Selfishness in Disguise?

This chapter presents the Darwinian account of altruism and alludes to, if not declares, the pseudo-altruistic nature of the Darwinian proposal. This final section makes the case that Darwinian altruism is nothing more than self-interest in disguise, and is, therefore, pseudo-altruism. Ruse must consistently refute charges of egoism, and whether his position devolves into egoism engenders much discussion. No definitive verdict is offered here, but the fact that Ruse repeatedly faces accusations of egoism and constantly defends against them illustrates the challenges Darwinian morality possesses in justifying altruism. The egoist ultimately performs actions for his own benefit; even if he acts altruistically toward others he does so with motives of enhancing his own fitness. To refute egoism, one need not possess only other-directed motives; even producing one example of genuine altruistic action illustrates that not every motive is self-directed.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, altruism does not naturally arise from natural selection working toward one's individual fitness. Altruism, apart from self-benefit, appears contradictory to Darwinism, hence Ruse's bifurcation of meanings by using quotation marks around "altruism." Biological altruism reveals that self-benefit must always entail, or at least must possibly entail, from altruistic actions. However, Darwinians are uncomfortable with the ends of this position: "The cynical view, that people are always out for number

¹¹⁴Sober and Wilson, "Unto Others," 443, say that egoism purports that all of ultimate human desires are self-directed whereas altruism illustrates that at least some desires are other-directed.

one, is slightly less pathetic. . . . On the contrary, evolution has equipped us with the capacity to put the needs of others before our own immediate needs.”¹¹⁵ Depending on what the author means by evolution, the simple fact is natural selection does not, indeed cannot, equip a person to ultimately place another’s needs before his own. By using “immediate” he may safeguard that self-benefit must not ensue quickly, but for such “altruism” to remain Darwinian, he cannot deny that acts must yield self-benefit. Ruse always takes Darwin seriously and recognizes that a distinction in meanings for altruism necessarily occurs, and he asserts that for us to achieve “altruism,” natural selection equipped us to act altruistically. However, even the altruism Ruse describes appears nothing more than pseudo-altruism by standard definition.

This assessment does not mean Darwinians do not act in genuinely altruistic ways; the view endorsed here is that Darwinians act altruistically but do so contrary to their worldview. The charge is that they actually borrow from the Christian worldview and act in accord with the *imago dei*. The problem for Darwinians is not knowing, but grounding, genuine altruism. Ruse eloquently expresses this inherent difficulty for those of Darwinian ilk.

I think it will be generally agreed . . . that all human beings show care and concern for others, even to the point of their own inconvenience or loss. . . . Now, granting this moral sense or faculty that we have, and granting also that it is not something supernaturally imposed upon us, the matter of explaining its origin becomes pressing. Moreover, if one is a Darwinian evolutionist, that is if one believes that natural selection was a prime cause of evolution, the matter of explanation becomes even more pressing, for at least in some sense there seems a premium on self-interest. . . . In other words, it would seem *prima facie* that morality does not pay from an evolutionary perspective, and hence ought not to have evolved. . . . Indeed, since on the surface, morality seems not in an individual’s evolutionary interest, one

¹¹⁵Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 268. Also Stephen J. Pope, “Relating Self, Others, and Sacrifice in the Ordering of Love,” in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 176, argues the coexistence of egoism and altruism: “Human nature, then, is essentially ambivalent, comprising a range of motivations that run from egoism to altruism. . . . Darwin himself acknowledged our emotional capacity for sympathy, as well as for selfishness.”

might have expected it to have been selected against.¹¹⁶

Of course, Ruse goes on to argue that natural selection made us literal altruists in order to make us proper biological altruists. Genuine altruism becomes a means of ensuring the ends of biological altruism where each person heeds self-interest. Dawkins expressed this sentiment explicitly in *The Selfish Gene*: “pure, disinterested altruism – something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world.”¹¹⁷ Admissions like this one not only exemplify Darwinism’s inability to ground genuine altruism, but they also illustrate an allegiance to genuine Darwinism that renders attempts to do so unnecessary.

Darwinians necessarily maintain that their altruism theories must retain a level of self-interest or else they fail to be Darwinian. The paradox is that altruism, genuinely thought of as selfless action, now means selfishness. Ruse argues for a commonsense morality contrary to the “idealized” Christian version where one gives all to the poor or practices no self-regard. “This clearly and unquestionably goes against Darwinian biology.”¹¹⁸ The idea of “commonsense” expresses an important point. Whereas Ruse here means that the Darwinian cannot act in radically altruistic ways, he seems to maintain that people do often act in an altruistic fashion that does not appear to benefit self. In other words, altruism – genuine altruism – represents a common feature of human interaction. Yet, no hypothesis explains why such behavior does not conform to the

¹¹⁶Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 195-97. Also Pope, “Relating Self, Others, and Sacrifice in the Ordering of Love,” 178, recognizes evolutionary theory’s inability to fully explain altruism, saying, “Science cannot explain how out-group altruism is possible on the basis of evolutionary principles. Yet this incapacity, rather than demonstrating the illusory nature of out-group altruism, can be taken to be an indication of the inability of evolutionary theory to ‘explain’ everything that is possible for human beings.” Also Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 164, unsurprisingly admits, “From the Darwinian perspective, there is no ontological compulsion about moral thinking.”

¹¹⁷Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 215. Also Wonderly, *The Selfish Gene Pool*, xiii, says that if genes are selfish then no longer is the individual responsible for behavior, but the gene is, rendering genuine altruism impossible.

¹¹⁸Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 161. One may question Ruse’s exegesis of Scripture here, but the reason these notions contradict Darwinism is precisely because they do not entail any benefit for the donor, something Darwinism demands.

reproductive self-interest predicted for traits that have an evolutionary origin, and these behaviors are rampant.¹¹⁹ Ruse possesses no philosophical explanation for such behavior, but he also cannot deny its existence; humans act altruistically, but Darwinians cannot explain why. “Real human beings have a commonsense morality that guides them in their everyday life. Real human beings can spot real altruism. Leave philosophy to the philosophers.”¹²⁰ His statement reveals a striking dilemma for the Darwinian: altruism exists among humans, is judged as “good” universally, but ultimately finds no grounds or explanation within the Darwinian worldview. Philosophically, Darwinism accounts only for “altruism,” selfishness in disguise, not for altruism, self-sacrifice for others.¹²¹

Recall that one critique resulting from Ruse’s illusion of objectivity was that, once the “cat was out of the bag” and everyone became aware of the illusion, inevitably cheaters would arise who would con others for selfish gain. A similar problem results in terms of altruism; Ruse argues that our altruistic sentiments are also illusory, though because we objectify them, recognizing this fact is difficult.¹²² He believes that our shared human nature prevents us from cheating one another and causes us to cooperate in social interactions. This position represents a great optimism concerning human nature, but nothing prevents cheaters from bilking the system for self-benefit. If altruism is illusory, then hypocrisy should abound. The person who gains a reputation for altruistic behavior and then hypocritically uses that reputation for self-benefit appears a Darwinian

¹¹⁹Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 247. Also Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 370, admits, “A short answer is that kindness exists in a cruel world. Human altruism is tempered not just by competition between groups, but by competition between individuals. This is a difficult concept but it describes our behavior in the real world.”

¹²⁰Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 160.

¹²¹Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 38-39, confesses, “at the gene level, altruism must be bad and selfishness good.” Also Evans, “Is There a Basis for Loving All People?” 87, says, “Of course evolutionary theory is not the only option for a naturalist who wishes a secular foundation for universal moral obligations. Another option is to see morality as a kind of social bargain, an agreement that humans make that is motivated by self-interest.”

¹²²Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 164.

success story.¹²³ Also, the person who genuinely believes they live in a Darwinian universe must regard all other persons with whom they interact socially as perspective cheaters. The motto follows, “con them before they con you.” Ruse rejects this argument, asserting that our shared human morality keeps us honest.

Unless we are all in the same game – unless we all appreciate altruism and recognize the urge toward it – it will not function for any of us. And do not incidentally think that my telling you all of this is going to give you the power to kick over the moral traces. Freud may have thought that the truth will set you free. The sociobiologist knows better.¹²⁴

Ruse disregards the possibility of rampant free-riding, but Darwinians assess that their system must prescribe a method for detecting cheaters.¹²⁵ If an altruistic individual desires social cooperation, he cannot put himself in situations where others continually take advantage of him; else, he incurs no self-benefit, and his “altruism” fails. Thus, Darwinians advocate a system of punishments for those who act hypocritically for self-regard at the expense of others.¹²⁶ This position reveals the difficulty of altruism in a Darwinian model; individuals must benefit by their actions or they violate Darwinism. However, the system begs for persons to arise who will take the possibility of self-benefit to its logical conclusions by cheating others for maximum narcissistic benefits. Contrary

¹²³Woolcock, “The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today,” 276-77.

¹²⁴Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 166. Also John Collier and Michael Stigl, “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality,” *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 53, embrace a Rusean approach where cheating is unlikely, saying, “Moreover, although cheaters are likely to be found out in small social groups (like families or tribes), making cheating a poor strategy, cheating is more likely to be successful with strangers, especially strangers one will never see again. It seems likely that we have evolved cues that stimulate altruistic behaviour and repress cheating behaviour under conditions of familiarity. Since humans evolved in small groups, it seems less likely that we have biologically evolved a tendency to believe our obligations are objective. This adaptation, if general, would interfere with our ability to cheat strangers to our advantage.”

¹²⁵Van Vugt and Van Lange, “The Altruism Puzzle,” 246, admit that individuals must distinguish between cheaters and those who are genuinely altruistic.

¹²⁶Klaus Jaffe and Luis Zaballa, “Cooperative Punishment and Religion’s Role in the Evolution of Prosocial Altruism,” in *The Biology of Religious Behavior*, ed. Jay R. Feerman (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009) 207-08, argue that altruistic punishment must occur and does so when individuals punish those who fail to act toward group benefit which thereby increases the costs for the free rider.

to Ruse's belief, Darwinian altruism struggles to dismiss the possibility of a society of cheaters or to even judge them guilty of anything except acting in truly Darwinian fashion. These features have little to do with genuine altruism.

Pseudo-Altruism?

Are egoism and altruism in conflict or can synthesis occur between the two? Again, Ruse vehemently rejects that his theory represents egoism, but that he must continually defend against it makes it conceivable. The egoist, motivated purely by self-love, believes the only good he should seek is his own. He may pursue actions that benefit others only if they produce self-benefit.¹²⁷ By definition, altruism and egoism appear at odds with one another. However, a theory emerges wherein altruism and egoism vary only slightly. Both egoistic and altruistic parents possess the same desires of wanting the best for their children; the only difference is that for the egoistic parent, this desire is an instrumental one whereas for the altruistic parent, it is an ultimate desire.¹²⁸ This theory expresses that both parents perform genuine altruistic actions toward their children, but the egoistic one, consciously or not, seeks self-benefit in so doing. Further, the theory allows motivational pluralism wherein people possess both egoistic and altruistic ultimate desires.¹²⁹ Another argument for the legitimacy of altruism in a Darwinian scheme is that it stems from evolved moral emotions like empathy and shame, so even if the altruist performs actions to increase his reproductive success, this selflessness does not equal selfishness in disguise.¹³⁰ Even with all these qualifications, the typical understanding of altruism purports that self-benefit is not generally considered

¹²⁷Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 4-5. Also Sober and Wilson, "Unto Others," 443, say, "Psychological egoism is a theory that claims that all of our ultimate desires are self-directed."

¹²⁸Sober and Wilson, "Unto Others," 449.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 444.

¹³⁰Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 9.

in genuine altruistic acts. Altruism and egoism do not synthesize so easily. Egoists perform altruistic acts for others with the motivation of self-benefit, exemplifying pseudo-altruism. Genuine altruism requires an intent to benefit others. Actions performed primarily with self-interest in mind achieve only the designation of pseudo-altruism.¹³¹

Recall that Ruse distinguishes between biological altruism and literal altruism, describing biological altruism as metaphorical, “It means acting or giving toward another because it furthers one’s own survival and/or reproductive ends. There is absolutely no implication of consciousness or intentionality.”¹³² The consequences of stripping intentionality or motivation from altruism are a devalued altruism or pseudo-altruism. Furthermore, Ruse explicitly states that self-benefit must obtain in Darwinian altruism; recall his statement: “I find it easier simply to build into my understanding of biological ‘altruism’ this expectation of reciprocation – this return of biological benefit – however caused and whatever form it takes.”¹³³ This description of “built-in” self-benefit for altruistic behavior does not merely imply pseudo-altruism but outright endorses it. Whereas Ruse would contest the dissertation’s critique of his anti-realism, his illusion of objectivity, and the epigenetic rules, he would most likely view as uncontroversial the critique of a weakened altruism in his theory. Darwinians concede that their system allows room for only an altruism resulting in self-benefit to the donor.

If one is an individual selectionist, and the sociobiologists to a person are, then altruism presents one with a major paradox. Unlike group selection, individual selection claims that it is absolutely impossible that selection promote characteristics which are not of benefit to the individual. But altruistic characteristics seem to be precisely those that are not of benefit to the individual. In short, individual selection seems to bar altruism. . . . How then is the sociobiologist to escape from the dilemma? Fairly obviously, by showing that for all appearances to the contrary altruism benefits the reproductive interests of the individual causing

¹³¹J. P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 429.

¹³²Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” 153.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 154.

the altruism.¹³⁴

Ruse's comments above reduce altruism to pseudo-altruism by maintaining that altruistic actions benefit the acting agent. Ruse does not promote selfish living and regularly encourages charity. In fact, he believes his illusion of objectivity ensures morality throughout the entire human race, and he believes this sense of morality produces genuine moral behavior. This innate sense of objectivity can even motivate us to perform actions without conscious expectations of reward, but the insurance model is ever present. Natural selection causes persons to act for expected rewards.¹³⁵ This accommodation does not dismiss, but highlights, charges of pseudo-altruism.

Ruse distinguishes between literal altruism and biological altruism, but he seems to equate literal altruism with "radical" altruism. By radical altruism, he apparently means performing altruistic acts to those beyond one's kin or apart from expectations of reciprocation wherein the acting agent benefits. What, then, is the status of radical altruism in a Rusean Darwinian model? "The fact is that the sociobiological approach at the substantive level puts the emphasis on the individual rather than the individual's close acquaintances, and in turn, on the individual's close acquaintances rather than the group. Radical altruism, if I may so call it, is no friend of biological 'altruism.'"¹³⁶ This statement produces far-reaching implications. While Ruse often applauds and most likely practices "radical" altruism, he illustrates that it has no genuine place in a Darwinian

¹³⁴Ruse, *Sociobiology*, 42-43. Also Singer, *A Darwinian Left*, 54-55, says, "Altruism – not just kin altruism, or reciprocal altruism, but genuine altruism toward strangers – does exist. . . . Darwinian thinking suggests that we are not likely to be naturally altruistic. . . . But there may be selective forces that encourage behavior that looks like altruism, and may be altruistic in its motivation, even though in specific circumstances it brings benefits to the apparently altruistic individual."

¹³⁵Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 243.

¹³⁶Ruse, "A Darwinian Naturalist's Perspective on Altruism," 161. In fairness, Ruse never disregards radical altruism nor does he view it as an overwhelming refutation of his position, evidenced when he says, "Do not misinterpret my message. I am not saying that there is nothing to radical altruism. I am not saying that a preacher should never press radical altruism on his or her flock. Perhaps by pushing the extreme we can better effect the more limited. I am saying that one should not wave it triumphantly as an immediate refutation of the Darwinian naturalist." Ibid., 162.

scheme. How, then, can a Darwinian account for an agent acting in a way so as to incur reproductive cost with no apparent reproductive benefits? Three approaches have been offered. The first option is acting altruistically to gain a positive reputation in the community, thereby enhancing opportunities for reproductive success or acquiring altruistic actions from others. One may object that, while benefits may possibly arise indirectly, the possibility of receiving direct reproductive benefits is generally rare.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, this option still depicts altruism as nothing more than pseudo-altruism. The second theory is genetic lag where the environments change faster than the human gene. Humans possess a trait that is fully adaptive in the environment from which it arose but not in the present one. This idea of “vestigial” altruism hardly seem plausible and few endorse it.¹³⁸ The third explanation was manipulation wherein every sacrificial act is an attempt to manipulate the beneficiary; one individual benefits by manipulating another into altruistic acts. Apparent acts of kindness are performed for ultimate self-interest in order to secure the altruism of others. This notion also removes the idea of human beneficence completely. Altruism for self-benefit, again, is not altruism in common understanding. “As it now stands, evolutionary theory asserts that radical human sacrifice – which is undeniable in its prevalence – must be the result of manipulation because humanity and human morality are taken to be designed not for altruism . . .”¹³⁹ This “just so” argument remains unconvincing. Ruse’s theory of altruism allows for only illusory feelings of genuine altruism so as to ensure biological altruism. This latter altruism is the ends; genuine altruism serves as the means to produce it.

In order to achieve "altruism," we are altruistic! To make us cooperate for our biological ends, evolution has filled us full of thoughts about right and wrong, the need to help our fellows, and so forth. We are obviously not totally selfless. Indeed,

¹³⁷Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design,” 243-44.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 244-45.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 245-46.

thanks to the struggle for reproduction, our normal disposition is to look after ourselves. However, it is in our biological interests to cooperate.¹⁴⁰

This account fails to depict a genuine, satisfying altruism; it expresses only pseudo-altruism.

If a worldview is unlivable, then it is time to re-examine one's worldview commitments. The Darwinian worldview provides no exhaustive account for genuine ("radical") altruism, but Darwinians also cannot deny its prevalence. The logical ends of a Darwinian case for altruism, where self-benefit is "built-in," is not an altruistic society but a narcissistic one. Ruse necessarily objects to such a conclusion:

First, the claim is that the literal altruism is genuine. Of course, we are all hypocrites sometimes, but we are not all like Uriah Heep – forever pretending to be helpful but really scheming otherwise. We are more efficient biological altruists if we are believers We may have selfish genes, but we are not necessarily always selfish humans.¹⁴¹

Ruse proposes here that humans must believe in altruism because of our shared human nature, and this belief spurs us on toward biological altruism. He believes that selfish genes do not necessarily produce selfish people because of the illusion of objectivity. However, if the illusion is illusory, nothing prevents full-blown narcissism. His system of biological altruism requires ("built-in") the necessity of self-benefit for altruistic acts.

I argue that human behavior, altruism that serves the end of 'altruism,' has to be such that it is going to serve the individual. That is not to say that it is going to serve the individual on every occasion, nor is it to say that one will be thinking about the personal gain every time one acts morally. As I have intimated already, in fact the whole point about morality is that one tends not to think in such a way. Perhaps by definition morality excludes such thinking. But it is to say that morality must be such that it will be of personal benefit.¹⁴²

How can one thus draw any distinguishing lines between a moderate self-interest that Ruse seems to license and a narcissistic self-interest that Ruse everywhere wants to deny?

¹⁴⁰Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," 99.

¹⁴¹Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics and the Search for Predecessors," 64. Although Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World*, 10, concedes, "The farther one moves from nuclear families, the more interesting, and more fragile, altruism becomes."

¹⁴²Ruse, "A Darwinian Naturalist's Perspective on Altruism," 158.

The fact of the matter is that Darwinism allows no lines of distinction between these two forms of self-interest. Altruism is not altruism in Darwinism, only pseudo-altruism. And pseudo-altruism may not even remain pseudo-altruism but could plausibly devolve into narcissism.¹⁴³ Cooperative strategies undertaken ultimately for self-benefit do not reflect altruism in its true form but merely dressed-up forms of self-interest. What seems to be sacrificial behavior is merely the means to the end of selfish good. True altruism, radical altruism, is a powerful apologetic for Christianity wherein the sacrificial nature of humans reflects that we are moral beings made in God's image.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³Jerome Kagan, "Morality, Altruism, and Love" in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48, expresses this idea clearly by saying, "The premises of evolutionary biology, which imply that looking out for the self first is also characteristic of animals acting to maximize fitness in the service of fecundity (Wilson, 1975) have contributed to the resurgent narcissism. The belief that anger, self-interest, and competitiveness should not be suppressed because they are natural components of our evolutionary heritage has advantages in a society in which a large number of strangers must compete for a small number of positions of dignity, status, and economic security. Under these conditions it is adaptive to be self-interested and disadvantageous to be too cooperative, too loyal, too altruistic or too reluctant to protest unjust advantage taken by another."

¹⁴⁴Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 210.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Michael Ruse is a brilliant philosopher and committed Darwinian, and he constructs a moral proposal in keeping with his Darwinian worldview. His moral proposal engenders critique precisely because he depicts a comprehensive morality based on the principles of Darwinism. Proposing theories is certainly much more difficult than critiquing them, and Ruse deserves credit for explicating a fully-orbed Darwinian morality. He also expects, even invites, critique of his position from proponents of other worldviews: “I do not think being a Christian is necessarily stupid or immoral or cowardly. I feel free to criticize Christians, but equally I give them the right to criticize me.”¹ Ruse explicates a moral system that radically diverges from that of an evangelical Christian, but he generally does so in a gracious manner. As one author said of him, “Michael Ruse is a self-described ethical skeptic and moral nihilist. But we might take heart in the realization that, nihilist though he may be, he is a nice nihilist.”²

Ruse’s Darwinian proposal engenders criticism concerning whether he formulates a satisfying ethical theory. One may grant that his position remains Darwinian, but is it “ethical” enough? Is his denial of the necessity of metaethical justification convincing? Does his illusion of objectivity satisfactorily overcome our intuitive sense that morality is genuinely objective? Does he adequately retain a place for

¹Michael Ruse, “Making Room for Faith in an Age of Science: A Response to David Wisdo,” *Zygon* 46 (2011): 659.

²Mark D. Linville, “A Moral Particularism Response,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012) 89.

substantive morality? This chapter concludes that Ruse's position fails to offer as robust an account of morality as theism provides where morality is rooted in the nature of an omnibenevolent God. Ruse recognizes the fact that theism more naturally and robustly satisfies substantive ethics:

Sociobiological ethics meshes with Christian ethics. But is this not all a little bit too smooth and optimistic? Does not Christianity try to push you out and beyond the common-sense maxims embraced by Darwinism? . . . A naturalistic account of morality like that of the sociobiologist may go so far, but ultimately it cannot go as far as the Christian demands in the name of the Lord. This is a serious objection, and it should not be minimized. It is indeed true that the sociobiological substantive ethic is going to be limited.³

Ultimately, the theist and the Darwinian account for morality differently; where the Darwinian necessarily explains morality resulting from purely natural processes, the Christian predicates his morality on the nature of God. Ruse's primary tool is his illusion of objectivity whereby he seeks to retain substantive ethics after dismissing metaethical justification. He knows he must preserve, at the very least, the feeling that morality is objective; apart from his illusion, morality devolves into a hopeless relativism that he everywhere denies. Ruse evidences that objectivity is crucially important; however, whereas his system provides only an illusion of it, theism supplies a sufficient account of our moral experience where the objective nature of moral values is properly basic.⁴

³Michael Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 310-11. Also Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 29, assesses that the move away from Christian ethics stemmed from the rise of science: "What can I know? What should I do? The problem of knowledge, or 'epistemology'. The problem of morality, or 'ethics'. For nearly 2,000 years, for those of us in the West, answers to both of these questions were defined and guaranteed within the Judaeo-Christian world picture. Knowledge comes through our God-given powers of reason and observation. It is to be set against the historical background revealed by the Sacred Texts, and it would be incompatible with His Goodness were we to be in constant error over everything. Morality comes through our God-given power of choice between good and ill. It is to be set against the moral background revealed by the Sacred Texts, and it is given meaning by God's great sacrifice in the person of the crucified Christ. This secure vision of life came apart for many reasons, but the prime factor was the development and rise of modern science."

⁴Paul Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," in *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 213. Also Bruce Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than without It* (New York: Alpha Books, 2009), 40 says, "Ultimately, militant atheists want the moral benefits of religion, but without the religion (as many people want the taste of chocolate without the calories)." Ruse is no militant

Ruse's career in the last decade displays a consuming interest in exploring the possibility of a synthesis between Darwinism and Christianity, exemplified in his title, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* He admits that science does not always provide answers to ultimate questions. He wrestles with the place of religion to do so, but the fact that he denies science the ability to omnisciently answer all of life's question seems important and separates him from some Darwinians.

Those who love science (and I am one), including those of us who are nonbelievers (and I am one), should quit sneeringly giving religion the backs of our hands and start to look seriously at the limits of science and whether it is appropriate for religion to fill the gaps. We should look at how that space-filling should take place, at how those of us who do not want to use religion to fill the spaces should do their work, and at how science should respond to religious people as they do their filling. Perhaps this effort will lead to an even greater divide between science and religion. But we should try.⁵

Ruse's Darwinian moral proposal seems to necessitate borrowing from Christianity by, minimally, retaining objectivity, upholding human dignity, and affirming altruism. This statement does not deny Ruse's Darwinian stance; he diminishes these aspects of human experience, but that he preserves these features inherent to a Christian worldview reveals their importance. These undeniable aspects of human experience found in Ruse's proposal illustrate the argument that people created in the image of God cannot help but affirm such values. "Because we humans are uniquely made in the divine image, we are capable of *recognizing* or *discovering* moral principles; we do not *invent* them."⁶

atheist, but as a Darwinian, he wants to retain the feeling of objectivity that theism genuinely supplies.

⁵Michael Ruse, "Science under Siege," *The Christian Century* (2005): 32. Also Ruse, "Making Room for Faith in an Age of Science," 658-59, says, "I have spent the past ten years working on the relationship between science and religion, an effort that has led to the writing of four books. . . . With qualifications to be noted below, I do believe that science and religion are different areas of inquiry and commitment and that they are (and should be) separate. . . . Also we have had the rise of the so-called New Atheists, hating religion and the religious with a passion. Expectedly, I have drawn the scorn both of the religious extremists . . . and of the atheists—they contemptuously refer to people like me as 'accommodationists' or (more hurtfully) as 'appeasers.' A middle way showing that one can accept science—real science, not science gelded to make it less threatening—and genuine religion is needed desperately. One may not convince the fanatics at the ends, but there needs to be a large place where people can perhaps disagree on ideas but nevertheless continue to respect opponents."

⁶Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul

Interestingly, Ruse does not state that moral principles are invented, but he proffers that they are part of our human nature as formed through the epigenetic rules. However, this shared common nature reflects a shared moral experience where humans have no choice about moral dictates. This objective sense shows that moral principles are discovered, not invented. While Ruse's theory offers an illusory defense of these seemingly objective moral principles, Christianity provides a more robust explanation by grounding them in the nature of God, and humans reflect them through the *imago dei*.

The Moral Argument and the Imago Dei

This section briefly expounds Christianity's moral argument and the doctrine of the *imago dei* and deems them better grounds for morality than a Darwinian scheme offers. The argument presented here is by no means exhaustive, and this doctrine entails much critique. This section discusses and responds only briefly to the Euthyphro Dilemma criticism.

The Moral Argument

Proponents of every worldview must explain and justify moral norms from the confines of their worldview. Christianity and Darwinism are two primary competing worldviews, and defenders of each propose moral theory. Christians locate the foundation of morality in the omnibenevolent nature of God and justify human dignity through the *imago dei* within each person. This moral ground stems directly from Christian doctrine and faces no charges of an ad hoc nature. Christianity finds no shortage of opponents who dispute various doctrines like the existence of God and the resurrection of Christ, but these same opponents are often willing to concede that *if* an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists, his character serves as a natural ground for morality.⁷ The

K. Moser (New York: Routledge, 2003), 149.

⁷For example, recall that Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 2, says "The difference

“if” in the previous statement is conspicuous, but the statement illustrates the point that the existence of an omnibenevolent God serves as a sturdy foundation for morality.

God is a morally perfect being, and no good exists without God. This statement does not express that people cannot exhibit goodness apart from belief in God; rather, it conveys that all goodness finds its ground in the existence of God who encapsulates personal moral goodness.⁸ Only a perfectly good Being is worthy of worship, and His existence provides a foundation from which to distinguish good and evil. God’s nature serves as the basis for moral absolutes; a worldview committed to the absence of God struggles to establish objective moral standards. The view that an objective standard of goodness exists is foundational to Christianity’s moral argument for the existence of God. One version of the moral argument states:

1. If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.⁹

This argument is powerful in that it is logically fixed, and the two premises find much agreement.¹⁰ God, as the objective standard of goodness, provides a robust foundation for

between the religious person and the secular is that devoted Christians . . . are able to derive the values of their lives from the highest source that humans can conceive: the transcendently good, eternal, and omnipotent.”

⁸J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 490.

⁹Ibid., 495. Also C. S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 4-6, asserted that the moral law is necessary to make sense of moral disagreements. Without an absolute standard by which to judge, our moral capacity makes no sense.

¹⁰William Lane Craig, “Richard Dawkins on Arguments for God,” in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 18-19, said that Dawkins agreed with the premises and “the affirmation of objective values and duties is incompatible with his atheism, for under naturalism we are just animals, relatively advanced primates, and animals are not moral agents. Affirming both of the premises of the moral argument, Dawkins is thus, on pain of irrationality, committed to the argument’s conclusion, namely, that God exists.” Also J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115-16, concedes, “If . . . there are . . . objective values, they make the existence of a god more probable than it would have been without them. Thus we have . . . a defensible inductive argument from morality to the existence of a god.” Thus, he rejected objectivity in morality.

morality.

While the Christian worldview finds much opposition, opponents generally concede that *if* God exists His character provides a straightforward foundation for morality. Furthermore, humans know and practice moral goods for their flourishing through the *imago dei*. Darwinians contend with more severe obstacles in justifying morality; for many Darwinians, no God exists by which to ground morality. Only the physical universe exists so any foundation for morality seems more contrived based on the naturalist's position. The theistic position expresses a rich grounding in a good God and promotes human dignity through the *imago dei*. Herein, theism secures a solid foundation for the existence of objective values; Ruse never dismisses the feeling of objective values but regards it as an illusion in his Darwinism:

It can be argued that theism may enter the picture by providing a richer metaphysical account as to why the cosmos is such that there are objective values. In a theistic cosmos, values lie at the heart of reality, whereas for most naturalists values are emergent, coming into being from evolutionary processes that are themselves neither inherently good or bad.¹¹

The objective standard of moral goodness is God himself; his nature, not his commands, ultimately serve as the final standard of moral values, and his commands flow from his unchanging, perfect nature.¹² This notion carries important implications in refuting the Euthyphro dilemma. Aquinas eloquently summarized the goodness of God as perfection itself: "The perfection of the divine being is not affirmed on the basis of

¹¹Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Walden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 370. Also Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 25, says, "Moral values are central to a religious view that claims the world was created by a loving, all-powerful God concerned with human flourishing, and that posits a supreme goodness as the basis for all reality. . . . This cannot be said of any other cultural institution. . . . The equation of religion with absolute goodness is total." Also Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics: Are They in Harmony?" *Zygon* 29 (1994): 20-21, says, "Clearly, here, the evolutionist and the Christian part company. . . . The Christian is surely committed to an independent, objective, moral code—a code which, ultimately, is unchanging, and not dependent on the contingencies of human nature."

¹²Mark D. Linville, "Moral Particularism," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 142, says, "A mainstream position in the history of theology has it that God himself – and not God's arbitrary commands – serves as the ultimate criterion."

something added to it, but because the divine being . . . is perfect in itself. The goodness of God, therefore, is not something added to his substance; his substance is his goodness.”¹³ This robust account of moral justification fails to obtain in a Darwinism divorced from the existence of a good, personal God. Theistic opponents assert that arguments for God’s existence cannot describe the full set of attributes of such a God, and their argument deserves careful response; however, “the moral argument does not purport to show that the ultimate standard of goodness is necessarily all-powerful and all-wise, but it is sufficient to render us morally accountable to a personal Being in whose image we have been made.”¹⁴

The Imago Dei

Origins matter; Ruse understands that origins deeply impact moral proposals. Christians believe that God created all humans and placed his image within them; this belief supplies a deep place for human dignity and distinguishes humans as the crown jewel of creation, distinct and different from the rest of the created order. Humans know the moral law because God has placed it in their hearts; they may rebel against it, but all persons know morality through the *imago dei*. Ruse rejects this origin and formulates a contradictory one with far-reaching implications for his moral proposal. “Above all, dealing with creationists had convinced me that it simply and absolutely has to matter that we humans are the end-products of a long, slow process of evolution rather than the creation, in His image, of a Good God, on the Sixth Day.”¹⁵ Ruse recognizes that these divergent theories of humanity’s origins render radically different accounts of our moral

¹³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 8.2-3, trans. Anton Pegis (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1: 153. Also Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xvi, disagrees saying, “After all, a very bad God could create the world, perform miracles, and appear to us . . . none of the standard arguments for the existence of God suggests, much less demonstrates, that morality depends on God or religion.”

¹⁴Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 201-02.

¹⁵Michael Ruse, “From Belief to Unbelief – And Halfway Back,” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 28.

awareness; whether we are the result of blind, purposeless chance or God's creation shapes the origin, foundation, and explanation of morality.

The argument offered throughout the dissertation is that Ruse's moral proposal, while Darwinian, is ultimately inferior to Christianity's doctrine of the *imago dei*. The moral impulse in persons is better explained by theism wherein humans are created in the image of a good God rather than Darwinism's depiction of morality as an adaptation. Theism's robust account of morality finds its foundation in the ontologically good character of God, not in an illusion foisted upon us by natural selection.

He created the world and imposed upon human persons an objective moral law grounded in his own good nature, along with the intrinsic goodness and properly functioning natures of the things he created . . . he gave all human persons his own image which serves as the ontological ground for high, equal human value and rights simply as such.¹⁶

Ruse stretches his Darwinian worldview to its limits by retaining a sense of objectivity while vanquishing the reality of it. His objective morality is nothing more than an illusion stemming from natural selection, forcing humans to cooperate for self-benefit. As Ruse concedes, "If we take evolution seriously, then in ethics – as elsewhere in the organic world – we should not expect everything to work perfectly. We should be thankful that it works at all."¹⁷ The reader is free to judge which worldview proposal produces a more robust account of morality.

¹⁶J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 143. Also Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 26, says, "The great moral advancement of religion comes from putting forth an ethical code that is rooted in an Absolute. God is understood as eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and infinitely good. That is not a coincidence: When we conceive of Absolute Value, goodness is an integral and inherent part of that conception. Thus, participating in the world of an infinitely loving God always implies a moral relationship between man and God and, by extension, man and man." Also J. Budziszewski, "Accept No Limitations: The Rivalry of Naturalism and Natural Law," in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 99, says, "If God himself is the Good – the uncreated source of all being, all meaning, and all value in created things – then inasmuch as his intentions are reflected in our own design, in human nature, these intentions are normative for us." However Kai Nielsen, *God and the Grounding of Morality* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991), 210 disagrees saying, "God or no God, some actions can be appreciated to be desirable and some as through and through evil and despicable." One wonders if he confuses moral epistemology here with moral ontology.

¹⁷Michael Ruse, "The Morality of the Gene," *Monist* 67 (1984): 195-96.

Ruse acknowledges general agreement on the tenets of substantive morality,¹⁸ but he argues that the reason stems from our shared human nature through the epigenetic rules. The dissertation notes objections to both the existence and power of the epigenetic rules; however, Ruse's rules seem to resemble a "substitute" *imago dei*, divorced from the dei. An *imago epigenetic rules* has power to affect commonality in all humans. Ruse describes natural selection as a "substitute" designer; here he allows a substitute *imago*. Ruse describes our shared human nature as contingent upon the epigenetic rules and not some outside force; nevertheless, the ontological grounding from a good God provides a more robust explanation. The *imago dei* reflects God acting interpersonally with his human creation, and this personhood provides a rich foundation for morality. "Theism is committed to the view that a particular Person is both metaphysically and axiologically ultimate. This, I believe, is where a coherent theistic ethic must begin."¹⁹ This aspect of personhood must not be overlooked; Darwinism, natural selection, and epigenetic rules are fully impersonal and cannot explain the deep relationality inherent in human nature:

As image-bearers, human beings have all those endowments necessary to represent and be representative of God, and to accomplish the tasks and exhibit the relationality placed before them: endowments of reason, self-determination, moral action, personality and relational formation, and so on. In this sense, the image of God is straightforwardly rooted in God's nature, or *ontological*.²⁰

The image of God residing in each person, Christian, atheist, and Darwinian,

¹⁸Ruse, "Can a Darwinian be a Christian? Sociobiological Issues," 309, says, "Philosophers like to isolate one or a few unique all-encompassing moral principles—like the categorical imperative—and then defend their choices against those of others, devising strange examples that favor one side or the other. There is no real harm in doing this sort of thing. After all, it is our job. But it should not blind us to the fact that although most people are not moral philosophers with a clearly articulated system, they do fairly well nevertheless, and that all moralities which have stood the test of time (thus excluding perversions like Nazi morality) concur on the basics."

¹⁹Linville, "Moral Particularism," 158.

²⁰J. P. Moreland, "The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism," in *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 33. Also Copan, "The Moral Argument," 157, agrees saying, "The reason human persons exist is because a personal God exists, in whose image we have been made. The instantiation of moral properties is internally related to (or bound up with) personhood, and if no persons existed, then no moral properties would be instantiated."

illustrates how all persons reflect common moral awareness. Persons need not profess Christianity to lead morally praiseworthy lives; they do so due to the image of God within them. Ontology takes primacy over epistemology or, “we might say that, while God is metaphysically prior to morality, our moral concepts are epistemically prior to the concept of God.”²¹ Thus, one understands how Ruse and other Darwinians who evidence no faith in God can live moral and charitable lives; ontologically they are created in God’s image for this purpose. People share common moral beliefs, regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof, because of a common ontology. Both origins and metaphysics matter. Theism accounts for the epistemological awareness of morality throughout humanity through the *imago dei*; Darwinians find a greater obstacle in explaining our moral notions.

Ontologically, however, a nontheistic metaphysic (that is, the *actual ground* or *basis* that makes moral knowledge possible) is inadequate: Why think impersonal/physical, valueless processes will produce valuable, rights-bearing persons? . . . The more plausible metaphysical context for grounding human rights and dignity is this: we have been *created* with a *moral constitution* by a supremely valuable being, and we are “hard-wired” to function properly by living moral, deeply relational lives. So if humans have intrinsic, rather than instrumental (or no) value, the deeper, more natural context offering a smoother transition is a personal, supremely valuable God as the source of goodness and creator of morally responsible agents.²²

The image of God represents an indispensable Christian doctrine in terms of

²¹Linville, “Moral Particularism,” 151. Also Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 221, says, “Atheists don’t need the Bible to recognize basic objective moral values. They have been created or constituted to be able to recognize them – even if they disbelieve. All humans are hard-wired the same way: they are made to function properly when living morally. This moral awareness is part of God’s general self-revelation. We see something of God in the moral order of the universe.” Also C. Stephen Evans, “Is There a Basis for Loving All People?” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 34 (2006): 84-85, says, “I want to clarify that the issue concerns the ontological foundation of moral obligations, not whether and how they can be known. I am not arguing that someone who is nonreligious cannot be aware of moral obligations or reasonably believe in their validity. The view that moral obligations are in fact divine commands does not imply that one must believe in God to be aware of moral obligations. Rather, if moral obligations are divine commands, then people who do not believe in God fail to know something important about the nature of moral obligations, but they can still be aware of their reality.”

²²Paul Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath & Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 146.

moral grounding and human dignity. Objective values, which even on Ruse's proposal at least seem to be part of the human experience, flow directly from God as the ontological foundation of morality to humans created in his image. This proposal entails that apart from the existence of God, morality is impossible (though the caveat remains that moral knowledge is possible apart from belief in God due to the *imago dei*).²³ Any description of a valueless process like evolution producing value seems contrived, but Christian theism depicts a maximally valuable Being from whom value flows into human beings.²⁴ This description of morality is robust, ontologically grounded, and direct. Even Ruse seems to recognize the legitimacy of such an argument *if* God exists:

I am all for the Nicene Creed. I am a very conservative nonbeliever. My nonexistent god is all-powerful and all-loving and I just do not buy into process philosophical claims that God is one of the chaps, trying along with the rest of us to get evolution (and the world generally) to desired ends. Whatever he may be, the God of Christianity is not a social worker: "No, no. I can't tell you what to do. All I can do is help you to tell yourself what you should do." So for these sorts of reasons, I say that the attempts at integration that I have seen are altogether too wishy-washy, both scientifically and theologically.²⁵

The moral argument and the image of God supply the common moral prescriptions which Ruse agrees humans share; they provide the reason why humans view acts as objectively morally good or evil. Ruse recognizes that some acts are inherently immoral, and any theory depicting them as moral should be rejected outright:

²³Nielsen, *God and the Grounding of Morality*, 218-19, though, disagrees saying that the burden of proof is on the theist to prove that morality is impossible apart from God. However, Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 44, says, "Science by itself cannot lead to a moral culture. Science has no moral valence. Right and wrong do not come from physics or chemistry or biology. It requires the intervention of ethical institutions, mainly religion."

²⁴Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 401-02, say, "Most Christian theists have advocated some form of ethical nonnaturalism since they hold that God himself has certain morally relevant value properties (goodness, holiness and so forth), that persons made in his image have worth and dignity (as he does) and that some acts have the property of moral rightness." Also Copan, "The Moral Argument" 154, similarly replies, "The same applies to objective moral values, which flow readily from a supremely valuable Being to us as his valuable creatures. Such a smooth transition does not appear in the move from mindless, valueless, naturalistic evolutionary processes to – *voila* – objective moral values and human dignity."

²⁵Ruse, "Making Room for Faith in an Age of Science," 666.

“If a moral system simply comes out wrong, right down the line – asking you to rape little girls, stamp on babies, and blackmail your friends – this is surely the best of all possible reasons for rejecting it.”²⁶ Ruse bases this right rejection on the shaky foundation of a shared human nature resulting from the epigenetic rules and the illusion of objectivity; a more solid foundation is the *imago dei*. Ruse, at least, describes horrific acts as immoral; another proposal suggests that acts like cannibalism, incest between consenting sibling adults, and necrophilia, may only strike people as immoral: “But maybe this is just because these acts are disgusting and inadvisable, rather than immoral. . . . I am not certain. Are you? How can you be sure?”²⁷ Humans are epistemically sure that such acts are clearly immoral through the *imago dei* based on ontological grounds in a good God.

What seems impossible to escape is a common recognition by people everywhere that actions are objectively moral or immoral, even apart from knowing why they are obviously so. Copan argues that the *imago dei* equips all humans with an innate “yuck factor” wherein they immediately recognize the inherent wrongness of moral acts.

Likewise, despite flawed moral judgments, there still are certain moral truths that we can’t *not* know – unless we suppress our conscience or engage in self-deception. We possess an in-built “yuck factor” – basic moral intuitions about the wrongness of torturing babies for fun, of raping, murdering, or abusing children. We can also recognize the virtue of kindness or selflessness, the obligation to treat others as we would want to be treated, and the moral difference between Mother Teresa and Josef Stalin.²⁸

The phrase “yuck factor” is as appropriate as it is inelegant. Darwinians evidence this yuck factor with a proper disgust toward immoral acts, yet their system makes grounding such judgments difficult, especially if they reject objective morality. Ruse rightly believes certain acts are morally wrong and disgusting; however, a Darwinian system

²⁶Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 76.

²⁷Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* 86.

²⁸Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 142-43.

fails to lead directly to such judgments due to lack of ontological grounds.²⁹ Ruse denies objectivity and embraces subjectivity; in doing so he rejects metaphysical reality. He believes this results in a “common sense” morality wherein “if anything is common sense, it is that rape is simply, totally, wrong.”³⁰ Ruse is certainly right that common sense tells us that rape is absolutely wrong; the problem obtains in arriving at this verdict after rejecting objectivity. His ethical judgment here is certainly accurate; nevertheless, a moral proposal vanquishing objective morality fails to account for this properly basic notion. Christian theism claims this belief is basic due to robust grounding in God’s character and infused in humans through the image of God.³¹ Persons share a common moral understanding, regardless of worldview, through the *imago dei*. Darwinians and theists often agree over substantive ethical prescriptions; the debate occurs over which

²⁹Linville, “A Moral Particularism Response,” 94-95, says, “Like Professor Ruse, I find certain of my moral beliefs to be irresistible. I too believe that killing is ‘absolutely, objectively wrong.’ Unlike Professor Ruse, I need not suppose a great divorce between my humanity and my philosophy when it comes to such beliefs. As a theist I believe that human persons have been fashioned in the image of God, and their moral faculties have been designed for the purpose of discerning moral truth. This is one difference that theism makes.” Although Wes Morriston, “God and the Ontological Foundation of Morality,” *Religious Studies* 48 (2012): 29, disagrees, saying that these characteristics are good just because: “Why are love and justice and generosity and kindness and faithfulness good? What is there in the depths of reality to *make* them good? My own preferred answer is: *Nothing further*. If you like, you may say that they are the ultimate standard of goodness. What makes *them* the standard? *Nothing further*. Possessing these characteristics just is good-making. *Full stop*.”

³⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 269.

³¹Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 151, says, “Many of our moral beliefs are *properly basic*. That is, they are properly grounded in certain appropriate circumstances. For example, we are properly *appalled* at a man’s adultery with his personal assistant and his abandoning his wife and children; there is no need to explain away our shock and horror at such actions. Even if it is impossible to prove in some scientific/positivistic fashion (a position which itself cannot be proven scientifically) that moral values exist, we probably find ourselves far more certain of the wrongness of such actions than we may be of the truth of Einstein’s relativity theories of the universe’s expansion.” Also Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 401 say that ethical nonnaturalism is “the only view we have considered that holds that irreducible moral facts and properties really exist as part of the furniture of the universe.” Also Linville, “Moral Particularism,” 146, says, “I am unaware of any premises more certainly known than the proposition *Recreational baby-stomping is wrong*. I find that I believe it as soon as I entertain it, and so I believe it as basic. Nevertheless, I think the belief is warranted, and it is a belief shared by all persons who entertain it and whose relevant faculties are functioning properly. And the point is relevant to our discussion for two reasons. First, we’ve no reason to suppose that a lack of theistic belief entails a lack of properly functioning moral faculties. Second, it may nevertheless be true that the theist is in a better position than is, say, the naturalist to explain how the human species may have come to possess faculties that are reliable indicators of moral truth.”

worldview better grounds this common moral experience.

Nonetheless, it is still a question worth pursuing why most cultures forbid the murder of their members, have taboos against incest, disapprove of lying for one's own benefit at another's expense etc. If moral objectivism is true, then this commonality is not a problem, provided some plausible account of how we come to know moral truths is available.³²

The key term above is “plausible,” and no account seems more plausible for the instantiation of moral truths than a personal God who instills such values in humans. The Darwinian proposal of value arising from a process devoid of value seems implausible.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

The Darwinian attack on the moral argument most fully resides in the Euthyphro Dilemma, proposed through Socrates in Plato's writings: “Is that which is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?” The first horn of the dilemma critiques Divine Command Theory and asserts that God may declare arbitrary commands. Opponents argue that God could produce moral prescriptions the complete opposite of what humans now possess.³³ The second horn of the dilemma makes God depend on an independent source for moral prescriptions. If this case obtains, then God is unnecessary for objective morality as it rests in this external standard.³⁴

³²Peter G. Woolcock, “Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics: A Critique,” *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 431.

³³Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 19, asserts, “Hence, our obligation as practicing, believing Christians is to follow God's will—blindly, if necessary. . . . In company with many Christians, I feel uncomfortable with a god who demands of us (what our nature leads us to regard as) the morally perverse.” Also Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* 75-76, says, “On that divine command theory, moral wrongness is not objective in the stronger sense. . . . Its wrongness does, after all, depend on what one person – namely God – thinks, will, or commands.” Also Peter Singer and Marc Hauser, “Why Morality Doesn't Need Religion,” in *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists*, ed. Russell Blackford and Udo Schuklenk (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 289, say, “God seems to be an arbitrary tyrant.” Although Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 128-29, argues that in the tradition of Augustine and Aquinas, God is limited by what is logically possible as well as his own omnibenevolent divine nature. Thus God could not command as good such injustices like that of the Nazis.

³⁴David Wisdo, “Michael Ruse's View of Faith and Science,” *Zygon* 46 (2011): 643-44, briefly sketches the problems that entail with Divine Command Theory. The first part of the Euthyphro Dilemma where opponents say that God could will that rape be obligatory shows God's commands could be

Opponents conclude that either horn of the dilemma fatally damages the theistic argument. Ruse offers a trite reply to Christian metaethics finding justification in God's will. "And why should we do that which God wants? Well, ultimately because that is what God wants us to do: end of argument! Ours is not to reason why."³⁵

Opponents regularly trot out the Euthyphro Dilemma when it is suggested that objective morality stems from God, and the moral argument invariably engenders the Euthyphro response. Is it as powerful as opponents believe? For the argument to produce the weight opponents desire, one must accept the premise that all goodness is ultimately located in God's commands. However, God's commands are penultimate, and moral goodness resides in his character, person, and nature. While God's commands are vital, they are not arbitrary when God's nature serves as the ultimate criterion for goodness.

I believe that the ultimate resolution to this dilemma is that God's good *character/nature* sufficiently grounds objective morality; thus we need to look nowhere else for such a standard. We have been made in the divine image, without which we would neither (a) be moral beings nor (b) have the capacity to recognize objective moral values. The ultimate solution to the Euthyphro dilemma focuses on the *nature* or *character* of God as the source of objective moral values. Thus, we (who have been made to resemble God in certain ways) have the capacity to recognize them, and thus his commands – far from being arbitrary – are in accordance with that nature.³⁶

malevolent. However, if God wills an action because it is right there must necessarily exist an independent moral standard apart from God, essentially making God useless. Also Michael Ruse, "Naturalist Moral Nonrealism," in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 71-72, says, "Christians have reason to tread very carefully when they appeal to God to justify morality (that is to say, to justify substantive morality). There is the well-known Euthyphro problem." Also Nielsen, *God and the Grounding of Morality*, 214 responds to the second part of the Dilemma and says, "the criterion of goodness remains *independent* of God."

³⁵Ruse, "Can a Darwinian Be a Christian? Ethical Issues," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 295-96.

³⁶Copan, "The Moral Argument," 165-66. Also Linville, "Moral Particularism," 150, says, "On such a view, we may think of God's commands, which are constitutive of moral obligation for us, as issuing from God's essential goodness. The commands are thus anything but arbitrary, and God's moral authority in issuing them is grounded in the essential goodness of his character. That moral goodness, in turn, supervenes upon certain of God's essential characteristics, such as justice, mercy, and love." Also Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 133, says, "God neither creates nor conforms to the standards of value; He is the standard." Also Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Objective Morality and Perfect Being Theology: Three Views," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 29 (2008): 205, says, "I will be advancing the view that this 'dilemma' is actually a tri-lemma (hence the scare quotes) and that to realize this is to make progress in philosophy of religion."

Grounding moral values in God's very nature avoids charges of arbitrariness and escapes the claim that God is superfluous; instead God is crucial for the existence of moral values. While this analysis is by no means exhaustive, much of the threat of Euthyphro is alleviated. "For all their huffing and puffing, naturalistic moral realists are mistaken about the 'threat' that the Euthyphro dilemma poses for God's being the ground of objective moral values."³⁷

The moral argument provides a superior explanation for morality than any Darwinian proposal. Ruse remains fully Darwinian, but his theory necessarily lacks many of the strengths that theism possesses. Locating morality in the character of an omnibenevolent God provides a powerful ground for morality, and the *imago dei* produces a direct and potent explanation for human moral awareness and agreement.

Recalcitrant Problems for Ruse's Proposal

The conclusion of this chapter depicts some recalcitrant facts of human experience that prove major obstacles to Ruse's proposal but demonstrate major strengths of theism's worldview through its doctrine of the image of God.³⁸

Altruism

The previous chapter described Ruse's problem of grounding genuine altruism, and this section briefly illustrates theism's superior ability to do so. Persons may exhibit altruism toward one another, but a Rusean scheme delivers no compelling reason why

³⁷Copan, "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality," 160. Also Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 11, says, "God neither obeys the moral order, nor does He invent it. He is Goodness Itself, and all else that is good is good in imitation of God's nature."

³⁸The "recalcitrant" term is employed here in the sense that J. P. Moreland used it in, "The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism," 33, where he says, "A theory may explain some facts quite nicely, but there are recalcitrant facts that doggedly resist explanation by a theory. No matter what a theory's advocate does, the recalcitrant fact just sits there and is not easily incorporated into the theory. In this case, the recalcitrant fact provides falsifying evidence for the theory and some degree of confirmation for its rivals."

one ought to do so apart from self-benefit. If no objective moral order exists, those aware of the illusion have no reason “to be benevolent rather than take advantage of the ‘vulgar’ herd of fools and suckers.”³⁹ The verdict of the preceding chapter expressed that Ruse’s scheme produces only pseudo-altruism. Indeed, Ruse admits that evolutionary ethics are geared toward survival and reproduction and present no smooth path to altruism:

In ethics we are not dealing with the relationship between humans and the outside world, which presumably is the case in science. We are dealing with the relationship between humans and humans, as humans. That is, we are dealing with competitors in the genetic sweepstakes. However, accepting evolutionary theory as true, we see that our ethical beliefs are no more than things which help in the struggle to survive and reproduce.⁴⁰

His thesis does not directly lead to altruism. Another means of responding to altruism on a Darwinian scheme is to suggest that genuine altruism is such a limited practice that it must be a variation stemming from natural selection.⁴¹ However, the previous chapter demonstrated that altruism was a widespread practice, and, further, that altruism was consistently judged as morally praiseworthy. Surely a more plausible thesis exists for the universality and goodness of altruism. Another proposal suggests that high costs in the community limits cheating the system for selfish gain and increases altruistic actions. The Pitcairn community is presented for illustration wherein reputational costs are so great in the community that if a person stole merchandise and attempted to resell it, nobody

³⁹Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 213.

⁴⁰Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 191. Also Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239, proffers, “There is plenty of warring and competitiveness in nature, certainly, but natural selection can also produce cooperation and altruism among organisms. Thus such tendencies do not necessarily go against nature. Natural selection is ruthless, but not all its products are.” The question is, based on a Darwinian scheme, why not?

⁴¹James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 157-58, utilizes this position, saying, “It is also important to remember that we are only trying to account for a limited phenomenon. If we start with the assumption that humans exhibit a kind of grand, Sermon-on-the-Mount altruism, and we then assume we are trying to explain *that*, then Darwin’s suggestion might seem altogether too feeble. But we should be careful not to overstate the extent of non-kin altruistic behavior. . . . Truly disinterested, generalized saintliness might exist in a few people, but it is so rare that it may be regarded, in the naturalist’s terms, as a mere ‘variation’ – and whether it is something that *could* spread to the population as a whole might well be doubted.”

would buy it. This reality may lead to the conclusion that altruistic acts lead to a better reputation in the community, thereby increasing one's reproductive opportunities. While this conclusion may be desired, the author concedes that the community "organized itself according to Christian principles . . . and it has survived for some two centuries without any formal policing."⁴² The evidence points to theism.

The more plausible thesis for altruism stems directly from the omnibenevolent nature of God and the *imago dei* within each person. Altruism presents no paradox for Christianity where goodness is rooted in the very nature of God, and mankind's altruism stems from God's sacrificial giving nature.⁴³ Upon a Darwinian scheme, human behavior arises from natural selection geared toward survival and reproduction, and radical love is an aberration. However, in Christianity, humanity was designed for loving interaction, and radical altruism is native to this worldview.⁴⁴ A religious motivation for the highest of human moral acts is historically common.

There is no doubt that numerous entirely secular individuals have achieved high levels of other-regard. . . . Yet history is also filled with the accomplishments of those who perceived a relationship with a Supreme Being or Divine Love and who interpreted their altruism as a direct consequence. . . . We do not suggest that altruistic love in its embrace of all humanity absolutely requires a spiritual and religious foundation; yet we cannot ignore the narrative of human history and experience indicating that this formation is quite often present, even in modernity.⁴⁵

⁴²Nigel Barber, *Kindness in a Cruel World: The Evolution of Altruism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 143.

⁴³Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, 143, says, "He created the world and imposed upon human persons an objective moral law grounded in his own good nature, along with the intrinsic goodness and properly functioning natures of the things he created. . . . He gave all human persons his own image which serves as the ontological ground for high, equal human value and rights simply as such."

⁴⁴Jeffrey P. Schloss, "Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design," in *Mere Creation: Science, Faith, & Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 252-53. Also Michael Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach," in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 501, admits, "I take it that a major reason why Christianity was such a raging success was that it did speak to fairly basic feelings that humans had about themselves and their fellow humans."

⁴⁵Stephen G. Post, et. al., "General Introduction," in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

This admission is telling; a religious motivation commonly produces altruistic acts. Again, the caveat remains that one need not possess Christian faith to act altruistically, but altruistic acts stem from the image of God inherent in all humanity. Natural selection simply cannot ground goodness that results in self-sacrificing acts.⁴⁶ The most plausible and direct explanation for the widespread practice of genuine altruism stems from Christianity where other-love is intrinsic to God's nature, the *imago dei*, and the direct teachings of Scripture.

What of accusations that a Christian worldview also lends itself toward egoistic self-interest? A biblical perspective endorses care for one's self; indeed, one cannot love his neighbor as himself without first loving himself. Moreland and Craig argue that the Bible teaches a proper self-concern for humans precisely because they are God's image-bearers; acts such as shunning hell and seeking heaven for one's own best interest reflect care for God's image-bearers. Acts where self-interest is a by-product are distinguished from acts where self-interest is the sole intent. Self-interest may serve as a partial motive for an action, but it does not follow that it serves as the sole reason to justify that action. Ethical egoism holds that our moral duty is purely self-interested, but the Bible shows that self-interest is merely one factor in moral deliberation. Scripture depicts proper self-love in at least two ways. First, whereas the right action in ethical egoism is the one that maximizes one's self interest, Scripture presents right acts of self-interest not primarily in the fact that they are one's own interests, but in that one is a creature of intrinsic value because he is made in God's image. One seeks his own welfare because of what he is, a creature distinct from all other creatures because of the image of

⁴⁶Schloss, "Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism & the Problem of Goodness by Design," 237, says, "It is not just that natural selection is claimed to leave no room for a designer but that the competition inherent in natural selection leaves no room for 'goodness' in the emergence and development of life." Also J. P. Moreland, "Reflections on Meaning in Life without God," in *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 17, says that adherents of naturalism find no basis for why people should perform supererogatory moral acts or why persons act morally even when it goes against their best interests.

God. Darwinism cannot supply high dignity to humans due to naturalistic common descent where each being is the result of blind, valueless processes. Second, as C. S. Lewis argued, some rewards have a natural connection with the acts one does to earn them because they express what God has made us to be by nature. God created humans with a desire for heaven and its rewards so as to bring honor to him.⁴⁷ Ruse rejects the strong form of agape where each person fails to care for self properly, but the correct understanding expresses that there exists legitimate and illegitimate self-love that is balanced by proper love for God. When one properly loves self, selfishness should disappear and proper neighbor love should result. Thus, proper self-love and proper neighbor love do not compete but should complement one another.⁴⁸

Altruism serves as a recalcitrant problem for the Darwinian in that he must receive some type of self-benefit, evidencing only a pseudo-altruism. However, the widespread genuine altruism practiced, even by the Darwinian who dismisses God, results from the creation of humans in God's image. If the Darwinian worldview allows no place for genuine altruism, and if Christianity supplies it for all persons, the truly altruistic Darwinian borrows from the Christian worldview.⁴⁹ If one cannot live out his theory, he should recognize it contains serious flaws and question its veracity.

Truth

A primary recalcitrant problem within the Darwinian worldview is grounding

⁴⁷Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 433-33. Also C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 5-7.

⁴⁸Pope, "Relating Self, Others, and Sacrifice in the Ordering of Love," in *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Stephen G. Post et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173-74.

⁴⁹Dorothy Nelkin, "Less Selfish than Sacred? Genes and the Religious Impulse in Evolutionary Psychology," in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology* (London: RandomHouse, 2000), 30, says, "Geneticists and evolutionary psychologists are borrowing the compelling concepts of one belief system to meet the needs of another, in an effort to attract converts – to convince the public and skeptics from other disciplines of the centrality and power of their ideas."

truth since survival and reproduction, not truth, occupies the central role. Theism more readily grounds truth. Persons require truth in their moral beliefs, judgments, and prescriptions in order to abide by them, and Ruse's scheme assigns no deep place to truth. Recall that Ruse acknowledges that his theory fails to provide a correspondence notion of truth: "One simply has to pull back from a correspondence theory of truth and go with coherence at this point."⁵⁰ Ruse recognizes that this position opens him up to charges of circularity in his reasoning, but he believes it is no vicious circularity. Even if this point were granted, serious problems exist when truth fails to correspond to reality. Ruse cannot evade these problems but must accept them.

Natural selection cares little about truth and knowledge in their own right. It cares only about survival and reproduction. For this reason, selection did not design humans to peer into the ultimate mysteries of the universe. Rather, from what we know of human evolution, we were designed to come down from the trees, move onto the plains, and to become scavengers.⁵¹

Ruse understands that his system as a whole contains no place for a robust theory of truth; however, he also knows that if persons fail to conclude that their moral beliefs are true, then they will fail to follow them: "We simply cannot deny truth in explaining ethics. Even if we say morality is just a response to certain non-moral situations, we are involving truth. Otherwise, what we are saying has no claim on anyone's attention, and we have no explanation at all."⁵² He expounds a paradoxical explanation in that when one's worldview allocates no deep place to truth, truth cannot be easily smuggled into component parts of said worldview. Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Truth does not follow naturally in a system geared toward survival and reproduction. A Darwinian worldview may supply reasons for holding moral beliefs, but

⁵⁰Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 297.

⁵¹Michael Ruse, "Belief in God in a Darwinian Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 350-51.

⁵²Ruse, "The Morality of the Gene," 190.

it is impotent in accounting for the truth status of any of those moral beliefs.⁵³

Ruse further describes his metaethical justification for morality as an illusion, a deception; however, for one to perceive a deception requires an awareness of truth. “To be able to designate something as deception requires some sense of what is true—which Ruse neither claims nor in fact possesses. If underdetermination by the data makes the judgment of what is true impossible, it does the same to judgments of what is deception.”⁵⁴ Ruse embraces skepticism and rejects (genuine) objectivity in epistemology and ethics. Yet, this very objectivity is necessary in order to render it an illusion. Ruse argues that just because our organs have evolved does not mean they are incapable of deceiving us: “Of course one might argue that these organs would not deceive one, but that surely is to assume the whole point! If they are deceiving us, then because we use these very organs to understand them, they will fill us with confidence about their veracity.”⁵⁵ If Ruse is correct, then what prevents our being deceived in all of life, rather than simply over objectivity in morality? Ruse optimistically believes our commonsense notions prevent deception in all areas of life. However, this belief is faith with little empirical proof. Ruse’s deception requires a baseline of truth that is immune to deception that a Darwinian worldview is powerless to deliver. Ruse necessarily concedes that “we cannot prove an ultimate correspondence between our seeing and thinking and absolute reality. . . . At the best, we can have a kind of coherence of our beliefs.”⁵⁶

The “at best” coherence of beliefs that Ruse’s scheme supplies pales in

⁵³Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 161.

⁵⁴Philip Hefner, “Entrusting the Life that has Evolved: A Response to Michael Ruse’s Ruse,” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 73.

⁵⁵Michael Ruse, *Sociobiology: Sense or Nonsense* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 206.

⁵⁶Michael Ruse, “Atheism, Naturalism, and Science: Three in One?” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 238.

comparison to the correspondence notion of truthfulness that theism delivers. If God, who refers to himself as Truth, created humans with an innate desire for and pursuit of truth, then this provides a much more robust grounding of truth than does a system geared toward survival and reproduction. Whereas Ruse's Darwinism apparently entails skepticism at every turn, including truthfulness about our moral beliefs, theism provides an objective basis for truth in God's nature and the *imago dei*.

Which worldview furnishes us with more solid grounding for believing that our beliefs about moral obligations and human dignity are not reducible to our being hardwired to survive and reproduce? If naturalism is true, why think we have moral *obligations*? Rather, our moral beliefs just *are* and *could have been different* (e.g. *rape* could have contributed to survival). To help us beyond brute facts and naturalistic "just so" stories, a theistic world, in which a good, rational Being has made us in his image such that we can have confidence that our belief-producing mechanism is not unreliable, so a theistic worldview inspires confidence that we can *know* moral truths – even if they do not contribute one whit to our survival. Theism gives us no reason to be skeptical about our general capacity to think rationally, about the reliability of our sense perceptions, and about a general capacity to move towards the truth. Naturalism, on the other hand, does not inspire confidence in our belief-forming mechanisms. Naturalistic morality may still be true, but there seems to be no way that we can confidently know it.⁵⁷

The clash of worldviews continues; whereas Darwinism is geared toward reproduction, theism is consumed with truth. Whereas Ruse's coherence theory of truth could only logically lead him to ethical skepticism, Christian theism's solid footing for moral beliefs and prescriptions leads to genuine objectivity in morality. Ruse's Darwinian explanation

⁵⁷Copan, "The Moral Argument," 161. Also Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Poverty of Evolutionary Naturalism," in *Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 73, says, "We have seen that both the evolutionary naturalist and the theist may be found saying that certain of our moral beliefs are by-products of the human constitution: we think as we do largely as a result of our programming. Whether such beliefs are warranted would seem to depend on who or what is responsible for the program. And this calls for some account of the metaphysical underpinnings of those beliefs and the mechanisms responsible for them. Are those mechanisms truth aimed? Are they in good working order? The sort of account available to the evolutionary naturalist ends in moral skepticism. The theist has a more promising story to tell." However, John Collier and Michael Stingl, "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Objectivity of Morality," *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 59, disagree, oddly asserting that naturalism better solves the ways we come to know moral values, "The fundamental problem with non-naturalistic ethics is that if its objectivity is not simply an illusion, then it remains a deep mystery how we might come to have knowledge of moral values, much less be motivated by them to act. Evolutionary ethics provides solutions to such mysteries, but current versions imply that moral principles so derived must be relativistic and arbitrary. Against this implication, we propose that morality is contingent on the general facts governing evolution." This assertion lacks evidence.

for human origins and its “goal” of survival and reproduction can only go so far with truth, precisely the coherence boundary that Ruse allocates instead of correspondence.⁵⁸ Ruse must argue for even coherence, but he realizes this limit to his ethical theory; Darwinism fails to provide a solid foundation for the truth status of moral beliefs.⁵⁹ Theism delivers an account of truthfulness in morality that humans intuitively desire, an assurance that their moral acts and beliefs are objectively true and correspond to reality. God designed human beings in his image equipped with an innate desire for truth in their moral precepts. In fact, one can argue that the very reason Ruse and other Darwinians who reject God but still propose moral theories that they desire for readers to believe is true reveals the image of God within them.⁶⁰ Apart from the *imago dei*, one may question why Ruse, who constructs a moral proposal from the perspective of skepticism, desires for his hypotheses to be accepted as objectively true. Even those who deny the image of

⁵⁸Ruse, “Making Room for Faith in an Age of Science,” 656-57, says, “One thing that I realized, thanks to engaging with the biblical literalists, was that I needed a philosophy of my own, that is to say a secular world view that started with my scientific commitments, in my case my Darwinian commitments. . . . Surely it had to matter that I am the product of a long, slow process of natural selection rather than the creation of a good God on the Sixth Day? So, for the next few years I worked on articulating just such a philosophy, one that starts with the fact that our brains were shaped adaptively by natural selection for the purposes of survival and reproduction, and that this governs what we can know and what we think we should do. . . . Epistemologically, I ended up with a kind of coherence theory—a version of what Hilary Putnam (1981) has called ‘internal realism’—and ethically with a form of moral nonrealism—what John Mackie (1977) called ‘ethical skepticism’ (skepticism about foundations not about morals).” Also Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 154 says, “Indeed, naturalism has the potential to undermine our conviction that rationality and objective moral values exist. If our *beliefs* – moral or epistemic – are survival-enhancing by-products of Darwinistic evolution, why think that we actually *have* dignity, rights, and obligations – or that we are thinking rationally? A theistic worldview, on the other hand, does inspire confidence that we can *know* moral (and rational) truths – even if they do not contribute one with to our survival.”

⁵⁹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 249, says, “Let me state what has been stated many times before. Evolution is not going anywhere. Evolution does not guarantee truth or, in this case, absolute knowledge of right and wrong. Moreover, evolution does not guarantee that our adaptations are going to work perfectly all of the time.”

⁶⁰Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 162, says, “The facts that (a) naturalistic evolutionists . . . can make pronouncements they believe to be true (as distinct from simply helping them to survive) and (b) they believe they have drawn rational and objective conclusions from data they have observed actually indicate that they are living as practical theists. They demonstrate what theists have always maintained – that we live in a rational and knowable universe because God is its designer and we have been made in God’s likeness.”

God seem to function according to it. Truth in our moral beliefs finds solid ground in the objectivity that theism provides as opposed to the skepticism of Ruse's Darwinism.

A "Livable" Worldview

Which worldview better explains the world that humans inhabit and describes a "livable" theory? Recall that Ruse is a proud disciple of Hume, arguing that his philosophy is Hume aided by Darwin. However, Hume's theory was unlivable. No one could rationally function as a skeptic about epistemology and ethics in the real world; at some point he would be forced to live contrary to his worldview. Hume's salvation was backgammon, but his solution was merely a re-entrance into the real world that disputed his impossible-to-live philosophical meanderings.

When one's philosophy is fundamentally unlivable and flies in the face of commonsense or everyday experience, an adjustment in philosophy is needed – not just a game of backgammon. . . . Hume's empiricism leads to reductionism, which means that Hume cannot practice what he preaches. Hume certainly *acts* as though the external world exists, that it is not five minutes old, that other minds exist, that his rational faculties are reliable, and he admits that the philosopher must live as the "vulgar" do if he is to get through life. But in making such a claim, he sides with the theist, who can trust such faculties precisely because human beings are made in the image of a rational and truthful God.⁶¹

Ruse's illusion functions similarly; humans are deceived into believing that their moral attitudes are objectively grounded, but the illusion produces this belief only to force cooperation. Yet, one is so systematically deceived by the illusion that he cannot possibly perceive it as a deception, and, furthermore, even if he could he would still behave as if the moral prescriptions were objective. Ruse knows that living as an "undeceived" skeptic is impossible so he argues that natural selection causes us to incontrovertibly believe in its illusion. Even if persons believe that objective morality is an illusion, few persons genuinely live like it is. Most everyone, including Ruse, lives as if morality is objective whether or not they are aware of any purported illusion.

⁶¹Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," 212.

Evolution does not have a sense of humor. It “knows” that the way to get good results is to have us care about means, but that we must also have an eye to the actual success rate. Hence, we care about both intentions and ends. . . . If we take evolution seriously, then in ethics – as elsewhere in the organic world – we should not expect everything to work perfectly. We should be thankful that it works at all.⁶²

A worldview must present a system that is livable and fits with reality; if one’s worldview fails to do so, at some point persons must necessarily step out of their worldview and borrow from another one in order to live. Recall C. S. Lewis’ statement, “The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can’t both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn’t fit the real universe.”⁶³ Ruse argues for an objectivity that he must necessarily regard as an illusion in his system, but objectivity fits in naturally with the theistic worldview. Theism better grounds three critical criteria for morality than Darwinism; in theism morality is more natural, more unified (systematically consistent), and more basic. Herein a smooth transition occurs from an ultimately valuable Being to humans who bear His image, supplying a more natural ground for morality. Objective morality better coheres with theism in that God created humans for moral behavior. Theism provides a more basic and less contrived account of morality in that God created a universe with goodness and value built-in. Thus, “Theism offers us the more ‘natural’ moral context to move us seamlessly from value to value instead of naturalism’s attempt move from valuelessness to value.”⁶⁴ The worldview of theism supplies a livable theory where humans are created in God’s image for the purpose of acting morally in a universe he created for such a purpose.

The human intuition that morality is objective favors theism over Ruse’s deception of objectivity. In other words, our sense of intuition about the truth-status of

⁶²Ruse, “The Morality of the Gene,” 195-96.

⁶³C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 110.

⁶⁴Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 150. Also Keith E. Yandell, “A Moral Essentialism Response,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 83, says, “But a Rusean can make no appeal to intrinsic or inherent value. . . . Thus for Ruse there is only the groundless *feeling* of obligation without any corresponding reality.”

our moral beliefs more naturally stems from theism's *imago dei* as opposed to Ruse's counterintuitive proposal of illusion. Our moral beliefs are properly basic and perceived directly through intuition apart from philosophical speculation. Thomas Reid argued for a common sense intuition about our moral norms with his principle of credulity. Theism, not Darwinism, provides a framework for such commonsense notions wherein, "in keeping with the principle of credulity, we should accept such commonsense intuitions and work out how objective moral values (or human freedom) harmonize with nature – something for which theism has ample room. The burden of proof is upon the one who would deny these."⁶⁵ Ruse does not deny our commonsense intuitions but locates them in our contingent human nature formed by natural selection through the epigenetic rules where humans are tricked into morality for the purpose of individual benefit. The deception provides a counterintuitive, as well as contrived, proposal for morality. Yet, this commonsense knowledge of intrinsic value and the moral law can only exist in Darwinism in a contrived fashion.⁶⁶

Moral intuition is crucially important and should not be overlooked; indeed, whereas Ruse denies that life has true meaning, the Christian, agnostic, and atheist share a common feeling that life does possess meaning. While Ruse rejects any philosophically defensible notion of meaning in life from Darwinism, he certainly lives as if life is meaningful for he can do no other as a creature made in the image of God. Ruse must live as if life is meaningful, but he cannot ground such meaning: "I am an evolutionary naturalist. I believe that we know what we know because of our biology. Unfortunately—although why express regret about that which is an impossibility?—adaptations for

⁶⁵Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," 217-18.

⁶⁶Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, 150-51, says, "Evolutionary naturalism would seem to predict that human moral agents would not be interested in or preoccupied with the illusory intrinsic rightness or wrongness of intents, motives, virtues/vices, moral rules and moral acts. Rather, those agents should be interested in and preoccupied with the reproductively advantageous consequences of intents, motives, and so forth."

getting out of the jungle do not necessarily guarantee insights into ultimate reality.”⁶⁷ Theism, by contrast, does offer insights into ultimate reality and provides a coherent explanation as to why life ultimately matters. The credulity principle also applies here; our intuition that life ultimately matters should be believed apart from any defeaters.⁶⁸ Ruse believes he possesses defeaters against meaning in life, but he fails to live like it. Again, if one’s worldview is unlivable, he should seek a new one. Our commonsense intuitions about meaning in life and objectivity in morality are not easily overcome. Darwinism fails to account for these deeply-held intuitions, but Christianity’s *imago dei* provides a natural, coherent, and basic foundation to support such beliefs.⁶⁹

Human Dignity

The first chapter described the inherent problem of human dignity for Darwinian morality, but human dignity is an essential attribute of a theistic worldview where persons are created in the image of a good God. Thus, whereas human dignity appears an insurmountable problem for Darwinism, it is an inherent strength of a theistic universe. Humans are the pinnacle of creation and ontologically distinct from the rest of creation; Darwinism presents a naturalistic account of origins from common descent

⁶⁷Michael Ruse, “A Few Last Words-Until the Next Time,” *Zygon* 29 (1994): 78. Also Victor Reppert, “Confronting Naturalism: The Argument from Reason,” in *Contending with Christianity’s Critics: Answering Atheists & Other Objectors*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 29, says, “If there is purpose in the world, it betokens the existence of a mind that has that purpose. So for anyone who denies the ultimacy of the mind, an explanation in terms of purposes requires a further nonpurposive explanation to account for the purpose explanation.”

⁶⁸Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 216-17, says, “As we discussed earlier, the *credulity principle* (we should reasonably believe what is apparent or obvious to us unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary) is appropriate with regard to our *sense* perceptions, our *reasoning* faculty and our *moral* intuitions. They are innocent until proved guilty. Furthermore, if a trustworthy God has created our noetic structure, then we have all the more reason for generally trusting these faculties or capacities rather than constantly doubting their reliability.”

⁶⁹Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” 142, says, “a naturalistic evolutionary account of morality fails to engage our deepest moral intuitions about right and wrong, and it leaves us skeptical about whether we can have confidence about fundamental epistemic and moral convictions. Any confidence would borrow metaphysical capital from a worldview like theism, as humans have been made in the image of a faithful, truthful, and rational Being.”

wherein an ontological difference between organisms is prohibited. Thus, human dignity necessarily disappears from Darwinism or one holds to it, like Ruse, arbitrarily.

Human dignity exists as a powerful apologetic for Christianity and is essential to a theistic universe. God's existence and human dignity constitute a natural fit; Darwinism provides no grounds for human dignity.

So the reason theism makes better sense of human dignity and objective moral values is that morality and personhood are necessarily connected. That is, moral values are rooted in personhood, as persons are intrinsically value-bearing beings. The moral argument points to a personal, good Being to whom we are responsible. Only if God exists can moral properties be realized or instantiated.⁷⁰

Ruse admits that he arbitrarily values human life over that of other organisms, but he also concedes that “we may properly look for suggestive behavior in chimpanzees and gorillas. (The ‘higher’ primates are closer to us. Neither they nor we are higher in some biologically absolute sense.)”⁷¹ He must necessarily take this stance to remain a true Darwinian. However, persons function as if humans are ontologically superior, revealing a basic belief that Ruse's Darwinism simply cannot explain. Ruse proves that human dignity is logically outlawed in his scheme when he says, “If you are prepared to accept a natural explanation of human origins, you just cannot deny that we are animals, and that we share a common origin with the rest of the organic world.”⁷² Theism provides a robust

⁷⁰Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 225. Also Sheiman, *An Atheist Defends Religion*, 43, concedes, “In the end, knowing that morality is an evolutionary adaptation shared with chimpanzees and social insects does not make a person more likely to act with high ethical standards. However, knowing that such morality is handed down by a higher power that loves him does make a believer more inclined to behave morally, and not so much because he will be punished or rewarded, but because he wants to share in that higher power's goodness. The most powerful way to participate in that higher value is by behaving in a way consistent with that goodness.”

⁷¹Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 227.

⁷²Ibid., 108. Also Yandell, “A Moral Essentialism Response,” 84, argues that on Ruse's scheme, “Being good is simply typically acting in accord with a set of propensities that we have evolved to have, and acting in a manner that is good is simply acting in accord with those propensities, which play only a causal and explanatory role. There is no – indeed, cannot be any – appeal to the value of human persons on Ruse's view.” Also Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 217, says, “Calling into question the properly basic belief in human dignity and objective moral values will lead to the kinds of Humean inconsistencies produced by an empiricistic philosophy that meshes poorly with practical living.”

explanation for human dignity; humans are created in the image of a Personal God who created persons distinct and different from the rest of the organic world. Ruse writes books for humans to read on the subjects of human epistemology and human morality, revealing an implicit favor to humans as biologically higher than the chimpanzees and gorillas. One simply encounters difficulty denying what appears so evidentially true: humans are more valuable than other organisms. Christian theism provides the reason in its doctrine of the *imago dei*. Our intrinsic human dignity, value, and worth bespeak the existence of a good God who created us in his image.⁷³ Whereas Darwinism necessarily suppresses human dignity, Christianity provides a robust explanation for human worth through the *imago dei*.

Conclusion

Professor Ruse deserves commendation for proposing a genuinely Darwinian theory of morality; he provides an exhaustive explanation of his position through his many writings. One cannot question his commitment to the Darwinian worldview or his desire to describe epistemology and ethics from this vantage point. He writes skillfully and convincingly, and while his writings engender much critique and controversy, a point in his favor is that his work is certainly not ignored. His career is distinguished both in longevity and production, and the name Michael Ruse will not soon be forgotten in the Darwinian establishment.

While allowing that Ruse is a decorated and distinguished Darwinian, the dissertation attempts to illustrate some fundamental weaknesses in his moral proposal and argues that Christianity provides a much more robust account of morality than Ruse or any Darwinian can provide. The image of God delivers a much more natural infusion of

⁷³Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," 201. Also Linville, "Moral Particularism," 157-58, says, "The value of human persons is found in the fact that, as bearers of the *imago Dei*, they bear a significant resemblance to God in their very personhood. God and human persons share an overlap of kind membership in personhood itself, and human dignity is found precisely in membership of that kind."

values where a good God created humans to reflect such value. Darwinism rests on the theory of naturalistic evolution, and a system of blind, purposeless chance does not naturally produce notions like “good,” “value,” and “worth.” Darwinians rarely deny value, but their system has little means of grounding these apparent goods; theism grounds them in a personal Being who is ultimately valuable.⁷⁴ The image of God serves as a robust explanation for these universal and seemingly incontrovertible ideas; these recalcitrant entities erect a formidable obstacle to the claims of Darwinism: “The Christian then, offers a challenge to other worldviews – particularly scientific naturalism: show that you have a better explanation for these features than Christianity does (with its doctrine of the image of God), or show that these features are not actually real, even though they seem to be.”⁷⁵ Christian theism accounts for the authenticity of objective moral values; whereas Ruse labels them illusory, he still recognizes a collective human feeling that they are genuine. Darwinism fails to provide a straight line to objectivity in that it is fully impersonal, and objective moral values seem to stem from a personal Mind. Christianity provides a direct line for this belief in the doctrine of the *imago dei*.⁷⁶

Ruse’s moral proposal and Christianity’s moral argument ultimately derive from worldview commitments. Christians do not believe that science and faith clash as Darwinians often suppose. In fact, Christians believe that science makes discoveries

⁷⁴Copan, “Hume and the Moral Argument,” 225, says, “If moral values, human dignity and personal responsibility exist, it seems that theism has ample resources to account for these facts (being made in the image of a good, personal God). Without such a personal, good God, there would be no moral values because there would be no persons, in whom value resides.”

⁷⁵Moreland, “The Image of God and the Failure of Scientific Atheism,” 33-34. Also Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 371, says, “The existence of a contingent, ordered cosmos in which life evolves and there is sentience and consciousness, intelligent activity, morality and objective values, and widespread reports of the experience of a divine reality. Does this, as a whole, constitute something that is better accounted for within a theistic or naturalistic framework? If theism is true, one has reason to believe this phenomenon would occur, whereas if naturalism is the case, one does not have an overriding reason to expect such a cosmos – except, as noted earlier, in the sense that given infinite time and opportunity virtually anything might occur.”

⁷⁶Moreland, “Reflections on Meaning in Life without God,” 12-13.

about the world that God created and the design he put in place. Christians do, however, believe that Christianity clashes with science that is solely committed to naturalistic premises and conclusions, arguing that science of this nature fails to follow the evidence where it most naturally leads if that evidence points to a Designer.⁷⁷ Ruse rejects scientism, but he believes that the scientific method illustrates the best way to explore the world, and he is committed to naturalistic explanations within science:

I am not a scientist, but I believe that the proper and most profitable way to explore and understand this wonderful world of ours is the *scientific* one. I am not implying that scientists are better or worse people than the rest of us, but I do think that their methodology is the best one. By “scientific methodology” or “attitude” in this case, I mean a commitment to the idea of the world being law-bound – that is, subject to unbroken regularity – and to the belief that there are no powers, seen or unseen, that interfere with or otherwise make inexplicable the normal workings of material objects.⁷⁸

While Ruse agrees that science is not the only means to human epistemology, differing from many Darwinians who ascribe to scientism, he still does not appear open to explanations from a Christian worldview where God actively sustains the created order.⁷⁹ Where Darwinism fails to consider supernatural explanations, it fails to be fully scientific in that this option is barred from the outset. This reality reveals prior commitments, worldview presuppositions, and even faith.

⁷⁷Alvin Plantinga, “Methodological Naturalism,” in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 340 says, “It would be excessively naïve to think that contemporary science is religiously and theologically neutral. . . . Perhaps *parts* of science are like that: the size and shape of the earth and its distance from the sun, the periodic table of elements, the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem – these are all in a sensible sense religiously neutral. But many other areas of science are very different; they are obviously and deeply involved in this clash between opposed worldviews.”

⁷⁸Michael Ruse, “Darwinism: Philosophical Preference, Scientific Inference, and Good Research Strategy,” in *Darwinism: Science or Philosophy?* ed. Jon Buell and Virginia Hearn (Richardson, TX: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 1994), 21.

⁷⁹Plantinga, “Methodological Naturalism,” 358, argues that humans should use all their knowledge in pursuing science, including what is known about God and his creation. This strategy is ruled out of bounds according to methodological naturalists who proclaim it should thus be rejected. Also Nancy R. Pearcey, “Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears: Evolution as a Total Worldview,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 54, says, “The case thus appears to be closed from the outset: No matter where the evidence points, science is permitted to consider only naturalistic theories.”

Scientists committed to philosophical naturalism do not claim to have found the precise answer to every problem, but they characteristically insist that they have the important problems sufficiently well enough in hand that they can narrow the field of possibilities to a set of naturalistic alternatives. Absent that insistence, they would have to concede that their commitment to naturalism is based upon faith rather than proof.⁸⁰

Whereas Darwinians often disregard Christian proposals outright because of their faith commitments, such commitments are no less true of Darwinians. All humans possess basic worldview presuppositions, and these basic beliefs are untestable; Darwinism is often committed to strictly naturalistic explanations. Christians hold to a supernatural Being who created humans in his image, but this reality does not necessarily lead to a God-of-the-gaps explanation for every problem.⁸¹ The *imago dei* account of human morality is no more “unscientific” than Ruse’s Darwinian proposal; both theories reveal a priori worldview commitments. Morality specifically, but also other factors like consciousness, emergence of life, rationality, and purpose in life, are better explained in a

⁸⁰Phillip E. Johnson, “Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism,” in *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ed. William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 27. Also J. L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 8, says, “I concede that if the requisite theological doctrine could be defended, a kind of objective ethical prescriptivity could be thus introduced. Since I think that theism cannot be defended, I do not regard this as any threat to my argument.” Also Alvin Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible,” in *The Philosophy of Biology*, ed. David L. Hull and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 694–95, argues that the methodological naturalist’s naturalism is also a metaphysical position. The naturalist’s belief is fundamental. The believer in God is able to look at the evidence more freely and follow where it leads; the Darwinian cannot: “The latter accepts the Grand Evolutionary Scheme because from a naturalistic point of view this scheme is the only visible answer to the question *What is the explanation of the presence of all these marvelously multifarious forms of life?* The Christian, on the other hand, knows that creation is the Lord’s; and she isn’t blinkered by a priori dogmas as to how the Lord must have accomplished it. Perhaps it was by broadly evolutionary means, but then again perhaps not. At the moment ‘perhaps not’ seems the better answer.”

⁸¹Plantinga, “Methodological Naturalism,” 350, refutes this idea saying, “God of the gaps theology is worlds apart from serious Christian theism. First and most important, according to serious theism, God is constantly, immediately, intimately, and directly active in his creation: he constantly upholds it in existence and providentially governs it. . . . Second, natural laws are not in any way independent of God, and perhaps best thought of as regularities in the ways in which he treats the stuff he has made, or perhaps as counterfactuals of divine freedom. . . . Indeed, the whole *interventionist* terminology – speaking of god as *intervening* in nature, or *intruding* into it, or *interfering* with it, or *violating* natural law – all this goes with God-of-the-gaps theology, not with serious theism. According to the latter, God is already and always intimately acting in nature, which depends from moment to moment for its existence upon immediate divine activity; there is not and could not be any such thing as his ‘intervening’ in nature.”

theistic world than a Darwinian one because of God's existence.⁸² This personal, intelligent, omnibenevolent Being who created persons in his image offers a robust grounding for morality that a Darwinian theory lacks and, as a result, could be labeled the most scientifically responsible choice for moral grounding.⁸³

Three characteristics of the moral law fit much more naturally into theism than Darwinism: (1) objective, intrinsic value and objective moral law; (2) the reality of human moral action; and (3) intrinsic human value and rights.⁸⁴ These attributes appear alien to Darwinism; Ruse labors to propose a fully Darwinian moral theory, but he cannot supply what is inherently missing within the Darwinian world: human dignity and value and authentically objective moral law. Furthermore, the nature of obligation appears, at least, much diminished when objectivity is illusory instead of genuine. One questions how, upon a person's awareness of a purported illusion, morality maintains any truly obligatory force.⁸⁵ However, the most Ruse's Darwinian illusion can provide is a false

⁸²Copan, "The Moral Argument" 154-55, says, "it seems that God's role as the unifier of the variety of features of the world – the universe's origin and fine-tuning, the emergence of life and of consciousness, the existence of rationality and of morally significant beings – is the superior explanation or grounding when contrasted with a naturalistic alternative (in which numerous, unconnected series of causes and effects bring about these features). God as the background factor serves as the natural unifier. . . . The naturalist must deal with the following hurdles – accounting for the origins of the universe, the fine-tuned nature of the universe making it fit for life, the actual emergence of first life, the emergence of consciousness, the emergence of moral and intrinsically valuable beings, etc. – in a kind of 'that's just the way things worked out' perspective."

⁸³Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 183, provides an interesting discussion along these lines, "Although we must strive to understand science and its triumphs, questions such as that about ultimate origins are simply not attempted by science as we know it. My claim is also – and this is very important – that these questions are genuine questions. Hence, I argue that it is open for others to attempt answers to these questions. However, these must be answers of a different type in some way: nonscientific answers. For this reason, it is not fair to criticize the religious person for not offering a science-like answer. At it happens, the Christian claims to be giving a faith-based answer, one that comes from a different source than the reason and empirical experience (through the senses) that yields science."

⁸⁴Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, 143.

⁸⁵Woolcock, "Ruse's Darwinian Meta-Ethics," 429-30, argues, "In what sense, then, is morality real? Presumably in the sense that there are codes of behaviour that tell us that we are under certain obligations. This is undeniable. Such systems are real enough. The effect of Ruse's point, however, is that we are not really under the obligations that such systems claim we are because there are really no such things as obligations. . . . This defense, then, in no way ameliorates the moral nihilism of a Darwinian

sense that morality is objective, thereby leaving obligation hanging in the balance.⁸⁶ Theism offers a much more robust account of human dignity and values as well as an objective morality capable of retaining its obligatory nature. God as the source of all goodness created a universe in which humans are to believe and behave morally in accord with the *imago dei*. Morality is one issue in a clash of two worldviews that furnish very different, often contradictory, accounts of origins, moral grounds, and purpose in the universe.⁸⁷ Ruse's moral proposal often agrees with Christianity in substantive ethics, but the metaethical grounds reveal divergent commitments. The *imago dei* accounts for Ruse's similar substantive ethics while supplying a much richer and direct metaethical ground for morality. Ruse's Darwinian morality lacks the justification that theism robustly contributes, and theism better accounts for both the sense and reality of objective ethics. The existence of God and the *imago dei* supply a potent explanation for genuine altruism whereas the most Darwinism provides is a pseudo-altruism promoting the ends of individual fitness. While Ruse argues for an exhaustive system of morality based on his Darwinism, even a fully undivided expression of Darwinian morality fails to compare to Christianity's robust explanation where a good God created valuable human beings in his image with innate moral beliefs to act in accord with his good nature.

meta-ethic. Not only is it an illusion that we have obligations to cabbages but it is also an illusion that we have obligations to people." Also Richmond Campbell, "Can Biology Make Ethics Objective?" *Biology and Philosophy* 11 (1996): 24, asserts, "Biology, in particular, the kind of evolutionary story that Ruse and others have sketched, promises to give an objective basis for morals in answer to the question 'Why have any morality at all?' without being able to do the same for the more specific question 'Why have such and such particular morality?'"

⁸⁶Linville, "A Moral Particularism Response," 91, says, "I agree conditionally with Professor Ruse. If we assume the truth of both evolution and Professor Ruse's naturalism, then something close to Professor Ruse's conclusion seems to follow. But I do not share his commitment to naturalism, and, because of this, I think that his skeptical conclusions – and their attending difficulties – are avoidable."

⁸⁷Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 301, assessed, "there are only two extremes, moral Darwinism and Christianity. All attempts at compromise by those in between are only temporary." He says similarly, "Since all compromise by the well-intentioned middle is ephemeral, and neither the pure Epicurean nor the pure Christian can accept compromise, our moral battles must be cosmological battles." Ibid., 316.

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ABSTRACT

THE PROPOSAL FOR DARWINIAN MORALITY OFFERED BY MICHAEL RUSE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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This dissertation describes and critiques the Darwinian proposal for morality constructed by Professor Michael Ruse. Chapter 1 outlines Ruse's background and Darwinian worldview while also depicting some inherent obstacles to the Darwinian worldview.

Chapter 2 describes the moral anti-realism of Professor Ruse and illustrates his position as Hume updated by Darwin. Ruse's ethical skepticism denies genuine objectivity in morality, but he also rejects traditional subjectivism. Ruse describes himself as a subjectivist of a distinct kind.

Chapter 3 examines the central and most controversial tenet of Ruse's moral proposal: the illusion of objectivity. Analysis and critique is offered of Ruse's proposal that objectivity is an illusion foisted upon all humans by natural selection.

Chapter 4 describes how Ruse defines altruism and illustrates the fundamental problem that genuine altruism is for Darwinism. A charge is offered that Darwinism only supports pseudo-altruism and cannot successfully justify the common practice of authentic altruism.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation and offers an argument that the nature of God serves as a far superior foundation for morality than Ruse supplies in his proposal. The doctrine of the *imago dei* provides a robust account of human dignity and morality.

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