A WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS OF SAM HARRIS' PHILOSOPHICAL

NATURALISM IN *THE MORAL LANDSCAPE: HOW*

SCIENCE CAN DETERMINE HUMAN VALUES

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Michael James Blackaby

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APPROVAL SHEET

A WORDLVIEW ANALYSIS OF SAM HARRIS' PHILOSOPHICAL

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Michael James Blackaby

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This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing wife, Sarah, and to our son, Everett. Sarah, thank you for the countless sacrifices and words of encouragement. I could not have done this without you! Everett, thank you for sharing the first two years of your life with this project. You have already made me so proud!

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PREFACE

I owe much of the credit for my education to my father, Richard Blackaby, who encouraged his oldest son, facing high school graduation with trepid bewilderment, to continue his education. At the time, the prospect of going back to school did not entice or excite me. Over several back-and-forth arguments, my father convinced me to enroll in college. Who would have thought this same son would now be placing "Dr." in front of his name? Certainly not me! The influence of a good father is a unique and irreplaceable blessing in this world, and I have been fortunate to receive the best I could imagine in that regard. I must also credit my mother with the many hours of editing she has provided for the countless writing assignments of her three children. She deserves an honorary MA in creative writing, PhD in Christian Aesthetics, and PhD in Apologetics for the amount of editing she has done in all three fields!

Many thanks goes to Dr. Parker, Dr. Cabal, and Dr. Coppenger, for the help they offered during the process of this dissertation. Thank you for pushing me to be better, even when it required significant edits and late nights! Also, thank you Dr. Douglas Groothuis for your helpful insights on my defense draft. Marsha Omanson, your expert use of red ink has made me a stronger writer, and I thank you.

I also think of one particular professor during my seminary studies, Dr. Jeremy Evans, who showed me how interesting Christian Philosophy and Apologetics could be. By taking a philosophical approach to subjects like church history and systematic theology, I suddenly found topics that had once bored me now enthralled me. When he had us read *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, by Christopher Hitchens, it opened my mind to the importance of engaging with ideas I disagreed with,

although much of that engagement was done with clenched fists. This dissertation is largely a result of the interests awakened in me during his Christian Philosophy course.

I also stand in a vast line of thinkers who engaged the world of ideas long before I ever put pen to paper (or, more appropriately, fingers to keyboard). I have often wondered what the intellectual landscape of our day might look like if my heroes C. S. Lewis, Blaise Pascal, and Francis Schaeffer were still among us. They, however, have run their race. They have fought their fight. They have laid the groundwork upon which those of us in the twenty-first century now build. They have passed the torch of engaging our culture for Christ to us. To these three in particular I am thankful, and I am proud to stand with them as a fellow defender of Christian truth.

Finally, it seems as though no project of this kind is possible without the proper working atmosphere and a significant dosage of caffeine to enable thoughtful writing. I must thank Safehouse Coffee Roasters in Griffin, Georgia, for meeting both needs. I'll be waiting for you to install a plaque for me on my table upstairs!

<div align="right">Mike Blackaby</div>

Fayetteville, Georgia

December, 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Facts/Values Distinction

The rise of the so-called "New Atheists" in the past decade has brought a resurgence of sorts among unbelievers. Their criticisms of religion vary, but they are unified in their desire to see beliefs in the supernatural replaced by an epistemology based on reason and science alone.[1] Individuals such as Richard Dawkins[2], Daniel Dennett[3], Sam Harris[4], and the late Christopher Hitchens[5] have delivered a forceful and sustained attack against religion, which they not only see as foolish, but also dangerous. They assert that religion is false and immoral, and preach these views with a passion that could rival even the most flamboyant evangelists. Religion, however, has traditionally provided ethical guidance to countless individuals throughout the centuries. Many of those who have thoroughly rejected religion in the past have conceded that there seems no other credible alternative to grounding meta-ethical foundations for morality if the idea of God

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[1]Paul Kurtz draws a distinction between *transcendental theistic morality* and *humanist morality*. He claims, "There can be an objective and positive humanist basis for ethical conduct. Indeed, the full dimensions of the ethical life can perhaps only be realized when we break the bonds of theistic illusion and move on to a new stage of creative development. An authentic morality relevant to the emerging civilizations of the future can be developed when we cast off the tribal limitations of our ancient past—retaining the best but discarding the inessential and the false—and move ahead to create a genuine appreciation for high ethical values and principles." Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 17.

[2]Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

[3]Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006).

[4]Sam Harris, *End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005); Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

[5]Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2009).

is jettisoned. Nonetheless, for the New Atheists, the time has come for science to reign in place of supernatural revelation, although it is difficult to see how science could speak effectively to every realm of human knowledge, including moral and aesthetic values.[6] This conflict has traditionally put atheist spokespersons in a quandary. If they wish to implore the faithful to reject religion as the basis for morality, how then will they ground moral precepts? What tools are they left with to rebuild the cathedrals of morality they have so passionately torn down? Sam Harris believes the answer lies on the frontiers of neuroscience.

Harris is convinced many of his fellow atheists have mistakenly bought into what has traditionally been called the "facts/values distinction." In this dichotomy, there exist two fundamentally different kinds of facts: those that describe the physical make-up of reality, and those that describe normative actions. Can one move from observations of the first kind of facts to assertions of normative values of the second, without making a category leap? This has led to the belief that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" in any clear way when it comes to morality.[7] Moral facts are different from other kinds of

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[6]Dawkins has previously stated that morality cannot be derived from science. He writes, "The question, 'What is right and what is wrong?' is a genuinely difficult question which science certainly cannot answer. Given a moral premise or a priori moral belief, the important and rigorous discipline of regular moral philosophy can pursue scientific or logical modes of reasoning to point up hidden implications of such beliefs, and hidden inconsistencies between them. But the absolute moral premises themselves must come from elsewhere, presumably from unargued conviction." Richard Dawkins, "You Can't Have It Both Ways: Irreconcilable Differences?", in *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003), 206. Dawkins has since changed his views, largely due to Harris' *The Moral Landscape*.

[7]David Hume is most famous for popularizing this concept. He observes, "I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always 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 surprised 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. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason." David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 469-70. Prominent scientific minds continue to agree with Hume's assessment. Nobel Prize winner Gerald M. Edelman states, "Not all judgment and thought can be reduced to scientific description. A key example is the area of normative judgment seen in ethics and

facts in that they are normative and seem to be binding on human behavior in ways that other facts are not. What makes an action moral or immoral? It will certainly be based on facts of some kind, and yet it is difficult to determine how exactly this connection works. Scientific observation may discover facts about the natural world, but how do these facts then inform how humans are morally accountable for their actions? Can science detect from the natural world how humans *ought* to treat one another? It is one thing to know the scientific facts about the physical structure of a gun and the damage it can do to another human being; it is an entirely different matter when contemplating whether or not to pull the trigger on someone, or to consider *if* and *why* a person is guilty for so doing. In this sense, science is often said to be *de*scriptive while ethics is *pre*scriptive. While science describes facts about the natural world, it has traditionally not been given authority to codify such observations into a system of ethics. This distinction has led to many adopting a version of what Stephen Jay Gould called "nonoverlapping magisteria," in which science deals with the workings of the physical universe, while religion speaks to purpose, values, and ethics.[8] Since religion is often looked to for guidance in matters of human purpose, it also addresses how our behavior must conform in order to fulfill such goals. Indeed, morality seems to be *lawful*, and laws must come from somewhere. Here, religion has traditionally pointed beyond any man-made social contract to a divine

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aesthetics. Hume's argument still holds: 'ought' does not derive in any straightforward way from 'is.'" Gerald M. Edelman, *Second Nature: Brain Science and Human Knowledge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 91. Philosopher of science Karl Popper says, "It is impossible to derive a sentence stating a norm or a decisions or, say, a proposal for a policy from a sentence stating a fact; this is only another way of saying that it is impossible to derive norms or decisions or proposals from facts." Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 65. Further, Samir Okasha simply notes, "Ethics cannot be deduced from science." Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 133.

[8]Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106 (March 1997): 16-22. One issue that Gould faces is his apparent dismissal of religion as merely a metaphorical tool for those who cannot accept the "cold bath" of a cruel naturalistic world. Most religious believers, however, do not hold their beliefs in the way Gould imagines. Indeed, the Bible is filled with propositional statements that are either true or false (such as the physical resurrection of Jesus, or even the existence of spiritual beings which science cannot prove or disprove). Will the statements of fact made by religion and science interact and affect each other? It seems as though they must, as both make truth-claims about the reality we live in. If, as Harris argues, ethical statements are statements of *fact*, then religion and science can be right or wrong in their assessment of such facts. It seems as though overlapping is an inevitable consequence.

authority or Law Giver.

The problem is further complicated if one claims that morality is objective, meaning its truth does not depend on one's acceptance or recognition of it. Objective morality claims certain acts are moral, even if every human on earth believed them to be immoral. The facts/values distinction has led many of those who reject religion to instead adopt a stance of subjectivity towards ethics, proposing what they believe to be an optional ethical system, while admitting it cannot be held with the same confidence that one holds knowledge of scientific facts.[9] In such cases, some might have good reasons for adopting the system of ethics promoted by their society, and yet may choose to opt out when this social contract no longer seems beneficial to them. Moral norms may seem prudent or useful for a time, but they are not *true* in an objectively real sense. For ethical subjectivists, morality is something we create, so it is also something we can change. In fact, morality often *has* changed throughout history and culture, and is apt to change again in the future. In such cases, morality is a social invention, and its authority rests with its inventors.

The Science of Morality

Harris, choosing to break away from the skepticism of many of his fellow atheists in the realm of metaethics, is confident that the facts/values distinction is an illusion. He firmly believes that morality can be both objective and determined through the methods of science. He presented these conclusions in a dissertation completed in

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[9]See J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1979); Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998); Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); and Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Karl Popper, *The Open Society*, 63, claims that nature itself is neither moral nor immoral. Rather, morality is something *we* impose on the natural workings of things. He says, "It is important for the understanding of this attitude to realize that these decisions can never be derived from facts (or from statements of facts), although they pertain to facts. The decision, for instance, to oppose slavery, does not depend upon the fact that all men are born free and equal, and that no man is born in chains. For even if all were born free, some men might perhaps try to put others in chains; and they may even believe that they ought to put them in chains."

2009 entitled, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values."[10]

Harris' work earned him a PhD in neuroscience from UCLA, and he soon after

condensed his thesis into a more popular level book released in 2010, with the modified

title of *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*.[11] The book

quickly became a New York Times Bestseller. It is perhaps not surprising that Harris has

chosen to address this complicated and controversial subject, as he has often sought to

gain ground in areas where religion has traditionally held sway.[12] Although Harris' area

of doctoral study was in neuroscience, he admits that his dissertation contains an unusual

amount of philosophy and cultural commentary, more than is typically found in a

neuroscientific thesis.[13] Harris adamantly argues that the facts/values distinction is an

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[10]Sam Harris, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2009). For a book that came out after Harris' own work, and delves more into the specifics of neuroscience, see Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Observing the fact that scientists have often been hesitant to undertake a scientific understanding of morality, Richard Carrier, *Sense & Goodness without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005), 335, notes, "First, it is the most controversial and ephemeral subject of all those undertaken by the sciences, and thus the most difficult. It is politically and emotionally charged, so bickering and debate and irrational commitment to beloved dogmas have prevented us from seeing the necessary research programme. Cultures also conceal the truth of morality behind customs and traditions, making moral facts difficult to get to . . . . Our science would also have to be a specialization of psychology, which is already one of the youngest of the sciences, so ethicology must necessarily be younger. It depends on psychology getting its act together first, which it only recently started doing." Harris has chosen to look to neuroscience, rather than psychology.

[11]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

[12]See Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), where he seeks a scientific and naturalistic understanding of spirituality. In so doing, *The Moral Landscape* and *Waking Up* are a dual effort in naturalizing perhaps the two most prominent areas over which religion has been authoritative.

[13]Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 8. However, in an early footnote in his book, Harris seems to avoid the inevitable philosophical engagement that comes with the topic he has chosen to address. He states, "Many of my critics fault me for not engaging more directly with the academic literature on moral philosophy. There are two reasons why I haven't done this: First, while I have read a fair amount of this literature, I did not arrive at my position on the relationship between human values and the rest of human knowledge by reading the work of moral philosophers; I came to it by considering the logical implications of our making continued progress in the sciences of the mind. Second, I am convinced that every appearance of terms like 'metaethics,' 'deontology,' 'noncognitivism,' 'antirealism,' 'emotivism,' etc., directly increases the amount of boredom in the universe. My goal, both in speaking at conferences like TED and in writing this book, is to start a conversation that a wider audience can engage with and find helpful." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 197n1. In response to this casual evasion of rigorous philosophical engagement, Massimo Pigliucci, asks, "That's it? The whole of the only field other than religion that has ever dealt with ethics is dismissed because Sam Harris finds it boring? Is that a fact or a value judgment?" Massimo Pigliucci, "Science and the Is/Ought Problem," *Skeptic* 16, no. 3 (June 2011): 60. Pigliucci elsewhere argues that science and philosophy are *both* needed in tandem if either is to be fully successful.

illusion, and drawing from supernatural sources outside of science is not necessary to

determine objective normative ethics. He argues,

> The boundary between science and human values is an illusion. The moment we see
> that values depend upon the wellbeing of conscious creatures like ourselves and that
> our wellbeing is lawfully related both to states of the world and to states of the
> brain, we will see that the questions about values are really questions about facts.[14]

Therefore, there is no need to go outside of science in order to understand morality. He

summarizes his position, stating,

> The divide between facts and values is illusory in at least three senses: (1) whatever
> can be known about maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures—which is, I
> will argue, the only thing we can reasonably value—must at some point translate
> into facts about brains and their interaction with the world at large; (2) the very idea
> of "objective" knowledge (i.e., knowledge acquired through honest observation and
> reasoning) has values built into it, as every effort we make to discuss facts depends
> upon principles that we must first value (e.g., logical consistency, reliance on
> evidence, parsimony, etc.); (3) beliefs about facts and beliefs about values seem to
> arise from similar processes at the level of the brain: it appears that we have a
> common system for judging truth and falsity in both domains.[15]

If the distinction between facts and values is false, then either values themselves do not

exist in any objective sense, or else they can be translated into physical things that can be

studied using the methods of science.

Every system of metaethics will rely on presuppositions at its foundations.

Indeed, this is where the tension of the fact/value distinction reveals itself. It seems as

though "oughts" *are* a certain kind of "is," in that they are factual statements that can be

true or false. For a moral realist, the sentence "One ought not murder innocent people"

contains a true proposition and states a fact about reality. However, how does one

determine whether or not such a statement is *true*? If it is impossible to get *behind* first

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See Massimo Pigliucci, "On the Relationship between Science and Ethics," *Zygon* 38, no. 4 (2003): 871-
94. For an analysis of Harris' goal to speak to a wider audience, see Nathan Johnson, "Conveying
Controversial Science: Sam Harris's *The Moral Landscape* and Popular Science Communication" (PhD
diss., Arizona State University, 2013). One may rightfully be confused as to why Harris believes the
language of neuroscience is more accessible to the lay reader than the language of philosophy.

[14]Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 2.

[15]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11.

principles of reasoning, then one must examine how such presuppositions fit within the whole context of their worldview to see if they provide the best explanation of reality or not. In this sense, many of the issues Harris faces in grounding and explaining his metaethics are common to all worldviews. In fact, radically different worldviews can often share similar ethics, at least in practice. Even core concepts, such as "well-being," find acceptance in religious ethical systems as well as those built on naturalism. The difference comes in *grounding* ethics. As a popular writer on worldviews has correctly noted, "Whatever the disagreements (or agreements) on ethical norms, the *basis* for these norms is radically different."[16] Since every worldview will be built on first principles and basic assumptions, the question is whether or not Harris' presuppositions can support the ethical worldview he constructs upon them, and whether or not his explanation and grounding of such concepts *better* explains morality than the other alternatives. Certain presuppositions become immediately evident in Harris' argument. Perhaps the clearest assumption is his claim that the well-being of conscious creatures *just is* what we speak of when we use moral language. If this is true, then it is accessible to science, since those things that help or hinder our well-being can be reduced down to physical actions and states of the brain. He observes, "Human well-being entirely depends on events in the world and on states of the human brain. Consequently, there must be scientific truths to be known about it."[17] Most everyone accepts that the concept of well-being plays an important role in ethics. That science might better inform us on this subject is also not contentious. However, that well-being is the ultimate goal and grounding for morality is a philosophical presupposition for Harris that must be accepted at the very beginning of his theory. As such, one is moved to ask what exactly Harris means by "well-being" and how

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[16]James W. Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 77.

[17]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11.

well this fits within the rest of his worldview.[18] These questions will be addressed further in chapter 3 of this dissertation. As Harris attempts to objectively determine values, he also admits that values are an inescapable part of the very science used to determine them. He says,

> Science has long been in the values business. Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, scientific validity is not the result of scientists abstaining from making value judgments; rather, scientific validity is the result of scientists making their best effort to *value* principles of reasoning that link their beliefs to reality, through reliable chains of evidence and argument. This is how norms of rational thought are made effective.[19]

If this is so, then does not science itself rely on values, rather than the other way around? This is a big confession for Harris, whose very thesis claims *science* "determines" *values,* rather than values determining science. Yet, it seems that values are an inescapable part of the reasoning process used by science and must be assumed from the beginning. If Harris is going to claim that science can determine human values, then it will be interesting to explore what determines science. It is also important to understand what Harris means by "determines." Does he mean that science is simply the best of *many* ways one can discover or examine the basics of morality? It seems as though there are non-scientific methods that can successfully arrive at the same ethical conclusions without relying on the scientific method. Indeed, science may inform our understanding of ethics in many ways, but metaethics seems to be a philosophical, rather than scientific, exercise. How extreme are the claims Harris makes? Is he suggesting that science is the

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[18]Harris is here getting into territory G. E. Moore identified, known as the "naturalistic fallacy" (in which "goodness" is identified as a specific natural trait) and the "open question argument" (in which what one identifies as "good" can always be questioned as to whether it is indeed good). See George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951) for his famous arguments. Harris does not believe that well-being falls into either of Moore's "traps." See Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 10. William Casebeer is also hopeful that a properly conceived theory can avoid the naturalistic fallacy. He states, "The goal of naturalized ethics is to show that norms are natural, and that they arise from and are justified by purely natural processes. If this can be done, then the naturalistic fallacy is not actually a fallacy (it merely amounts to saying that you don't have a good naturalized ethical theory yet)." William D. Casebeer, "Opinion: Moral Cognition and Its Neural Constituents," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 4, no. 10 (2003): 843, accessed June 2, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nrn1223.

[19]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 144.

only effective way to get to the bottom of moral realities, much like one is forced to use logic to study logic, as the very rules of logic themselves cannot be reduced any further? Science and its presuppositions will be addressed further in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Harris points out that the brain uses similar processes to arrive at the truth of facts and values. The same regions of the brain are active when one considers mathematical truths (2+6+8=16) as when one considers ethical statements such as "It is good to let your children know that you love them."[20] This seems to address the issue *epistemologically*. However, does this answer the *ontological* questions that are raised regarding the fundamental difference between facts and values? Harris' observations indicate that the psychological process of thinking through these issues is similar, but this does mean that both sets of propositions are of the same nature *ontologically.*

Due to the controversial claims he makes and the new territory he seeks to open for science, Harris' work has been widely criticized.[21] Despite his critics, Harris maintains the goal of his book is to ". . . begin a conversation about how moral truth can be understood in the context of science."[22] Indeed, he makes no promises that every ethical issue will be conclusively solved. However, he warns not to confuse "no answers in practice" for "no answers in principle," as there may very well be answers to moral dilemmas that science is not equipped (at the moment) to answer, although answers to these questions *must* exist.[23] Harris displays a clear commitment to moral realism, and

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[20]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 121.

[21]See Pigliucci, "Is/Ought Problem"; Thomas Nagel, "The Facts Fetish," *New Republic* 241, no. 18 (2010): 30-33; Russell Blackford, review of *The Moral Landscape*, by Sam Harris, *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 2 (December 2010): 53-62, accessed August 25, 2016, http://jetpress.org/v21/blackford3.htm; Deepak Chopra, "Beyond Belief: Sam Harris Imagines a 'Moral Landscape,'" October 18, 2010, accessed February 28, 2015, http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/chopra /article/Beyond-belief-Sam-Harris-imagines-a-moral-2461246.php; Craig Hovey, *What Makes Us Moral? Science, Religion, and the Shaping of the Moral Landscape: A Christian Response to Sam Harris* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012); Scott Atran, "Sam Harris' Guide to Nearly Everything," *National Interest* 112 (March/April 2011): 57-68.

[22]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 2.

[23]Ibid., 3. Harris says, "The deeper point is that there simply must be answers to questions of this kind, whether we know them or not" (4).

understandably has little patience for moral relativists who claim that moral truths exist only relative to a specific cultural context, while assuming that their own statements about the issue are true across all such frameworks.[24] According to Harris, moral truths, as facts, should transcend culture and bring unity among all rational people, since well-being is a universal human pursuit, and science is the best tool we have for obtaining objective answers to such questions.[25]

What is the "moral landscape" of which Harris speaks? He observes there is a finite amount of "peaks" and "valleys" that correspond to human well-being that can be traversed between the spectrums of what he calls "The Good Life" and "The Bad Life." He provides an extreme example of what each might look like, relying on the intuitive agreement of his readers that one is good and the other bad. If an individual can conceive of such extremes, and if one believes it possible to move closer or further from such peaks and valleys, then moral progress or regress can be understood. He states, "For my argument about the moral landscape to hold, I think one need only grant two points: 1) some people have better lives than others, and 2) these differences relate, in some lawful and not entirely arbitrary way, to states of the human brain and to states of the world."[26] This distinction, however, assumes that one grants his initial premise that furthering well-being is the goal of morality, in which actions are considered moral if they increase our well-being. The term "better" assumes an understanding of value that can be measured, which seems to be an essential requirement to study something *scientifically*, rather than just making mere stand-alone observations about the world. Harris claims that if actions and attitudes can ultimately be reduced to brain states corresponding to real conditions of the world, then one can use science to study these and arrive at conclusions regarding

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[24]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 45.

[25]He says, "Only a rational understanding of human well-being will allow billions of us to coexist peacefully, converging on the same social, political, economic, and environmental goals." Ibid., 7.

[26]Ibid., 15.

what humans *should* and *shouldn't* do in order to achieve greater well-being for themselves and others. Some actions will be more or less effective at reaching this goal, revealing different routes one might take as they traverse the moral landscape. Indeed, there is likely not *one* answer to every ethical question, but rather different paths available to navigate through the moral terrain, since there may be various ways to achieve the same heights of human flourishing (or, sink to the same depths of human misery).

Harris' Five Philosophical Foundations

Harris' moral theory is built upon the pillars of several philosophical presuppositions, each of which leads him to his final conclusions. No worldview is immune from this, as every philosophy must rely on certain "first principles" at the beginning of the reasoning process. For Harris, the first significant presupposition of his worldview is an unwavering commitment to philosophical naturalism.[27] It is clear from *The Moral Landscape*, as well as his other writings, that Harris is opposed to supernaturalism of any kind. He draws a clear divide between religion and science, and views the two as incompatible, because of this very issue:

> Here is our situation: if the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to supernatural modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous; if the basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the nature of reality, confounded by irrational hopes and fears, and tending to waste precious time and attention—often with tragic results. Is this really a dichotomy about which science can claim to be neutral?[28]

As a naturalist, he is opposed to the suggestion that any other reality beyond what is physical might exist to interfere with the natural order. The reason science must be the

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[27]I use the term "philosophical" rather than "scientific" here to make a distinction between those who may approach the discipline of science as a methodological naturalist, whereas they might approach other realms of human knowledge (such as aesthetics or morality or religion) with a more open mind, relying on other methods such as *a priori* reasoning and properly basic beliefs. Such is not the case with Harris, who is fully committed to naturalism in all areas of human knowledge.

[28]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 25.

tool used to determine morality is because science deals with the natural world, and if

Harris believes that the natural world is all there is, then science is seemingly the only

option. Since every experience and thought we have must ultimately be realized in the

brain, Harris claims, "The primacy of neuroscience and the other sciences of mind on

questions of human experience cannot be denied. Human experience shows every sign of

being determined by, and realized in, states of the human brain.[29] However, although

morality finds its expression within the framework of naturalism, Harris is clear he does

not intend to develop an *evolutionary* account of morality. He notes, "Most of what

constitutes human well-being at this moment escapes any narrow Darwinian calculus.

While the possibilities of human experience must be realized in the brains that evolution

has built for us, our brains were not designed with a view to our ultimate fulfillment."[30]

In this sense, our moral impulses transcend the simple evolutionary calculus of survival

and gene replication while, at the same time, relying on the same structures of the brain

that were developed *by* evolution. In so doing, he seeks to reject two extremes he sees,

with religious ethics based on God on the one side, and evolutionary subjective ethics on

the other.[31] This issue will be addressed further in Chapters Two and Five of this

dissertation.

The second pillar of Harris' worldview is the concept of "well-being," adapted

from Aristotle's *eudemonia*.[32] Well-being is central to Harris' thesis in that it is both the

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[29]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 8.

[30]Ibid., 13.

[31]Ibid., 2.

[32]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Dover Thrift ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications), 1998. Harris is not the first to attempt to construct a form of Aristotelian ethics around modern science of the mind. The other two significant modern works, which he briefly acknowledges, are William D. Casebeer, *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, Connectionism, and Moral Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), and Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Harris claims to identify with a form of Aristotelian *eudemonia*, and yet does not engage with any of the literature on that topic. Indeed, apart from this brief mention of Casebeer and Flanagan, their works are not referenced again in *The Moral Landscape*. Harris admits that his own work differs from these other authors' in that he aims to address the metaethical "knowing that," while Casebeer and Flanagan focus on the practical "knowing how." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 196n9.

beginning observation and the ultimate goal of his ethical theory. He believes achieving

well-being is the pursuit of every system of ethics, whether in this life or the next. What

is well-being? Harris admits the concept resists an easy definition, much like the concept

of health, and says that both will likely remain perpetually open to revision in the future

as progress is made in science.[33] It seems as though our idea of health is somewhat

intuitive, even if a precise definition is not forthcoming.

      To illustrate the moral landscape Harris has in mind, and how it pertains to

well-being, one must consider his contrast between the "The Good Life" and "The Bad

Life." He begins by relying on the intuitive acceptance by his readers that such extremes

are desirable or undesirable, and that we all seek to experience the one and avoid the

other. In each example, Harris provides a picture of physical and emotional misery,

contrasted with its opposite. As such, these theoretical positions provide the metaphor of

a "peak" and a "valley" of well-being on the moral landscape. This, it seems to Harris, is

intuitively obvious. Ethics, then, is the process of travelling between the two in either

direction, achieving greater or lesser well-being in the process. Again, the concept of

health provides his clearest illustration. He says, "The difference between a healthy

person and a dead one is about as clear and consequential a distinction as we ever make

in science. The differences between the heights of human fulfillment and the depths of

human misery are no less clear, even if new frontiers await us in both directions."[34] If

well-being is the only worthy pursuit of conscious creatures, then well-being, in fact, *just

is* what we mean when we speak of "the good" which ethics is designed to seek. On

Harris' naturalistic worldview, it could not mean anything else. He says,

> If we define "good" as that which supports well-being, as I will argue we must, the
> regress initiated by Moore's "open question argument" really does stop. While I
> agree with Moore that it is reasonable to wonder whether maximizing pleasure in

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[33]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11-12.

[34]Ibid., 12.

any given instance is "good," it makes no sense at all to ask whether maximizing well-being is "good." It seems clear that what we are really asking when we wonder whether a certain state of pleasure is "good," is whether it is conductive to, or obstructive of, some deeper form of well-being.[35]

Harris concedes science cannot tell us why we *should* value health. However, once we decide to do so, we can then study and promote it through science. Well-being is even more foundational than health, in that health is merely one of the many facets of our well-being.[36] Just as it is true that there are better and worse ways for people to maximize health, Harris claims the same will be true of well-being, thus creating a hierarchy that one can compare between individuals and cultures, revealing better and worse ways to act.[37] There may also be many different peaks and valleys along the moral landscape, as well-being can be experienced and achieved in a variety of ways. This is not an endorsement of moral relativism, however. Harris is clear that there are certain forms of well-being that people *should* desire, even if, in their limited understanding, they actually desire something else. Such is the case with psychopaths, who seem to desire well-being in ways that are costly to others. Harris believes such people are mistaken about what are truly the peaks of the moral landscape.[38] In the end, Harris thinks it is "indisputable" that

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[35]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 12.

[36]Ibid., 37.

[37]Ibid., 62. Harris also confesses that humanity may not occupy the highest peaks of this moral landscape. If there are beings who are in relation to us as we are in relation to bacteria, then Harris admits that their well-being would trump our own. Ibid., 211n50.

[38]Harris notes that if it could be shown that the same peaks of well-being could be occupied by those who adhere to a completely different set of moral precepts, then this would strike a major blow against his thesis. He is doubtful, however, that such a case could be made. He says, "It is also conceivable that a science of human flourishing could be possible, and yet people could be made equally happy by very different 'moral' impulses. Perhaps there is no connection between being good and feeling good—and, therefore, no connection between moral behavior (as generally conceived) and subjective well-being. In this case, rapists, liars, and thieves would experience the same depth of happiness as the saints. This scenario stands the greatest chance of being true, while still seeming quite far-fetched . . . . It would no longer be an especially 'moral' landscape; rather it would be a continuum of well-being, upon which saints and sinners would occupy equivalent peaks." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 189-90. The issue of psychopaths is a tricky one. It seems obvious that they are missing something in their lives, even if they do not realize it. Their lives are apparently somehow "incomplete" due to their contrary social habits. However, this may not be as obvious as we assume. Peter Singer notes, "Admittedly, a psychopath could use the same argument against us: how can we say that we are truly happy when we have not experienced the excitement and freedom that comes from complete irresponsibility? We cannot enter into the subjective states of psychopathic people, nor they into ours, so the dispute is not easy to resolve." Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 289.

most of what we do with our lives assumes that the greatest pursuit is the "good life" over the "bad life."[39]

The third philosophical pillar of Harris' worldview is his unwavering commitment to strict determinism and a rejection of the concept of free will.[40] This will be discussed further in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Resisting any form of compatibilist alternative, Harris is convinced that the notion of free will is an illusion, and this raises serious issues concerning moral responsibility. However, Harris believes our understanding of the brain leaves us with no other choice but to accept determinism. He explains,

> It means nothing to say that a person would have done otherwise had he chosen to do otherwise, because a person's "choices" merely appear in his mental stream as though sprung from the void . . . . From the perspective of your conscious mind, you are no more responsible for the next thing you think (and therefore *do*) than you are for the fact that you were born into this world.[41]

Free will, then, is simply our way of describing the feeling we experience, which is limited due to our ignorance of the prior causes that led to our current state. In this sense, people are not 'responsible' for their actions as has so often been believed. The only difference between an intentional action and an unintentional one is that the *feeling* of intention arises in a person's consciousness in one case, but not in the other.[42] This should have profound consequences for how society understands moral responsibility and retributive justice.[43] If one tries to go backwards to track the cause-and-effect relationship

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[39]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 16.

[40]Much of Harris' material on free will and determinism appears in *The End of Faith*, 273-74n7, and *The Moral Landscape,* 102-12. It was later collected and expanded on in Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

[41]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 104.

[42]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 106.

[43]Harris explains, "It makes sense to treat a man who enjoys murdering children differently from one who accidently hit and killed a child with his car—because the conscious intentions of the former give us a lot of information about how he is likely to behave in the future. But where intentions themselves come from and what determines their character in every instance, remains perfectly mysterious in subjective terms." Harris, *Free Will*, 13.

to the original starting point, it will ultimately end in mystery. Harris' naturalism prevents him from accepting any idea of a soul or self with the freedom to act other than what has been determined by the various natural processes that have led to the current moment. His determinism seems to be an inevitable conclusion given his philosophical naturalism, as is evident when he states, "In improving ourselves and society, we are working directly with the forces of nature, for there is nothing but nature itself to work with."[44] Indeed, either ". . . our wills are determined by prior causes, and we are not responsible for them, or they are the product of chance, and we are not responsible for them."[45] In this sense, moral actions result in the same way as every other action. The same physical process is at work throughout our bodies all the time, allowing our internal organs to work continually, although these actions do not arise in our consciousness the way our thoughts do. While we may *feel* as though we choose to act in a certain way, at the level of the brain, the cause-and-effect relationship is the same as other physical actions in our bodies of which we remain blissfully unaware. So what are we to do with the notion of moral responsibility? Moral "luck" plays an important part in one's life, and the psychopath that has been born with such a disposition should be pitied as profoundly unlucky.[46] Cases such as retribution, Harris admits, are tricky.[47] Our actions still have consequences that must be dealt with in an appropriate way, but Harris also believes our understanding of determinism should lead us to a greater humility in how we understand the actions of others.[48] For them, as with others, acts of volition merely arise in

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[44]Sam Harris, *Free Will*, 63.

[45]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 273n7. He goes on to say, "In physical terms, every action is clearly reducible to a totality of impersonal events merely propagating their influence: genes are transcribed, neurotransmitters bind to their receptors, muscle fibers contract, and John Doe pulls the trigger of his gun" (274n7).

[46]Harris, *Free Will*, 53.

[47]Ibid., 57.

[48]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 109.

consciousness, and cannot be accurately traced back to a point of origin.[49] Therefore,

Harris argues that judgments of responsibility depend on the overall complexion of one's

mind.[50] Rather than a simple judgment of "Thou shalt not kill; thou killed; therefore, thou

shalt be punished," he believes the issue is much more complicated and requires deeper

study at the level of the brain to understand *why* an individual did what he or she did.

What should be condemned is the *intention* to do harm, taking into account all the

relevant facts leading to such intent. This may result in prison for the condemned, to

safeguard the well-being of possible future victims, as these actions reveal what kind of

person the guilty party is, and what actions they are likely to commit later if allowed to

remain free. Harris says we would build prisons for earthquakes and hurricanes as well, if

we could, as the harm they inflict are also the result of nature running its course, just like

our minds and bodies.[51] Retribution in society, when considered from Harris' worldview

of determinism, becomes a humble undertaking. He states, "Our system of justice should

reflect our understanding that each of us could have been dealt a very different hand in

life. In fact, it seems immoral not to recognize just how much luck is involved in morality

itself."[52] Harris urges our beliefs about moral responsibility to be reconsidered and

understood in light of our mistaken understanding of free will.

  Harris is a naturalist, but he is also a moral realist, which is the fourth pillar of

his naturalistic worldview. He exhibits frustration towards those who adhere to any form

of moral relativism.[53] He defines morality as bringing about the well-being of conscious

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[49]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 274n7.

[50]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 107. Harris gives five separate scenarios in which a woman dies as the result of the events arising in the brain of another individual. Each case, however, requires one to judge differently the moral responsibility of the perpetrator. The scenarios vary from a four-year-old accidently firing his father's gun to a twenty-five-year-old man killing the woman as the result of a large tumor in his brain. In each scenario, the woman still dies at the hand of another. However, the differing details in each case seem to require differing judgments (107).

[51]Ibid., 109.

[52]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 109.

[53]He sees moral relativism as having a damaging effect on substantive cultural discourse, and

creatures, and since well-being can be tracked at the level of the brain, then moral actions are those that result in certain brain states for conscious creatures. For Harris, a naturalistic account of ethics is unifying in that it puts all cultures on the same playing field, rather than referencing any sort of ethereal supernatural realm that cannot be studied objectively through science, or that is only available to the select few to whom God chooses to reveal it. He hopes that science, since its findings about facts are universal, can unite people globally under the same ethical objectives.[54] Harris insists that scientific facts transcend cultural and subjective biases, noting that there is no such thing as "Christian physics" or "Muslim algebra," and such should be the case for a scientific understanding of morality.[55] If moral facts are objectively true, then they will be true for all people across all cultures.

The fifth and final pillar of Harris' worldview is his belief that science and religion are fundamentally opposed in how they seek to determine truth, and one must therefore replace the other. He holds out no hope that the two could ever be reconciled, since the reality religion attempts to uncover cannot exist for a naturalist. There is no middle ground where one can feasibly be a scientist and a religious believer, without compromising one's intellectual honesty. Indeed, it is Harris' goal in writing this book that ethics be removed from the authority of religion and developed into a subject which can be studied through neuroscience.

Thesis

Francis Schaeffer famously put forth the metaphor of a house to illustrate the

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notes, "The categorical distinction between facts and values has opened a sinkhole beneath secular liberalism—leading to moral relativism and masochistic depths of political correctness." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 109.

[54]Harris states, "Only a rational understanding of human well-being will allow billions of us to coexist peacefully, converging on the same social, political, economic, and environmental goals." Ibid., 7.

[55]Ibid., 4.

philosophical system each person has constructed in order to understand their experience of the world. This house, or worldview, is built on the foundation of his or her presuppositions.[56] If Christianity is indeed true, then all non-Christian presuppositions that contradict a biblical understanding about the nature of reality will eventually break down when followed to their logical conclusions. Arguably, Christianity can provide the most adequate explanation for the coherence of the reality we see all around us.[57] Schaeffer saw the purpose of apologetics as putting tension upon the non-Christian's house by "taking the roof off," or, gently pushing them to follow their worldview to its logical conclusions, leading past a "line of despair" in which they see the instability of the house they have built. Sam Harris presents his case for naturalistic ethics, determined by science, from a worldview constructed on the presuppositional foundations of philosophical naturalism. If Schaeffer is right, then Harris must hold internal inconsistencies within his worldview, and when pressure is put on the right places, these tensions will be revealed. Indeed, Schaeffer says, "Push him towards the logic of his position in the area of his own real interests. If he is interested in science, we will push him to the logical conclusion of his position in science."[58] It is my intention to take Schaeffer's method as an approach in this dissertation and apply it to Harris' philosophical naturalism. His worldview is supported by several presuppositions, outlined in the previous section. Each of these, however, reveals weaknesses when one

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[56]The heart of Schaeffer's work is found in his trilogy *The God Who Is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, all in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 1 (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982). For an updated version of Schaeffer's methodology, see Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

[57]Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 125-26, says, "The existence of the God of Christian theism and the conception of his counsel as controlling all things in the universe is the only presupposition which can account for the uniformity of nature which the scientist needs. But the best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is required for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world."

[58]Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 139.

"takes the roof off" and critically evaluates the structural foundations of his worldview. In the end, I will attempt to discover whether or not Harris' philosophical naturalism supports the objective realist account of morality that he claims can only be understood through science.

In chapter 2, I look specifically at the evolutionary account that underlies Harris' naturalism. Harris is a proponent of using reason as the only alternative to faith. However, there are good reasons to believe a naturalistic account of evolution undermines itself, thereby calling our very cognitive ability to reason into question. I survey the arguments levied against an evolutionary understanding of reason and the reliability of our cognitive abilities by C. S. Lewis,[59] Alvin Plantinga,[60] and Thomas Nagel.[61] I conclude that these arguments provide compelling reasons to mistrust Harris' reliance on our reasoning capacities, as his naturalistic worldview leads us to question the epistemological integrity of our cognitive faculties. Since our reasoning capacities *do* seem to track truth, Harris' presupposition of naturalism can therefore be called into question as the best explanation of *why* this is so.

In chapter 3, I focus on Harris' neo-Aristotelian use of the term "well-being" within the context of his naturalistic worldview. Well-being is certainly an important aspect of ethics, and a Christian worldview shares this acceptance. However, while Harris is not the first to argue along such naturalistic lines, he does so without ever providing a concrete definition of well-being, which is arguably the central concept to his theory. It is my assertion that Harris' conception of well-being remains too vague to accomplish the

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[59]C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1960).

[60]Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[61]Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Naturalist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

specific goals of his thesis.[62] The notion of well-being is also one that Harris arrives at as a presupposition, not as a result of scientific research. It is a starting place he chooses intuitively. However, if one of the most central concepts of his theory is not arrived at through science, then does this not undermine the very idea that science itself is the driving force of his metaethics? I also look at the problems a naturalistic account of well-being entails, and whether or not a theistic explanation better makes sense of human flourishing in a teleological sense.

In chapter 4, I examine Harris' view of free will and determinism. I argue that his strict determinism ultimately undermines the concept of moral responsibility, accountability, and retribution. These concepts seem, however, to be intuitive beliefs needed to make sense of any moral theory. To develop a system of morality that rejects moral responsibility is arguably to lose something central to the very heart of ethics. While Harris attempts to offer an explanation of why his ethical framework can still work despite his determinism, I argue that his case is not strong enough to stand alongside the rest of his presuppositions. I look to the arguments of Peter Van Inwagen[63] and John Hare[64], which argue that "ought" fundamentally implies "can," and apply this to Harris'

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[62]Two of the main works considered in this chapter will be Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), and James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). In both books, the authors address the difficulties of defining and determining the concept of well-being. Griffin summarizes the issue well: "Still, there is another, altogether more familiar, obstacle to reducing morality to human flourishing. A defensible conception of flourishing is bound to be too indeterminate to yield interesting moral results. Aristotle's conception, on some interpretations, approached the degree of determinateness needed to yield moral conclusions. But . . . the most that we can hope for from an account of flourishing is not a picture of the ideal form of life for all humans to adopt but a relatively short list of prudential values—the values that contribute to making a normal human life go well. Though these important values are valuable for everyone, and though the list of them does even constitute a kind of perfectionist picture of human existence, the conception of human flourishing they can be made to yield is far too indeterminate to serve in a reductionist programme." Griffin, *Well-Being,* 131. Another significant work addressing this subject is Andrew G. van Melsen, *Physical Science and Ethics: A Reflection on the Relationship between Nature and Morality*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series 23 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967).

[63]Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[64]John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); John E. Hare, "Naturalism and Morality," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2002), 189-211.

moral framework.

In chapter 5, I assert that Harris cannot rationally be a moral realist, while also adhering to his naturalism. As a naturalist, evolutionary Darwinism arguably undermines this understanding. While Harris attempts to sidestep the issue of evolution, I sample the works of three thinkers who argue that evolution gives good reasons to believe moral realism is an illusion we are forced to accept when, in reality, moral subjectivism is all we can hope to believe on a naturalistic understanding of ethics. I devote attention to the works of J. L. Mackie,[65] Michael Ruse,[66] and Richard Joyce.[67] Ultimately, if natural selection is a valid explanation of our moral development, then it seems objective moral realism is simply a "useful fiction" that helps further the ends of evolution. Although Harris strongly resists any form of relativism in human values, this destination may be unavoidable to him if he is consistent in his naturalism.

In chapter 6, I argue that Harris attempts to stretch the discipline of science too far. While Harris resists any accusation of "scientism," he is actively attempting to push science into territories formerly under the authority of other disciplines, and he does so by failing to understand the significance of the philosophical foundations that science itself is built upon. If science determines morality, then what determines science? I argue that the Western science Harris relies on rests upon presuppositions that are themselves accepted *a priori*. If this is the case, and philosophy analyzes and defines science, then one could argue that *philosophy*, or even *intuition*, is needed to guide science, and that *Sola Scientia* is an untenable position. I also address his belief that the worldviews of science and religion are fundamentally and irreconcilably in conflict. Specifically, I attempt to show how Christianity, far from being *opposed* to science, is indeed the

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[65]Mackie, *Ethics*.

[66]Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*.

[67]Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*; Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*.

worldview out of which modern science grew and flourished.[68] I do not attempt to argue

the point that Christianity was *essential* to the development of modern science. However,

I conclude that science did arise out of a pervading Christian worldview, and attempt to

show how the presuppositions of science are not in conflict with the presuppositions of

Christianity. If this is the case, then unity between the two is possible, and Harris'

concerns of Christianity sabotaging science are unfounded.

In the final chapter, I suggest that the underlining motivation for Harris' theory

is not driven by the obvious facts of science, but rather by a deep-seated opposition to

religion. His science, however, cannot lead to his intended conclusions unaided by the

correct philosophical presuppositions. I interact with a case study of Harris' ethical

system in practice, and also address the question of whether or not science is the

historical force for progress in the world. I also look to C. S. Lewis' argument in *The

Abolition of Man*[69] to show how science, unaided by the correct moral philosophy, is far

more dangerous than Harris admits. Rather than science determining morality, it seems as

though morality is needed to guide science. One does not need to choose between

Christianity and science when addressing the questions of ethics. Rather than choose,

science and Christianity may work together in tandem to provide a richer account of, and

motivation for, human values.

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[68]See Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994).; Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1972); Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Lowell Lectures, 1925 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925).

[69]C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL NATURALISM AS A
PRESUPPOSITION

Introduction

One of the hallmarks of the "New Atheism" is their absolute dependence on

science to speak authoritatively in all realms of knowledge. Sam Harris is no exception to

this. Why such a reliance on the scientific enterprise? Harris, along with the others, is

committed to a naturalistic understanding of the universe, in which nothing beyond the

physical exists. Only matter *matters.* If everything breaks down into material substance of

some kind, then it can be studied through science, which is directed towards the study of

our physical universe.[1] The term "naturalism" is often used and understood along these

lines, even if it sometimes resists a precise definition. However, this can also make it

difficult for a philosophical critique, in that "naturalism" can often mean different things

(at least in the details) depending on who is using it. As Jack Richie notes,

> Philosophers are inclined to think that when a term is in common usage, without a
> clear definition, that is when they are most needed. They roll up their sleeves and set
> to work to find necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be X I
> doubt if there is any such definition for naturalism. Like most of the other –isms in
> philosophy, naturalism embraces many differing views.[2]

Throughout this dissertation, I understand the term "naturalism" simply as "The belief

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[1]As John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4, notes, "Scientific naturalism assumes not only that nature is all there is but also that science is the only reliable way to understand it."

[2]Jack Richie, *Understanding Naturalism* (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2008), 1. Although a single definition of naturalism is difficult to ascertain, William Hasker believes there is a certain "family resemblance" within most formulations. He says, "The view held by the main body of contemporary naturalists can be defined in terms of the conjunction of mechanism, supervenience, and causal closer." William Hasker, "What Is Naturalism? And Should We Be Naturalists?" *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 1 (2013): 27.

that nature is all there is and that science alone can make sense of it."[3] Or, "The

philosophy that *everything that exists is a part of nature and that there is no reality*

beyond or outside of nature."[4] In other words, there is nothing "spooky" that the natural

sciences such as biology, chemistry, and physics cannot reach. The science Harris

espouses is a logical conclusion of his naturalism. Harris' naturalism informs every other

part of his worldview, and so it is the first presupposition I assess, as it is foundational to

all others that follow. If there are good reasons to suspect Harris' naturalistic starting

point is untrustworthy, then a significant crack appears in the foundation of his

worldview.

Harris believes there is a dichotomy regarding our understanding of reality.

Either religion is true, and there exists a supernatural realm beyond the material world, or

else naturalism is true and the physical is all there is. This would rule out anything along

the lines of Cartesian souls, Platonic forms, gods, angels, demons, heaven, hell, ghosts,

etc. from being "real," as everything that exists must exist physically within time and

space. For Harris, the natural and the supernatural cannot co-exist without undermining

science:

> If the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and
> susceptible to supernatural modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous; if the
> basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the
> nature of reality, confounded by irrational hopes and fears, and tending to waste
> precious time and attention—often with tragic results.[5]

In Harris' estimation, were religion true, it would throw off the entire enterprise of

[3]Haught, *Is Nature Enough?*, 2.

[4]Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 6.

[5]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Moral Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 25. Harris here falls into the trap that often plagues the New Atheists in that "religion" becomes a catch-all for what are actually a great variety of worldviews. He does not engage in any serious discussion of how religion might also affirm and respect science and the natural order, while also believing in a Being who stands "above" it. This is discussed further in chap. 6 of this dissertation. Elsewhere, however, he shows an affinity towards a naturalistic understanding of Buddhism. See Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

science because miracles and things outside of nature would make the predictions of science nearly impossible to trust. However, since morality is in fact rooted in states of the brain, which can be studied by science, it "reveals that our efforts to ground ethics in religious conceptions of 'moral duty' are misguided."[6] Harris sees no possible reconciliation between religion and science in ethics, for to accept one is to undermine the other. He notes, "Consequently, it will come as no surprise that I see very little room for compromise or peaceful coexistence between faith and reason on questions of meaning and morality."[7] Indeed, if Harris is to reject the supernatural, then it means everything must fall within the purview of naturalism. Since science is specifically designed to study phenomena in this realm, ethics, by necessity, becomes a scientific enterprise. In other words, Harris' presupposition of naturalism leaves him no other alternative but to attempt a science of morality.

Two things are important to note in Harris' naturalism. The first is his unwavering commitment to Darwinian evolution.[8] However, he clearly states what he is attempting is not merely an evolutionary account of the origins of morality.[9] He admits that much of our inner yearnings may be incompatible with finding happiness in the world today, even if they were helpful for our hunter-gatherer ancestors.[10] In fact, he also

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[6]Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 172.

[7]Sam Harris, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values" (PhD diss., University of California, 2009), 46.

[8]He states, "All complex life on earth has developed from simpler life-forms over billions of years. This is a fact that no longer admits of intelligent dispute. If you doubt that human beings evolved from prior species, you may as well doubt that the sun is a star." Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 68.

[9]He notes, "It is important to emphasize that a scientific account of human values—i.e., one that places them squarely within the web of influences that link states of the world and states of the human brain—is not the same as an *evolutionary* account. Most of what constitutes human well-being at this moment escapes any narrow Darwinian calculus. While the possibilities of human experience must be realized in the brains that evolution has built for us, our brains were not designed with a view to our ultimate fulfillment." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 13.

[10]Ibid.

states that our beliefs about morality "cannot be directly reduced to instinctual drives and evolutionary imperatives" as ". . . our modern concerns about meaning and morality have flown the perch built by evolution."[11] In further attempting to safeguard himself from critique on this point, he says,

> We must continually remind ourselves that there is a difference between what is natural and what is actually good for us . . . . Evolution may have selected for territorial violence, rape, and other patently unethical behaviors as strategies to propagate one's genes—but our collective well-being clearly depends on our opposing such natural tendencies.[12]

Human flourishing, then, is dependent on our ability to rise above our natural impulses to achieve greater heights. However, this seems to be at odds with the basic premise of naturalism that we are nothing *but* natural cause-and-effect biological machines.[13] How can "we" rise above the very things that make us who we are? I discuss the implications of this further in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The second important commitment Harris holds is a belief in the power and trustworthiness of our reasoning capacities. Our beliefs are guided by reason to influence

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[11]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 14.

[12]Ibid., 101. Indeed, seeking the well-being of others beyond our close relations seems *un*natural for us. Gregory R. Peterson, "A Hard Problem Indeed," *Zygon* 44, no. 1 (March 2009), 22, notes, "We human beings may in fact be programmed by our genes to genuinely care for our kin and members of our group. But this is well short of a universal concern for others. 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."

[13]Harris may thus be described as what Strawson terms a "nonreductive naturalist." Strawson identifies two different types of naturalists. There are "reductive naturalists" who must understand humans as "objects and events in nature, natural objects and natural events, to be described, analyzed, and causally explained in terms in which moral evaluation has no place; in terms, roughly speaking, of an observational and theoretical vocabulary recognized in the natural and social sciences, including psychology." P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*, The Woodbridge Lectures, 1983 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 40. On the other hand, the nonreductive naturalist resists the conclusion that morality can be explained away. Rather than trying to find a metaphysical foundation for morality, the nonreductive naturalist *presupposes* a moral framework as a basic fact of humanity that needs no rational justification for its existence. Strawson says, "Questions of justification arise in plenty *within* the general framework of attitudes in question; but the existence of the general framework itself neither calls for nor permits an external reaction justification" (41). Harris seems to agree, in that he accepts moral realism without basing it on much more than intuition. Furthermore, the system of thought that he relies on is itself based on several assumptions. He notes, "The very idea of 'objective' knowledge (i.e., knowledge acquired through honest observation and reasoning) has values built into it, as every effort we make to discuss facts depends upon principles that we must first value (e.g., logical consistency, reliance on evidence, parsimony, etc.)." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11.

and determine how we act in the world. In order for our beliefs to make sense to us, they must also be logically consistent with each other. However, since the amount of beliefs in one's brain are so numerous as to be uncountable, a total coherence of the brain is impossible, as each new belief added would need to be checked against every other belief existing prior to it.[14] What is perhaps most important for knowledge of the world to be possible is that "regularities in a nervous system must consistently mirror regularities in the environment."[15] In order for us to have "true" beliefs, we must have confidence that they tell us what is actually real in the world.[16] Harris admits, "At present, we have no understanding of what it means, at the level of the brain, to say that a person believes or disbelieves a given proposition—and yet it is upon this difference that all subsequent cognitive and behavioral commitments turn."[17] While there may still be some mystery as to how beliefs work, Harris is convinced that science is the best method we have of rationally verifying what is true (or at least, not false) about the world.[18] For Harris, *reason* should lead us to create a better society. He claims to know of no society in history that ever suffered because "its people became too reasonable."[19] This reason, on Harris' estimation, must exist independent of any supernatural high-jacking of the natural order.

What does all this mean for Harris' moral theory? It means he sees no insurmountable conflict between his naturalism and his belief that science and reason

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[14]He asserts, "While behavior and linguistic necessity demands that we seek coherence among our beliefs wherever we can, we know that *total* coherence, even in a maximally integrated brain, would be impossible to achieve." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 57.

[15]Ibid., 58.

[16]He says, "The moment we admit that our beliefs are attempts to represent states of the world, we see that they must stand in the right relation *to* the world to be valid." Ibid., 63.

[17]Ibid., 60.

[18]Ibid., 75-76.

[19]Ibid., 231.

can, and must, deliver a true account of morality. In fact, *reason* provides the starting point on which Harris builds his argument that morality concerns the well-being of conscious creatures. He claims, "I think we can know, through reason alone, that consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value."[20] However, there are good reasons to suspect that Harris' confidence in rational science is undermined by his commitment to evolutionary naturalism. The very fact that religion has survived as important for the vast majority of human beings raises an issue. If Harris is indeed right that religion of any kind is false, then evolution has preserved a plethora of irrational false beliefs around the world for millennia, simply because they did not directly affect the survival of the agents negatively enough to have been selected against. He anticipates this criticism and claims, "The fact that reason must be rooted in our biology does not negate the principles of reason."[21] He agrees that belief systems can be passed down that are not adaptive, or even wise, if they do not *directly* lead to a society's collapse or the practitioner's demise.[22] He goes so far as to admit, "It is just as true to say that our logical, mathematical, and physical intuitions have not been designed by natural selection to track the Truth."[23] If this is the case, then what confidence can one put in their abilities to reason if the process of evolution that developed those very capabilities was *not* designed with truth in mind, but simply survival? Indeed, if one can survive, while still holding beliefs that are false (or, in the case of the majority of creatures on earth, no "beliefs" at all), then there is little reason to accept that natural selection would give us a belief-forming brain that is wired to accept true beliefs over false ones, except in cases where our immediate survival was at stake. Or, as John F. Haught asks, "Is the creed of

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[20]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 32.

[21]Ibid., 131.

[22]Ibid., 20.

[23]Ibid., 66.

naturalism consistent with the trust that you are now placing in the imperatives of your mind?"[24] For, "There must be a coherence between your worldview and the critical intelligence by which you experience, understand and know the world. Otherwise your worldview is an illusion."[25] A worldview must not undermine itself when explaining the very faculties we use to construct a worldview in the first place. Haught believes naturalism is not enough. He states,

> I have concluded that the universe as conceived by scientific naturalism is quite clearly incompatible with the critical intelligence with which I attempt to understand the universe. More strongly stated, a consistent acceptance of scientific naturalism logically impairs the very trust that underlies my attempts to understand and know the world.[26]

In this chapter, I attempt to show how Haught is correct in this assessment by surveying three related arguments against naturalism. These critiques, if valid, provide reasons to question the epistemological integrity of Harris' naturalism, on which the rest of his scientific enterprise is built. As such, this is not be an attack on *science*, but rather, a critique of the idea that a *trustworthy* science is the logical conclusion of evolutionary naturalism.

C. S. Lewis' Argument from Reason

C. S. Lewis presented what has come to be known as the "Argument From Reason" in his book *Miracles*.[27] I develop the argument put forth by Lewis and restated

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[24]Haught, *Is Nature Enough?*, 36.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 37.

[27]C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). For a summary and discussion of Lewis' views on this subject, see Peter S. Williams, *C. S. Lewis vs The New Atheists* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013), chap. 4. A careful analysis and updated defense of Lewis' Argument from Reason can be found in Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), as well as Victor Reppert, "Physical Causes and Rational Belief: A Problem for the Materialist?" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1989). See also an abbreviated formulation of this argument in Victor Reppert, "The Argument from Reason and Hume's Legacy," in *In Defense of a Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 253-70, and Stewart Goetz, "The Argument From Reason," *Philosophia Christi*, 15, no. 1 (2013): 47-62. For a variety articles on the topic, see *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 1 (2003). In assessing Lewis' argument, I present his revised edition as found

more recently by Victor Reppert, which both claim that the scientific enterprise, relying on the truthfulness of our reasoning capacities, cannot be trusted if it has been developed by the evolutionary process supported by naturalists like Harris. Indeed, such an explanation would instill little confidence that such faculties were trustworthy at all. However, since our cognitive abilities *do* seem trustworthy, it calls into question the explanation given by the naturalist to explain their existence. Reppert summarizes the argument in this way:

> If naturalism is true, we could not know that naturalism is true, or that anything else is true, as a result of a train of reasoning. But enterprises such as the natural sciences presuppose that we can acquire knowledge through trains of reasoning, so to accept the sciences we have to deny naturalism, in spite of the fact that it is science that is often thought to support naturalism.[28]

If effective, this argument calls the very science Harris relies on into question. Lewis, understanding what is at stake, simply states, "Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true."[29] Lewis' argument draws upon the fact that our reasoning, if it is to be trusted, must tell us actual facts about the world, not just how we feel about it.[30] Furthermore, a worldview that attempts to explain everything, but fails to account for our own reasoning capabilities, cannot itself be trusted. Lewis did not believe a naturalistic account of reality could do this, and if it failed here, then any system built upon it (specifically, science) would also crumble. The world system proposed by naturalism is

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in the 1960 edition of *Miracles*. Elizabeth Anscombe is widely believed to have countered Lewis' earlier edition in the 1948 meeting of the Oxford Socratic Club. For a discussion of Anscombe's criticisms, see Victor Reppert, "The Lewis-Anscombe Controversy: A Discussion of the Issues," *Christian Scholar's Review* 19 (September 1989): 32-48.

[28]Victor Reppert, "Pro: The Argument from Reason Defended," *Value Inquiry Book Series* 286 (2015): 76. The Argument from Reason is part of a greater family of arguments that address the many facets that must in be in place in order for rational thought to exist, and thus give us epistemic grounding. For a summary of other similar arguments, see Victor Reppert, "Several Formulations of the Argument from Reason," *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 1 (2003): 9-33.

[29]Lewis, *Miracles*, 14.

[30]Ibid. Harris agrees: "The moment we admit that our beliefs are attempts to represent states of the world, we see that they must stand in the right relation *to* the world to be valid." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 63.

not guided or directed by any sort of rational mind, but is rather a combination of physical parts. How could rational thought ever emerge from a collection of irrational parts, with no rational mind at the beginning of the process? This is the question that Lewis seeks to address, specifically in chapter 3 of *Miracles*.

In order to understand the capacity of reasoning, Lewis identifies two senses of how we use the word "because." We can use it to mean a Cause and Effect relationship ("Grandfather is ill today *because* he ate lobster yesterday"), in which A is the cause of B, the effect. The second way we can understand "because" is to hold a Ground and Consequent relation ("Grandfather must be ill today *because* he hasn't gotten up yet, and he is usually an early riser when he is well"). In this sentence, the grandfather's late rising is not the *cause* of the illness, but is the reason that leads one to believe he *is* ill.[31] In order for rational thinking to be valid, it must include both of these senses; otherwise, our reasoning is simply the cause-and-effect process of physical brain activities, which we have no control over. If this is true, then it does not seem to matter that they are logically connected to identify truth about the world, as they simply follow one from the other for no particular *reason* at all (as reasons can only be attributed to minds, which the naturalist denies are 'behind' the long and indefinite process of cause-and-effect). Indeed, acts brought about by such a process are not necessarily *true*. Harris certainly agrees that reasoning requires such a capacity. He asserts,

> Believing a given proposition is a matter of believing that it faithfully represents some state of the world, and this fact yields some immediate insights into the standards by which our beliefs should function. In particular, it reveals why we cannot help but value evidence and demand that propositions about the world logically cohere.[32]

Harris admits that our beliefs must be free of logical contradiction in order for them to be helpful to us: "In order for my speech to be intelligible to others—and, indeed, to

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[31]Lewis, *Miracles*, 15.

[32]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 51.

myself—my beliefs about the world must largely cohere.[33] While this may be a valid statement, the important question is not whether our beliefs *make sense* or are "helpful to us," but whether they are *true.* Evidence is only useful if it leads the one considering it to identify either true or false facts about the world. Recognizing a cause-and-effect relationship is the first stage, but not the final one. If our beliefs were simply the effects of prior causes, then they would arise inevitably, *not* because of a Ground and Consequence relationship.[34] If naturalism cannot account for this, then it "leaves no room for the acts of knowing or insight on which the whole value of our thinking as a means to truth depends."[35]

Lewis further argues that, on the naturalist's worldview, the process of thinking must have come about by natural selection rather than design. However, natural selection is not 'interested' in selecting for *truth*, but only for *survival*. This means thoughts are subjective events that either aid or hinder the survival of the thinking agent. While this issue will be taken up in more detail by discussing Alvin Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism in the next section, a word should be said about Lewis' thinking on the subject, as it preceded and influenced Plantinga's updated version.[36] Lewis notes, "The relation between response and stimulus is utterly different from that between knowledge and the truth known," as it is not our ability to see that provides knowledge of light, but rather, our ability to reason *about* our ability to see.[37]

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[33]Harris, *End of Faith*, 54.

[34]Lewis*, Miracles*, 17. This also leads to further issues when one considers the idea of free will and determinism. Harris, as a strict determinist, must explain why ideas are under our control at all at a Ground and Consequence level, rather than simply a Cause and Effect relationship. His views will be discussed further in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[35]Ibid., 18.

[36]For a comparison of Lewis and Plantinga on this, see John M. DePoe, "The Self-Defeat of Naturalism: A Critical Comparison of Alvin Plantinga and C. S. Lewis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 44, no. 1 (2014): 9-26.

[37]Lewis, *Miracles*, 19.

The ability to reason puts humans above the animals in their mental ability. Lewis

explains,

> The assumption that things which have been conjoined in the past will always be
> conjoined in the future is the guiding principle not of rational but of animal
> behaviour. Reason comes in precisely when you make the inference "Since always
> conjoined, therefore probably connected" and go on to attempt the discovery of the
> connection.[38]

Indeed, one can find many examples of animals that are equipped by natural selection to

survive, and yet lack the very reasoning capacities that set humans apart as unique. It is

possible to survive *without* the ability to see Ground and Consequent relationships.[39]

Harris may go on to argue that rational thinking, more often than not, leads to survival,

therefore giving nature the ability to 'select' it for survival, and humans are simply an

example of this at the highest level. However, in so stating his case, Harris is relying on

the very reasoning capacities (Ground and Consequence) that are under discussion. Lewis

and Harris both agree that our rational capacities exist; they *dis*agree on just what sort of

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[38]Lewis, *Miracles*, 20.

[39]Paul Copan, "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality," in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 152, "Given naturalism, it appears that humans could have evolved differently and inherited rather contrary moral beliefs ('rules') for the 'chess game' of survival. Whatever those rules, they would still direct us toward surviving and reproducing." For a fuller discussion, see William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 64-75. Hasker notes, "On the assumption of the causal closure of the physical, no one ever accepts a belief because it is supported by good reasons" (68). Since we generally *assume* the validity of our reasoning capacities in order to discuss them at all, Hasker believes, along with Reppert and Lewis, that this provides a "Best Explanation" argument. Rather than calling our reasoning into question, he calls into question our *justification* of our reasoning, which, arguably, evolutionary naturalists fail to adequately explain. Upon naturalism, it seems that Cause and Effect understanding must trump Ground and Consequence. Indeed, people accept beliefs all the time that are not justified rationally, as Harris would surely point out in the case of religion. The truth-value of a belief does not determine whether one will believe or reject it. In fact, Hasker imagines a world that is physically exactly similar to this world, but where the natural laws establishing psychophysical connections do not obtain. In this world (physically similar but without mentality, or, as he calls it, "physically equivalent zombie-world") would rationality be a factor at all? Given the closure of the physical world, would mental facts be irrelevant to the physical course of events? If such a "zombie-world" is even possible, these questions become extremely relevant (71). It could be argued that the mental emerges *from* the physical, such that a physical world similar to ours would result in the mental, just as it has in our reality. However, upon Harris' determinism, do Ground and Consequence relations *really* matter, or will things simply happen as they are determined to happen, regardless of the mental connections and justifications we see? Even if a being's conscious states are supervenient upon its brain states, the issue does not go away. Hasker says, "*The mental properties of the event are irrelevant to its causal influence.* One simply cannot say whether an organism's behavior would have been different had the action been unreasonable from its standpoint, though one can say with assurance that the behavior would not have occurred had its physical sufficient condition been lacking" (78).

history best explains *how* and *why* we should trust the ability we undoubtedly have. As Lewis notes, "If the value of our reasoning is in doubt, you cannot try to establish it by reasoning."[40] Upon an evolutionary epistemology, it seems as though mental events actually cannot add survival value, as they are not *needed* for survival, and therefore cannot be selected by natural selection. William Hasker summarizes,

> What this means is that, given the physicalist assumption, the occurrence and content of conscious mental states such as belief and desire are irrelevant to behavior and are not subject to selection pressures. On this assumption, natural selection gives us no reason to assume that the experiential content of mental states corresponds in any way whatever to objective reality. And since on the physicalist scenario Darwinist epistemology is the only available explanation for the reliability of our epistemic faculties, the conclusion to be drawn is that physicalism not only has not given any explanation for such reliability, but it is in principle unable to give any such explanation. And that, it seems to me, is about as devastating an objection to physicalism as anyone could hope to find.[41]

So, Ground and Consequence reasoning is undoubtedly an ability we have, and yet it is not *necessary* for the survival of a living being. As such, one wonders *why* humans possess such ability, and whether or not naturalism provides the best explanation.

In chapter 5 of *Miracles*, Lewis speaks specifically about how moral judgments serve to undermine naturalism. He states, "If the fact that men have such ideas of *ought* and *ought not* at all can be fully explained by irrational and non-moral causes, then those ideas are an illusion."[42] Whereas Lewis' first argument addresses the difficulty a naturalist like Harris must face in grounding his belief in the trustworthiness of our reasoning capacities (given their irrational evolutionary beginnings), Lewis' second argument applies this difficulty to morality. The evolutionary explanation may explain why and how we make moral judgments, but it does not give us reason to believe they are *true*. As Lewis notes, for the naturalist, "I ought" is the same sort of statement as "I itch"

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[40]Lewis, *Miracles*, 21.

[41]Hasker, *Emergent Self*, 79.

[42]Lewis, *Miracles*, 35. A further discussion on how such morality may point in the *other* direction, away from naturalism and towards Christianity, can be found in C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 3-32.

or "I'm going to be sick."[43] Both sets of statements merely describe a subjective thought about the world, but ultimately fall prey to the "is/ought" distinction Harris resists.

Those arguing against Lewis may raise the objection that Lewis is *also* relying on his reasoning capacities to explain their origin. In fact, it is impossible *not* to rely on our reasoning capacities, as they are our only tools to work with. This is a valid objection, and therefore Lewis' Argument from Reason must *presuppose* that we *do* have the ability to reason. It is then up to both parties to provide an explanation, and then choose the best of the options. Victor Reppert understands Lewis' argument in this sense. Lewis' argument is not a "skeptical threat" argument that calls our reasoning capacities into question, but rather a "best explanation" argument that assumes these abilities exist and seeks to adequately explain them.[44] Reppert notes that if the universe is nothing but physical, and the state of the physical world does not determine the meaning the world has, then the world must not have meaning at all. So then how could there be meaning to the words and concepts that we use?[45] Lewis' Argument from Reason is effective because few scientists would attempt to revise or deny our concept of reasoning as traditionally understood, and therefore must explain its origins in a way that fits within their naturalism.[46] The task of anyone who would attempt to explain our ability to reason must inevitably work backwards to a 'brute fact.' For the naturalist, this fact becomes the way the particles of physics act as they do. Explanations eventually run out and must be presupposed. The ultimate explanation will either be mental or it will not.[47] Harris, as a naturalist, must come to a materialistic explanation as his brute fact, where Lewis is free

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[43]Lewis, *Miracles*, 36.

[44]Reppert, *Lewis' Dangerous Idea*, 70.

[45]Ibid., 74.

[46]Reppert, "Argument from Reason Defended," 77.

[47]Ibid.

to explore the possibility of a Mind at the end of a seemingly infinite regress of causes and effects. Reppert explains the difference between a mentalistic and a nonmentalistic explanation of ultimate reality:

> But how do we distinguish between a mentalistic and a nonmentalistic view? There are four characteristics that seem to mark out the mental from other kinds of states. First, mental states are purposive. They, as Lewis puts it, prefer one thing to another. Second, mental states possess intentionality or about-ness. Mental states are ordinarily about something, whereas nonmental states usually are not. Third, some mental states are normative, and this goes along with preferring one thing to another. Finally, mental states have a perspective, a first-person point of view. A genuinely nonmental account of a state of affairs will leave out of account anything that indicates what it is like to be in that state.[48]

In our everyday experience of reasoning, we use mental processes. Reppert uses the example of a homicide. A detective can look at the event using all available scientific methods (physical, chemical, biological, psychological, and sociological), but must go over and above the physical data to determine whether the act was *justified* or not. He says, "Either there is some nonnatural fact that makes the statement concerning the rightness or wrongness of the homicide justified or unjustified, or the matter is a subjective matter, determined by the preferences of an individual or a society."[49] The naturalist is then faced with two options. He can attempt to explain the mental away, which essentially "de-mentalizes" mental states. Or he can "attribute states of mind to the brain, converting the brain into a person and implying that mentalistic accounts somehow are not mentalistic because they are attributed to a physical object, namely the brain."[50] As a neuroscientist, Harris falls into this latter category, as he states that all events must eventually be understood at the level of the brain.[51] Indeed, Harris understands mind

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[48]Reppert, *C. S. Lewis' Dangerous Idea*, 78. Reppert lists nine assumptions that one must hold if he or she is to do science (73). Harris, and any other naturalist, must conform to these premises in order to do science. The issue they have is *explaining* their origin.

[49]Reppert, "Argument from Reason Defended," 85.

[50]Ibid., 86.

[51]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11.

events as supervening upon brain events, arising in our subjective consciousness, which remains a mystery. Although the relationship between the mind and the brain is far from settled within the scientific community, Harris falls back on a naturalistic explanation, rather than being open to a supernatural one.[52] He recognizes that the "hard problem" of how consciousness could arise as a mental activity from the brain need not hinder his ethical system. He says, "When comparing mental states, the reality of human consciousness is a given. We need not understand how consciousness relates to the behavior of atoms to investigate how emotions like love, compassion, trust, greed, fear, and anger differ (and interact) in neurophysiological terms."[53] This seems to be an evasion of the very issue that Lewis is seeking to address, and if Harris wants to instill confidence in the metaethical theory he is proposing, he must provide a satisfactory explanation as to why we can trust the reasoning capacities that have developed through an unguided process that did *not* have truth as its end goal, arising from within a consciousness that remains a mystery to those who would seek to explain it with a naturalistic explanation. I have argued that Harris recognizes, and then sidesteps, the problem simply by presupposing the reliability of our reasoning faculties, without giving a satisfactory answer as to how these could possibly have arisen, and be trustworthy, if naturalism is true.

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[52]He says, "While the ultimate relationship between consciousness and matter has not been settled, any naïve conception of a soul can now be jettisoned on account of the mind's obvious dependency upon the brain. The idea that there might be an immortal soul capable of reasoning, feeling love, remembering life events, etc., all the while being metaphysically independent of the brain, seems untenable given that damage to the relevant neural circuits obliterates these capacities in a living person." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 158-59. John Searle also recognizes the problem. He observes, "At the moment, the biggest problem is this: We have a certain commonsense picture of ourselves as human beings which is very hard to square with our overall 'scientific' conception of the physical world." John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 13. He identifies four specific features of mental phenomena that seem to put them at odds with the scientific understanding of identifying mental events simply *as* brain events, including consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity of mental states, and mental causation. Ibid., 15-17. Searle also shares Harris' view that mental states are caused by brain states (18).

[53]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 222n18.

Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism

While Lewis addresses the naturalist's difficulties in explaining our reasoning capacities, Alvin Plantinga has adapted Lewis' ideas and specifically argues that an evolutionary account of epistemology undermines our belief that we can know true things about the world at all. This is because evolution has *survival*, not *truth*, as its 'goal.' Harris himself recognizes how this could lead to what he sees as a misunderstanding. He observes,

> It is easy to see why the study of the evolutionary origins of "morality" might lead to the conclusion that morality has nothing at all to do with Truth. If morality is simply an adaptive means of organizing human social behavior and mitigating conflict, there would be no reason to think that our current sense of right and wrong would reflect any deeper understanding about the nature of reality. Hence, a narrow focus explaining why people think and behave as they do can lead a person to find the idea of "moral truth" literally unintelligible.[54]

Plantinga's argument is not meant to prove that naturalism or evolution is false, simply that, when taken together, they undermine each other. This is because *if* unguided evolution were true, it would give us good reasons to *mis*trust the reliability of our cognitive faculties in determining truth about the world.[55] Since these very faculties are needed to develop and believe the worldview of naturalism, it would also cause us to doubt the truth of naturalism, since this belief was developed using untrustworthy faculties. This has come to be known as the "Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism" (or, EAAN).[56] Plantinga's basic argument states that at the heart of evolution is the claim that adaptive traits that aid in survival are 'selected.' Therefore, humans have

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[54]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 50.

[55]By "cognitive faculties," Plantinga is referring to "those faculties, or powers, or processes that produce beliefs or knowledge in us." These include memory, perception, *a priori* intuition, sympathy, introspection, testimony, induction, and (for the theist) the moral sense and *sensus divinitatis.* Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 311-12.

[56]Although Plantinga has developed this argument over several years and many publications, I will rely primarily on the most recent version presented in *Where the Conflict Really Lies*. For an extensive critique and defense of his position, see James Beilby ed., *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). His argument was first presented in Alvin Plantinga, "An Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism," *Logos* 12 (1991): 27-48.

developed in the way we have because these qualities add (or have added in the past) to our chances of survival. Natural selection does not select mental beliefs based on their being true or false, but merely on their adding survival value to our evolutionary fitness.[57] Specifically, *actions* that lead to survival will result in the corresponding brain functions being preserved by natural selection. While true beliefs may correspond to actions that aid in survival, this is certainly not *always* the case. Indeed, many of the beliefs we have, whether true or false, do not seem to add any sort of survival value to our lives.[58] While believing that lions are carnivorous and should not be kept as pets will certainly carry survival value, not all beliefs were so obviously useful to our ancestors (or to us today). Plantinga summarizes,

> The basic idea of my argument could be put (a bit crudely) as follows. First, the probability of our cognitive faculties being reliable, given naturalism and evolution, is low. (To put it a bit inaccurately but suggestively, if naturalism and evolution were both true, our cognitive faculties would very likely not be reliable.) But then according to the second premise of my argument, if I believe both naturalism and evolution, I have a *defeater* for my intuitive assumption that my cognitive faculties are reliable. If I have a defeater for *that* belief, however, then I have a defeater for *any* belief I take to be produced by my cognitive faculties. That means that I have a defeater for my belief that naturalism and evolution are true. So my belief that naturalism and evolution are true gives me a defeater for that very belief; that belief shoots itself in the foot and is self-referentially incoherent; therefore I cannot rationally accept it.[59]

Evolution is concerned with our *behavior*, not necessarily our *beliefs*. The only way evolution could select beliefs is based on the physical actions that resulted from such beliefs. If Harris is correct, and all religions are indeed false, then it seems as though evolution has allowed significantly false beliefs to endure for the vast majority of the

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[57] Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis, and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 339, summarizes well: "It is, of course, true that if we were mere evolutionary products, then we should not be able to arrive at knowledge; we would merely have sentience linked by a multitude of routes to behaviour that would maximize the chances of our genetic material being replicated."

[58] John Gray, *Straw Gods: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta, 2002), 27, notes, "Truth has no systematic evolutionary advantage over error."

[59] Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 314.

world's population. This is noteworthy, especially considering some religions have motivated its adherents to acts of terror, which are of least survival value: blowing themselves up. Or, in more noble circumstances, religions have inspired individuals to sacrifice themselves for others. Indeed, it seems as though beliefs that are extremely important to people (their religious doctrines) may endure, and yet be false, simply because they do not lead to the extinction of the people who hold them. This is perhaps why atheists struggle to understand and explain why false beliefs about religion have remained a universal characteristic of humanity to this day.

If beliefs are at all significant to how we act (what Harris calls "principles of action"[60]), then it is important to know whether or not we can trust the cognitive faculties we use to develop these beliefs. How often do faculties, such as memory, need to result in true beliefs before they can be considered reliable? Greater than fifty percent of the time? Two thirds of the time? Plantinga notes that we generally trust our faculties, although we also know they can be *un*reliable (as when inhibited by alcohol or fatigue). Darwin himself, in what has come to be known as "Darwin's Doubt," questioned the reliability of our rational faculties, if they indeed arose through the unguided process of natural selection.[61] A belief being *true* does not necessarily carry any weight for its *survival value*. In fact, "Natural selection is interested, not in truth, but in appropriate behavior."[62] This leads Plantinga to take Darwin's Doubt seriously because "the conditional probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given naturalism together with the proposition that we have come to be by way of evolution, is low."[63] Harris clearly states

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[60]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 52.

[61]Plantinga offers this illuminating quote from Darwin himself: "With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the conviction of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of 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?," quoted in Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 316.

[62]Ibid., 316.

[63]Ibid., 317.

that he is not developing an *evolutionary account* of morality, and yet this seems to be inescapable for him as a naturalist. He says,

> It is important to emphasize that a scientific account of human values—i.e., one that places them squarely within the web of influences that link states of the world and states of the human brain—is not the same as an *evolutionary* account. Most of what constitutes human well-being at this moment escapes any narrow Darwinian calculus. While the possibilities of human experience must be realized in the brains that evolution has built for us, our brains were not designed with a view to our ultimate fulfillment.[64]

Harris never fully gives an adequate explanation of how this is possible. If anything, it seems as though morality becomes a *second-hand* function of the brain, which was cobbled together through evolution to fulfill very different ends. Harris argues that *all* higher cognitive states are an outgrowth of our capacity for action, ultimately guiding and adapting our behavior.[65] He says, "Beliefs are *principles of action*: whatever they may be at the level of the brain, they are processes by which our understanding (and *mis*understanding) of the world is represented and made available to guide our behavior."[66] But why must we have beliefs at all in order to act? Many of our bodily functions (such as our heart and liver) have no need of beliefs at all, let alone *true* beliefs, in order to function. What purpose does our inner mental life serve when it comes to gene replication and physical survival? Certainly there are living things (such as trees) that operate and survive (often much longer than we do) *without* the capacity of a rigorous thought life. In fact, Harris admits there is much mystery surrounding beliefs. He notes, "By recourse to intuitions of truth and falsity, logical necessity and contradiction, human beings are able to knit together private visions of the world that largely cohere. What natural events underlie this process? What must a brain do in order to believe that a given statement is *true* or *false*? We currently have no idea."[67]

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[64]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 13.

[65]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 52.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid., 51.

Plantinga notes that survival is dependent upon the response a being has to its environment. There are many "indicators" that lead an animal to respond in any number of ways to threats to its survival, but these do not necessarily require *beliefs* about anything. He says,

> Indicators, however, need not be or involve beliefs. In the human body there are indicators for blood pressure, temperature, saline content, insulin level, and much else; in these cases neither the blood, nor its owner, nor anything else in the neighborhood ordinarily holds beliefs on the topic. The objector is therefore right in pointing out that fitness requires accurate indication; but nothing follows about reliability of belief.[68]

As its truth or falsity does not directly lead to better chances of gene replication, there is reason to doubt the belief in naturalism is true. The most common argument levied against Plantinga is that a belief doesn't have to *directly* lead to survival in order to be selected by natural selection. As Harris points out, as long as it did not directly lead to a being's *non*-survival, we might expect it to remain. In fact, Harris specifically says morality requires us to *resist* many of the things natural selection has selected for.[69] However, this seems counterintuitive. For one, Harris does not believe there is an "us" to do this, as he resists any form of soul or mind-body dualism. Consciousness is simply a mysterious subjective experience that arises out of the brain, but can just as easily disappear if the brain is damaged in some way. Second, how is it possible for a being that is determined by his or her genes to resist the very genes that make up their identity? This is even more problematic when one considers Harris' determinism, in which the illusive "us" does not ultimately have the power to choose anything at all. It seems as though one is then forced to accept Patricia Churchland's sobering explanation of naturalism is action:

> Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F's: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principal chore of nervous

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[68]Plantinga, *Where The Conflict Really Lies*, 329.

[69]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 101.

systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive . . . . Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: A fancier style of representing is advantageous so long as it is geared to the organism's way of life and enhances the organism's chances of survival. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost.[70]

Plantinga further questions how a neural structure's propositional content can causally influence behavior in such a way that natural selection can act upon it at all. When a soprano sings a high C note and the champagne glass shatters, it is not by nature of the *content* of the line she sings; it is due to the physical nature of the event in question. In what way are the neural structures that make up beliefs different in their causal activities? Must the content of a propositional belief be true in order to cause the agent to act in a way that enhances its survival? If the truth or falsity of the belief is ultimately inconsequential to the agent's actions, how can natural selection "reward" true beliefs and "punish" false beliefs at all?[71] Indeed, as long as the right physical processes are in place to get an individual's limbs where they need to be in order to avoid being eaten by a predator, it seems this is all that is needed to survive. A more evolved brain may certainly do this *better* than a less evolved brain, but does this necessitate the development of a brain that can accept and reject *propositional content*? Looking around the world at the many other living things that lack the very reasoning capacities that set humans apart as unique, it seems as though it is certainly possible to survive (and even thrive) without such abilities.

Another common challenge to Plantinga's argument is that it may be that certain mental states supervene upon physical states, such that when a specific belief is present, certain actions always follow, and those actions are what natural selection "selects." Plantinga, however, fails to see the connection between the mental state *causing* the physical state to be selected. He explains,

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[70]Patricia Churchland, "Epistemology in the Age of Neuroscience," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 548-49.

[71]Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Beilby's Cohorts," in Beilby, *Naturalism Defeated?*, 214-15.

> Suppose there is a physical property *P* such that, necessarily, a human being has *P* just when she thinks of a horse; and suppose having *P* causes her to have *Q*, some other physical (maybe behavioral) property: it doesn't follow that her thinking of a horse causes her to have *Q*, or that it is by virtue of its content that this thought causes her to have *Q*. In these cases of supervention, it is still really the neurophysiological properties, not the content, in virtue of which the beliefs, the neural structures in question, enter into the causal chain leading to behavior.[72]

All that matters is that certain actions lead to survival; *not* that the content of those beliefs that accompany the actions are true. "As far as adaptivity goes, it doesn't matter whether the supervening content is true or false. It would be no more than a sort of touching natural piety to suppose that because the neurophysiological properties are adaptive, the supervening content properties must involve true propositions."[73] The difficulty that Harris faces is to avoid the reductionist move of making beliefs simply neurological physical events. If the content of a belief is going to have significant meaning at all, it is because it arises from within consciousness. Consciousness, however, is admittedly mysterious and difficult to explain. It seems Harris is then forced to simply affirm that belief content is important to the actions of a being, leading evolution to select those beliefs that are true and have adaptive value, leading to the development of trustworthy cognitive faculties. However, there seems to be much left unexplained. Harris assumes our cognitive faculties are trustworthy in producing true beliefs, and he must attribute this to natural selection, since this is the default belief held by naturalists. Plantinga asserts that the EAAN provides an epistemological defeater for naturalism. If this is true, it significantly weakens the rest of Harris' system, which is built on naturalism, but relies on our reasoning capabilities.

An Unlikely Ally: Nagel's Doubts

C. S. Lewis and Alvin Plantinga are both Christian theists, and so it may not be much of surprise that they would critique naturalism, a worldview that seems to

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[72]Plantinga, "Reply to Beilby's Cohorts," 218.

[73]Ibid., 219.

undermine their deeply held beliefs about God. However, critics of naturalism can also

find a rather unexpected ally in philosopher Thomas Nagel. Nagel, as an agnostic, has

drawn much criticism for his failure to fall in line and accept the evolutionary

explanations many of his fellow unbelievers preach with such confidence. His most

recent critique of naturalism can be found in *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-

Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*.[74] Nagel believes the

currently held version of naturalism is inadequate to explain our experience of the

universe, and this will have consequences on how we do science. Indeed, a worldview's

explanatory power is arguably the most important thing about it, and Nagel is not

convinced that evolutionary naturalism does the job. As is his custom, Nagel is more

concerned with *raising* questions than he is *answering* them. However, he levies harsh

criticism against a worldview that has become somewhat unquestioned by modern

philosophers today. He summarizes,

> The aim of this book is to argue that the mind-body problem is not just a local problem, having to do with the relation between mind, brain, and behavior in living animal organisms, but that it invades our understanding of the entire cosmos and its history. The physical sciences and evolutionary biology cannot be kept insulated from it, and I believe a true appreciation of the difficulty of the problem must eventually change our conception of the place of the physical sciences in describing the natural order.[75]

Lewis and Plantinga challenge naturalism's ability to explain our reasoning capacities

and our ability to know truth about the world. Nagel aims his criticism at the process of

evolution bringing forth conscious creatures *like us*, who are able to have these types of

conversations at all. Harris' thesis relies on the assumption that morality is only relevant

to conscious creatures like us. Nagel questions how such conscious creatures could come

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[74]Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Further criticisms of evolutionary naturalism can be found in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Nagel has also aimed specific challenges to Harris' ethical system in Thomas Nagel, "The Facts Fetish," *New Republic* 241, no. 18 (2010): 30-33.

[75]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 3.

to exist in the first place. Indeed, why is it that a mindless system like evolution has

brought forth minds that can truthfully track and understand the world? He asks two

significant questions:

> First, given what is known about the chemical basis of biology and genetics, what is the likelihood that self-reproducing life forms should have come into existence spontaneously on the early earth, solely through the operation of the laws of physics and chemistry? . . . . [Second] In the available geological time since the first life forms appeared on earth, what is the likelihood that, as a result of physical accident, a sequence of viable genetic mutations should have occurred that was sufficient to permit natural selection to produce the organisms that actually exist?[76]

Nagel makes it clear that his questions are not driven by a religious agenda, and also that

he has no clear alternative explanation. Rather, he is attempting to challenge the existing

worldview that is held dogmatically by scientists like Harris who refuse to question their

naturalism, even if it seemingly fails to match up with common sense.[77] Nagel believes

that "mind is not just an afterthought or an accident or an add-on, but a basic aspect of

nature."[78] He understands "mind" to be something that cannot be reduced to the merely

physical, as Harris does. Harris believes perhaps the most significant aspect of our

humanity, consciousness, may forever resist a complete scientific explanation.[79] Nagel,

rather than reducing everything to the physical, argues that we cannot escape the

importance of mind in the universe. He notes science itself is driven by the assumption

that the physical universe is intelligible. What explains this? One could argue nothing

does, and explanation comes to an end and bottoms out with the order itself.[80] In this

case, the intelligibility and order of the universe must merely be assumed as a basic fact

that needs no further explanation. However, if science is indeed in the business of seeking

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[76]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 6.

[77]Ibid., 7.

[78]Ibid., 16.

[79]Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 86.

[80]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 16.

answers to important questions, then this is a question worth pursuing, even if the possible answers venture into areas that are uncomfortable to many naturalists. Those who argue for Intelligent Design (which Nagel respects, even if he does not agree with their conclusions) have pursued these questions at length, seeking to understand if the basic ground of all reality is *mind* rather than *matter*. Nagel is driven by the "principle of sufficient reason," in which everything in the world can, at some level, be understood and explained. In fact, the universe itself has given rise to creatures that, in turn, can understand the very universe that lies behind their own creation. The natural order is *intelligible*, but is it *necessarily* so? This, Nagel believes, cries out for a deeper explanation than what reductionist materialism has provided.[81] Theists have answered this question by pointing to a divine Mind that stands behind everything else in creation, which humanity reflects by their ability to reason. In a theist worldview, it comes as no surprise that humans, who have been created in the image of a rational God, are rational creatures. As with the arguments made by Lewis and Plantinga, the fact that we have the ability to reason is not in question. What Nagel seeks is the *best explanation* for this accepted fact. He notes, "Eventually the attempt to understand oneself in evolutionary, naturalistic terms must bottom out in something that is grasped as valid itself—something without which the evolutionary understanding would not be possible."[82] Does a strictly evolutionary account of our origins satisfactorily explain the very reasoning capacities used to arrive at that explanation?

Although Nagel points out several issues that face naturalism, he also rejects theism, and one may be skeptical as to what credible alternative exists between these two options—a middle ground Nagel thinks necessary. He leans towards a "natural teleology" in which the structure of the universe is the way it is because it was *meant* to be that way.

[81]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 17.

[82]Ibid., 81.

He is not, however, willing to attribute this guidance to a theistic God; rather, he leaves it open to the possibility that there is some other form of mind at the foundation of reality. The goal of his enterprise is ultimately not to remove every form of skepticism, but to understand ourselves in a way that is "not radically self-undermining, and that does not require us to deny the obvious."[83] While he takes issue with theism for "going outside" of nature for an explanation, he critiques evolutionary naturalism in a similar way to Lewis and Plantinga, noting how this account ultimately undermines itself.[84] He notes, "Inevitably, when we construct a naturalistic external self-understanding, we are relying on one part of our 'sense-making' capacities to create a system that will make sense of the rest."[85] In so doing, we rely on the very capacities we are trying to explain in the first place. Regarding the evolutionary process, Nagel points out that, "Mechanisms of belief formation that have selective advantage in the everyday struggle for existence do not warrant our confidence in the construction of theoretical accounts of the world as a whole."[86] Indeed, it seems as though much of our knowledge is superfluous to the goal of survival.[87]

Nagel points to consciousness as one of the most difficult problems naturalism is ill-equipped to answer. Consciousness plays an important role in Harris' moral theory,

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[83]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 25.

[84]Ibid., 27. For Plantinga's review of *Mind & Cosmos*, see Alvin Plantinga, "A Secular Heresy," *The New Republic* 243, no. 18 (December 2012): 36-40.

[85]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 27.

[86]Ibid.

[87]David Papineau, *The Roots of Reason: Philosophical Essays on Rationality, Evolution, and Probability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 40, suggests, "Evolutionary explanations do not always account for traits in terms of selective advantages they provide. Some biological traits have not been selected because of their effects. Rather they are byproducts of other traits which have been so selected. They do not serve any function themselves, but have been carried along by different traits that do yield advantages," arguing that "once these other abilities are in place, then nothing more is needed for humans to achieve high levels of theoretical rationality." Papineau's explanation seems to give us even more cause to doubt our cognitive abilities, as their present purpose was not even their initial function. They are, rather, second-hand tools that were adaptive for some other purpose.

as morality can only arise within the minds of conscious creatures.[88] It makes no sense to speak of a rock as having moral responsibility, because it is not conscious, and cannot act or value anything at all. However, does it not undermine Harris' theory if such a central part of his ethics (consciousness) is left unexplained? Indeed, consciousness, while still largely a mystery, is foundational to our self-understanding as humans, and as such, must be addressed by any worldview that seeks credibility. John Searle accepts this, observing,

> Consciousness is such a stunning and mysterious phenomenon that one always feels that the very effort to describe it in ordinary words somehow is not only bound to fail, but the very effort reveals a failure of sensibility. The general character of the relation of consciousness to the brain, and thus the general solution of the mind-body problem is not hard to state: consciousness is caused by microlevel processes in the brain and realized in the brain as a higher-level or system feature. But the complexity of the structure itself, and the precise nature of the brain processes involved remains unanalyzed by this characterization. We are tempted to trivialize consciousness by thinking of it as just one aspect of our lives; and, of course, biologically speaking, it is just one aspect, but as far as our actual life experiences are concerned consciousness is the very essence of our meaningful existence.[89]

Harris is also well aware of the difficulty in explaining consciousness in purely naturalistic terms. He says,

> First there is a physical world, unconscious and rolling with unperceived events; and then, by virtue of some physical property or process (quantum coherence, self-excitation, recurrent connections, synchronous firing…*something*) consciousness itself springs, or staggers, into being. It seems to me that this idea is not merely strange, but perfectly mysterious. It is, I think, so opaque to our understanding as to be unassertable. Of course, this doesn't mean that it isn't true. Consciousness may well emerge from unconscious complexity. But when we linger over the details here—rather than pretend that the indissoluble difference between consciousness and unconsciousness has disappeared simply because we have learned to ignore it— the notion of emergence that underwrites physicalism seems a mere placeholder for

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[88]Harris notes, "I think we can know, through reason alone, that consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value. What is the alternative? I invite you to try and think of a source of value that has absolutely nothing to do with the (actual or potential) experience of conscious beings. Take a moment to think about what this would entail: whatever this alternative is, it cannot affect the experience of any creature (in this life or in any other). Put this thing in a box, and what you have in that box is—it would seem, *by definition*—the least interesting thing in the universe." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 32. While humorous, this statement by Harris fails to get at what might make something objectively valuable. Certainly, to value something is to have conscious thoughts and beliefs towards it. However, what *makes* it valuable, in a way that avoids mere subjectivism? Nobody is arguing against Harris that things of value (especially in the realm of morality) have *nothing* to do with conscious creatures. The disagreements arise when the discussion turns to what *makes* such things objectively valuable.

[89]John Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 157-58.

a miracle.[90]

In fact, as one observes the brain physically, there is absolutely no hard evidence that consciousness exists within it.[91] Try as they may, a scientist will not find a "thought" while studying the brain. Rather, subjects experience consciousness directly, and attribute it to others by analogy, as they describe experiences similar to ours, and we correlate these experiences with physical conditions that seem to exist alongside them in the brain. Is a possible answer on the horizon? Harris thinks it doubtful. In a sobering confession, he says,

> It's not that we are currently unable to answer this question in any detail: the problem is that the sort of answer that physicalism seems poised to deliver amounts to a mere declaration of a miracle. *How* is it that the activity of unconscious structures gives rise to consciousness? Not only do we not have any idea, it seems impossible to imagine what sort of idea could fit in the space provided. Of course, every chain of explanation must end somewhere—generally with some brute fact that neglects to explain itself. Perhaps the emergence of consciousness represents a terminus of this sort and, defying analysis, will one day cease to trouble us.[92]

These startling admissions from Harris bring into question the explanatory power of naturalism, as consciousness occupies such an important place in our understanding of ourselves. Indeed, the fact that a central concept of Harris' ethical system relies so heavily on something this vague and mysterious is enough to give one pause in accepting his worldview. In theology, such evasions of understanding and explanation have gone under the umbrella of fideism, which is often, ironically, looked on with disgust by the very naturalists who claim a similar status for their understanding of consciousness. It's not simply that an explanation has thus far escaped us; it is that such an explanation may forever be out of our reach. Just how much of an issue does the "hard problem" of consciousness raise for the naturalist? The phenomenon of consciousness, which Nagel has written further on,[93] seems to cry for an external *and* internal explanation. The

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[90]Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 63.

[91]Ibid., 66.

[92]Ibid., 86.

[93]See his chapter "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" in Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*

experience of a phenomenon is not identical to the brain state in the same way that H_2O is identical to water.[94] While brain states may be said to *cause* mental states and consciousness, this is not the same as offering a substantial explanation. Nagel says,

> Merely to identify a cause is not to provide a significant explanation, without some understanding of why the cause produces the effect. The claim I want to defend is that, since the conscious character of these organisms is one of their most important features, the explanation of the coming into existence of such creatures must include an explanation of the appearance of consciousness. That cannot be a separate question. An account of their biological evolution must explain the appearance of conscious organisms as such.[95]

If the naturalist is going to explain every physical thing about humanity using the theory of evolution, then they must also explain consciousness. If a purely materialist account of evolution is inadequate in its explanation, then their theory must be modified in order to address consciousness. Nagel believes a psychophysical theory of consciousness, when woven into the evolutionary story, would need to "make intelligible both (1) why specific organisms have the conscious life they have, and (2) why conscious organisms arose in the history of life on earth."[96] The evolutionary account naturalists rely on will remain explanatorily inadequate unless it can make sense of our consciousness, for it is out of this consciousness that morality, and even the very science Harris wishes to employ to study it, arises. This is not to say that such a difficult problem must be fully illuminated before a worldview can have *any* explanatory power. However, the mystery of consciousness makes room for alternative explanations that might *better* explain our world. The main point made by Nagel is that the naturalistic explanation of consciousness does not seem to give their worldview *more* explanatory power, but actually seems to be at odds with our experience and common sense.

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Harris refers to Nagel's famous analogy in his own understanding of consciousness. Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 52.

[94]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 41.

[95]Ibid., 45.

[96]Ibid., 50-51.

The issue of consciousness leads to another problem for Harris, related to the arguments by Lewis and Plantinga, and that is the issue of cognition. Human reasoning, in Harris' worldview, is the force that wields the tool of science in order to determine ethical norms. However, this relies on the assumption that human cognition can be trusted to get at objective truth, which is independent of what the thinker (or even the community of thinkers) *believes* is true. Harris is a scientific and moral realist, and trusts his reasoning faculties to guide him. Nagel has not been suggesting that we become skeptics of every form of knowledge. Rather, he seems to be calling for a re-evaluation of the confidence scientists like Harris hold regarding evolutionary naturalism, since tensions arise when our intuitions are not clearly explained by the accepted theory. Indeed, it seems impossible to avoid a circular argument if one attempts to justify reason using an evolutionary explanation, the conclusion of which relies on reason itself. "Therefore any evolutionary account of the place of reason presupposes reason's validity and cannot confirm it without circularity."[97] Any attempt to understand oneself in evolutionary, naturalistic terms must eventually be grasped by something else that is self-evident. Reason must play this role. To be a moral realist seems to imply that *something* allows us to rise above our subjective opinions and grasp objective truth. Does the account that evolutionary naturalism provides give us confidence that reasoning beings could be produced with the ability to grasp objective reality? Harris seems unwilling to fully address these concerns. He says,

> Total uniformity in the moral sphere—either interpersonally or intrapersonally—may be hopeless. So what? That is precisely the lack of closure we face in all areas of human knowledge. Full consensus as a scientific goal only exists as a limit, at a hypothetical end of inquiry. Why not tolerate the same open-endedness in our thinking about human well-being?[98]

This appears to be a side-step by Harris, who speaks with the utmost confidence when

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[97]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 80-81.

[98]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 67.

claiming that all religions are false or that science is the only way one can truly understand the universe. He seems to be identifying as a moral realist when it comes to moral ontology, while remaining somewhat skeptical regarding moral epistemology.[99] However, one cannot simply brush aside such concerns. Nagel, in his book review of *The Moral Landscape*, addresses this problem. He says,

> Harris rejects this facile opposition in the only way it can be rejected—by pointing to evaluative truths so obvious that they need no defense. For example, a world in which everyone was maximally miserable would be worse than a world in which everyone was happy, and it would be wrong to try to move us toward the first world and away from the second. This is not true by definition, but it is obvious, just as it is obvious that elephants are larger than mice. If someone denied the truth of either of those propositions, we would have no reason to take him seriously.[100]

Essentially, Harris is claiming to be able to transcend his own subjectivity and understand the world as it *really* is, specifically in the realm of moral facts, despite our evolutionary beginnings. However, Nagel does not share Harris' view that moral realism and evolutionary naturalism are compatible. He says, "One can intelligibly hold that moral realism is implausible because evolutionary theory is the best current explanation of our faculties, and an evolutionary account cannot be given of how we would be able to discover judgment-independent moral truth, if there were such a thing."[101] If Harris is going to insist on holding on to his evolutionary naturalism, it seems as though he is forced to re-evaluate his moral realism. This will be further discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Nagel's final criticism of naturalism in *Mind & Cosmos* is birthed from his

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[99]For example, he says, "Again, this does not mean that all opinions about morality are justified. To the contrary—the moment we accept that there are right and wrong answers to questions of human well-being, we must admit that many people are simply wrong about morality." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 67.

[100]Thomas Nagel, "The Facts Fetish," *New Republic* 241, no. 18 (2010): 30.

[101]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 75. For another good critique of Darwinian moral realism, see Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109-66. Street makes many similar points as Plantinga, arguing that natural selection had survival, *not* the recognition of mind-independent truths, as its goal. Reasoning truthfully about the physical world is essential to survival, but reasoning truthfully about mind-independent value realism is not.

previous arguments. He asserts that "value" is difficult to explain in the currently accepted theory of evolutionary naturalism, just as consciousness and cognition are.[102] In fact, value will be grasped and understood within consciousness *using* cognition, so any weaknesses in those areas will translate into weaknesses in value theory as well. He argues that there must be values that are seen as true in themselves, without needing further outside justification. Negel suggests that, if moral realism is true, then the current theory of Darwinian account of morality must be false, since it leads to moral *anti*realism, as argued by Sharon Street.[103] Nagel recognizes the critique that might be levied against him as he is using a philosophical assertion to debunk a scientific one. In response, he explains,

> Value judgments and moral reasoning are part of human life, and therefore part of the factual evidence about what humans are capable of. The interpretation of faculties such as these is inescapably relevant to the task of discovering the best scientific and cosmological account of what we are and how we came into existence. What counts as a good explanation depends heavily on an understanding of what it is that has to be explained.[104]

If one must begin at a basic grounding point, it seems as though moral realism is as good as any. Harris begins from evolutionary naturalism, and yet insists on holding on to moral realism despite the good reasons there are to believe that such a stance is incompatible with his worldview.

Conclusion

It seems as though Harris' moral realism is a presupposition, rather than a position arrived at by science. However, if moral realism *is* a presupposition, might this fact lead in the opposite direction of where Harris goes? Rather than building a bridge to evolutionary naturalism, moral realism may point towards something else. Nagel is never

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[102]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 97.

[103]Ibid., 105. See Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma."

[104]Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*, 106.

clear in what he thinks that might be, and resists labeling himself as a theist or intelligent design theorist. However, he observes that moral realism more likely supports a form of teleology than it does the current Darwinian consensus. Harris admits that the evolutionary objection does seemingly carry some weight. However, it also puts one in the position of doubting *all* knowledge. He says, "It is just as true to say that our logical, mathematical, and physical intuitions have not been designed by natural selection to track the Truth. Does this mean that we must cease to be realists with respect to physical reality?"[105] This, however, is exactly the point. *If* we believe our cognitive faculties to be reliable ways of ascertaining truth, then we must seek the best explanation for *why* this is the case. Both Lewis and Plantinga believe that theism provides a far better explanation than naturalism, as it points to a rational Mind at the bottom of reality, which is responsible for designing humans in His image. Harris agrees that our reason is reliable; his explanation for its origins, however, does not seem to support this conclusion. There are certainly many unresolved issues, but the arguments and doubts levied against Harris by Lewis, Plantinga, and Nagel give important reasons to question the coherence of Harris' worldview, and re-evaluate the evolutionary naturalism on which it stands. Thus, a crack may be visible in one of the pillars of his worldview.

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[105]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 66.

CHAPTER 3

WELL-BEING: THE ONE TRUE PURSUIT
OF MORALITY?

Introduction

A foundational issue that every metaethical system must address is what the

goal of ethics is. For the utilitarian it is "the greatest good for the greatest number," while

for the deontologist it might be to fulfill one's obligation to "duty" or to obey the

commands of a deity. Sam Harris presents a consequentialist argument for the well-being

of conscious creatures, relying on a naturalistic understanding of Aristotle's idea of

eudemonia.[1] He recognizes two others, William Casebeer and Owen Flanagan, who have

similarly attempted a scientific understanding of Aristotle's influential concept, although

he distinguishes his project from theirs.[2] In the process, he also distances himself from

Aristotle as well. He says,

> Both Casebeer and Flanagan have resurrected Aristotle's concept of *eudemonia*,
> which is generally translated as "flourishing," "fulfillment," or "well-being." While
> I rely heavily on these English equivalents, I have elected not to pay attention to
> Aristotle. While much of what Aristotle wrote in his *Nichomachean Ethics* is of
> great interest and convergent with the case I wish to make, some of it isn't. And I'd
> rather not be beholden to the quirks of the great man's philosophy. Both Casebeer
> and Flanagan also seem to place greater emphasis on morality as a skill and a form
> of practical knowledge, arguing that living a good life is more a matter of "knowing
> how" than of "knowing that." While I think this distinction is often useful, I'm not
> eager to give up the fight for moral truth just yet.[3]

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[1]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Dover Thrift ed., ed. William Kaufman (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998).

[2]William D. Casebeer, *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, Connectionism, and Moral Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

[3]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 195-96n9. Another who views pragmatic usefulness as being the primary value of morality is Paul Churchland. He notes, "If . . . we reconceive strong moral character as the possession of a broad family of perceptual, computational, and behavior skills in the social domain, then the skeptic's

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In this chapter, I attempt to understand what Harris means by a naturalistic understanding of "well-being" and how this holds a central place in his worldview. The works of Casebeer and Flanagan are discussed as they shed light on Harris' theory. Also, I take a closer look at the concept of well-being, and the difficulties a naturalist has in defining and measuring it, sampling the works of Daniel Haybron[4] and James Griffin.[5] Russell Blackford's critique further reveals how Harris uses "well-being" as a philosophical presupposition, rather than a scientific discovery.[6] Finally, I discuss Richard Boyd's idea of "homeostatic property clusters"[7] as a possible explanation of how Harris seeks to define the concept of well-being, and compare this with Robert Merrihew Adams' idea of "The Good." I suggest that a theistic worldview may provide a fuller account of teleological well-being that is lost in a purely naturalistic explanation, especially as it pertains to morality.[8]

Aristotelian Foundations

The concept of "well-being," for Harris, has its roots in Aristotle's *eudemonia*, being The Chief Good, which ". . . we choose always for its own sake, and never with a view to anything further."[9] Like Aristotle, Harris observes that everybody seeks well-

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question must become, 'Why should I acquire those skills?' To which the honest answer is, 'Because they are easily the most important skills you will ever learn.'" Paul M. Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 294.

[4]Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*, paperback ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5]James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[6]Russell Blackford, review of *The Moral Landscape*, by Sam Harris, *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 2 (December 2010): 53-62, accessed August 25, 2016, http://jetpress.org/v21/blackford3.htm.

[7]Richard N. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181-228.

[8]Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[9]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.

being. He does not see how anything *other* than well-being could be the source of value for people. He notes,

> Clearly, if there is a more important source of value that has nothing to do with the well-being of conscious creatures (in this life or a life to come), my thesis would be disproved. As I have said, however, I cannot conceive of what such a source of value could be: for if someone claimed to have found it somewhere, it could be of no possible interest to anyone, by definition.[10]

Although "well-being" is a foundational part of his ethical theory, Harris struggles to define the term, and takes for granted the shared intuitive understanding his readers already have of the concept. In this, he is not completely unjustified, in that a detailed description of what constitutes well-being can often be vague. This does not mean that one cannot say anything about it. However, if Harris is going to tie the concept of well-being directly to his understanding of ethics, then this connection must fit comfortably within his naturalistic worldview. In Harris' estimation, when we talk about things being morally "right" or "wrong," what we are actually talking about is whether or not those actions increase or decrease the well-being of conscious creatures. He believes our moral language may even be redundant, in that a scientific language of well-being more clearly specifies what we intend to say.[11] Although well-being resists an easy definition, Harris likens it to our concept of health:

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[10]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 189.

[11]William Frankena is not satisfied with merely swapping moral language for a naturalistic or scientific alternative, as it does not seem to accurately capture the truth of what we mean when we speak of morality. He says, "Even after studying them I find myself doubting that any pure definist theory, whether naturalistic or metaphysical, can be regarded as adequate as an account of what we do mean. For such a theory holds that an ethical judgment simply is an assertion of a fact—that ethical terms constitute merely an alternative vocabulary for reporting facts. It may be that they should be interpreted so that this is the case. In actual usage, however, this seems clearly not to be so. When we are making merely factual assertions we are not thereby taking any pro or con attitude toward what we are talking about; we are not recommending it, prescribing it, or anything of the sort." He goes on to observe that simply changing the language avoids getting to the heart of what we talk about when we use ethical terms, and whatever new terms we choose will still stand in need of justification. He notes, "It might be replied . . . that we ought to redefine our ethical terms so that they merely constitute another vocabulary for reporting certain empirical or metaphysical facts (perhaps on the ground that then our ethical judgments could be justified on the basis of science or metaphysics). Then we would have to consider whether we really need such an alternative way of reporting those facts, and whether we can get along without a special vocabulary to do what we have been using our ethical terms to do—which at least includes expressing pro and con attitudes, recommending, prescribing, evaluating, and so on . . . But this means that the whole burden rests on the definition, and we may still ask how the definition is justified or why we should accept it." William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 100.

Many readers might wonder how can we base our values on something as difficult to define as "well-being?" It seems to me, however, that the concept of well-being is like the concept of physical health: it resists precise definition, and yet it is indispensible. In fact, the meanings of both terms seem likely to remain perpetually open to revision as we make progress in science.[12]

In making the connection to physical health, he finds some kinship with Aristotle, who also understood the fluidity of definition. Due to this, Aristotle believed a basic guide for moral action, not a hard-and-fast rule, should be accepted. He says,

But let this point be first thoroughly understood between us, that all which can be said on moral action must be said in outline, as it were, and not exactly: for as we remarked at the commencement, such reasoning only must be required as the nature of the subject-matter admits of, and matters of moral action and expediency have no fixedness any more than matters of health. And if the subject in its general maxims is such, still less in its application to particular cases is exactness attainable: because these fall not under any art or system of rules, but it must be left in each instance to the individual agents to look to the exigencies of the particular case, as it is in the art of healing, or that of navigating a ship. Still, though the present subject is confessedly such, we must try and do what we can for it.[13]

Harris agrees, which is why the concept of well-being, like that of physical health, should be left open for future revision. However, he believes well-being is not so hard to grasp that we cannot say something about it at present. He gives two examples, one of The Good Life and one of The Bad Life.[14] Each offers a possible scenario of someone experiencing great physical, emotional, and psychological pleasure or pain. While these examples are hyperbolic, Harris' point is that we can intuitively agree that one life is preferable, and that it is desirable to move away from one and towards the other. If this is so, then there can be specific facts known and said about these experiences. He says, "I also think it is indisputable that most of what we do with our lives is predicated on there

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[12]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 11-12. Patricia Churchland, also attempting to understand morality through the study of neuroscience, admits this as well. While she states, "Surprisingly often, well-being is not terribly hard to assess," she also notes, "In many other cases, well-being can be difficult to settle, especially when a practice is deeply entrenched in an institution with a long and esteemed history, making it difficult to get agreement on what serves human well-being in the long run." Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 181. For an account of "eudaimonic" ethics that seeks to ground *eudemonia* in the "bottom-up" observations of psychology, see Lorraine Besser-Jones, *Eudaimonic Ethics: The Philosophy and Psychology of Living Well* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[13]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 21-22.

[14]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 15-16.

being nothing more important, at least for ourselves and for those closest to us, than the difference between the Bad Life and the Good Life."[15] Since all of these actions and experiences will ultimately be realized as states in the brain, and the brain can be studied scientifically, Harris claims that a scientific understanding of well-being is possible through neuroscience. Even though the definition of well-being may be open to future clarification and revision, it is obvious *enough*. Harris says, "Indeed, the difference between a healthy person and a dead one is about as clear and consequential a distinction as we ever make in science. The differences between the heights of human fulfillment and the depths of human misery are no less clear, even if new frontiers await us in both directions."[16] In fact, Harris believes his premise to be so obvious, that anyone who disagrees with his presentation of The Good Life and The Bad Life ". . . is unlikely to have anything to contribute to a discussion about human well-being."[17]

The observation that people generally seek their own well-being is not controversial. In fact, theists would agree that well-being is a desirable benefit of a relationship with God. It is also true that well-being, by definition, refers to something that is valued by individuals. How does Harris tie this basic observation about humanity into his understanding of ethics? As a consequentialist, he presupposes that well-being is the ultimate *goal* of ethical behavior, and the morality of our actions is determined by

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[15]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 16.

[16]Ibid., 12.

[17]Ibid., 19. Here, Harris finds further kinship with Aristotle, who largely relied on his audience's assumed understanding that *eudemonia* was something of value worth seeking. Sarah Broadie, "Aristotle and Contemporary Ethics," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 345, notes, "When Aristotle presents them—and himself— with his equation, he and they are immediately inclined to accept it. But the immediacy to them of its rightness or truth is an expression of their character, not of an analytic or conceptual connection." In other words, both Aristotle and Harris are beginning with what they believe to be a universally accepted premise: that everyone desires *eudemonia*. There is evidence that suggests most people reason about morality in such a way, accepting something as valuable *first*, and then seeking an *ad hoc* justification later. See Fiery Cushman and Joshua Greene, "The Philosopher in the Theater," in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 33-50.

how they affect the flourishing of others and ourselves. However, is this what *makes*

something moral, or is this the *result* of moral actions? Harris has also appealed to our

selfishness to ground our pursuit of well-being, noting how we treat others in certain

ways because of the consequences it ultimately has for us in the end. He says,

> [W]e experience happiness and suffering ourselves; we encounter others in the world and recognize that they experience happiness and suffering as well; we soon discover that "love" is largely a matter of wishing that others experience happiness rather than suffering; and most of us come to feel that love is more conducive to happiness, both our own and that of others, than hate. There is a circle here that links us to one another: we each want to be happy; the social feeling of love is one of our greatest sources of happiness; and love entails that we be concerned for the happiness of others. We discover that we can be selfish together.[18]

Harris begins with a basic observation (people seek happiness), and connects it to our

relationships with others (we can experience more happiness when we work together),

and then bridges these observations together to form an ethical system that suggests it is

in our best interest to be moral, because acting morally will help us get what we want out

of life (happiness). However, if well-being is the ultimate goal of ethics, it seems that this

can be in conflict with our actual experience. Sacrificing our own best wishes for the

well-being of others does not always come back to increase our own well-being in a

cyclical fashion. Many times, seeking the well-being of others involves diminishing our

own. We are often faced with a choice between increasing our own well-being or that of

another (even a stranger). Thus, a morality built on selfishness has difficulty explaining

some of the greatest virtues (such as self-sacrifice). Furthermore, ethics mostly deals with

how our actions affect others, not how they affect us. An ethic built on selfishness fails to

explain why the young man who gives up his spot on the lifeboat for another on the

Titanic is performing an act of moral virtue. In no way would such a man hope to

experience happiness at the bottom of the ocean, so what motivates him to accept this fate

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[18]Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 186-87.

to save a stranger?[19] Harris has correctly observed that we seek our own well-being, and will cooperate with others to the degree that it furthers that end (a form of 'reciprocal altruism'). However, this fails to answer the age-old question, "Why *should* I be moral when its not prudent or convenient for me?" Morality is often costly, and seems to involve more than fulfilling our own selfishness. When we label someone as *im*moral when they choose *not* to seek their own well-being (or, especially, that of others) we seem to imply that the individual has committed a graver error than simply imprudence towards basic self-interests. Such a person would not just be flouting the herd mentality. Rather, they are *not* doing something they *should* do, and are thus condemned for it.

Once we presuppose well-being as the goal of ethics, Harris believes much else will fall into place. The lack of a concrete definition for "well-being" does not prevent science from studying it. The same is true in other areas of science. He says,

> The definition of "life" remains, to this day, difficult to pin down. Does this mean we can't study life scientifically. No. The science of biology thrives despite such ambiguities. Again, the concept of "health" is looser still: it, too, must be defined with reference to specific goals—not suffering chronic pain, not always vomiting, etc.—and these goals are continually changing.[20]

His point is that we do not need a solid definition of "well-being" in order to construct a science of morality around it, just as we can study biology while leaving major concepts like "life" ill-defined. The issue, however, is not whether science can make significant statements about well-being like it can about health. The difference is that the biological study of health is not *normative*. A science of morality does something extra that a study of biology does not do. Science may determine what leads to longer life and more efficient functioning of bodily systems, but to make a normative statement of whether this is *good* or *bad,* or whether we *should* or *shouldn't* pursue such goals, is to make a

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[19]C. S. Lewis notes the tension between our selfishness and what we know to be morally right. He says, "You probably *want* to be safe much more than you want to help that man who is drowning: but the Moral Law tells you to help him all the same." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 10.

[20]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 35.

different sort of claim. Harris says, "Science cannot tell us why, *scientifically*, we should value health. But once we admit that health is the proper concern of medicine, we can then study and promote it through science."[21] He infers that morality is similar, in that once we accept well-being as the proper goal for ethics, a science of morality can then be built to speak authoritatively over us. This presupposition is foundational to the rest of his project. For Harris, well-being seems to be an obvious starting place that others should recognize. In fact, he believes the basics of well-being to be so evident, that one can easily identify those who are wrong about it (and, by extension, wrong about morality). He draws on the especially low-hanging fruit of the Taliban and their treatment of women as an example, claiming, "Whatever they *think* they want out of life—like keeping all women and girls subjugated and illiterate—they simply do not understand how much better life would be for them if they had different priorities."[22] While few of his readers would likely defend the Taliban, it is illuminating that Harris would spend time admitting the vagueness in his concept of well-being, only to then turn around and condemn anyone who doesn't understand it in the obvious way he does. Indeed, one might assume that members of the also Taliban do what they do based on their own ethics of well-being, even if it is achieved at the expense of other people's happiness.

When pushed to justify these central concepts of his worldview (well-being and science), he admits that any such "radical" justification is not possible. He says,

> It is essential to see that the demand for *radical* justification leveled by the moral skeptic could not be met by any branch of science. Science is defined with reference to the goal of understanding the processes at work in the universe. Can we justify this goal scientifically? Of course not. Does this make science itself *unscientific*? If so, we appear to have pulled ourselves *down* by our bootstraps.[23]

He asks, "What evidence could prove that we should value evidence? What logic could

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[21]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 37.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid.

demonstrate the importance of logic?"[24] Here, he is correct. Justifications must eventually

bottom-out somewhere. As this is a common issue for all worldviews, Harris must then

seek to show why *his* worldview makes more sense of well-being than any other

conceptions of morality. However, it may be that intuition or *a priori* reasoning or divine

revelation is sufficient to ground morality, and its relation to well-being, better than

Harris' naturalism.[25] Harris seems to use the term "science" to mean simply the process

by which we determine justified truth claims, leaving the definition open and vague

enough to cross boundaries into any number of disciplines not traditionally thought of as

"science."[26] This would seem to take much of the punch out of the thesis "How *Science*

Can *Determine* Human Values."

It is important to note that Aristotle's concept of *eudemonia* is not necessarily

opposed to Christian doctrine and, as such, is not exclusively available to naturalists.

There is a rich history of natural theology that finds its foremost defender in Thomas

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[24]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 37.

[25]In a summary of what he sees as an evasion on Harris' part to adequately account for the central place of "well-being" in his theory, Patrick Arnold, review of *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, by Sam Harris, *Westminster Theological Journal* 73, no. 2 (2011): 395, says, "We might sketch his methodology in ethics as follows: first, create an intuitive set of definitions for moral terms. In Harris's case, moral goodness just means the maximization of the well-being of conscious creatures. Second, assert that all other systems of morality presuppose this definition. Assert, finally, that anyone who disagrees with this system of morality is misusing words, beyond the reach of reason or at least confused, and comparable to the radical skeptic that no one can possibly answer."

[26]Harris issued an open challenge on his website calling for essays that disproved his theory. In his response to the essay selected as the winner, he seeks to clarify this point, but actually confuses the issue even more. He states, "For practical reasons, it is often necessary to draw boundaries between academic disciplines, but physicists, chemists, biologists, and psychologists rely on the same processes of thought and observation that govern all our efforts to stay in touch with reality. This larger domain of justified truth-claims is 'science' in my sense." Harris seems to be referring to a unified method of finding truth in all spheres of knowledge. He says, "I am, in essence, defending the unity of knowledge—the idea that the boundaries between disciplines are mere conventions and that we inhabit a single epistemic sphere in which to form true beliefs about the world." He admits that this is indeed confusing, but that he simply means ". . . our best effort to understand reality at every level." Finally, in a startling admission, he concludes, "The whole point of *The Moral Landscape* was to argue for the existence of moral truths—and to insist that they are every bit as real as the truths of physics. If readers want to concede that point without calling the acquisition of such truths a 'science,' that's a semantic choice that has no bearing on my argument." In fact, it seems to have everything to bear on his argument, because it significantly weakens the very premise of his title. His thesis is not simply that moral facts exist, but that they are discoverable through "science." Sam Harris, "Clarifying the Moral Landscape: A Response to Ryan Born," June 6, 2014, accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/clarifying-the-landscape.

Aquinas, who brought together Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy, to develop a theistic understanding of *eudemonia*. Indeed, Aquinas believed that God desires human beings to flourish, and so to seek well-being was to function properly as God had designed. However, he also taught that our ultimate fulfillment could not be found in nature alone, as we have been created with *super*natural goals as well:

> For [Aquinas], final happiness consists in beatitude, or supernatural union with God. Such an end lies far beyond what we through our natural human capacities can attain. For this reason, we not only need the virtues, we also need God to transform our nature—to perfect or "deify" it—so that we might be suited to participate in divine beatitude.[27]

Christianity explains *eudemonia* by positing a goal-oriented God at the foundation of reality. While a naturalist may observe a sort of teleology in the world, is this *best* explained by their evolutionary worldview? One can see the appeal of Aristotle for Harris, in that it seems to accept an order to the universe, without attributing that order to a supernatural deity. As Oliver O'Donavan notes, "The virtue of the Aristotelian conception is that it allows us to think of teleological order as a purely *natural* ordering, an ordering within the created world which does not beg questions about what lies outside it."[28] Indeed, both the secular and the religious ethicist must decide how they

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[27]Sean Floyd, "Thomas Aquinas: Moral Philosophy," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 10, 2016, http://www.iep.utm.edu/aq-moral/. Aquinas considers, and rejects, many of the common sources of well-being as the ultimate goal of humanity (including physical pleasure). Rather, he asserts that man's happiness is two-fold. We experience a certain kind of happiness here on earth, but this will always remain incomplete, as we were ultimately created to find our complete fulfillment and perfection in God. Since our final goal is to be united with God, the mere preservation of our bodies along the way is not sufficient to fulfill our desired ends (just as the captain of a ship maintains his ship *in order to* reach his final destination). Happiness, then, is the *result*, but not the final *goal*, of humanity. He states, "Happiness is called man's supreme good, because it is the attainment or enjoyment of the supreme good [God]." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IaIIae 3.1, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948). For a theistic conception of *eudemonia*, Harris' naturalistic description of well-being does not go far enough. Aquinas states, "Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence." *ST* IaIIae 3.8. There are two levels of happiness, the lower form being incomplete without the higher. He claims, "Happiness is twofold; the one is imperfect and is had in this life; the other is perfect, consisting in the vision of God." *ST* IaIIae 4.5. Where does this leave Harris' naturalistic *eudemonia*? Incomplete, according to Aquinas, and yet conceivable (in part) even for an unbeliever. He says, "Men esteem that there is some kind of happiness to be had in this life, on account of a certain likeness to true Happiness. And thus they do not fail altogether in their estimate." *ST* IaIIae 5.3.

[28]Oliver O'Donavan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 34.

interpret the apparent order in the world, as this will largely determine what shape their ethical system will take.[29] For Harris, as a naturalist, he cannot simply accept the fact that humans seem ordered *towards* flourishing. Why should this be, on a Darwinian understanding of nature? It seems as though the naturalist must accept this as a brute fact, without further explanation. O'Donovan observes that theism may offer a better understanding of *telos* we observe around us, and it could point towards a supernatural explanation. He says,

> One cannot speak of the flourishing of any kind without implicitly indicating a wider order which will determine what flourishing and frustration within that kind consist of. An acorn flourishes by becoming an oak; but why should this be a more successful thing for it to become than pig's food? We have to choose between a purely anarchistic answer, based on an ultimate competition between all species, and an answer which points to the value for *other* beings of there being oaks and not just acorns. So it is, when we speak of the flourishing of a human being, that we raise the question of the wider order within which the content of human flourishing is determined. And there arises the possibility that the answer will point to a 'supernatural end', to a reference point outside the network of kinds and ends in nature, which nature as a whole is ordered-to-serve and which determines what the flourishing of the natural order is to be.[30]

For the theist, it may be that well-being *in itself* is not the final goal of ethics, but rather the result of achieving the goals for which humans have been designed to seek (a relationship with their Creator). This must be sought in the right way, or, in accordance with the natural moral law given by a divine Law Giver.[31] When the theist observes the *telos* in the world, it fits within their worldview of a Creator who designed the world to function towards certain ends. We, as a special creation of this God, find our fulfillment when we live in accordance with our design, much like the hammer is used excellently when hitting nails, although it may also be used in other, less perfect, ways. If such is the

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[29]O'Donavan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, 35.

[30]Ibid.

[31]For good explanations of this Natural Law, see Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chaps. 1-5; J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997).

case, then Harris is talking about something different than the theist when he speaks of

well-being, as his understanding of *eudemonia* will not include elements that are central

to the theist's conception of flourishing. This does not mean that theists like Aquinas give

a complete explanation of what this final *eudemonia* might look like. It *does* show that

theists might find kinship with Aristotle within their own worldview, while also

disagreeing with much of the way Harris deals with similar issues. I am not attempting to

argue that *eudemonia* has no place in ethics. Rather, it is my assertion that Harris'

naturalistic understanding of well-being, and his use of it as the central goal of morality,

does not fit comfortably within the rest of his worldview, as it assumes a *telos* at the

bottom of an unguided natural system. Harris seems to make an existential leap in

affirming teleology, and projecting value onto a valueless natural system. In this way, his

teleological use of *eudemonia* as the goal of morality borrows from Aristotle, and yet

does not seem to fit within the rest of his naturalism.[32] Though many of his observations

about well-being may be true, his explanation and grounding of them appear to be

inconsistent with other aspects of his naturalistic worldview.

Casebeer's "Natural Ethical Facts"

In order to shed light on what Harris means by his naturalistic conception of

well-being, it will be useful to survey others who have thought similarly about it. One

such individual is William Casebeer, whom Harris mentions in passing, and whose work

in *Natural Ethical Facts* precedes *The Moral Landscape* by several years. Similar to

Harris, Casebeer's goal is to move ethics *out of* the realm of "dogmatic supernatural and

non-naturalistic conceptions of the moral life" and into a "post-Enlightenment normative

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[32]J. Budziszewski notes that Aristotle misses an important aspect about morality because of his refusal to ground it in God. He says, "So it is that although he understands the baseness and absurdity of vice, he cannot fathom its sheer guiltiness. However disgusting and ridiculous it may be, it is not *sin*." Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 188. In his observations, Aristotle ". . . saw the virtues as characteristics that admirable men *do* have, rather than things we *ought* to have" (214).

anchor."[33] He also states, "The nature of morality and the picture of moral cognition I defend are rooted in a pragmatic construal of knowledge and in a modern, biologically informed neo-Aristotelianism."[34] Casebeer attempts to combine Aristotle's *eudemonia* within the naturalistic framework of Darwinian evolution. Perhaps in an effort to avoid what Harris struggles with above, he claims that morality is a matter of "knowing how" more than a matter of "knowing that."[35] Can one avoid making "knowing that" statements about morality if one is a moral realist? Knowing *how* to do something seems of little importance if one does not know *why* they are doing it, especially in the case of morality. Ethics *in practice* always arises out of a framework of *ethics in theory.* The question is whether the metaethic properly grounds the applications that follow.

Casebeer combines Aristotle with Darwin in order to create a teleological ethics based on functionality. He admits, "It is not the case that our only function is to reproduce. Our various characters and traits have functions that they can fail to satisfy, even well after our period of reproductive fecundity."[36] Explaining Aristotle, Casebeer says, "Aristotle's ethics thus has a distinctively teleological flavor—in his biological studies, he thought that a thing's nature was determined by what counted as its successful operation; so is it too for his ethics."[37] Therefore, humans are acting moral when they are *functioning* in the appropriate way (like a hammer used to drive a nail). For Aristotle, our true function is that which distinguishes us as unique from other animals: our ability to reason. Realizing our true nature and function leads us to success, or, *eudemonia*.[38]

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[33]Casebeer, *Natural Ethical Facts*, 1.

[34]Ibid., 3.

[35]Ibid., 5.

[36]Ibid., 66.

[37]Ibid., 42.

[38]Ibid., 43.

Through experience, one learns the distinction between *deficiency* and *excess* in the content of their virtues, and leads a life in the middle of these two extremes. However, like Harris, much philosophy is done *before* Casebeer can apply any sort of scientific process to determine moral actions. If one accepts his starting place, then one can further move along in Casebeer's natural ethical theory. The same can be said regarding Harris' scientific morality of well-being.[39] Even if one *does* accept Casebeer's and Harris' formulation of well-being and human functionality, this process is arrived at by philosophy, not science, although Casebeer says, "Just as we can come to have medical knowledge, we can come to have moral knowledge; this knowledge will be gained in much the same way that scientific knowledge is—through the application of reason to experience."[40] However, he also admits, "We may have to make some assumptions about the nature of values in order for this argument to be convincing."[41] Such seems to be the case with Harris as well. If one is ready to accept his definition of well-being and why it is the driving force behind ethics, and is further ready to accept the presuppositions behind science as a method of truth-seeking, then much else may fall into place. The problem is whether or not evolutionary naturalism supports this idea of well-being or not. Aristotle's ethics are teleological, but this poses a problem when combined with evolution. The heart may have the *function* of pumping blood, but is this its *goal*?[42] It

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[39]Harris seems reluctant to admit just how much philosophy must be done before one can do science. In fact, he claims not to have arrived at his theory by reading moral philosophy, but by "considering the logical implications of our making continued progress in the sciences of the mind." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 197n1.

[40]Casebeer, *Natural Ethical Facts*, 48.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Richard Joyce, in response to Casebeer's formulation, says, "Although evolutionary biology allows us to speak sensibly of the function of eyes, hands, and feet, it doesn't obviously assign a function to humans . . . . How we get from 'Joe's heart ought to pump blood' to 'Joe ought to keep his promise' remains problematic." Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 170. Indeed, we do not praise a heart as "moral" because it pumps blood well. He notes, "Evolutionary biology may license our claiming that a particular heart is good because it pumps blood well, but in saying this we would not really be praising the heart, any more than we would be praising the assassin for his ruthless efficiency if we admitted that he is good at his profession" (171).

seems that only rational beings can have goals, as opposed to simply functions that lead to certain ends. If this is the case, what is the function or goal of a human? Humans can, in fact, imagine many different goals for themselves. In Aristotelian thinking, a virtuous person is one who functions in a way that moves them closer to "perfection." For Aristotle, this took the form of rational contemplation. However, this very thesis seems completely at odds in a naturalist's conception of an evolutionary world, in which there is no "goal" of evolution, and certainly no "perfection," which would imply an objective standard to measure against. To claim that natural selection has goals is to read into natural processes anthropomorphically, and sounds very much like "intelligent design." If one is to apply the terminology of goals to naturalism at all, one must speak in terms of survival and adaption. There is, however, no guarantee that acting morally will always be in the best interest of achieving these goals. In fact, many of the most virtuous and praiseworthy actions are *sacrificial* for the agent. Harris seems to believe that to function properly and virtuously is to seek our own well-being and the well-being of others. However, he admits that many yearnings of our inner life are in fact *not* compatible with us finding happiness in the world.[43] Both Casebeer and Harris are forced to define what the proper function of humanity is, while also adhering to Darwinian evolution, and avoiding any arbitrary subjective goal that might change depending on the individual. It seems that Harris simply *chooses* "well-being" as the proper goal for humanity, considering it to be something that is sought after universally. While this may *seem* obvious based on evolution (well-being, after all, assumes survival at the most basic level), it is not at all clear why one might commit a moral "transgression" were they to decide to seek only their own goals, even at the expense of another's.

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[43]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 13.

Owen Flanagan's "Really Hard Problem"

In his book *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*, Owen Flanagan (who acted as an outside-reader on Harris' dissertation) offers what he calls *eudaimonistic scientia* ("flourishing knowledge"). Although he admits that this way of thinking is not a "science" in the modern sense, it relies on "systematic philosophical theorizing" that is consistent *with* science.[44] Similar to Harris, Flanagan states, "If there can be such a thing as eudaimonics, systemized theorizing about the nature, causes, and constituents of human flourishing, it is because it is possible to say some contentful things about the ways of being and living that are likely to bring happiness, sense, and meaning to persons."[45] Also like Harris, Flanagan resists any "non-natural, occult, or supernatural causes or forces" in his explanations.[46] Anticipating the evolutionary objection, Flanagan states, "It would make sense to be completely selfish—with self-serving strategic exceptions—*if* we were designed solely to achieve individual 'fitness.' But we were not designed that way. We were designed to be fit as *social animals . . . .* Humans are designed to care about more than individual fitness."[47] Apparently, one is supposed to excuse his use of "design" in a naturalistic world *without* designers. How, then, is our understanding of human flourishing cultivated? Flanagan says,

> One observes lives that work and lives that don't work to produce what a reflective person thinks is eudaimonia. One examines the conditions of the world and of character that seem to do the job, critically evaluates these with that initial reflective conception of eudaimonia in hand, and adjusts one's conception of both the "conditions" productive of and/or constitutive of eudaimonia and one's conception of 'true happiness/flourishing' along the way.[48]

While this certainly taps into the spirit of pragmatism, it is nevertheless built on a

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[44]Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 2.

[45]Ibid., 16.

[46]Ibid., 2.

[47]Ibid., 43.

[48]Ibid., 111.

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presupposition in its premise: that well-being *just is* what morality is the ultimate goal of ethics.[49] This is the same starting place as Harris. Flanagan notes that, "Close inspection begins with an initial hypothesis about what eudaimonia is, what leads to it, what constitutes it, and so on."[50] This is a philosophical assumption.[51]

Perhaps most enlightening to Harris' theory is an example Flanagan uses of a meditating monk, and the difficulties it raises when applied to an ethics based on neuroscience. Flanagan speaks of his "natural method" in attempting to ". . . triangulate a subject domain by coordinating phenomenological data with psychological and behavioral data and both with neuroscientific data," in order to identify "happiness" in the brain.[52] He refers to an experiment done on a Buddhist monk in which the

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[49]Like Harris, Flanagan fails to see how morality could be about anything other than well-being. He says, "If ethics is about anything it must be about flourishing." Ibid., 126. He admits that speaking about "happiness" is difficult precisely because of the disagreement about what happiness is (146).

[50]Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 146.

[51]Perhaps because of this, Flanagan recognizes the inevitability of normative philosophy in the very process of doing science. He says, "Doing science at all *and* then doing it the ways we do it, and for the reasons we do it, involve a host of normative commitments. Nevertheless, I do think we need an account for the often observed fact that ethical wisdom, insofar as there is such a thing, fails to reach convergence in the way epistemic norms and scientific knowledge do—where by 'science' I mean, for ease of argument, to restrict myself to areas like anatomy, physiology, inorganic and organic chemistry, and physics without general relativity or quantum physics." Owen Flanagan, *Self Expressions: Minds, Morals, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122. Flanagan also believes that science alone is not sufficient to develop a robust ethics. Rather, "What is relevant to ethical reflection is everything we know, everything we can bring to ethical conversation that merits attention—data from the human sciences, from history, and literature, and the other arts, from playing with possible worlds in imagination, and from everyday commentary on everyday events. Critique is perspectival not transcultural or neutral—it originates in reflection from the point of view of this historical place and time" (133). He further resists any accusation of "scientism" by stating, "The simple and obvious point is that not everything worth expressing can or should be expressed scientifically. Scientism is descriptively false and normatively false." Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 23. Phillip Gorski, also a naturalist, agrees that science alone is insufficient for morality. He notes, "It must be emphasized, once again, that the sort of ethical naturalism I have in mind here would not – and could not – dispense with moral and political philosophy, and for a number of reasons. For one thing, there are certain sorts of moral and political questions which cannot be readily answered in naturalistic terms, such as assisted suicide or just war, questions, in other words, that concern what is right rather than what is good. For another, there are certain questions concerning human flourishing which cannot be outsourced to the sciences. The sciences alone cannot easily adjudicate between utilitarian and Aristotelian models of human happiness, for example. There are problems of conceptualization and evaluation here that go beyond the competencies of the sciences." Phillip Gorski, "Beyond the Fact/Value Distinction: Ethical Naturalism and the Social Science," *Society* 50, no. 6 (December 2013): 550-51, accessed August 23, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12115-013-9709-2.

[52]Flanagan, *Really Hard Problem*, 159.

individual's brain was studied while he was in a state of deep meditation. During the test, the monk's left pre-frontal cortex lit up brightly, far more than the approximately 175 previous subjects. This region of the brain is "crucially implicated in emotion, mood, and temperament," which led many at the time to ask whether this monk was "the happiest person ever to exist." The issue, as Flanagan points out, is that being the leftmost PFC-wise does not necessarily mean that this monk was the "happiest," in the same way that a person can be measured to be "the tallest." Essentially, our brains may "do the same thing," but in different ways, such that the conscious experience of one person cannot be determined to be identical to the conscious experience of another, even if the same areas of their brains are activated. The truth is, "Left-side pre-frontal activity is a reliable measure of positive affect, but no one has asserted let alone confirmed that among the group of 'lefties,' the leftmost individual is the happiest."[53] Both the causes and the contents of those who are tested may reveal very different results for their "happiness." As Flanagan admits, "There are no brain imaging or scanning techniques that (as of now) distinguish among contents. All information about *content* needs to come from first-person and third-person narratives and the like."[54] This means that subjectivity will be unavoidable when attempting to study well-being at a brain level, because the only source for learning brain *content* is to hear it from the subject herself. Harris may desire to study well-being at the level of the brain, but ultimately he must rely on the subject letting him know how happy or unhappy she is, regardless of what the brain scans reveal. This once again harkens back to the difficulty in defining exactly *what* well-being is, which is a term used differently by different people. There seems to be no way around relying on a subjective account of well-being, as expressed by the individuals being studied.[55]

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[53]Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 161.

[54]Ibid., 162.

[55]C. D. C. Reeve, "Beginning and Ending with *Eudaimonia*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Ronald Polansky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31, notes, "Because happiness does consist in a favorable emotional state, moreover, what evokes it can vary

Even if such brain states could be labeled as revealing well-being, is the happiest person simply the individual who experiences the *most* or the *longest* periods of a specific brain state? This does not seem to be what most people are thinking of when they understand happiness. Daniel Haybron addresses this in relation to hedonism. He writes,

> The fundamental problem, I would suggest, is that hedonistic happiness consists of nothing but a series of conscious events: to know that someone is happy on this view is only to know that his recent experience has been mostly positive. So construed, ascriptions of happiness are little more than capsule summaries or histories of subjects' conscious episodes.[56]

If this were the case, would not a possible solution to finding happiness simply be to develop a machine or a drug that could alter the brain state to meet the neurological requirements of well-being? As technology increases, scenarios such as Robert Nozick's "Experience Machine" seem more probable.[57] This notion would seem to make sense on a naturalistic worldview, as well-being is ultimately realized in states of the brain.[58] As one reviewer of Harris' book put it, "If what we want to do is stimulate our brains so that

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from person to person, and—arguably—the person himself or herself is the final authority on its existence: if X feels happy, he is happy."

[56]Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 69.

[57]See his thought experiment in Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42-45. Nozick imagines a machine that one could be attached themselves to, which would artificially stimulate the brain of the individual in such a way that they subjectively *felt* like they were experiencing things that were not actually happening. Similar ideas were explored in the movie *The Matrix*, in which people lived blissfully unaware that they were plugged into a giant machine that was manipulating their conscious experiences. How important is it that such brain states are based on *truth*? Shelly Kagen, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 34-35, presents a sobering scenario: "Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company, which will soon go bankrupt." In such a case, would the truth or falsity of the scenario ultimately make a difference in his brain states as they pertain to his well-being?

[58]Or, as one critic notes, "If what ultimately matters is the felt brain state, it is open for neuroscientists not just to discover what brain faculties are involved in that experience, and what tends to induce it in humans, but to discover how to induce the experiences correlated with happiness far beyond what evolutionary forces have thus far concocted. Perhaps the future of happiness, then, is not peace, love, and justice, but massive doses of the neurochemicals that activate the brain faculties involved in producing experiences of happiness and removing misery." Arnold, review of *Moral Landscape*, 395.

we feel perennially happy, all we need are appropriate drugs to be injected into our veins while we sit in a pod in perfectly imbecilic contentment."[59] Harris may argue that this would not be moral as it would harm the well-being of *others*, specifically family members whose own well-being is, in part, achieved through a real relationship with that individual. This, however, is not an issue for someone without a network of relationships, who would perhaps *prefer* such an isolated existence. The fact is, when most people think of "well-being" they do not think that such a state is the preferred option for anyone seeking to be happy. This form of happiness would not be considered "real." Indeed, it remains difficult to determine which *type* of experiential happiness is better than another. Flanagan concludes, "The important point is that for all anyone knows at this point, a happy life whose source is family might light up the brain in the same way as a happy life whose source is virtue or even money."[60] It would seem, then, that drawing too close a connection between happiness and morality is difficult, because happiness may be achieved through means that many would not consider moral.

Blackford's Objections

Philosopher Russell Blackford observes that Harris' fundamental claims about well-being are at odds with the thesis stated in the title of his book. If science is the tool identifying those courses of action that lead to greater amounts of well-being, then what leads us to adopt well-being as the central tenet of morality in the first place?[61] This

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[59]Massimo Pigliucci, "Science and the Is/Ought Problem," *Skeptic* 16, no. 3 (June 2011): 61.

[60]Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 161.

[61]Patricia Churchland notes that our brains are organized to value our own well-being. She says, "Brains are organized to seek well-being, and to seek relief from ill-being. Thus, in a perfectly straightforward way, the circuitry for self-maintenance and the avoidance of pain is the source of the most basic values—the values of being alive and of well-being." Churchland, *Braintrust*, 30. However, it is also true that our brains give us the ability to completely ignore both of these values (both for ourselves and others). The question, "Why *should* I seek well-being for myself or others?" is not answered by stating the fact that our brains are organized to do so. Our brains are capable of a great many things that may or may not be *moral*. That our own well-being is valuable to us does not tell us why we should value the well-being of others, especially in cases where maximizing their well-being does not maximize (or perhaps even diminishes) our own.

seems to be the difference between "knowing how" and "knowing that." The concept that morality is *at its core* a concern about the well-being of conscious creatures is a ontological presupposition, and is thus not determined by science. It is the starting place that provides the foundation for the rest of Harris' enterprise, and must be *assumed* at the outset. Although any ethical system must ultimately be built on presuppositions, Blackford notes,

> If we presuppose the well-being of conscious creatures as a fundamental value, much else may fall into place, but that initial presupposition does not come from science. It is not an empirical finding. Thus, even if we accept everything else in *The Moral Landscape*, it does not provide an account in which our policies, customs, critiques of policies and customs, and so on, can be determined solely by empirical findings: eventually, empirical investigation runs out, and we must at some point simply presuppose a value at the bottom of the system, a sort of *Grundnorm* that controls everything else.[62]

Empirical experience and observation can indeed determine that something like "well-being" exists, and people seem to desire this for themselves and others. This is not controversial. It is only when Harris then moves to define morality *as* the pursuit of well-being that he is making a philosophical assumption, since the concept of morality carries with it far more than what well-being seems to entail (authority, responsibility, normativity, etc.). If Harris' thesis were simply that science could be used as a tool to *better understand* those things that lead to greater well-being, then it would be far less tendentious. In the beginning of the book, Harris says, "While the argument I make in this book is bound to be controversial, it rests on a very simple premise: human well-being entirely depends on events in the world and on states of the human brain. Consequently, there must be scientific truths to be known about it."[63] This is, however, not the full claim he is suggesting. There is a substantial difference between science *informing* our ethics and science *determining* our ethics. At the bottom of Harris'

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[62]Blackford, review of *Moral Landscape*, 55-56.

[63]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 1.

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worldview are presuppositions that are themselves *not* determined by science. One may

wish to call these presuppositions, philosophical assumptions, or first principles, but they

must be in place before science can ever be applied. It seems obvious that people

generally value their own happiness and that there are certain actions and events that have

an effect on this mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual state. While someone's

definition of well-being may forever be subjective, there can certainly be scientific

observations as to what the vast majority of people *generally* see as contributing factors

to their overall happiness. Good health, basic needs, freedom from oppression or

coercion, fulfilled desires, etc. may be classified under those things that are often

believed to increase a person's well-being, and the actions that aid or hinder achieving

these brain states can certainly be studied through science. However, a philosophical leap

takes place as soon as one argues that people *should therefore* seek to enhance this state

in themselves and others.[64] It may be prudent and beneficial to do so, and it may even

have survival value, but to be morally *responsible* to act in this way is to say something

else. Craig Hovey observes, "Harris has things backward: rather than moral values being

determined by facts about the world, what we call facts are actually shaped by the things

we already value."[65] Harris' metaethic admits an *ought* at its very foundations.[66] If this is

the case, then Harris cannot use "determine" in an epistemological sense because the

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[64]There seems to be a clear difference in telling people that they *ought* to take care of their health, and telling them that they *ought* to respect human life and not murder. One is not necessarily held morally accountable for failing to follow the first ought, while they are certainly responsible for the second. This is why Harris' comparison of well-being and physical health is not helpful, because moral responsibility *adds* something to one that is missing from the other, and the question becomes, "Why do we add this property of moral accountability to one human state (well-being) and not the other (physical health)?" While physical health is often *included* under the umbrella of well-being, the "ought" of morality is different in kind than the many other "oughts" which are out there. That someone "ought" to look after their own health if they want to live long, or that they "ought" to mow their grass if they want to keep their yard presentable, or that they "ought" to develop a good work ethic if they wish to hold down a job, are all oughts based contingently on their own personal goals (*if* they want *a*, then they *ought* to do *b*). However, we are not held morally accountable for all "oughts." Why does "the well-being of conscious creatures" constitute normative responsibility in a way that other "oughts" do not?

[65]Craig Hovey, *What Makes Us Moral? Science, Religion, and the Shaping of the Moral Landscape: A Christian Response to Sam Harris* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 47.

[66]Blackford, "Sam Harris' Moral Landscape," 56.

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truths of morality are not ultimately arrived at through science alone. His title and his thesis appear to be misleading. In fact, it seems that these philosophical steps are required for anyone to do ethics at all, since presuppositions must build the foundation of any system of ethics. However, that he relies on philosophy *before* he gets to his science is something Harris does not fully address. In what appears to be a substantial admission, Harris claims, "I have reviewed scientific data that, I believe, supports my argument; but I have made a more basic, philosophical case, the validity of which does not narrowly depend on current data. Readers may wonder how these levels are related."[67] Indeed, is it ultimately science or philosophy that drives his ethic? While philosophy closely works alongside science, this admission by Harris seems to come late in his project. It appears near the end of his book, converging on a topic that bears much of the weight of his thesis. He goes on to explain, "We should observe that a boundary between science and philosophy does not always exist . . . . We cannot always draw a line between scientific thinking and 'mere' philosophy because all data must be interpreted against a background theory, and different theories come bundled with a fair amount of contextual reasoning."[68] This is true, and must be faced by anyone who seeks to do science. "In practice, science is rife with prior assumptions, preconceptions, ideological commitments, and articles of faith."[69] How does Harris deal with the relationship between science and philosophy? He acknowledges it, while avoiding any serious discussion on how this affects his basic claims. He notes that, while some philosophy has no contact with science, "science is often a matter of philosophy in practice," which leads him to admit that his proposed ethic could be called a "philosophical" position, but "it is one that directly relates to the boundaries of science."[70] Blackford has no problem

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[67]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 179.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Hovey, *What Makes Us Moral?*, 47.

[70]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 180.

admitting as much, suggesting that the philosophical concept of well-being could be a

"place-holder for something else for which it stands as a first approximation: it might be

a kind of summation of other things that we value, such as pleasure, satisfaction of

preferences, and the possession of various functional capabilities."[71] However, this is

significantly *less* than what Harris attempts. It seems as though Harris leaves "science"

open to include many things not traditionally attributed to the discipline.[72] His starting

place is more a matter of philosophy than it is science.[73] Andrew G. van Melsen observes,

> Once it is accepted that the important issue in life is to produce the greatest possible
> material welfare, other pragmatic considerations can help us to implement this goal.
> But this question remains: is the posited, ultimate value the right one? And if so,
> why? The empirical answer, "Everyone tends to such welfare," is not irrelevant; it
> certainly is not decisive, however, and, at any rate, only partially correct. For it
> remains a fact that one does not make all values subservient to material welfare;
> certain rules are to be observed, such as that which says that no human beings
> should be sacrificed to it . . . . Hence, the reason cannot be this resistance alone:
> something else also plays a role and at the crucial moments this role is decisive. It is
> in this sense that, above, we said that the pragmatic approach is possible only by
> virtue of something else . . . . Only by virtue of man's awareness of certain
> fundamental ethical principles, is the pragmatic approach, based on certain
> empirically verifiable tendencies of man, practically useful and valuable.[74]

If well-being is going to be regarded as a scientific study, how exactly is one to

measure this phenomenon? For Harris, well-being is to be a graded state, as indicated by

the peaks and valleys of his moral landscape. It certainly seems that well-being, at least

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[71]Blackford, review of *Moral Landscape*, 56.

[72]In a panel discussion, Peter Singer questioned Harris' strict thesis of science alone informing values, to which Harris responded by asserting that scientists in white lab coats is a straw man for what he means by "science," which would indeed *include* Singer's brand of *philosophy*. What Harris is referring to is simply "honest secular reasoning." This is a not-so-subtle shift in what most people mean by the definition of "science." Sam Harris et al., "The Great Debate: Can Science Tell Us Right From Wrong?," November 2010, accessed April 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtH3Q54T-M8.

[73]It may be the case that one simply *has* to start with some or another assumption about morality. Daniel Dennett calls these "conversation stoppers," admitting that the discussion must eventually end *somewhere*, or else lead to an infinite regress. He says, "It will not do at all for these people to be *endlessly* philosophizing, endlessly calling us back to first principles and demanding a justification for these apparently (and actually) quite arbitrary principles." Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 506.

[74]Andrew G. van Melsen, *Physical Science and Ethics: A Reflection on the Relationship between Nature and Morality*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series 23 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 78.

as experienced by individuals, can be expressed in terms of "less" or "more." James Griffin observes, "'Well-being' is certainly a quantitative attribute, in the sense that we can sometimes say that one thing makes us better off, or at least as well off, or exactly as well off, as another."[75] Science is well-acquainted with qualitative measurements, from degrees Celsius to joules to inches to kilometers to Kelvins to seconds to candelas. What such unit of measurement is given to study well-being as a subject of scientific inquiry?[76] Harris does not provide one, and it seems doubtful that such a concept as well-being would fall into any of the existing metrics currently used by neuroscience. To study well-being scientifically, one needs an objective scale to make comparisons and measurements, to converge on the truth.[77] This is especially difficult if one considers well-being to be more than simply pleasure and pain. Blackford remains skeptical that such measurements could ever take place in a way required for Harris' system to truly be considered scientific.[78] Harris may argue that states of the brain can be observed and studied that correlate with states of well-being. This, however, runs into the problem that brain states in one person may not line up exactly with the brain states in another person. Indeed, the same region being activated in the brain of one individual does not tell the scientist that each individual is consciously experiencing the same thing, or receiving the

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[75]Griffin, *Well-Being*, 95.

[76]Due to this, Sean Carroll asks, "So how are we to decide how to balance one person's well-being against another's? To do this scientifically, we need to be able to make sense of statements like 'this person's well-being is precisely 0.762 times the well-being of that person.' What is that supposed to mean? Do we measure well-being on a linear scale, or is it logarithmic? Do we simply add up the well-beings of every individual person, or do we take the average? And would that be the arithmetic mean, or the geometric mean? Do more individuals with equal well-being each mean greater well-being overall? Who counts as an individual? Do embryos? What about dolphins? Artificially intelligent robots?" Sean Carroll, "You Can't Derive Ought from Is," *Discover*, May 3, 2010, accessed August 23, 2016, http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/cosmicvariance/2010/05/03/you-cant-derive-ought-from-is/#.V7xtJWUcUUt.

[77]Mark McGillivray and Matthew Clarke, "Human Well-Being: Concepts and Measures," in *Understanding Human Well-Being*, ed. Mark McGillivray and Matthew Clarke (New York: United Nations University Press, 2006), 3, note, "Human well-being . . . is an ambiguous concept. It lacks a universally acceptable definition and has numerous, and often competing, interpretations. As human well-being cannot be directly observed, it cannot be directly measured."

[78]Blackford, review of *Moral Landscape*, 57.

same satisfaction from such experiences. Well-being may admit to similar *reports* from subjects on their experiences, and these reports may converge on similar states of the brain, thus telling the scientist that there are *generally* some actions that lead to some brain states that lead the subjects to express their experience in the language of happiness. However, there is simply too much subjectivity built in to such a system to be satisfying on the account Harris proposes.[79] This is troubling, since Harris believes it is precisely the objectivity of science that makes it the proper tool for ethics.

A further issue Blackford addresses is how to move from maximizing *my* well-being to maximizing the well-being of *others*. This is especially troubling since ethics should not just inform what we should do individually but also how we should act *globally*. Blackford notes,

> It's no use telling somebody (we'll call her Alice) to act so as to maximize global well-being on the ground that this is the morally right thing to do, while also telling her that "morally right" just means "such as to maximize global well-being": the upshot is that Alice is told to act to maximize global well-being because this will maximize global well-being! That's circular. If she is more committed to a goal such as maximizing her own well-being, or that of her loved ones, than to maximizing global wellbeing, she is not thereby making a mistake about anything in the world. Nor is she doing anything self-defeating, if she maximizes her own well-being, or that of her loved ones, whenever these conflict with maximizing global well-being.[80]

It may be the general case that maximizing the well-being of others will indirectly increase our own well-being. However, it is certainly not always the case that to maximize the well-being of others affects us personally, either directly *or* indirectly. In fact, it is hard to imagine one convincing another scientifically to sponsor poverty-stricken children in Uganda because it will affect their own well-being (other than

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[79]This has posed difficulties for studies such as the World Happiness Database, which must rely on questions such as, "All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your life-as-a-whole now?" Such questions are incredibly subjective, and assume that the individual being asked has a proper understanding of what their own well-being entails. Mark McGillivray, "Human Well-Being: Issues, Concepts and Measures," in *Human Well-Being: Concept and Measurement*, ed. Mark McGillivray (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11, notes, "A challenge to measuring subjective well-being concerns the sensitivity of survey responses to momentary or immediate mood swings."

[80]Blackford, review of *Moral Landscape*, 58.

perhaps alleviating a sense of emotional guilt). This may be done for emotional reasons, but can it be justified *scientifically*? When facing the decision to sponsor a child in poverty, am I morally *obligated* to such an action? To choose not to sponsor the child will arguably have zero impact on my well-being (apart from perhaps an uneasy conscience). Are there not other ways (such as purposeful ignorance) to avoid any unpleasant emotions that might hinder our well-being? Why, in fact, should the well-being of another, excluding close relations, matter to us at all? In a case in which my well-being and another's are at odds, and only one can be maximized, can science determine what decision I should make?[81] Can science ever tell us *why* the well-being of another may in fact be *more* important than my own well-being at any given moment? Religion has traditionally provided answers to such questions, not least of which being the call to care for others because we are *commanded* to do so. It is difficult to imagine Harris' metaethic compelling people scientifically to do the same. Blackford summarizes, "Why, for example, should I not prefer my own well-being, or the well-being of the people I love, to overall, or global, well-being? If it comes to that, why should I not prefer some other value altogether, such as the emergence of the *Ubermensch*, to the maximization of global well-being?"[82] Indeed, if one's priority is their own well-being, rather than the well-being of another, are they doing anything wrong by choosing to act in their own self-interest, according to Harris?

Defining "Well-Being"

Harris is aware that defining "well-being" objectively is a difficult task, since

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[81]Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 498, admits, "It is unlikely in the extreme that there could be a feasible algorithm for the sort of global cost-benefit analysis that utilitarianism (or any other 'consequentialist' theory) requires." This has traditionally been a criticism of utilitarian ethics in general. It seems impossible to determine whether one should sacrifice the 49 percent so that the 51 percent can flourish, or even to decide whether or not to maximize the well-being of one person rather than spreading out smaller amounts of happiness to multiple recipients.

[82]Blackford, review of *Moral Landscape*, 57.

people often use similar language to describe very different situations.[83] He notes, "We can mean many things when using words like 'happiness' and 'well-being.' This makes it difficult to study the most positive aspects of human experience scientifically."[84] This problem of subjectivity will be faced by anyone attempting to study well-being, not just Harris. However, it seems an especially difficult task for the naturalist not to reduce "well-being" to "well-feeling," which seems to only capture, at most, a series of moment-by-moment psychological states, which is significantly less than what most people would have in mind when they use the term.[85] This seems to acknowledge the subjectivity of well-being as experienced by moral agents often seeking different things out of life, even if we share the same *basic* human needs (such as food/water, shelter, and clothing). While those in Third World populations may be immediately concerned over basic needs, such is not often the case in many scenarios among wealthier populations. Harris also admits that a vague definition of well-being may open the door for such differing goals to be met in traditionally *un*ethical ways. This becomes one way in which his thesis could be questioned. He says,

> It is also conceivable that a science of human flourishing could be possible, and yet people could be made equally happy by very different "moral" impulses. Perhaps there is no connection between being good and feeling good—and, therefore, no connection between moral behavior (as generally conceived) and subjective well-being. In this case, rapists, liars, and thieves would experience the same depth of happiness as the saints. This scenario stands the greatest chance of being true, while still seeming quite far-fetched.[86]

While it may be "far-fetched," one must deal with those in history such as Mao Zedong or Joseph Stalin or Genghis Khan who sought their own well-being, unconcerned about

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[83]For further discussion on the difficulties a naturalist faces in defining well-being, or, "happiness," see Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), chap. 6.

[84]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 182-83.

[85]Des Gasper, "Human Well-Being: Concepts and Conceptualizations," in McGillivray, *Human Well-Being*, 25.

[86]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 189.

robbing others of theirs.[87] In the case of someone like Genghis Khan, he seemed largely

to fulfill his cultural expectation to achieve power and pleasure, and certainly passed on

enough genes to ensure his evolutionary existence until the end of time. He lived in

comfort and pleasure, achieving the goals and desires he set out for himself. One may

very well wish to condemn his life as not a "good" life, but could one deny that he

achieved "well-being" during his days? What sort of brain scan could be done on Khan

that would reveal that such experiences actually gave him significantly *less* well-being

than he might otherwise have achieved had he been more compassionate? Is it at all

obvious that we must strive towards *a certain level* of well-being? Who decides that the

type and amount of well-being reached by Khan is poor in that it fell below the agreed

upon standard of what is considered full or complete? Perhaps Khan simply did not *want*

whatever sort of well-being might have been gained through self-sacrifice or altruistic

kindness. In Harris' view, Khan presumably missed the peaks of the moral landscape. But

what if someone is sincerely content to occupy a spot at the base camp, or halfway up,

Mount Morality? Is it *wrong* for them to be satisfied there? Harris replies that such a

scenario "would no longer be an especially 'moral' landscape; rather it would be a

continuum of well-being, upon which saints and sinners would occupy equivalent

peaks."[88] Indeed, without grounding the concept of morality within a framework of

ultimate moral *accountability* and *responsibility*, it seems this is exactly the type of

landscape Harris is imagining, in which an individual may potentially achieve a high

level of well-being in especially *im*moral ways.

  When studying the concept of well-being, what matters is the *thing*, not just the

word.[89] Haybron makes a distinction between well-being ("happiness") and "morality."[90]

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[87]What is to stop such people from defining "happiness" as Genghis Khan did: "Happiness lies in conquering one's enemies, in driving them in front of oneself, in taking their property, in savoring their despair, in outraging their wives and daughters," quoted in Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 155.

[88]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 190.

[89]Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 4.

That morality often *results* in well-being is an idea held in common by most ethical

systems; however, it is also true that most people are confused as to *what* well-being

ultimately is in the first place, and how to achieve it. He says,

> The central thesis of this book is that people probably do not enjoy a high degree of authority or competence in matters of personal welfare. We should expect them systematically to make a host of serious mistakes regarding their own well-being. Surprisingly often, people's choices may frustrate their prospects for happiness and well-being rather than improve them.[91]

In so stating, one can see where a scientific account of well-being could be extremely

helpful for humanity, which is no doubt part of Harris' motivation for objectively

grounding it in science. However, if well-being is ultimately the state of conscious

creatures, and if it is currently impossible to study mental events as individuals

experience them subjectively in the privacy of their own consciousness, then is it possible

to discover an objective account of well-being? The mystery of consciousness seems to

put a stop to any attempt of objectively studying well-being, as a person's happiness will

always be private conscious experiences that are ultimately accessible only to the

individual. Haybron's observation that most people tend to be confused when they

consider well-being further complicates the issue, and Harris seems to agree. He notes,

"The best of this research . . . reveals that our intuitions about happiness are often quite

wrong . . . . One of the most interesting things to come out of the research on human

happiness is the discovery that we are very bad judges of how we will feel in the

future."[92] Haybron suggests that perhaps the current theory of happiness to beat is the

desire-fulfillment theory, in which one experiences happiness when their personal desires

are being met.[93] In any case, Haybron believes that scientific naturalism is not equipped

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[90]Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 7.

[91]Ibid., 13.

[92]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 183.

[93]Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 34.

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to discover happiness, since "the pretheoretical notion is too ill-defined and covers too much psychological ground for empirical research alone to settle the question of what happiness is."[94] Indeed, without a proper definition, it seems as though the concept of well-being will remain too open to interpretation to be an effective conceptual idea for science. Haybron notes, "The concept of happiness is, as we saw, a folk notion; 'happiness' is not a technical term for theorists to use as they please. Empirical researchers are not more entitled to co-opt it for their parochial purposes than moral theorists are."[95] Whatever well-being turns out to be, it seems as though it will involve a step beyond what science can tell us, as it will rely largely on subjective experience.

James Griffin describes a concept of objective well-being based on the degree to which basic needs are met.[96] These basic needs will be those things that are essential for human survival (food, shelter, water, health, etc.). In this sense, Griffin sees the "needs" of life as the bread, and "wants" as the mere "jam."[97] Several issues, however, arise. Griffin notes, "Whatever in the end goes on the list of basic needs, there are likely to be persons who want things off the list more than they want things on it."[98] What happens to well-being once these basic needs are met? If an individual has everything she needs to survive, does acquiring more of these things *increase* her well-being? It seems that one can indeed have too much of a good thing. Also, basic needs seem to cover only a fraction of the desires and circumstances we find ourselves facing in life. Our basic needs, once they are comfortably met, often recede to the background and other desires become more important to us. Due to this, Griffin suggests some flexibility into the

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[94]Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 46.

[95]Ibid.*,* 34.

[96]Griffin, *Well-Being*, 42.

[97]Ibid., 45.

[98]Ibid.

needs-based account, saying, "*well-being is the level to which basic needs are met so long as they retain importance.*"[99] If well-being is to be broadened in this way, one may include any values that, when they appear in one's life, no matter their tastes, attitudes, or interests, their life becomes better.[100]

Griffin also speaks about the Aristotelian perfectionist account, in which one's well-being is in direct proportion to how near a person's life is to the "ideal."[101] The most immediate problem, however, is how to identify this ideal, if there is indeed only one. The theist can point to the purposes given to humanity by a Creator, in which God's ideal acts as the final standard. For Aristotle, this ideal was found in the ability of man to engage in rational contemplation. However, as a naturalist, Griffin notes, "There is no such ideal. And even if there were, it would be too insensitive to variations between persons to be the basis of a measurement of each individual's well-being."[102] According to Griffin, the concept of well-being needed for moral theory is one that is *prudential* in nature. He attempts to put together a system in which a set of such values could be compiled and compared to determine the well-being of one's life. He says,

> We have a picture of normal human desires: virtually all persons, when informed, want to live autonomously, to have deep personal relations, to accomplish something with their lives, to enjoy themselves. With experience, we build up such a profile of the components of a valuable life, including their relative importance—a chart to the various peaks a human life can reach. These values, if our profile is complete, cover the whole domain of prudential value. They are valuable in any life; individual differences matter not to what appears in this profile of general prudential values, but to how, or how much, a particular person can realize one or other particular value. Then, we also build up an understanding of how individuals deviate from the norm . . . . But all this reasoning about individual differences takes place within the framework of a set of values that apply to everyone. And these three elements, a list of universal prudential values, general causal knowledge of human nature, and the information about particular persons relevant to these causal

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[99]Griffin, *Well-Being*., 52 (italics in original).

[100]Ibid., 54.

[101]Ibid., 56.

[102]Ibid., 59.

generalities, make up our grounds for judging how well off persons are.[103]

Griffin here seems to be getting closer to a basic definition of well-being that might be observed to be universal in its scope. However, when one moves into the issue of morality, one is immediately faced with the further problem of *obligation*. Even if we can describe well-being as the fulfillment of basic human needs, or prudential values, in what way are we obligated to seek the well-being of *others* (or, for that matter, ourselves)? Griffin believes the dualism between *reason* and *desire* must first be erased. In every area of life, we acknowledge that simply having a desire to perform an action does not mean that we automatically have reason to do it. So, if a life seeking well-being is one of informed desire, as Griffin says, then what motivation is enough to push us towards acting morally to others? Griffin notes that reasons are intuitively important to us. In fact, one can only come to deny that reasons are valuable *through the very act of reasoning*. In other words, reasons are important for anyone who would question the validity of reasoning. He also notes, much like Harris, that well-being in itself is something that we value intuitively. But to value it in ourselves is to acknowledge that others like us will also value it, which makes well-being *itself* universally valuable to humanity, whether or not *we* value it in the other person. Harris would certainly agree that to deny the importance of well-being and reason *in our own life* is highly unlikely. Thus, calling one to stay consistent with what they have already admittedly confessed to be true in their life seems the reasonable thing to do. However, this perhaps misses the *authority* often granted to morality. One might conceivably admit all of the above, and yet come back with, "Yes, but why *should* I stay consistent in my life? By telling me to live consistently, are you not making a moral claim on my life even in the act of defining *why* I should be moral?" Indeed, can one appeal to morality itself to justify moral obligation? Is one forced to treat "well-being" or "reason" in the same way that the deontologist might refer

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[103]Griffin, *Well-Being*, 114-15.

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to duty or God? Living consistently may be prudent for a person, but this does not seem to rise to the level of moral responsibility as we typically understand it. Griffin concludes, "The only answer possible seems to be of the form that, when one represents the full range of practical reasons to oneself, moral reasons find a place in the hierarchy, and a place high in it."[104]

"Homeostatic Property Clusters" and "Infinite Goods"

Where does this leave us in defining "well-being?" Harris does not identify this term with any *one* natural property, but rather assumes it to be something achieved in a variety of ways. An interesting account of how this might work is found in Richard Boyd's essay, "How to be a Moral Realist."[105] In this final section, his views will be presented, along with those of Robert Merrihew Adams, who argues that the realm of values must be organized around a *transcendent* Good.[106] Boyd chooses to base ethical properties in the natural realm, while Adams looks to the supernatural.

Like Harris, Boyd believes there are true and false statements to be made about moral facts, which hold regardless of our opinions *about* them, and which can be discovered using the ordinary methods of science and everyday factual reasoning.[107] He offers that one plausible way in which the facts/values gulf may be bridged is to "Show that moral beliefs and methods are much more like our current conception of scientific beliefs and methods (more 'objective', 'external', 'empirical', 'intersubjective', for example) than we now think."[108] Boyd also admits, like Harris, that no science is free of

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[104]Griffin, *Well-Being*, 162.

[105]Richard N. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181-228.

[106]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 50.

[107]Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 182.

[108]Ibid., 184.

presuppositions, as a theory must first be formulated philosophically before it can be tested empirically. This, however, contributes *to* its reliability, rather than detracts *from* it.[109] In fact, both Harris and Boyd agree that the presuppositional foundations of a scientific theory do not hinder its objectivity in discerning truth. The theory itself is a truth-claim, and the scientific method is the means by which the theory is determined true or false. Boyd says,

> The upshot is this: The theory-dependent conservatism of scientific methodology is *essential* to the rigorous and reliable testing and development of new scientific theories; on balance, theoretical 'presuppositions' play neither a destructive nor a conventionalistic role in scientific methodology. They are essential to its reliability. If by the 'objectivity' of scientific methodology we mean its capacity to lead to the discovery of *theory-independent reality*, then scientific methodology is objective precisely because it *is theory-dependent*.[110]

Boyd believes that morality is not in direct relation to any *one* natural property, but rather is a sort of "Homeostatic Property Cluster," much the same as how "water" is a word given to describe two separate things (hydrogen and oxygen) that come together to form something new, identified by a new name. Another example that Harris would surely agree with is the concept of being "healthy," which is not *in itself* a thing, but is a combination of many properties that come together to create its existence. Boyd explains, "According to various property-cluster or critical attribute theories, some terms have definitions which are provided by a collection of properties such that the possession of an adequate number of these properties is sufficient for falling within the extension of the term."[111] Once such a property cluster is recognized, Boyd suggests a form of

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[109]Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 190.

[110]Ibid., 191. Attempts have also been made to ground scientific ethics objectively in evolution. Michael Shermer seeks to ground ethical objectivity in the fact that morality is a universal human trait developed by evolution, which stands above, but in relation to, every human that would attempt to do ethics. He says, "My thesis is that morality exists outside the human mind in the sense of being not just a trait of individual humans, but a human trait; that is, a human universal . . . . In this sense, moral sentiments and behaviors exist beyond us, as products of an impersonal force called evolution. In the same way that evolution transcends culture, morality and ethics transcend culture, because the latter are direct products of the former." Michael, Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 18-19.

[111]Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 196.

consequentialism could be a plausible metaethic that should be taken seriously philosophically.[112] Much of what Boyd says fits so well into Harris' system that it is puzzling why Harris makes no mention of him in his work. Perhaps it is because Harris wishes to ground his metaethic more upon the foundations of neuroscience, where such property clusters might be studied at the level of the brain. This raises more issues, as it is difficult to imagine properties like "good health," "peace," "autonomous freedom," "desire fulfillment," etc. being reduced to simple states of the brain. Where both Harris and Boyd run into trouble is in deciding exactly what properties belong within the cluster, and what combination of such properties could form well-being. Boyd admits as much, noting that it is often an *a posteriori* question, and a difficult theoretical one.[113] He believes this is open to empirical investigation, leading to a *homeostasis* that is the goal for his consequentialist system of ethics. This can motivate individuals because such a homeostatic unity of goods often mitigates conflicts between individual goods, partly because many individual goods are mutually reinforcing.[114] He notes, "Morally concerned choice is constrained by the imperative to balance potentially competing goods in such a way that homeostasis is maintained or strengthened."[115] Boyd believes we can have confidence in "reflective equilibrium" to lead us closer to the truth of moral realism, and is in agreement with Harris that any attempt to speak about morality *must* say something "about what we independently recognize as human well-being."[116] He is also in agreement with Harris that well-being provides its own motivation for seeking it. In fact, those who see no reason to seek this property cluster reveal something wrong with *themselves.* Boyd says,

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[112]Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 202.

[113]Ibid., 197.

[114]Ibid., 203.

[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., 211.

> What I have in mind is the very strong intuition which many philosophers share that the person for whom moral judgments are motivationally indifferent would not only be psychologically atypical but would have some sort of *cognitive* deficit with respect to moral reasoning as well. The anti-realist diagnoses this deficit as a failure to recognize a definitional or otherwise necessary connection between moral goodness and reasons for action.[117]

While this may be true as a general observation, Boyd does not deal with the phenomenon of moral *responsibility*. Such a property cluster may indeed motivate people to seek it for any number of reasons. However, this is not the same as what most people think of when they imagine morality as being binding on them in that they are held responsible and accountable for their actions. Ultimately, well-being is chosen by Boyd as the ultimate goal of ethics, so that morality is merely *instrumental* in achieving it. While the various basic human needs and desires that make up the properties of this cluster are open to empirical investigation, one gets the sense that Boyd, like Harris, is confident that a general consensus will not be difficult to achieve, and will be open to revision as improvements in our understanding increase.

While much of this "homeostatic property cluster" system makes sense, there are issues it must contend with. For example, what process is used to determine which properties belong to the cluster if well-being could conceivably be achieved *without* some of these properties? Is there a certain ideal form of well-being that all others might be measured against? While most people would likely consider health, autonomous freedom, and just treatment to be properties of a person's individual well-being, what does one do with situations like the biblical account of Paul and Silas singing praises to God while imprisoned (as recorded in Acts 16:25)? Or, for that matter, the many stories told in books like *Tortured for Christ*,[118] in which Christians seemingly had joy in the most miserable situations? Their lives seem to be *missing* many of the properties that make up well-being, and yet it could be argued that they are expressing—and if their expression is

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[117]Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist," 215.

[118]Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Glendale, CA: Diane Books, 1976).

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genuine, they are *feeling*—more *eudemonia* than the other prisoners in a similar position

(or, perhaps more well-being even than their captors).

This is where religion has traditionally offered more than what Boyd and

Harris propose. For "the good" to be an objective reality, it must go beyond our mere

subjective formulation of it. Robert Adams attempts to ground value in that which is

good and praiseworthy *for its own sake*, and not as a means to some other end. Harris,

following Aristotle, sees *eudemonia* as this final goal. Alexander Rosenberg notes,

> At some point, some end or other will have to be identified as morally good in itself. So, we might as well face, sooner rather than later in the regress, the question of whether anything can be good in itself. This is the question arguments for moral realism must answer, for no one ever doubted that there are things that are good as means.[119]

For Harris, well-being *is* that thing. Adams challenges this way of thinking, believing

there to be something even more fundamental, of which well-being is just a part. He

explains,

> Within the realm of what is good for its own sake, and not just instrumentally good, most contemporary ethical thought focuses mainly on *well-being* or welfare—that is, on the nature of human flourishing or what is good *for* a person. The theory developed here, however, gives a primary place to *excellence*—the type of goodness exemplified by the beauty of a sunset, a painting, or a mathematical proof, or by the greatness of a novel, the nobility of an unselfish deed, or the quality of an athletic or a philosophical performance. It is the goodness of that which is worthy of love or admiration, honor or worship, rather than the good (for herself) that is possessed by one who is fortunate or happy, as such (though happiness may also be excellent, and worthy of admiration).[120]

Harris may argue that such an object of desire is desirable ultimately *because* it affects

our well-being in some way. This is not immediately true, as one can acknowledge that

something may be good, even if it does not directly impact their own well-being. It may

be the case that something such as self-sacrifice or altruistic behavior severely *hinders*

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[119]Alexander Rosenberg, *Darwinism in Philosophy, Social Science and Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 154.

[120]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 83.

the well-being of a person and is still recognized as something good to be praised.[121] Is

there an ultimate Good that transcends a naturalistic concept of well-being? For Adams,

this Good takes the form of a life that finds enjoyment in what is excellent.[122] In so doing,

the Good is not simply that which instrumentally leads to our "happiness" (although it

may also result in this). It is something that is valued for its own sake, in that our

happiness being achieved *by* it is not what *makes* it valuable in the first place. It goes

beyond our experience, and is therefore not limited to our own conscious brain states, as

Harris proposes, since it is valuable whether or not we experience it personally.

Admittedly, Adams must also rely on presuppositions, just as Harris does. The issue is

ultimately *whose* presuppositions *best* explain reality. While Harris is correct in his

observations that people generally seek their own well-being, and cooperation often leads

to greater well-being for both parties, Adams' account may better explain other aspects

that seem intrinsic to morality. One such area may be the basic observation of teleology

within the world. Adams' conception of an ultimate Good that stands at the peak of

reality seems to make better sense of our teleological experience, as creatures specifically

designed *for* certain ends, which we are compelled to seek, but which can only be

fulfilled in certain ways. God, as the supreme Good, stands as the objective standard that

all other goods must measure up to.[123] Furthermore, Adams' modified divine command

theory seemingly makes more sense out of the sense of *obligation, accountability*, and

even *guilt* that are intuitively attached to morality. This is not to say that Adams'

conception does not have its own issues, but rather that he illuminates deeper connections

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[121]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 88.

[122]Ibid., 93-94.

[123]As C. S. Lewis notes, "The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 13.

that a naturalistic account of morality struggles to adequately explain and ground.

Adams also notes that well-being is something that must be measured in the long run, not merely instant by instant. One's life may include many good things, and yet not be *enjoyed* by the subject, thus not really qualifying as "well-being."[124] It is the culmination of many things judged as a whole, not just a life that experienced 51 percent more positive brain states compared to 49 percent negative ones. In fact, a life well-lived is not just about personal experiences of well-being at all. The question of our relationship to the Good arises when we consider the issue of *obligation*. This will be addressed further in the next chapter of this dissertation; however, it also reveals something essentially missing in Harris' ethic. As has been pointed out above, Harris presupposes that well-being is valuable and should thus be *sought after*, for ourselves and other conscious creatures like ourselves. Although his definition is fuzzy as to what exactly *constitutes* well-being, he is clear that well-being is the only thing that could be of value to us enough to seek it. He does not, however, address why or how we might be *obligated* to pursue it. Obligation is a fundamental aspect of morality, in that it moves prescriptive imperatives out of the realm of "could" and into the realm of "should." It includes more than a mere suggestion of that which is in the best interest of the individual, and encompasses that idea of moral responsibility or accountability. Harris may claim that this is the result of centuries of religious influence, and yet it is difficult to ground a form of moral realism that doesn't have these concepts built into it. The question then becomes, responsible and accountable to *what* (or *whom*)? Adams notes that the universal sense of guilt experienced by clear-thinking people may be evidence of a higher obligation innate within us. Obligation presupposes a social relationship or a network of relationships.[125] Harris would likely point to our kin relationships, while

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[124]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 95.

[125]Ibid., 233.

Adams points higher to the divine. Indeed, could it be, for the moral realist, that one may actually argue from an "ought" to an "is?" If our sense of morality is indeed *real* (or, as Harris would argue, *factual*), then these facts should tell us something about *other* facts related to them.

Adams is well-known for his "Modified Divine Command Theory,"[126] which connects the relationship with the Good and how it works its way out within the context of interpersonal relationships, ultimately grounding ethics in the character of a loving God. Although there are plenty of criticisms that have levied against such theories, Adams' formulation may have an advantage over naturalistic theories in that it seeks to better explain our sense of moral *responsibility* and *guilt*, observing that we are morally responsible to something higher than ourselves.[127] These feelings are only understood from within interpersonal relationships. Indeed, it may be that a certain level of well-being is only possible when one is in relationships with the very Creator who grounds morality in His character (such is the case with Christianity).[128] In this, and other

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[126]In addition to *Finite and Infinite Goods*, see Robert Merrihew Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 462-76; Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (March, 1979): 66-79. For some common objections to divine command theories, see Janine Marie Idziak, ed., *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 13-20.

[127]Indeed, often the actions that moral obligations require of us will give a net *loss* in our well-being, if judged from the worldview of naturalism. George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in Taliaferro and Griffiths, *Philosophy of Religion*, 487, notes, "Pleasure, happiness, esteem, contentment, self-realization, knowledge—all of these can suffer from the fulfillment of a moral obligation." In a naturalistic world, where does such obligation come from? Perhaps our *own* well-being benefits when we live morally, in that it will (more often than not) lead to a world in which *others* act moral towards us. However, Mavrodes notes, "It is in my best interest for me to be moral *if everyone else is moral*" (490). Is it the case that by being moral ourselves, it leads others to return the favor? Or, does this offer opportunities for others to take advantage of those who *do* act morally, so that they themselves do not have to do so? It may also be the case that *my* well-being can be sacrificed so that the well-being of everyone else can increase. Is there any authoritative way to prevent such a scenario on Harris' naturalistic view of well-being? Weighing one person's well-being over and against the well-being of others proves to be a difficult calculus; one that may forever be elusive to the scientist. It does not seem at all clear whose well-being "weighs" more in certain scenarios. Here, one may think of the infamous and unfortunate train tracks operator who must choose to sacrifice his own son *or* a train full of strangers. *Someone's* well-being will take precedence, and philosophical naturalism seems ill-equipped to answer such a difficult question.

[128]Paul Kurtz, although ultimately coming down on the affirmative, asks whether a purely humanistic ethics can provide *everything* that people are searching for. Indeed, it seems as though individuals continue to look for something *else* in religion that might satisfy their well-being, even after sampling all of what secular humanism has to offer. He asks, "Is it because these prophets promise that

deontological systems, living morally may very well lead to greater well-being, though this is not *necessarily* true. A moral action can be done which does not lead to the well-being (at least, as understood naturalistically by Harris) of the agent. It is difficult to understand how an evolutionary naturalist could explain the moral motivation of one who sacrifices their life for another, especially in cases where the other does not even want them to do so. There are certainly scenarios in which what is "right" is not necessarily what will lead to greater well-being. A Divine Command theory, however, understands that "right" is not determined by the consequential outcome. Well-being, for someone like Adams, is a secondary benefit. The possibility of increasing well-being may be a partial *motivation* for moral living, but it is not the *goal,* or the thing to which we are held accountable. Indeed, it seems as though our understanding of morality is built around foundational concepts such as praise and blame. If these ideas are more than just a social construct, then they must be founded in reality objectively. Divine Command theories, while certainly facing many other criticisms, seek to establish such ideas as essential to understanding morality. God, as the creator of all reality, has infused the world with moral law, which is reflected (albeit imperfectly) by our own human systems of law. Praise and blame are real concepts because they reflect reality at the deepest level—between Creator and creation. Harris certainly does not accept such supernatural explanations. In the end, the question may come down to the existence or non-existence of God. Harris believes that God is a fiction, and so *must* ground his ethics in something else. However, *if* God exists, then a formulation like that presented by Adams could arguably make more sense of our experience and understanding of morality, especially as it pertains to obligation, guilt, and accountability.

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there is indeed *more* to this life as lived and endured in the phenomenological life context and in the universe? And if so, do many or most souls *need* something more? I reiterate my question: Is humanism forever condemned to be a minority point of view of a relatively limited number of skeptics, one that is unpalatable to the broad mass of humanity? Or are there other options?" Paul Kurtz, *Embracing the Power of Humanism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 58.

Conclusion

Harris' presuppositions regarding well-being are just as essential to his moral theory as are his presuppositions of naturalism. Harris begins with the observation that all people seek well-being, and this is ultimately the goal of morality. However, "That happiness is the highest ethical end can be assumed as true only when 'happiness' is nothing more than an abbreviated expression for 'the highest ethical end.'"[129] From this beginning assumption, he then builds the rest of his consequentialist theory of ethics.[130] While well-being may indeed be a *consequence* of ethics (though, it is not obvious that it must *always* be so), Harris' naturalistic concept of well-being remains vague. He does not think this prevents him from using it as a foundation for the rest of his theory, just as a fuzzy definition of health can still be studied scientifically. Harris says, "I think our concern for well-being is even less in need of justification than our concern for health is—as health is merely one of its many facets."[131] Indeed, *once we admit* that well-being is the proper concern of ethics, much else may fall into place. It remains to be seen, however, if Harris' consequentialist case for well-being is the *only* or *best* account of what grounds ethics ontologically. There is a rich history of theistic formulations of ethics that may *result* in well-being, and even seek it as an important good, while also delving deeper into what gives us *obligation* towards acting morally. Science can describe what promotes the well-being of conscious creatures, but as William Lane Craig observed in his debate with Harris on the topic, science tells us the same thing about flies

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[129]W. R. Sorley, *The Ethics of Naturalism: A Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), 6-7.

[130]He is certainly not alone in doing this. It can be argued that *most* people tend to build their ethical systems this way, beginning with *intuitive* beliefs about morality, and then justifying them *a posteriori*. "A moral intuitionist position suggests that people seldom reason from the bottom up to moral conclusions using deontological or consequentialist logic. Rather, they more typically generate this logic from the top down and thus are likely to latch onto any justification they can find to support their intuitions." Peter H. Ditto and Brittany Liu, "Deontological Dissonance and the Consequentialist Crutch," in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 66.

[131]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 66.

and corn. It doesn't make it a *moral* observation. Rather, it simply tells us what conditions and actions are best suited for the continued survival and flourishing of certain biological systems. But nobody would consider the well-being of corn to be an especially *moral* concern.[132]

Few, if any, claim that value has *nothing* to do with well-being. The difficulty is in grounding *ethics* in human well-being. There are many things a person may value that are not *moral* or *immoral* in their nature. However, when one moves into the realm of *objective normative behavior*, including moral accountability and responsibility, it seems as though one should be held morally responsible for his or her actions, regardless of whether they *valued* such actions. Perhaps there is an ultimate source of value that is valued *for its own sake*, rather than the effect it may have on the moral agent's well-being. It seems that this source would be objective in that its status does not dependent on those who choose to value it or not. It also seems conceivable that the enterprise of ethics may find its foundation in *this* type of value, regardless of the net increase it may (or may not) impart on our own personal and collective well-being. Theism adds something interesting to our understanding of value in that it points beyond nature to something intrinsically valuable, which is reflected in creation. As Paul Copan notes, "Naturalistic moral realism becomes increasingly ad hoc by virtue of its embracing the massive additional assumption that a valueless context can somehow produce valuable personal

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[132]William Lane Craig and Sam Harris, "Is the Foundation of Morality Natural or Supernatural?," a debate held at Notre Dame University, April 2011, accessed May 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com /watch?v =yqaHXKLRKzg. Also referencing corn, Richard Carrier attempts to argue in favor of the point Harris is making. He says, "Physical laws entail that specific objectives can only be efficiently obtained by certain behaviors. So one could demonstrate scientifically, in a lab or in the field, that mercy is an inevitable by-product of compassion, and that compassion is essential for human happiness, and therefore ought to be sought by all human beings, for all human beings desire happiness. Thus, science can indeed demonstrate that a value is 'normative' . . . . In other words, just as science can demonstrate proper 'normative' behaviors for growing corn, so it can for enjoying human society." Richard Carrier, *Sense & Goodness without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005), 325. While this may be true, it assumes that one has already accepted the authority of the given moral system. However, that such-and-such an action might lead to our flourishing does not entail that we are *obligated* to follow that course of actions. Indeed, we may just as well choose *not* to seek our well-being in this instance. The issue becomes further complicated when we are told to seek the well-being of *others*.

beings."[133] Further, it is not obvious that science is the lone tool one must use to discover this source. In the end, Harris presupposes the central point of his metaethics, relying on intuition and commonly held assumptions, rather than a rigorous scientific method of study. It is only *after* this pillar is in place that science can then contribute it any way. Harris seems to understand as much, even while brushing it off as an inevitable issue that does not undermine his ethical system. Indeed, Harris is not alone in this quandary. Ultimately, anyone who wishes to formulate a system of metaethics will be forced to presuppose certain fist principles to avoid an infinite regress of justification. I have sought to show some of the difficulties that face Harris as he attempts to build an ethical system on the foundations of philosophical naturalism. Nicholas Rescher summarizes well:

> The quality of our lives turns on a broad spectrum of personal and communal desiderata such as physical well-being, human companionship, environmental attractiveness, social harmoniousness, cultural development, and so on—values toward whose attainment the insights afforded by science can often help us, but which themselves nevertheless fall outside its domain.[134]

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[133]Paul Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," in *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 220.

[134]Nicholas Rescher, *The Limits of Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 208.

CHAPTER 4

FREE WILL, DETERMINISM, AND MORAL
RESPONSIBILITY

Introduction

Every system of ethics must deal with the issue of moral responsibility. To

whom are we held accountable for our actions? God? People? The State? Ourselves?[1]

Moral responsibility seems to be built into the very definition of the term "ought," in that

it implies a sort of contract which is binding on us.[2] For the objective moral realist, this

carries much greater weight than it does for a subjective moral relativist. Sam Harris

expresses clear disdain for moral relativism, which leads him to emphasize the fact that

there are actions we *should* or *shouldn't* (one might go so far as to say *must* and *must not*)

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[1]The feeling that there is morality of some kind is common to all humanity with the properly functioning mental and psychological capacities to feel it. As Michael Shermer notes, "Although cultures differ on what they define as right and wrong, the moral feelings of doing the right thing or wrong thing are universal to all humans." Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 251. Where the differences become apparent, on a metaethical level, is in the explanation of these feelings of morality and responsibility. R. Jay Wallace asserts that we must begin from the point of view of the *judge*, rather than the *judged*. He asserts the premise that we are the ones who judge others, and our expectations *of* others influence our expectations *for* them. See R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Others may claim that, for moral responsibility to be objective, it must start with a judge *beyond* us. Either way, the presuppositions one starts with will determine what follows in their formulation of moral responsibility.

[2]Christopher Cowley, *Moral Responsibility* (Bristol, CT: Acumen, 2014), 2, says, "'Responsibility' clearly has something to do with a *response*; but more specifically, a response to *someone*. Whenever we talk about responsibility, therefore, there is a person (we might call him an agent) who may or may not *be* responsible, who may or may not *feel* responsible, and there is the other person (we can call him the observer), who is *holding* the agent responsible for a *fault*, and who may or may not be *justified* in holding him responsible." If one is going to seek objectivity in their explanation of moral responsibility and obligation, then they will need to step outside of the ever-changing laws and mores of society and culture, and even our own self-interests. This is the difficult situation in which the naturalist finds himself. As William F. Quillian Jr., *The Moral Theory of Evolutionary Naturalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945), 64, notes, "The problem which faces the evolutionist is to explain the nature of this special kind of feeling and furthermore to explain why it seems to have a rightful claim to ascendency as a motive over all other feelings. He seeks to find an explanation for the apparently unintelligible fact that man will pursue a course of action which is apparently detrimental to his own personal interest and pleasure."

do. It has, however, traditionally been argued that *ought* implies *can*. To condemn an

individual for his or her actions is to suggest that they could (and should) have done

otherwise. To praise an individual is to suggest that they made the *right* choice, rather

than some other *wrong* option that was open to them. If an individual is forced into an

action, or if they have no available options other than that which they chose, we do not

hold them morally responsible for their actions. If someone intentionally shoves me from

behind, and my forced trajectory causes me to knock over a priceless museum artifact

and break it, I am not held "morally responsible" for breaking it. Rather, the individual

who pushed me is. Indeed, when one turns to the issues of retribution or punishment, it

seems unjust to inflict such judgment on a person who is not free in their ability to make

decisions. This is also understood in the differing expectations put on children and adults,

based on their cognitive ability to understand the moral rules and expectations of the

society in which they live. Babies and those with severe mental handicaps are not held

responsible in the same way as fully functioning adults are. While these distinctions may

be made regarding *responsibility*, it does not necessarily mean that the action *itself* was

not bad. For the moral realist, the action may still be bad, even if the one who performed

it is not held responsible for doing it (such as a child who accidently shoots his father's

gun while playing with it, tragically killing a friend). However, moral responsibility does

speak significantly to the issue of moral realism. If anyone is responsible at all, they must

be responsible *for* something and *to* something. John Martin Fischer summarizes the

issue, observing,

> What motivation could be given for the ought-implies-can maxim? I think the most
> natural justification for acceptance of the maxim is that, if it were not valid, then
> there could be cases in which an agent ought to do X but cannot do X (and never
> could do X). Thus, given that if an agent ought to do X, then he would be
> blameworthy for not doing X, there could be cases in which an agent is
> blameworthy for not Xing and yet he cannot X. And this seems objectionable—even
> unfair.[3]

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[3]John Martin Fischer, *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2006), 220.

Harris claims forces outside of our control determine our actions. Every thought and act can be traced backwards to previous causes indefinitely, none of which are under our direct influence.[4] For Harris, our choices arise within our consciousness, and are previously determined by prior forces of which we are ultimately unaware. His rejection of any form of compatibilist alternative solidifies his position as a strict causal determinist. This position is often worrisome to people precisely because the feeling that we are in control of our own actions seems intuitively true. Furthermore, our conception of moral responsibility seems to disappear (or, at least, radically change) the moment we accept determinism. In response, philosophers have proposed a variety of compatibilist alternatives that grant a certain amount of free will to individuals from within the framework of a determined universe. Harris, however, rejects all such compatibilist accounts. This philosophical position is the third pillar of his worldview, along with his naturalism and his conception of well-being. It is not clear, however, how his determinism can be adequately wedded to his objective moral realism as it pertains to moral *responsibility*. In this chapter, I give a summary of Harris' position, and argue that it is incompatible with the moral responsibility he implicitly demands from those adhering to his ethical framework.

The Issue of Free Will

The debate over free will has a long and complicated history. There are those, like Harris, who claim that science has proven the folk notion of free will false. However, there is still a widespread sense that we *are* in control of our actions. This feeling may

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[4]Owen Flanagan, Hagop Sarkissian, and David Wong, "Naturalizing Ethics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 23, go so far as to claim, "There is no such thing as 'will,' and thus no such thing as a 'free will.' (Here is one of the rare places where the eliminativist move is totally warranted.) There is no faculty of will in the human mind/brain. Talk of dedicated faculties can be useful when speaking of sensory and perceptual systems, but no respectable cognitive neuroscientist thinks there are distinctive faculties of will, reason, imagination, and the like. If there is no such faculty as will, then there is no way for it to *be*—large, small, heavy, light, free, or unfree."

simply be that—a feeling—but it cries out for an explanation, especially as it relates to ideas of moral responsibility, praise, and blame. As one seeks to develop a worldview that comprehensively explains our experience in the world, this feeling must be accounted for.

That there is a personal *self* at the heart of our decision-making seems to be *intuitively* obvious. Whether or not free will is an illusion, we *feel* as though we are the ones making the decisions we do. This feeling is summarized well by John Searle:

> If there is any fact of experience that we are all familiar with, it's the simple fact that our own choices, decisions, reasonings, and cogitations seem to make a difference to our actual behaviour. There are all sorts of experiences that we have in life where it seems just a fact of our experience that though we did one thing, we feel we know perfectly well that we could have done something else. We know we could have done something else, because we chose one thing for certain reasons. But we were aware that there were also reasons for choosing something else, and indeed, we might have acted on those reasons and chosen that something else. Another way to put this point is to say: it is just a plain empirical fact about our behaviour that it isn't predictable in the way that the behaviour of objects rolling down an inclined plane is predictable. And the reason it isn't predictable in that way is that we could often have done otherwise than we in fact did. Human freedom is just a fact of experience.[5]

Thomas Nagel also struggles with the issue, stating,

> Although many of the external and internal conditions of choice are inevitably fixed by the world and not under my control, some range of open possibilities is generally presented to me on an occasion of action—and when by acting I make one of those possibilities actual, the final explanation of this (once the background which defines the possibilities has been taken into account) is given by the intentional explanation of my action, which is comprehensible only through my point of view. My reason for doing it is the *whole* reason why it happened, and no further explanation is either necessary or possible.[6]

It seems as though our feelings of freedom are inescapable, even if we are forced to accept the materialist view that each of our physical actions (including states of the brain) are simply the effects of previous causes, over which we have no control. Indeed, determinists of Harris' ilk often argue that the mental is supervenient on the physical, in

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[5]John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 87-88.

[6]Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 114-15.

that mental events are caused by physical events. If our decisions take place (at least, as they appear to us) as mental events, and the mental is determined by the physical, and the physical is determined by an infinite regress of prior causes, then 'we' do not act as an autonomous agent in our 'decisions' at all.[7] We may, in fact, *feel* as though we are free, but these feelings themselves might also be determined just as everything else in our minds is. Fischer defines causal determinism as ". . . the thesis that, for any given time, a complete statement of the hard facts about the world at that time, together with a complete statement of the laws of nature, entails every truth as to what happens after that time."[8] If causal determinism *is* true, how can we say that we arrived at this position through rational deliberation? It seems that determinism undermines its own conclusions, much like the Argument from Reason. The fact that we believe one thing or another was not arrived at because it was *true*, but because it was determined that we believe as we do.

Causal determinism seems to have much bearing on our conception of moral responsibility. As William Hasker states, "How in reason can a person be held responsible—whether for good or for ill—for doing what she was ineluctably determined to do by forces that were in place long before she was born?"[9] For free will to be more than just an illusion, it seems as though control must be available to the agent in some

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[7]Stewart Goetz, "Naturalism and Libertarian Agency," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2000), 168, explains, "That is, physical indiscernibility entails psychological indiscernibility. Contemporary bottom-to-top determinism is typically characterized by its naturalist proponents as the supervenience of the mental on the subvenient physical, and, thus, might be termed 'supervenience determinism.' In supervenience determinism, the supervenience of the mental on the physical is held to be *asymmetric* in character in the sense that the higher-level mental properties are dependent upon and determined by the lower-level physical properties, but the bottom-level physical properties are not dependent upon and determined by the higher-level mental properties . . . . Because one's physical life superveniently determines one's mental life, one's mental life is not autonomous from one's physical life."

[8]John Martin Fischer, "Introduction: Responsibility and Freedom," in *Moral Responsibility*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 33. Fischer goes on to note that, if causal determinism is in fact true, then future events could theoretically be predicted if one had access to enough information, as the prior causes and laws of nature would inevitably lead to certain events obtaining.

[9]William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 85.

significant way. Here is where compatibilists argue that we have *enough* control to claim free will, even if we do not have *ultimate* control as the 'first cause' of our actions. In the compatibilist conception, the kind of control needed for moral responsibility is indeed available to us if we are free to act upon our desires (even though our desires themselves are out of our control).

The topic of determinism will inevitably lead to questions about fatalism. While some have attempted a distinction between determinism and *fatalism*,[10] it is difficult to see any worthwhile difference. Fatalism, in the sense that most people seem to understand it, is usually focused on one particular event from within a series of events. It is the idea that "*x* would have happened even if the events surrounding *x* had been different," or, "*x* would have happened, regardless of the choices I made." This, however, is not obviously true. Had the events surrounding *x* been different (including our choices), another outcome would have been likely. So, the idea that certain things will happen regardless of the circumstances seems to be obviously false. However, does not determinism *imply* fatalism? One cannot pull an event out of the causal connections surrounding it and expect the same results. If one understands fatalism as saying whatever happened was inevitable, based on the causal chain of events leading up to it, then it certainly fits with determinism. One must ask who or what could ever intervene, from outside the vast causal chain of events, to change the results. An infinite regress of prior causes seems to guarantee that future actions are set, unless there is someone *outside* of the causal chain to interfere. If we are not the final source of our actions, then our actions are set in place from the beginning of time if one is to follow the cause-and-effect chain back to a 'first cause.'[11] If this is indeed true, then our conception of

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[10]See Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Viking, 2003).

[11]Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 38, says, "Ultimate responsibility for anything that exists, and hence for any person and his deeds, can thus rest only with the first cause of all things, if there is such a cause, or nowhere at all, in case there is not. Such, at least, seems to be the unavoidable implication of determinism."

responsibility is merely illusionary language to describe our experience or our feelings, but not to describe what is, in fact, *true* of such concepts.[12] Richard Taylor notes,

> Some philosophers, faced with all this, which seems quite clear to the ordinary understanding, have tried to cling to determinism while modifying traditional conceptions of morals. They continue to *use* such words as *merit, blame, praise,* and *desert,* but they do divest them of their meanings as to finish by talking about things entirely different, sometimes without themselves realizing that they are no longer on the subject. An ordinary person will hardly understand that anyone can possess merit or vice and be deserving of moral praise or blame, as a result of traits that he has or of behavior arising from those traits, once it is well understood that he could never have avoided being just what he is and doing just what he does.[13]

It seems as though free will is built into our understanding of moral choices, and a compatibilist account that attempts to accept causal determinism while also retaining the idea that we make free choices is simply to keep the shell and language of libertarian freedom, while denying the fundamental tenets. Compatibilists argue that, as long as we are not *forced* into doing something or *prevented* from doing some action, we are "free." This, however, assumes that an outside object or individual forces us to do something *against our will*, when it is that very will that is in question.[14] On determinism, even our desires are outside of our control.

It is not my intention to argue specifically for libertarian freedom. What must be true in order for us to have this sort of freedom? Searle suggests,

> In order for us to have radical freedom, it looks as if we would have to postulate that inside each of us was a self that was capable of interfering with the causal order of nature. That is, it looks as if we would have to contain some entity that was capable of making molecules swerve from their paths. I don't know if such a view is even intelligible, but it's certainly not consistent with what we know about how the world works from physics. And there is not the slightest evidence to suppose that we

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[12]P. F. Strawson famously argued that our sense of "moral responsibility" is simply a reflection of our reactive emotional attitudes inevitable in our interpersonal relationships. See Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *Agency and Responsibility: Essays on the Metaphysics of Freedom*, ed. Laura Waddell Ekstrom (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 183-204.

[13]Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 38.

[14]J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 271, describe compatibilism in this way: "We are free to will whatever we desire even though our desires are themselves determined. Freedom is willing to act on your strongest preference."

should abandon physical theory in favour of such a view.[15]

If every physical event is the result of former material causes, then we (according to the naturalist) fall directly into this same chain. Our mental actions are no less determined than the many other physical functions our body performs of which we remain blissfully *un*aware (such as our lungs breathing and our hearts beating). Libertarians, however, disagree with this assessment of our condition. Robert Kane explains,

> *Free will*, in the traditional sense I want to retrieve . . . is *the power of agents to be the ultimate creators (or originators) and sustainers of their own ends or purposes* . . . .To act freely is to be unhindered in the pursuit of your purposes (which are usually expressed by intentions); to will freely, in this traditional sense, is to be the ultimate creator (prime mover, so to speak) of your own purposes . . . . [W]hen we trace the causal or explanatory chains of action back to their sources in the purposes of free agents, these causal chains must come to an end or terminate in the willings (choices, decisions, or efforts) of the agents, which cause or bring about their purposes. If these willings were in turn caused by something else, so that the explanatory chains could be traced back further to heredity or environment, to God, or fate, then the ultimacy would not lie with the agents but with something else.[16]

One can see how the conception of a soul, which would lay at the foundation of who we are and ultimately be responsible for our decisions in some way, is a tempting explanation for what we all universally *feel* to be true. Naturalists, however, will reject this solution in that it adds something into the natural world that doesn't fit within a naturalist account of reality.

The traditional understanding of moral responsibility claims that if an agent has ultimate control over his or her actions, then they can indeed be held morally responsible for these actions. If they do not have control, however, then they are not responsible. Or, *ought* implies *can*. If determinism is true, it is argued, then *can* is not true in any way that makes sense morally. This is due to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities, which suggests that the moral agent must have other options open to him or her, and must have the ability to *choose* between these options, in order to be held

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[15]Searle, *Minds, Brains, & Science*, 92.

[16]Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

morally responsible, even if the only option is simply to refrain from acting at all.[17]

Ought also implies *obligation* to do such actions. One does not simply claim that *ought*

means some actions are preferable, but that individuals have a moral obligation towards

doing certain actions if they are to be morally praiseworthy. These obligations provide

the *reasons* for the "ought" of morality.[18] Peter Vranas, explaining the "Ought Implies

Can" principle, says, "(OIC) Obligations 'correspond' to ability plus opportunity: If an

agent (S at a given time t) has an (objective, pro tanto) obligation to u, then the agent (at

that time) can (i.e., has both the ability and the opportunity to) u."[19] Without the ability or

opportunity, the determinist must explain why anybody would still be obligated towards

certain actions. The determinist, if he or she is also a moral subjectivist, might argue that

such obligations are illusory, but are necessary for the proper functioning of a society,

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[17]Harry Frankfurt is most famous for challenging the assumption that someone is morally responsible only if he could have done otherwise. His thought experiment (known in its many manifestations as "Frankfurt Examples") imagines an individual, Black, as a decision-maker, and Jones as one who wants Black to make a certain decision. Jones will only intervene and manipulate Black's mind *if* it becomes obvious that Black is about to make a decision *other* than the one Jones wants him to make. If, however, Black makes the decision Jones desires, then there is no need for Jones to intervene. In this sense, Black feels as though he has made a decision based on his own free will when, in reality, he otherwise would have been forced to make it anyway. In the end, there was really only one possibility open to Black, and yet he retains the feeling that he "chose." In this way, Frankfurt is largely credited with giving an example of someone being held morally responsible for his actions, even though the Principle of Alternate Possibilities is not in effect. See Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829–39. One of the main issues with Frankfurt's example, however, is the question of *when* Jones intends to intervene. It seems as though Jones is forced to wait until Black has deliberated enough to become *set* on making a certain decision, and thus Jones must intervene *right before* such an action is actualized. The *decision*, it seems, is still decided by Black, even if Jones ultimately prevents him from acting on it. William Hasker notes, "While a person cannot have the power to do something that is causally impossible, a person may have the power to *decide* to do such a thing—to form an effective intention so to act—*provided he does not know that the act in question is impossible*." Hasker, *The Emergent Self*, 90. Libertarians thus ground their argument for freedom not in the ultimate actualization of the intention, but in the intention itself, arrived at by deliberation.

[18]Such reasons may turn out to be 'first principles' that are presupposed intuitively. Ishtiyaque Haji, "Obligation, Reason, and Frankfurt Examples," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 291, observes, "Principle *OR* ["obligations are tied to reasons"] captures the view that (overall) moral obligation provides us with reasons. I do not know what sort of argument may be advanced to support this principle because it seems no less basic than the principle that obligation requires control or that responsibility requires control. It may simply be that obligations of any kind are conceptually linked to reasons of the given kind (e.g., moral obligations to moral reasons)."

[19]Peter B. M. Vranas, "I Ought, Therefore I Can," *Philosophical Studies* 136 (2007): 171-72, accessed August 9, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-007-9071-6.

and so they are binding on us by nature of the social contract we have entered into with the others of our community. They cannot, it seems, claim that the obligations are objectively grounded *outside* this situation. For the objective moral realist, causal determinism is a problem.

Harris' Determinism

Harris' views on free will and determinism, as they pertain to ethics, are primarily found in *The Moral Landscape*[20] and a short book entitled *Free Will*.[21] Harris' thesis suggests that because thoughts and intentions arise within our consciousness based on prior physical states of which we are not aware, this suggests that free will (commonly understood to regard the agent as a 'primary mover') is an illusion. He says, "I, as the subject of my experience, cannot know what I will next think or do until a thought or intention arises; and thoughts and intentions are caused by physical events and mental stirrings of which I am not aware."[22] Our thoughts and intentions "spring from the void" and we become *aware* of them, though they do not ultimately originate with us. How might this affect our idea of responsibility?[23] According to Harris, "From the perspective

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[20]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

[21]Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012). Harris is certainly not the only one who arrives at determinism based on his naturalism. Richard Carrier, *Sense & Goodness without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005), 98, notes, "I believe determinism is true because it is simple and has great explanatory power, it is a reasonable inference from the facts so far, it leads to a much clearer and more accurate understanding of many things, and alternative accounts are neither needed nor useful."

[22]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 103. Harris' determinism includes thoughts, which would also encompass any rationalization before a decision is made. This undercuts any notion that things could have been otherwise, in any sense that involves free will. As Derek Pereboom, *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138, points out, "Determinism allows our actions to be different had the causes of those actions been different from what they actually were. Given that reasons can be causes of actions, determinism allows that if the reasons had been otherwise, our actions could have been different as well. Thus, our deliberations and actions can vary with the reasons if determinism is true." While reasons may indeed be causes, the very process of reasoning is itself determined by other factors out of our control, according to Harris. The same physical processes that cause our actions are also at work causing our thoughts and deliberations.

[23]Some determinists have come to the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with our understanding of free will, and that we are *not* morally responsible for our actions, at least not in the way we often think we are. Rather, our ideas of moral responsibility result from our *feelings* of responsibility. Pereboom, says, "From the hard incompatibilist perspective, it is legitimate to feel moral concern in

of your conscious mind, you are no more responsible for the next thing you think (and therefore *do*) than you are for the fact that you were born into this world."[24] Indeed, the feeling of free will is exactly that: a *feeling*. To support his point, he looks to the famous experiments of Benjamin Libet as evidence that the physical brain will make a decision 350 milliseconds prior to it arising in our consciousness.[25] There are, however, reasons to question such experiments. Libet used an EEG to measure brain activity ("readiness potential"), specifically an electrical build-up immediately before the action, finding that the individuals in the experiment became aware of their desire to flex their wrist slightly *after* their brain had already 'decided' and committed to the action. It seems as though their *brains* acted before their *minds* became aware of the decision. This sits well in Harris' view that our minds supervene upon our brains. In Libet's experiment, however, subjects were asked to recognize when they felt the intention arise to do pre-planned or spontaneous wrist flexes. The EEG readings recorded the "readiness potential," or, the preparatory brain activity prior to the awareness the subject felt. One of the issues with such experiments is that they do not deal with what most philosophers feel is important to moral actions, namely, *deliberation*. The subjects were told to perform an action that took no previous training or deliberation. Such actions require little (if any) conscious awareness to perform, much like a tennis player reacting to their opponents shot before fully realizing that she has even *done* so.[26] Robyn Repko Waller summarizes the issues

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response to an immoral action, and to be deeply saddened that there are agents with immoral character, but most often one's response of moral abhorrence, because it presupposes moral responsibility, is unjustified." Pereboom, *Living without Free Will*, 156. If there is no such thing as moral responsibility, where does that leave us? He gives one option: "One might propose that even if hard incompatibilism were true, it would still be best to behave as if people were morally responsible. Even if the claim that we are morally responsible cannot be justified, there may be a practical argument for nonetheless treating ourselves and others as if it were true" (156). In other words, it might be a useful (or even necessary) fiction.

[24]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 103.

[25]See Benjamin Libet et al., "Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activity (Readiness-Potential). The Unconscious Initiation of a Freely Voluntary Act," *Brain*, 106, Pt. 3 (1983): 623-42.

[26]Anthony Marcel, "The Sense of Agency: Awareness and Ownership of Action," in *Agency and Self-Awareness,* ed. Johannes Roessler and Naomi Eilan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61.

for moral responsibility well, stating,

> The Libet-style experiments, then, do not appear to have the evidentiary force that neuroscientists have been claiming: First, the simple movement at issue in these studies is not an adequate test of whether the conscious aspect of conscious proximal intentions plays a causal role in action production. However, that very issue is at the heart of the bold scientific conclusions regarding our lack of free will and limited moral responsibility. Second, the arbitrary free choice afforded participants in the experiments, the choice of when or whether to perform a simple movement, is disconnected from participants' everyday justificatory or motivational reasons—moral, prudential, or otherwise—for action and thus fails to capture the type of decisions and actions for which agents are typically held morally responsible.[27]

Most actions that people view as morally praiseworthy or not are far more complicated than a simple flex of the wrist (unless said wrist is holding a knife to someone's throat). They involve *deliberation*, in which the individual weighs the different choices open to them, and then performs the action they have decided upon. Reactionary movements are taken into account for exactly this reason (for example, the husband who catches his wife with another man, and reacts violently from a surge of negative emotion), as opposed to premeditated actions. The question at hand is not whether our brains sometimes regulate certain trivial actions outside of our direct conscious awareness, but whether we have the ability to act *intentionally* after deliberation.[28] Libet has not proved that free will (at least, the *kind* of free will important to moral philosophers) is impossible.

Harris insists that determinism does not mean that our 'choices' are meaningless. Rather, since our decisions result in actualized events in the world, our choices *do* matter. In fact, "The question of free will is no mere curio of philosophy

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[27]Robyn Repko Waller, "Beyond Button Presses: The Neuroscience of Free and Morally Appraisable Actions," *Monist* 95, no. 3 (2012): 451.

[28]Gardar Árnason, "Neuroscience, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility," *Trames: A Journal Of The Humanities & Social Sciences* 15, no. 2 (June 2011): 153, notes, "There is a difference between being (minimally) conscious on the one hand, and being directly conscious of one's decisions and the reasons behind them on the other hand. The first is necessary for free will, but the second is not. Most of the time we are not directly conscious of our decisions and actions, or the reasons for them. It is typically only if we need to particularly focus on or deliberate a decision, or if something out of the ordinary is going on, that we become directly aware of our decision and action. Most of the time our decisions and actions just barely enter consciousness, and that is a good thing. We know what we are doing, when everything is working right, in the sense that if we are asked what we are doing and why, we can give answers, even if we are not fully conscious of our decisions and actions at the time."

seminars. The belief in free will underwrites both the religious notion of 'sin' and our enduring commitment to retributive justice."[29] Indeed, the belief in free will has significantly shaped our culture, our legal system, our interpersonal relationships, and our own understanding of ourselves. Where does this leave us, if Harris' determinism is a true account of reality? Here, Harris seems to reject the traditional understanding of responsibility, while still holding onto its basic concepts. He claims, "Perhaps 'responsibility' is simply the wrong construct," and yet also holds that "while it is true that responsibility is a social construct attributed to people and not to brains, it is a social construct that can make more or less sense given certain facts about a person's brain."[30] So, is moral responsibility nothing more than a social construct we have developed to keep order in society? If this is the case, who decides *when* someone is morally responsible for his or her actions? What sort of calculus could be used? Indeed, on determinism, *nobody* is more or less responsible for his or her actions, as none of us are ultimately in control of our actions.

It is unclear whether Harris is willing to follow his determinist views to their logical conclusions. Rejecting all notions of moral responsibility may lead to unwelcome consequences. For example, do we have the right to lock someone away, or worse, execute him, if he is not ultimately responsible for how he acted? Harris states, "Judgments of responsibility, therefore, depend upon the overall complexion of one's mind, not on the metaphysics of mental cause and effect."[31] One assumes that "responsibility" here is an illusory, but beneficial, fiction. To further explain, Harris gives five examples of tragic crimes, each involving differing degrees of responsibility. He notes how, even though each scenario ends with a woman dying at the hands of another

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[29]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 106.

[30]Ibid., 217n109.

[31]Ibid., 107.

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individual, our level of moral outrage depends largely on the background conditions described in each case. We are far *less* outraged by the four-year-old boy who accidently shoots a woman while playing with his father's loaded gun than we are the twenty-five-year-old man who kills a total stranger "just for the fun of it." However, if we find out that the twenty-five-year-old had a tumor on his brain, he would perhaps gain *sympathy* in our eyes, instead of hatred. It seems as though much of how people will ultimately act is in accordance to the amount of "moral luck" they have received.[32] Harris goes on to say, "What we condemn in another person is the *intention to do harm*—and thus any condition or circumstance (e.g., accident, mental illness, youth) that makes it unlikely that a person could harbor such an intention would mitigate guilt, without any recourse to notions of free will."[33] However, is this not the very issue in question? How can one truly *intend* anything if each thought is determined? What does he mean by "guilt?" If guilt is a social construction, then it seems perpetually open to re-definition (much like his concept of "well-being"). It is doubtful that anyone will disagree with Harris that such cases as tumors and mental illness need to be taken into account when judging someone's actions. However, these things seem important exactly *because* they affect what is the normal operating of a person's mind as they deliberate and make moral choices. Such handicaps seem to limit what would otherwise be seen as a properly functioning *will* of a person. The language Harris uses confuses his earlier statements with the generally accepted

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[32]Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 34, notes the issues this raises for moral responsibility. He observes, "A person can be morally responsible only for what he does; but what he does results from a great deal that he does not do; therefore he is not morally responsible for what he is and is not responsible for. (This is not a contradiction, but it is a paradox.)" It seems as though some individuals are simply blessed with more "moral luck" than others. However, when one begins to understand moral responsibility in such a way, it actually seems to *undermine* responsibility. He says, "If one cannot be responsible for consequences of one's acts due to factors beyond one's control, or for antecedents of one's acts that are properties of temperament not subject to one's will, or for the circumstances that pose one's moral choices, then how can one be responsible even for the stripped-down acts of the will itself, if *they* are the product of antecedent circumstances outside of the will's control?" (35). In the end, "The area of genuine agency, and therefore of legitimate moral judgment, seems to shrink under this scrutiny to an extensionless point. Everything seems to result from the combined influence of factors, antecedent and posterior to action, that are not within the agent's control" (35).

[33]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 108.

language used by proponents of free will. He says, "But why is the conscious decision to do another person harm particularly blameworthy? Because consciousness is, among other things, the context in which our intentions become completely available to us."[34] It is unclear what Harris means by this. Our actions, according to him, are no more under our control once they arise in our consciousness than they were before. We are simply *aware* of them at this point, where we previously were ignorant. That a person's actions reveal what kind of person they are, and how they might act in the future, is completely in line with wanting to treat them accordingly, especially in the interest of our own survival. This is why serial killers are locked away so that the interests of the greater population can be preserved (which, in itself, is a moral decision—to prize the safety of many over the destructive desires of one.). Harris notes,

> It makes sense to treat a man who enjoys murdering children differently from one who accidently hit and killed a child with his car—because the conscious intentions of the former give us a lot of information about how he is likely to behave in the future. But where intentions themselves come from and what determines their character in every instance, remains perfectly mysterious in subjective terms.[35]

However, the action of locking away a potential murderer in the future to safeguard the well-being of others can be done without any *moral* judgment. It may simply be *prudent* to do so, or in the interests of the greater population. But this is not how most people would understand the situation, and fails to address whether or not that person is morally *responsible* for their actions. The man who hits a child on purpose with his car will have done something *wrong* and *evil*, not just *dangerous* or *unpleasant* for future children. To let such a man go unpunished would be *unfair* and *unjust.* However, this man would be no more in control of his actions than the man who accidently hits a child as he backs out of his driveway. In both scenarios, the actions are causally determined, and yet only one of the men is held morally responsible. What are we saying, objectively and

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[34]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 108.

[35]Harris, *Free Will*, 13.

ontologically, about such actions (and people) when we make moral pronouncements on them? Harris seems to reflect on this as it pertains to systems of retribution. He believes that our feelings will be greatly influenced by our understanding of the underlining brain functions of the guilty party. This, however, misses the point. Harris is dealing with the decision (although he has effectively discounted that we make decisions at all) to *punish* the wrongdoer. The question, however, is whether they were ultimately *responsible* for their actions and *deserving* of punishment.[36]

Harris further confuses the issues when he writes, "The fact that our choices depend on prior causes does not mean that they don't matter. If I had not decided to write this book, it wouldn't have written itself."[37] He perhaps should have said, "If I had not been part of the chain of causes that led to the writing of this book, a different outcome would have obtained, of which I was not involved." It is obviously true that had the steps that led to the writing of the book not taken place, the book would not have been written. However, to claim that something "matters" is to make a value judgment, stating the *importance* of something. Harris is essentially saying that his choice to write the book led to the book being written, although he has just explained that he doesn't make "choices" at all. So, in fact, Harris had nothing to do with it being written, as his decisions were simply links in a vast chain of cause-and-effect actions, all of which are outside of his control. He was just one of the many dominoes in the line that fell when caused to do so.

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[36]Bruce Waller attributes our feelings of retribution as essentially a "strike back" emotional response to an unpleasant action. According to Waller, it is unfair to *blame* an individual for such actions, as each person acts from within a vast network of causes and effects, and therefore the same standard cannot be held for each person. See Bruce Waller, *Against Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). For a response, see William A. Rottschaefer, "Can We Responsibly Reject Moral Responsibility?: A Critical Assessment of Bruce Waller's 'Against Moral Responsibility,' *Behavior and Philosophy* 41 (2013): 1-26. The problem with such an approach is that one ends up with an ever-changing standard of responsibility, as each individual's genetic and behavioral make-up will be different from all others. The deeper issue is why anyone is held responsible *at all* and on *any level*, even if there are differing standards for each case. It will be impossible to ever know *every* influence on a person's actions, which makes it questionable whether any moral pronouncement will be correct. There could always be a gene or a past experience or some other explanation for why an individual did what they did, and it is unlikely that we could ever see the whole picture.

[37]Harris, *Free Will*, 34.

Indeed, for it to "matter" to anyone is ultimately not in anyone's control either. Determinism essentially explains away the very language Harris (and anyone else who speaks about values) relies on.

Again, while Harris attempts to clear the air that *determinism* is not the same as *fatalism*, it seems as though the two *are* the same. For example, Harris states,

> If I had been born with the brain, body and experience of Ted Bundy, I would have been Ted Bundy – a serial killer put to death for his crimes. There is no extra part of me that could have resisted taking his path in life. Even if there is an immortal soul lurking in my brain, my will would acquire no more autonomy in the presence of ectoplasm. Any man who comes into this world with the soul of a serial killer is unlucky indeed.[38]

Fatalism is ultimately the end result of a deterministic world in that whatever is set up to happen will happen, since there is nothing outside of the determined framework to interject and change the course of events. To rewind time back to the exact point where one makes a "decision," but not change anything about the world, means that the same decision will be made as the scenario plays out exactly as it had before. Harris claims, "You will do whatever it is you do, and it is meaningless to assert that you could have done otherwise."[39] However, does such a worldview make *more* or *less* sense out of our understanding of moral responsibility? If moral responsibility is simply a necessary fiction we must live under, why does Harris not admit that our moral framework is an illusion? Why does he continue to write polemics against the evils of religion, when neither he nor those he condemns have any choice in what they do (or believe)? Should one accept a philosophical explanation of the world that seems so far removed from our

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[38]Sam Harris, "The Free Will Delusion," *New Statesman* 140, nos. 5084/5085 (2011): 47.

[39]Harris, *Free Will*, 44.

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actual experience? Thomas Nagel summarizes the difficult situation a determinist faces,

as it ultimately changes how we understand agency:

> I believe that in a sense the problem has no solution, because something in the idea of agency is incompatible with actions being events, or people being things. But as the external determinants of what someone has done are gradually exposed, in their effect on the consequences, character, and choice itself, it becomes gradually clear that actions are events and people are things. Eventually nothing remains which can be ascribed to the responsible self, and we are left with nothing but a portion of the larger sequence of events, which can be deplored or celebrated, but not blamed or praised.[40]

Perhaps in an attempt to avoid such pessimistic conclusions, Harris never addresses such

objections at length. While he notes that studying the brain of a subject will better help us

understand her, and that our moral judgments of that person must take such knowledge

into account, he never ultimately *does away* with the idea of moral responsibility. Indeed,

it is unlikely that anybody *could* do away with such a concept and still live a life that is

not an utter contradiction to our human experience. The confusion found in Harris is that

he denies free will, but cannot help but use language and ideas that are built on that very

notion. In fact, his writings against religion are full of vicious condemnation of those

who, on his account, are merely living out the script written for them by nature and

previous historical events, over which they have no control. It may simply be that Harris

is using the language familiar to his readers to convey his ideas, even while ultimately

rejecting the ideas that birthed such language. However, consider the following

biographical admission:

> Losing a belief in free will has not made me fatalistic—in fact, it has increased my feelings of freedom. My hopes, fears, and neuroses seem less personal and indelible. There is no telling how much I might change in the future . . . . Becoming sensitive to the background causes of one's thoughts and feelings can—paradoxically—allow for a greater creative control over one's life. It is one thing to bicker with your wife because you are in a bad mood; it is another to realize that your mood and behavior have been caused by low blood sugar. This understanding reveals you to be a biochemical puppet, of course, but it also allows you to grab hold of one of your

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[40]Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 37.

strings: A bite of food may be all that your personality requires.[41]

It is no mere "paradox" to deny the autonomous self, and then to attribute to this self the power to "grab hold of one of your strings." Harris essentially regards it as intellectual cowardice to hold onto the notion of free will, but never fully addresses the fact that he is calling for people to live under this fiction anyway.[42] This may be a *necessary* illusion, but it will be an illusion nonetheless.[43] It is understandable why others have opted instead for a compatibilist notion of free will, in which we are "free" so long as there are no forces preventing us from doing what we *want* to do. Harris is rightly critical of such a stance, which attempts to affirm most of the same truths as determinism, yet retains the language and concepts of libertarian notions of freedom and responsibility. Basic observation shows that people feel an undeniable sense of moral *responsibility* (often expressed in the form of guilt), and our experience tells us that we often have the ability to act upon those things that our prior deliberations led us to choose. There is also an intuitive feeling that our choices can be objectively *right* or *wrong*, and that we have an obligation to choose correctly. The very notion of *ought* implies *can*, and yet Harris seeks to deny the "can" and preserve the "ought." Perhaps he knows that to radically alter the way people understand morality is too large an undertaking, so he works within the framework of the current language. However, there are issues that even he admits don't have easy answers. He observes,

> We are deeply disposed to perceive people as the authors of their actions, to hold them responsible for the wrongs they do us, and to feel that these transgressions must be punished. Often, the only punishment that seems appropriate is for the perpetrator of a crime to suffer or forfeit his life. It remains to be seen how a

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[41]Harris, *Free Will*, 46.

[42]Harris, "The Free Will Delusion," 46.

[43]Michael Shermer, while accepting the evidence for determinism, nonetheless struggles with the implications this has for morality. His final answer is as unsatisfying as it is vague. He says, "Free will is a useful fiction. I feel 'as if' I have free will, even though I know we live in a determined universe. This fiction is so useful that I act as if I have free will but you don't. You do the same. Since the problem may be an insoluble one, why not act as if you do have free will, gaining the emotional gratification and social benefits that go along with it?" Shermer, *Science of Good and Evil*, 121.

scientifically informed system of justice might steward these impulses.[44]

Indeed, it seems as though Harris is forced to venture down the uncomfortable road of moral subjectivism if he is going to deny moral responsibility. It remains to be seen how Harris can justify any form of objective moral responsibility if he accepts a fully determined world.

"Ought" Implies "Can"

Could moral responsibility be the *starting* place, which leads to a belief in free will? If moral realism is correct, and certain moral actions are objectively true, could not the truth of these actions point towards further facts about ourselves? If one can indeed get an *ought* from an *is*, could one learn an *is* from an *ought*? Might the universal experience of moral responsibility, which seems to necessitate free will, make it a plausible assertion that free will indeed exists? Peter Van Inwagen, in his influential work, *An Essay on Free Will*, goes so far as to claim that our feelings of moral responsibility are so foundationally justified as to lead one to the belief in free will. In this way, moral responsibility acts as a first principle leading to the notion that "ought implies can," which provides the foundation for the belief in free will. He says,

> I think that we shall discover that we cannot but view our belief in moral responsibility as a justified belief, a belief that is simply not open to reasonable doubt. I myself would go further: in my view, the proposition that often we are morally responsible for what we have done is something we all know to be true . . . . If we do know that moral responsibility exists, then we should have no doubt about whether we have good reason to believe we have free will. It is this and only this, I think, that provides us with a reason for believing in free will.[45]

In other words, the "ought implies can" principle may necessitate an "ought-to-is" conclusion. Indeed, it seems as though first principles of some kind are required to avoid an infinite regress of justifications for truth. If moral responsibility is one of those foundational principles that lay at the base of our epistemology, and is essentially self-

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[44]Harris, *Free Will*, 57-58

[45]Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 209.

justifying, then this truth may be used in support of free will. While this would certainly be deeply unsatisfying to Harris, it seems as though Van Inwagen, at the very least, points out inconsistencies in Harris' worldview which he is forced to live with if he doesn't adequately deal with the issue of moral responsibility. Specifically, Van Inwagen observes, "To reject free will is to condemn oneself to a life of perpetual logical inconsistency. Anyone who rejects free will adopts a general theory about human beings that he contradicts with every deliberate word and act."[46] Van Inwagen, like Harris, is an incompatibilist, in that he does not believe that one can be a determinist and simultaneously believe in free will.

Determinism, according to Van Inwagen, is the view that a certain future is inevitable based on past events and the physical laws of nature. Therefore, it is not true that *any* imaginable future is possible, as it will always be constrained by past history and natural laws. In fact, at any instant, there is exactly *one* possible future. If there are two or more ways in which the world could go, then determinism is not true.[47] If the Principle of Universal Causation is true, which states that every event is caused by a previous event, then it seems as though determinism is a plausible description of our world. However, *causation* does not necessarily entail *determinism*, in that an individual might be a "first-cause" of an event that is not determined by prior events or causes. This is what Harris rejects, since the actions of each individual are themselves the product of many prior causes that are *not* within the individual's control. This is a direct result of his naturalism. For Van Inwagen, free will entails that the subject can choose between multiple options when a choice must be made, and the choices that matter to free will are those which are *possible* (a person can either choose to dive in and save a drowning child or not, but the choice to use the Force to levitate the child from the water is not a legitimate option, and

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[46]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*, 160.

[47]Ibid., 3.

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so does not count towards free will). In this sense, "can" refers to the power to act, which Van Inwagen distinguishes from moral or legal permissibility, physical possibility, epistemic possibility, causal power/capacity, and skill.[48]

Van Inwagen offers what he calls the *Consequence Argument* in support of his thesis that determinism and moral responsibility are incompatible. He claims, "If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us."[49] As Harris observes, we are simply passive participants, observing our decisions as they arise in our consciousness and become realized by our actions. He says, "Our belief in free will arises from our moment-to-moment ignorance of specific prior causes. The phrase 'free will' describes what it *feels like* to be identified with the content of each thought as it arises in consciousness."[50] He goes on to assert that this in no way undermines the importance of our choices. He says, "Decisions, intentions, efforts, goals, willpower, etc., are causal states of the brain, leading to specific behaviors, and behaviors lead to outcomes in the world. Human choice, therefore, is as important as fanciers of free will believe."[51] To say that we *have* no free will, but we *feel like* we do, therefore our choices matter, is merely to make a

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[48]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*, 9-12.

[49]Ibid., 16. John Fischer and Mark Ravizza call this the "Principle of the Transfer of Nonresponsibility." They say, "If causal determinism is true, then there is some state of the world in the distant past *b* (before there were people) that is connected by the laws of nature to a particular action *A* that one performs in the present. But since no one is morally responsible for the state of the world *b* in the distant past, and no one is morally responsible for the laws of nature that lead from *b* to *A*, it follows that no one is morally responsible for any action *A*. That is, if no one currently existing is morally responsible for the distant past, and no one is morally responsible for the distant past's leading to current actions (via the natural laws), then no one is now morally responsible for current actions." John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

[50]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 105.

[51]Ibid.

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claim about the subjective value of a feeling. But to many who would come to understand "free will" as Harris postulates it, it would not be a cause of celebration but of despair. For Pinocchio to discover he has strings would not lead him to shrug it off and merely pretend not to notice them. It would, rather, be a constant reminder that the very thing he longs for is an illusion that forever remains out of reach. Harris, as a committed atheist, is the last person one might expect to preach the acceptance of an illusion. Indeed, if one's worldview encourages its adherents to accept and live under an illusion, it seems that this worldview is a good candidate for re-evaluation or rejection. As Van Inwagen notes, having inconsistent beliefs is not necessarily a *bad* thing in itself; it is bad because it entails that one or more of the inconsistent beliefs are *false*.[52]

Van Inwagen's argument relies heavily on the fact that we *deliberate* between two (or more) incompatible courses of action. In this sense, it is not dealing with reactions such as those measured in the Libet experiments, but rather choices that take time and effort, weighing possible options and outcomes. Even courts of law distinguish between actions that are done "in the heat of the moment," and those that are the result of intentional deliberation. This reveals an inconsistency in what Harris professes and what he actually seems to believe. Van Inwagen says, "All philosophers who have thought about deliberation agree on one point: one cannot deliberate about whether to perform a certain act unless one believes it is possible for one to perform it."[53] This is because human behavior almost always reveals certain beliefs about the agents who would perform the actions. Harris, although he claims not to believe in free will, cannot help but use language that betrays the fact that he actually *does* believe he is free to some extent. If he indeed sees moral responsibility as a necessary illusion, it seems as though he must also adapt the position of those who claim that morality *itself* is nothing but a necessary

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[52]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*, 158.

[53]Ibid., 154.

illusion.[54] Van Inwagen asserts that moral responsibility, without free will, *is* an illusion. In his view, the most compelling evidence that we *have* free will is that we intuitively seem to know that we have moral responsibility as a basic belief, and since moral responsibility is impossible without free will, free will must exist. It is not my purpose in this chapter to argue for libertarian free will against determinism. Rather, it is to suggest (with Van Inwagen) that the determinist cannot claim to believe in both determinism *and* moral responsibility, in any sort of way that is not ultimately illusory. This may, in fact, be exactly what Harris intends to claim. He is certainly no stranger to challenging common folk notions. However, he does so while remaining firmly entrenched within the vocabulary and concepts of the moral responsibility he seeks to deny. Either we are responsible for the actions and states of affairs we bring about, or we are not. Van Inwagen claims, "If we do not reject the reality of moral responsibility, then we shall have to reject either incompatibilism or determinism."[55] For Van Inwagen, moral responsibility is a presupposition that can be held with such certainty as to rule out determinism. He says, "If the reality of moral responsibility entails the existence of free will, then, I would suggest, we have a perfectly good, in fact, an unsurpassably good, reason for believing in free will. For surely we cannot doubt the reality of moral responsibility?"[56] Van Inwagen argues moral responsibility is a universal human reaction that cries out for an explanation. He says,

> Few people if any will react to an act of gratuitous injury deliberately done them by a human being in the way that they would react if that same injury were caused by a bolt of lightning or a bough broken by the wind. When some *person* injures *us*—at least if we believe he knew what he was doing and that he could have helped doing it—we react in certain characteristically human ways: we blame, we remonstrate, we hate, we reflect on the futility of hate, we plan revenge, we remind ourselves that

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[54]This is discussed further in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

[55]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*, 189.

[56]Ibid., 206.

the desire for revenge is a desire to usurp God's prerogative. Which among these things we do will presumably be partly a function of our constitution and our education. That we shall do at least some one of them follows from our being human, if not simply from our being rational beings. And to react in any of these ways is to demonstrate more surely than any high-minded speech ever could that we believe in moral responsibility.[57]

While Harris would perhaps take issue with presupposing moral responsibility to necessitate free will, he never fully rejects the idea of moral responsibility. He does claim that much "moral luck" is involved, and that brain states should be taken into account when deciding how best to deal with those who act immorally. However, he never outright rejects the idea that those who cause harm to others should be held responsible for their actions, but also never defends how this idea might survive in a deterministic world. He is forced to make his own presuppositional claims, such as, "Judgments of responsibility depend upon the overall complexion of one's mind, not on the metaphysics of mental cause and effect."[58] This, however, does not answer the question. In his previous example, it may be true that the man who shot a woman "just for the fun of it" and the man who acted in like manner, but was later found to have a severe brain tumor, are being influenced by different factors. Harris' thesis is that *both* men's actions are just as much out of their control. It just so happens that one man's brain leads him to one action, while the other's takes a different route. The result, however, is the same, and Harris does not explain if (or why) either man is responsible for this action at all. He is speaking about *degrees* of responsibility, without addressing why *anybody* is morally responsible at all in a determined universe. He merely suggests that what we condemn in a person is the *conscious intention to do harm*.[59] What does he mean by this? On his view, the intentions that arise in our consciousness are just as much out of our control as

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[57]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*.

[58]Harris, *Free Will*, 49.

[59]Ibid., 52.

everything else about us. His answer is to imprison such people so as to remove the danger from the rest of society. This says nothing about moral *responsibility*; it merely lays out a prudent action in the best interest of survival for others. That is, if this person's actions are indeed an indication of what they are likely to do again in the future. On determinism, what one will do in the future is just as much out of their control as what they have done in the past. Harris claims that our feelings of retribution are the result of not being able to see the underlying causes of human behavior. It is doubtful, however, that in every case in which a person desires retribution, a certain amount of information about the evil-doer's brain states would be sufficient to erase this feeling. The issue is not *why* we feel as we do, but whether these feelings are *justified.* Could one not simply explain away every instance of evil by describing the process that led to such circumstances? This fails to get at the heart of retribution and desert. He admits that the issue of retribution is a "tricky one."[60] Harris goes on to say that attributing moral responsibility to people in situations in which punishment or incentives might change their behavior is a natural response. Again, however, this is speaking to how a society might *respond* to immoral behavior; not *why* such behavior is immoral and should be condemned. Harris believes that such actions should be treated in a way that safeguards the well-being of other people, which is not controversial. However, he fails to give an account of whether such people *deserve* to be treated in this way. Indeed, we do not condemn and imprison the lion for killing the antelope even though allowing it to be free is surely a continued danger to the antelope population. Nor do we call such an action "murder," and condemn it.[61] On Harris' view, although we possess a greater degree of rationality than lions, our decisions and thought processes are no less determined than

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[60]Harris, *Free Will*, 57.

[61]In a similar example, Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 14, says, "A hawk that seizes a fish from the sea *kills* it, but does not *murder* it; and another hawk that seizes the fish from the talons of the first *takes* it, but does not *steal* it—for none of these things is forbidden."

theirs are. However, we don't punish such animals because we see their capacity to perform and restrain themselves from such actions as essentially different from our own experience. The important question is "What is the difference between us and other animals that justifies our sense of moral obligation and responsibility?" How can Harris, as a naturalist, continue to hold both determinism and moral responsibility within the framework of his worldview?

In the end, it seems as though it is Harris' philosophical worldview that leads him to many of his conclusions. Van Inwagen states,

> I am convinced that in a large number of cases the answer is that the people who regard my central thesis as simply incredible are victims of scientism. Scientism, as I use the word, is a sort of exaggerated respect for science—that is, for the physical and biological sciences—and a corresponding disparagement to all other areas of human intellectual endeavour. It hardly need be pointed out that scientism is the primary ideology of our age. It hardly need be pointed out that the illusions scientism engenders are so pervasive and so insidious that it is practically impossible to get anyone who is subject to them to consider the possibility that they might be illusions.[62]

It seems as though Harris is driven to determinism by his naturalism, and yet cannot help but act as though free will is true in some sense. Here one finds an important inconsistency in his ethical theory, and his explanations and alternatives are confusing and undesirable.

The Moral Gap

If *ought* implies *can*, then it means humanity must somehow have the ability to fulfill the moral demands placed on us. This seems to be an essential part of what makes ethics what it is. However, in an illuminating statement, Harris attempts to further distance himself from a traditional understanding of morality. He says,

> Ethics is prescriptive only because we tend to talk about it that way—and I believe this emphasis comes, in large part, from the stultifying influence of Abrahamic religion. We could just as well think about ethics descriptively… In my view, moralizing notions like "should" and "ought" are just ways of indicating that certain

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[62]Van Inwagen, *Free Will*, 215.

experiences and states of being are better than others . . . . [M]any of my . . . critics think that I must add an extra term of obligation—a person *should* be committed to maximizing the well-being of all conscious creatures. But I see no need for this.[63]

However, to remove the prescriptive aspect of ethics is to so radically undermine what most people mean when they speak on the subject, that one wonders what sort of moral "clout" Harris could possibly replace it with? Is he suggesting that morality is merely a topic of *suggestions* that may or may not be accepted by those who are privy to such knowledge? How does this ultimately fit with his moral realism? Are certain harmful actions im*moral* or simply im*prudent*? He is clear to point out that moral acts are not intrinsically right or wrong, or that moral truths exist independent of our experience of them, like Platonic Forms of the Good.[64] He also rejects any notion of following God's law "for its own sake," as he believes it will ultimately come back to his own thesis of well-being of conscious creatures.[65] So where do these moral demands come from, and how does Harris avoid drifting into subjective moral relativism? He claims to be arguing that "…science can, in principle, help us understand what we *should* do and *should* want—and, therefore, what *other people* should do and should want in order to live the best lives possible."[66] By the very act of writing his book, Harris admits that there are moral acts which humanity *should* follow, but do not (if everyone was already living morally, a book on morality would be far less interesting). Indeed, the "moral landscape" is navigated by our choices that take us to its peaks or valleys. For Harris, what makes a decision moral or immoral is based on the consequences it has for well-being. Harris uses a term like "well-being" because, by its very definition, it includes all things that we care about. However, it seems the more far-reaching and vague a term is, the less it really says

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[63]Sam Harris, "Clarifying the Moral Landscape: A Response to Ryan Born," June 6, 2014, accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/clarifying-the-landscape.

[64]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 30.

[65]Ibid., 33.

[66]Ibid., 28.

about the subject at hand. Of course well-being is important to people, but this is not what most people think of as making something *moral*, as one could promote their own well-being by eating an apple when they are hungry, but the act will not be seen as a *moral* act. There seems to be another quality about moral actions over and above well-being that is binding on us in an authoritative way. Harris is not explicit in this, and yet his book (and his many other diatribes against religion) is heavy with *indignation* towards immorality. It is not merely that suicide bombers are mistaken in their search for well-being, but that their actions are "an astounding and immoral misuse of human life."[67] What makes any use of human life a *mis*use, unless there is an objective use that one can compare to? Harris claims that much of our "intuitive" sense of morality is "clearly wrong."[68] He laments the moral relativism often found among intellectuals, recounting a conversation with a woman who, when pressed, argued that one could not automatically rule out the morality of a culture blinding every third child at birth.[69] Such relativism is foolish because it seems to rule out any sort of binding obligation we have *to* anything, for one could always reject Harris' concept of well-being, choosing a life of misery or suicide instead. When most people think of morality and well-being, they agree that one is more binding on us than the other.

John Hare espouses a Kantian view of morality that assumes three things: 1) There is a moral demand placed upon us, 2) We naturally fall short in seeking to live up to this demand, and 3) We are in need of help to fulfill this demand.[70] However, since *ought* implies *can*, there must be some way in which it is possible for us to achieve the moral demands placed on us. For Kant, this took the form of divine assistance. Although

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[67]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 63.

[68]Ibid., 36.

[69]Ibid., 44.

[70]For the fullest account of his views, see John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

we couldn't meet these demands *on our own*, the "can" implied is achieved through the aid of God's intervention. It seems as though Harris agrees that there is some sort of moral "demand" on us, even if he is unclear as to where this ultimately comes from. It is not simply that people *could* choose to maximize well-being in conscious creatures, but they *should* do so, and he frequently condemns those who do *not* do so. He would also agree that we have the capabilities to work towards this end, but that nobody has perfectly met such demands. On Harris' deterministic view, it is impossible for anyone to choose other than they do, which places a wedge between the demands and our ability to achieve them. Hare, therefore, says, "If contemporary moral philosophers who have embraced naturalism want to keep the structure of the moral gap, they will have to find a substitute for Kant's (and the tradition's) appeal to divine assistance in dealing with the problem about 'ought' and 'can.'"[71] Hare offers three ways in which one can deal with this problem without divine assistance:

> The first strategy is to keep the moral demand as high as Kant said it was and to exaggerate our natural capacities to live by it. The second strategy is to agree that there is a gap, on the Kantian understanding of the moral demand, and therefore to reduce the moral demand. The third strategy is to concede the gap and find a naturalistic substitute for God's assistance in bridging it.[72]

While Harris might seek to ignore that any such demands have been placed on us at all, he operates under the assumption that there *are* such things as moral facts that are not determined by mere preferences, and that humans have some sort of obligation to meet these demands or else be labeled "immoral." Harris also observes that humans do not meet such standards, and are often even false in what they *think* is moral.[73] Therefore, in order to deal with the "ought implies can" dilemma, Harris must offer a way in which

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[71]John E. Hare, "Naturalism and Morality," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2002), 189.

[72]Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 1.

[73]He says, "I am arguing that everyone also has an intuitive 'morality,' but much of our intuitive morality is clearly wrong (with respect to the goal of maximizing personal and collective well-being)." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 36.

humans can rise above their nature to meet these moral demands. He promotes science as the objective tool that can be used to clarify morality, all the while suggesting that the very scientists who do this work are completely determined by forces outside of their control. It seems as though the naturalistic substitute for God that Harris chooses is science. However, can science ever *make* us moral? Harris may appeal to our selfish nature, in that an increase in scientific knowledge of what promotes well-being may then lead me to pursue such actions. At least, this may lead me to pursue such actions *as long as they satisfy my selfish desires.* Hare notes that there will always be "free-loaders" who leech off of the social contract. Scientific knowledge is not enough to bridge the moral gap. Indeed, knowledge of any kind is not guaranteed to lead people to morality. Hare says, "It is not at all clear that if all our beliefs were vivid, especially our beliefs about the interests of others, we would tend to conform to the impartial standpoint."[74] If Van Inwagen is correct in his claim that a deterministic world cannot demand of us responsibility over that which we have no control of (past history and laws of nature), and if Hare is correct in claiming that the moral demands required of us imply the ability to fulfill them, then Harris comes up empty in providing a satisfying explanation of how morality could possibly exist in a deterministic world. Moral duties seem to be impossible, unless Harris jettisons moral authority and responsibility from his theory. This, it seems, he is unable or unwilling to do.

Conclusion

Harris asserts that our decisions merely arise within our consciousness, due to prior causes over which we have no control. We simply do not operate as the prime mover of our thoughts or actions. Rather, we become aware of them only after they appear in our consciousness. Libertarians, however, do not suppose that agents are prime

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[74]Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 106.

movers at the beginning of every causal chain. Rather, they are agents who are not predetermined to act in one way or another based on their past, genes, laws of nature, etc. They exert a certain amount of control over the decisions they make. Harris has admitted that consciousness is a deep mystery. It may be that the answer to free will lies somewhere within this mystery. The theist, in speaking about the soul, seems to postulate that perhaps some personal identity is, at bottom, responsible for our actions. Whether this is some form of "Ghost in the Machine," or an "Emergent Self," the mystery of consciousness lends itself to either confusing or clarifying our experience of free will. Harris accepts the mystery of consciousness but rejects the conclusion that our wills are free. For him, just as free will must have a naturalistic explanation, so also must consciousness. In the meantime, he is not willing to accept the possibility of free will. Interestingly, however, he cannot help but speak in terms that rely on this basic folk notion, regardless of whether or not he believes it to be true. This remains an inconsistency throughout Harris' work, as he flip-flops between rejecting the traditional concept of free will, while using the very language that implies it. I have not attempted to defend libertarian free will in this chapter. Rather, I have sought to offer good reasons for being an incompatibilist about determinism and moral responsibility. As a moral realist adamantly opposed to moral relativism, Harris' determinism seems to leave little room to be consistent within his worldview. If free will does not exist, and we are not responsible either for the prior historical causes that lead to the present effects *or* the laws of nature that direct and constrain such causes, then how could anyone be held *responsible* for their actions? And if one cannot be held responsible for their actions, how could it be that they are *morally* responsible? It seems the only option Harris has is to reject one or more of the philosophical pillars that support his worldview. He may admit that morality itself is an illusion, and that our feelings of justice and moral responsibility are exactly that— feelings—but are not objectively true. This seems to be behind his understanding of retributive justice. He notes that we do not condemn the *person,* but rather, the "intention

to do harm."[75] However, he still claims, "Viewing human beings as forces of nature does not prevent us from thinking in terms of moral responsibility."[76] It seems as though Harris effectively explains away moral responsibility by reducing moral decisions to determined actions. This is perhaps most clearly seen in his discussion of retributive justice. He maintains that building prisons for those intent on harming others is comparable to the desire to prevent natural disasters that also cause human suffering. He says, "The men and women on death row have some combination of bad genes, bad parents, bad ideas, and bad luck—which of these quantities, exactly, were they responsible for?" which leads him to the conclusion, "Our system of justice should reflect our understanding that each of us could have been dealt a very different hand in life. In fact, it seems immoral not to recognize just how much luck is involved in morality itself."[77] From here it is perhaps easier to understand his strained example of finding a "cure for human evil," which could be administered to the human brain in order to prevent it from committing acts of evil again.[78] What such an Orwellian "cure" might be, and how it might work, is left unexplained. He notes that withholding such a cure for the man responsible for a crime would shift the moral blame to the ones *withholding* the cure. However, this misses the entire point that moral responsibility is granted to those precisely *because* of their actions. Had such a cure been in effect then the crime would not have taken place, in which case the retributive punishment would have been

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[75]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 108.

[76]Ibid., 109.

[77]Ibid. Derek Pareboom, in discussing the ideas of Ferdinand Schoeman, reflects Harris' ideas when he notes, "If we have the right to quarantine carriers of severe communicable diseases to protect people, then for the same reason we also have the right to isolate the criminally dangerous. Quarantining someone can be justified when she is not morally responsible for being dangerous to others . . . . Now suppose that a serial killer continues to pose a grave danger to a community. Even if he is not morally responsible for his crimes, it would be as legitimate to detain him as it is to quarantine a non-responsible carrier of a deadly communicable disease." Derek Pareboom, "Hard Incompatibilism," in John Martin Fischer et al., *Four Views on Free Will* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 116.

[78]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 109.

unnecessary. This reveals much about Harris' naturalistic thinking, in that human actions are the result of natural causes, which could theoretically be controlled by further natural substances added to or subtracted from their brains. This essentially flips much of what is traditionally understood about morality on its head to replace it with a revisionist account of ethics. While this may, in part, be Harris' intention, he is thus faced with re-building an entire explanation for our understanding of morality from the ground up, without reference to the foundational concepts of moral responsibility or objective authority. Such an enterprise is daunting, and may easily lead down the path to moral relativism, which is certainly a destination Harris resists. Once the roof has been taken off of Harris' worldview, the foundations of his moral indignation appear to be rotted and cracked due to the infestation of his determinism.

In the end, it seems as though Harris' determinism suffers a similar fate as his naturalism. In the same way as evolutionary naturalism undercuts the very capacity of reason used to accept it as a worldview, determinism suggests that Harris denies the concept of free will not because it is true, but because he was simply determined to do so. As E. Jonathan Lowe, notes,

> If we are not free to act in the light of reason, then we are not free to deploy our judgment in the light of reason in seeking out and assessing evidence and arguments for or against this or that belief. If, lacking freedom of rational action, we were to acquire the belief that we lack that freedom not through the free direction of our thoughts and the free use of our power of judgment, but rather as a consequence of prior causes determining the contents of our beliefs, then we would not have acquired that belief rationally and would not be rationally justified in holding it. There is a perfectly good sense, then, in which we simply cannot rationally believe that we lack freedom of rational action.[79]

One might ask why they should believe Harris' conception of free will, as each of us were determined to hold the views we now have, and if those views are to change, it will

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[79]E. Jonathan Lowe, "Rational Selves and Freedom of Actions," in *Analytic Philosophy without Naturalism*, ed. Antonella Corrandini, Sergio Galvan, and E. Jonathan Lowe (London: Routledge, 2010), 177.

not be as a result of anything under our direct control. The principle of moral responsibility presupposes that 1) Agents have the capacity to act or refrain from acting in certain moral or immoral ways, 2) There are genuine alternative possibilities open to the agent from which to choose, and 3) The agent is responsible *to* something or someone. Morality intuitively seems to require all three of these truths, and if Harris' conception of naturalistic ethics can exist while denying any of them, he has the burden of proof to show how this new understanding of morality can coherently hold together. I have attempted to show that he fails to do so. Rather, Harris attempts to use the same language and operate by the same presuppositions as non-determinists, all the while holding on to his determinism. It seems as though the logical conclusions of his naturalism will inevitably lead him to the very conclusion he so strongly resists: moral relativism.

CHAPTER 5

NATURALISM AND MORAL RELATIVISM

Introduction

Any system of ethics must determine whether or not normative statements are true, or if they just reflect the subjective feelings of the individual. Grounding ethics objectively is a daunting task, especially for the naturalist.[1] However, Harris is clear that his metaethic is such an undertaking, and he identifies as a naturalistic moral realist.[2] He states,

> I believe that we will increasingly understand good and evil, right and wrong, in scientific terms, because moral concerns translate into facts about how our thoughts and behaviors affect the well-being of conscious creatures like ourselves. If there are facts to be known about the well-being of such creatures—and there are—then there must be right and wrong answers to moral questions. Students of philosophy will notice that this commits me to some form of moral realism (viz. moral claims can really be true or false) and some form of consequentialism (viz. the rightness of an act depends on how it impacts the well-being of conscious creatures). While moral realism and consequentialism have both come under pressure in philosophical circles, they have the virtue of corresponding to many of our intuitions about how the world works.[3]

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[1]Jesse Prinz, "Measuring Morality," in *Reflections on Naturalism*, ed. Jose Ignacio Galparsoso and Alberto Codero (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense, 2013), 52-53, observes, "Objectivists must show that moral emotions occur in response to real moral facts . . . . There is no obvious common denominator between incest, cannibalism, mutilation, and bestiality even though they all cause disgust. There is also no obvious common denominator between inequality, murder, theft, and dishonesty even though they all cause anger. One might think that all moral wrongs violate autonomy, but some people moralize consensual sex acts (sibling incest), and consensual killing (euthanasia and suicide). We might think that all moral wrongs involve harms, but some people moralize victimless crimes (flag burning and sex with dead animals), and many harmful things (high fat diets and exploitation of workers) are often regarded as permissible. Philosophers have tried to find a moral common denominator, but no extant proposal has identified any mind-external property that reliably correlates with moral judgments. This makes it unlikely that moral judgments refer to objective facts."

[2]For others who argue for a naturalistic understanding of moral realism, see Peter Railton, "Naturalism and Prescriptivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989): 151-74; Richard N. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181-228.

[3]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 62.

He argues that moral actions can either be true or false because any talk of values must be related to the experiences of conscious creatures, otherwise it is empty talk. Morality that does not involve conscious creatures has nothing to do with value because it has nothing to do with well-being. Rocks do not have values because they are not conscious, and because they do not have values they do not have a system of morality. Something must be valuable *to* somebody for it to have value at all.[4] Therefore, if one accepts Harris' premise that well-being is the only conceivable thing to be valued, there appears to be factual answers to moral questions as they either increase or decrease well-being. For Harris, this leads to a form of moral realism, in that moral actions can have real consequences for the well-being of ourselves and others, and these consequences can be studied scientifically. He says, "Moral view A is truer than moral view B, if A entails a more accurate understanding of the connections between human thoughts/intentions/behavior and human well-being."[5] Here, Harris separates himself from many scientists who believe that "such judgments are mere expressions of cultural bias—and, thus, unscientific in principle."[6]

Do the pillars of Harris' worldview support the objective moral realism he espouses? He uses the example of Muslim women forced to wear veils as a test case. He admits that something being objectively moral does *not* mean it is true in *every* situation. He observes,

> Must compulsory veiling be ethically unacceptable *without exception* in our world? No. We can easily imagine situations in which forcing one's daughter to wear a

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[4]There are, however, fellow atheist moral realists who would disagree with Harris that moral truths must rely on the experience of conscious creatures in order to exist. Such moral truths would exist, whether or not conscious creatures had yet evolved to experience them. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 442-43, claims, "Morality is like physics and mathematics in this respect (though not in many other respects, of course). What evolves are only moral *beliefs* and *attitudes*, not moral *facts* or *truths*. When T-Rex ruled, there were no free agents to rape or be raped, but it was still true that free agents ought not to rape other free agents. This moral principle can be true even at times when it does not apply to anyone because nobody could break it."

[5]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 65.

[6]Ibid.

burqa could be perfectly moral—perhaps to escape the attention of thuggish men while traveling in rural Afghanistan. Does this slide from brute, analytic, *a priori*, and necessary truth to synthetic, *a posteriori*, contingent, exception-ridden truth pose a problem for moral realism? Recall the analogy I drew between morality and chess. Is it *always* wrong to surrender your Queen in a game of chess? No. But generally speaking, it is a terrible idea. Even granting the existence of an uncountable number of exceptions to this rule, there are still objectively good and objectively bad moves in every game of chess.[7]

One must not miss his use of "good" and "bad" in this paragraph. He is attempting to ground objective value, yet in his explanation he refers to terms that assume the very definition he is seeking to explain. That there may be exceptions to the rules is very likely for *any* system of ethics. However, what is it about Harris' metaethic that *makes* something good or bad, even if the circumstances surrounding the action may change depending on the situation? Losing your Queen in a game of chess is bad because it violates the rules of the game. Is it still morally bad for someone who refuses to play by the rules? Is morality the same sort of situation? It seems as though, for his analogy to be valid, one must hold to a social contract view of morality, in which something is bad only within the rules defined by society, but not objectively so for the societal rebel.

Furthermore, does Harris' reliance on evolution, a naturalistic explanation of well-being, and strict determinism lay a proper foundation for a realist account of morality? He is not proposing an evolutionary account of morality. Such accounts may attempt to explain *how* we became moral agents, but often fail to give a proper justification for *what* ethics is.[8] In fact, many times the basic goal of evolutionary adaption may go *against* what is moral, in which case we must rise above our natural instincts and go beyond our selfish impulses. Harris says,

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[7]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 207n17.

[8]Erin I. Kelly and Lionel K. McPherson, "The Naturalist Gap in Ethics," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 193, observe, "Moral naturalism . . . shifts questions of justification heavily in the direction of explanation. For example, naturalists have stressed the primacy and functional role of various sentiments and reactive attitudes in accounting for the normativity of moral judgments. The idea is that psychological elements that characteristically explain why people are moved by certain considerations are the very basis of normative reasons: explaining why people reach the moral judgments they reach is not clearly the same as showing that such judgments are right or reasonable."

It is important to emphasize that a scientific account of human values—i.e., one that places them squarely within the web of influences that link states of the world and states of the human brain—is not the same as an *evolutionary* account. Most of what constitutes human well-being at this moment escapes any narrow Darwinian calculus. While the possibilities of human experience must be realized in the brains that evolution has built for us, our brains were not designed with a view to our ultimate fulfillment.[9]

While we use the mental tools evolution has given us, these tools serve capacities *beyond* what they were originally intended for. They have allowed us to "[fly] the perch built by evolution," which is good, as many of our inner yearnings are actually "incompatible with our finding happiness in the world."[10] In fact, evolution has certainly selected for things that are *contrary* to what is moral. Harris notes,

> We must continually remind ourselves that there is a difference between what is natural and what is actually good for us . . . . Evolution may have selected for territorial violence, rape, and other patently unethical behaviors as strategies to propagate one's genes—but our collective well-being clearly depends on our opposing such natural tendencies.[11]

He also observes that the selfishness associated with evolution is a common misconception that has harmed the credibility of science in the eyes of the public. He explains that our "selfish genes" will also be interested in the survival of our relatives in that they will share and pass on *our* genes.[12] Harris, therefore, strongly resists any association with purely evolutionary accounts of morality. This is perhaps due to the connection many of these accounts have with moral relativism in ethics, or even forms of social Darwinism.

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[9]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 13.

[10]Ibid., 13-14.

[11]Ibid., 101.

[12]Ibid., 56. How this can make sense within a purely reductionist materialism is difficult to imagine, in that genes cannot 'want' anything. That Harris confers on selfish genes the ability to see the benefit of family survival is something he gives no detailed explanation for. In fact, Harris elsewhere seems to rely on the assumptions of his readers that caring for others *just is* part of seeking our own happiness. He writes, "While feeling love for others is surely one of the greatest sources of our own happiness, it entails a very deep concern for the happiness and suffering of those we love. Our own search for happiness, therefore, provides a rationale for self-sacrifice and self-denial. There is no question that there are times when making enormous sacrifices for the good of others is essential for one's own deeper well-being." Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 24.

Harris correctly observes that moral relativism is a difficult position to hold consistently, in that it is self-defeating.[13] This does not mean, however, that his philosophical naturalism automatically leads to moral realism.[14] In fact, try as he may to avoid the consequences of evolution for his moral theory, he cannot avoid the logical conclusions of his naturalism.[15] Merely to set such foundational concepts aside is not an option, considering the prominent place Darwinian evolution holds for the naturalist.[16] Surveying the work of some prominent evolutionary naturalists presents challenges to Harris' moral realism. In fact, there seem to be good arguments that one cannot be what Harris purports to be (an evolutionary, deterministic, naturalistic, objective, moral realist) while remaining consistent with what evolution teaches about morality. An evolutionary explanation of morality may ultimately lead to a form of moral *anti*realism. Morality might be *useful*, but the question is whether Harris' metaethic is *true* or not.[17] In this

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[13]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 45.

[14]Giving a basic definition of naturalistic moral realism, Michael Smith, "Moral Realism," in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, 2nd ed., ed. Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013), 26, says, "Naturalistic moral realism holds not only that some of the sentences that we use to make moral claims are capable of being true and false, strictly speaking . . . and that some are true, but also that what makes the true ones true are naturalistic features of the world: features amendable to understanding in scientific terms. If moral features exist at all then, given the truth of naturalism, it follows that they too must be features that can be discovered either directly by observation, or by inference from observational information."

[15]The undesirable consequences of evolution for morality have long been noted. As William F. Quillian Jr., *The Moral Theory of Evolutionary Naturalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945), 55, wrote, "It will be well to recognize the fact that not all evolutionary ethicists regard moral rules or judgments or sentiments as having objective validity. Indeed, it is claimed that the evolutionary treatment of moral phenomena destroys the last supports of a normative ethic by showing how morality has meant so many different things at different times and in different places. Thus, moral skepticism appears in the guise of ethical relativism and subjectivity."

[16]Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 9, admits, "Ultimate why questions about social and moral behavior, while considerably more challenging, must nevertheless be subjected to an evolutionary analysis." He further notes, "Here we cut to the heart of what is, in my opinion, the single biggest obstacle to a complete acceptance of the theory of evolution, especially its application to human thought and behavior, particularly in the realm of morality and ethics: the equating of evolution with ethical nihilism and moral degradation" (15).

[17]Michael Smith, "Meta-Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5, notes, "For if moral facts require the existence of properties alien to science, and if for general metaphysical reasons we have no reason to believe that there are such properties, then these considerations look as if they might well undermine our confidence in *all* of our moral judgments at once. And if that happens, then further questions suggest themselves. We can ask whether this would undermine the entire point of going in for moral

chapter, I survey the works of Michael Ruse, Richard Joyce, and J. L. Mackie, as they shed light on some of the more unwelcome conclusions of Harris' worldview. While I do not personally argue that the following evolutionary conceptions are true, I do attempt to show that Harris' worldview is internally unsustainable if *he* insists on holding on to both his Darwinism and his moral realism. Indeed, if naturalistic evolution is true, then it seems there are good reasons to believe in the subjectivity of values.

Taking Darwin Seriously

Michael Ruse may be considered to be a more "friendly" atheist than Harris in that he attempts to keep an open mind about difficult issues, rather than simply dismissing those he does not agree with. He is, however, a fellow atheist who, like Harris, shares no hope that ethics can be grounded in any sort of supernatural foundation. He is a naturalist and a Darwinist, and from these roots his moral theory grows. However, he reaches conclusions that are far from what Harris proposes, in theory, if not in application. Although Ruse offers his thoughts on moral theory in many places, I will mostly draw from *Taking Darwin Seriously*, in which he lays out an account of morality based on Darwinian evolution.[18] He admits that an evolutionary account of ethics may be worrisome to many people, as it can easily be assumed that selfishness is the rule, and the weaker of our species are merely selected against in a world where only the strong survive.[19] Ruse seeks to provide an explanation that might alleviate such hesitations

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appraisal, or whether we could happily go on as before by (say) simply pretending that our moral judgments are true. In other words, we can ask whether morality is nothing more than a useful fiction. If so, what is the use of the fiction?"

[18]Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998). See also, Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, "The Evolution of Ethics," *New Scientist* 108 (1985): 50-52; Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 365-79.

[19]Michael Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," in *The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science*, ed. Bruce L. Gordon and William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011), 856. Here one cannot help but think of the "Social Darwinism" that is so distasteful today. For a classic example, see Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1892).

among those who are skeptical of evolutionary morality.

Ruse argues we each tend to get further in life by cooperating rather than competing with each other. This has driven humanity to a social contract in order to avoid our own extinction. We can develop answers to moral questions by seeking how this will ultimately benefit our survival in the long run. Due to the fact that we are *social* animals, this will inevitably lead to questions about how we treat others, not just ourselves. Our survival is largely in the hands of other people, and so notions like reciprocal altruism (at least to some degree) makes sense on a Darwinian explanation. Now, while such moral actions can be made sense of in *practice*, is there any foundation to ground a metaethic of moral realism objectively in evolution? Ruse does not think so. He notes,

> But what about justification? What kind of metaethical justification can one give for the love commandment or a Rawlsian justice-as-fairness? I would argue that ultimately there is no justification that can be given! That is to say, I argue that at some level one is driven to a kind of moral skepticism: a skepticism, please note, about foundations rather than about substantive dictates. What I am saying therefore is that, properly understood, the Darwinian approach to ethics leads one to a kind of moral nonrealism.[20]

Ultimately, morality is a necessary illusion, put in place by our genes, to make us "good social cooperators."[21] The reason this illusion is so successful is because we *believe* it to be objective. In essence, what we believe to be moral realism is actually built on the foundation of moral *non*realism. The driving force behind this is individual (Ruse rejects "group selection") survival and reproduction. This means behavior that leads to successful reproduction will be selected for, and this often involves cooperation with others. There is no authoritative demand on us by Darwinism that we act morally, even

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[20]Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics," 858.

[21]Ibid. He and Wilson firmly believe that morality is driven by biology, and the illusion works because *objectivity* is far more successful in getting us to act moral than *subjectivity*. They argue, "Human beings function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking that there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which all should obey. We help others because it is 'right' to help them and because we know that they are inwardly compelled to reciprocate in equal measure. What Darwinian evolutionary theory shows is that this sense of 'right' and the corresponding sense of 'wrong,' feelings we take to be above individual desire and in some fashion outside biology, are in fact brought about by ultimately biological processes." Ruse and Wilson, "Moral Philosophy," 369.

though our sense of morality often steers us clear of mistakes that would otherwise hinder gene replication.[22] That we evolved to consider morality binding is simply because *objective* morality is far more persuasive in controlling our actions than *subjective* morality. It may be an illusion, but it is a beneficial (and often necessary) illusion. While Ruse rejects Harris' moral realism, their ethics still share similar goals and applications. He notes, "We can conclude, therefore, that the Darwinian agrees with the utilitarian that happiness is an important desired end in life. Indeed, when broadly conceived, it is virtually the only such end in life."[23] While Harris admits that there may be many different roads to reach the peaks of the moral landscape, Ruse suggests that an evolutionary account of morality allows us to be more humble in our moral convictions precisely *because* "evolution does not guarantee truth or, in this case, absolute knowledge of right and wrong," or "that our adaptions are going to work perfectly all of the time," because "humans, like everything else, are bundles of compromises."[24] If there is no *ultimate* right or wrong, then Ruse admits that some situations may lead to insoluble dilemmas, in which either choice we make is considered "wrong" by us.[25] In the end, however, the fact that we *feel* as though something is wrong does not find its truth in any objective Platonic forms or supernatural moral law, but in our own human nature. Ruse says, "Morality has neither meaning nor justification, outside the human context. Morality is subjective."[26] He identifies himself as a combination of Hume and Darwin, in that morality is largely an *emotional* undertaking, developed that way through Darwinian evolution. In fact, what we *feel* to be immoral may very well have been different had

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[22]Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 221.

[23]Ibid., 236.

[24]Ibid., 249.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 252.

evolution taken us down a contrary road. This does not mean that morality itself is un*real* (it certainly serves an important purpose), but rather, any metaethical *justification* of *objective* morality cannot be sustained.[27] These are issues that Harris does not tackle. Rather, his interaction with Ruse in *The Moral Landscape* is a brief mention, and a declaration that,

> The fact that our moral intuitions probably conferred some adaptive advantage upon our ancestors does not mean that the *present* purpose of morality is successful reproduction, or that "our belief in morality" is just a useful delusion . . . . Nor does it mean that our notion of "morality" cannot grow deeper and more refined as our understanding of ourselves develops.[28]

Harris does not, however, offer an alternative explanation of how his understanding of evolution can avoid the conclusions arrived at by Ruse. Ruse does not argue that every moral inclination we have *today* has its immediate goal as reproduction. Rather, this is the *foundational* drive that underlies those things selected for by evolution, including the very emotions that drive our moral instincts. To give morality a "purpose" at all is to ground it *in* something, and yet the Darwinist is forced to the conclusion that the ultimate

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[27]Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 253. Michael Shermer attempts to ground moral objectivity by noting, "Evolutionary ethics can be ennobling and morality transcendent by virtue of the fact that the deepest moral thoughts, behaviors, and sentiments belong not just to individuals, or to individual cultures, but to the entire species." Shermer, *Science of Good and Evil*, 10. The problem is, simply observing the (seemingly) universal moral feelings shared by people does not seem to provide the kind of justification needed for the "ought" of morality. Humans have many things in common universally (such as the ability to breathe oxygen), but to fail to act in accordance with all of these shared properties does not make us morally accountable. It seems as though Shermer is moving from a simple observation of a shared aspect of humanity, and then leaping from the "is" to a normative "ought." He points to this universality outside each of us to explain the objectivity of ethics. He says, "In this sense, moral sentiments and behaviors exist beyond us, as products of an impersonal force called evolution. In the same way that evolution transcends culture, morality and ethics transcend culture, because the latter are direct products of the former" (19). He concludes, "Morality exists outside the human mind in the sense of being not just a trait of individual humans, but a human trait; that is, a human universal" (18). However, this would simply mean that morality is indeed a human construct, although one shared by *all* humans. However, how does this avoid the conclusion that Ruse arrives at, that morality is a subjective human construct, albeit one shared (to some degree or another) by all humans?

[28]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 48. Daniel Dennett shares Harris' views. He says, "Our reproductive ends may have been the ends that kept us in the running till we could develop culture, and they may still play a powerful—sometimes overpowering—role in our thinking, but that does not license any conclusion at all about our current values. It does not follow from the fact that our reproductive ends were the ultimate historical *source* of our present values, that they are the ultimate (and still principle) *beneficiary* of our ethical actions." Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 470.

purpose of evolution has always been survival. Any cognitive tools we use to try and understand evolution were themselves developed by the very thing we are seeking to explain. There is therefore no foundation that can be found *outside* of the primary purposes of evolution.

None of this means that Ruse's Darwinism is at odds with Harris' theory in every way. In fact, Ruse is clear that his Darwinian ethics are compatible with utilitarianism, stating,

> Since happiness is something which we all crave, what is more natural than that we should have a sense that *we ought to promote happiness of others?* Our general inclination is to look to our own ends. However, (unbeknown to us) our biological fitness is increased if we have urges to expend effort on promoting the ends that others (consciously) want. Since the ends of others are analogous to our ends . . . our urges are directed towards promoting the general happiness of our fellows, as well as ourselves.[29]

While this observation may make utilitarianism *natural*, this does not validate our sense of *objective moral realism* or *moral responsibility*. It acts as an explanation of why morality is a natural phenomenon, but fails to give it authoritative status. For Ruse, utilitarianism may just be one formulation invented to guide our behavior, which is ultimately driven by Darwinian natural selection. In such a case, utilitarianism may be a helpful calculus, but it is an illusion to think we have any moral obligations to follow it, as morality itself is merely a helpful illusion to further gene replication. One may just as well choose a deontological method such as Kant's "categorical imperative" as a guide. It will be just as illusionary, as it also acts to further Darwinian purposes. Finally, these ethical structures are not reached (as Harris believes) by science alone. Rather, ". . . only a total hypocrite would pretend that we have arrived at this conclusion independent of any prior knowledge of utilitarianism. In filling out the content of our sense of obligation, the Darwinian has obviously turned to the philosopher."[30] This is not troubling to Ruse,

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[29]Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 237.

[30]Ibid., 238.

who concludes, "As empirical scientists, who are we to turn to but the moral philosophers, if we are to discover the sorts of constraints which govern human thought and action?"[31] Who indeed?

The Myth of Morality

Richard Joyce is another who claims that the objective foundations for moral realism, based on evolution, are an illusion. In this section, I will primarily draw on his works *The Evolution of Morality*[32] and *The Myth of Morality*.[33] Like Ruse, Joyce sees objective moral realism as a necessary illusion thrust on us by Darwinian evolution. He says, "We have evolved to categorize aspects of the world using moral concepts. Natural selection has provided us with a tendency to invest the world with values that it does not contain, demands which it does not make."[34] Like Ruse, Joyce notes that since our family members share a significant portion of our genetic material, then their survival is genetically tied to our own.[35] This will lead to caring about more than just oneself. For Joyce, to claim that something is 'morally right' is really to acknowledge a common property (or cluster of properties) that could just as easily be described by saying a certain action ". . . is a type of thing towards which humans, by the process of natural selection, are disposed to have attitude A."[36] While this may be how we recognize ethical activities within a society, where does this leave the foundational justification for morality? Joyce does not believe evolution holds much hope for grounding ethical

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[31]Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, 238.

[32]Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

[33]Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also, Richard Joyce, "Ethics and Evolution," in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, 2nd ed., ed. Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013), 123-47.

[34]Ibid., 135.

[35]Ibid., 135-36.

[36]Ibid., 156.

realism. He notes, "The innateness of moral judgments undermines these judgments being true for the simple reason that if we have evolved to make these judgments irrespective of their being true, then one could not hold that the judgments are *justified*. And if they are unjustified, then although they *could* be true, their truth is in doubt."[37] In this sense, he makes an argument similar to Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism. If evolution selected for moral traits *not* because of their truth, but because of their adaptive value, then it is possible that an entirely different set of values could have been selected for, in which case we might call moral what we, in fact, believe today to be *im*moral. There is no outside standard that can be brought to bear on our current moral attitudes, only the feelings that we have evolved towards them, which have been selected for due to their survival value.[38] He notes that "truth" *is* important in such cases as math. Mathematical rules, such that 2+2=4, are only valuable enough for evolution to select if they are actually true. Is morality in a similar position? Joyce believes it is not, as false forms of morality could also be selected for, which lead to survival. Understandably, one might be skeptical that we could ever reach our current level of survival had we developed a system of morality that is opposite to what we now understand. However, one can find examples in the animal kingdom, as well as among humans, in which they operate (and survive) under a form of ethics completely foreign to our modern sensibilities. It is here that Harris briefly mentions Joyce in *The Moral Landscape*, as Joyce considers science in the same evolutionary category as math, but not morality. While Harris accepts that this may be true of arithmetic, he takes issue with Joyce for suggesting science is only valuable if it is true to reality. He says, ". . . science has progressed by violating many (if not most) of our innate, proto-scientific intuitions about

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[37]Joyce, *Myth of Morality*, 159.

[38]Contrast this with the Moral Law described by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 3-32.

the nature of reality. By Joyce's reasoning, we should view these violations as a likely step away from the Truth."[39] For Harris, if science can evolve into a trustworthy discipline, despite being at odds with many of our intuitions about reality, then certainly morality can evolve in the same way. He refuses to accept the distinction Joyce makes between moral intuitions and other such beliefs. He does not, however, go into detail as to *why* he thinks Joyce's verdict is incorrect. Rather, his argument seems to be that science must often go against our intuitive notions, and we have obviously developed a trustworthy science. If this is true of science, it can also be true of morality.

Joyce notes that morality *seems to us* to carry an authority that transcends mere preference, like etiquette. He says, "It may be that as a matter of fact morality is just a matter of human convention; the point is that this is not how we think of it (when we are 'within it,' so to speak); we think of it as having a convention-transcendent practical clout."[40] This, for Joyce, is the biggest issue facing naturalistic conceptions of morality. He notes, "No such naturalism can accommodate the sense of inescapable practical authority with which moral claims appear to be imbued."[41] As Ruse noted earlier, it may be that morality, even if it is an illusion, is such an *important* illusion that we have come to view it as authoritative. It seems obvious that the idea of objective morality will carry more weight with people than subjective. In this sense, morality acts like Daniel Dennett's "conversation stoppers," preventing one from deliberating endlessly before making a final decision. It is much swifter to follow the moral guideline "Stealing is wrong," than to seek further and further justification, pros and cons, for why you should or should not steal. This does not make deliberation unnecessary when making moral decisions. It means, however, that those deliberations must ultimately come to an end

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[39]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 208n19.

[40]Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*, 63.

[41]Ibid., 190.

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somewhere, and grounding morality objectively and authoritatively seems to do the trick. However, this is not to say that these moral statements are *true*, for they could turn out to be false. It is rather to say that "conversation stoppers" are *useful*. As was mentioned regarding the EAAN, many useful things may in fact turn out to be false. This is why any naturalistic attempt will struggle to formulate an ethical structure that takes into account the "*inescapable authority* we apparently expect and require of moral values."[42] One can always think of an example of an individual who might simply say "But I *want* to kill people!" and go right along doing it. To claim that this person has a contractual obligation to society is one thing, but to say that they are under some *moral* obligation to anything higher than the law of the land makes little sense for the naturalist. Harris simply chooses to dismiss such cases as those who are morally deviant, and who would certainly choose something different to maximize their well-being if they only knew better. In the meantime, Harris proposes that such people have little say in the conversation of morality. Indeed, Harris dismisses any such would-be contributors who fall outside the special parameters that are set by science. He asks, "How have we convinced ourselves that, on the most important questions in human life, all views must count equally?"[43] In the case of certain cultural practices, Harris concludes, "Whatever they *think* they want out of life—like keeping all the women and girls subjugated and illiterate—they simply do not understand how much better life would be for them if they had different priorities."[44] The issue, however, is not just that Harris thinks a *better* life is available to such people; it is that they are *morally obligated* to seek this life. He speaks with righteous indignation towards practices that would decrease well-being, decrying religion as one of the worst offenders. He is not simply making observations about how

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[42]Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*, 191.

[43]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 34.

[44]Ibid., 37.

different worldviews promote more or less well-being, but that such people are morally accountable for their actions, and should be condemned for them. This is a far cry from the objective observations of a scientist in a lab, and this is exactly what Joyce is getting at. There is a deep sense of moral *authority* that underlies every meaningful system of ethics. Joyce notes that some people attempt to ground moral authority by stating why one might have sufficient reason to follow it. He says,

> Many naturalistic strategies introduce a middleman between morality and reasons. A certain kind of utilitarian strategy, for example, first says that moral goodness is identical to happiness, then tries to show that we have reason to pursue the general happiness. A simpler strategy declares that moral requirements *just are* whatever one has real reason to do—assuming that the idea of what counts as a genuine deliberative consideration for a person is itself amenable to naturalization.[45]

For Harris, "well-being" *just is* the proper pursuit of morality. Is Harris able to give his ethic *authority*? Joyce notes that the very act of asking "Why X?" presupposes one's interest in rational answers, so to use rational questioning to ask why they should care about rational reasons is to answer one's own question in the very act of asking it. If one does not care about reason, one cannot use reason to question it. Fair enough. This would be similar to asking why one must follow the rules of chess after one is already playing the game. To commit oneself to the game is to accept the rules that make playing the game possible. In other words, only those who reject reason as a guiding principle in their life can question why they should use reason, which would then betray the fact that they actually *do* use reason.

Joyce adds a further requirement: inescapability. He says, "We need a property that has this authority over people *irrespective of their interests*. But it is doubtful that any naturalizable account can deliver this."[46] A moral rule would seem to have little authority over someone who rejects any reason they might have to follow it. Joyce sees

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[45]Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*, 194.

[46]Ibid., 196.

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only two options for the naturalist: either admit that there must be a *non-naturalistic* notion of correct reasoning that will satisfy, or else surrender the need to satisfy the criterion at all. The dilemma for the naturalist is that moral authority seems essential to give any system of ethics its clout. This is especially true of Harris, who tirelessly seeks to move people away from their previous moral foundations onto his own moral landscape. To claim that authority is not central to morality is to go to the very heart of the concept. In fact, to deny such authority is to open the door to exactly the kind of things morality seeks to prevent. Joyce notes,

> When the authority of morality is surrendered, when the practical force of morality depends on the agent's contingent mental states, and when the agent is aware of this fact, then a worrying consequence is that people can to some extent *determine* whether they have reason to act morally on any token occasion: They can jiggle their desires—or perhaps overhaul their desires if the rewards of immorality appear great enough—in order to elude any moral command. The very presence of immoral temptation encourages them to do so.[47]

If there is no such authority to undergird morality, then one wonders why the very discussion does not change to that of what one "likes" or "dislikes." Or, as Harris sees it, what promotes or detracts from human well-being. While we may choose to use such language, there will still be an implicit understanding that our deepest moral impulses transcend mere preference. One does not get the idea, for example, while reading *The Moral Landscape*, that Harris is simply suggesting that there are better or worse ways to seek well-being in the world.[48] If this were the case, then one could simply say, "Well, I would like to live my life by a different set of rules." Or, perhaps, a lazy or selfish person

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[47]Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*, 206.

[48]Although, at times it *does* seem as though Harris is suggesting a change in the language and understanding of morality. For example, "What would our world be like if we ceased to worry about 'right' and 'wrong,' 'good' and 'evil,' and simply acted so as to maximize well-being, our own and that of others? Would we lose anything important? And if important, wouldn't it be, by definition, a matter of *someone's* well-being?" Harris, *The Moral Landscape,* 64. Here, though, he is confusing the language with the ontology of morality. No matter what one decides to *call* it, what *makes* something moral? Unless the concept of well-being has, built into its very definition, an objective authority, then it is open to the whims and wishes of those who choose to seek it or not. Also, language *is* important because it is the tool we use to develop, teach, and challenge *ideas*. Merely choosing to define morality by another set of terms is not to deal with the ontological reality of what it is.

may simply choose to live at a level of well-being that takes less effort, as morality often burdens us with tasks that are costly and difficult, even if there is a greater reward in the end. Of course, such people will exist in *any* system of morality, as there will always be deviants who choose to reject the moral expectations placed on them. When a person does so, it leaves others in a position to either say, "Well, that's their choice, although another choice may have been more conducive to their well-being," or, "They are morally *wrong* in choosing to do such-and-such a thing and should be held accountable." While Harris may see little distinction between these two responses, Joyce would not think this so obvious. He says, "Moral naturalism without clout, first of all, seems to enfeeble our capacity to morally criticize wrongdoers; second, it might actually encourage wrongdoing for certain persons; and third, it renders moral language and moral thinking entirely redundant."[49] So what does this amount to? Joyce suggests a moral agnosticism, in which actions like stealing may not be *immoral*, and yet there are good reasons *not* to do it. He, like Harris, rejects that one must rely on supernatural explanations in order to justify morality. While there may not be an authoritative objective morality that can be explained naturalistically, there will still be good reasons for embracing some actions and avoiding others. Joyce ultimately believes Darwinian evolution undermines morality in the same way Plantinga believes it undermines rationality. He concludes,

> Acknowledging beliefs under the influence of natural selection raises epistemological concerns, for the faithful representation of reality is of only contingent instrumental value when reproductive success is the touchstone, forcing us to acknowledge that if in certain domains *false* beliefs will bring more offspring then that is the route natural selection will take every time. Moral thinking could very well be such a domain.[50]

Joyce, like Ruse, understands the importance of morality, and yet acknowledges that it

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[49]Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*, 208.

[50]Ibid., 222.

has no objective authority from with a naturalistic framework.

Inventing Right and Wrong?

In his influential work, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*,[51] J. L. Mackie argues that the logical end of a naturalistic system of ethics is the subjectivity of all values. He says,

> 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.[52]

He distinguishes between those "first order" stances that one might take in simply *rejecting* any normative practice she sees as "morality," and "second order" views, which question the *ontological* status of moral values. Is there some *extra* quality that makes something objectively moral or valuable? He believes there is not, and so moral subjectivity (a label he accepts alongside "moral skepticism") is unavoidable. Harris disagrees, and notes, "Many people are . . . confused about what it means to speak with scientific 'objectivity' about the human condition."[53] Citing John Searle, Harris claims to use the term "objective" to refer to *how* we know, and "subjective" as *what there is to know*. He says,

> When we say that we are reasoning or speaking "objectively," we generally mean that we are free of obvious bias, open to counterarguments, cognizant of relevant facts, and so on. This is to make a claim about *how* we are thinking. In this sense, there is no impediment to our studying *subjective* (i.e., first-person) facts "objectively."[54]

Nobody is ever free of bias. This does not make it impossible to ever speak objectively about anything. We share enough in common with each other that we can use agreed-

[51]J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977).

[52]Ibid., 15.

[53]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 29.

[54]Ibid.

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upon descriptions to explain objects and circumstances. However, it seems as though moral values are tricky because they do not share easily identifiable characteristics like other objects. To say that a rock is "solid" is to make an objective, scientific claim. *Any* person will have to agree that a rock displays the characteristics of solidity, especially when contrasted with something liquid. What a person *feels* about the rock must be measured against what the rock is *shown to be*. Do ethical statements occupy this same realm? While much of Harris' book is written to dissolve the facts/values distinction, it is exactly at points like this where such a distinction rears its ugly head.

Harris disagrees with Mackie that there must be something "extra" about moral actions that qualify them ontologically as moral. For Harris, moral actions are those actions that further the well-being of conscious creatures. Therefore, if a scientist can determine whether or not an action increases or decreases an individual's well-being, then they can decide whether it is moral or not. However, this seems to be where the confusion lies. In order to know whether or not something furthers a person's well-being, we must ultimately rely on *the person* to tell us, which is a subjective statement about how they feel, for well-being manifests itself as a subjective experience. Moral statements ultimately reflect the attitudes and experiences of people, *not* the underlying neurological states that drive them. Indeed, well-being is made up of *many* neurological states in the brain that come together and are felt from within our consciousness as a unified experience we call "well-being." Harris notes, "Clearly, we can make true or false claims about human (and animal) subjectivity, and we can often evaluate these claims without having access to the facts in question."[55] True, and it seems unlikely that a moral subjectivist would deny this. The issue, however, is the *ontological* status of morality. What is up for discussion is not whether or not we can make statements about subjective experience. This appears to be true. What is *not* obvious is whether value statements that

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[55]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 31.

are made subjectively refer to things that are themselves objective realities.[56] This can be seen in questions such as, "Was the Holocaust objectively wrong, regardless of what someone *thinks* or *feels* about it?" We can certainly speak of the Holocaust, and people's experience *of* it, in objectively provable terms, such as, "The Holocaust was carried out by the Nazis during World War II and resulted in the loss of many Jewish lives." However, to label the event of the Holocaust itself as *wrong* seems to assign to it a special characteristic that is altogether different from mere factual statements about its historicity. The issue is not the *epistemology* of moral actions ("Can we *know* that this or that thing is moral?"), but rather the *ontology* of moral actions ("*Is* this or that thing moral?"). As Mackie observes, "There are also ontological, as contrasted with linguistic or conceptual, questions about the nature and status of goodness or rightness or whatever it is that first order moral statements are distinctively about," and these issues cannot be resolved simply by determining what people mean when they use terms like "goodness."[57] Indeed, when the lion kills the gazelle, we do not call it "murder," even though the results may be similar to a human murdering another human (or, as a more comparable example, cannibalism). What is it that changes when a human kills another human that shifts our understanding of the action from "killing" to "murder?" What extra characteristic does the ontological status of the human action have that the showdown in the Serengeti lacks? If one considers a case in which two people disagree on the morality of a given action, the subjectivist seems to be at a loss to resolve the problem

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[56]A helpful definition of objective and subjective reality says, "Many philosophers would use the term 'objective reality' to refer to anything that exists as it is independent of any conscious awareness of it (*via* perception, thought, etc.) . . . . Subjective reality would then include anything depending upon some (broadly construed) conscious awareness of it to exist," cited from "The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," accessed June 10, 2016, http://www.iep.utm.edu/objectiv/. In this sense, Harris would seem to be subjective about human values, in that he claims that values can *only* exist where there are conscious minds to perceive them, rejecting any form of Platonic Forms to describe moral realities that are somehow outside of our experience. Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 30.

[57]Mackie, *Ethics*, 13.

conclusively (assuming conclusive resolution is indeed the goal[58]). However, if there is an *objective* reality that those in disagreement can discover, it provides a possible solution. If objective morality exists, it seems as though "there is something that backs up and validates some of the subjective concern which people have for things."[59] Indeed, Harris seeks to discover a scientific method that could universally resolve ethical debates.[60]

Mackie observes that for values to be objective does *not* simply mean they are valued by everyone. Indeed, objective morality would mean that the Holocaust was wrong *even if everyone believed it was good*. Universal agreement would not make an action right, just as we know that universal agreement that, say, the sun revolves around the earth would not make it true. Also, a moral imperative must be formulated as a certain *kind* of 'ought statement.' One possible 'ought statement' might be, "If you want *X*, do *Y*," in which case the "ought" is implied because of the value one has already placed on *X*. In Harris' case, he might say, "If you want to increase well-being for yourself and others, do *Y*." This is all well and good, unless a person responds with "I want to increase *my* well-being, but I don't much care about the well-being of others, so I choose to do *Z* instead of *Y*." To what objective standard might Harris appeal to claim that this person is acting, fundamentally, *immoral*, rather than, say, *imprudent*? Another 'ought statement' might be, "If you promised to do *Y*, then you ought to do *Y*." This, however, need not be construed as an *imperative* or *moral* statement. It may simply mean, "*If* you desire to be a promise-keeper, then you *must* keep your promise, otherwise you are not, by definition, a

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[58]See Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 29, for his brief discussion on the limits of science in this area.

[59]Mackie, *Ethics*, 22.

[60]He claims, "Only a rational understanding of human well-being will allow billions of us to coexist peacefully, converging on the same social, political, economic, and environmental goals. A science of human flourishing may seem a long way off, but to achieve it, we must first acknowledge that the intellectual terrain actually exists." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 7.

promise-keeper." In such a scenario, it is logically impossible to be a promise-keeper if you do not keep your promises. This, however, is not making a value or moral statement about promise keeping, or even about the person in question. It is, rather, speaking about the logical consistency of the person as construed by the definition of "promise-keeper."

Mackie notes that something like Kant's "categorical imperative" would "express a reason for acting which was unconditional in the sense of not being contingent upon any present desire of the agent to whose satisfaction the recommended action would contribute as a means."[61] It is here that naturalism seems to show a deficiency if the naturalist seeks to claim objectivity in ethics. Mackie notes,

> On a naturalist analysis, moral judgements can be practical, but their practicality is wholly relative to desires or possible satisfactions of the person or persons whose actions are to be guided; but moral judgements seem to say more than this. This view leaves out the categorical quality of moral requirements. In fact both naturalist and noncognitive analyses leave out the apparent authority of ethics, the one by excluding the categorically imperative aspect, the other the claim to objective validity or truth.[62]

Indeed, moral authority is an issue that Harris never fully addresses. It seems as though "well-being" is assumed by Harris to be such a natural, universal, and uncontroversial value (the vagueness of the term allows it to cover a wide-ranging set of experiences) that *authority* is not needed. Its value, importance, and worthiness of pursuit are built into it by its very definition, and he can simply dismiss as delusional anyone who might question the value of well-being. However, as Mackie points out, when we speak of something being "right" or "moral," we seem to have in mind that such a thing is also *binding* on us in some authoritative way. Not just that we *should* do such-and-such a thing, but that we *must* do it. While this may be seen as a carry-over from a culture steeped in a long history of religious deontological ethics, it would seem that this authority is found not just in such societies, but is a universal characteristic of ethics.

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[61]Mackie, *Ethics*, 28.

[62]Ibid., 33.

Even Plato's idea, as expressed by Euthyphro, that The Good is worthy of God having commanded it, assumes a certain obligation that we have to pursue it for its own sake.

One argument Mackie makes for the subjectivity of ethics is the relativity that is found around the world. If ethics were indeed objective, then it seems as though the same moral imperatives would be found in every culture. Such is a controversial claim since (depending on how specific one is) most cultures *would* seem to value certain things, such as honesty.[63] However, if Mackie is correct in his assessment of moral relativity (and indeed, there certainly is *variety* among different cultures, even if this ultimately amounts to nothing more than a difference in *application* of the same core values), then it seems that objective morality may not, at least, be as *obvious* as one might think. The second argument, what Mackie calls "The Argument from Queerness," holds more weight, and is directly rejected by Harris. This argument states, "If there were objective values, then they would be entities 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."[64] Indeed, it does seem as though moral statements go beyond mere descriptive accounts. One could say, "Bill shot Joe," and be simply describing an action that took place. *Moral* judgment need not be read into such a statement. However, to then add, ". . . and Bill is immoral for having done so," is to add another statement of a different kind that does not describe any physical characteristic of Bill (such as his brain state at the time, or the way in which he did the killing, or even his motivations for having done so). Rather, it is making a different *kind* of descriptive statement about the action and the person responsible, one that makes a moral *judgment*

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[63]C. S. Lewis identifies such universal morals as the *tao* that can be found in cultures around the world. See C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

[64]Mackie, *Ethics*, 38.

upon his character. Harris disagrees. He claims that Mackie is conflating two different senses of the term "objective." He notes that we need not speak of such actions in any way differently than we speak of other types of actions,

> We need only admit that the experiences of conscious creatures are lawfully dependent upon states of the universe—and, therefore, that actions can cause more harm than good, more good than harm, or be morally neutral. Good and evil need only consist in this, and it makes no sense whatsoever to claim that an action that harms everyone affected by it (even its perpetrator) might still be "good."[65]

Harris, however, is confusing what Mackie is saying, and in so doing, smuggles in moral language and concepts into his own statement. That experiences of conscious creatures are lawfully dependent on states of the universe is not being debated. The question is whether or not these experiences are *moral*. Harris includes the term "good" in his explanation, when that is the very concept up for debate. The question is whether or not such conscious experiences *are* good, not whether good or harmful actions are dependent on the laws of the universe. Actions that happen *will* happen within the laws of the universe. It is the *evaluation* of these actions that is under investigation. Here there is a jump from *de*scriptive to *pre*scriptive. Neither is Mackie claiming that a universally harmful action is "good." What he is saying is that it may be *said* to be good (or bad), but it holds no *objective* goodness (or badness). The "queerness" of moral statements is that they appear to be different, in some way, than descriptive statements. Harris goes on to say,

> We do not require a metaphysical repository of right and wrong, or actions that are mysteriously right or wrong *in themselves*, for there to be right and wrong answers to moral questions; we simply need a landscape of possible experiences that can be traversed in *some* orderly way in light of how the universe actually is. The main criterion, therefore, is that misery and well-being not be completely random.[66]

This, however, *assumes* morality built in to the concepts of misery and well-being, which is basically to accept Harris' entire argument up front. What is to keep someone from

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[65]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 190n4.

[66]Ibid.

merely describing actions that bring greater or lesser misery or well-being to people, without speaking about them *prescriptively*? Mackie is not arguing that misery and well-being are somehow detached from the physical world, or that they are random. He is arguing that people, like Harris, add something *extra* to these descriptions when they make them objective, prescriptive, "ought" statements. Certainly one can objectively make statements about what does and does not increase well-being and decrease misery. However, these statements need not be *moral* statements. Moral statements seem to indicate an *obligation* toward such actions.[67] To observe this "queerness," Mackie suggests asking "about anything that is supposed to have some objective moral quality, how this is linked with its natural features. What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty—say, causing pain just for fun—and the moral fact that it is wrong?"[68] Mackie, like Ruse and Joyce, believes that we have given morality objective authoritative status because of the benefit it brings to society, *not* because it is true. There is nothing built into the natural properties of moral or immoral actions that make them *objectively* good or bad.[69]

Conclusion

According to Ruse, Joyce, and Mackie, morality is a useful fiction for the

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[67]This is what George Mavrodes has in mind when he speaks of the "queerness of morality." He states, "Morality, however, seems to require us to hold that certain organisms (namely, human beings) have in addition to their ordinary properties and relations another special relation to certain actions. This relation is that of being 'obligated' to perform those actions." George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 489. The "queerness" arises when thinking that a naturalistic understanding of the world could somehow produce obligation on us, since our understanding of obligation presupposes *something* we are obligated to, and a blind, pitiless, indifferent universe seems a poor candidate.

[68]Mackie, *Ethics*, 41.

[69]Interestingly, Mackie notes how this may be somehow possible *if* theism is true. He admits, "To meet these difficulties, the objectivist may have recourse to the purpose of God: the true purpose of human life is fixed by what God intended for (or, intends) men to do and to be. Actual human strivings and satisfactions have some relations to this true end because God made men for this end and made them such as to pursue it . . . . I concede that if the requisite theological doctrine could be defended, a kind of objective ethical prescriptivity could be introduced." Ibid., 48.

naturalist. There is nothing *objective* about an action's moral status. It is, rather, based

upon what we decide it to be. John Haught notes, "Perhaps evolutionary biology can help

to explain the *origins* of virtue, but it cannot *justify* any particular course of action."[70]

While the theist may claim that an extra property is added to a moral action to provide its

moral status (the "queerness" Mackie talks about such as, say, "Reflects the character of a

perfect God"), the naturalist is left to explain what *makes* an action moral or immoral.

What changes a statement from descriptive to prescriptive? For Harris' system of ethics

to hold together, he must deal adequately with the objections raised by Ruse, Joyce, and

Mackie. Otherwise, it seems as though he is forced, by his philosophical naturalism, to

accept a form of moral relativism. As William F. Quillian Jr. states,

> The evolutionary theory of ethics, then, either explains away moral obligation in the attempt to account for it by the descriptive method, or denies that there is really any such thing as moral obligation. In so far as these writers do not surrender the notion of obligation, they commit the fallacy of shifting illegitimately from descriptive to a normative morality. However, in so far as they deny obligation, debate with them seems futile.[71]

If this is the case, then a significant crack appears in another pillar of Harris' worldview.

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[70]John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 153.

[71]Quillian, *Moral Theory*, 96-97.

CHAPTER 6

IN SCIENCE WE TRUST?

Introduction

The relationship between science and religion has been the topic of much

discussion, although the supposed conflict between the two is a relatively recent

phenomenon.[1] Some have argued that science and religion deal with different subject

matters, and can thus both operate in peace, as long as they respect the proper

parameters.[2] In this understanding, science answers questions about the physical

universe, while religion deals with the topics of meaning, values, and morality. This is

precisely what Harris resists in his thesis. He claims that morality should not be the

exclusive domain of metaphysics, as it intersects closely with the physical world in a way

that is open to scientific study. He claims, "Meaning, values, and the good life must relate

to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures—and, in our case, must lawfully

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[1]Steven Tomlins observes, "The notion that science and religion are, or may be, in conflict is a relatively recent one. In fact, the phrase 'science and religion' did not appear until the early years of the nineteenth century, and books with that phrase in their title did not appear until the 1820s and 1830s." Steven Tomlins, "In Science We Trust: Dissecting the Chimera of New Atheism" (PhD. diss., University of Ottawa, 2010), 98-99. For more on the history of how this perception arose, see Lawrence M. Principe, "Scientism and the Religion of Science," in *Scientism: The New Orthodoxy*, ed. Richard N. Williams and Daniel N. Robinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 44-52. See also A. G. M. van Melsen, "Science and Religion," in *Science and Religion: One World – Changing Perspectives on Reality*, ed. Jan Fennema and Iain Paul (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1990), 27-34. The idea that theology has been the primary stumbling block for scientific progress has been termed the "conflict thesis," the "warfare model," and the "military model." Colin Russell, "The Conflict of Science and Religion," in *Science & Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 3-4. The two works that are largely responsible for perpetuating this view are John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), and Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896). These two works are often referred to as the "Draper-White Thesis." For a good summary, see Ronald L. Numbers, "Aggressors, Victims, and Peacemakers: Historical Actors in the Drama of Science and Religion," in *The Religion and Science Debate: Why Does It Continue?* ed. Harold W. Attridge (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15-53.

[2]See Stephen J. Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106 (March 1997): 16-22.

depend upon events in the world and upon states of the human brain."[3] These states of the

brain can then be studied through neuroscience. Values and morality do play out within

the physical world in their application. This much, it seems, it not contested among

theologians. However, that morality and values "lawfully depend on events in the world

and upon states of the human brain" is another matter. While science may certainly

contribute to our understanding of ethics, is it the *only* way (or even the *best* way) to gain

knowledge of the moral realm? Is there any room for science and religion and philosophy

to all work in tandem to achieve greater knowledge of morality? Further, is it possible for

science to speak about ethics, on any level, without first relying on philosophy? Harris is

clear where he stands regarding faith and science, stating, "Rational, open-ended, honest

inquiry has always been the true source of insight into such processes. Faith, if it is ever

right about anything, is right by accident."[4] He is well-known for his polemics against

religion.[5] It is this antagonism, more than perhaps anything else, that fuels his project.[6]

While others may attempt to find ways to reconcile the projects of science and religion,

Harris firmly see the two as incompatible.[7] He declares, "My goal is to convince you that

human knowledge and human values can no longer be kept apart. The world of

measurement and the world of meaning must eventually be reconciled. And science and

religion—being antithetical ways of thinking about the same reality—will never come to

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[3]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 6.

[4]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 6.

[5]See Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) and Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

[6]For a study on how Harris and the other New Atheists view science in an almost religious way, see Tomlins, "In Science We Trust." He says, "I propose that part of the hostility lies in the fact that they do not view science simply as an *enemy* of religion—they view science as a *replacement* for it. From this perspective, they see secularization as part of the process of the replacement of religion with science" (145).

[7]Harris is hardly the first or the only one to hold this view. Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "A religion like Christianity, which does not have contact with reality at any point, which crumbles as soon as reality is conceded its rights at even a single point, must naturally be mortally hostile against the 'wisdom of the this world,' which means *science*." Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 627.

terms."[8] For Harris, there is no middle ground. In this chapter, I look at several important aspects of Harris' thesis as it pertains to the relationship between science and religion. If Harris truly believes that the two are incompatible, it is vital to determine what he means by "science" and what he means by "religion." It may be the case that *his* understanding of science and religion are indeed incompatible. However, it seems possible that his understanding is not the only viable option for others who would see both disciplines reconciled together. Further, I take a closer look at his claim that *science* determines human values. Can science ever be done apart from the foundations of philosophy? Where is this line drawn? If science relies on certain presuppositions (as it must) then there is something *behind* science that is the ultimate starting point for knowledge. Science can arguably only thrive under specific philosophical presuppositions. If this is the case, then it seems as though Harris' declaration that "science determines human values" may be an overreaching statement. Finally, I inspect the relationship between Christian philosophy and the presuppositions of science to see if they are indeed incompatible, or whether they might work together.[9]

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[8]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 10.

[9]There are really only two examples that could possibly be deemed "conflicts" between science and Christianity: The Copernican and the Darwinian. However, these are more complicated than a simple "religion vs. science" label can accurately portray. The Galileo conflict was arguably more about theological differences than scientific debate, and the continuing Darwinian conversation is contested more for the implicit naturalistic worldview smuggled in than it is the specifics of evolution. In both conflicts, there were passionate believers on *both* sides. Resistance to change is not unique to Christians. Rather, it is a *human* phenomenon. One must also remember that those who claim the Bible to be infallible never claim that *humans* are infallible in their interpretation of it. Christian theology does leave room for growth in our understanding of Scripture, just as we grow in other areas of human knowledge. Indeed, beliefs are often difficult to change, especially when they have seemingly explained a situation adequately for a long time. David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 59, notes, "Neither Muslim nor Christian scientists are to be faulted, obviously, for clinging so long to late antiquity cosmology; it accounted fully for the phenomenon of celestial rotation, and the geometric picture of the universe accorded with common sense." Similarly, "When an indisputable fact conflicts with a common interpretation of Scripture, then the interpretation—not the divine revelation itself—must be at fault." Vincent Carroll and David Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial: Arguments against Anti-Religious Bigotry* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 74. In the specific cases of Galileo and Darwin, there was far more going on than is usually acknowledged. For a helpful explanation of the events surrounding Galileo, see Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 38-40; Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 163-66; Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 63-66. Darwin's ideas continue to be debated today, presenting a wide spectrum of Christian positions. For examples of critics, see Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books,

Harris on Religion and Science

What drives Harris' resistance to religion and the influence it has had over morality? There are several candidates. He directly links many great tragedies to religion, as can be attested by simply browsing any of the books he has written. However, that religion has been at least one of the motivating factors of evil in the world is not necessarily a controversial statement. One of the central beliefs of Christians is that humanity is a fallen race living within a damaged and broken world. There must be a clear distinction between the *call* of God to live moral lives, and the *capacity* of human agents to successfully live such lives. A failure to perfectly meet the moral standards of God is not necessarily an indictment that such a God is unworthy to issue moral commands. In fact, it seems that *any* system of ethics is going to present a "moral gap" that is not perfectly achievable without some sort of aid. A standard that is not easily met does not thereby lose its value as an ideal. Indeed, it remains a constant goal to aim towards, whether or not any one individual reaches it with a "perfect score." It seems, rather, that Harris' resistance to religion in the realm of morality comes from the perceived *dogmatism* that often accompanies religious doctrine. He says, "Anyone truly interested in morality—in the principles of behavior that allow people to flourish— should be open to new evidence and new arguments that bear upon questions of happiness and suffering. Clearly, the chief enemy of open conversation is dogmatism in all its forms."[10] To support his claim, Harris often chooses to focus on the atrocities done in the name of Islam by radicals and terrorists. He, like other New Atheists, has a habit of

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2010); William Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance Through Small Probabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). For examples of those who seek to reconcile Darwinian evolution with faith in God, see Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 2000); Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2007). Today, the thesis that religion and science have been (and must remain) in conflict is not widely held by reputable scholars. The relationship between science and religion has indeed been complicated, but this is not the same as claiming they have been in perpetual conflict with each other.

[10]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 22-23.

lumping all religions together, regardless of their many important differences. In this chapter, however, I am especially interested in *Christianity's* relationship with science. There are certainly those in every religion that are "dogmatic" in ways that leave them ill-equipped to successfully think and act scientifically. Is Christianity, at heart, a religion that embraces dogmatism and pits it *against* the scientific enterprise?

Harris asserts that religion cannot speak effectively about the natural order because it primarily explains and understands the world according to the *super*natural. He says,

> Here is our situation: if the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to supernatural modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous; if the basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the nature of reality, confounded by irrational hopes and fears, and tending to waste precious time and attention—often with tragic results. Is this really a dichotomy about which science can claim to be neutral?[11]

According to Harris, it is not possible to hold the view that God can act within the world in ways that go above and beyond the laws we have crafted to explain it, and yet also believe consistently in such laws. Christianity is too full of the miraculous to ever give credence to a scientific way of thinking. Miracles, it seems, would render the natural laws arbitrary, and a God who might intervene at any time seems to open the door to "God of the Gaps" explanations that are intellectually lazy and dishonest. The problem, however, is that this does not fit within the basic understanding of Christian doctrine regarding nature, which never denies that the natural world can (and even should) be understood according to regularities and rational structures. In fact, there are those who have argued that the scientific worldview is not only compatible with the Christian picture of the world; it is, in many senses, an outgrowth *from* it.[12]

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[11]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 25.

[12]See Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*; Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God*; R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1972); Carroll and Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial*, 54-85; Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Lowell Lectures, 1925 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925); Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, chap. 6.

What, then, is Harris' understanding of science? It proves difficult to find a concrete definition in his writings. Indeed, for someone who so confidently trumpets the authority of science, Harris is strangely silent on what he means by the term. He resists using the word "science" in an overly restrictive sense. He explains,

> For the purposes of this discussion, I do not intend to make a hard distinction between "science" and other intellectual contexts in which we discuss "facts"—e.g., history. For instance, it is a fact that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Facts of this kind fall within the context of "science," broadly construed as our best effort to form a rational account of empirical reality. Granted, one doesn't generally think of events like assassinations as "scientific" facts, but the murder of President Kennedy is as fully corroborated a fact as can be found anywhere, and it would betray a profoundly unscientific frame of mind to deny that it occurred. I think "science," therefore, should ne considered a specialized branch of a larger effort to form true beliefs about events in our world.

This is important to note, because it significantly impacts one's understanding of his main thesis that "science" can determine human values. It seems as though "science" may stand for a certain conglomeration of methods and beliefs about discovering truth. Harris dismisses any attempt to define science in increasingly narrow terms, or segregating it into specialized departments on college campuses that have little interaction with each other. In fact, it seems as though Harris may use "science" simply to speak of any structured, empirical process of learning about the world. He admits, "There may be something confusing about my use of the term 'science': I want it to mean, in its broadest sense, our best effort to understand reality at every level, but I also acknowledge that it is a specialized form of any such effort."[13] He also warns of confusing science with its "tools." He says, "Science simply represents our best effort to understand what is going on in this universe, and the boundary between it and the rest of rational thought cannot always be drawn."[14] It is certainly true that a concise and authoritative definition of the scientific method is difficult. John Polkinghorne observes,

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[13]Sam Harris, "Clarifying the Moral Landscape: A Response to Ryan Born," June 6, 2014, accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/clarifying-the-landscape.

[14]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 29.

It has proved impossible to distill the essence of the scientific method. Proposals such as making refutable conjectures (Popper), pursuing progressive research programmes (Kakatos), attaining empirical adequacy (van Fraassen) or pragmatic success (Rorty), capture aspects of the complex practice of science but each falls far short of an adequate account.[15]

John Lennox agrees, and notes,

What is science? Contrary to popular impression, there is no one agreed scientific method, though certain elements crop up regularly in attempts to describe what 'scientific' activity involves: hypothesis, experiment, data, evidence, modified hypothesis, theory, prediction, explanation, and so on. But precise definition is very elusive.[16]

Science may include many ideas that drive its methods, such as those relating to "…cause and effect, respect for evidence and logical coherence, a dash of curiosity and intellectual honesty, the inclination to make falsifiable predictions, etc."[17] However, none of these are incompatible with a Christian worldview. In fact, David Berlinski fails to see why the 'scientific method' is treated as such a unique form of truth-finding, as if its methods are not utilized commonsensically all the time outside of the laboratory. Commenting on five aspects of this method that are commonly suggested (observation, hypothesis, testable predictions, observations or experiments, and hypothesis modification), he observes that they "[apply] pretty much to any human undertaking."[18] Nowhere in the Christian faith are the basic presuppositions needed to do science opposed at a philosophical level. Indeed, it seems as though what Harris really means by 'science' is *scientific naturalism* (discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation), which excludes any form of *super*natural beings or events *a priori*. While science and Christianity are not in conflict, *naturalism*

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[15]John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 104-5.

[16]John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2009), 32.

[17]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 29. In a panel discussion with fellow atheist and ethicist Peter Singer, Harris suggested that naturalistic philosophy itself be included under his definition of "science," Sam Harris et al., "The Great Debate: Can Science Tell Us Right from Wrong?" November 2010, accessed April 22, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtH3Q54T-M8. One then wonders what classifies as distinctly "scientific" when the definition is made so broad.

[18]David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 55-56.

and Christianity certainly are.[19] What does this mean for Harris? He claims, "The truth, however, is that the conflict between religion and science is unavoidable. The success of science often comes at the expense of religious dogma; the maintenance of religious dogma *always* comes at the expense of science."[20] Although it is true that many religious assertions can be studied by science, Harris refuses to accept them. His reason? "Such claims are intrinsically in conflict with the claims of science, because they are claims made on terrible evidence."[21] Such a pronouncement is problematic. Here, Harris does not say that *no* evidence is given; rather, *terrible* evidence is given. However, evidence is a tricky thing, because it may be reasonable to one individual, while leaving another completely unconvinced. Berlinski notes, "The concept of sufficient evidence is infinitely elastic. It depends on context."[22] *Bad* evidence is not the same thing as *no* evidence.[23] If Harris is not convinced by the arguments made by religion, this does not mean Christianity is *opposed* to scientific discovery, in theory. There are those who believe science actually *strengthens* and *supports* their religious beliefs.[24] Indeed, Christian

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[19]For more on this distinction, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[20]Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 63.

[21]Ibid., 64.

[22]Berlinski, *Devil's Delusion*, 48.

[23]In the words of Blaise Pascal (himself a theologian and a scientist), "There is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition." Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995), 50.

[24]Thomas Nagel, although not a religious believer himself, urges his fellow agnostics to give the Intelligent Design movement a fair hearing. Even if one disagrees with their conclusions, Nagel asserts that their *methods* should not be automatically dismissed as unscientific, as they are dealing with the same scientific evidence available to all scientists. Where they differ is in their interpretations and conclusions, at a philosophical and worldview level. See Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10. P. K. Fayerabend agrees that a plurality of theories is a good thing for our overall epistemology. He states, "This, then, is the methodological justification of a plurality of *theories*: Such a plurality allows for a much sharper criticism of accepted ideas than does the comparison with a domain of 'facts' which are supposed to sit there independently of theoretical considerations. The function of unusual *metaphysical* ideas which are built up on a nondogmatic fashion and which are then developed in sufficient detail to give an (alternative) account even of the most common experimental and observational situations is defined accordingly: They play a decisive role in the criticism and in the development of what is generally believed and 'highly confirmed'; and they have therefore to be present at *any* stage of the development of our knowledge." P. K. Fayerabend, "How to Be a Good Empiricist—A Plea for Tolerance in Matters

apologists have written extensively on many of the issues Harris rejects about Christianity, presenting evidence from across the spectrum of academic disciplines. The Bible itself is not opposed to scientific investigation. The locations, cultures, and customs mentioned within its pages are just as open to archaeology as any other historical claims, and it is near impossible to read passages such as 1 John 1:1-3 without observing the clear reliance on empirical evidence and eye-witness testimony.[25] Harris calls for intellectual honesty, and declares that religion fails this test, being "the one area of our lives where people imagine that some other standard of intellectual integrity applies."[26] Again, it seems as though Harris' real complaint is not that religion is *incompatible* with the methods of science, but that it is dogmatic and lacks sufficient evidence, which are characteristics science seeks to avoid. He summarizes, "The conflict between science and religion is reducible to a simple fact of human cognition and discourse: either a person has good reasons for what he believes, or he does not."[27] In the end, Harris notes, "It will come as no surprise that I see very little room for compromise or peaceful coexistence between faith and reason on questions of meaning and morality."[28]

Harris on Philosophy and Science

What is the relationship, for Harris, between science and philosophy? While he may attempt to dismiss religion from science, it is arguably much more difficult to do the

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Epistemological," in *The Philosophy of Science*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 15.

[25]"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us" (NIV).

[26]Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 65.

[27]Ibid., 66-67.

[28]Sam Harris, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values" (PhD diss., University of California, 2009), 46.

same with philosophy. Philosophical presuppositions lay at the foundation of any scientific enterprise. In fact, for science to work at all it must rely on several presuppositions, including the rules of logic, the reliability of our cognitive faculties, and the uniformity of nature.[29] Harris' epistemological method is in line with W. K. Clifford's statement: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."[30] It seems as though Harris' high opinion of evidence is, in fact, founded on certain *values* that he presupposes. As John Haught notes,

> The imperative to *be responsible* in the exercise of observation, intelligence and knowing undergirds the whole naturalistic project. Naturalism, as it turns out, is rooted in a profoundly ethical belief system . . . . The naturalistic ethic is demanding, almost puritanical in its moral rigor: the responsible knower is one who becomes detached from pre-scientific ways of seeing and understanding. Right knowing requires not just cognitive growth but also a painful process of moral development.[31]

In fact, Harris admits that the rules that undergird his own reliance on the scientific enterprise are *philosophical* in nature. He says, "It would be impossible to prove that our definition of science is correct, because our standards of proof will be built into any proof we would offer. What evidence could prove that we should value evidence? What logic could demonstrate the importance of logic?"[32] Indeed, hidden behind the scientific worldview are specific presuppositions that allow it to flourish.[33] If one presupposes that

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[29]For further discussion on these presuppositions, as well as further limits to the scientific enterprise in gaining knowledge, see René van Woudenberg, "Limits of Science and the Christian Faith," *Perspectives On Science & Christian Faith* 65, no. 1 (March 2013): 24-36.

[30]W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 199.

[31]John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151.

[32]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 37.

[33]David Resnik notes several norms that must be present first in order to guide the process of science, including honesty, objectivity, openness, freedom, fair credit allocation, respect for colleagues, respect for property, respect for laws, stewardship of research resources, social responsibility, humane treatment of animal subjects, respect for human subjects. See David B. Resnik, "Ethics of Science," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Curd and Stathis Psillos (New York: Routledge, 2014), 184-89. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland also list several philosophical presuppositions of science: "(1) the existence of a theory-independent, external world; (2) the orderly nature of the external world; (3) the knowability of the external world; (4) the existence of truth; (5) the laws of logic; (6) the reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties to serve as truth gatherers and as a

the rules of logic are arbitrary, or that the world cannot be organized into consistent laws, or that the future will not resemble the past, or, for that matter, that our cognitive capacities are untrustworthy, then the modern scientific method falls apart. Science must be philosophically *justified* at a foundational level. Harris admits that it may be impossible to appease the *radical* skeptic, who seeks justification all the way down. He notes, "We simply must stand somewhere. I am arguing that, in the moral sphere, it is safe to begin with the premise that it is good to avoid behavior in such a way as to produce the worst possible misery for everyone."[34] In so doing, however, is his starting place really empirical *science*? On what basis does he justify the methodological principles that science must rely on?[35] When the title of his book claims that "science" is what determine human values, then one expects science to be the driving force that leads to our understanding of morality. It seems, though, that one can step *behind* science. In such a case, philosophical presuppositions may, in fact, be what ultimately lead us to understand morality, even if they do so through the *tools* of science and reason.[36] In the

source of justified beliefs in our intellectual environment; (7) the adequacy of language to describe the world; (8) the existence of values used in science (e.g., 'test theories fairly and report test results honestly'); (9) the uniformity of nature and induction; (10) the existence of numbers." William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 348.

[34]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 39. While it would certainly make Harris bristle, there may even be an element of *faith* involved in the scientific enterprise. Daniel L. Robinson, "Neuroscience and the Soul," *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 1 (2013): 11, observes, "It is an article of faith that the well-established laws of science stand as laws in that they are not will-nilly, capricious, and unpredictable. If they were, they would not be laws."

[35]Aaron Barth, "Anti-Naturalism: The Role of Non-Empirical Methods in Philosophy," *History & Philosophy of Logic* 34, no. 3 (2013): 202, notes, "The role of empirical data in science is to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. It tells us whether individual claims, or theses, or even entire theories, are likely to be true or false. Methodological principles, however, are not hypotheses. They are not even, strictly speaking, assumptions. Rather, they are precepts, or rules, which unlike claims, are not the sort of thing that can be true or false. Precepts are normative not descriptive. They are rules which guide theoretical analyses and experiments, but are not confirmed or disconfirmed by them. Of course, they can be good or bad in the sense that they can be fruitful or foolhardy. But they cannot be false."

[36]Kelly James Clark, "Naturalism and its Discontents," in *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 3, says, "Scientific Naturalism constitutes a role reversal for traditional approaches to philosophy, which have relied on *a priori* theorizing about the nature and extent of reality. Philosophy comes first in the order of inquiry, on this traditional view, and science comes second; accordingly, philosophy has authority over science." It seems as though one must be clear what one means by "science." Is science merely empirical observation? Surely not, as this happens all the time in people who would not be considered "scientific," simply forming their beliefs

end, Harris goes so far as to admit that ethics and science *both* rely on "intuition." He says,

> Whatever its stigma, "intuition" is a term that we simply cannot do without, because it denotes the most basic constituent of our faculty of understanding. While this is true in matters of ethics, it is no less true in science. When we can break our knowledge of a thing down no further, the irreducible leap that remains is intuitively taken . . . . The point, I trust, is obvious: we cannot step out of the darkness without taking a *first* step. And reason, without knowing how, understands this axiom if it would understand anything at all. The reliance on intuition, therefore, should be no more discomfiting for the ethicist than it has been for the physicist. We are all tugging at the same bootstraps.[37]

In essence, Harris seems to be admitting that *nothing* is determined solely by science, as science itself is ultimately grounded in intuition. What, then, is the relationship between science and philosophy for Harris? It seems as though much of his enterprise is actually a work in philosophy, rather than science. His claim that the well-being of conscious creatures *just is* what drives morality is built not on the foundations of science, but on intuition. In fact, "Understanding, evidence and logical consistency are only 'scientific values' *in the sense that they are values that must be assumed by the scientific enterprise*. They aren't the type of facts that can be *discovered by* the scientific enterprise."[38] Harris admits that his basic rejection of the facts/values distinction is "a philosophical claim" which is made "before ever venturing into the lab."[39] This is true, since science itself relies upon values to function at all. Near the end of his book, he attempts to explain the entangled relationship between science and philosophy. He notes, "First, we should

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on experiences immediately accessible to them. Rather, science seems to apply a system of thought in order to look *back* at experiences and understand them in a particular way. If this is the case, where does such a thought-structure come from? It must be a philosophy of some kind, which would assert that philosophy must be done prior to science, even if no philosophy is needed prior to immediate experience. Clark seems to acknowledge this, observing, "Philosophers have usually focused on things such as the *justification* of moral claims, the *foundation* or *grounds* of morality or moral truth, and how we *ought* to live our lives. These questions seem to be of a very different sort than the empirical questions pursued by science" (4).

[37]Harris, *The End of Faith*, 183.

[38]Peter S. Williams, *C. S. Lewis vs The New Atheists* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013), 156.

[39]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 122.

observe that a boundary between science and philosophy does not always exist . . . . We cannot always draw a line between scientific thinking and 'mere' philosophy because all data must be interpreted against a background theory, and different theories come bundled with a fair amount of contextual reasoning."[40]

Harris admits, "Science is often a matter of philosophy in practice," and much of his argument turns out to be *philosophical*, while the points he makes also have scientific *implications*.[41] He further states that his position is "philosophical," even though it directly relates to the "boundaries of science." In an interesting statement, Harris admits that his entire project may ultimately come down to a *philosophical* argument. He says,

> If I am correct, science has a far wider purview than many of its practitioners suppose, and its findings may one day impinge upon culture in ways that they do not expect. If I am wrong, the boundaries of science are as narrow as most people assume. This difference of view might be ascribed to "philosophy," but it is a difference that will determine the practice of science in the years to come.[42]

Indeed, it seems as though Harris' entire enterprise really comes down to philosophical, rather than scientific, questions.[43] He admits that his argument ultimately relies on "first principles."[44] If morality becomes a question of intuition, then one may reasonably ask, "What do we do when our intuitions are in conflict with the intuitions of others?" Such

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[40]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 179.

[41]Ibid., 180. Indeed, in his dissertation, he notes, "Consequently, *The Moral Landscape* contains more philosophical argument and cultural commentary than is typical in a neuroscience dissertation. Style is inseparable from substance here—as one of my principle claims is that most scientists have deluded themselves, along with the general public, about the boundaries of science. If such boundaries exist, they do not conform to the intuitions that most people have about the human mind." Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 8.

[42]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 179.

[43]While science itself is built on philosophical presuppositions, the broad assertion that science is the best (or only) way to epistemologically understand the world ("scientism") is also a *philosophical* standpoint. Paul K. Moser and David Yandell, "Farewell to Philosophical Naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11, observe, "Sweeping metaprinciples about the nature of legitimate enquiry, particularly metaprinciples bearing on non-empirical inquiry, are not the fruits of empirical sciences; they rather issue from philosophy, good or bad."

[44]Harris, "The Moral Landscape," 8.

seems to be the case between those who intuitively feel as though objective morality must come from a Law Giver and those, like Harris, who argue a form of consequentialism. Once his presuppositions are in place, science may be formed and used as a tool to answer human questions. However, science is not the *starting place* for his theory. If this is the case, one may then analyze the underlying philosophy as the foundation on which the rest of his worldview is built. That has been the goal and purpose of this dissertation. Harris' claim that science and religion are incompatible is a *philosophical* claim, and one that is not sustainable.

Science and Religion in Conflict?

Harris never gives a definition of "science" in *The Moral Landscape,* so it is difficult to know exactly what he includes under the wide shadow of the term's vast canopy. Samir Okasha observes that science is a "heterogeneous activity, encompassing a wide range of different disciplines and theories" and there may or may not be one set of features that determine what science is.[45] He goes on to state,

> If we want to know whether the methods of science are applicable to every subject matter, or whether they are capable of answering every important question, we obviously need to know what exactly those methods *are*. But . . . this is much less straightforward a question than it seems. Certainly we know some of the main features of scientific enquiry: induction, experimental testing, observation, theory construction, inference to the best explanation, and so on. But this list does not provide a precise definition of 'the scientific method.' Nor is it obvious that such a definition *could* be provided. Science changes greatly over time, so the assumption that there is a fixed, unchanging 'scientific method', used by all scientific disciplines at all times, is far from inevitable.[46]

Science is essentially a descriptive enterprise, seeking answers to *how* and *why* things work as they do in the world.[47] In fact, there may not be a single "scientific method."

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[45]Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17.

[46]Ibid., 124-25.

[47]Nicholas Rescher, *The Limits of Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 213.

Rather, it seems that science is made up of a ". . . cluster of practices and issues that are used in a variety of contexts and can be loosely called scientific methodologies."[48] Its relationship with philosophy is often complicated, because of how science overlaps with and influences so many other disciplines. J. P. Moreland observes three ways in which philosophy is important to science: "First, attempts to put limits on science are philosophical in nature . . . . Second, philosophy undergirds science by providing its presuppositions . . . . Third, philosophy undergirds science by focusing on what constitutes good theories, good cases of scientific explanation, confirmation, and so on."[49] Indeed, as Andrew G. van Melsen observes, "The method of physical science—the way in which this science investigates nature—presupposes something concerning the essence of nature and of man's cognitive power."[50] Science may be pragmatic in helping us understand how we might live, but it always does so by being *parasitic* on underlying presuppositions of value.[51] In fact, "The first and most important ethical question in reference to science is: why may we and should we pursue science?"[52] Science operates

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[48]Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 310.

[49]J. P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 44-45.

[50]Andrew G. van Melsen, *Physical Science and Ethics: A Reflection on the Relationship between Nature and Morality*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series 23 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 40.

[51]Ibid., 78. Speaking to the pragmatic approach to science, van Melsen argues that such scientific pursuits must be guided and directed by ethical consideration. In this sense, rather than science determining morality, it seems as though ethics must already be in place to guide science. He says, "Once it is accepted that the important issue in life is to produce the greatest possible material welfare, other pragmatic considerations can help us to implement this goal. But this question remains: is the posited, ultimate value the right one? And if so, why? The empirical answer, 'Everyone tends to such welfare,' is not irrelevant; it certainly is not decisive, however, and, at any rate, only partially correct. For it remains a fact that one does not make all values subservient to material welfare; certain rules are to be observed, such as that which says that no human beings should be sacrificed to it. But, we must ask, why not? Is it because of the value any person has, or simply because the resistance of those victims would otherwise endanger the tendency to material welfare? If the latter is the reason, one can usually take appropriate steps to counteract that resistance. Hence, the reason cannot be this resistance alone: something else also plays a role and at the crucial moments this role is decisive. It is in this sense that, above, we said that the pragmatic approach is possible only by virtue of something else. This dependence indicates at the same time the limits of the pragmatic approach. Only by virtue of man's awareness of certain fundamental ethical principles, is the pragmatic approach, based on certain empirically verifiable tendencies of man, practically useful and valuable" (78).

[52]Ibid., 89.

under several presuppositions. These include the assumption that nature is understandable, that nature is uniform, and that observable patterns in nature provide clues to *un*observable patterns and processes.[53]

Science is often assumed to rely on a naturalistic worldview. Such is the case with Harris. How is this worldview decided upon? It seems as though the naturalist must first make *a priori* commitments to naturalism before he or she can do science. Dallas Willard notes, "Short of [this], one simply can find no reason why naturalistic monism with respect to reality, knowledge, or method should be true: no reason why there should not be radically different kinds of realities with correspondingly radically different kinds of knowledge and inquiry."[54] Much is made about the objective quality of science, in that it can supposedly converge on truth more reliably than mere subjective opinion. However, in order for such objectivity to come into play, there are several philosophical assumptions that must first be accepted. Helen G. Longino notes,

> Scientific communities will be objective to the degree that they satisfy four criteria necessary for achieving the transformative dimension of critical discourse: (1) there must be recognized avenues for the criticism of evidence, of methods, and of assumptions and reasoning; (2) there must exist shared standards that criticisms can invoke; (3) the community as a whole must be responsive to such criticism; (4) intellectual authority must be shared equally among qualified practitioners.[55]

All four of these observations are *philosophical* in nature, not scientific. This means science must rely on something *outside* of itself in order to justify its own existence. As Del Ratzsch observes,

> If we then are justified in accepting the foundational principles of science (that is, if accepting those foundations is legitimate or rational), then that justification must rest on something other than scientific method. Thus, either accepting science itself

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[53]Del Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 16-17.

[54]Dallas Willard, "Naturalism's Incapacity to Capture the Good Will," in *The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science*, ed. Bruce L. Gordon and William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011), 869.

[55]Helen E. Longino, "Values and Objectivity," in *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Curd, J. A. Cover, and Christopher Pinock (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 154-55.

is not justifiable or else there is some nonscientific, justifiable basis for accepting science. Therefore, not only can science not validate its own foundations (implying that there *are* areas outside the competence of science), but if we do accept science, including its foundations, there must be some other sort of grounds for accepting at least some beliefs.[56]

It seems clear, then, that there must be certain philosophical presuppositions that undergird science, just as there must be philosophical assumptions for any epistemological undertaking. These may be implicit, but they are there nonetheless. In the case of science, philosophy is foundational as a starting point, but also as an *interpretive* tool once observations are made. Today, it is not uncommon to hear what "science says" regarding some important realm of human experience when, in fact, it is more accurate to declare, "*scientists* say." No scientist is unbiased or perfectly objective. Rather, they interpret their discoveries through the lens of their own worldview. Harris is no exception to this. So, do the presuppositions that form the foundation of religion (specifically, Christianity) irreconcilably conflict with those that undergird science? If not, Harris' laments are in vain.

Presuppositions of Christianity and Science

For Harris, there is a zero-sum conflict between science and religion. The two cannot be brought together in harmony, and so one must go. Indeed, he is certainly not alone in these views. Paul Kurtz notes that, in order for science to flourish historically, religious thinking had to be set aside. He says, "Scientific progress could only occur when the theological and philosophical authorities of the past were discarded, and a fresh bold approach to nature was adopted."[57] This is because "There is a profound difference between science and religion in its concept of truth. Science requires an open mind, free inquiry, critical thinking, the willingness to question assumptions, and peer review."[58]

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[56]Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science*, 98.

[57]Paul Kurtz, "An Overview of the Issues," in *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 11.

[58]Ibid., 13.

The implicit assumption is that religion does not require such things. Harris shares similar concerns that religion is dogmatic, and often not open to critique or change. It also deals with subjects that fall outside the scope of the natural world (souls, angels, demons, heaven, hell, etc.). However, the central question here is whether or not the presuppositions that lay at the foundation of Christianity are compatible with those of science.[59]

It may not be surprising that science and religion have been perceived to be in conflict. Some of this may have to do with the attitude surrounding each subject. A dogmatic approach might be expected from those who claim to have the revealed word of God Himself. Alister McGrath argues that the natural sciences have often been opposed to authoritarianism, and since science ultimately arose in the predominantly Christian West, it seems inevitable that tension would arise between the two.[60] However, *must* the relationship between science and religion be one of enmity? Sociologist Rodney Stark observes that the birth of science did not just happen in any or every country. Rather, science arose only once: in Christian Europe. He notes,

> It is the consensus among contemporary historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science that real science arose only once: in Europe. In this regard it is instructive that China, Islam, India, and ancient Greece and Rome had a highly developed alchemy. But only in Europe did alchemy develop into chemistry. By the same token, many societies developed elaborate systems of astrology, but only in Europe did astrology lead to astronomy.[61]

While many cultures of the world experienced great achievements, why is it that the organized, systematic tools of science arose in the West? Stark attributes this phenomenon to the pervading Christian understanding of the world and, more

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[59]For an extensive collection of articles on the intersection between Christianity and science, see Paul Copan et al., *Dictionary of Christianity and Science: The Definitive Reference for the Intersection of Christian Faith and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

[60]Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2004), 84.

[61]Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 127.

specifically, their theological understanding of God. While other cultures worshiped various deities, none of these gods or goddesses possessed the attributes that would lead to a belief in the scientific method. Modern science could not develop from just any worldview. As Stanley Jaki notes, "Insofar as science is not a mere tool but an intellectual creativity it is intertwined with presuppositions that have distinctly ideological character."[62] The presuppositions of Christianity, however, are such that science could be birthed and nurtured from within its worldview. Stark asserts, "Christianity depicted God as a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent being and the universe as his personal creation, thus having a rational, lawful, stable structure, awaiting human comprehension."[63] Far from being in conflict with science, it seems as though the Christian formulation of God provided a philosophical foundation for science to build upon. The Christian God is a rational being whose creation is good, which has been given into the hands of humanity so they might act as its stewards. Although the creation is currently in a fallen state, its goodness as a handiwork of God remains, and is therefore *worthy* of investigation. Additionally, humankind, as special creatures created in God's image, has the ability to comprehend and understand the work of the One whose image they reflect. This God is not a haphazard, or an anthropomorphic reflection of the instability of humans. Rather, He is organized and rational, and so also is the world He has created. Because of this, it is no wonder why many of the most prominent scientists of history shared a Christian faith. Stark has compiled fifty-two of the most prominent scientists of history, and found that only *two* could reasonably be labeled "skeptics." In contrast, 61.5 percent should be considered "devout" in their faith.[64] This does not

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[62]Stanley L. Jaki, *The Savior of Science* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1. Jaki further provides a good historical and theological discussion of why other cultures failed where Christianity flourished in producing a scientific understanding of the world.

[63]Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 147.

[64]Ibid., 162.

suggest that science and religion must be at odds with each other. Stark concludes that "religion and science are compatible, and that the *origins* of science lay in theology."[65]

Reijer Hooykaas agrees that modern science arose in a particular place saturated with a particular religious philosophy. What one believes about God (especially in the epoch when modern science arose) will have a profound influence on how a person views the world, and how they investigate nature.[66] How did Christianity open the possibility of modern science? Hooykaas suggests it was the "de-deification" of nature that allowed science to develop. While some religions worshiped nature, the Israelites (and later, Christians) worshiped the one who was *over* nature. Indeed, idolatry was to "worship the creation rather than the creator."[67] The world thus became an object of study, rather than an object of worship.[68] "In total contradiction to pagan religion," Hooykaas notes, the Christian worldview believes that "nature is not a deity to be feared and worshipped, but a work of God to be admired, studied and managed."[69] The creation picture of Genesis, which, ironically, has come under scientific attack more than any other section of the Bible, was influential in forming minds that could accept an organized picture of nature. Rather than nature itself being a living and changing deity, it is a special creation *of* a deity. This creation is a free act of an all-powerful God, in that God is not *required* to create in any certain way. This being so, one cannot simply reason *a priori* about how the world is. If God is free to create, then the only true way to discover what He has created is through empirical investigation. A world of Platonic Forms might lead one to assume that nature could be understood purely through

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[65]Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 197.

[66]Hooykaas, *Rise of Modern Science*, xiii.

[67]Rom 1:25 (NIV).

[68]Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*, 24.

[69]Hooykaas, *Rise of Modern Science*, 9.

rationalizing, without ever stepping foot outdoors to experientially and experimentally investigate. In fact, it may be the very thing that Harris rejects about Christianity that is one of its greatest scientific strengths. Harris believes that a worldview that accepts the miraculous can only lead to a view of science that is "so blinkered and susceptible to supernatural modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous."[70] This is false. In fact, the ability to recognize a miracle is possible *only because* it stands in such stark contrast to the regular workings of nature. To believe in the miraculous is not to render all scientific laws meaningless or arbitrary. It is, rather, to recognize that they are not *necessary* conditions of how the world is, but explanations and descriptions of how the observed world seems to act most of the time (all things considered). The fact that natural laws have been continually amended and rejected throughout history displays the truth that laws are merely our best (but not infallible) attempts at describing the world around us. In fact, a belief in the miraculous should cause *more* curiosity, rather than less. Hooykaas gives the example of Blaise Pascal as possessing a brilliant theological *and* scientific mind. For Pascal, divine revelation must be considered, no matter how ludicrous it might seem given the backdrop of our current knowledge. Just because it is not "rational," does not mean it should be rejected outright. Hooykaas notes, "Pascal's scientific method strongly bears the stamp of his religious faith. He took up an empirical attitude towards both studies: that which *experience* has revealed (to me or to others), that which has been touched and seen, is the foundation of both."[71] Harris may fear that a Christian worldview is too open-minded about certain phenomena, but he cannot pretend that such curiosity did not drive people to explore first-hand the natural world around them. Hooykaas further notes that science has largely been the discipline of the experimental method.

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[70]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 25.

[71]Hooykaas, *Rise of Modern Science*, 45. Pascal also held no hope that science alone could guide us in morality. He said, "Knowledge of physical science will not console me for ignorance of morality in time of affliction, but knowledge of morality will always console me for ignorance of physical science." Pascal, *Pensées*, 6.

However, in order for this to be accepted, it first had to be approved morally and socially. The Christian worldview allowed this to happen, in part because of its positive view of manual labor and technology.[72] Christians permitted scientific study because it fell into the realm of the 'cultural mandate' for humans to investigate and develop the powers of creation found in Genesis.[73]

Alfred North Whitehead may have seemed an unlikely candidate to support the unity between Christianity and science. However, in his Lowell Lectures in 1925, he claimed, "When we compare this tone of thought in Europe with the attitude of other civilisations [*sic*] when left to themselves, there seems but one source for its origin. It must come from the medieval insistence on the rationality of God, conceived as with the personal energy of Jehovah and with the rationality of a Greek philosopher."[74] According to Whitehead, the rise of "naturalism" (the interest and study of the natural world, as distinct from the philosophical position discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation) in the Middle Ages came out of a desire to study nature *for its own sake*. Its value, apart from being used to further other ends, arose because it was the study of the good creation of the Creator. However, explanations must become philosophical if they are to give meaning to mere observations and prevent them from "degenerating into a medley of *ad hoc* hypotheses."[75] Faith in reason (driven by faith in a rational God) is ". . . the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness. It is the faith that at the base of things we shall not find more arbitrary mystery."[76] Ultimately, science *must* be driven by philosophy if it is to avoid becoming a steady stream of mere *observations* without *explanations*. Whitehead notes,

[72]Hooykaas, *Rise of Modern Science*, 75.

[73]Pearcey and Thaxton, *Soul of Science*, 35.

[74]Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 18.

[75]Ibid., 25.

[76]Ibid., 27.

Philosophers are rationalists. They are seeking to go behind stubborn and irreducible facts: they wish to explain in the light of universal principles the mutual reference between the various details entering into the flux of things. Also, they seek such principles as will eliminate mere arbitrariness; so that, whatever portion of fact is assumed or given, the existence of the remainder of things shall satisfy some demand of rationality.[77]

Far from being at odds with Christianity, such explanations of the natural world are at home within a Christian worldview. The world is not arbitrary, but an *intentional* creation of a rational Being. There is a deeper explanation and meaning behind the myriad observations of facts, and they fit together into a unified world picture. A pagan culture with a pantheon of gods and goddesses has no reason to see unity in nature, as often there is no unity among the deities themselves. A monotheistic culture, however, can develop a worldview that gives purpose and harmony to the created order. Harris would no doubt point to the theory of evolution as an example of how nature seems to progress through making *mistakes*, which does not reveal a coherent intelligence behind the mechanism. First of all, this accusation assumes that a perfect intelligence cannot purposefully create a world that contains an "imperfect" process like evolution. Why must this be so? Is a perfect Being *obligated* to create the kind of perfect world we think He should? Furthermore, Christian theology has always understood the world to be a broken version of the ideal, and this is revealed in countless ways. Also, one might perhaps argue that the very fact that evolution progresses *towards* anything at all is a sign of some sort of order. Indeed, it does not seem as though organisms necessarily must survive or seek to flourish (rocks certainly don't have any sort of teleological drive for survival, although they are fairly good at it). The theory of evolution actually assumes a sort of teleology at its very core. Finally, Harris cannot deny that there is an underlying philosophical rationality which scientists rely on to understand the world; otherwise science itself could not be possible. There must be something to unify the many observations and conclusions drawn from countless experiments and ultimately interpret the findings into conclusions.

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[77]Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 204.

There have indeed been specific conflicts between institutional Christianity and certain scientific ideas. This, however, does not mean that Christianity and science are fundamentally in conflict. History is not so easily understood. Whitehead notes,

> All our ideas will be in a wrong perspective if we think that this recurring perplexity was confined to contradictions between religion and science; and that in these controversies religion was always wrong, and that science was always right. The true facts of the case are very much more complex, and refuse to be summarised [*sic*] in these simple terms.[78]

In fact, it may turn out to be a blessing to science that all of its findings are not so easily accepted. For Harris, this may seem like an impediment to progress, especially in areas such as abortion, to have religion interfere with or question the work of science.[79] However, one can easily think of regimes and examples in history where science and technology pushed boundaries too far or participated in atrocious acts.[80] Can science guide itself in such cases, or must there be a philosophy that aids it? Harris may well reject the objections of religion in the public sphere, but to silence all such voices is to invite an unwelcome society in which only those who adhere to the current *zeitgeist* are given a proper hearing. Christianity will inevitably come into conflict with the *conclusions* of science at times, but this does not reveal an impasse with its *methods*. Whitehead notes, "In formal logic, a contradiction is the signal of a defeat: but in the evolution of real knowledge it marks the first step in progress towards victory."[81] There seems to be no fundamental reason why science and religion must conflict, and so why does Harris desire to silence the religious voice? Is it such a bad thing for science to have critics? Will this not ultimately make science stronger? Whitehead observes, "Consider this contrast: when Darwin or Einstein proclaim theories which modify our ideas, it is a

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[78]Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 261.

[79]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 5.

[80]See Walter Gratzer, *The Undergrowth of Science: Delusion, Self-Deception, and Human Frailty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[81]Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 267.

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triumph for science. We do not go about saying that there is another defeat for science, because its old ideas have been abandoned. We know that another step of scientific insight has been gained."[82] He goes on to caution religion to function with the same humility. This seems to get at the heart of at least some Harris' resistance. For Harris, a religion that prides itself on having a direct word from God is not in a place to easily admit fault or accept change. While this may be true, the Christian worldview also agrees that human understanding is *not* infallible, and the rich history of debates in Christian theology should be enough evidence that Christians *will* change their minds *if* properly convinced they should. Harris may not like the bloody history and conflict that often accompanied such transitions, but this is hardly unique to religion. There has been resistance to change whenever change has been introduced in the world.

While Harris believes that Christianity is antithetical to rational thought, this is not so. I have claimed there is no conflict between the basic methods of science and the Christian worldview, as evidenced by the birth of modern science from within (and not in spite of) a pervading religious culture. Christianity valued the natural world, while other worldviews either deified it or denigrated it.[83] Due to this, Christians were able to develop an organized and systematic way to study nature. Pearcey and Thaxton observe,

> Belief in an orderly universe came to be summed up in the concept of natural law. The phrase "laws of nature" is so familiar to the modern mind that we are generally unaware of its uniqueness. People in pagan cultures who see nature as alive and moved by mysterious forces are not likely to develop the conviction that all natural occurrences are lawful and intelligible.[84]

Certain philosophical beliefs are necessary for science to flourish. A worldview that does not believe nature is predictable and intelligible will never develop modern science. How could one make reliable predictions about a world that was created or inhabited by

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[82]Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 270.

[83]Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*, 22.

[84]Ibid., 26.

*un*reliable and *un*predictable gods? However, a worldview that establishes an unchanging God who acts consistent with His character, and who is lawful both in the moral sphere and in the natural order, is better suited towards developing a systematic way to study the world. The understanding of nature is not just based on the existence of God, but on the character of that God.[85] While the voluntarist view of God claimed that He was not bound by anything and thus freely created, it does *not* mean that God could go against His own character. In this sense, God is restricted only by His nature. If God is rational, then the theologian would expect for His creation to reflect this. If humans are created in the image of this rational God, then we should expect ourselves to be equipped to understand both Him and the world He created. In none of this does one see a conflict between Christianity and science.

Shermer's "Moral Arc"

Michael Shermer, like Harris, believes the future of moral discourse can only be sought through science. In fact, he states that *science* has increased morality throughout history, not religion. In his book *The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom*, Shermer suggests that as societies reject religion and embrace science and technology, they become more moral.[86] Like Harris, he acknowledges that the 'scientific method' is not easy to define. He settles on this definition of science: "A set of methods that describes and interprets observed or inferred phenomena, past or present, and is aimed at testing hypotheses and building theories."[87] He goes on to recognize a worldview *behind* science that drives it. He notes, "Data-gathering observations are not made in a vacuum. The hypotheses shape what sort

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[85]Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*, 25.

[86]Michael Shermer, *The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015).

[87]Shermer, *The Moral Arc*, 15.

of observations a scientist will make, and these hypotheses are themselves shaped by education, culture, and the particular biases of the observer."[88] Shermer claims that acceptance of reason and scientific methodology has been what led humanity out of the dark ages into a more enlightened future. Giving the example of medieval witch-burners, he concludes, "The primary difference between these premodern people and us is, in a word, science."[89] Shermer (like Harris) assumes that it must be one or the other. He does not mention the fact that *everybody* (not just religious zealots) was trying to figure out how to respond to the witch craze, based on their limited understanding at the time.[90] Shermer claims, "The witch theory of causality, and how it was debunked through science, encapsulates the larger trend in the improvement of humanity through the centuries by the gradual replacement of religious supernaturalism with scientific naturalism."[91] However, he also admits that many of these people were not being *ir*rational in their actions.[92] This is fascinating, because it seems to say that *rationality alone* is not enough to prevent false thinking, as one can be wrong but rational at the same time. If this is the case, then it may not be that religious beliefs are to blame for all pre-modern tragedies. Rather, it may be ignorance *in general* that is the culprit. Christianity certainly is not opposed to growing in knowledge and understanding, as Shermer and Harris seem to think it is. Indeed, it is difficult to find a direct cause-and-effect relationship between properly understood biblical Christianity, and many of the atrocities committed throughout history. Religion has often just been one of *many*

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[88]Shermer, *The Moral Arc*, 15.

[89]Ibid., 105.

[90]For good discussions on the relationship between Christianity and the witch hunts, see Stark, *For the Glory of God*, chap. 3; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths about Christianity: A Guide to Answering 145 Viral Lies and Legends* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 49-52; Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, chap. 7.

[91]Shermer, *The Moral Arc*, 105.

[92]Ibid., 109.

contributors, alongside other influences like political ideology. Again, the Christian worldview never claims that Christians are infallible in their interpretations of Scripture. Rather, Christian theology *should* be open to discussions of any sort that will help clarify truth. In fact, within Scripture itself one can see growth and illumination of earlier dictates. One example is in Matthew 5:38-42, in which Jesus quotes an Old Testament rule ("You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'") and then increases their understanding of it to include more than they originally thought ("*But I tell you*, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.") In such cases, one can see moral understanding increased even within the pages of Scripture. Indeed, much of the Old Testament law is fulfilled through Jesus in a way that suggests moral *progress* for humanity. Furthermore, the Christian worldview does not believe that the Bible is the *only* source for truth in the world. Indeed, there are many moral subjects that are not explicitly addressed in Scripture. The issue is whether or not the *presuppositions* of Christianity are directly opposed to the presuppositions of science. Shermer may find examples of Christians who acted wrongly, perhaps even motivated by a misguided understanding of the Christian faith. He may also find examples of how moral progress was achieved as science and technology increased. However, more likely what happened in each case is that *knowledge* increased, and this is not antithetical to a Christian worldview. Shermer notes, "Was everyone in the prescientific world so superstitious? They were."[93] However, knowledge increased and dispelled former ignorance. This growth, as argued above, may in fact have been largely possible *because* of the Christian worldview. It was not a skeptical or atheistic worldview permeating society that helped develop modern science, as Shermer seems to think when pointing to the Scientific Revolution and the Age of Reason. However, as he goes on to mention the great men of science who drove the system forward, he continually mentions

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[93]Shermer, *The Moral Arc*, 116.

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Christians (Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Newton).[94] Only in more modern times has science been associated so closely with unbelief. Interestingly, Shermer believes his thesis that reason-based Enlightenment thinking leads to moral progress is "one that can be tested through historical comparison and by examining what happens to countries that hold anti-Enlightenment values."[95] He then goes on to mention five historical examples. All of these, however, were *anti*-Christian in their worldview (Revolutionary France, Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, and modern fundamentalist Islamic states).[96] This does not prove that Christianity is opposed to, or antithetical towards, modern science. Rather, it seems as though its *rivals* have historically been so opposed.

The presuppositions that undergird Christianity are compatible with those that support science, regardless of those who have abused morality under the name "Christian" throughout history. To believe otherwise is to misunderstand the Christian worldview. Shermer simplifies the presuppositions of Christianity (or, in his context, monotheism in general), and claims that the belief in "one true God" will inevitably lead to immoral acts against those who do not fall under this umbrella. It is hard to reconcile this claim with the Great Commission, the call to love your enemies, the covenant with Abraham to bless all nations, and the "turn the other cheek" passage, among others. He also asserts that, unlike science, religion has no empirical method of falsification. However, it seems as though rational discussion, archaeological findings, internal logic, and the discoveries of science *are* just as valid when considering Christianity as they are anywhere else, since Christianity makes specific truth claims about historical events. Shermer will be hard-pressed to find a Christian apologist today that attempts to prove the resurrection by simply saying, "It happened because I *believe* it happened." Rather,

[94]Shermer, *The Moral Arc*, 118-19.

[95]Ibid., 137.

[96]Ibid.

there are good *reasons* to believe it happened as Scripture says it did.[97] Furthermore, the Bible itself may be the single most debated book in all of history, which is hardly a compelling case for Christianity avoiding attempts at falsification. Finally, Shermer notes the immorality in the Bible. There are certainly passages in Scripture that are more difficult to understand than others, and require a thoughtful hermeneutic.[98] The fact that the Bible contains some troubling historical accounts does not thereby prove that it is in a conflict with science (which also has a fairly checkered record of injustices done in its name). Moreover, many of the moral issues that Shermer points to as evidence of progress are still hotly debated subjects. He may claim that advancement in gay rights and abortion are signs of moral *progress*, but this can only be made from within his own framework of what he believes to be moral. There are many who would disagree, and claim that the current sexual revolution is a sign of moral *re*gress. Shermer does not give a convincing argument as to why science and Christianity cannot co-exist and work together to further our moral understanding. Indeed, it seems as though many of the very tools he relies on as a scientist have grown out of the presuppositions that lay at the foundation of Christian philosophy.

Conclusion

There seems to be no fundamental conflict between the presuppositions of science and the presuppositions of Christianity. McGrath concludes, "The idea that science and religion are in perpetual conflict is no longer taken seriously by any major

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[97]See Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

[98]For insightful discussions on some of the troubling passages of Scripture (specifically in the Old Testament), see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

historian of science, despite its popularity in the late nineteenth century."[99] Modern

science was birthed from within a culture saturated by a Christian worldview. Pearcey

and Thaxton, summarizing Hedley Brooke, observe,

> To begin with, Christian teachings have served as *presuppositions* for the scientific enterprise (e.g., the conviction that nature is lawful was inferred from its creation by a rational God). Second, Christian teachings have *sanctioned* science (e.g., science was justified as a means of alleviating toil and suffering). Third, Christian teachings supplied *motives* for pursuing science (e.g., to show the glory of God and wisdom of the Creator). And fourth, Christianity played a role in *regulating* scientific methodology (e.g., voluntarist theology was invoked to justify an empirical approach in science).[100]

There seems to be no reason why Christianity cannot have a healthy relationship with

science, as the presuppositions that lie at the foundation of both worldviews are not

fundamentally in conflict. Science without philosophy is dead, as the proper

presuppositions must be in place before science can ever get off the ground. Also, science

will rely on philosophy in the interpretation and application of its discoveries. Finally,

science alone is insufficient to speak to morality, as it relies on philosophy before *and*

after its work. Scientific presuppositions, as it turns out, are not essentially in conflict

with Christianity. If this is true, then another significant crack is revealed in Harris'

worldview.

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[99]McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 87.

[100]Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*, 36.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Summary of Harris' Worldview

My goal in this dissertation has been to analyze the underlying worldview of Sam Harris to see if it does indeed support the ethical system he has built upon it. In Francis Schaeffer's language, I have attempted to "take the roof off" and peer inside the house constructed by Harris, looking closely at the foundations to see if there are any worrisome cracks. Indeed, several issues have been noted and addressed, providing reasons to suspect that Harris' house is not as sturdy as he may claim. In the end, it seems as though Harris cannot hold each of his stated beliefs together in unity without contradicting some of the most fundamental elements of how we understand morality. While this, in part, may be his goal, he fails to acknowledge the tacit presuppositions that undergird (and work against) his thesis. Indeed, it seems as though science, while having much to say and contribute to ethics, cannot *determine* it. Science itself must be guided by philosophy, which itself is built from presuppositions and intuitive first principles. Harris briefly acknowledges this at the end of *The Moral Landscape*, but fails to enter into a discussion of how this might make his provocative title misleading. Few today would argue that science says *nothing* about morality, but fewer still would accept that it *determines* human values. Science is not much in the business of *determining* anything. Rather, it *discovers* facts that then shape the way we think about reality. This is not highly contested among Christians, and yet Harris believes science and religion must forever live in conflict with one another. It is, however, unclear *why* this must be the case, especially considering the outgrowth of modern science from within a culture saturated by a Christian worldview.

Harris' project is built upon a worldview grounded in philosophical naturalism. One can understand his concern that a supernatural foot in the door might render the very natural laws that science relies on untrustworthy or even arbitrary. However, this is to adopt a simplistic view of miracles that many Christian scholars would reject today. That a Creator might be *above* nature, and not constricted by its laws, does not thereby negate those laws as descriptions of how the world *usually* works. How this might unravel the scientific enterprise is unclear, as can be attested by the many respected scientists who are able to hold their belief in the natural *and* the supernatural without conflict.[1] This is not acceptable to Harris. For him, naturalism is an essential pillar of his worldview. In chapter 2, I noted three related arguments that call into question philosophical naturalism. These arguments maintain that naturalism, if it is true, undermines itself in the process. This is because a naturalistic explanation of the world would give us reason to doubt the very cognitive abilities that we rely on to accept naturalism in the first place. This has consequences for science. C. S. Lewis' Argument From Reason simply states, "Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true."[2] However, it seems as though such "Ground and Consequent" reasoning, as Lewis terms it, is not necessary for the survival of an organism. Rather, natural selection selects specifically for survival value, not truth. If this is the case, then the very process that brought our reasoning capacities into existence is not 'interested' in those capacities providing us *true* beliefs at all. Lewis does not doubt that we *have* reasoning capacities; his argument is that evolutionary naturalism is a poor *explanation*, since the ability to reason towards truth is only valuable to natural selection insofar as it leads to survival. It is possible to survive while still holding on to many false beliefs. Due to this, naturalism does not appear to be the *best* explanation of

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[1] For an example of one that Harris particularly dislikes, see Francis Collins, *The Language of God*: *A Scientist Presents Evidence for God* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

[2] C. S. Lewis *Miracles: How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1960), 14.

our reasoning abilities. Alvin Plantinga takes a similar approach in noting that if naturalistic evolution is true, then it undermines itself in that the very reasoning capacities used to come to this conclusion are themselves the result of an unguided process that did not have truth as its intended goal. Essentially, if naturalism is true then we have reason to doubt the very faculties that formed this belief in the first place. Evolution is more concerned about our *behavior* than our *beliefs*, so as long as our false beliefs do not lead to fatal behavior, they will not be selected against. Therefore, if naturalistic evolution is true, it provides a "defeater" for the belief in naturalism. Finally, Thomas Nagel represents an agnostic's doubts about the ability of naturalistic evolution to bring forth the *kind* of conscious beings that we have become. The "principle of sufficient reason" suggests that there must be an answer to why the universe is intelligible to human minds. In fact, perhaps the most difficult explanation of all is consciousness, which Harris relies heavily on, and yet admits that it remains a perfect mystery to us. Nagel believes a psychophysical theory of consciousness, when woven into the evolutionary story, would need to ". . . make intelligible both (1) why specific organisms have the conscious life they have, and (2) why conscious organisms arose in the history of life on earth."[3] It is his assertion that the current evolutionary explanation of conscious creatures arising within an intelligible world is weak and in need of revision.

The second pillar upon which Harris has built his worldview is his neo-Aristotelian concept of "well-being." While there is much to appreciate in Aristotle's conception of *eudemonia*, Harris' naturalistic understanding of it arguably leaves several important aspects inadequately explained, as they pertain to morality. Harris asserts, "Questions about values—about meaning, morality, and life's larger purpose—are really questions about the well-being of conscious creatures."[4] He cannot conceive of any other

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[3]Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Naturalist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50-51.

[4]Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York:

goal of morality since well-being is, by definition, the only thing worth caring about and pursuing. While it may be true that all people *seek* well-being, the problem is ultimately that this starting place *is not arrived at through science*. Harris presupposes the value of well-being as a worthy goal of ethics, and the rest of his system flows from that assumption. What exactly well-being is, however, remains fuzzy, just as an exhaustive definition of "health" is difficult to ascertain. Once one accepts health as something of value, much else may follow, but that initial acceptance is a presupposition, not a scientific find. To build an ethical system on the foundation of an ill-defined concept, and then dismiss anyone who does not understand such a concept like you do, is not a solid place to begin one's metaethic. Granted, *every* ethical system must, at bottom, rely on certain assumptions, presuppositions, and first principles. Well-being may resist a concrete definition, but this does not necessarily mean we cannot speak about it with any sort of clarity. However, what does this say about Harris' claim that *science* determines morality? Is his naturalistic worldview the best explanation of the teleological pursuit of well-being we find as a feature of the world?

A further issue for Harris's naturalistic understanding of *eudemonia* is that if well-being is ultimately about states of the brain, what is to prevent someone from inventing an "Experience Machine" that manipulates the brain to achieve such states by plugging into a sort of *Matrix*-like super-computer? What is it, specifically, about well-being that denies that such an experience could count as a worthy option to achieve happiness? If well-being is simply about conscious brain experiences, and nothing deeper, then this picture of reality seems tenable. However, this does not match what most people would think of when asked to define "happiness." Furthermore, such a method lacks an objective tool of measurement as to be authentically scientific. Any such feeling of well-being must ultimately come from the subjective testimony of the

Free Press, 2010), 1.

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individual, relating how they feel under various brain states. Other issues arise when one considers those who might be perfectly happy occupying a spot halfway up the moral landscape, rather than seeking the peaks. Such people may achieve this goal through *immoral* means, and be satisfied in their attempts, even claiming to be happy. This is complicated further when the issue of moral *authority* is considered. By nature of *what* should we seek the well-being of others when it is not in our own best interest to do so? Surely it is not always to our advantage that we consider others' well-being as closely as we do our own? This sense of moral *obligation* is missing from Harris' formulation of well-being, in that one wonders why a wrong-doer should be punished or condemned for choosing not to seek his own well-being or that of others. In such cases, it seems as though theists like Robert Adams hit closer to home when they view The Good as something that has objective value *in itself*. Thinkers like Aquinas have argued that a naturalistic conception of well-being does not go far enough, in that the teleological end of man is ultimately spiritual in nature. A theistic worldview may also better explain the concepts of authority and obligation as they relate to morality. A theistic explanation of the world seems to better account for the teleological aspects of morality observed by Aristotle. Goals, such as seeking the well-being of ourselves and others, are only possible for conscious creatures. It makes less sense to attribute the rise of such creatures to a valueless natural system than it does a Mind at the foundation of reality, in whose image conscious creatures are made.

The third pillar of Harris' worldview is his strict causal determinism. This poses important questions regarding moral responsibility, especially since Harris rejects any compatibilist alternative. If human agents are ultimately not free, then how must we understand our accountability in relation to moral norms? It has been traditionally believed that "ought" implies "can," and yet determinism often shows us that we *can't*. For Harris, our conscious mental decisions are supervenient on the physical, in that our 'choices' are determined by physical events that go back in history indefinitely. Our

'decisions' merely arise from within our consciousness, but their ultimate origin remains a mystery. We are not the ultimate first causes of our actions, but, rather, become aware of our intentions only after they have already been decided upon. Peter Van Inwagen, on the other hand, argues that moral responsibility may be the *starting place* we need to understand free will. If determinism is true, then moral responsibility must be false, since determinism claims that our actions are the results of a history and a set of natural laws that are not under our control. Free will seems to be something we *must* accept, or live in a constant state of inconsistency. Van Inwagen claims, "To reject free will is to condemn oneself to a life of perpetual logical inconsistency. Anyone who rejects free will adopts a general theory about human beings that he contradicts with every deliberate word and act."[5] Ultimately, Harris' worldview calls for its adherents to live under an illusion. John Hare notes that there seems to be moral "demands" placed upon us, which we ultimately fail to live up to. In this sense, if *ought* implies *can*, then there must be some form of assistance available to us. Harris, as an atheist, rejects the Kantian solution that God provides divine assistance, thus allowing us to fulfill the moral demands placed upon us. He does not, however, offer an adequate explanation of where any such obligations might come from, and why they should be authoritative over us.

A fourth significant pillar in Harris' worldview is his moral realism. However, when the rest of his worldview is taken into account, it seems as though moral *relativism* or *subjectivism* is the unavoidable honest conclusion. Harris does not convincingly argue for the consistency of his moral realism with his acceptance of Darwinian evolution. Michael Ruse believes that the idea of objective morality is a necessary illusion we must live under in order to successfully propagate the continuation of our species. In fact, we evolved to believe in *objective* morality as binding on us because it is far more persuasive than *subjective* morality in controlling our actions. It may be an illusion, but it is a

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[5]Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 160.

beneficial illusion. Similarly, Richard Joyce says, "Natural selection has provided us with a tendency to invest the world with values that it does not contain, demands which it does not make."[6] Joyce also finds some kinship with Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism. He notes that evolution selects moral traits *not* for their truth value but for their survival value. Indeed, evolution could have selected for an entirely different set of actions, which we would consider moral, if those actions had given us an advantage in our survival. In fact, evolution does not give us confidence that such moral 'demands' hold any authority over us. He says, "No such naturalism can accommodate the sense of inescapable practical authority with which moral claims appear to be imbued."[7] The moral accountability we feel is, again, a necessary illusion we must live under, rather than an inescapable demand on us, which we are obligated to follow. There may always be a rebel who chooses to buck the accepted account of morality and do the opposite, in an attempt to fulfill his own well-being. This man, according to naturalism, cannot be condemned by any court higher than that which his own society has subjectively established. In fact, J. L. Mackie argues that all values must ultimately be subjective. Indeed, for a moral statement to be objective would be for it to possess a "queerness" by making more than just a *de*scriptive statement, but also a *pre*scriptive one. Ultimately, for the naturalist, morality is a fiction, albeit a useful one.

The fifth and final pillar on which Harris' worldview stands is his belief that science and religion are irreconcilable. It is here that one senses the motivation at the root of Harris' project. He has made no secret of his disdain for religion and its conflict with scientific ways of thinking, stating that a "spirit of open inquiry is the very antithesis of religious faith."[8] It seems as though religion still holds at least some significance over

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[6]Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123.

[7]Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 190.

[8]Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 48.

people on the topic of morality, and Harris is alarmed at how scientists seem content to leave it be. For him, the influence religion wields today over moral philosophy is false and dangerous, and must be eradicated. There is no harmony to be found between the two, and he takes a significant amount of time in *The Moral Landscape* to lament the perceived intellectual dishonesty of the Christian scientist Francis Collins.[9] Are religion and science truly at odds? It was my assertion that the presuppositions underlying Christianity are certainly not incompatible with those of science. In fact, many of the greatest scientists in history were Christians who were driven *by* their faith. Modern science arose only once, and it did so in the West from within a culture saturated with the Christian worldview. While there have indeed been conflicts between the hierarchies of religious institutions and those individual scientists who sought acceptance of new ideas that challenged the way most people understood the world to be, the scientific method itself is not at odds with an authentic Christian worldview, properly understood. However, it remains unclear exactly what Harris means by "science" other than, "Our best effort to understand what is going on in this universe."[10] It seems as though science, for Harris, can include anything *but* the supernatural. In this sense, he is simply presupposing philosophical naturalism. However, the tools of science (hypotheses, experimentation, empirical evidence, verification/falsification, etc.) are just as open to the believer as to the non-believer. Harris' disdain for religion is more specifically aimed at *dogmatism*, in whatever forms it is found (except, apparently, his own "scientism"). Due to the miraculous claims of Christianity, Harris sees the Christian worldview as making fundamental statements about the natural world that are not verifiable through science. Here, however, things seem to break down at the worldview level. If Harris presupposes that there is no such thing as the supernatural, then everything that can be known *must* be

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[9]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 160-74.

[10]Ibid., 39.

accessible to science. However, the Christian claim is that *not* everything is accessible merely at the physical level, and so there are some realities which science is not best equipped to study. Harris' other fear is that a belief in miracles renders natural laws arbitrary. How can one rely on natural laws if there is a God outside of such laws who may choose to break them at any time? Does this not lead to lazy "God of the Gaps" explanations? Christian theology, however, would affirm that it is *because* of the natural laws that miracles become obvious to us. This does not have to undermine the scientific enterprise, as no Christian theologians are seriously proposing we throw out all scientific and natural laws simply because God is not confined by them. The writers of Scripture certainly do not discount empirical evidence in the face of miracles. Rather, it is often *because* of the evidence that they believe.[11]

Harris' understanding of the relationship between science and philosophy is also underdeveloped, perhaps because it blurs the lines of his thesis. Behind every method of science are philosophical presuppositions. Indeed, science cannot make sense of anything unless it is explained and understood against a philosophical backdrop. However, if this is the case, then does science really determine human values, or is this a task that is ultimately driven by philosophical presuppositions? Certainly philosophy and science are intertwined, but this is exactly the point that Harris does not spend adequate time defending. Rather, he sees it as a given that *any* understanding of the world must rely on first principles, or risk an infinite regress of explanations. Science is no exception to this. On this we agree, which is why his claims about the supremacy of science seem so dubious.

The history of modern science shows a relationship with theology from its very

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[11]John makes this clear in 1 John 1:1-3, as does Peter in 2 Pet 1:16. Perhaps the most famous example is "Doubting Thomas" physically inspecting the risen Jesus in John 20:24-29. In these and other such cases, the New Testament writers actually seem to go out of their way to remind the reader that they were *eyewitnesses* to the miraculous events.

beginnings. Far from being opposed to science, many of the most prominent scientists in history were driven by their Christian worldview, which led them to de-deify nature so that it might be studied rather than worshiped. Their faith led them to believe that a rational God had created an ordered universe that was good and worthy of study. Further, the cultural mandate of Genesis encourages Christians *to* study nature, which is knowable ultimately because humans bear the image of God, its Creator. At the most basic, presuppositional level, there is nothing about science that puts it in conflict with a Christian worldview. The *findings* of science and the *interpretations* of those findings may be said to conflict with various truth-claims of Christianity. If this is the case, then it should lead to conversations and debate over whether or not they are indeed incompatible, and if so, which side needs to adjust their beliefs. However, the method and rationale of science is not in opposition to a Christian worldview. There is a clear conflict between Christianity and *naturalism*, but not Christianity and *science*.

Lying: A Case Study

An important question to ask of any system of ethics is, "How does this work in its application?" In *The Moral Landscape* Harris is mostly concerned about building foundations, rather than addressing specific ethical issues. However, not long after *The Moral Landscape* was released, he published a short book called *Lying*, in which he seemingly puts his ethical theory into action. What one might expect to find in such a book is a vigorous scientific account of why lying is immoral. What one discovers, rather, is a book in which science is merely brought in to bolster beliefs that are argued for using philosophy and common sense.

The main issue this short book wishes to address is whether or not lying is immoral. Harris comes down decisively on the affirmative, noting that "lying, even about the smallest matters, needlessly damages personal relationships and public trust."[12] He

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[12]Sam Harris, *Lying* (n.p.: Four Elephants Press, 2013), 2.

claims the line between lying and deception is often blurred, as one can deceive using the truth. Ultimately, he defines lying as intentionally misleading others "when they expect honest communication."[13] He notes also a distinction between truth and truthfulness by referring to a philosopher, who observed that one can be a truthful person while also being mistaken. In all of this, he has made significant points without consulting scientific research to do so. He has brought the issue into the realm of morality by noting the relationship between lying and our well-being, lamenting how lying in our everyday lives is a common source of misery.[14] Other than making our lives unhappy, why is lying considered to be *immoral*? Harris says, "The moment we consider our dishonesty from the perspective of those we lie to, we recognize that we would feel betrayed if the roles were reversed."[15] It hardly needs to be said that such a conclusion is based on the simple practice of "putting the shoe on the other foot" rather than a rigorous scientific analysis. He cites two studies that suggest ten percent of communication between spouses is deceptive and thirty-eight percent of encounters with college students contain lies. He further claims, "Research suggests that all forms of lying—including white lies meant to spare the feelings of others—are associated with less satisfying relationships."[16] Here, Harris puts his ethical theory into practice. Simply put, if morality seeks the well-being of ourselves and others, and if deception results in diminished returns of well-being, then deception must be immoral. The issue with such studies involving people, however, is that they rely on interviews in which individuals express their experience of well-being, which will unavoidably be subjective. Indeed, one wonders what is especially scientific about asking questions of people in order to discover whether truth-telling or lying leads

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[13]Harris, *Lying*, 4.

[14]Ibid., 1.

[15]Ibid., 6.

[16]Ibid., 7-8.

to healthier relationships. Why is science equipped to do this in ways that philosophy or theology (or even common sense) is not? Harris has presupposed that well-being is the goal of morality, and then pointed to research that supports (based on subjective testimony) his theory that people feel *less* happy when surrounded by deceit. Harris would no doubt use this as an example of how religion (which has long taught the value of truthfulness) is right "by accident," and that his cited scientific studies are far more concrete than the proclamations of a revelatory deity from the sky. The issue, however, is not just *epistemological* but *ontological*. Harris simply does not rely on science to determine that lying is *wrong*. Rather, he concludes that it is wrong because it results in a net loss in well-being for those involved, and even this is arrived by through subjective testimony, not rigorous lab work. Research may show that people are deceptive to each other in their relationships, but that this is *immoral* is to make the leap from *is* to *ought* that Harris disdains. Religion has long taught that deception does not lead to better relationships. This, however, is not what *makes* lying immoral, but is rather the *result* of actions that are considered immoral for separate reasons (in the case of divine command ethical theories, because they conflict with the commands of a loving God). Harris is clearly a consequentialist, and any consequences that do not result in his understanding of "well-being" are thus considered immoral. One must not forget, in the process, how difficult it is to define, determine, or understand our own well-being and the well-being of others. Simply put, it is not (nor has it ever been) an exact science. Furthermore, there are many ways in which science may discover what does and does not promote well-being. The scientific results on the effect McDonald's has on the human body may be disturbingly illuminating, but would it therefore become *immoral* to ever eat a Big Mac? How might one weigh the psychological happiness one gets from eating fast food against the physical costs of such actions? At what point do such eating habits tip the scales towards immorality (such as gluttony) rather than merely imprudence?

Harris goes on to philosophically (not scientifically) make distinctions between

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regular lies and "little white lies," which he notes children learn by age four.[17] Here, again, he references scientific discovery that is helpful to the ethical discussion, but hardly determinative of *why* lying is immoral. Harris notes that white lies often offer a form of "false encouragement" that "steals time, energy, and motivation that a person could put toward some other purpose."[18] Such may be the case in the classic "Does this dress make me look fat?" scenario, in which withholding the truth may be the sensitive thing to do, and yet ultimately do more to harm to the woman, rather than help her, in the end. Of course, very little of this is "scientific." It is rife with situational exceptions and subjective interpretations. If the overweight questioner is your wife, then the stark truth may not be what she needs (or, indeed, is even asking for) at that moment. Her well-being may very well be served *better* in the long run to be encouraged by her husband (whose opinion of her looks is likely ranked high on her priority list) than to be told that she could look *better* if she lost a few pounds. Harris is certainly not advocating that we tell the truth in a blunt or hurtful manner in such delicate situations. The point, however, is that the complications of such social behavior are accessible through natural reasoning, common sense, and basic observation. In other words, they are not especially *scientific* questions at all, even if science might shed further light on the subject. Indeed, the more intricate the subject matter, the *less* Harris seems to rely on science. He makes observations such as "If the truth is painful to tell, often background truths are not—and these can be communicated as well, deepening the friendship," and, "When we presume to lie for the benefit of others, we have decided that *we* are the best judges of how much they should understand about their own lives—about how they appear, their reputations, or their prospects in the world."[19] These statements are purely philosophical, not

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[17]Harris, *Lying*, 14.

[18]Ibid., 17.

[19]Ibid., 18.

scientific.

Are their exceptions to the "never tell a lie" rule? It seems there are, although such situations will be rare. Critiquing Kant's view that lying was immoral in all cases, Harris notes that one might run into a situation in which the person being deceived is "dangerous and unreachable by any recourse to the truth." [20] In such a situation, there may still be options that do not involve an outright lie. However, one may wonder what sort of scientific discoveries could surface that would resolve such conflicts. The ethical status of lying to the Nazis at the door when one is harboring Jewish runaways is ultimately not an issue that comes down to a scientific discovery. Indeed, what sort of experiment could determine the rightness or wrongness of the myriad forms in which this situation might manifest itself? Harris offers none, reverting yet again to philosophy rather than science.

Harris cites research to suggest that liars often trust those they deceive *less* than they might have otherwise.[21] Again, this information is illuminating, but hardly determinative of the morality of lying. It simply tells us that liars get further tangled in their webs so that they become less trusting of others, which one might expect given their experience of humanity and the possible ease with which they have deceived members of it. Science appears again when Harris notes how often pharmaceutical companies deceive the public regarding the safety of new drugs, as well as a reference to the "illusory truth effect," in which people will believe false rumors despite the evidence that debunks them.[22] In both cases, interesting information is brought forth, but it does nothing to "determine" the morality of the lies being told. This concludes Harris' use of science to determine the morality of lying. While much of what he says in this essay is informative

[20]Harris, *Lying* , 29.

[21]Ibid., 35.

[22]Ibid., 37-38.

and of interest to the subject, it is hardly a strong case in support of his position that science is sufficient to make sense of and answer moral questions. His conclusion that "Lies are the social equivalent of toxic waste: Everyone is potentially harmed by their spread," is one that has been arrived at countless times before, and certainly not by means of the scientific method.[23]

Men without Chests

It seems as though science is indeed illuminating and helpful in the field of ethics. However, it is so only when wedded to a rigorous and honest *philosophy*. In fact, a proper philosophy is needed for science to "say" anything at all, as the results of any experiment will need to be interpreted against the backdrop of society, culture, and a variety of other factors. Something must form the foundation on which science will operate and make sense. If science is not sufficient on its own to determine morality, are there consequences that Harris has not addressed *if* one adopts his theory?

Several decades ago, C. S. Lewis anticipated the world of which Harris dreams. In his book, *The Abolition of Man,*[24] Lewis speaks of "men without chests," who have essentially exchanged their soul for reductionist science. Harris seems to fall into this category in his attempt to naturalize ethics. In so doing, he fails to engage at the level of presuppositions, at which the argument about morality arguably must begin. Lewis describes such actions:

> A great many of those who 'debunk' traditional or (as they would say) 'sentimental' values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process. They claim to be cutting away the parasitic growth of emotion, religious sanction, and inherited taboos, in order that 'real' or 'basic' values may emerge.[25]

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[23]Harris, *Lying*, 41.

[24]C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

[25]Ibid., 29.

Indeed, it is Harris' intention to rip away the whole enterprise of ethics from the grasp of religion, which has been holding it for centuries. Lewis' critique of naturalism is that it must ultimately end in subjectivism, which itself is put into contradiction by the way we live. For the naturalist to claim that "It is good to be truthful" is for him to claim that there is something virtuous *about* truthfulness. In the case of Harris, this would take the form of "Truthfulness tends to lead to greater well-being for everyone involved." While this might be challenged, Harris would not be claiming that truthfulness *in itself* is a thing of virtue. Rather, it is "good" because it leads to well-being, which must ultimately be accepted as good *in itself*. Indeed, *something* must be accepted as good for its own sake, otherwise there is an infinite regress of subjective feeling. This is what Lewis notes. For Lewis, it goes back to the is/ought distinction that Harris refuses to accept. He says,

> From propositions about fact alone no *practical* conclusion can ever be drawn. *This will preserve society* cannot lead to *do this* except by the mediation of *society ought to be preserved. This will cost you your life* cannot lead directly to *do not do this:* it can lead to it only through a felt desire or an acknowledged duty of self-preservation. The Innovator is trying to get a conclusion in the imperative mood out of premises in the indicative mood: and though he continues trying to all eternity he cannot succeed, for the thing is impossible.[26]

Lewis claims that there must be an objective reality to moral actions (what he calls the *Tao*). Harris elevates "well-being" to this type of status. As noted earlier, this is a presupposition, on which the rest of his enterprise is built. However, what Harris does not do is fully admit that he is drawing from the *Tao* in order to build an argument that rejects it. Lewis says, "This thing which I have called for convenience the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgements [*sic*]. If it is rejected, all value is rejected."[27]

Lewis also points out a very real danger in the kind of ethical position Harris is

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[26]Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 31-32.

[27]Ibid., 43.

proposing. While Harris has been critical of religion and the many evils done in its name

because of the authority religious people felt lay behind their actions, what is to stop

scientists from doing the same thing? Harris makes it sound as if science alone will

inevitably lead us to a more idealistic state. He writes,

> But there is no mystery why many scientists feel that they must *pretend* that religion
> and science are compatible. We have recently emerged—some of us leaping, some
> shuffling, others crawling—out of many dark centuries of religious bewilderment
> and persecution, into an age when mainstream science is still occasionally treated
> with overt hostility by the general public and even by governments.[28]

From such a statement, one would expect to look to modern history and see science

moving humanity forward morally. Such is the case that Michael Shermer makes in *The*

Moral Arc.[29] However, the twentieth century, while being vastly more advanced in

science and technology than any preceding century, had its share of horrific

wickedness.[30] Indeed, science was put to violent use by the great powers of what became

the bloodiest century of our history.[31] History reveals there has never been a shortage of

top scientists who would allow their abilities to be used for great evil. If science

determines morality, then what guides science? Lewis expresses this fear when he writes,

"From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power

exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument."[32] Indeed, one gets

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[28]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 24.

[29]Michael Shermer, *The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015).

[30]It is a difficult case to make that religion-free modernity automatically leads to a *more* moral society. Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 69, notes, "Some people think it Eurocentric to point out that Europe was the historical home of modernity, forgetful that it was also the home of the Holocaust. The radical answer to the question of whether modernity is a positive or negative phenomenon is an emphatic yes and no."

[31]See David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism And Its Scientific Pretentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 22-24, for a list of casualties. Indeed, the atheistic regimes of the twentieth century had no shortage of bloodbaths. Vincent Carroll and David Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial: Arguments against Anti-Religious Bigotry* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 109, state, "The body count from the two great barbarisms of the twentieth century, communism and Nazism, is extraordinary on its own. Communism's toll ran to perhaps 100 million: 65 million in China, 20 million in the Soviet Union, 2 million in Cambodia, 2 million in North Korea, 1 million in Eastern Europe and 10 million in various other spots around the globe."

[32]Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 55.

the sense from Harris that this is a very real possibility within his ethical system. He admits, "Those who do not share our scientific goals have no influence on scientific discourse whatsoever," leading him to state, "How have we convinced ourselves that, on the most important questions in human life, all views must count equally?"[33] He gives the example of how biblical creationists should not be taken seriously in the realm of science. While this may be his opinion, the implications of this view are dangerous. If some can be indefinitely excluded from scientific conversations, and if morality becomes a realm in which science is the sole voice, then it means vast amounts of those who do not fit into Harris' accepted categories are not given a voice to speak on moral issues. As science is continually becoming more and more specialized, this ultimately excludes many people who have significantly contributed to moral philosophy for decades. Are we willing to suddenly re-write the credentials of what it means to speak about ethics? Who decides this? The community of scientists? One can hardly be blamed for conjuring up visions of Orwellian pig scientists claiming, "All opinions are equal," while at the same time muttering, "But some are more equal than others."[34] Indeed, scientists are not necessarily better-equipped or more unbiased than the rest of the population. The Christian worldview understands that *nobody* is free from the ability to corrupt a good thing. As Francis Schaeffer wrote, "The problem is that you cannot trust the scientist just because he wears a white coat. It is as simple as that. Inside the coat he is still a fallen man."[35] This is an inevitable consequence of specializing morality. If ethics is a subject of philosophy, then it is open to all who think carefully (and even those who don't) on the

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[33]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 34.

[34]Add to this the evidence that many people seem to intuitively associate scientists with immorality. See Bastiaan T. Rutjens and Steven J. Heine, "The Immoral Landscape? Scientists Are Associated with Violations of Morality," *Plos ONE* 11, no. 4 (April 5, 2016): 1-16.

[35]Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century,* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 25. For an illuminating sampling of historical abuses by scientists, see Walter Gratzer, *The Undergrowth of Science: Delusion, Self-Deception, and Human Frailty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

subject. It opens itself for healthy debate and discussion. However, if we turn it over to only those of Harris' ilk (namely, naturalistic neuroscientists[36]), it then becomes a very limited conversation between increasingly smaller groups of people. This is even more worrisome when Harris makes suggestions such as spying on important conversations, in which he envisions ". . . a time when every courtroom or boardroom will have the requisite technology discretely concealed behind wood paneling. Therefore, civilized men and women might share a common presumption: that wherever important conversations are held, the truthfulness of all participants will be monitored."[37] Further, given Harris' past polemics against religion, people of faith may understandably be hesitant to grant men like him the power over such important concepts as morality. Indeed, anyone who insists on silencing those they disagree with from arguably the most important conversations of society should be carefully critiqued. This dissertation has been my attempt at doing that. Since presuppositions and philosophical paradigms are at the foundations of science, a variety of opinions should be heard. Indeed, a morality that is merely studied in the laboratory seems far removed from the ethical decisions most people are faced with in the real world.[38]

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[36]Harris claims, "The primacy of neuroscience and the other sciences of mind on questions of human experience cannot be denied." Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 8. However, as Daryl J. Charles notes, "At the most basic level, the inability of neuroevolutionary and material accounts of human behavior to distinguish between genotype and moral agency, between chemical activity in the brain and human self-consciousness and intentionality, debases our self-understanding. Largely missing from contemporary scientific discussions is what biology, genetics and neuroscience *cannot* tell us about ourselves." J. Daryl Charles, "Blame It on My Criminal Brain: Materialism, Metaphysics, and the Human Moral Instinct," *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 1 (2013): 66-67.

[37]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 134.

[38]For further discussion on this point, see Lawrence Walker J., Jeremy A. Frimer, and William L. Dunlop, "Paradigm Assumptions about Moral Behavior: An Empirical Battle Royal," in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 275-92. Owen Flanagan, who advocates for a similar ethic combining Aristotle, Darwin, and neuroscience, is aware of the danger of scientific elitism in morality. He cautions, "Like Plato and Aristotle and Confucius and Mill, I suggest that we listen to thoughtful sensitive souls who have studied the matter, the experts. If there are shared ends and there is information about reliable means to achieve them, it will be good to know what they are." Owen Flanagan, "One Enchanted Being: Neuroexistentialism and Meaning," *Zygon* 44, no. 1 (April 2009): 43, accessed August 9, 2016, 10.1111/j.1467- http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2009.00984.x.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

Science certainly has a vital place in society, and plays an important role in morality. This is not controversial. Indeed, science sheds light on how our ethical beliefs play out in the real world and the facts it reveals will undoubtedly converge with our ethics in innumerable ways. However, it has been my assertion that Harris' scientific morality overreaches in that he attempts to conflate a conversation that stands open to many voices into a single monologue. While science may speak into moral issues, I have argued that it does not ultimately *determine* morality. In fact, science itself depends upon philosophical presuppositions at its core. If one is trying to determine where the foundations of morality lie, one cannot go to science. It would be similar to claiming the hardwood floor of a house is the foundation, while ignoring the concrete that lies beneath. Harris, by assuming that well-being is simply a starting point everyone should accept, skips over the meaningful discussion one needs to have at a foundational level to determine one's methaethical structure. Indeed, Harris' project is just as much (or perhaps more) a practice in philosophy as it is science. He defines science so broadly as to completely change the idea that most people have when they think of the term. This may, in fact, be part of his goal—to expand our understanding of science. However, as such, his thesis becomes far less controversial. He admits that, "We cannot always draw a line between scientific thinking and 'mere' philosophy because all data must be interpreted against a background theory, and different theories come bundled with a fair amount of contextual reasoning."[39] He notes that philosophy and science have always been deeply intertwined, as evidenced by science's original name: "natural philosophy." However, he further admits that his core argument is *philosophical*, rather than *scientific*. He says,

One could call this a "philosophical" position, but it is one that directly relates to the

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[39]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 179.

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boundaries of science. If I am correct, science has a far wider purview than many of its practitioners suppose, and its findings may one day impinge upon culture in ways that they do not expect. If I am wrong, the boundaries of science are as narrow as most people assume. This difference of view might be ascribed to "philosophy," but it is a difference that will determine the practice of science in the years to come.[40]

I have sought to show that science may indeed influence our understanding of morality. However, it is not the starting point, nor is it the final destination in practice. Harris is correct in stating that our philosophy will determine *how* we do science in the years to come. This much is not controversial, in that philosophy has always guided science from the beginning. His use of "determine" in this sentence, however, seems far more appropriate than his use of "determine" in the title of his thesis. While philosophy will directly assert a guiding force upon our science, as all science must, by necessity, grow out of a worldview that allows it to flourish, the same cannot be said of science and morality. As Harris admits, science is always done and interpreted against some background theory or presuppositions. As such, he confuses the word "determine," and never clarifies his different uses of this foundational term.[41]

In the end, it seems as though Harris' motivations are driven by a deep mistrust and disdain for *religion*, rather than his love for *science*. That science should contribute to the conversation on morality is acceptable; that religion should be *excluded* is not. The presuppositions of science and the presuppositions of Christianity are not irreconcilable. Harris worries about dogmatism, and yet science is not free from a rigid assurance of its own conclusions. Extreme dogmatism that is closed to further conversations or criticism *should* be viewed as suspect. In this sense, Christianity does not crumble. Indeed, the Christian worldview has a rich history of defending itself from criticism. It has withstood attacks for centuries, and those that Harris levels towards it are not new. It must be shown

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[40]Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 180.

[41]For an example of how empirical facts may indeed shed light on our morality, see John M. Doris and Stephen P. Stich, "As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 114-52.

whether Harris' own worldview can withstand similar criticism. In this dissertation, I have attempted to give a critical analysis of Harris' worldview of philosophical naturalism. I believe that the pillars that support it, when inspected closely, reveal several cracks that threaten to topple the entire enterprise. I am in agreement with Harris that science has, can, and will make important contributions to the discussion of morality. However, the very science that is done will always be done against the backdrop of a worldview philosophy. Harris sees a deep conflict between science and religion, and is confident that only his scientific worldview can address moral issues. I have disagreed, and have attempted to show how his worldview is in fact internally in conflict with the goals he sets out to prove. If science determines morality, then what determines science? *Something* must sit at the bottom of every worldview.

It will be up to Christian apologists to argue why their worldview is not only compatible with science, but is actually equipped to be a better guide for morality. Harris seeks to tap into a growing mistrust of religion. In this, his concerns are not without some justification. There is no shortage of examples one can cite to show where Christians have failed to live morally exemplary lives. However, if one believes that the Christian worldview is true, and that it provides a satisfactory *explanation* and *motivation* for morality, then one must continue to find new and updated (or rediscover the old) arguments for why this is so. The task of Christian apologists is indeed an important one in the twenty-first century, as we seek to defend a Christian ethic in a culture in which secular alternatives like *The Moral Landscape* are sure to rise in opposition. Indeed, Harris' ideas, based on a neo-Aristotelian understanding of an *ordered* world, present an opportunity for the Christian worldview to *better* explain why this might be so. Indeed, there is no reason, on naturalism, to assume that we should find ourselves in a world that seems to display a fundamental teleology, into which human beings fit. Oliver O'Donavan observes that naturalism must adequately explain such a phenomenon, stating,

On the one hand he may interpret these relations of order as part of a universal world-order, a network of interrelationships forming a totality of which mankind himself is a part. If he does so, he steps, despite himself, on to teleological ground, and will find himself required to specify rather carefully how he conceives the relation of cosmic order to the presence of mind and reason within it. Alternatively, renouncing the pretensions of 'metaphysics', he may turn altogether away from the apparent objectivity of order. Dismissing the immediate and pre-critical supposition that order could be 'perceived', he will maintain instead that it was 'imposed' upon the raw material of experience by the will-to-order within the observing mind. For moral philosophy this means that all our moral beliefs, such as that every human being is the equal of every others, are not 'beliefs' at all but mere 'commitments', claiming no correspondence with reality. They are the ways in which the will projects patterns of the mind upon the blank screen of an unordered world.[42]

Every system of ethics must ultimately rely on presuppositions, and our intuitions and experiences of the world must fit within the worldview built from these foundational principles. While much of what Harris borrows from Aristotle in valid and interesting, it ultimately doesn't fit together within his naturalistic worldview. A theistic alternative, which attempts to ground the teleology we observe around us in the creative actions of a personal God, arguably better explains why well-being is not just prudent for survival, but ultimately fulfills goals we were designed to seek. Thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas have captured the importance of well-being, while not losing the sense of authority, obligation, and objectivity that seems so vital to morality. Harris seeks to ground ethics in the pursuit of well-being, but his naturalism forces him to jettison several vital aspects of morality. He may feel as though one is forced to choose between an ethic built on religion and one built on science. It has been my attempt to argue that no such divide need take place, as science may ultimately best be used as a tool to help better understand a system of morality which is built on a *higher* foundation.

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[42]Oliver O'Donavan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 35.

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ABSTRACT

A WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS OF SAM HARRIS' PHILOSOPHICAL
NATURALISM IN *THE MORAL LANDSCAPE: HOW
SCIENCE CAN DETERMINE HUMAN VALUES*

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The atheistic worldview has, ironically, experienced a sort of "re-birth" in modern times. The "New Atheists," of which Sam Harris is a prominent spokesperson, have made no secret of their desire to make converts to their worldview, liberating people from the false and repressive shackles of religion. It is their desire to officiate the funeral of religion, and usher in a new era governed by reason and science.

Harris, in his book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, seeks to naturalize ethics through the means of science, so that religion might lose its grasp on a stronghold it has held for centuries. In so doing, he presents an ethical system based on the worldview of philosophical naturalism, which leaves no room for a divine foot in the door. His ethical system is supported by several presuppositional pillars, including an unwavering belief in Darwinian evolution, a neo-Aristotelian concept of well-being, a commitment to strict determinism, a confidence in moral realism, and the belief that science and religion are in irresolvable conflict with each other as modes of seeking truth.

This dissertation seeks to analyze Harris' naturalistic worldview by inspecting these five pillars as the foundation upon which his ethical system stands. In the famous words of Francis Schaeffer, I attempt to "take the roof off" of Harris' worldview, in order to analyze the philosophical ideas he espouses. It is my assertion that Harris ultimately

fails to properly defend the controversial claims his book makes, as the most important points he makes are not actually scientific at all, but philosophical. Although he approaches the issue as a scientist, his arguments rely on philosophical presuppositions of which science can only be applied *a posteriori*. If this is true, it is a positive force for Christian apologetics, as the Christian worldview may continue to be a valid alternative to the philosophical naturalism Harris espouses.

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