

2011

Evolutionary Psychology in the Service of Moral Psychology: A Possible Future for Ethics

William S. Lewis
Skidmore College

Follow this and additional works at: https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/phil_rel_fac_schol

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lewis, W. S. (2011). Evolutionary Psychology in the Service of Moral Philosophy: A Possible Future for Ethics?. *Journal Of Speculative Philosophy*, 25(1), 48-63.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy Department at Creative Matter. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Creative Matter. For more information, please contact jluo@skidmore.edu.

draft

**Evolutionary Psychology in the Service of Moral Philosophy,
A Possible Future for Ethics?**

William S. Lewis
Skidmore College

"Someone may ask, "What is the difference, then, between moral philosophy and moral psychology?" The answer may be that there is no interesting difference and that the issue is of interest only to university administrators."¹

In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life (1891)," William James provides a rough taxonomy of the state of ethical philosophy at the time that he is writing. Making a division between psychological approaches that identify the good with the feeling of pleasure derived by a naturally evolved organism and metaphysical approaches which hold that the good is conceptual, James argues that both are equally goods and that they each imply similar obligation.² James' solution, therefore, to the problem of which type of good must be honored is the pragmatist one: both are seen to have an effect on the organism and are thus equally real. Both are therefore equally worthy of consideration and respect.

Today, it may be harder to make the same kind of sweeping survey of the state of ethics and to solve the problem of casuistry in one stroke. In some department, somewhere, every type of moral philosophy is actively defended. However, for almost four decades, the "brain-borne" or metaphysical approach to ethics has been dominant in academic philosophy and the evolutionary psychological understanding of happiness has played a secondary role. Now, deontologists, contractarians, utilitarians, experimental philosophers, and many virtue theorists work on how to conceptualize the good properly. Meanwhile, evolutionary moral psychologists have taken up the other part of James' project, but with little of his concern as a moral philosopher about finding how to achieve the most good. Instead, these scientists look to clues in our own and in other species' development in order to determine why we perceive certain activities and actions to be good (e.g. caring for others) and others bad (e.g. cheating on exams).

The question this paper for the American Philosophies Forum takes up is that of whether Ethics as a discipline has something to learn from the literature in evolutionary moral psychology and if this mode of explanation should be part of its future. Its primary

¹ Harman, Gilbert. 2003. Three trends in moral and political philosophy. *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, (3) : 415-420.

² James, William. 2000 [1891]. The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life. In John J. Stuhr (ed.) *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 207.

thesis is that Ethics does have much to learn because the sciences that study the evolutionary mechanisms by which ethical judgments are produced will allow us, in a naturalist and pragmatist fashion, to better understand the possibilities for achieving our ethical goals. They will do so not because they demonstrate that all effective and achievable moralities must be anchored in evolutionarily derived moral faculties or intuitions, but because these sciences can help to reveal the means by which our culturally derived ethical ideals might be realized as well as indicate the innate psychological and psycho-social stumbling blocks and hurdles to these ideals' realization.

In "The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life," James proves a keen diagnostician of the aim of moral philosophers as well as a keen analyst of the main questions to which moral philosophy must find answers if it is to be successful. Regarding the goal of moral philosophy, he notes that it aims "to find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world...a genuine universe from the ethical point of view."³ In order to construct such a system, James notes that the moral philosopher must answer questions about the psychological origin of our moral judgments, about the meaning of our primary ethical terms such as good and obligation, and about how to rank competing goods and duties in order that we may act correctly.⁴ In order to assess the importance of evolutionary moral psychology for moral philosophy, this paper will primarily be concerned with what James call the origin question . However, the semantic and casuistic questions will be returned to when this paper argues that evolutionarily derived moral sentiments mean something different than do second-order moral sentiments and that the latter should be given primacy over the former.

In attempting to answer the question about the psychological origin of our moral ideas, James notes that there are two main schools of thought on this matter. These he terms the "evolutionist" and the "intuitionist." Cited as his primary example of the evolutionist school is utilitarianism as it was developed by the J.S. Mill, Jeremy Bentham, and Alexander Bain. Utilitarians, he maintains, attempt "to explain all our sentiments and preferences" by showing how "our human ideals...must have arisen from the association

³ James 2000, 203.

⁴ James 2000, 203.

with acts of simple bodily pleasures and reliefs from pain.”⁵ Though James agrees that associationist psychology can account for many of our sentiments, he argues that there are preferences for which the evolutionary moral psychology of his day cannot account. At the base level, these include psychosomatic reactions like our tendency “to faint at the sight of blood” as well as socio-psychological affects like our “passion for poetry.” At more exclusively cognitive levels—such as when we think it wrong for a romantic couple with a troubled history to reunite—these include the preference for others to follow certain norms for social behavior even when that social behavior has no effect on the judging individual’s happiness. At the highest level, the preferences for which associationist psychology cannot account include our ideals and aspirations for cultural change and direction.⁶ All of these emotions, intuitions, and ideals, James maintains, are the result of “secondary affections,” feelings that have their origin in “incidental complications to our cerebral structure, a structure whose features arose with no reference to the perception of such discords and harmonies as [association and utility].”⁷ In other words and according to James, there exists a class of moral sentiments which supervene upon and are qualitatively different from those which are a product of our association with objects and processes that cause us to experience pleasure or pain.

The existence of these secondary, supervenient or, to use James’ terms, “brain-borne” or “intuitive” preferences presents a real problem for the philosopher who aims to “furnish an account of the moral relations that obtain among things.” This is because the moral universe is not a universe but a pluriverse; it consists of at least two types of moral sentiments: those which function to preserve the human organism and to bring it pleasure and those that inform our preferences and our ideals but which have no such evolutionarily attributable function. Acknowledging that both types of moral sentiments exist and wishing to give each type its due as being a real preference expressed by a living individual, James proposes in “The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life” that neither be given priority in terms of moral reasoning and that only the common and salient feature of each (that they

⁵ James 2000, 204.

⁶ James 2000, 204-05.

⁷ James 2000, 204.

both indicate a preference) be included in the calculations of a moral philosopher concerned with envisioning a world where the most good may be realized.⁸

James' suggestion of a compromise position between the evolutionist and intuitionist approaches to moral philosophy is an unusual position in both modern and contemporary philosophy where, more often than not, philosophers have privileged one type of sentiment over another and have also given reasons why the one is superior to the other in terms of the way in which it does or does not satisfy a general moral principle. What's more, though novel, his solution is deeply unsatisfying, for it leaves us with both a moral dualism and a mystery. The dualism is between (a) those moral sentiments that function to preserve the human organism; and (b) those moral sentiments that equally inform our preferences and our ideals but have no such evolutionarily attributable function. Though he hints at a secondary psychological process by which intuitive moral sentiments are created (the "incidental complications to our cerebral structure" mentioned above), the mystery is how and why a pleasure seeking organism whose aim is reproduction should come to have moral judgments (informed by moral sentiments) such as "Corporations should not have the same free speech rights as human beings" or "A kid should never rat on another kid." Further, with this dualism, the casuistic question is raised of which type of moral sentiment should be given primacy in ethical decision making, a question that James sidesteps by assigning them equal worth based on their both being psychological preferences held by concrete individuals.⁹

How to answer this question, to overcome this dualism, and to solve this mystery? The remainder of this paper will argue that a nuanced and thoroughgoing naturalism may allow us to accomplish all three of these things. First, such a naturalism answers the question of which type of moral sentiment should be given primacy by indicating why intuitionist sentiments need to be respected in a way in which evolutionarily derived sentiments do not. Second, it solves the puzzle and overcomes the dualism by providing us with a materialist explanation of how natural, evolutionary processes came to generate these secondary moral sentiments. In order to make these points and to set up this paper's overall argument that Ethics has much to learn from evolutionary moral psychology

⁸ James 2000, 211.

⁹ James 2000, 209.

and that a consideration of this literature should be included in future theorizing about value, it is first necessary to define evolutionary moral psychology. After that, it will be possible to deal with the main philosophical challenges to evolutionary moral psychology's relevancy to the discipline of philosophical ethics. This accomplished, the paper will proceed to show how the naturalistic account of the origin of our moral sentiments and intuitions solves the mystery of where our moral judgments come from and overcomes the dualism between primary and secondary moral preferences. In the course of these explanations, the question of which type of moral sentiment should be given primacy in our ethical decision making will be answered.

Thus far, and in order to introduce the problem of the role that evolutionary moral psychology should play in our moral philosophy, this paper has been using utilitarianism and the psychological theory which supports it, associationism, as an example of an evolutionarily based moral psychology. Though useful for setting up the distinction between evolutionarily derived moral sentiments and moral sentiments which cannot be so derived, late 19th century associationist psychology is not a good representation of contemporary evolutionary moral psychology. While the theory is still widely held that evolution predisposes us to prefer states that bring pleasure rather than pain, many more predispositions have been suggested including that to rape, to avoid incest, to prefer cleanliness, to show deference, to be compassionate, etc.¹⁰ What each of the accounts of the genesis of these moral sentimental predispositions includes is the supposition that each sentiment somehow and for an evolutionarily meaningful amount of time conferred a survival advantage on the members of our species that possessed it and that it was therefore passed on.¹¹

Many of these accounts have suggested that evolutionary pressures have been sufficient to generate not only moral predispositions, but many of our moral intuitions as well.¹² To take one example, a group of evolutionary psychologists has argued that the

¹⁰ Haidt, Jonathan, & Craig Joseph. 2004. Intuitive Ethics: How Innately Prepared Intuitions Generate Culturally Variable Virtues. *Daedalus* Special Issue on human nature: 59. Also see Hamilton, Richard. 2008. The darwinian cage: Evolutionary psychology as moral science. *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, (2) (03) : 110.

¹¹ Ruse, Michael. "Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach" pages 223-256 in *Evolutionary Naturalism*. London: Routledge, 1995.

¹² Haidt & Joseph 2004.

universal intuition that incest is wrong resulted from an evolutionary pressure "to inhibit sex among reproductively mature close genetic relatives because children produced by these unions would be less healthy."¹³ The vehicle for this inhibition, they claim, is a specialized psychological circuit or module which takes "certain cues as input that were reliably correlated with genetic relatedness ancestrally"¹⁴ and combines these with an innate psychological predisposition against having sexual relations with these people. Such cues include living in the same domicile together from a young age and for extended periods of time and—when combined with the psychological predisposition—result in the moral intuition that incest is wrong.¹⁵ Developed to explain a broader range of moral judgments and actions and also much more voluminous is the evolutionary psychological research into altruism. Using methodologies such as game theory, comparative primatology, and statistical comparative analysis of evolutionary success rates, this body of evidence strongly suggests that humans share with other animals the tendency to be "social, cooperative, and even altruistic under certain circumstances."¹⁶

It is with these and similar claims to the effect that evolutionary pressures are generative of moral judgments that many moral philosophers and especially those who consider themselves moral realists challenge evolutionary psychology's claim to making a contribution to moral philosophy.¹⁷ Though most grant that evolutionary theory may provide explanations for why we instinctively act in certain ways or have predictable affective and cognitive reactions to certain states of affairs, they do not believe that the judgments thus engendered have anything to do with our morality. Rather, they argue that there is a qualitative difference between our moral judgments about what is good and bad and those things we tend to prefer or shun due to our native affective constitutions. As Virginia Held writes, the

¹³ Lieberman, Debra, John Tooby & Leda Cosmides. 2003. Does morality have a biological basis? An empirical test of the factors governing moral sentiments relating to incest. *Proceedings of the Royal Society London (Biological Sciences)*, 270(1517) : 820.

¹⁴ Lieberman *et al* 2003 : 821.

¹⁵ Lieberman *et al* 2003 : 822-26.

¹⁶ Curry, Oliver. 2006. Who's afraid of the naturalistic fallacy? *Evolutionary Psychology* 4: 235.

¹⁷ This is a summary of the philosopher's arguments in De Waal, Franz 2006 *Primates and Philosophy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. (particularly Korsgaard?) against EMP, publishable draft to cite these arguments and work more closely with them.

conscious awareness of moral choice has trouble fitting into the causal order of the world of scientific naturalism [that informs the evolutionary psychological perspective]. Not only can it perhaps not be fully explained by any science without being explained away; more importantly, explanation is characteristically not what we look for when we consider choosing one course of action and not another, or when we deliberate about one interpretation of what we are doing instead of another. What we characteristically seek is justification rather than explanation, evaluation rather than description, the normative rather than the natural.¹⁸

When we think through examples, this qualitative distinction makes sense. Though it may be the case that some of these evolutionarily derived moral sentiments track the real good (for example, when we are revolted at seeing home-made videos of homeless people being set on fire by bored adolescents), there is no necessary relation between the two. This is suggested by the fact that we can also think of evolutionarily derived moral judgments—like that of disgust when we see people with different dietary and hygienic regimes than those to which we are accustomed—that do not square with our ideas about the moral equality of human beings. Just because we have these native moral sentiments, does not mean that we judge them to be good. Rather, they are judged to be good or bad by some other measure (like their accordance with virtue, because they follow from a principle, because God commanded or forbade such a thought or act, etc.).

Employed but not made explicit here in this distinction between proper, evaluative moral judgments and evolutionary moral psychological judgments is the naturalistic fallacy. This fallacy as it was variously theorized by David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) and G. E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica* (1903) has supported many philosophers' claims that ethics has nothing to learn about the good from evolutionary moral psychology.¹⁹ For their part, many evolutionary moral psychologist's have also held to this distinction because the separation between the natural and the ethical spheres that it underwrites allows them to investigate such questions as innate racism and whether the male of our species has an evolved tendency to rape (and women to resist) without dealing with whether these activities are truly moral or not. As scientists and naturalists, they claim, they

¹⁸ Held, Virginia. 2002. Moral subjects: The natural and the normative. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 76, (2) (Nov.): 7-24.

¹⁹ Go through literature for published paper, cite Held 2002 and Stanford Encyclopedia article article on moral anti-naturalism literature

are just dealing with the evidence for or against these social adaptations and not whether they are moral or immoral.

In its Humean version, the naturalist fallacy supports the distinction between distinction between proper, evaluative moral judgments and evolutionarily derived judgments by pointing out that it is illegitimate to move from a claim about the way something *is*, to a claim about the way it *ought* to be.²⁰ In other words, because values "are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind,"²¹ one cannot "make logical inferences of value from observations of natural facts"²² To illustrate this fallacy with an example, from the empirical claim that "there are less species of frogs in the Northeastern United States today than there were forty years ago," one cannot logically proceed to the perceptual claim that "there ought to be a greater variety of frogs in the Northeast." In order to make this move, one needs to combine it with an ethical claim such as "It is good for the environment in the Northeast that there be a large variety of frogs within it." To give another example, and one more germane to the topic at hand, just because humans (along with other primates)²³ have an evolutionarily derived tendency to punish cheating and even to judge it to be wrong, this does not mean that cheating is wrong.

Though often confused with Hume's, Moore's iteration of the naturalistic fallacy is somewhat distinct and is based upon the semantic content of judgments of value rather than on the distinction between *is* and *ought*. According to Moore, it is fallacious to identify "the good" with its object (such as when we say "Good dog, thanks for my slippers,") because it is possible to conceive of "the good" separately from my dog, or from any other object or its properties to which we attribute the quality of being good. The Good, Moore claims, is not definable, it is a simple concept and it cannot be known in terms of the objects to which it pertains.²⁴ To try to define the good (or the bad) in terms of the properties of natural objects is, according to Moore, to commit the naturalistic fallacy. Taking up again the example used in the previous paragraph, just because humans tend to

²⁰ Hume, David. 1740 *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740). As cited in Teehan, John, and Christopher diCarlo. 2004. On the naturalistic fallacy: A conceptual basis for evolutionary ethics. *Evolutionary Psychology* 2 : 34

²¹ Hume, David. 1740 *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). As cited in Curry 2006 : 238

²² Teehan & diCarlo 2004 : 34

²³ De Waal or other literature to support this point.

²⁴ Teehan & diCarlo 35

call cheating bad, does not explain why cheating is morally bad. To do that, we would have to have a definition of "the bad." However, as a simple concept, no such definition is available. This does not mean that evolutionary psychological research cannot explain why we believe cheating to be bad, only that it cannot voice an opinion on whether cheating is really bad or not. For instance, an evolutionary psychologist might hypothesize that cheaters were not reliable partners in complex cooperative behaviors needed for a group's survival and that those who cheat therefore came to be instinctively judged to be bad. However, because these are all claims about natural objects and their relations and not about what the good is in-itself, they do not violate the naturalistic fallacy.

While the naturalistic fallacy in both its Humean and Moorean versions gives philosophers logical reasons to doubt that we can learn anything about morality from evolutionary psychology, the history of the science seems to provide additional reasons to doubt its ability to help us identify the good. This is because, when viewed with a historical lens and also when examining some of its contemporary claims, the moral philosophy which evolutionary psychologists believe to be "natural" often does not accord at all with our moral intuitions about the good. To take one widely recognized example and one that comes from the origins of this science, Herbert Spencer in his attempt to develop an evolutionary moral science posited that, for the most happiness, "the welfare of humanity at large will be achieved by the prosperity and spread of the best varieties [of the human race],"²⁵ and that other varieties should be allowed to die out. To take another example from the history of moral psychology, the science of eugenics as it was developed in the 1920s and 1930s identified the good with a certain view of evolutionary fitness and took active steps including the sterilization and the murder of unfit individuals in order to advance this end.²⁶ Though examples of claims that run so counter to our moral intuitions about the good are difficult (if not at impossible²⁷) to find in the contemporary literature, the sheer variety of native moral sentiments and their accompanying intuitions that have been found and the fact that only some of them (e.g. the empathic sentiment evoked by the suffering of others,

²⁵ Spencer, Herbert. 1897. *Principles of Ethics*. New York: Appleton & Company, 222.

²⁶ need reference

²⁷ See Rushton, J. Phillippe & Glayde Whitney. 2002. Cross-National Variation in Violent Crime Rates: Race, r-K Theory and Income. *Population and Environment* 23:6 as well as Levin, M. 1984. Why Homosexuality is Abnormal. *Monist* 67: 251-83 for examples.

cheater detection, etc.) correspond to our ideas about virtue while others (e.g. innate tendencies to stereotype groups) indicate that there is no necessary and direct correspondence between our evolved moral sentiments and moral truth.

When one adds the non-relevance of natural facts to moral philosophy suggested by the naturalistic fallacy to the non-correspondence of evolutionarily produced moral sentiments with what we take to be moral truths, there seems to be ample reason to doubt that naturalism in general and evolutionary moral psychology in particular can ever provide us with insights into what we should do. In the main, this paper is in agreement with the many philosophers who make this claim and, therefore, it concludes that it is secondary or "brain-borne" moral sentiments and judgments about the good that should be given primacy in discussions about what we ought to do. This is because most of us would not want to live in a world where the proof of one's virtue is the ability to pass on one's genes and where the urges, inclinations, and preferences we have evolved to allow this transmission are judged to be the only right ones. That said, there are still good reasons for moral philosophers to pay close attention to the results of evolutionary moral psychology. First, because it can provide us with an account of the way in which we come to have moral dispositions and second, because it can provide us with a compendium of these dispositions. Finally, it may also explain why we sometimes have conflicting ideas about the good, as well as give us insights about how we might go about achieving the goods that we hold in common. In short, and to quote a 2004 essay that appeared in *Evolutionary Psychology* by John Teehan and Christopher DiCarlo: "Any science that which helps us to understand and assess morally problematic situations has something to contribute to moral philosophy."²⁸ Evolutionary moral psychology is such a science and the remainder of this paper will be devoted to showing how it makes these contributions.

The increasingly sophisticated account of the development of complex or secondary moral intuitions that evolutionary moral psychology is in the course of providing is one that solves the mystery James left us with in "The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life" of how we come to have moral intuitions that differ from those for which we can discover an evolutionary explanation. At first glance, any such account seems problematic

²⁸ Teehan & diCarlo 41

and unlikely, for why would evolutionary pressures ever select for cognitive intuitions about the good rather than just select for affectively triggered reactions to certain environmental or social stimuli? For example, if protecting one's mate from other potential suitors conferred an evolutionary advantage on an individual, then it would make sense that the affect of jealousy is triggered when Colin Farrell sidles up next to your mate at a bar and lights her cigarette. Though at that point the game is usually lost, you would at least be motivated to fend off his advance in order have a chance at passing on your genes with the help of the partner you have selected for her reproductive fitness. If passing on one's genes is all that matters to evolution, then affectively motivated action is sufficient for this purpose;²⁹ the affect of jealousy does not have to be accompanied by the thought "mate stealing is wrong" in order for the evolutionary goal that the moral sentiment aims at to be realized.

Nonetheless, we find ourselves as products of evolution who have intuitions not only about the viciousness of mate stealing, but also about how murder is wrong, how the American education system does a disservice to its youth, and about how needless suffering is to be avoided. Given the logic of evolution, there are at least three possibilities for how this came to be. One is that these intuitions have an evolutionary utility and confer some advantage on those beings that possess it. The second is that these intuitions serve no adaptive purpose and are merely by-products of other successful adaptations. For instance, it could be the case that an evolutionary advantage was conferred upon individuals who could generalize about objects and their experience in the natural world and that this cognitive ability was then applied to the categorization of affective states despite the fact that this act of combination and reflection conveyed no evolutionary advantage. The third possibility is that all both of these stories are somewhat true and that intuitions have an evolutionary utility and confer some advantage on those beings who possess it, but that they also came about partly by chance or for some other reason and that they do not always confer an evolutionary advantage (and may sometimes even be evolutionarily disadvantageous).

Though the second possibility would be an interesting to investigate, the fact that these intuitions have endured gives us reason to suspect that our moral intuitions confer some real advantage that purely affective means of behavioral control do not (and those that

²⁹ Lahti, David 2003. Parting with illusions in evolutionary ethics. *Biology and Philosophy* 18: 646-648

option one or three is the case). The chief candidate for the advantage that moral intuitions confer is the production and communication of social norms which are advantageous to the cooperation and survival of some group. However, the question of supervenience, or of how moral sentiments become intuitions, still needs an explanation. In their 2004 article "Why Moore's Open Question is Open: The Evolution of Moral Supervenience," Richmond Campbell and Jennifer Woodrow provide a plausible, naturalistic account of how moral intuitions or James' "secondary preferences" can be explained as the cumulative results of selection pressures that tend to favor cooperative groups. They also provide an explanation for how these selection pressures can come to create creatures like us who often have conflicting opinions about the good and sometimes ask questions about why we should pursue certain goods. In the developmental narrative that they give, Campbell and Woodrow start with the example of chimpanzees that can "learn...to share foliage from trees when it is neither so abundant nor so scarce that it makes sharing useless."³⁰ Though the chimps may not be aware of it, there is a reason for sharing food (it allows them to survive and pass on more of their genes). Therefore, those chimpanzees who can communicate by signs of approbation and disapprobation that food sharing in circumstances of relevant abundance is the correct behavior to follow will tend to have more offspring than those who do not have the faculties to communicate this message or to internalize it as a preference.

The world, however, does not always stay the same and when food supplies change or other animals compete for food resources, those animals that are inflexible in terms of what norms they can communicate or adopt do not survive. Thus evolution would tend to favor those animals whose norms are somewhat plastic and who can more or less rapidly develop and diffuse new norms and abandon ones that are less useful.³¹ Language itself, they argue, partly "arises along with and because of the capacity to recognize and respond to patterns of normative consistency and inconsistency"³² and it allows those creatures that develop it to communicate norms appropriate to the situation much more readily. Knowing that some type of action is a good or a bad thing therefore confers advantages because it allows for sophisticated and subtle cooperative actions. For the reason

³⁰ Campbell, Richmond, and Jennifer Woodrow. 2003. Why moore's open question is open: The evolution of moral supervenience. *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, (3): 354.

³¹ Campbell and Woodrow 2003 : 356-57

³² Campbell and Woodrow 2003 : 361

that social and environmental situations change, it is also good to have the ability to question why some action or state of affairs is a good thing, to debate it, and to communicate a new norm if the old social intuition no longer fulfills its function. Creatures with these abilities look a lot like us.

However, even after we have undergone a secondary process of social evolution, we are also still those creatures that, for most of our history, evolved to survive and to pass on our genes in a social, economic, and natural world far different to the world that we live in today. Though this paper has argued that moral intuitions (or what we can now equally call social norms) deserve to be respected in a way that evolutionarily derived moral sentiments do not, this rough casuistry is little help when it comes to actually deciding what the good is and how it should be pursued. It is little help because we cannot always tell the difference between the two types of sentiments and because these cultural intuitions have themselves evolved to respond to specific socio-economic and environmental situations. Further, they remain part of our intuitive arsenal even when they have outlived their usefulness and other, different and competing norms have moved into take their place. Nonetheless, each of these demands is equally felt and we are contradictorily pulled. As Teehan and DiCarlo put it

While the universe is value-neutral in the sense of not entailing any moral imperatives, it does contain the conditions that give rise to valuing and to creatures who make value judgments. These value judgments are not the expression of some pre-existing moral essence but rather arise from the complex interactions between individuals and the environment. In effect, morality is not "out there" waiting to be found, it is constructed by individuals-who-value, who live in an environment which provides the conditions for both satisfying and frustrating our desires, and who must live with others who may or may not value the same things, in the same way. Morality is both the result of and a contributor to complex social interactions.³³

This paper will not deal with the difficult problem of how to adjudicate between the competing norms and ideals that are a product of complex social interactions. However, it does want to suggest that, once we settle on an ideal, knowing something about how norms are generated through social interaction and what moral sentiments and intuitions

³³ Teehan & diCarlo 40

have been generated through evolutionary activity would be a useful thing. This is because these evolutionarily derived norms can either be harnessed to compliment and deepen our commitment to the selected ideal and therefore provide part of the motive force for its accomplishment, or they can actively work against it.

Suppose, for instance, that we judge it to be a good thing for those who love each other to be able to get married and we progressively extend this right to include not only homosexuals, but also polygamists, and even incestuous couples.³⁴ If it is the case that there is an evolved moral sentiment against such unions, then we would need to act to create a social environment where this sentiment is less likely to be expressed and acted upon such that it might result in discrimination against the incestuous couple (or triple!). This may seem far-fetched, but disgust—a moral sentiment that is strongly suspected to be a product of our pre-linguistic evolution³⁵—is currently one of the main motivators for maintaining or enlarging political discrimination against homosexuals, including marriage discrimination.³⁶ Here, there is no evolutionary reason for us to be disgusted with homosexual acts, but the capacity for moral disgust has informed a cultural history of attitudes and practices in which, for various social and economic reasons, homosexuality came to be regarded as increasingly contra-normative.

Leaving disgust and other evolutionarily derived hurdles and stumbling blocks to the realization of our common goals aside, Stephen G. Morris in his article "The Evolution of Cooperative Behavior and its Implications for Ethics" (2009) provides us with an argument for how an evolutionarily derived moral capacity can be harnessed to realize one of the goals that we hold in common. Given their evolutionary history, Morris maintains, "a particular picture of human nature emerges—namely, that a person's propensity to behave cooperatively is positively cooperated with the degree to which that individual is able to maintain a positive affective state."³⁷ Therefore, there is reason to

³⁴ Cahill, Courtney Megan. 2005. Same Sex Marriage, Slippery Slope Rhetoric, and the Politics of Disgust: A Critical Perspective on Contemporary Family Discourse and the Incest Taboo. *Northwestern Law Review* 99 : 1543-160/

³⁵ Haidt and Joseph 2004 : 59.

³⁶ Nussbaum, Martha. 2009. A Right to Marry? Same-sex Marriage and Constitutional Law" *Dissent*. Accessed 12 march 2010 @ <<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=1935>>

³⁷ Morris, Stephen G. 2009. The evolution of cooperative behavior and its implications for ethics. *Philosophy of Science* 76, (5) (12/01) : 923

suspect that, if we wish to make more people happy, then we should be concerned with creating an environment in which there are many opportunities for cooperative behavior.

To any reader familiar with the ethics of John Dewey and his views on human nature, this paper's thesis that those who are concerned with realizing their idea of the good have much to learn from the natural sciences and that we must take evolved human nature into account when we try to realize our ideal community is not surprising. Certainly, this paper is Deweyan in inspiration and generally follows his recommendations for critical inquiry into the ethical domain so as to best prepare ourselves for the successful realization of our ethical ideals. To make it sound even more Deweyan, this paper supports a critical inquiry into the history and causes of our present valuations and practices using the best methods of the sciences and with the aim of understanding how these norms might create tensions or problems. Further, it believes that, having undertaken this critical reflection, we can then seek ways to adjust our norms and practices such that these tensions might be overcome. Why then, if the paper's conclusions are largely in agreement with Dewey's moral philosophy, do we need to update his ethics and to claim that this update represents (part of) the future of ethics? The first reason is that many contemporary academic philosophers are hostile to Dewey's claim that our norms are the product of biological and cultural evolution. Therefore, the argument needed to be made again, using current science, in order that the field of ethics might benefit from the knowledge of these processes that current science provides. The second reason is that, to the lay public, evolutionary moral philosophy explains the way in which we act and suggests that, try as we might, we cannot act any differently. By showing why and how our culture shapes these evolved moral sentiments and does or does not allow them to be expressed, this public can be disabused of the notion that it has no responsibility for its actions or that it cannot change the actions of others because we "evolved to be like this." The third reason to update Dewey is that advances in evolutionary moral psychology have taught us something different about human nature than Dewey believed to be the case. In works like *Freedom and Culture* and *Does Human Nature Change?* Dewey calls attention to the near infinite malleability of human nature by culture and is very resistant to the idea that our brutishness or our cooperativeness

might be more than the result of acculturation.³⁸ However, evolutionary moral psychology has strongly suggested that we have innate moral sentiments and that these leave us with certain strong tendencies. Thus, if we wish to be faithful to Dewey and follow his logic of inquiry rather than his conclusions, we should update our ethical practices to be cognizant of this fact. Including it will allow us, in a naturalist and pragmatist fashion, to better understand the possibilities of and means for achieving our ethical goals.

draft

³⁸ Dewey, John. 1938 Does Human Nature Change? LW 13, 288 + *Freedom and Culture + Experience and Nature*.

draft