

ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY AND THEISM

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Abstract. Human beings are the products of many thousands of years of biological evolution, and this process occurs in accordance with the principles of natural selection originally articulated and defended by Charles Darwin and developed and defended further in the modern synthesis of the 20th century. In this paper, I consider how it may be thought that this fact threatens the rationality of belief in the Christian God. These threats are countenanced with respect to issues of design, randomness, suffering, and the objectivity of ethics. I argue that while some versions of Christian belief, such as those grounded in a literalist reading of the Genesis creation story or those committed to the image of God thesis, may be threatened by a Darwinian worldview, there are nonetheless plausible versions of Christian belief that are immune to Darwinian challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings exist as the consequence of an evolutionary process which has spanned over many thousands of years. As such, human beings share a close common evolutionary ancestry with the great apes and we are genetically related to all other life forms. The evolution of new species of organisms has been a product of the forces of natural and sexual selection as articulated in the theories of Charles Darwin. Additionally, Darwin's theories have been developed further and offered additional support through further developments in the biological sciences since the mid-nineteenth century when Darwin's works first appeared in print. This further development and support of the evolutionary understanding of the origin and nature of species has been significantly enhanced through the modern synthesis of the twentieth century in which an understanding of the principles of genetics was conjoined with the principles of natural and sexual selection found in Darwin's work.

Insofar as human beings are products of such evolutionary processes, it is reasonable to think that many of our cognitive capacities and innate behavioral dispositions have been shaped by natural selective pressures and that there should be some semblance of our cognitive capacities and behavioral tendencies found in other animal species with whom we are closely genetically related, such as the great apes. Indeed, there is well-supported evidence that (a) our innate tendencies to engage in altruistic acts — that is, actions intended to help other human beings at some risk to ourselves — as well as (b) our tendency to pursue alternative pathways of action in response to the same kinds of stimuli as opposed to acting in accordance with rote, simplistic neural programming are both products of natural selection. These capacities are both intimately related to our moral sense and our capacity for free will. Thus, evolutionary biology should play some role in understanding the existence and nature of our ethical thinking and our freedom of will.

Some people believe that if these things are true — that is, if human beings and their innate moral sense and their capacity for free will are products of evolution — then this somehow challenges the rationality of belief in God or the belief that we are special beings made in God's image and called upon to live in accordance with the moral law.¹ However, such is not the case. While evolutionary biology may challenge certain types of design arguments for God's existence, such as that of William Paley, it does little else to challenge the rationality of faith or the belief that we are made in God's image.²

1 Some authors who argue in this way are among others Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (W W Norton & Co Inc, 1985); Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (Simon & Schuster, 1995); James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990). Of these thinkers, I believe that Rachels provides the most philosophically rigorous defense of this view. For a detailed reply to Rachels, see John Lemos, *Commonsense Darwinism: Evolution, Morality and Human Condition* (Open Court Publishing Company, 2008), Ch. 5; and John Lemos, "Rachels on Darwinism and Theism", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2003). For some interesting critical responses to Dawkins, see James A. Sadowsky, "Did Darwin Destroy the Design Argument?", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1988) and Kenneth T. Gallagher, "Dawkins in Biomorph Land", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1992); Kenneth T. Gallagher, "Dawkins, Darwin, and Design", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (1993). For an interesting critical response to Dennett, see Errol E. Harris, "Darwinism and God", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1999).

2 See William Paley, *Natural Theology* (Rivington, [1802] 1819).

By the term “God” I reference a supremely perfect creator and sustainer of the universe who knows and loves us. “God” references an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good being; and on the Christian worldview this being became incarnate in the person of Jesus to give evidence of his reality and to send a new moral message and to clarify that those who believe in Him and follow his message shall gain eternal life. In what follows, I will give a partial defense of the view that the truth of Darwinian evolution does not conflict with God’s existence nor undermine the rationality of Christianity. I will do so by focusing on the following issues: design, randomness, suffering, and the objectivity of ethics.

II. DESIGN

Now, why might someone think Darwinian evolution conflicts with Christianity or renders belief in the Christian worldview irrational? As noted, one might think it undermines the design argument for God’s existence. However, regarding this matter several points need to be made. First, not all design arguments are the same. In the 19th century William Paley noted the complex design of organisms and how their parts are coordinated in complex ways to provide for the survival of organisms. Given a lack of understanding of how such functional complexity could come into being without an intelligent designer, he was led to conclude that there must be a God as this is the most rational way to explain the complex design that we see in nature. As noted, this kind of argument is undermined by the truth of Darwinism. We no longer need to appeal to God’s existence to explain how the specific complex functional parts of organisms came into existence. Thanks to Darwin, we can give perfectly cogent naturalistic explanations for such things.

However, not all design arguments for God’s existence look to the functional complexity in the design of biological organisms and then move to God’s existence as the best explanation for this. For instance, Richard Swinburne³ has developed and defended a different kind of design argument which is fully compatible with Darwinian evolution. While I cannot do full justice to his argument here, I would note that the basic idea behind it is that in doing science we explain regularities found in nature in terms of scientific

3 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Clarendon Press, 1991).

laws. We also explain the existence of such laws in terms of more fundamental laws. But, since science explains phenomena in terms of laws and laws are explained in terms of more fundamental laws, then science will be incapable of explaining the most fundamental laws. However, the existence of the most fundamental laws and their consistent operation throughout the universe is a phenomenon that itself cries out for explanation, an explanation which cannot be given in natural scientific terms and which, then, makes rational the appeal to intelligent design.⁴

One might find fault with this version of the design argument too, but, and this is important, one would have to appeal to things other than Darwinism to do so. It's a mistake to talk about the design argument for God, because there are different kinds of design arguments. Darwinism is only relevant to refuting some kinds of design arguments, like that of Paley, while it is irrelevant to refuting design arguments like that of Swinburne. Now one might say that the best kind of design argument is Paley's argument or some other Paley-type argument which appeals to the functional complexity in biological organisms. And one might go on to argue that since Darwinism undermines any of these, it undermines the design argument. But to argue in this way will beg the question unless one has good evidence that such Paley-type design arguments are the best varieties of design arguments. I for one don't know how this can be demonstrated.

Besides the preceding considerations, it is also important to note that even if there were no good design arguments for God's existence and even if Darwinism was instrumental in refuting some of them, it would still not necessarily follow from this that Darwinism undermines the rationality of belief in God. For there are other ways of giving defense of the rationality of such belief — e.g. ontological arguments, arguments from contingency, arguments from religious experience, arguments from moral experience, etc. — and it is unclear how, if at all, Darwinism would be relevant to refuting these kinds of arguments for God's existence.

4 For a nice summary and critique of Swinburne's design argument see Gary Doore, "The Argument From Design: Some Better Reasons for Agreeing with Hume", *Religious Studies* 16, no. 2 (1980).

III. RANDOMNESS

Now even if the truth of Darwinism does not by itself show that there is no God or that there can be no good arguments for the existence of God, it still may be thought that the truth of Darwinism conflicts with the belief that human beings have been willfully and intentionally created by God in his own image. According to Darwinism, human beings are the products of thousands upon thousands of years of a process of natural selection. According to Darwinism, human beings exist today due to the occurrence of random favorable mutations that enabled humans or human-like precursors to survive and reproduce. Had these random mutations not occurred and/or had environmental conditions been different humans might never have existed. A critic could argue that if, as Darwinism suggests, random mutation plays a crucial role in the story about how we came to exist, then God could have no hand in our creation, for God acts intentionally, not randomly.

In reply to this concern, I would note that the random mutations that occur in nature are at least in principle capable of being explained, for they are material events governed by the laws of nature. If the laws of nature are a product of God's creation, as Swinburne maintains, then God could have set things up so that eventually human beings would have come into existence. Thus, there is no essential incompatibility between the prevalence of seemingly random mutation in Darwinian natural selection and the view that God creates human beings in his own image. Notice I say here that "there is no essential incompatibility." I say this because if it turns out that what we perceive as randomness at work in the process of evolution turns out to be a fundamental randomness of the sort which some believe to exist in quantum level phenomena, as opposed to a merely perceived randomness where in reality deterministic processes occur in a manner hidden to us, then the truth of Darwinism would pose a threat to God's willful, intentional creation of human beings in his own image.

Here we must keep an open mind. Darwinism gives us a theory which can make sense of the origin of human beings even if genuine quantum-style indeterminacy is operative in that process. If such genuine indeterminacy is at work, then I don't see how we can reasonably think that human beings have been willfully and intentionally made in God's image. But (1) we don't know that there is genuine quantum-style indeterminacy at work in evolutionary

processes and (2) if there were such genuine randomness, while this would undermine an important aspect of the Christian world view, it seems to me that much still might be preserved in the Christian world view. For example, it still might be reasonable to believe that there is a good and wise and loving creator God, and he could have become incarnate and he still might provide the prospect of eternal life for his followers. Again, though, having said this, if there is genuine indeterminacy at work in evolution and not perceived randomness in which deterministic law is operative but unknown to us, then the image of God thesis and God's control over the path of evolution are both challenged.

IV. SUFFERING

Another way in which it may be thought that the truth of Darwinism challenges the rationality of belief in God is the way in which the process of natural selection works. A central feature of what drives evolution is the occurrence of random mutations within species, some of which are advantageous to survival and reproductive success and others of which are damaging to these, if not outright crippling, leading to ensured suffering and death. As Michael Ruse writes:

There are some mutations which have quite horrendous effects, causing the most devastating of physical and psychological illnesses. Young children compulsively mutilating themselves, for instance, wracked with pain, their mental deficiencies depriving them of any chance of happiness and a normal life. Is eternal bliss for any of us — that child, the Pope, Mother Teresa, you or me — worth the suffering of that child? Dare one say yes?⁵

The question we must face here is why would a supremely good and all-knowing and all-powerful God set up the universe in such a way that the creation of human beings is achieved through such a harsh and painful process in which many beings are brutally unfit for survival and reproduction? Given the suffering inherent to the Darwinian picture of evolution, isn't it more reasonable to think that there is no such supremely perfect creator God? The Christian is here faced with a genuine mystery, that is not easily solved. But for the Darwinian naturalist who rejects belief in God, there is no mystery

⁵ Michael Ruse, *Can a Darwinian be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 139.

here. These tragic deformities are just the result of random mutations operating within a biological world driven by the blind forces of natural selection.

One point that should be made here is that the alleged Darwinian challenge to Christianity countenanced in these considerations doesn't really require any appeal to Darwinism. It is really just the old problem of evil being presented under Darwinian trappings. Even if Darwinism was false and human beings were not the products of evolution by natural selection, it would still be the case that there is much suffering in the world. And if it is believed that this world was made by a supremely perfect being, then there would still be the mystery of why God allows for all this suffering, death, and destruction. Whether Darwinism is known to be true or not, Christians will still face this puzzle about why evil exists. Thus, there's a very real sense in which Darwinism presents no new problem here for the rationality of belief in God.

I would note as well that the problem of evil has never struck me as demonstrating that there is no supremely perfect creator and sustainer of the universe nor that a belief in such a being is positively irrational. It might be that such a being exists and we are incapable of understanding why he allows such suffering and despair to exist. Additionally, there may be some good evidentiary reasons or moral/pragmatic reasons which justify belief in God's existence despite the mystery of evil into which it leads one.

Daniel Dennett⁶ expresses opposition to such a response to the problem of evil. He argues that if the belief in God leads one to throw up one's hands, admitting ignorance as to why evil exists, then it cannot be rational to adopt belief in a supremely perfect creator God. But, Michael Ruse⁷ provides an interesting response that the Darwinian Christian might have to Dennett. He notes that on the Darwinian view our cognitive capacities have been designed to help us survive and reproduce.

The Darwinian knows at once that our limitations come from our having evolved in certain ways. These are ways appropriate to our station, that is, midrange primates who came down out of the trees and went into the garbage and offal business. We do not as a matter of everyday practice think in quantum terms because our world is not a quantum world. We do not

6 Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*.

7 Ruse, *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?*

think (to take another example) in non-Euclidean terms because our world is not a non-Euclidean world. Our perceptual space is not curved.⁸

Ruse's point is that the Darwinian can make sense of the fact that some aspects of reality may well be very difficult if not impossible for us to understand, because our cognitive capacities have evolved to help us solve problems relating to survival and reproductive success. Given the intellectual tools evolution has granted us, we simply may not be able to make sense of certain aspects of reality.

This point can help support the Christian Darwinian in facing up to the mystery of God's allowing so much pain and suffering into a world He created. Ruse writes:

[W]hen one is dealing with a system like Christianity, which is grappling with some of the really deep issues which face humankind — physical pain and moral evil, particularly — precisely because one is a Darwinian one ought to be sympathetic when the system runs into doubt and mystery. Being a Darwinian does not compel one to be a Christian; but, because one is a Darwinian one is opening the way for someone to be a Christian.⁹

Ruse's point is that when the Christian runs into trouble making sense of why a supremely perfect creator of the universe would allow for so much pain and suffering, then from the Darwinian perspective we might simply see this as one of those instances where our limited cognitive capacities designed for survival and reproductive success just get in the way of our comprehension. Here he sees Darwinism as paving the way for an explanation as to why one might rationally believe that God exists while admitting that there are certain mysteries surrounding His existence, such as why God would allow so much evil into the world.

V. THE OBJECTIVITY OF ETHICS

I now want to turn to another way in which Darwinism might be thought to conflict with the Christian world view. On the Christian world view, it is believed that there are objective moral norms which we ought to obey. God lays down the moral law and we are to obey it. As such, the Christian believes in objective moral facts. However, in recent years it has been argued

8 Ibid., 140–41.

9 Ibid., 142.

that the truth of Darwinism conflicts with the belief that there are such objective moral truths. Michael Ruse¹⁰ and Richard Joyce¹¹, for instance, have both argued that the truth of Darwinism implies there are no objective moral facts. The basic idea behind their argument is that we should only believe in the existence of moral facts if they play some role in explaining our moral beliefs — why we believe what we do regarding moral matters. They go on to contend that since Darwinism is true and since Darwinism gives a cogent explanation for our moral beliefs which makes no appeal to moral facts, we then have no reason to believe that there are any moral facts.

They both contend that the foundational moral beliefs, which our moral sense inclines us to accept as true and from which we go on to develop more detailed moral systems, are influenced by the pressures of natural selection. In other words, the foundational moral principles which shape our moral worldview are believed not because they are true but because they are adaptive. Why do we think that killing, lying, or stealing from our family, friends or neighbors is wrong? It is not because these things are objectively wrong, it is not because they reference some objective moral facts which are the ground of their wrongness; rather, we believe these things because it is adaptive — it aids us in doing well at surviving and reproducing. They rightly note that human beings are inherently social animals. We don't do well living in isolation from other human beings. Our best chances at reproductive success are met by living in community with other human beings. Furthermore, humans flourish — do better at surviving and reproducing — when they live in communities in which people do well at cooperating with one another. A community in which persons frequently engaged in killing, lying to, and stealing from their family, friends, and neighbors would not be a cooperative community and, thus, it would poorly serve the ends of human survival and reproduction. Belief in the objective wrongness of such community destroying, uncooperative behavior, helps facilitate obedience to these norms and it, thus, contributes to the inclusive fitness of those who hold such beliefs. Thus, there is widespread belief in the truth of such basic moral beliefs because it is adaptive, not because it is objectively true that we should live in such ways.

10 Michael Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics", in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Mathew H. Nitecki and Doris V. Nitecki (SUNY press, 1993); Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Prometheus, 1998).

11 Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (MIT Press, 2006).

In response to this line of argument it might be thought that even if the beliefs we form are adaptive, there may still be good reason to think they are objectively true. For instance, accepting certain fundamental logical principles or basic mathematical principles is adaptive, but we aren't then led to deny the objective truth of the law of the excluded middle or that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But, Ruse and Joyce contend that the best explanation for the adaptiveness of logical, mathematical, and scientific belief hinges upon the fact that such beliefs are true. Whereas moral beliefs would be adaptive even if they were all false. In this way, they head off such an objection to their view.

In my *Commonsense Darwinism*¹² I deal at length with the anti-objectivist evolutionary ethics of Ruse and Joyce. There I concede that if we think the objective truth of our moral assertions has to do with their accurately reflecting the will of God or capturing non-natural properties of goodness and badness, then their argument would appear to have merit. As Ruse has said, "There is something distinctly peculiar about saying that God wants certain things of us, but that not only is our behavior in no way predicated on God's wishes but that what we do might be something quite different because our biology has led us thus wise."¹³ If one views the objective ground of moral truth as residing in divine or non-natural properties wholly divorced from the facts of evolved human nature, then one would reasonably be led to view the marriage of evolutionary theory and objective morality as paradoxical. However, as I argue in my book, there is another option for locating the ground of objective moral truth, namely in the facts of our evolved human nature, and I go on to develop and defend an Aristotelian objectivist approach to ethics one which I think can be given some support from Darwinian considerations.

The basic idea behind my own Darwinian Aristotelian objectivist approach to ethics involves taking note of the fact that things are good when they do their characteristic activity well—knives are good when they cut well, hearts are good when they circulate the blood well—and the virtues of things are those properties which enable them to do well at their characteristic activity. Thus, a sharp blade and a firm grip are virtues of a knife. What is characteristic of human beings is our rational and social natures, and so human goodness is

12 Lemos, *Commonsense Darwinism*.

13 Ruse, "The New Evolutionary Ethics", 157.

to be understood in terms of what enables us to do well at rationality and social living. As such, various virtues, such as justice, courage, temperance, will be seen as necessary to human flourishing. In this way, we can ground a conception of moral goodness on objective facts of human nature.

Richard Joyce¹⁴ acknowledges that were such a naturalistic approach to ethics defensible then it would be able to answer the kind of anti-objectivist arguments forged by him and Ruse. However, he makes four different arguments against such Aristotelian objectivist approaches. In what follows, I will address each of these arguments.

Joyce's first complaint with Aristotelian objectivist naturalism is that it cannot make sense of moral transgression.

To the extent that we expect a moral system to have room for the idea that a wrongdoer deserves punishment for her crimes, a system of hypothetical imperatives will not serve. The basic problem is that someone who fails to act so as to secure her ends has principally wronged herself, but a value system revolving around self-harm doesn't look much like a moral system. Punishment, in such a system, would amount to a bizarre institution of inflicting further harm upon a person because she has harmed herself. On such a view Jack the Ripper should elicit our deepest sympathy, since what was really wrong about his killing all those women is that he radically undermined his own flourishing.¹⁵

Here he makes the familiar suggestion that on an Aristotelian conception of morality the moral norms — the moral imperatives — are hypothetical, commanding us to act in ways so as to serve our own flourishing. As such, failure to conform with such imperatives would be damaging to ourselves and be wrong because of this. This leads him to say that such a view cannot make sense of the fittingness of blame and punishment for wrongdoing, since the principle wrong of immoral conduct is the harm done to the person who acts wrongly.

The argument here is problematic on at least two fronts, however. First, it can make sense to blame and punish someone who has harmed himself, because he might not know he has harmed himself and the punishment may motivate him to not continue doing so. Second, the Aristotelian need not view blame and punishment solely as means to keep people from harming themselves. He may be equally concerned for the flourishing of others. So,

14 Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*.

15 Ibid., 171.

the Aristotelian doesn't have to think that Jack the Ripper is bad just because he damages his own prospects for flourishing. Rather, he is also bad because he destroys the opportunity for others to flourish, and for this reason he deserves punishment.

Joyce also argues that Aristotelian naturalists cannot make sense of moral praise.

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 an assassin for his ruthless efficiency if we admitted that he is good at his profession. Thus, if evolutionary biology by the same logic allows us to call a person "good" (in that she is a flourishing example of humankind), this must be a "praisefree" use of a normative term — hardly a moral usage.¹⁶

Joyce is correct in asserting that when we say a heart and assassin are good insofar as they do their characteristic activities well we are not thereby praising them. But it does not follow that when we say the flourishing human being — the human who does well at rational activity and social living — is good we must also be using a praise free notion of goodness. For one thing, the reason why we are not praising the heart when we acknowledge its goodness is because it is not morally responsible for its being good. But human beings are typically morally responsible for having the virtues necessary to flourish as human beings. Thus, it is typically the case that when we say a human is good qua flourishing human being we are praising him. Additionally, while the assassin may be morally responsible for being good qua assassin, when we say he is good qua assassin, this is not necessarily to praise him. For there is no essential connection between being a good assassin and being a good human being. Think of the many assassins who engage in wrongdoing which contributes to the breakdown of their communities. Someone may be a good assassin while being a terrible human being and his well-performed assassin activities may even contribute to his badness as a human being. In contrast, it is inconceivable how one can be morally responsible for his being a good exemplar of human rationality and community membership and fail to be praiseworthy, since to be good at this will require possession of virtues like

¹⁶ Ibid.

courage, justice, kindness, temperance, etc. By comparison, the good assassin can be unjust and mean and yet still be good qua assassin.

Joyce also argues that Aristotelian ethical naturalism cannot make sense of the overridingness of moral norms. When a person acknowledges a moral “ought,” he should see that this is all things considered what ought to be done. But Joyce continues:

Suppose it is true that evolutionary biology can somehow underwrite the prescription of “Jack ought not to kill people.” On what grounds would the “ought” claim override any competing “ought” claims that might arise? Suppose that Jack gets immense pleasure from killing people, and suppose that gaining pleasure is one of Jack’s chosen ends; thus there is a competing hypothetical imperative: “Jack ought to kill people.” Who is to say that the former overcomes the latter, that the former has a “to be doneness” that the latter lacks?¹⁷

Joyce believes there is nothing in the Aristotelian approach which can explain why Jack ought not kill people if Jack derives immense pleasure from doing so. He is asking why it is more important to satisfy the end of human flourishing which involves not killing people than to satisfy one’s heartfelt desires, which might be satisfied by killing people.

However, for the Aristotelian these worries are misplaced. The point of ethics is to give an account of human goodness or human flourishing and then to derive a list of virtues from that account. Along with the list of virtues, there would be a derivative list of do’s and don’t’s. So, for instance, since justice is a virtue necessary to human flourishing and since killing innocent people is unjust, one ought not to do so. Given that living in community with others is a part of what is involved in human flourishing and since acts of injustice, like killing innocent people, lead to the breakdown of community, the Aristotelian can plausibly maintain that the good or flourishing human being is just and, consequently, one ought not to kill.

Now, if someone, like Jack, comes along and says, “What I really want to do in life is kill people, so I ought to kill people,” then does this present a problem for the Aristotelian? Not at all. For Jack only has justification for his conclusion (“I ought to kill people”) if he can show how that conclusion is derived from a conception of human flourishing that is equally or more warranted than the Aristotelian conception, and I seriously doubt that he or

17 Ibid., 172.

anyone can show this. Joyce himself does not endeavor to show this, but he does say, “One could, with just as much *prima facie* warrant, assert that the ends that a person cares about in the most heartfelt way (i.e. nasty desires in Jack’s case) are the ones from which the overriding imperatives derive.”¹⁸

Perhaps, *contra* Aristotelians, Joyce would argue that flourishing involves the satisfaction of one’s most heartfelt desires. But are we really to think this conception of flourishing can compete with Aristotle’s? It is obvious that flourishing involves more than this. Flourishing has to do with the successful performance of activities that are characteristic of beings of a kind. That’s why the good heart does well at pumping blood, the good stomach does well at digesting food, and the good doctor does well at healing. Since there is no essential connection between satisfying one’s most heartfelt desires and doing well at the characteristic activity of human kind, this proposed conception of human flourishing is off the mark.

Finally, Joyce also argues that moral properties have an intrinsic action guidingness to them such that they provide persons with reasons for acting irrespective of their ends. So, for instance, to believe that justice is good provides a person with reasons to be just whether that person desires to be just or not. He contends that Aristotelian naturalism cannot account for this. If the Aristotelian ethics works, then getting clear about the characteristic activities of human beings — their social and rational natures — should then give persons reasons to act in conformity with their given nature irrespective of their desires. Our human nature would in this way place practical demands upon us. However, Joyce thinks this will not work.¹⁹

Contra Joyce, I contend that clarification of the characteristic activities of human beings does entail certain practical demands, because noting this provides the key to giving a correct account of the nature of human goodness and a correct account of human goodness gives humans some reason to pursue human goodness. There is intrinsic action-guidingness in the description of human nature because it leads to an account of the human good, and such an account gives some reason for humans to act so as to attain the human good.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 174.

However, I am not claiming that clarification of human nature or the human good gives all persons overriding reasons to act in certain ways. Whether or not reasons are overriding will be relative to the interests of persons. Whether or not an account of human nature or the human good will give one overriding reasons to pursue the human good will depend upon how much one cares about being good. Perhaps, one cares more about being pleased and one finds pleasure in things that are incompatible with the human good/human flourishing. Here it may be thought that this will not suffice as a response to Joyce, because what he really means by saying moral properties are intrinsically action-guiding is that they provide overriding reasons to act in certain ways and to be overriding reasons they must motivate anyone cognizant of such reason to act in accord with them. But, if this is what he intends, then he places too high of a demand on the moral theorist. It is not the moral theorist's job to convince every person how he ought to act, to give every person overriding and sufficiently motivating reason to do what he ought. It is enough to give an accurate account of human nature and the human good and to show how the virtues are derived from this. If this does not give every person overriding and sufficiently motivating reason to pursue these ends, then so be it. If a person does not see a correct account of the human good as overriding and sufficiently motivating reason to act in pursuit of it, this may be more a reflection of his bad character than it is a problem with the account.²⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

While my remarks on the matters covered in this essay have been somewhat brief, I do hope they show that, contra the “new atheism” of thinkers, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, the truth of Darwinism is not so obviously a threat, if any, to the truth of the Christian worldview. While we must give up on a literalist reading of the creation story of Genesis

20 The point I make here has some kinship with a point Paul Bloomfield, “Review: The Evolution of Morality”, *Mind* 116, no. 461 (2006) makes in a review of Joyce's book. In responding to Joyce, the Bloomfield believes the moral naturalist would (and should) say: “[T]he moral facts, like facts about good parenting, are what they are. What we make of them, how they make us feel, the importance we give them, the practices we adopt for praising and punishing, etc. are all independent of their existence, and it is only establishing their existence that is the concern of the moral naturalist.” (180).

and certain forms of the design argument for God, neither of these is essential to a Christian world view. And if it turns out that there is a fundamental, metaphysical, randomness at work in the evolutionary processes that have given rise to the human species, then the image of God thesis is challenged. But, as I've argued, we don't really know that this is so and if it turns out to be so, there still may be ways to preserve much of value in the Christian world view. Lastly, regarding ethics, I've argued that, despite their arguments to the contrary, neither Ruse nor Joyce have shown that Darwinism threatens the objective foundations for ethics. For an Aristotelian naturalism about ethics can be preserved in which objective moral values are grounded in the facts of human nature — a nature which, if Christianity has it right, was bestowed upon us by God and whose commandments serve as guides leading us to a well-lived flourishing life.

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