

THESIS

ETHICAL REALISM AND THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA

Submitted By

Aaron Rabinowitz

Department of Philosophy

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Elizabeth Tropman

Matthew MacKenzie

Matthew Hickey

ABSTRACT

ETHICAL REALISM AND THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA

In this thesis, I will examine a recent objection against ethical realism put forth by Sharon Street, a prominent advocate of ethical constructivism. Street's Darwinian Dilemma argues that ethical realism is incompatible with evolutionary psychology and that attempts to reconcile the two theories will result in the unacceptable epistemic conclusion that humans lack ethical knowledge. Street believes that the Darwinian Dilemma provides a strong reason for abandoning ethical realism in favor of ethical constructivism.

It is my contention that the ethical realist can successfully defend herself against Street's objection. I will consider several possible responses that are available to the ethical realist for defusing the Darwinian Dilemma, including my preferred response which I believe has largely been neglected in the literature. I will argue that these responses provide the ethical realist with a functional defense against Street's challenge, and that ethical realism therefore remains superior to ethical constructivism.

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INTRODUCTION

Within metaethics, there is an ongoing debate between realists and constructivists concerning the nature of ethical truths. Ethical realists claim that ethical truths are objective, in the sense that they are true independent of any individual's hypothetical or actual beliefs about the ethical truths. Ethical constructivists, on the other hand, claim that ethical truths are ultimately subjective, in the sense that they depend on being entailed from within a practical point of view. So, for example, an ethical realist would claim that torturing others for pleasure is ethically prohibited, no matter what anyone believes about recreational torture. Conversely, the ethical constructivist would claim that recreational torture is only ethically prohibited because it is entailed from within our practical viewpoints that we shouldn't torture people for pleasure. On the constructivist view, if it followed from our practical point of views that we ought to engage in recreational torture, then it would be ethical to do so, whereas on the ethical realist view it would be unethical to torture an individual for pleasure, even if doing so was entailed by one's practical point of view. I believe it fair to say that the debate between these views has serious implications for our understanding of ethical beliefs and actions.

In this thesis, I will examine a recent objection against ethical realism put forth by Sharon Street, a prominent advocate of ethical constructivism. Street argues that ethical realism is incompatible with evolutionary psychology and that attempts to reconcile them result in the unacceptable epistemic conclusion that humans lack ethical knowledge. Street believes this objection provides a strong reason for abandoning ethical realism in favor of ethical constructivism.

It is my contention that the ethical realist can successfully defend herself against Street's objection. In chapter one, I will define the competing positions of ethical realism and ethical constructivism. I will make use of the Euthyphro dilemma to clearly distinguish these two positions and illuminate their relative strengths and weaknesses. In chapter two, I will present Street's objection and show how it poses a significant threat to ethical realism and not to ethical constructivism. In chapter three, I will consider several possible responses to Street's objection, beginning with an analysis of three responses by prominent ethical realists. I will then present my preferred responses to Street's objection, which I believe have largely been neglected in the literature. I will argue that these responses actually provides the ethical realist with the best possible defense against Street's challenge.

CHAPTER 1: ETHICAL REALISM AND THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

1. The Euthyphro Dilemma

Consider this: Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods? (Plato, 10a)

This is the dilemma that Socrates confronts Euthyphro with on the steps of the same courthouse where Socrates will later be sentenced to death. In this chapter, I will show how the Euthyphro dilemma mirrors and illuminates an important debate in metaethics. To that end, it will be helpful to first understand the dilemma in its original context. In the dialogue, Euthyphro is on his way to prosecute his own father for the accidental murder of a slave. When he arrives at the courthouse he recognizes Socrates, who is there to defend himself against accusations of impiety, and engages him in conversation. Socrates, learning of Euthyphro's intention to prosecute his own father, asks Euthyphro how he can feel justified committing such an apparently impious act. Euthyphro responds that his specialized knowledge of piety allows him to act in such a way that most others would consider impious, because he knows that the gods will favor his actions. Socrates then asks Euthyphro to use his specialized knowledge to define piety for him, so that he may better defend himself against accusations of impiety. Naturally, Euthyphro fails to give Socrates a satisfactory definition of piety, for just as Euthyphro settles on the definition of the pious as that which all the gods love, Socrates confronts him with the dilemma above. According to Socrates, it is insufficient simply to equate the pious to that which the gods love, because the question remains whether the pious is pious because the gods love it or if the gods love it because it is pious.

Euthyphro initially has trouble even understanding the dilemma that Socrates is presenting. When Euthyphro claims that the pious is whatever all the gods love and the impious

is whatever all the gods hate, I believe he means merely to posit an identity relationship between the property of piousness and the property of being loved by all the gods. On this view, if something has the property of piousness then it must be loved by all the gods, and vice versa. Of course, Socrates remains unsatisfied with this definition. He believes some explanation of the relationship between the property of piousness and the love of the gods is still required for an adequate account of piety.

Socrates presents Euthyphro with two possible accounts of the relationship between the property of piousness and the property of god-love. It is these two possible accounts that constitute the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. Either it is the love of the gods that makes something pious, or it is the fact that something is pious that makes the gods love it. So, for example, respecting one's father and not prosecuting him for murder is either pious because the gods love it, or it is loved by the gods because it is pious.¹

Euthyphro eventually defends what seems to him the more natural option, that it is the love of the gods that makes something pious and not some feature of the pious thing that makes the gods love it. I will call this the subjective horn of the dilemma, because on this view piousness is a subjective property. For our purposes, something is subjective if its existence ultimately depends on the beliefs and attitudes of some actual or hypothetical individual. Conversely, if something exists independently of any individual's beliefs or attitudes about it,

¹ If the terms 'pious' and 'god-loved' are confusing, it is fine to think of the dilemma in terms of 'good' and 'valued by the gods'. The dilemma then, is whether good things are valued by the gods because they are good, or are good because they are valued by the gods. Note that, using this terminology, the dilemma would still be dealing with the more general evaluative good and not the more narrow ethical good.

actual or hypothetical, then it is objective.² In Euthyphro's opinion, whether something is pious depends on whether it is loved by the gods, and so for him piety is a subjective property.

The subjective horn of the dilemma has the advantage of providing what appears to be a straightforward and plausible account of the relationship between the quality of piousness and the love of the gods. If the gods love something, that makes it pious, simple as that. The problem with this horn is that things are not that simple. Euthyphro is not a naive subjectivist about piety. He doesn't think that the love or approval of just anyone can determine what is pious, or else he would have more concern over everyone's criticism of his suit against his father. For Euthyphro, it is specifically the love of the gods that determines what is pious, because only the gods are supremely rational and so bestow their love wisely. However, if the gods are acting rationally in loving some things and not others, then it follows that they must possess some reason for loving some things and not others. The most straightforward explanation of such reasons would be that some things possess a feature that gives the gods a reason to love them and deem them pious. In order for this explanation to avoid circularity, the feature that provides a reason for the gods to love something must be independent of the god's beliefs and attitudes, or else their approbation really only rests on itself and so collapses into capriciousness. For example, if respecting one's elders is pious because the gods love it, and the gods only bestow their love rationally, then there must be some independent feature of respecting one's elders which gives the gods a reason to love it. If this were not the case, and there were no reason for the gods to love respecting one's elders, then they could just as easily choose not to love it. In such a situation, one might wonder

² I clarify the sense in which subjective things are belief dependent and objective things are belief independent in section three of this chapter.

why one should respect the things that the gods chose to love, knowing that their choice is ultimately unjustified.

The need to posit some independent feature of the pious thing that will serve as a reason for the gods to love that thing pushes the debate towards the objective horn of the dilemma. On this horn, the gods love what is pious because it is pious, meaning because it possesses some objective feature that merits or justifies their love. As Cohen puts it in his analysis of the dilemma:

...if the gods do have reasons for loving what is pious, it is to these reasons that we should look in trying to define 'pious'. If the gods have a reason for loving pious acts, it will be that these acts have, or are thought by the gods to have, certain features. It is these features, then, that should serve to define piety. (Cohen 2001, 13)

If we are going to assume that the gods have reasons for loving some things and not others, those reasons, it seems, must ultimately depend on features of the things they love. It then seems that those features will constitute the essence of piety, while the love of the gods is merely an accidental or contingent property of the pious thing. At best, the love of the gods is a decent indicator of whether something is pious, but is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be pious.

Naturally, like the subjective horn of the dilemma, the objective horn also has its disadvantages. As we've seen, it avoids the problems of arbitrariness and capriciousness by providing an objective basis for the gods to love some things and not others. However, it does so by positing the existence of some mysterious feature of objects that commands the love of the gods. This might seem problematic for a variety of reasons. For example, if there is an objective fact about what things the gods should love, then it follows that the gods could err in what they

choose to love, such that something could be pious even while all the gods hated it. Even if the gods are so supremely rational that they would never actually make such an error, the lack of an essential constitutive connection between the love of the gods and something's piousness allows for the possibility that the two could conceivably come apart. Some might take this as a reductio of the objectivist account of piety, because it shows that the view simply fails to grasp what we mean by 'piety'. They could reasonably argue that the concept of piety is necessarily connected to the love of the gods, and that any theory which fails to recognize that connection is therefore unacceptable. So it is that both horns of the dilemma face serious challenges.

2. Applying the Euthyphro Dilemma

Though originally phrased in the narrow terminology of god-love and piety, the Euthyphro dilemma has significant implications outside of questions of piety. I believe this dilemma maps onto and illuminates the realist/constructivist debate in metaethics. On the one side are the ethical realists, who accept the objective horn of the dilemma by positing the existence of an objective ethical aspect of reality. On the other side of the debate are the ethical constructivists, who accept the subjective horn of the dilemma while attempting to retain some approximation of objectivity for ethics.

I should note that non-cognitivist forms of anti-realism, such as the theories defended by Ayer (1952) and Blackburn (1993), are not represented in this debate. Non-cognitivist theories of ethics reject the notion that ethical claims possess the sort of content that can be cognized and assigned truth values. These views will often argue that ethical claims still have content, just that it isn't the sort of content that warrants a truth value. Expressivism, for example, argues that ethical claims such as "murder is wrong" are actually expressions of an individual's pro or

negative attitudes, akin to “Murder, Boo!” or “Murder, Yay!”. Certainly we can discuss whether it is true if an individual actually dislikes murder, but the expression “murder, boo!” is not the sort of claim that can be true or false. By excluding these views from my thesis, I do not mean to suggest that they lack merit. It is simply that I wish to focus on the debate between ethical realists and the constructivist version of anti-realists and how it relates to the Euthyphro dilemma. Non-cognitive anti-realism does not correspond to either horn of the dilemma and so will not be discussed any further. For our purposes, it will be assumed that ethical claims are the sorts of things that have a truth value, so that we may focus on discovering what makes ethical claims true or false. I shall now turn to two promising metaethical theories that attempt to answer this question, and show how these positions mirror the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma.

3. Defining Ethical Realism

Several intelligent individuals have recently put a great deal of effort into defining and defending ethical realism. Rather than catalogue every position that has laid claim to the title of ‘moral realism’ or ‘ethical realism’,³ I will focus on the sole claim that I believe is essential to ethical realism, and then contrast this theory with what I believe is its strongest metaethical competitors.

The only tenet that I believe is necessary for ethical realism is the metaphysical claim that *there exist objective ethical properties, facts, and truths*. ‘Objective’ here is again defined as independent of the beliefs and attitudes of any individual, actual or hypothetical, about what is ethical. Just as there are facts and truths concerning the properties of molecules that hold independent of any individual’s beliefs or attitudes about molecules, there are ethical facts and

³ For a current and well-structured summary, see FitzPatrick (2009).

truths that hold for the ethical aspects of reality, independent of any individual's ethical beliefs or attitudes. Following Shafer-Landau, I will sometimes refer to this sort of objectivity as stance-independence, which he defines as independent of "ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective" (Shafer-Landau 2003, 15). So, for example, the ethical realist sees it as an objective ethical truth that the act of genocide, defined as the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group, is *prima facie* wrong. According to the ethical realist, this claim about genocide is true independent of any actual or hypothetical individual's beliefs or attitudes concerning genocide. In this respect, the wrongness of genocide is a fact on par with the fact that a collection of particles arranged just so constitutes an oxygen molecule instead of a sulfur molecule. Just as no amount of believing or desiring could change an oxygen molecule into a sulfur molecule, no amount of believing or desiring could change the ethical valence of genocide from prohibited to obligatory. On the realist view, even if every individual fervently believed that committing genocide is a sacred ethically obligation, it would not alter the ethical valence of genocide one bit, any more than widespread belief that the earth is flat could actually make the earth flat.

Many of the objections raised against ethical realism can be dispelled merely by clearly distinguishing between the claim that ethical features of reality are stance-independent and the more radical claim that ethical features of reality are consciousness-independent. Opponents of realism will often attempt to saddle realism with the latter claim, when all that is really necessary is the former. I define consciousness-independence as existing independent of the existence of any conscious point of view. So, for example, most would agree that the physical universe is consciousness-independent, because it appears to have existed prior to, and therefore

independent of, the existence of any conscious entities. It is understandable why opponents of ethical realism have mistakenly thought that realism requires consciousness-independence. Consciousness-independence and stance-independence are similar properties. That said, I believe there is a clear sense in which ethics is consciousness-dependent, and the realist should willingly accept this fact while maintaining that some ethical aspects of reality are stance-independent. As I see it, the existence of consciousness is a necessary precondition for reality possessing an ethical aspect at all. This is readily apparent if we imagine a universe that contains only non-conscious entities. Events in that universe would seem to entirely lack any ethical dimension; nothing that happens could plausibly be considered right or wrong. Therefore, it appears that the existence of consciousness is a precondition for the existence of ethics, and so ethics is rightly considered ontologically consciousness-dependent. What matters though is that this consciousness-dependence is entirely compatible with ethics also being stance-independent in the way discussed above.⁴

Thus, the core principle of ethical realism is the fervent rejection of the subjective horn of the Euthyphro dilemma as applied to ethics. The ethical realist denies that ethical truth is ultimately dependent on the beliefs and attitudes of any individual, actual or hypothetical. Just as Socrates would say, taking up the objective horn, that the gods love the pious thing because of a

⁴ Further questions can be raised concerning just how radically objective the ethical truths are on the realist view. For example, given the claim that the ethical truths are independent of even the beliefs of a hypothetical, ideal ethical observer, the question arises whether it is possible that even such an ideal agent could theoretically fail to recognize the objective ethical truths. This would be a more radical form of objectivity than if the view held that an ideal ethical agent would necessarily form ethical beliefs that track the objective ethical truths. Neither position is essential to ethical realism as I define it, and nothing in my thesis hangs on adopting one position over the other. I'm sympathetic to the less radical position, so long as it remains clear that, even if an ideal ethical agent would necessarily form ethical beliefs that track the objective ethical truths, the order of dependence remains such that the ideal agent believes certain things are ethical because they are ethical, and not that they are ethical because the ideal agent believes that they are. This is all that is meant in claiming that the ethical truths are independent of any hypothetical individual's beliefs about them. My thanks to Dr. MacKenzie for pressing this point.

recognition of some feature that merits their love, the ethical realist will say that we judge certain things to be ethically called for or prohibited because of a recognition of some stance-independent feature of the thing that merits those judgments. It is this commitment to objectivity which I believe distinguishes ethical realism from every other metaethical position and secures for it certain philosophical advantages which other metaethical theories fail to replicate. That said, I will now discuss, for the sake of contrast, one metaethical theory that claims to successfully replicate those advantages while rejecting the central tenet of ethical realism.

4. The Constructivist Alternatives

Before discussing in more detail the philosophical advantages and disadvantages of ethical realism, I will present, for the sake of contrast, what I take to be one of its closest competitors in the field of metaethics. This theory, called ethical constructivism, competes with ethical realism in the sense that it claims to achieve an acceptable approximation of the philosophical advantages of ethical realism while denying its central tenet. As with ethical realism, I will not attempt to give an exhaustive survey of the diverse group of theories that fall under the general category of ethical constructivism.⁵ Rather, I will focus on a particular version of ethical constructivism that has recently been defended by Sharon Street (2010). I choose to focus on Street's constructivism because I believe it provides an ideal foil to ethical realism in a way that other versions of constructivism, subjectivism, and anti-realism do not. Further, Street and I share a similar view on the conflict between realism and constructivism and its relationship to the Euthyphro dilemma, and I respect her willingness to fully embrace the subjectivist/anti-realist position and not avoid or obfuscate its difficulties.

⁵ For two useful surveys of the different versions of ethical constructivism, see Street (2010, 7-12) and Shafer-Landau (2003, 39-43), where he also discusses how the constructivist faces a variation of the Euthyphro dilemma.

The central tenet of Street's ethical constructivism is the claim that "the truth of a normative claim consists in that claim's being entailed from within the practical point of view" (Street 2010, 367). The term 'normative' here means action guiding, and is often used by Street as roughly interchangeable with the term 'ethical', based on the widely accepted assumption that ethics is essentially action guiding. Street uses 'entailed' here to refer a noncontroversial form of logical and practical entailment, based on a combination of the practical point of view and relevant non-ethical facts. For Street, 'the practical point of view' refers to an actual evaluative point of view, meaning a consciousness which already embraces certain evaluative judgments and attitudes, as well as everything that goes along with accepting those attitudes. The practical point of view also includes the complex of desires and beliefs necessary for a full fledged normative point of view. Street finds the traditional Humean focus on desire as the basis for all normativity to be too limiting, and so introduces the concept of the practical point of view to provide a broader and more plausible foundation for her subjectivist theory of ethics. So, on Street's view, the ethical claim that "murder is wrong" is only true if it logically and practically follows from an actual practical point of view, such as one which already values life or perhaps believes that individuals possess an inalienable right to live. If practical points of view existed, and it was not entailed from within those points of view that murder is wrong, then on Street's view the claim 'murder is wrong' would be false.

This thoroughgoing commitment to subjectivism distinguishes Street's theory from more traditional, restricted versions of ethical constructivism, which claim only that the truth of some limit set of ethical claims must be entailed from within a practical point of view. These views often assume the truth of other ethical claims, such as liberal views about an equal society in

Rawls's case, and then determine what other ethical claims are entailed by those assumed truths. However, Street believes that ethical constructivism, if it is to serve as a genuine alternative to ethical realism, cannot assume the truth of any substantive ethical claim. Doing so would amount to a covert acceptance of realism about those truths. So it is essential to Street's view that the truth of *every* ethical claim depend on entailment from within a practical point of view. This subjective basis must be the only source of ethical truth; if even a single objective source of ethical truth exists then Street's ethical constructivism will be proven false. The slogan Street adopts, "no normative truth independent of the practical point of view" (Street 2003, 5), is equivalent to the claim that there are no objective ethical truths.

Of course, Street's ethical constructivism, while thoroughly subjectivist, is not a form of naive subjectivism. Naive subjectivism states that the truth of an ethical claim follows simply from its ratification by an individual. On this view, if an individual believed or felt that genocide was something they ought to pursue, then that would be sufficient to make that ethical claim true. Naive subjectivism therefore leaves no gap between ethical viewpoints and the ethical truth. As a result, there appears to be no room for errors of ethical judgment in naive subjectivism. Even if you somehow ratified an "incorrect" ethical claim, perhaps because of hast or poor judgment, merely believing the claim to be true would still be sufficient to make it true according to naive subjectivism. This account of ethics conflicts with common experience of individuals making mistakes of ethical judgment that seem to remain mistakes of judgment even after they make them. Street recognizes that naive subjectivism is untenable, and so develops ethical constructivism as a sophisticated form of subjectivism, which she believes can make room for

errors of judgment and other important ethical phenomena without having to appeal to any objective ethical truths.

First of all, notice the use of the word ‘entailed’ rather than ‘ratified’ in the central tenet of Street’s ethical constructivism. What an individual would ratify within her practical point of view, and what is entailed by that practical point of view are two distinct things. For example, from within the practical point of view that contains the evaluative judgment that it is good to do well in school, it follows that individuals within that practical point of view have an obligation to study, even if those individuals fail to recognize their obligation to study. So, by defining ethical truth in terms of what is entailed, rather than ratified, from within a practical point of view, Street has already made room for errors of ethical judgment while still maintaining purely subjective foundations.

Street also recognizes that procedures of idealization, often used in other ethical theories to achieve an approximation of objectivity, are not an option for her ethical constructivism. In idealizing theories of ethics, the truth of an ethical claim consist in that claim being ratified by an individual under some hypothetical ideal circumstances, such as, for example, perfect rationality and perfect knowledge of non-ethical facts. Obviously, the idealization cannot include things like ‘perfectly ethical’, as that would trivialize the whole process. Furthermore, describing the idealizer as ethical would be meaningless unless there existed some stance-independent ethical truths that he recognized. What else could it refer to? However, when the individual is idealized only in non-ethical terms, such as making her simply omniscient of non-ethical facts and entirely rational for example, then problems emerge.⁶ First and foremost, it seems unlikely that such an

⁶ For a thorough repudiation of idealization as a process for approximating objectivity in ethical theories, see Enoch (2005).

idealized individual would ratify an acceptable set of ethical judgments. That said, If we think back to Cohen's comments on the subjective horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, we'll remember that defining truth in terms of the judgments of an ideally rational individual is ultimately insufficient, because rationality only matters if there objective reasons to recognize. It appears then that the idealizing views cannot escape some sort of commitment to ethical realism.

So Street attempts to avoid any covert appeal to ethical realism by defining the truth of ethical claims exclusively in terms of their entailment from within an actual practical point of view. For Street, entailment within a practical perspective ultimately amounts to coherence between the claim and other evaluative judgments one has already accepted. If an ethical claim is consistent with the content of one's practical point of view and whatever relevant non-ethical facts there are, then the ethical claim is true, at least for that individual. Street believes that this coherentism provides a sufficient level of sophistication to avoid the problems of naive subjectivism, and that it allows her theory to approximate most of the philosophical advantages of ethical realism while rejecting its untenable metaphysics. For the remainder of this chapter, I will compare some of the philosophical strengths and weakness of ethical realism and ethical constructivism, and show how these positions mirror the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma.

5. Contrasting Ethical Realism with Ethical Constructivism

When choosing between metaethical theories, there are a variety of metrics for comparing their philosophical merit, and the amount of weight that an individual places on different metrics will typically determine which theory he or she ultimately endorses. Rarely will a single objection completely undermine a theory, so much as highlight weaknesses that make the theory less appealing. A metaethical theory is generally judged on its ability to explain a variety of

ethical phenomena, including ethical errors of judgment, ethical disagreement, and the overwhelming, action guiding nature of ethical judgments. Theories are also judged based on their metaphysical parsimony, meaning whether they introduce mysterious or unnecessary entities into the list of things that exist, as well as their metaphysical plausibility and coherence. They can also be judged on how well they give an account of the content, or lack of content, in ethical claims. Finally, they can be judged on how many of our ethical intuitions they match up with, as well as whether they face any unique counterarguments.

Ethical realism, through its central tenet of stance-independent objectivity, has traditionally been thought to achieve many philosophical advantages through a significant loss of metaphysical parsimony. According to the ethical realist, if one assumes that some ethical aspects of reality are objective, then this will allow for straightforward explanations of a vast array of ethical phenomena, as well as provide for a simple account of the content of ethical claims and their truth value. It will also support many of our important ethical intuitions. If there are objective ethical truths, then ethical mistakes and disagreements are just as easily explained as their non-ethical counterparts. Ethical objectivity allows one to easily explain why Hitler is wrong to believe he has an ethical obligation to murder Jews, even if murdering Jews is entailed from within his practical point of view. Furthermore, ethical objectivity lines up neatly with the intuition that an ethical truth like ‘subjugating women is wrong’ would remain true even if every individual in a culture or even the entire world believed that subjugating women was ethically called for. If we think back to the Euthyphro dilemma, the advantages of ethical realism mirror those of the objective horn of the dilemma. It avoids the capriciousness and arbitrariness that subjectivism faces, and many believe this gives ethical realism the edge as a metaethical theory.

As I said, ethical realism has traditionally been seen to face difficulties in the area of metaphysical parsimony and plausibility. Unlike anti-realist theories, ethical realism must posit the existence of a stance-independent ethical aspect of reality, and so face the challenges of explaining why all these additional ethical entities are necessary for a complete ontology, and furthermore how the ethical aspect of reality function and interacts with the non-ethical parts of reality. J.L. Mackie's argument from queerness is likely the most famous attack on the metaphysical plausibility of ethical realism (Mackie 1977, 38). Mackie claims that if objective values existed, they would be strange and non-natural entities, unlike anything else in reality. For example, it is hard to see how ethical properties could be causally efficacious. It is not as if the property of wrongness itself causes us to do anything, nor can we see the property of wrongness when we look at an ethical violation. Yet, according to Mackie, for ethical realism to be true, objective values must be able to affect us in some way, or else how could we have any knowledge of them. This leads him to conclude that ethical realism must defend some sort of mysterious faculty of intuition that provides us access to these non-causal, non-natural objective values. Given Mackie's background metaphysical assumption of material reductionism, he concludes that the existence of objective values, and by extension objective ethical aspects of reality, is highly implausible, and that our belief in objective values must be an error. According to Mackie, no such objective values exist (Mackie 1977, 40).

I believe that the metaphysical queerness argument against realism has largely been played out, and that the defenses against it are well worn and stable.⁷ Naturally, it goes beyond the scope of my thesis to prove that metaphysical concerns about objective ethical properties are

⁷ See Shafer-Landau (2003).

no more pressing than metaphysical concerns about the nature of other allegedly strange properties, such as those studied in epistemology, mathematics, psychology, and economics. It seems to me though that metaphysical concerns apply to these other abstract entities in much the same way that they apply to ethical aspects of reality. For example, the truth of the equation $2+2=4$ or the logical validity of modus ponens are not casual entities. You certainly can't see them, any more than you can see the property wrongness in an ethical violation. Yet these truths appear to influence us every day. Mackie recognizes the potential for this sort of partners in crime argument, but dismisses it on the presumption that science will eventually provide a naturalist account of every one of these abstract phenomena, leaving only ethics unexplained (Mackie 1977, 39) . I believe Mackie's presumption to be unjustified, and until it can be shown that ethical objectivity has a uniquely problematic metaphysics, I will assume that ethical realism is sufficiently defended against metaphysical objections. Therefore, for the remainder of this thesis, I will focus on newer epistemic challenges to ethical realism that I believe pose a more significant threat than the traditional metaphysical concerns.

I believe that many who find ethical realism tempting but ultimately unacceptable will also experience a strong affinity for Street's ethical constructivism. As I've said, Street's constructivism, more than any other metaethical theory, aims to achieve a sufficient approximation of the advantages of ethical realism while fully denying its problematic central tenet. Constructivism's success as a metaethical theory depends, at least in part, on its ability to account for enough of the ethical phenomena and intuitions explained by ethical realism. How many is enough is hard to say as some phenomena and intuitions will inevitably either be

debated or abandoned as lost causes. As I said though, this is true of every metaethical theory. No theory explains every phenomena and intuition perfectly, or it would dominate the debate.

For ethical constructivism, the potential loss of some explanatory capacity is offset by the philosophical advantage of metaphysical parsimony, as this theory does not have to posit the existence of any objective ethical aspect of reality. On this view, the nature of ethical truth is not at all mysterious; it simply follows from whatever is entailed within a practical point of view. Given our access to a practical point of view and a method for determining whether an ethical claim does or does not cohere with that point of view, ethical constructivism can easily explain how we distinguish ethical truths from falsehoods. The feeling that these ethical truths are objective can be explained as a functional illusion, much like the way our mind tricks us into experiencing our perceptions of the external world as “out there”, rather than as the virtual representations inside our mind that they actually consist in. The constructivist can reasonably argue that the capacity to externalize ethical truths arose because it enhanced ethical effectiveness as a normative system, not because there actually is some external ethical truth to cognize.

Ethical constructivism, insofar as it embraces the subjective horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, will naturally mirror the philosophical advantages and disadvantages of that particular horn, and Street recognizes this. Street accepts that, in basing ethics on actual practical points of view, she is opening up constructivism to charges of capriciousness. She willingly cites the example of the coherent Caligula, a thought experiment that is often used against subjectivist forms of ethics, as a situation where constructivism is true despite its counterintuitive conclusions (Street 2010, 12). In this thought experiment, the question is whether an internally

coherent Caligula is correct in his belief that he should engage in recreational torture. Assuming that recreational torture is consistent with Caligula's practical point of view and any relevant non-ethical facts, is Caligula ethically permitted to torture people or is there some further ethical fact that makes the torture still wrong. Many will want to argue that Caligula is still wrong, even if he is completely internally consistent, because of some further ethical fact that he is failing to recognize. However, Street rejects this idea of any further ethical fact, and maintains that there is no genuine sense in which Caligula is making an error of ethical judgment. Naturally, she attempts to mitigate any discomfort we might feel with this conclusion by arguing that we can still restrain Caligula and punish him for his actions. Yet the problem still remains that, on Street's view, it is quite possible that if everyone valued radically different things then everything we take to be ethical would actually be unethical and vice versa. If the truth of ethical claims depends on what is entailed from within actual practical points of view, then the truth of every ethical claim is ultimately up for grabs. If we were all Caligulas, then recreational torture would be morally obligated instead of prohibited. Street, to her credit, is willing to bite this bullet, and believes that the harshness of this conclusion is ameliorated by the counterpoint that "had you entered the world taking entirely different things to be reasons, you wouldn't have been *you* at all" (Street 2006b, 245). Certainly I agree that this takes some of the sting out of the capriciousness objection, but realists such as myself will maintain that there is no way one could have entered the world such as to make certain things ethical, and that there must therefore exist some objective ethical truths that stand as a further fact beyond what is entailed from within any actual practical point of view.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis I will examine a newer epistemic challenge to ethical realism, proposed by Street on the basis of recent theories in evolutionary psychology. Street believes her argument is particularly significant because her ethical constructivism supposedly avoids the dilemma entirely, giving it at least one significant philosophical advantage over ethical realism. I consider Street's epistemic challenge to ethical realism to be superior to traditional metaphysical objections and likely one of the most pressing challenges currently facing ethical realism. However, I also believe that the ethical realist has a functional response to Street's epistemic challenge.

CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA

1. A New Objection to Ethical Realism

Having discussed some of the philosophical advantages and disadvantages of ethical realism and what I take to be its closest competitor, ethical constructivism, I will now turn to a significant new objection against ethical realism. Sharon Street, an advocate of ethical constructivism, claims that recent developments in evolutionary psychology produce a dilemma concerning the relationship between our ethical viewpoints and the objective ethical truths posited by ethical realists (Street 2006a). Street believes that the ethical realist cannot avoid or defuse this dilemma, and so finds herself in conflict with modern science. Street concludes that ethical realism cannot be reconciled with evolutionary psychology, and should therefore be abandoned in favor of ethical constructivism, which is easily reconciled with modern science. In this chapter, I will present Street's objection as forcefully as I can before considering possible responses to it in my final chapter.

Street's Darwinian Dilemma has at least one significant philosophical advantage over the metaphysical objections to ethical realism discussed in the previous chapter. Wielenberg correctly classifies the Darwinian Dilemma as an epistemic argument rather than a metaphysical argument (Wielenberg 2010, 442). As we've seen, metaphysical arguments target the nature of objective ethical aspects of reality, claiming that their existence is somehow implausible, absurd, or otiose. These sorts of arguments aim to conclude that we cannot or should not posit the existence of objective ethical aspects of reality. Mackie's argument from queerness, discussed in the previous chapter, is the classic example of a metaphysical argument against ethical realism. It refuses to accept the central premise of ethical realism, that objective ethical aspects of reality

exist, and instead attacks this premise through a variety of plausibility arguments, with the conclusion that objective ethical properties and truths are far too metaphysically queer to actually exist. Epistemic arguments, on the other hand, begin by accepting the central premise of ethical realism, that objective ethical features of reality exist, and then raise objections concerning the relationship between those objective ethical features of reality and our own ethical beliefs and attitudes. While the epistemic argument, like the metaphysical argument, ultimately leads to a rejection of the ethical realist's metaphysics, it does so by first accepting the realist's metaphysics and then arguing that unacceptable epistemic conclusions necessarily follow. An objection that begins by accepting its target's premises and then proceeds to show that something unacceptable follows from those premises is, all things being equal, more damaging than an objection that refuses to even entertain the premises of the position it challenges. Therefore, it is my opinion that epistemic arguments against ethical realism possess a significant philosophical advantage over metaphysical arguments, because they oppose ethical realism on its own terms. Even if the ultimate goal of these two arguments is the same, their method of achieving that goal is significantly different. In this way, the Darwinian Dilemma poses a greater philosophical threat to ethical realism. I will now discuss the details of Street's Darwinian Dilemma.

2. The Darwinian Dilemma

The Darwinian Dilemma begins with two essential premises. The first, as I just explained, is the assumption that ethical realism is correct in claiming that objective ethical truths exist. The second premise is that the basic motivational tendencies that provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the formation of our ethical beliefs and attitudes were heavily influenced by natural selection (Street 2006a, 113). According to evolutionary psychology, a

subfield of evolutionary biology, many psychological traits arose in humans as a result of natural selection, in much the same way that many physical traits arose in humans as a result of evolutionary pressures. This occurred because the psychological traits, like the physical traits, were adaptive, meaning that they provided a fitness advantage for those organisms that possessed them. Memory and reason are just two examples of the numerous psychological traits that would plausibly confer an advantage on the organisms that possessed them. As with adaptive physical traits, the advantage produced by psychological traits would have resulted in higher inclusive fitness, which includes both personal reproductive success and kin selection. The result is that certain psychological traits, and the genes associated with them, gained dominance over opposing traits and thereby proliferated throughout the species.

Street's claim is that, along with psychological traits like memory and reason, certain basic behavioral and motivational tendencies were also selected for because they were adaptive, and that those basic motivational tendencies in turn provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the later development of our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes (Street 2006a, 117). To see how this process could have worked, let us look at several examples of basic motivational tendencies that would have likely contributed to inclusive fitness:

- (1) Do things that promote one's survival.
- (2) Do things that promote the interests of one's family members.
- (3) Help one's offspring instead of a total stranger.

In their most basic form, these motivational tendencies were little more than an urge or felt need in favor of some actions and against others. They simply pushed individuals to respond to their circumstances in certain ways. It is easy to see how possessing each of these basic motivational

tendencies would increase one's inclusive fitness, especially when compared to the opposing tendencies. An individual who feels compelled to act in ways that promote her survival is obviously more likely to survive, and therefore more likely to repeatedly reproduce, compared to an individual who feels compelled to act in ways that impede her survival. An individual who feels compelled to promote the interests of her family members is more likely to increase the reproductive success of her family members, and by extension her own inclusive fitness because her family members likely share her genetic material. If an individual felt compelled to actively undermine the interests of her family members, that would likely result in a decrease in their reproductive success and by extension her own inclusive fitness. Finally, an individual who feels compelled to help her offspring, when faced with the choice between helping her offspring and helping a total stranger, will likely exert more of her energy on things that help her children and less of her energy on complete strangers. She will therefore be more likely to maximize her offsprings reproductive success. If she felt that helping a total stranger was as good or better than helping her own offspring, she would likely spend less energy maximizing the reproductive success of her own offspring. In each example, a clear connection can be made between an individual possessing certain basic motivational tendencies and an increase in that individual's inclusive fitness.

Street recognizes that some explanation is necessary to get from the evolution of basic motivational tendencies to the claim that evolution has significantly influenced our ethical beliefs and attitudes. She provides this explanation in the form of several caveats, resulting in the conclusion that natural selection had a significant but *indirect* influence on our ethical beliefs and attitudes (Street 2006a, 118). The first caveat is really a narrative explaining how the direct

influence of natural selection on our basic motivational tendencies resulted in a significant indirect influence on our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes. Street recognizes that the capacity to possess and reflect on complex ethical beliefs and form full-fledged ethical judgments about those beliefs is a relatively late forming human capacity. While natural selection likely played a role in the development of higher brain function, leading to the capacity for abstract thought, it is unlikely that it played a significant role in shaping the more abstract ethical beliefs. For comparison, consider the role that evolution might have played in producing the human capacity for mathematics. Natural selection likely contributed to the formation of a larger, more highly developed brain, and influenced the basic spatial reasoning skills that would in turn influence our most rudimentary geometric considerations. It is unlikely, however, that natural selection would have caused us, for example, to prefer euclidian geometry over non-euclidian geometry, or caused us to prefer a base ten system over a base eight system of counting. It is unlikely that these sorts of more advanced, abstract beliefs and attitudes were directly influenced by natural selection, even as they built on more basic psychological features that likely were shaped by natural selection. Street believes that something along these lines also holds true for ethical beliefs and attitudes. It is unlikely that evolution directly influenced the human capacity to reflect on one's ethical viewpoint and make an abstract judgment, such as that one should do unto others as you would have them do unto you or that it is unethical to ever lie. What is more likely is that more basic behavioral and motivational tendencies, such as the tendency to nurture one's offspring or to act kindly to those who show you kindness, arose and proved adaptive, thereby increasing the reproductive success of individuals who possessed those tendencies and causing a proliferation of the adaptive motivational tendencies (Street 2006a, 116). These basic

motivational tendencies, which Street calls “proto” forms of ethical judgments, in turn provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our more abstract, full-fledged ethical judgments (Street 2006a, 119). Therefore, while we will sometimes speak, for convenience sake, of the ethical beliefs that were influenced by natural selection, it should always be remembered that the actual process was far more complex.

Street uses the same evolutionary narrative to avoid the second complication with claiming that our ethical beliefs and attitudes have been significantly influenced by evolution. For a trait to be subject to natural selection, it must be genetically heritable. If the trait cannot be proliferated through reproduction, then merely increasing the individual’s inclusive fitness will not be enough to disseminate the trait. It is implausible, however, to claim that full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes are genetically heritable, and so Street must once again appeal to more basic behavioral and motivational tendencies as a bridging device. It is far more plausible that basic motivational tendencies are genetically heritable, given the widespread homogeneity of basic motivational tendencies found throughout a variety of species. While many of an organism’s response mechanisms are likely produced through conditioning, others appear to exist in the animal without any such habituation. Fight or flight mechanisms, for example, appear to function without the organism first needing to be taught what it is appropriate to fear. A newborn’s strong desire to stay near its mother, and conversely a new mother’s strong desire to protect her offspring, both appear to function without any sort of teaching or habituation. While all of these behaviors can certainly be altered through conditioning, the basic motivational tendency appears to be present in the individual on a genetic level. It stands to reason then that human beings, like every other species shaped by natural selection, possess genetically inherited

motivational tendencies. These unreflective tendencies to experience some actions as called for and other actions as prohibited could therefore be influenced by natural selection, because they are genetically heritable. Then they in turn provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our more complex ethical beliefs and attitudes. In this way, evolution has had a significant but indirect influence on our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes.

Given these caveats and the examples provided, it should appear at least plausible that natural selection strongly influenced the development of the basic motivational tendencies that provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our more full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes. If most individuals feel a strong need to protect their own offspring, that felt need will likely be reflected in the ethical codes that those individuals come to accept upon reflection. Basic tendencies like promoting fairness and punishing unfairness will shape human ethical consideration by counting in favor of ethical beliefs that reflect those tendencies and against ethical beliefs that oppose those tendencies. Certainly some ethical beliefs will still develop that challenge the more basic motivational tendencies, but in those cases individuals will likely feel pulled between two conflicting ethical intuitions. For example, the enlightenment view that all individuals possess inalienable rights and dignities which do not disappear if those individuals happen to be total strangers has resulted in an increase in the belief that one should work to secure an acceptable quality of life for others, no matter their relationship to oneself. However, this universalized altruism continues to conflict with the strong intuition that, when given a choice, it is right to help a loved one instead of helping a total stranger. The conflict between these and other ethical intuitions plays out daily in socio-political debate, with little end in sight. In this way, modern ethics is constantly working with, and sometimes against, the basic

motivational tendencies that were inculcated in us long ago. In the next chapter, I will discuss the potential for the ethical realist to challenge Street's evolutionary account of ethical psychology, but at present I will accept, for the sake of argument, that natural selection had a significant influence on the basic motivational tendencies that developed in humans, and that it therefore has had a significant but indirect influence on the full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes that make up our ethical viewpoints.

Once the ethical realist accepts that evolution has had a significant influence on the basic motivational tendencies that developed in humans, the Darwinian Dilemma necessarily follows. According to Street, the ethical realist must choose between two accounts of the relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths. Either there was a relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, such that the basic motivational tendencies tended to correspond to the objective ethical truths, or there was no relationship between the basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, such that the two did not tend to correspond. These two options constitute the two horns of the Darwinian Dilemma, which I will henceforth refer to as the relation horn and no-relation horn, respectively. According to Street, the ethical realist must defend one of these two accounts of the relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, or else return to challenging Street's evolutionary account. There are no other alternatives (Street 2006a, 135). However, Street claims that both horns are untenable, because the relation horn conflicts with evolutionary psychology and the no-relation horn leads to an unacceptable epistemic conclusion.

One might find the idea of basic motivational tendencies corresponding to ethical truths problematic, as we normally think of beliefs with propositional content as the sort of thing that corresponds to a truth. However, I believe that if we look at one of the examples of basic motivational tendencies I provided, such as the tendency to act in ways that promote one's survival, there is a clear sense in which this tendency corresponds to the ethical truth that one ought to act in ways that promote one's survival. I will therefore describe basic motivational tendencies as corresponding to or tracking objective ethical truths in the same way that an ethical belief or attitude corresponds to or tracks an objective ethical truth.

I will now consider the two horns of the Darwinian Dilemma in detail, in order to make clear why the ethical realist supposedly cannot defend either account of the relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truth. I will also show why the ethical realist faces a serious epistemic challenge as a result of the Darwinian Dilemma. I will then end the chapter by explaining how Street's ethical constructivism avoids the Darwinian Dilemma entirely, combined with a discussion of how the Darwinian Dilemma connects in a significant way to the Euthyphro dilemma.

3. The Relation Horn

Let us begin with the relation horn of the dilemma, which asserts that there was a relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, such that the two tended to correspond. Street believes that this is the more plausible of the two horns for the ethical realist to defend, because it allows the realist to claim that the ethical beliefs and attitudes that developed out of our basic motivational tendencies also tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths (Street 2006a, 125). As we shall see, while it is not strictly necessary for

ethical realism that our ethical beliefs and attitudes tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths, the realist has good reason to defend the claim that they do.

According to Street, if the ethical realist wants to claim that our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths, then the realist must explain how our basic motivational tendencies also tended to correspond to the objective ethical truths, because those tendencies played such a significant role in the development of our ethical beliefs and attitudes. Given the premise that natural selection had a significant influence on the development of our basic motivational tendencies, Street claims that the ethical realist must give a plausible evolutionary account for why humans developed basic motivational tendencies that tended to correspond to the objective ethical truths.

Street suggests that the only plausible account available to the realist to explain the reliable correspondence between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths is a tracking account. Street borrows the term ‘tracking’ from Nozick (1981), and a quick reminder of the nature of a tracking relationship will be helpful for understanding what is necessary to claim that our basic motivational tendencies tracked the objective ethical truths. I will discuss tracking here in terms of beliefs, but I believe that basic motivational tendencies can also track objective ethical truths just like they can correspond to those truths.

Tracking is a technical epistemic term that describes a relationship with four essential conditions (Nozick 1981, 172). The first two conditions are obvious, that the individual holds the belief and that the belief corresponds to the truth. The third and fourth conditions take the form of subjunctive conditionals, which must be met for the belief to count as tracking the truth. For an individual’s belief to track the truth, it must be the case both that the individual would have

that belief if it corresponded to the true, and that the individual would not have that belief if it failed to correspond to the true. For an individual's beliefs to count as tracking the truth, those beliefs have to meet these conditionals to a sufficient epistemic degree, which is to say that every belief need not fulfill the conditionals, so long as a sufficient amount do. So, to use a very simple example, an individual's belief that it is raining outside tracks the truth if that individual tends to believe it is raining when it is raining and tends not to believe it is raining when it is not raining. An ethical example would be that an individual tends to believe she is obligated to protect life, assuming that it is ethical to protect life, but the individual would cease to believe that she is obligated to protect life if it became the case that she was not obligated to protect life. So, for the ethical realist to claim that our basic motivational tendencies tracked the objective ethical truth, it must be the case that individuals tended to develop basic motivational tendencies if and only if those tendencies corresponded to the objective ethical truths.

In the context of the relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma, Street defines the tracking account as claiming that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truths because it was adaptive to have basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truths. It is important to see that the tracking account is an evolutionary account, in the sense that it seeks to explain why it is that natural selection drove humans to form basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truths. It is an attempt to explain why human evolved certain tendencies and not others. For the tracking account to succeed as an account of the development of our basic motivational tendencies, it must explain the data better than competing ethical theories.

The problem with the tracking account is that it fails to plausibly explain the basic motivational tendencies that humans came to adopt. I will look first at examples of basic motivational tendencies, found in humans, which do not correspond to what some might take to be the objective ethical truths, before arguing that the tracking account also fails to properly explain situations where human motivational tendencies do tend to correspond to what some might take to be the objective ethical truths.

First, let us look at several basic motivational tendencies which I assume, for the sake of argument, do not correspond to the objective ethical truths.

- 1) Sleep with as many partners as possible through whatever means necessary.
- 2) Mistreat outsiders if it benefits one's family members.
- 3) Act aggressively and violently towards competitors.

While some will claim that these motivational tendencies do not correspond to the objective ethical truths, in my experience many people still act according to these tendencies, and many of them would challenge the claim that these tendencies are even wrong. I therefore believe it is plausible to claim that these basic motivational tendencies were selected for in humans, as I see no significant difference between these basic motivational tendencies and the ones discussed above. It is easy to see how each of these tendencies would have contributed to an individual's inclusive fitness, just as it was with the ethically unproblematic motivational tendencies discussed above. During the time that basic motivational tendencies were evolving in humans, a man's reproductive success depended largely on the number of mates he could acquire, and there were likely little or no negative repercussions for taking mates by whatever means necessary. This is a plausible explanation for the widespread predilection towards infidelity among males. It

also seems likely that there were little negative repercussions for mistreating outsiders in order to benefit one's in-group, whether that was a tribe or just one's family, when compared to the potential benefits. Finally, it clearly provides a reproductive advantage to eliminate one's competition, violently if necessary. Why else would we see this sort of activity not just in humans but throughout the animal kingdom. The point of these examples is that natural selection appears to have driven human beings to possess some ethically dubious basic motivational tendencies. This strongly suggests that the adaptivity of basic motivational tendency is independent from whether the tendency tracks the objective ethical truth. If natural selection drove humans to adopt motivational tendencies that were adaptive, and many of those tendencies were ethically dubious, then it appears that there is no significant correlation between a basic motivational tendency's adaptivity and whether it tracks the objective ethical truth.

Even if one downplays the examples of ethically dubious but adaptive motivational tendencies, and maintains that in the vast majority of cases human beings evolved basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths, this claim will still prove false. For even if we focus solely on examples of adaptive motivational tendencies that do correspond to what some might consider the objective ethical truths, it will quickly become clear that, even in these cases, humans still fail to actually track the objective ethical truths. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the motivational tendency to care for one's offspring corresponds to the objective ethical truth. This in no way begs the question, as the Darwinian Dilemma assumes that objective ethical truths exist, and so we must assume some things are objectively ethical in order to critically evaluate that assumption. As a result of natural selection, human beings developed basic motivational tendencies to care for their offspring, which then developed into ethical

beliefs and attitudes in favor of caring for one's offspring. However, consider that some animals do not in fact care for their offspring at all, but instead leave them to fend for themselves. For these creatures, abandoning their offspring appears to have been adaptive, or related to some other adaptive tendency, or else the tendency would likely not have proliferated so thoroughly throughout the species. Now, if it had proven adaptive for human beings to abandon their offspring, then humans likely would have developed basic the motivational tendency to do just that. Therefore, human basic motivational tendencies fail the first tracking conditional, because if it had proven adaptive for humans to abandon their offspring then they would likely have developed tendencies to do just that, even if it remained objectively true that it is unethical to abandon one's offspring. What is more, imagine if it turned out to be false that one ought to care for one's offspring, meaning that it was objectively ethically true that one ought to abandon one's offspring, but it remained the case that it was adaptive for humans not to abandon their offspring. In such a hypothetical, humans would have likely developed the tendency to abandon their offspring, even though that tendency would not correspond to the objective ethical truth in that situation. Our basic motivational tendencies therefore fail the second tracking conditional as well, because we would not cease to have an ethical belief even if it proved unethical. Thus, even when humans evolved basic motivational tendencies like caring for one's offspring, which corresponded to generally accepted objective ethical truths, the tendencies still fail to meet the conditions for tracking.

Ultimately, the major flaw with the tracking account is that there does not appear to be any significant correlation between a basic motivational tendency's adaptivity and its correspondence to an objective ethical truth. A motivational tendency can prove adaptive

whether or not it corresponds with any objective ethical truth, and vice versa. Corresponding to an objective ethical truth is not an adaptive making property for a basic motivational tendency. Therefore, if human beings evolved motivational tendencies that track what is adaptive, and there is no correlation between adaptivity and ethical truth, then it is likely that our basic motivational tendencies do not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths.

This brings us to Street's adaptive link account of the evolution of human motivational tendencies, which she claims is superior to the tracking account in several key respects. Street calls this theory the adaptive link account because it states that evolution selected for motivational tendencies that "forged adaptive links between our ancestors' circumstances and their responses to those circumstances" (Street 2006a, 127). The adaptive link account, like the tracking account, begins by claiming that natural selection favored adaptive motivational tendencies. However, it opposes the tracking account's explanation of *why* the motivational tendencies were adaptive. The tracking account claims that the motivational tendencies were adaptive *because* they tracked the objective ethical truths, whereas the adaptive link account claims that the motivational tendencies were adaptive simply because they caused individuals to respond effectively to their circumstances. The primary reason that the adaptive link account is superior is that there is a strong, demonstrable correlation between responding effectively to one's circumstances and an increase in one's inclusive fitness, whereas we have seen that there is no significant correlation between tracking objective ethical truths and an increase in one's inclusive fitness. Street cites several other secondary considerations, including clarity and parsimony, for why the adaptive link account is superior to the tracking account (Street 2006a, 129-135). In brief, the adaptive link account does not appeal to unnecessary metaphysical entities

such as objective ethical truths in its explanation. This makes the account more ontologically parsimonious and more clear, because it allows for the removal of unnecessary steps, thereby providing the simplest explanation possible. I feel it is unnecessary to discuss these considerations in detail, as the failure of the tracking account, coupled with the existence of a plausible alternative theory, is sufficient.

According to Street, if the ethical realist abandons the tracking account, she is forced to abandon the relation horn entirely (Street 2006a, 135). Street claims that, because of the stance-independent nature of objective ethical truths, the tracking account is the only explanation the realist could give for how natural selection drove human beings to adopt basic motivational tendencies that reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths. In the next chapter, I will consider arguments which challenge this claim, but for the moment I will accept Street's claim that the ethical realist must appeal to the tracking account to explain how humans developed basic motivational tendencies that tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths. If the ethical realist cannot defend the tracking account, and there is no alternative way for the ethical realist to grasp the relation horn, then it appears that the realist is forced to try to grasp the no-relation horn, which states that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that did not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths. In this way, Street concludes that "to abandon the tracking account -- in other words, to abandon the view that selective pressures pushed us *towards* the acceptance of independent evaluative truths -- is just to adopt the view that selective pressures either pushed us *away from* or pushed us in ways that *bear no relation* to these evaluative truths" (Street 2006a, 135). I will now turn to the no-relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma, to see why this position is also closed to the ethical realist.

4. The No-Relation Horn

The no-relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma states that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that do not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths. On this horn, the best case scenario is that humans developed many motivational tendencies that happened to coincide with the objective ethical truths and some motivational tendencies that did not. The worst case scenario is that the vast majority of the basic motivational tendencies that humans developed did not correspond to the objective ethical truths. It is entirely a matter of chance which scenario occurred, given the influence of natural selection and the lack of correlation between the adaptivity of a motivational tendency and its correspondence to the objective ethical truth. Given the vast number of possible motivational tendencies that could have developed in humans, Street claims that it would have required an extremely lucky coincidence for humans to have developed a significant number of our motivational tendencies that happened to correspond with the objective ethical truths (Street 2006a, 122). The ethical realist has no basis to claim that such a lucky coincidence occurred, given the lack of correlation between the adaptivity of a basic motivational tendency and its correspondence to an objective ethical truth. The likely scenario then is that many or even most of our basic motivational tendencies did not correspond to the objective ethical truths.

According to Street, if humans developed basic motivational tendencies that did not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths, and those basic motivational tendencies provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes, then it stands to reason that those full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes also do not

tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths. As Street puts it, “we have thus been guided by the wrong sort of influence from the very outset of our evaluative history, and so, more likely than not, most of our evaluative judgments have nothing to do with the truth” (Street 2006, 14). The lack of a correspondence between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths results in a similar lack of correspondence between our full-fledged ethical beliefs and the objective ethical truths. This is the unacceptable epistemic conclusion that Street believes the ethical realist is forced to by the darwinian dilemma. If it is the case, as a result of the influence of natural selection on our basic motivational tendencies, that our full-fledged ethical beliefs largely do not correspond to the objective ethical truths, then this lack of correspondence will constitute a significant, potentially insurmountable obstacle for our attempts to gain human knowledge.

Furthermore, Street argues, the ethical realist cannot appeal to ethical reasoning to avoid the conclusion that human ethical beliefs are largely off track. According to Street, rational reflection regarding ethics largely proceeds through a coherentist system of reflective equilibrium, by testing the quality and consistency of some ethical beliefs when compared with some other set of ethical beliefs (Street 2006a, 124). On the no-relation horn, many or most of our basic motivational tendencies do not correspond to the objective ethical truths, and so it is implausible that reflective equilibrium would have been able to improve upon our basic motivational tendencies. It is just as likely that reflective equilibrium would have weeded out the basic motivational tendencies that do happen to correspond to the objective ethical truths. The same problem applies to the idea that ethical reasoning could improve the reliability of our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes, since those also appear to be largely off track to begin with.

Rational reflection is therefore no solution, because it is still ultimately a matter of luck whether the process of reflective equilibrium would have corrected our basic motivational tendencies or drove them even further astray.

I believe that this is an unacceptable skeptical conclusion for the ethical realist, even if it is compatible with the central tenet of ethical realism. If human ethical beliefs and attitudes are largely off track, such that humans lack knowledge of the objective ethical truths, then it is hard to see how humans can be held responsible for not recognizing those objective ethical truths and acting accordingly. Furthermore, if it is true that one can only be expected to do what is possible, which is to say ought implies can, then it follows from the human inability to gain knowledge of the objective ethical truths that we have no obligation to try to gain knowledge of those truths or act according to them. The ethical realist is left with two undesirable options: either try to defend the relation horn through a tracking account that conflicts with modern science, or accept the no-relation horn and the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that appears to follow. It is at this point that Street offers her alternative ethical theory.

5. Ethical Constructivism and the Euthyphro Dilemma

Ethical realism's failure to defend either horn of the Darwinian Dilemma seems to present a significant problem for the theory, as the existence of objective ethical truths appears to be rendered moot by our inability to gain any knowledge about them. Though this may not be enough to completely undermine the theory, it does weaken the position in comparison to opposing theories, especially when the opposing theories can easily avoid the same problem. Street claims that this is the case with ethical realism and ethical constructivism, because the former cannot avoid or defuse the Darwinian Dilemma while the latter can (Street 2006a, 154). I

will end this chapter with a discussion of how ethical constructivism theoretically avoids the Darwinian Dilemma, using the Euthyphro Dilemma to help clarify ethical constructivism's solution to the problem.

The most obvious way that ethical constructivism avoids the Darwinian Dilemma is through a denial of the first premise, that objective ethical truths exist. By denying the existence of objective ethical truths, ethical constructivism has no trouble adopting the adaptive link account as a solution to the dilemma. On Street's view, the constructivist simply accepts that, through natural selection, humans developed basic motivational tendencies that were adaptive, and then defines ethical truth as "a function of the evaluative attitudes we have, however we originally came to them" (Street 2006a, 153). Denying ethical realism removes any sense in which the basic motivational tendencies that were selected for could be wrong or off base, because there are no objective ethical truths for them to fail to track or correspond to. Whatever basic motivational tendencies humans ended up with is less important on Street's view, because for her the ethical truths are simply whatever is entailed from within the practical point of views that developed.

Yet it is not enough simply to say that ethical constructivism avoids the problem by denying the truth of ethical realism, because as I discussed in chapter one, ethical constructivism is still interested in achieving an approximation of the philosophical advantages of ethical realism. These philosophical advantages, such as making sense of ethical phenomena like errors of judgment and ethical disagreement, depend on a substantive sense of ethical truth and a gap between our ethical beliefs and the truth. Street defines ethical constructivism as a sophisticated form of subjective anti-realism for exactly this reason, because naive subjectivism does not allow

for any gap between one's ethical beliefs and the ethical truth. Without the gap between belief and truth, phenomena like errors of judgment and ethical disagreement become impossible or nonsensical. So ethical constructivism cannot abandon the idea of ethical truth entirely, even if it rejects the realist idea of objective ethical truths and claims that ethical truth is ultimately a function of our ethical point of view. However, by maintaining a gap between our ethical beliefs and the ethical truth, constructivism is once again forced to explain how natural selection has not had a pervasive and misdirecting influence on our ethical beliefs and attitudes. Street can explain how there remains a relationship between our ethical beliefs and the ethical truth, so that the unacceptable skeptical conclusion does not apply to ethical constructivism, but it requires more than just a denial of objective ethical truths. Street must postulate her own account of the relationship between our ethical beliefs and the subjective ethical truths, and show how that account avoids the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that ethical realism appears driven to by the Darwinian Dilemma.

To understand how Street's ethical constructivism avoids the epistemological challenge of the Darwinian Dilemma, I believe it will help to look back at the Euthyphro Dilemma and see how the same problem lies at the heart of both dilemmas. In both cases, the debate focuses on the relationship between our ethical viewpoint and the ethical truth. The ethical realist is committed to the realist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, which states that we believe certain things are ethical or unethical *because* they really are ethical or unethical, independently of any individual's view of them as ethical or unethical. Therefore, in order to explain how we acquire knowledge of the objective ethical truths, that is to say, how we come to believe certain things *because* they are true, the ethical realist must defend some sort of tracking account between our ethical point of

view and the objective ethical truths. The ethical constructivist, on the other hand, is committed to the second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, which states that ethical truths are ultimately true *because* they follow from our ethical points of view. The key here is that the order of dependence between the ethical points of view and the ethical truths is reversed (Street 2006a, 154). On the realist view, the ethical truth is metaphysically primary and the ethical point of view is secondary, whereas on the constructivist view, the ethical point of view is metaphysically primary and the ethical truths are secondary. This reversal of the dependence order is crucial for a variety of reasons, but it is significant to our current concerns because it allows the ethical constructivist to accept that evolution had a significant influence on our ethical beliefs and attitudes while maintaining that there is still a relationship between our ethical viewpoints and the ethical truth. As I explained in the previous section, the ethical realist claims that ethical truths are stance-independent, and so cannot assume that rational reflection on our actual ethical beliefs and attitudes is a reliable method for reaching the objective ethical truths, especially when one's ethical beliefs and attitudes have been heavily marred by natural selection. However, for ethical constructivism, the reversal of the dependency relationship between our ethical point of view and the ethical truths means that, on the constructivist view, rational reflection on our ethical point of view will always be a reliable method for reaching the ethical truth, no matter what motivational tendencies are initially selected for. This is only possible because, on Street's view, the ethical truth is ultimately a function of our ethical point of view. The thinking goes, it seems to me, that the metaphysical priority of our ethical point of view over the constructed ethical truth ensures the reliability of rational reflection for bridging the gap between our knowledge of our ethical point of view and our knowledge of the ethical truth. For example, on

Street's view the ethical truth that slavery is wrong is a function of our ethical beliefs and attitudes, and so reflecting on those beliefs and attitudes will reliably provide us with knowledge of that ethical truth that slavery is wrong. If that reflection led us to believe that slavery was correct, because it is compatible with our most deeply held beliefs and attitudes, then in that situation slavery would be ethical on Street's view. That is a bullet Street is willing to bite to claim that there is a significant correlation between our ethical viewpoints and the ethical truth. While there is room for error on the constructivist view, the ethical truths are ultimately still dependent on our actual ethical beliefs, such that the two cannot really come apart the way that our ethical beliefs can be wholly independent of the objective ethical truths on the realist view. This difference allows constructivism to accept whatever motivational tendencies natural selection provided for humans, because ethical truth is ultimately nothing more than what follows from whatever practical point of view we developed.

If Street is correct in claiming that the Darwinian Dilemma presents a problem for ethical realism and not ethical constructivism, then it constitutes a strong argument for adopting ethical constructivism over ethical realism. I will now spend the final chapter of my thesis considering ways that the ethical realist might escape this position, either by challenging the science behind the Darwinian Dilemma, or by trying to defend one horn of the dilemma.

CHAPTER 3: DEFUSING THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA

1. Possible Responses

In the final chapter of my thesis, I will discuss several possible responses that the realist could give to Street's Darwinian Dilemma. Obviously, one response open to the ethical realist is to challenge Street on the science behind the Darwinian Dilemma. I will consider this response briefly, but I do not believe that it is the ideal response for the ethical realist. I will then look at attempts by Copp (2008), Wielenberg (2010), and Enoch (2009) to defend the relation horn of the dilemma. As a reminder, the relation horn states that our basic motivational tendencies tended to correspond to the objective ethical truths. While Wielenberg and Enoch have more success than Copp in defending the relation horn, I do not believe that any of these responses are entirely sufficient by themselves to resist the dilemma. Therefore, I will turn to possible defenses of the no-relation horn, which accepts that our basic motivational tendencies did not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths, but deny that humans therefore lack ethical knowledge. Many ethical realists eschew the no-relation horn, for fear of the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that humans lack any knowledge of the objective ethical truths. However, I believe that the ethical realist's best response to the Darwinian Dilemma is a partners in crime argument that begins by grasping the no-relation horn of the dilemma. My partners in crime response argues that the Darwinian Dilemma, as Street formulates it, poses just as much of a problem for our abstract knowledge in general as it does for ethical knowledge. The Since the aim of the Darwinian Dilemma is to raise an epistemic problem that applies specifically to ethical realism, if I can show that the dilemma targets abstract knowledge in general, Street may have to revise the Darwinian Dilemma to address these issues.

2. Challenging Street's Science

If the ethical realist wishes to stop the dilemma before it even gets off the ground, she is free to challenge Street's understanding of evolutionary psychology. She could claim that evolution actually had a relatively insignificant influence on basic motivational tendencies compared to other forces, or challenge the claim that basic motivational tendencies are heritable traits that can be passed on and are subject to natural selection. While there is nothing to prevent the realist from taking this approach, I personally believe that doing so fails to lock horns with the Darwinian Dilemma. As I said in the previous chapter, part of what makes the Darwinian Dilemma a powerful challenge to ethical realism is that it begins by accepting the truth of ethical realism and then argues that an unacceptable conclusion follows from that truth when combined with evolutionary psychology. I believe that a proper response from the ethical realist will begin by accepting the scientific premise of the Darwinian Dilemma, that evolution significantly influenced our basic motivational tendencies, and then argue that the unacceptable skeptical conclusion does not follow.

Street also claims that the dilemma is not limited to evolutionary psychology, but applies to any scientific explanation of our ethical viewpoints (Street 2006a, 155). If she is correct, then challenging her on the science of evolutionary psychology will only delay the dilemma, not fully disarm it, because it can reemerge with further scientific study. Given these considerations, I will focus for the remainder of the chapter on responses that assume the scientific premise of the Darwinian Dilemma is correct.

3. Copp's Reply

Copp chooses to defend the relation horn of the dilemma, by arguing that our basic motivational tendencies evolved to quasi-track the ethical truth. He claims that “the capacity to quasi-track the moral truth was part of a system of evaluative responses that was adaptive” (Copp 2008, 195). According to Copp’s society-centered theory, basic motivational tendencies that quasi-track the objective ethical truth were adaptive because they promoted more functional communities and societies, which in turn increased the fitness of individuals within those societies. Humans, as social creatures, therefore evolved basic motivational tendencies which quasi-tracked the objective ethical truth in order to live together better.

Before I consider the details of Copp’s theory, I want to address the term “quasi-tracking”. This term seems to me to be ambiguous and misleading. It is not clear in what sense the prefix “quasi” applies, and therefore what makes quasi-tracking different from the normal tracking account. One might think the prefix is meant to suggest that humans track the ethical truth an acceptable amount of the time, or perhaps it means that when we are tracking a particular truth we do so with sufficient reliability but not infallibly. Copp certainly seems to use it both ways to suggest that his theory makes room for error. It doesn’t really matter though which meaning Copp intends, because the original tracking account makes room for both forms of fallibility as well. Therefore, it remains unclear in what sense “quasi-tracking” is different from the normal tracking account. While this may seem like an insignificant terminology dispute, I draw attention to it because I believe Copp’s society-centered tracking account suffers from the same problems as the original tracking account, because it is really just a fleshed out example of the original tracking account. Copp’s society-centered theory is simply an explication of one

possible tracking account, and it is therefore confusing to describe it as quasi-tracking, with the implication that as a hybrid theory it somehow avoids the problems of the original tracking account. I will therefore refer to Copp's theory as simply a defense of the tracking account.

Copp's theory is that the adaptive link account is actually compatible with the tracking account, and that the two can be combined to support the claim that humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truth. As a reminder, the tracking account states that humans evolved to possess basic motivational tendencies that tend to track the objective ethical truths, because it was adaptive to have basic motivational tendencies that tended to track the objective ethical truths. The adaptive link account states that humans evolved to possess basic motivational tendencies that produce an effective response to their circumstances, because it was adaptive to have that effective responses to their circumstances. While these two accounts give different reasons for the adaptivity of basic motivational tendencies, they are in theory compatible. If it was the case that the basic motivational tendencies that produce the most effective response to one's circumstances were also the basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truths, then the two theories would be compatible. In such a scenario, the adaptive link account serves to explain *why* it is that tracking the ethical truth is adaptive.

According to Copp, just such a scenario occurred with human beings, because the most adaptive basic motivational tendencies for living in a community or society are those that track the objective ethical truths. If Copp can tell a convincing story about the adaptivity of evolving basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truth when living in a community or society, then he can argue that the tracking account is compatible with the adaptive link account.

If that is the case, then he will have successfully defended the relation horn by showing that the ethical realist can give a scientifically acceptable explanation for why humans developed basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths. I will now look at Copp's society-centered theory of ethics, to see if it can support such an argument, before considering problems with Copp's response to the Darwinian Dilemma.

Copp's society-centered view states that the function of ethics is to promote a harmonious society that meets the needs of its members (Copp 2008, 198). He therefore adopts a pluralistic form of ethical realism, which states that an ethical belief corresponds with the objective ethical truth only if that ethical belief is included in "the moral code that would best serve the function of enabling society to meet its needs" (Copp 2008, 199). This means that, for an ethical belief to correspond to the objective ethical truth, it must be the case that if most of a society's members acted in accordance with that belief, the society would best achieve its goals. So, for example, the ethical belief that 'one ought to treat others fairly' corresponds to the objective ethical true if and only if a society's goals would best be served by its members treating each other fairly. Copp is somewhat vague about the needs and goals of a society, but he does say that a functional society needs "to motivate us to live together peacefully, cooperatively and productively" and to promote "peaceful relations with their neighbors" (Copp 2008, 198, 201). It appears that a society's needs consist in whatever is needed to promote productive activity within the society, which Copp contends is best achieved through social harmony and cooperation.

This society-centered theory counts as a form of ethical realism because the truth of an ethical belief is still a function of what is socially advantageous, which is an objective fact of the matter. This distinguishes it from subjectivist views like social relativism or constructivism,

which determine what is ethically true based on what members of the society believe is right or would agree to accept as right in certain circumstances. It is an objective fact that a society functions better with access to basic necessities like food and water, and if it turns out to be the case that things like fairness give society better access to those needs, then it is an objective fact that fairness is socially advantageous and therefore ethical on Copp's view. That fact is independent of any individual's beliefs about fairness or about what contribute most to a functioning society. The theory therefore counts as a form of ethical realism.

The result of Copp's society-centered account of ethical truth is a form of ethical pluralism where ethical truth can vary according to the context sensitive needs of a society. So, for example, what is advantageous for a society in the tropics might not be advantageous for a society in the arctic circle. These societies may therefore have different, possibly conflicting ethical codes that follow from the differing needs of their citizens. Copp does argue that this variability has limits though, because all societies share the same basic needs, and the best means to achieve those needs are finite. According to Copp, any society will need to protect its citizens and ensure social harmony both within the community and with its neighbors, and in order to do so he believes functional societies will inevitably develop "a deontological code of a familiar kind" (Copp 2008, 200). I take this to mean that ethical norms concerning things like fairness and cooperation, of the sort that we take to be ethically correct today, have to develop in a society for that society to meet its needs. When such ethical codes don't arise, the society suffers and dies out. There are therefore a limited number of societally-relative ethical codes that track the objective ethical truths.

Copp applies his society-centered theory of ethics to the Darwinian Dilemma as a means to defend the relation horn. His contention is that basic human motivational tendencies evolved in community settings, and that in those community settings the tendencies that produced the most effective responses to circumstances were those that tracked the objective ethical truths. There is no coincidence here for two reasons. First, Copp's society-centered theory defines the ethical as a function of what is socially advantageous, which means that so long as natural selection favors socially advantageous motivational tendencies, it will by definition favor ethical motivational tendencies. Second, on Copp's view, the basic needs of harmony and cooperation shared by all societies ensure the adoption of ethical codes that track the generally accepted objective ethical truths concerning things like justice and equality, because tracking those objective ethical truths is the best way to meet society's needs. For example, the tendency to track truths about fairness is socially advantageous, because reliably recognizing and responding to violations of fairness promotes stability and trust within a society, which leads to more prosperous commerce and communication. On this view, tendencies towards things like honesty and open discourse and against things like wanton violence and antagonism all promote social harmony, and therefore produce an effective response to the circumstances of a human society. Once again, these basic motivational tendencies, which provided the content for our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes, would have evolved to track a variety of objective ethical truths, because doing so produced an adaptive response to one's circumstances. Copp concludes from this that the tracking account is compatible with the adaptive link account for humans living in societies, and that the ethical realist therefore has no trouble explaining how it is that humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths. The ethical realist

can combine these evolved social tendencies with rational reflection in order to safely grasp the relation horn of the dilemma and claim that humans believe certain ethical propositions *because* they are true.

4. Problems with Copp's Society-Centered Theory

There are several problems with Copp's defense of the tracking account and the relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma. I will look first at issues with the society-centered theory in particular, before arguing that Copp's theory is insufficient to defend the relation horn of the dilemma. The problem with the society-centered theory is that Copp's definition of ethics is unacceptable, and without that definition, the theory has no way to support the claim that there is a significant correlation between a motivational tendency's adaptivity and its tracking the objective ethical truth. I will conclude that any version of the original tracking account will fail, because the tracking account is simply philosophically untenable.

Once again, Copp's society-centered theory defines the ethical truth as a function of what is socially advantageous. In short, this society-centered definition of ethics is unsupported, on both a theoretical and a historical level. I will look first at why the definition is philosophically implausible before discussing how it is also unsupported by historical evidence. Copp's definition is implausible, in my opinion, because it ultimately means that anything that is socially advantageous is therefore ethical, even if that thing violates generally accepted objective ethical truths. If slavery proved to be a functional way for society to meet its needs, then according to Copp's society-centered theory, slavery is ethical. Many will find this line of thought extremely philosophically unappealing, both because it suggests that slavery could ever be ethical, and because it suggests that social advantage is a right-making property for slavery. I believe it is

intuitively apparent that the ethical valence of slavery is not a function of slavery's social advantageousness. If you asked an individual why it is ethically acceptable to own slaves, and she responded that it was an advantageous way to meet society's needs, you would seriously question her understanding of ethics. This is also intuitively apparent if we replace slavery with child abuse, rape, or any number of other abhorrent behaviors. Therefore, even if tendencies and beliefs that are socially advantageous happen to correspond to what is objectively ethically true in some cases, the objective ethical truth still does not depend on what is socially advantageous.

Furthermore, I challenge Copp's claim that this definition of ethical truth naturally follows from the fact that one function of ethical beliefs and attitudes is to meet society's needs. It might very well be the case that one main function of ethical beliefs and attitudes is to promote advantageous social behavior, without it following that the ethical truth is merely a function of what is socially advantageous. Ethics might very well turn out to promote social functioning specifically because it takes into account other factors than what is simply socially advantageous, such as human rights and deontological considerations. An argument is needed, at least, to explain why Copp's definition of ethical truth follows from his claim that ethics function is to meet society's needs.

Even if Copp can support his definition of ethical truth as a function of what is socially advantageous, there is still the additional problem of defining what is socially advantageous. What sort of metric is used to determine if a society is successfully meeting its needs? Is it determined solely by the aggregate fitness of all its citizens, or is quality of life also a consideration? Should we factor in the length of time the society as a whole survives, or perhaps its impact on human development? Unlike with individual adaptivity, there is no simple way to

define a successful and functioning society. As a result of this inability to define a successful society, it is difficult to agree on which societies throughout history were adaptive and successful and therefore what sorts of social codes are genuinely ethical.

Looking at possible examples of successful societies throughout history will not solve the problem either, because history appears to be full of successful societies doing things that are generally considered ethically unacceptable. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that acting fairly is ethical. Copp clearly thinks it is, because he believes that fairness is socially advantageous. While it might seem true in theory that a fair society would function better than an unfair society, historically many societies have benefited from acting unfairly. Most successful human societies have, at some significant point in their history, developed their society through slave labor and conquest. The Greeks, the Egyptians, the Romans, America and Europe all built empires through war, conquest, and slavery. Many countries today, including the worlds largest superpowers, are still supporting their economic development through an unfairly paid labor class. It therefore appears that unfair policies like slavery have proven socially advantageous throughout human history.

To avoid this problem, Copp has to claim that these societies actually failed to meet their needs as successfully as they would have if they adopted ethical codes that better tracked the objective ethical truths. On Copp's view, societies that owned slaves would have actually been more successful if they had promoted freedom and equality. This is an understandable proposition to maintain, as there is reason to think that things like economic equality promote a more harmonious society, which in turn promotes a more advantageous society. However, it remains questionable to claim that unethical social codes are never an advantageous way for a

society to meet its needs. To me, this claim is equivalent to the claim that unethical actions are never the best way for an individual to meet her needs. Those that find this claim implausible for individuals will likely also find it implausible for societies. There are countless examples of situations where an unethical action is still the best overall option available to an individual, even if an ethical action would theoretically be preferable. The same might be said for societies, that sometimes the best way for a society to meet its actual needs, given its circumstances, is to adopt a social code that does not track the generally accepted ethical truths. I remain sympathetic to Copp's view that an ethical code that tracks the objective ethical truth would be the most socially advantageous, but historically most societies have not adopted such an ethical code.

5. Problems with Copp's Defense of the Relation Horn

The fact that Copp is forced, by his own society-centered account of ethical truth, to admit that most societies throughout human history have adopted social codes that were flawed in the sense of not optimally meeting their needs, raises a far more serious problem for the society-centered theory as a response to the Darwinian Dilemma. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Copp's society-centered theory is correct in claiming that the ethical is a function of the socially advantageous. If this is true, and we agree that many human societies have acted unethically through slavery and warfare, it follows that societies throughout human history have failed to adopt optimal advantageous ethical codes, because those codes failed to track the objective ethical truths. If that is the case though, then it appears that humans did not actually evolve basic motivational tendencies that track the socially advantageous objective ethical truths, because they tended to develop societies with ethical codes that did not track the object ethical truths. This wouldn't necessarily be an issue for Copp, but he is trying to use the society-centered

theory to support the claim that basic motivational tendencies did evolve to reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. If Copp's society-centered theory is correct about social advantage and the ethical truth, but history is filled with unethical and maladaptive societies, then it appears that the adaptive link account is actually false for human beings as social creatures. To be clear, the adaptive link account states that humans evolved motivational tendencies that produced an adaptive response to one's environment, and on Copp's view that does not actually appear to be true as far as human social tendencies are concerned. If the adaptive link account is actually false for the society-centered theory, and our basic motivational tendencies did not evolve to track what is socially advantageous, then it follows, by Copp's definition, that humans did not evolve to track the objective ethical truth. The theory therefore fails as a response to the Darwinian Dilemma.

Copp might try to argue that, overall, societies have done a good job of adopting ethical codes that tended to track the ethical truth, and that over the course of human history rational reflection has improved upon those moral codes. I am not interested in debating this empirical question. The key thing to note is that Copp's society-centered theory is facing the same difficulties as the original tracking account, and his theory ultimately provides the same responses. When faced with historical examples of societies acting in ways that seem wrong, Copp must marginalize these cases and focus on examples of societies acting ethically. This is no different than someone who wants to claim that individuals evolved to track the objective ethical truth, and so marginalizes the examples of human motivational tendencies that do not correspond to objective ethical truths and overemphasizes the cases where the two do correspond. It is this inability to account for all the data that Street cites as clear evidence that the adaptive link

account is superior to the tracking account for explaining the evolution of human motivational tendencies. Following Street, we can respond to Copp by claiming that, based on the historical evidence, it makes more sense to reject his definition of the ethical as identical to the socially advantageous. If we reject that definition, then we can use the adaptive link account to explain the history of unethical human societies as well as the history of ethical human societies. In every case, the individuals were adopting basic motivational tendencies that tracked what is socially advantageous, but in some cases what was socially advantageous was unethical. Given the strong intuition that societies do tend to adopt ethical codes that are advantageous, it doesn't really make sense to claim that historically most societies have acted against their best interests. It makes more sense to say that they have largely acted in their best interests, and that in some cases those actions were not in keeping with the objective ethical truths. Finally, we may reiterate that when our social codes do appear to line up with what we intuitively believe is ethical, on Street's view that is just a consequence of humans evolving to strongly believe that the ethical code they adopt is correct, because it is adaptive to do so.⁸

Without the assumption that the ethical is identical to the socially advantageous, basic motivational tendencies that formed based on what is socially advantageous and happened to correspond to the objective ethical truths will still not count as tracking those truths, because they will fail the two conditionals of tracking discussed in the previous chapter. As a reminder, the two conditionals that must be met for a belief to count as tracking the truth are that the individual believes the proposition when it is true and does not believe it when it is not true. If the individual's beliefs cannot reliably meet those counterfactuals, then the belief fails to track the

⁸ For more on Street's criticism of the society-centered theory of ethics as an answer to the Darwinian Dilemma, see Street (2008).

truth. Looking again at the case of slavery, it seems true, if we assume the correctness of the adaptive link account and the society-centered theory, that a society would adopt an ethical code that included slavery if it proved advantageous, even if it was the case that slavery was objectively unethical. Conversely, if somehow slavery was ethical, but not socially advantageous, then societies would still not adopt ethical codes that involved slavery. The only way for Copp to avoid these conditionals is to claim that, based on his society-centered definition of ethical truth, it is not possible for social advantage and ethical truth to come apart. Given the implausibility of his Copp's definition of ethical truth discussed in the previous chapter, I believe this is an extremely weak response. Barring further evidence from Copp, it appears then, as it did with individuals, that there is no significant correlation between whether a social code helps a society meet its needs and whether that social code tracks the objective ethical truths. Sometimes ethical codes are socially advantageous, sometimes unethical codes are socially advantageous.

In conclusion, whether or not Copp claims that societies which owned slaves or amassed power through conquest were doing what was socially advantageous and tracking the ethical truth or not, neither answer is acceptable. Either way he is unsuccessfully grasping one horn of the Darwinian Dilemma. It is abhorrent to claim that slavery is ethical for a society, whether or not it is functional for that society, just as it is abhorrent to claim that infidelity is ethical for an individual, whether or not the basic motivational tendency was adaptive. So it is very difficult for him to claim that slavery was ethical for some societies. But admitting that all societies that owned slaves failed to track the objective ethical truth is equivalent to claiming that human beings as social creatures did not evolve to track the objective ethical truths. This forces Copp back onto the no-relation horn and the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that human social codes

are largely ethically off track, and that humans therefore lack a means to gain knowledge of the objective ethical truths.

Ultimately, I believe that every defense of the relation horn which begins by claiming that our basic motivational tendencies track the objective ethical truth *because* it is adaptive to do so will face these problems. It just doesn't make sense to say that we have a belief *because* it is adaptive *and* that belief tracks the objective ethical truth, unless one can make a case that those two things are strongly correlated. If they are not though, and it is only contingently the case that an adaptive ethical belief also corresponds to the objective ethical truth, then it follows that ethical beliefs that reliably correspond to what is adaptive still fail the conditions of tracking. This leads once again to the no-relation horn of the dilemma and the unacceptable skeptical conclusion. The only way I can see to defend the relation horn and the claim that our basic motivational tendencies reliably correspond to the objective ethical truth is to argue that they reliably correspond for some other reason than because it is adaptive.

I will now look at two examples of such an argument, where a "third-factor" explains both why the beliefs humans evolved are adaptive *and* why those beliefs reliably correspond to the objective ethical truth. I believe these theories get closer to avoiding the problems I've been discussing in this section, though I still believe they are insufficient by themselves to defuse the dilemma. Still, by not claiming that humans track the objective ethical truth *because* it is adaptive, they definitely get closer than Copp to successfully defending the relation horn.

6. Third-factor Responses

Wielenberg and Enoch both take a different approach to Copp in trying to defend the relation horn of the dilemma. Copp argues that there is a direct connection between the objective

ethical truth and what is adaptive, such that certain basic motivational tendencies are adaptive *because* they track the truth. On the other hand, Wielenberg and Enoch argue that there is no direct connection between the adaptivity of a basic motivational tendencies and whether it tracks the objective ethical truth, but there is a pre-established harmony between the adaptivity of an a tendency and its reliability, caused by a third factor that ties these two factors together. I will begin with a general account of the third-factor response, before considering the strengths and weaknesses of Wielenberg and Enoch's versions. I will conclude that Wielenberg and Enoch's third-factor arguments are superior to Copp's society-centered defense of the relation horn, but that they are perhaps insufficient by themselves for a thorough response to the Darwinian Dilemma.

For the ethical realist to defend the relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma, she must argue that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the ethical realist is obligated to explain how this reliable correspondence developed, given the significant influence of natural selection. Without an evolutionary explanation of this correlation, Street is right in claiming that the ethical realists is simply positing a lucky and miraculous coincidence. Enoch claims that there are three ways to explain such a correlation (Enoch 2010, 429). Either our basic motivational tendencies cause the ethical truths, as the anti-realist claims, or the objective ethical truths cause our basic motivational tendencies, as the tracking account claims, or there is some third factor that explains the correlation between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths without positing a direct causal relationship between them.

Obviously, the anti-realist explanation is not available to the ethical realist, so she is left with the second and third explanations. As we've seen, the second explanation is problematic, because it is difficult to support the claim that there is a significant correlation between the adaptivity of a basic motivational tendency and its reliable correspondence to the objective ethical truth. To defend this explanation, the realist has to try to explain, as Copp does, why a basic motivational tendency is adaptive *because* it reliably corresponds to the objective ethical truths. In Copp's case, a social ethical code based on basic motivational tendencies that reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths is socially advantageous, and is therefore adaptive for humans. As we saw though, it is difficult to support the claim that there is a significant correlation between a social code's correspondence to the objective ethical truths and whether it produces a social advantage. It is therefore difficult to maintain, as Copp does, that humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths *because* it is adaptive to do so.

Enoch and Wielenberg therefore opt for the third possible explanation, where a third factor explains both why humans developed certain basic motivational tendencies and why those tendencies reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. The primary advantage of the third-factor account is therefore that it provides an alternative to the unacceptable options Street presents to the ethical realist. The realist need choose between the no-relation horn and abandoning realism in favor of ethical constructivism. She can claim that the correlation arises without using the tracking account as an explanation. This means that the third-factor account avoids the scientifically implausible claim that humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths *because* it is adaptive to do so. On the third-factor theory,

humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that are adaptive, and as a separate fact some of those beliefs and attitudes reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. Both of these facts are explained by a third-factor, which necessitates that both facts obtain, rather than by a direct relationship between the adaptivity of the basic motivational tendencies and its correspondence to the objective ethical truths. Thus, the crucial feature of the third-factor accounts is that they attempt to defend the relation horn without appealing to the tracking account. I will now consider the details of the third-factor theories offered by Wielenberg and Enoch, and we shall see how much these theories actually differ from a Copp's defense of the relation horn. It is my contention that they differ in significant ways, which make it harder for Street to discredit them.

7. Wielenberg's Third-factor Response

Wielenberg's third-factor argument rests on the claim that certain basic motivational tendencies are adaptive, and that the cognitive faculties needed to develop those basic motivational tendencies necessitate that the tendencies reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. Wielenberg focuses specifically on the cognitive faculties that produce basic motivational tendencies concerned with personal boundaries. He argues that these motivational tendencies are clearly adaptive, because protecting one's person will increase one's survivability and therefore one's fitness. Expanding these views about personal boundaries to include one's kin is clearly also adaptive for the same reasons. There is no trouble explaining the evolution of these tendencies. Nor, Wielenberg claims, is it hard to see how these basic motivational tendencies provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes concerning rights and the inviolability of personhood. This is one

plausible explanation for how humans acquired ethical beliefs about rights and personhood, as a result of the adaptive motivational tendencies to protect oneself.

According to Wielenberg, the cognitive faculties which allow an individual to develop basic motivational tendencies concerning her personal boundaries and rights also ensure that her basic motivational tendencies track the objective ethical truths regarding her boundaries and rights. Wielenberg claims that "...if rights exist at all, their presence is guaranteed by the presence of certain cognitive faculties", specifically, the faculties that allow an individual to develop basic motivational tendencies and subsequent ethical beliefs concerning her rights (Wielenberg 2010, 449). On this view, there is no gap between possessing the cognitive faculty to believe that one has rights and the truth of that belief, because simply possessing those faculties and forming those beliefs is enough to ensure their reliability. "If you think you possess moral barriers, than you do" (Wielenberg 2010, 449). The idea here, as I understand it, is that any individual evolved enough to have motivational tendencies and beliefs concerning her rights and boundaries is the sort of entity that has rights and ethical boundaries.

This theory counts as a form of ethical realism, because it maintains that there are objective ethical truths determined by the existence of entities with the cognitive faculty to form beliefs about rights. These objective ethical truths are consciousness-dependent, in the sense that they depend on the existence of sufficiently conscious entities, but they are stance independent, in that they are true independent of any individual's beliefs or attitudes about them. Also, while Wielenberg claims that these cognitive faculties secure the reliability of our ethical beliefs and attitudes, it does not follow that our actual beliefs about rights and boundaries are necessarily infallible; there is still room for error. If a person believed she had the right to kill anyone she

wanted and never be punished, that would clearly be a false belief about rights. Conversely, if she believed she had a right not to be violated or tortured in any way, then the reliable correspondence of those beliefs to the objective ethical truth would be ensured by the existence of the cognitive faculties that produced those beliefs.

So, on Wielenberg's view, the cognitive faculties that produce basic motivational tendencies, and by extension full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes, concerning ethical boundaries and rights serve as the third-factor for explaining how humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. Once again, the key point here is that Wielenberg is trying explain the reliable correspondence without appealing to a tracking account. Wielenberg is *not* claiming that the cognitive capacities evolved because it is adaptive to track the objective ethical truths. The cognitive faculties exist solely because was adaptive to form basic motivational tendencies about personal rights and boundaries. Humans would have developed these faculties even if Wielenberg's theory proved wrong and our basic motivational tendencies concerning personal boundaries turned out not to reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. However, on Wielenberg's theory, the tendencies are necessarily reliable, because that reliability is ensured by the very capacity to develop the tendencies. Notice again that the reliability of these basic motivational tendencies has nothing to do with their adaptiveness, because on Wielenberg's view basic motivational tendencies concerning rights and boundaries would still be reliable even if it was not adaptive to develop them or the cognitive faculty that produces them.

In conclusion, on Wielenberg's view, there is no direct relationship between a basic motivational tendency's adaptiveness and its correspondence to the objective ethical truths, but

thanks to a third factor, the basic motivational tendencies that are adaptive for humans also turn out to reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. This is crucially different from a theory like Copp's, where the reliable correspondence between our basic motivational tendencies the objective ethical truths is ensured by a direct connection between the tendency's adaptivity the fact that it tracks the objective ethical truths. Wielenberg's theory does not assume the ethical rightness or wrongness of developing the cognitive faculties that allow humans to form basic motivational tendencies concerning personal boundaries and rights, he merely claims the existence of those cognitive faculties is adaptive and, as a separate fact, the existence of those cognitive faculties secures the reliability of those tendencies. "Sufficiently cognitively developed creatures that are products of evolution will possess moral barriers (if such barriers are real) and will also be disposed to believe that they have such barriers" (Wielenberg 2010, 449). Thus, human motivational tendencies concerning rights and boundaries, and by extension our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes about rights and boundaries will reliably correspond to the objective ethical truth because their reliability necessarily follows from the fact that humans possess the cognitive faculties to form such tendencies and beliefs. If this is correct, then Wielenberg can safely grasp the relation horn of the dilemma and state that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that tracked the objective ethical truths. Since he supports this claim by appealing to a third-factor rather than the tracking account, Wielenberg avoids the scientifically implausible claim that a tendency's adaptiveness depends on its correspondence to the objective ethical truth. I will now look at Enoch's third-factor argument, before considering how Street might respond to these two theories.

8. Enoch's Third-factor Response

Enoch focuses on survival as the third factor for explaining how humans developed basic motivational tendencies that reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths. He assumes that, other things being equal, survival is a good (Enoch 2009, 430). Unfortunately, Enoch is somewhat ambiguous about how he means that survival is good, though he does say that it is not absolutely, ultimately, or intrinsically good (Enoch 2009, 430). There are situations, he claims, where survival is not the highest good and acts that promote survival are still unethical. He merely wants to assume that, generally speaking, surviving is better than not surviving. I discuss below the problems raised by this assumption and a possible way that Enoch can actually support the claim that survival is a good. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that survival is a good, it is not too difficult to explain a correlation between the objective ethical truth that survival is good and our basic motivational tendencies concerning survival. Through the selection of adaptive basic motivational tendencies, humans evolved strong urges to survive, which then developed into ethical beliefs and attitudes that promote safety and survival. Insofar as survival is a good, these tendencies, and the full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes that developed out of them, reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths.

This theory might appear at first to be simply another explication of the tracking account, similar to Copp's society-centered theory but focused on the good of individual survival. It might seem that in both cases, the ethical realist is claiming that natural selection drove humans toward basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths because it is adaptive to track the ethical truth. On Copp's view, the ethical truth is a function of what is socially advantageous, and tracking what is socially advantageous is adaptive. On Enoch's view, the ethical truth is a

function of promoting survival, and tracking what promotes survival is adaptive. However, I believe that this constitutes a significant misreading of Enoch's view. Enoch explicitly states that he is not claiming that survival is good because it is adaptive, or that ethics is entirely a function of promoting survival, the way that ethics is entirely a function of promoting social advantage on Copp's view (Enoch 2009, 430). Nor is there a direct relationship, on Enoch's view, between a basic motivational tendency's adaptiveness and its tracking the objective ethical truth. The only reason, according to Enoch, that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that sometimes correspond to the objective ethical truths is that the "aim" of natural selection, promoting survival, also happens to be good other things being equal. Enoch's view therefore avoids the problematic claims associated with a defense of the relation horn that relies on the tracking account, as Copp does. Enoch does not have to claim that humans evolved to track the objective ethical truths *because* it is adaptive to track those ethical truths, and consequently he does not have to defend an implausible definition of the ethical truth as a function of whether the corresponding belief promotes survival or social advantage.

Therefore, while Enoch's third-factor argument essentially describes a tracking relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, in the sense that our basic motivational tendencies reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths, it should not be considered a defense of the tracking account as originally laid out by Street, because it does not explain the reliable correspondence by claiming that tracking the objective ethical truth is adaptive. On Enoch's view, tracking the objective ethical truth is not an adaptive-making property for basic motivational tendencies. Humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that promoted survival, because doing so was adaptive, and it also happens to be the

case that promoting survival is a good. The fact that our basic motivational tendencies concerning survival tended to correspond to the objective ethical truths has no impact on the adaptiveness of those beliefs, nor vice versa. This might seem like a minor point, but I have focused on it because I believe that, by avoiding the tracking account, Enoch's theory avoids most of the issues that Copp's society-centered theory faced as an explication of the original tracking account. By denying that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that track the objective ethical truths because it is adaptive to do so, the ethical realist can avoid arguing for an indefensible positions.

So, on Enoch's view, two entirely unrelated facts necessarily obtain: humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that promote survival, and survival is generally speaking a good. It follows from this that, generally speaking, the basic motivational tendencies and subsequent ethical viewpoints that developed in humans reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths, because they aimed to promote survival, and survival is a good. Notice that Enoch does not need to claim that ethics is nothing more than promoting survival, or that survival is the only or greatest good. All he has to assume is that survival is counted among the things that are good, and as a result the basic motivational tendencies that promote survival often correspond to the objective ethical truths. According to Enoch, this is enough to explain the correlation between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, because in truth the correlation is not especially strong (Enoch 2009, 427). There are many other goods besides survival, and many things that humans evolved to do for survival sake that might not correspond to the generally accepted objective ethical truths. Therefore some of the tendencies and ethical beliefs that humans formed in the promotion of survival will not correspond to the objective ethical

truths. This fallibilism is perfectly acceptable, so long as survival is enough of a good that tendencies which promote survival mostly correspond to the objective ethical truths.

In conclusion, Enoch's third-factor argument aims to refute Street's accusation that the ethical realist is simply positing the happy coincidence that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that happened to correspond to the objective ethical truths. Enoch is providing an explanation for the correspondence between what is ethically true and what evolution pushed humans to believe. Like Wielenberg, Enoch bases this explanation on a third-factor, rather than on the tracking account, and so avoids the implausible scientific claim that a basic motivational tendency's adaptiveness depends on its correspondence to the objective ethical truths. Enoch simply claims that, insofar as survival is *prima facie* good, evolution provided humans with some reliable motivational tendencies, and then ethical reasoning took over and weeded out the unethical tendencies that happened to promote survival. I will now look at what responses Street can effectively make against third-factor arguments.

9. Challenging Third-factor Responses

As I've already suggested, I believe that third-factor theories are resistant to Street's standard responses to defenses of the relation horn. There is no implausible equation of the ethical with some adaptive-making property like social advantage, as there is in Copp's case. Also, Street cannot merely dismiss the correlation between our ethical viewpoints and the objective ethical truths as an illusion, produced through natural selection to further reinforce the effectiveness of our motivational tendencies. Wielenberg and Enoch can both freely admit that adaptivity drove us to believe that our basic motivational tendencies and ethical beliefs reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths solely because it is adaptive to objectivize one's

motivational tendencies and ethical beliefs, and still claim that it is also the case that our tendencies and beliefs still reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. As Enoch puts it, “one efficient way of pushing us in the direction of acting in those ways is by pushing us to believe that it is good to act in those ways. And in fact, as we have just seen, it is good so to act” (Enoch 2009, 431). On these views, the truth of the claim that humans evolved to act in ways that promote survival solely because it is adaptive to do so does not detract from the goodness of those actions, because on these view the goodness of an action is still not solely dependent on its adaptiveness. For example, on Wielenberg’s view, the truth of the claim that we evolved cognitive faculties and ethical beliefs that track facts about personal boundaries and rights solely because it is adaptive to recognize and track such facts does not detract from the fact that possessing such cognitive faculties is sufficient to guarantee the reliability of the ethical beliefs they produce. Therefore, Street must do more than merely push the burden of proof onto the ethical realist by positing the supremacy of the adaptive link account, because the truth of the adaptive link account poses no threat to the third-factor argument.

It seems that Street must make the more difficult argument that the cognitive faculties cited by Wielenberg do not necessarily produce reliable motivational tendencies, and that Enoch cannot assume that survival is a good. In discussing Street’s potential responses to the third-factor arguments, I will focus primarily on a reply to Enoch, as his theory does not involve the added complication of rights introduced by Wielenberg’s theory. I still believe that Wielenberg’s account has a great deal of merit, especially because of the strong premise that the existence of certain cognitive faculties necessitates the existence of certain ethical truths. In fact, I believe that Wielenberg and Enoch’s accounts both come down to the idea that the existence of certain

forms of consciousness necessitates the existence of certain objective ethical truths. As we shall see, when Enoch talks of the goodness of survival, he really means the goodness of survival of entities with certain forms of consciousness. Wielenberg's rights talk could therefore be considered roughly synonymous with talk of the goodness of preserving consciousness. For the sake of space then, I shall focus on possible counterarguments to Enoch, with the assumption that similar arguments could be applied to Wielenberg so long as allowances were made for the concept of rights.

I believe that the most plausible counterargument that Street can make against Enoch is that he cannot assume that survival is even *prima facie* good. Without an argument supporting the claim that survival is good, other things being equal, Enoch's claim appears to be no more than a restating of the extremely lucky coincidence that adaptive beliefs also happen to correspond to the objective ethical truths, rather than explaining how this occurred. Furthermore, Street argues that the intuition that survival is a good in any objective sense is false. In her paper on ethical constructivism, Street argues that nothing, not even survival, is good or valuable, other than in the constructivist sense of being entailed from within a practical point of view. She cites, as an example, two organisms who develop diametrically opposed motivational tendencies concerning survival (Street 2006b, 220-221). The first organism is motivated to act in ways that preserve his life, and so dodges out of the way when a boulder rolls past. The second organism is motivated to act in ways that do not preserve his life, and so leaps in front of the boulder when it rolls past. Certainly we can say that the first organism is more likely to survive, while the second organism will quickly die off. But can we say that the second organism acted unethically by jumping in front of the boulder, assuming that he possessed nothing within his practical point of

view that entailed the goodness of survival? Street argues that we cannot claim that the second organism failed to recognize the value of his survival, and therefore was in no way in error for choosing to jump in front of the boulder. Think of this as the evolutionary equivalent of the coherent Caligula argument discussed in the first chapter. We may recommend that the lizard not jump in front of the boulder, just as we may recommend that Caligula not torture people, but we cannot say that either individual is making an error of ethical judgment in choosing the actions that they do, so long as those actions cohere with the rest of their practical point of view. I take from this that Street would contradict Enoch's claim that survival is good in any objective sense. It can only be considered good because it is entailed by the beliefs, attitudes, and desires present in our practical points of view. To claim otherwise is simply to restate the implausible coincidence that the adaptive thing for humans to track also happened to be good.

Enoch does not focus on providing an argument for the claim that survival is objectively a prima facie good, but that does not mean that no argument is available. I believe that I can supply Enoch with a possible argument that supports his claim that survival is objectively good, and therefore that his third-factor argument is more than just a restatement of the implausible coincidence that evolution happened to produce humans that track the objective ethical truths. Think back to the discussion in chapter one of the way in which ethical truths are consciousness-dependent. The existence of conscious entities is a necessary precondition for the existence of any particular ethical truths, in the sense that a universe without conscious entities lacks any particular ethical truths. I believe that Enoch could argue that, if we assume that objective ethical truths exist, as the Darwinian Dilemma does, one of those ethical truths would be that the survival of consciousness is prima facie good or called for, because consciousness is a necessary

precondition for anything else being ethical. It seems to me that it would be irrational to consider anything to be ethically called for without also considering the survival of consciousness to be ethically called for by extension. It would be like believing that philosophical dialogue is ethically called for, but that it would be ethically acceptable if all forms of communication were abolished. Therefore, I believe that Street cannot simply deny that the survival of consciousness is objectively ethical without essentially denying that anything is objectively ethical, which is the conclusion that her argument is meant to prove and therefore cannot be a part of the argument without begging the question. For me, little is riding on the success of this argument, I present it simply as one way that Enoch might try to support his claim that survival is *prima facie* good.

If Street cannot simply deny that survival is good, without covertly assuming the falsity of ethical realism, then I imagine the next response would be to argue that my defense of Enoch's theory really just amounts to claiming that the survival of consciousness is good in a constructivist sense, not a realist sense. Street could claim that the goodness of survival is still ultimately a function of what is entailed from within a conscious entity's practical point of view. I lack the space to pursue this issue further, but I do believe one could argue that, because the goodness of survival seems entailed by the existence of *any* ethical truths, not just a particular set of ethical truths, that survival is therefore not merely good in the constructivist sense.

There is one final objection that could be raised against these third-factor accounts by other ethical realists. Remember that, as a defender of the realist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, the ethical realist wants to claim that humans believe things are ethical or unethical *because* they are ethical or unethical. The third-factor argument avoids the problems of the tracking account, but it does so by removing any sense in which humans developed basic

motivational tendencies that are ethical *because* they are ethical. Wielenberg and Enoch are very clear that our basic motivational tendencies evolved to track what is adaptive, and that we therefore did not develop those tendencies *because* they correspond to the objective ethical truths. By denying a direct relationship between the adaptiveness of a basic motivational tendency and its correspondence to the objective ethically truths, they effectively make it impossible to claim that humans developed these tendencies *because* they are true. However, I believe that Wielenberg and Enoch could argue that it is acceptable that humans did not develop our basic motivational tendencies *because* they were true, because through ethical reasoning humans have developed full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes *because* those beliefs and attitudes track the objective ethical truths. I lack the space to pursue this issue further, but I do believe that the third-factor account is compatible with the realist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

In conclusion, I believe that Wielenberg and Copp's third-factor arguments fair much better than Copp's in defending the relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma, but that they still face some problems explaining the connection between our ethical beliefs and the objective ethical truths. I do not believe these problems are insurmountable, and that third-factor accounts could still prove useful in explaining how some of our evolved ethical beliefs happen to reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. but I will not pursue the issue further here. I turn now to two possible defenses of the no-relation horn of the dilemma, with the intention of arguing that even if ethical realists cannot conclusively defend the relation horn of the dilemma, they can still grasp the no-relation horn while avoiding the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that humans lack any knowledge of the objective ethical truths.

10. Defenses of the No-Relation Horn

For many ethical realists, the no-relation horn of the dilemma appears too problematic to defend. As we've seen, prominent ethical realists tend to focus on the relation horn, and Street herself claims that the relation horn is the more plausible position for the ethical realist to take (Street 2006a, 125). I believe this has resulted in a lack of consideration for some promising responses to the Darwinian Dilemma, and that ethical realists should not be so quick to dismiss the no-relation horn as a viable option. I will now present two defenses of the no-relation horn which I believe show significant promise, and which avoid some of the disadvantages of realist theories that defend the relation horn. Ultimately I will conclude that a combination of these arguments and the other realist responses discussed in this chapter is likely the best possible defense for the ethical realist.

To refresh, the no-relation horn states that humans developed basic motivational tendencies which had no relationship to the objective ethical truths. By no relationship I mean that our basic motivational tendencies did not track the objective ethical truths, and so did not consistently or reliably correspond to those truths. Some of those basic motivational tendencies may have happened to correspond to the objective ethical truths, but that is a matter of luck and in many cases no relationship existed. According to Street, since these basic motivational tendencies provided the content and intuitive backdrop for the development of our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes, the lack of reliable correspondence between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths resulted in a lack of reliable correspondence between our ethical viewpoints and the objective ethical truth. This lack of reliable ethical beliefs, combined with the stance-independent nature of objective ethical truths and the inability of

ethical reasoning to bridge the gap, results in the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that humans lack any knowledge of the objective ethical truths as well as any way to gain such knowledge. We cannot depend on our ethical beliefs and attitudes, because most of them aren't reliable, and rational reflection is unlikely to get us any closer to the objective ethical truths, because in the case of ethics rational reflection depends upon the reliability of our ethical beliefs and attitudes to gain further ethical knowledge. Therefore, the ethical realist cannot accept the no-relation horn unless she is willing to bite the bullet and accept that, whether or not objective ethical truths exist, humans have no knowledge of them.

It should be noted that the ethical realist could accept the skeptical conclusion that humans lack knowledge of the objective ethical truths without contradicting her position as a realist. As I argued in chapter one, all the ethical realist is really committed to claiming is that objective ethical aspects of reality exist. That is perfectly compatible with humans lacking any knowledge of the objective ethical aspects of reality. If there is a problem with adopting the no-relation horn, is that it makes ethical realism seem like empty theorizing. If we can have no knowledge of objective ethical truths, than positing their existence and making claims about them seems like pointless musing rather than genuine philosophical inquiry. Some would argue that claims about objective ethical truths are still important, even if humans ultimately lack knowledge of those objective ethical truths, but I will not press the point further here. I'm simply noting that the ethical realist is not logically forced to reject the no-relation horn. If the no-relation horn is indefensible for realists, it is because the skeptical conclusion is simply too unpalatable a pill to swallow.

The defenses of the no-relation horn I will now consider both aim to defend the horn by arguing that, even if natural selection had a pernicious influence on the development of our ethical viewpoints, the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that humans lack ethical knowledge does not follow. As I said, I believe that arguments like these have been neglected in the literature in favor of defenses of the relation horn, and that they play a crucial role in defusing the Darwinian Dilemma.

11. A Kantian Inspired Challenge to Street's Account of Ethical Reasoning

One way for the ethical realist to accept the no-relation horn while rejecting the skeptical conclusion that humans lack knowledge of the objective ethical truths is to challenge Street's account of how ethical reasoning functions. As we saw in chapter two, Street claims that ethical reasoning cannot correct for the effects of natural selection, because ethical reasoning can only determine the quality of an ethical belief or attitude by testing its compatibility with our other ethical beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, successful reasoning about ethical beliefs and attitudes depends on humans already possessing a set of reliable ethical beliefs and attitudes to use as a base. Unfortunately, according to the no-relation horn, humans lack a base of reliable motivational tendencies, and by extension a base of reliable ethical beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, according to Street, if the realist accepts the no-relation horn, she cannot appeal to ethical reasoning to improve the reliability of our ethical beliefs and attitudes.

I believe the ethical realist can challenge Street's assumption that ethical reasoning works through a coherentist system, where an ethical belief or attitude is only ever judged in terms of its compatibility with other ethical beliefs and attitudes. Taking a Kantian inspired approach, the ethical realist could argue that ethical reasoning properly determines the ethical valence of a

maxim, or guiding principle for action, by reflecting on the rationality of the maxim when universalized, not by reflecting on whether the maxim coheres with other accepted maxims (Kant 1956, 22). What matters, on this Kantian inspired view, is that when one acts according to a maxim, one would not be irrational in willing that everyone act according to that maxim. Whether the maxim coheres with the rest of the individual's practical point of view only matters insofar as it helps determine whether it would be irrational to universalize the maxim. On this view, it matters less that natural selection has provided humans with a mix of ethical and unethical basic motivational tendencies, because reason can determine which tendencies are rationally universalizable and discard the rest. If this Kantian inspired account of ethical reasoning is correct, it appears that reason may well be capable of bridging the gap between our misguided ethical beliefs and the objective ethical truths.

Street is left having to argue that the Kantian account of ethical reasoning is either flawed in itself or else is still somehow insufficient for bridging the gap between our ethical viewpoints and the objective ethical truths. It is not my aim in this thesis to defend this Kantian inspired account of ethical reasoning, though I do believe it provides a viable alternative to Street's coherentist account. I merely put it forth as one way that the realist could accept that evolution produced no relationship between our basic motivational tendencies and the objective ethical truths, while maintaining that reason has allowed humans to avoid the unacceptable skeptical conclusion that we lack ethical knowledge. It falls to Street to explain why this account of rationality is also insufficient to overcome the pernicious influence of natural selection. I will now turn to my final and preferred response to the Darwinian Dilemma.

12. My Partners in Crime Response

I classify my partners in crime response to the Darwinian Dilemma as a defense of the no-relation horn because it begins with accepting the truth of the no-relation horn. Like the Kantian inspired response that I have just presented, my partners in crime argument assumes that the ethical realist has failed to defend the relation horn and is forced to accept that humans evolved basic motivational tendencies that did not reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. That is the crime in question. That said, my partners in crime argument, again like the Kantian inspired response, does not accept that the skeptical conclusion that humans lack any ethical knowledge follows from accepting the no-relation horn. In the case of the Kantian inspired response, the argument why the skeptical conclusion does not follow is rather straightforward, as it depends entirely on the Kantian account of ethical reasoning. With my partners in crime argument is slightly more complicated, because I begin by showing that all abstract beliefs are at least as susceptible to the Darwinian Dilemma as ethical beliefs. I then argue that, if there is no significant difference between ethical beliefs and other abstract beliefs regarding the Darwinian Dilemma, then any evidence that humans can improve on the reliability of our abstract beliefs will also count as evidence for the claim that humans can improve on the reliability of our ethical beliefs. So, while my partners in crime argument begins by raising the specter of general skepticism, it ends by concluding that humans are able to improve upon both their ethical and non-ethical abstract beliefs, despite the influences of natural selection.

Note that a rejection of the skeptical conclusion that humans lack ethical knowledge is equivalent to the claim that, despite evolution, our ethical beliefs and attitudes have turned out to reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. Therefore, these defenses of the no-relation

horn still conclude the same thing as the defenses of the relation horn discussed earlier, which is that there is a relationship between our ethical viewpoints and the objective ethical truths. The reason they do not qualify as defenses of the relation horn is because they do not begin by claiming that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths. Defenses of the no-relation horn, as I understand it, begin by accepting that humans developed basic motivational tendencies that do not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths and then argue that our full-fledged ethical beliefs and attitudes still reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths.

My partners in crime response to the Darwinian Dilemma essentially claims that the dilemma applies to most of our abstract beliefs, such that the unacceptable skeptical conclusion follows for most of our non-perceptual knowledge, not just our ethical knowledge. I'm relying here on the rough distinction between perceptual beliefs or knowledge, which are about concrete entities and arise through our evolved perceptual faculties, and abstract beliefs or knowledge, which are reached through reasoning and inference, rather than through direct sensory experience. This distinction, which Street endorses, is significant because Street attempts to argue that the reliability of perceptual beliefs secures the reliability of abstract, non-ethical beliefs, thereby saving them from the Darwinian Dilemma. However, I believe that one cannot use the Darwinian Dilemma to argue for localized skepticism about ethics, without also arguing for global skepticism concerning all non-perceptual knowledge, because the arguments for skepticism presented in the Darwinian Dilemma apply to most of our abstract beliefs and not just ethical beliefs.

Take the example of human beliefs and attitudes concerning abstract subjects like statistics and probability. My partners in crime argument claims that one can apply the Darwinian Dilemma to human beliefs about statistics and get the same unacceptable skeptical conclusion that humans lack knowledge of statistics because it wasn't adaptive to develop reliable beliefs about statistics. It does appear to have been adaptive to develop a set of heuristics for dealing with issues of probability, just as it was adaptive for humans to develop heuristics about how to respond to their environment, but those heuristics were solely concerned with what was adaptive to believe, and not with tracking the truth. This is one possible explanation for why humans appear to consistently make errors of judgment concerning problems of statistics and probability.

I believe that similar arguments can be made for any field that is primarily concerned with abstract beliefs, such as economics, logic, psychology, philosophy, and mathematics in general. Any field where the object of study either was not of pressing concern to evolving humans, on par with fires and predators, or where beliefs in that field cannot be easily confirmed through perceptual observation, will have to face the Darwinian Dilemma. If no plausible evolutionary account can be given for why humans would have formed beliefs that track economic or mathematical or philosophical truths, then it seems reasonable to conclude that, thanks to natural selection, a large amount of our abstract beliefs fail to reliably correspond to the truth.

If my partners in crime argument is correct, then Street is faced with two options. She can maintain that the Darwinian Dilemma raises a skeptical problem for ethical realism, and accept that it also raises a skeptical problem for our abstract beliefs in general. If that is not acceptable, Street can reject global skepticism, but then she must either revise the Darwinian Dilemma or

argue that it still applies exclusively to ethical knowledge. I will now consider the comments Street has made concerning partners in crime arguments of this sort, and assess the strength of those responses.

13. Street's response to the partners in crime argument

Street does not believe that the Darwinian Dilemma results in global skepticism, and maintains that the dilemma applies exclusively to ethical knowledge. She addresses the issue directly in her original account of the dilemma, claiming that reason is able to provide us with reliable abstract, non-ethical beliefs because “our “starting fund” of (non-evaluative) factual judgments need not be viewed as mostly “off track”” (Street 2006a, 130). The reason that the Darwinian Dilemma applies to ethical beliefs and not other abstract beliefs is that the set of basic motivational tendencies that humans acquired through evolution do not track the objective ethical truths, but the set of perceptual beliefs humans acquired through evolution do reliably correspond to the perceptual truths, and can be used to ground the reliability our non-perceptual abstract beliefs. I will now examine Street's reasoning behind this distinction, and why I believe that it fails to prove that our abstract knowledge escapes the Darwinian Dilemma or that ethical knowledge is a special case.

In her original account of the Darwinian Dilemma, following her claim that it is easy to explain why it would be adaptive to reliably perceive the existence of fire and other nearby dangers, Street gives the following footnote:

It is points like this which explain why the Darwinian Dilemma doesn't go through against realism about non-evaluative facts such as facts about fires, predators, cliffs, and so on. In short, the difference is that in the case of such non-evaluative facts, unlike in the case of evaluative facts, the tracking account prevails as the best explanation of our capacity to make the relevant sort of judgment. In order to explain why it proved advantageous to form judgments

about the presence of fires, predators, and cliffs, one will need to posit in one's best explanation that there *were indeed* fires, predators, and cliffs, which it proved quite useful to be aware of, given that one could be burned by them, or would plummet over them. (Street 2006a, 130)

Street's claim is that in the case of perceptual beliefs, the best explanation for why they are adaptive is that they are true. Believing that dangerous things like predators and significant resources like food exist near oneself is only adaptive when they actually do exist. In other words, when it comes to perceptual beliefs, it is possible to grasp the relation horn of the Darwinian Dilemma, because the tracking account is the best explanation for the evolution of our perceptual beliefs. It is therefore easy to explain why human perceptual beliefs evolved to reliably correspond to the perceptual truths.

While Street does not state the next step of the argument explicitly, the thought appears to be that our set of reliable perceptual beliefs provides the starting fund for reason to use in making our abstract beliefs generally more reliable. Since our abstract beliefs do not concern things like fires and predators, Street cannot simply assume that they are reliable in the same way that perceptual beliefs are reliable. Street has to claim that our reliable perceptual beliefs, combined with reason, secure the reliability of our abstract, non-ethical beliefs. This allows Street to claim that reason can successfully provide humans with reliable abstract beliefs in general, while maintaining that it cannot do the same for ethical beliefs. Ethical beliefs cannot be secured by the reliability of perceptual beliefs alone, for reasons I discuss below, and my partners in crime argument assumes that there is no comparable set of reliable ethical beliefs for reasoning to build on. Street can therefore conclude that ethical knowledge really is a special case, and that it faces the Darwinian Dilemma alone.

Let us examine this argument, beginning with Street's claim that our perceptual beliefs are reliable. I concede to Street that the tracking account is the most plausible account for explaining the evolution of human perceptual faculties, because the adaptivity of our perceptual beliefs largely depends on the truth of those beliefs. I say largely because there are cases where the adaptivity of a perceptual belief and its correspondence to the truth can come apart. For example, take the common perceptual illusion, often cited by Buddhists, of looking at a piece of rope on the ground and thinking is a snake. A possible evolutionary justification for a perceptual mistake of this sort is that it is adaptive in certain circumstances, such as in a poorly lit area, to perceive things that look like snakes as snakes, because it causes the individual to react as if there is a snake there, whether there is or not. This reaction is adaptive because if the object does turn out to be a snake, the person will have avoided danger, but if it turns out not to be a snake the misguided reaction costs the individual very little. This is an unusual example though, and I believe it still makes sense to agree with Street that the tracking account is the best explanation for the evolution of human perceptual faculties.

However, that still only means that our perceptual beliefs are reliable for a very small segment of possible perceptual truths. Human perceptual beliefs are largely focused on tracking facts about medium sized dry goods, such as fires and predators and cliffs, because those are the things that it is most adaptive for humans to track. Consequently, these faculties do not produce reliable beliefs about a vast array of perceptual objects, from small scale entities like sub-atomic particles up to macro scale entities like universes. By Street's own account, human perceptual faculties also did not evolve to perceive abstract or non-causal entities, because it would not have been adaptive to perceive entities that we couldn't interact with. Even in cases like harmful

radiation, where it could potentially have been adaptive to be able to reliably perceive the presence of a danger in the environment, it seems that such perceptual faculties were either not adaptive enough compared to the cost of developing such faculties, or were precluded by developmental or genetic variation constraints. So, while Street may be right that human perceptual faculties are reliable belief forming mechanisms for a small set of perceptual beliefs, it also appears that they are not reliable belief forming mechanisms for a vast number of potential perceptual objects.

The reliability of our perceptual beliefs is essential to Street's response to a partners in crime argument, because she seems to claim that our perceptual beliefs provide the reliable base for the rational development of the rest of our non-ethical beliefs. The idea, once again, is that our reliable perceptual faculties, when combined with reason, allows humans to successfully separate non-ethical abstract truths from falsehoods. Support for this idea can be found in the success of science, where empirical observation and rational thought have combined to produce a wealth of knowledge and technological advancement. Clearly, proper empirical observation when combined with proper reasoning reliably produces knowledge, even of things which we cannot perceive directly.⁹

However, I do not believe that Street can simply assume that all our non-ethical abstract beliefs can be supported by a combination of reliable perceptual beliefs and reasoning. First of all, it is fairly controversial to claim that abstract beliefs in general can reliably be justified by perceptual beliefs. Indeed, one of if not the central problem in epistemology is how we can

⁹ Cornell ethical realists such as Brink (1989), who claim that ethical knowledge functions like scientific knowledge, would argue that this explanation for the reliability of our non-ethical abstract beliefs can also be applied to our ethical beliefs. I do not agree with this position, though I lack the space in this paper to argue against it. For arguments against Cornell realism, see Shafer-Landau (2003) and Tropman (2012). I mention them simply as an example of ethical realists who might try to use Street's method for defending non-ethical abstract knowledge to also defend ethical knowledge.

justify our non-perceptual beliefs based on our limited set of reliable perceptual beliefs and our reasoning. The Pyhrronian skeptic Sextus Empiricus famously argued through his two modes that, even if we can trust our perceptual beliefs about the world as they are immediately given to us, we must still suspend judgment on anything that cannot be confirmed through direct perception, because all arguments justifying abstract judgments are ultimately flawed. It was this problem of justification that led psychology to deny for decades any discussion of activity inside the black box of the mind, because the activity could not be externally perceived and verified. Therefore, Street cannot simply help herself to the assumption that the majority of human non-ethical beliefs, especially the non-perceptual beliefs about abstract entities, can be supported by our limited set of reliable perceptual beliefs.

I also do not believe that Street can assume that reason can close the gap between our non-ethical abstract beliefs and the non-ethical truths. Recent work in evolutionary psychology has begun to challenge the assumption that reason evolved in humans as a faculty for discovering the truth. In their recent work, Mercer and Sperber (2011) claim that reason actually evolved as a mechanism for forming and evaluating arguments, and that the aim of reason is not to discover which position is true, but which position can best be argued for (Mercer & Sperber 2011, 59). They claim that this account of the function of reason better explains the data collected by psychologists regarding the strengths and weakness of reasoning. As evidence, they cite a variety of well documented errors of reasoning, such as confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and belief persistence, which are reliably found through human reasoning. These flawed reasoning habits cannot be easily explained on the truth direct model of reasoning, because they inhibit the search for truth. However, if we look at these phenomena on the argumentative model of

reasoning proposed by Mercer and Sperber, they actually appear adaptive, because they help an individual to find arguments that support their beliefs. Mercer and Sperber therefore claim that if we accept that the function for which reason evolved is to supply individuals with arguments for their beliefs, then we are able to explain why our reasoning appears to possess certain mechanisms that do not contribute to discovering the truth.

Naturally, there are many situations where the position that can best be argued for is also the true one. However, it is important to see that truth and defensibility can and do come apart. Take our adversarial court system for example. Innocent people are regularly convicted and guilty people often walk free, because the case that can best be argued for is not necessarily the true case. If the most defensible position and the true position were typically the same thing, Socrates and the sophists would have had far less to argue over. The sophists were interested in what one can argue for, and Socrates was interested in the truth, so the only way for them to be in conflict is if the position that can most easily be argued often does not correspond to the truth. The very idea of a sophist as someone who aims to make the most convincing argument rather than the argument that leads to the truth assumes that these two things can and do come apart. Furthermore, according to Mercer and Sperber, “when a more easily justifiable decision is *not* a good one, reasoning still drives us in the direction of ease of justification” (Mercer & Sperber 2011, 71). Therefore, on this view, reason did not actually evolve to form beliefs that track the truth. It evolved to form beliefs that are easily justified and defended, some of which happened to correspond to the truth.

Of course, Street may argue that reason can still be used to successfully improve our abstract beliefs. Mercer and Sperber recognize situations where the argumentative model of

reasoning actually produces more reliable abstract beliefs, such as in groups where individuals hold competing beliefs and actively attempt to defend those beliefs (Mercer & Sperber 2011, 63). They also recognize that, in most cases, beliefs which reason can support with strong arguments are more likely to be true, and therefore “in most cases, reasoning is likely to drive us towards good decisions (Mercer & Sperber 2011, 71). Based on these considerations, I do believe that Street can make an argument that reason can improve the reliability of our abstract beliefs. I raises these issues to point out that Street cannot simply assume that reasoning is a reliable belief forming mechanism when it comes to non-ethical abstract beliefs and not ethical beliefs.

If Street wanted to provide further support for the claim that our non-ethical abstract beliefs avoid the Darwinian Dilemma, the strongest argument that I believe she can give is to appeal to the actual history of improvement in our non-ethical abstract beliefs as proof that our non-ethical abstract beliefs somehow escape the dilemma. I will not argue the point here, but I believe it is fair to say that human non-ethical abstract beliefs have improved over the course of human history through science and reasoning. Denying this would call into question all of academia, and would conflict with the many examples of human achievements that arose from an improvement in our abstract knowledge. Since no improvement in our non-ethical abstract beliefs would be possible if the Darwinian Dilemma applied to those beliefs, the fact that our abstract beliefs appear to have improved over the course of human history strongly suggests that the Darwinian Dilemma does not apply to those beliefs.

However, I believe that this argument for the reliability of non-ethical abstract beliefs can be cited as evidence that our ethical beliefs also avoid the Darwinian Dilemma, because Street has failed to show that our ethical beliefs are susceptible to the dilemma but our non-ethical

beliefs are not. If there is evidence that our non-ethical abstract beliefs are reliable despite the influence of natural selection, and no evidence that our ethical beliefs are significantly different than our other abstract beliefs in this respect, then it follows that our ethical beliefs must also be reliable despite the influence of natural selection. This is the positive upshot of my partners in crime argument. If our non-ethical abstract beliefs have somehow improved over time then there must also be hope for our ethical beliefs as well.

Once we reach this point, where there is good reason to think that our ethical beliefs, like our non-ethical abstract beliefs, could still be reliable despite evolution, I believe that the other responses to the Darwinian Dilemma that I have discussed can play a crucial role in explaining how our ethical beliefs turned out to be reliable. Enoch and Wielenberg's third-factor arguments could be used to explain why humans developed ethical beliefs and attitudes that do reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths. The Kantian inspired account of ethical reasoning could then be applied to explain how those reliable ethical beliefs and attitudes were sufficient for reason to secure the reliability of our other ethical beliefs and attitudes. Another option, which I have not discussed in this thesis but which remains an open option for the ethical realist, is to take the approach of ethical intuitionists such as Huemer (2005) and Tropman (2012), who argue that the same reasoning faculties which we use for improving our abstract ethical beliefs in general also serve to improve the reliability of our ethical beliefs. My goal here is not to provide a detailed explanation for how human ethical beliefs came to track the objective ethical truths. All I have shown is that the Darwinian Dilemma does not pose a special epistemic challenge for ethical realism, and that there are several possible ways that the ethical realist can explain the reliability of our ethical beliefs. Thanks to my partners in crime argument, realists

have breathing room to speculate, because they are in essentially the same situation as anyone else attempting to solve difficult epistemic challenges.

There is one final consideration I should mention concerning the distinction between abstract beliefs in general and ethical beliefs. Anti-realists have often appealed to the so called 'is/ought' or 'fact/value' divide to raise problems for the ethical realist. For example, I believe Street might argue that the reliability of our perceptual beliefs cannot secure the reliability of our ethical beliefs, because the fact/value divide prevents us from securing our ethical beliefs on the basis of our reliable perceptual beliefs. To do so would be to try to derive an ought from an is, and Street is likely to deny that this is possible. The fact/value divide is an extremely confused and contentious issue, which Bergmann analyzes as a conflation of several considerations about the subjectivity of value claims (Bergmann 1973, 257). I don't want to get sidetracked here debating the fact/value divide, which many ethicists believe poses no problem for ethical realism (Brink 1989, 144). I mention it as one remaining reason why the anti-realists might claim that ethical knowledge is still significantly different from the rest of abstract knowledge, and therefore faces the Darwinian Dilemma alone. The important thing is that the fact/value divide is never mentioned by Street in the original account of the Darwinian Dilemma, and the dilemma appears to function without it. If the claim is now that the Darwinian Dilemma only applies to ethical beliefs because of the fact/value divide, Street needs to make this explicit in her account of the dilemma and provide both an account and a defense of the fact/value divide.

In conclusion, I believe that the ethical realist can accept that humans did not develop basic motivational tendencies that reliably correspond to the objective ethical truths, while also maintaining that humans still have knowledge of the objective ethical truths. I believe that this

option has been sorely neglected in the literature and that it is the best response available to the ethical realist for defusing the Darwinian Dilemma. Street has not shown that her account of ethical reasoning is the only one available to the realist, nor has she shown that our non-ethical abstract beliefs successfully avoid the Darwinian Dilemma while our ethical beliefs do not. Therefore, if it appears that our non-ethical abstract beliefs can overcome the pernicious influence of evolution and become reliable, then I believe the same must be said for our ethical beliefs as well. The onus is on Street to show that ethical knowledge is uniquely susceptible to the Darwinian Dilemma, and until she does so, I believe that the ethical realist can successfully defend herself against Street's epistemic challenge.

14. Conclusion

In this thesis, my aim has been to confront and defuse Street's Darwinian Dilemma. I believe that the Darwinian Dilemma is one of the most pressing objections that ethical realism currently faces, and that without a proper response the dilemma presents a strong reason to abandon ethical realism in favor of ethical constructivism. However, I have argued that the ethical realist has plausible options available to her for responding to the Darwinian Dilemma.

I began the thesis by contrasting ethical realism with ethical constructivism, through the lens of the Euthyphro Dilemma. My goal, in framing the debate this way, was to clarify the conflict between the positions by showing that each ethical theory has the same strengths and weaknesses as one horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. I argued that ethical realism achieves a high degree of explanatory success, by making sense of a large proportion of ethical phenomena and intuitions, but at the potential loss of ontological parsimony and metaphysical plausibility. Ethical constructivism, by my account, avoids the metaphysical problems of ethical realism, but

faces accusations of capriciousness, arbitrariness, and an inability to make sense of certain significant ethical phenomena and intuitions.

I then laid out Street's Darwinian Dilemma and her claim that this dilemma gives ethical constructivism the philosophical advantage over ethical realism. I argued that the Darwinian Dilemma poses a greater threat to ethical realism than traditional metaphysical objections. According to the Darwinian Dilemma, the ethical realist is unable to give a scientifically acceptable explanation for how humans developed basic motivational tendencies that reliably corresponded to the objective ethical truths. The realist must therefore accept that natural selection produced humans with basic motivational tendencies that do not tend to correspond to the objective ethical truths, and that as a result humans lack ethical knowledge.

Finally, I presented several possible responses that the ethical realist can draw from to defuse the Darwinian Dilemma. I began with several defenses of the relation horn, some of which I believe are promising theories when combined with defenses of the no-relation horn. I then presented two defenses of the no-relation horn, both of which, I believe, allow the ethical realist to safely grasp the no-relation horn without accepting the further conclusion that humans lack ethical knowledge. While this option has largely been ignored, I have argued that defenses of the no-relation horn can defuse the Darwinian Dilemma, such that ethical realists can maintain that humans possess ethical beliefs and attitudes that track the objective ethical truths.

Where, then, does this leave ethical realism and ethical constructivism? In one sense, it leaves them where they were before, competing for philosophical advantage on a variety of fronts. It was not my aim in this thesis to provide a decisive argument in favor of ethical realism. My goal was only to show that the Darwinian Dilemma does not provide a decisive argument

against ethical realism. However, I do believe that, by defending ethical realism from the Darwinian Dilemma, I have placed realism at a significant advantage over ethical constructivism, because I have shown that ethical realism can defuse one of the most significant challenges it currently faces. This advantage can be combined with the advantages of ethical realism I discussed in chapter one, especially realisms ability to make sense of the ethical phenomenon that an individual can act in ways that are entirely consistent with her practical point of view, but still seem to violate some further ethical fact. As we saw in the coherent Caligula thought experiment, Street must maintain that Caligula is not making an error of ethical judgment when he engages in recreational torture, so long as that torture is entailed by and consistent with Caligula's practical point of view. I find this to be an unacceptable conclusion, because it seems clear to me that Caligula is failing to recognize the further ethical fact that recreational torture is ethically prohibited, even if it is entailed by his practical point of view. Those who do not share this intuition, and believe that Caligula cannot be accused of error, will likely believe that ethical constructivism retains some philosophical advantage, especially if they have trouble accepting the ethical realist's metaphysics. As I said, I do not claim to have given a decisive argument for ethical realism or against ethical constructivism. What I have attempted to prove in this thesis is that ethical realism can successfully defuse the Darwinian Dilemma, one of the most significant challenges it currently faces, and that this gives us a good reason to stick with ethical realism instead of abandoning it in favor of ethical constructivism.

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