THE MYTH OF MORALITY
CHAPTER 6

Morality and Evolution
“Natural selection has provided us with a tendency to invest the world with values that it does not contain, demands which it does not make.” (p. 135)

Outline:
1. Evolutionary story
2. Evolutionary ethical naturalism and naturalist fallacy
3. The genetic fallacy and the argument for false moral beliefs
Evolutionary Story

1. Sympathy/affect towards kin
2. Sense of requirement towards kin (‘conscience’)
3. Extension of these attitudes towards non-kin
4. Fully developed tendency to develop notions of the morally ‘forbidden’ and ‘obligatory’
Helpful behavior towards kin

- It all begins with helping behavior among ‘family members’ (not necessarily blood relatives).
- On a psychological level, a desire to protect/help is motivated by sympathy towards them, but sympathy (and desires) aren’t enough.
  - “Desires can be overridden by stronger, contrary desires, and desires for intense, immediate gratification can be temporarily re-evaluated to the detriment of satisfying longer-term, calmer desires.” (p. 136)
Helpful behavior towards kin

• Claims flexibility of desires is beneficial.
  • [Desires are more primitive than helpful behavior to kin. It may be stronger to explicitly hypothesize that their flexibility evolved independently.]

• A sense of requirement makes people more reproductively fit, ensuring helpful behavior regardless of changes in affect.
  • [What about remembering/prioritizing desires?]

• Morality is contingent on the development of this sense. (pp. 137-8)
  • Development of sense of requirement (conscience) leads to guilt (failure to satisfy a requirement), not merely regret (failure to satisfy a desire). We associate morality with guilt.
  • Experiments demonstrate presence of ‘guilt’ in hominids.
  • “A creature with a sense of sympathy [and not requirement], no matter how strong it may be, does not thereby have anything recognizable as ‘a moral sense.’” (p. 138)
Helpful behavior towards non-kin

- Helpful behavior towards kin “may be exploited by natural selection for other useful ends… [such as] helpful behavior towards non-kin individuals on the expectation that they will reciprocate.” (p. 141) [An account that doesn’t personify natural selection can be offered.]

- Creates risk of exploitation [and extermination], but sensitivity to requirements brings sensitivity and hostility towards exploiters.
- Gives a story of how cooperators will win over exploiters once kin-directed requirements have been developed.
Helpful behavior towards non-kin

• Again, sense of requirement is preferred (in the sense of ‘optimally efficient’) to desire-driven helpful behavior because it is more reliable. (Example of tiger evasion as prisoner’s dilemma.)

• Sympathetic desires are too flighty.
• ‘Calculating helper’ may recalculate.
• “[H]unters will be better off (reproductive fitter) if they have in place a mechanism that makes them stay and fight side by side.” (p. 146)
Helpful behavior towards non-kin

• Moral dispositions are thus psychologically ‘hardwired’, but environmental cues are required for them to manifest.

• To clarify, there are three ways we might be ‘morally hardwired’, only one of which Joyce endorses:
  × Innate beliefs like “murder is forbidden”
  × Innate beliefs that “there are actions that are forbidden”
  ✓ Innate tendency/predilection to develop beliefs that there are actions that are forbidden.
Evolutionary Ethical Naturalism

- Rottshaefer and Martinsen: There is a dispositional property [of actions, presumably] that we have evolved to respond to it with approval. This is identified with ‘moral rightness’.
  - Parallels to dispositional properties in philosophy of color.
Evolutionary Ethical Naturalism

• Joyce argues that these properties aren’t enough to account for desire-independent requirements.

• [Perhaps a better response for Joyce: The argument for objectivity of color properties isn’t available to Rottshaefer and Martinsen’s moral properties. Only actions performed by agents with a sense of requirement can be deemed morally right or wrong.]
Evolutionary Ethical Naturalism

- Richards’s success theory: As humans, we have evolved a disposition to promote community good. (Moral imperatives are hypothetical.)
- Joyce points out that this disposition isn’t enough to account for requirement.
  - If Jack the moral felon has this moral disposition but it is unmanifested, then how are we still able to impugn him with categorical force?
  - “[W]hy does a mere disposition provide an ‘end,’ or ground an ‘ought’ statement.” (p.151)
Naturalistic Fallacy

• Moore’s “naturalistic fallacy” concerns the definability of the concept “good”. His point is that we shouldn’t confuse the ‘is’ of predication with the ‘is’ of identity. Joyce says the naturalist isn’t necessarily so confused.

• Even so, naturalism doesn’t seem to yield an adequate account of moral discourse.
Naturalistic Fallacy

The naturalist might use either the ‘is’ of predication or ‘is’ of identity, making *a posteriori* or *a priori* statements about the good, respectively. (p. 154)

- *A priori* claim doesn’t make sense – it would be *a priori* available to systematize moral platitudes in terms of natural selection prior to Darwin. [Why does the is of identity yield a prioricity and not analyticity?]  
- *A posteriori* claim would vindicate defective discourses. But, for example, discovering that every ‘witch’ had a particular property wouldn’t change the fact that they weren’t witches. Witches (*see above*) are non-negotiably magical, the same way morality is non-negotiably categorical.
The Genetic Fallacy

• “The claim seems to be that the circumstances under which a belief is formed have no bearing on the likelihood of that belief being true; and this, I contend, is simply false.” (p. 160)

• If a belief is formed through some evidence-sensitive manner, it is more likely to be true. If the formation is independent of evidence, then it is dubious.
  • The fact that John’s belief about Sally is the result of his paranoid neurosis (and hence independent of evidence) calls its truth into doubt.
The Genetic Fallacy

• To move from doubt to dissent requires further background information. (No one is likely to be ‘out to get’ John, so Sally isn’t.)

• Joyce argues that moral beliefs are formed independently of evidence and so judgment should be withheld.
  • Belief about Paris as capital of France has nothing to do with innate belief disposition in the way that moral beliefs do.
  • “[T]he point is that there is a concept of ‘forbidden’… waiting for a word to be applied to it…. [I]t follows that the process by which humans form beliefs is an unreliable one, for they are disposed to do so regardless of the evidence.” (pp. 162-3)
  • [It’s simply wrong to assume that the belief that $p$, or even the disposition to form the belief that $p$, is “terribly useful” because we’ve evolved to have it. (See appendices!)]

[123x104]The Genetic Fallacy
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Probably false moral judgments

• If moral judgments are unreliable, then “what evidence do we have of their inescapable demands on our actions?” (p. 166).
  • Answer: None, and so they’re probably false.
• Imagines an alien race that has the same beliefs as us, but for the existence of (naturalistic) categorical imperatives. Their explanatory framework will be “superior because it confines itself to (tolerably) unmysterious items: beliefs intentions and desires” (p. 167)
  • We can’t attribute morality to them if they’re lacking categorical imperatives. Again, this would vindicate phlogiston (or witch) discourse.
Against the coherentist and looking ahead

• Concludes by considering a coherentist theory of justification, but argues that upon learning that moral discourse is defective we’ll abandon it.
• Contra Lycan, Singer, Ruse, he claims moral intuitions are not unavoidable. (Compare to failed mother-child bonding and overcoming xenophobia.)

• Moving forward, he’ll consider the pragmatics of abolishing moral judgments.