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What can Darwinian evolution teach us about the nature of morality? For the better part of the twentieth century, the answer was: nothing. To assert that natural selection was a moral imperative was to fall afoul of Hume's Law, according to which no moral claim is ever entailed by any set of purely descriptive claims. Advances in evolutionary theory could not violate moral philosophy's sovereign enterprise.

This conclusion, however, belied a lack of imagination: there is more than one relation between evolution and traditional moral questions. For example, evolutionary theory might reveal something about the structure of our moral sense by contextualizing its history—how, that is, the processes of natural selection not merely tolerated, but apparently favored, creatures that exhibited other-regarding thoughts and behavior. In the 1970s developments in ethology, genetics, game theory, anthropology, and philosophy (to name a just a few) began converging on a common understanding of just how *homo moralis* out-reproduced our hominid cousins. But the evolution of moral thought (and altruistic behavior) also points to other implications for traditional moral questions. If it turns out, as many writers suspect, that moral thought evolved as a means of ensuring social cohesion and, by extension, the fitness of trustworthy conspecifics, then the explanatory role of moral facts begins to look dubious. According to this retooled moral skepticism, we tend to judge that stealing is wrong because of the biological advantage the tendency to make such judgments conferred on our ancestors, not because stealing is, in some mind-independent way, *actually wrong*. What Darwin can teach us about morality is that the

objective basis of morality is an illusion, exactly the inverse of what early evolutionary ethicists thought.

Philip Kitcher takes Darwin seriously. In his sophisticated and compelling new book *The Ethical Project*, Kitcher outlines a familiar story about the evolutionary development of *homo moralis*, beginning some 50,000 years ago with rudimentary forms of altruism and proceeding through stages of rule-governed behavior that eventually yield something that approximates contemporary moral deliberation. Professional philosophers and laypersons interested in the relation between evolution and ethics will find this book highly rewarding—and challenging. It represents a significant contribution to the field. What separates Kitcher's project from other current philosophical projects exploring this terrain, however, is the normative and meta-ethical implications. The orthodox position is that the evolutionary genealogy of moral thought—whatever its details—implies nothing about what we ought morally to do. This is as one should expect since, taken as a premise in a meta-ethical argument, the evolutionary genealogy of moral thought debunks moral objectivity: there is *nothing*, objectively speaking, we morally ought to do.

Kitcher rejects this claim—as well as the claim that natural selection implies nothing about what we ought morally to do. What Kitcher dubs *pragmatic naturalism* attempts to ground the notion of ethical truth in the concept of ethical progress. The descriptive counterparts of moral imperatives are true in virtue of how what is expressed fulfills the function of ethics, where "the original function of ethics is to promote social harmony through the remedying of altruism failure" (p. 225). We make progress when we specify codes or practices that tend towards a better world. That is how the project started, and this is how it continues.

The first part of the book reconstructs a "how possibly" story of moral development, beginning with early forms of psychological altruism. Key to this story are the limits of altruism. For according to Kitcher, if moral thought had an inception, it was at the point of altruism failure. Without some strategy to fill the gap left by an absence of other-regarding feeling, life within these early bands of humans became intolerably dire. If individuals acquired the capacity to follow rules established by the local demands of social life—a capacity Kitcher calls "socially embedded normative

guidance"—local groups could suppress strife and more consistently satisfy biological imperatives. Different groups might exploit this capacity differently, depending on local traditions and needs. One common strategy was the introduction of an "unseen enforcer," a god or mythic ancestor, appeals to which tended to increase compliance among group members who might otherwise break rules thinking their free-riding was undetected.

The genealogical account is followed in the second part of the book with the following meta-ethical account: we make sense of ethical progress (which Kitcher maintains is a desideratum of any plausible theory) not by invoking an independent realm of ethical truths on which we are converging, but by noting functional refinement. We are better at fulfilling the original function of ethics. Ethical truth, then, is understood in terms of progress: "descriptive counterparts of rules *come to count as true* in virtue of the fact that they enter and remain in ethical codes that unfold in a progressive sequence" (p. 246). Truth is what happens to an idea that becomes part of a practice. This attempt to navigate between nihilism, on the one hand, and full-blown realism, on the other, is meant to appease metaphysical naturalists without sacrificing the trappings of moral objectivity. Kitcher insists that this result is more firmly secured via pragmatic naturalism than, say, extant versions of moral constructivism. This section is not altogether convincing to me, largely because Kitcher fails to consider the ways in which his genealogical story might be co-opted in the formation of revised constructivist views. Indeed,

Kitcher's positive proposal counts in important respects as a constructivist view.

Kitcher's meta-ethical picture invites a normative counterpart, laid out in the remaining part of the book. Not only does the story of our species' evolutionary past support a notion of ethical truth, it *justifies* certain modes of conduct, namely, those that tend towards a better world as characterized by the prevalent conception of good. And what will count as good is determined, once again, by the successful discharging of the functions of ethics: remedying altruism failure. Call this normative stance *dynamic consequentialism*. Its flexibility is meant to capture the persistent experiments in living; like any piece of technology, it is a work in progress. This does not mean that we cannot give some content to the good. For Kitcher, "a world counts as good to the extent that actualizing it would lead us toward" a state in which "each member of the human population has a serious chance of living a good life" where this is freely chosen by the individual (pp. 316–317).

Where some might regard the vagueness of this proposal as a defect, Kitcher regards it as inevitable. What counts as a good life is subject to functional refinement over time, and there is no guarantee that our current conception is ideal or that future conceptions will inevitably be progressive. As creatures whose social arrangements inevitably lead to conflict, we will continue to confront the need to reduce that conflict. This original function of ethics remains at the heart of our social experiment in living, even as the opportunities to live better lives arise.