

What’s wrong with being wrong: part 5—a more than cursory look into evolutionary ethics

Marc Kay

Previous parts critiqued three major evolutionary explanations for morality’s appearance: group selection, kin selection, and reciprocal altruism. These fall short of coming to grips with morality’s quintessential non-materiality. In order to sidestep this difficulty, materialists argued for an ill-defined ‘proto-morality’ arising in non-human animals and redefined morality as survival value. Survival is serially cashed out in terms of the number of an organism’s offspring and is a measure of how successfully an individual’s ‘altruistic’ genes are passed on.

In addition to these neo-Darwinian explanations for morality’s appearance, there are multiple auxiliary explanations. This part focuses on E.O. Wilson’s sociobiology. It, too, lacks sufficient epistemological and empirical warrant to explain morality.

“Greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit” (Michael Douglas’s character, Gordon Gekko, in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film *Wall Street*).

Sociobiology

“Sociobiology”, wrote E.O. Wilson (figure 1), “is the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviour.”¹ The significance of human sociobiology is that

“... science is now in a position to approach ... the very origin and meaning of human values, from which all ethical pronouncements and much of political practice flow. ... to the extent that the biological interpretation noted here proves correct, men have rights that are innate, rooted in the ineradicable drives for survival and self-esteem.”²

Wilson, a myrmecologist by training (he was called the ‘ant man’), claimed that his and others’ studies of animals brought a clearer, more accurate understanding of the evolution of human society and its values. Although human societies are exceedingly more complex than the animal world, he believed both had evolved through not too dissimilar processes of cooperation and the like. Noteworthy for its lack of historical details, sociobiology couples these primeval, communal life-forms with the rise of *Homo sapiens*. That criticism aside, sociobiology is important. As two editors noted:

“[it] is not *merely* an abstract, academic speciality, nor *merely* a piece of traditional sexual or political theory designed to put minorities in their place, but a purportedly scientific theory which carries with it a controversial world view with implications for a wide

variety of political and economic policies with respect to race, sex, hierarchy, institutions, and control.”³

We began as insects?

Lower order animals, such as ants (figure 2) and bees, are social. Their colonies are vast and are rigidly controlled by genetics, with all members contributing to the greater good of maximizing survival. Fast forward to the Pliocene, droughts changed the forests to savannahs and proto-man was forced to adapt to this new ecological niche. Through further mutation and natural selection, these human-like creatures acquired the ability to partially transcend the deterministic force of its genes and create culture:

“Human beings adapt to environment in terms of a socially transmitted system of behaviour and meanings called ‘culture’. The neurological capacity for this system apparently evolved in response to a rapidly changing ecology in which maximum behavioural flexibility won out over more stable (‘wired in’) behavioural mechanisms It has the unique and emergent property of itself evolving.”⁴

The argument is simple: human ancestors having a capacity for culture survived better than those who didn’t and would reproduce more prolifically. There would be a feedback effect, and greater cultural invention would dominate and outstrip biological evolution. Feedback loops are a standard mechanism invoked to tie biology to morality and culture and lend theoretical support to impotent evolutionary explanations. The Ukrainian geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky recognized feedback’s apologetic value in evolutionary discussions:

“What is more, since the environment in which man lives is in the first place his sociocultural environment, the genetic changes induced by culture must affect

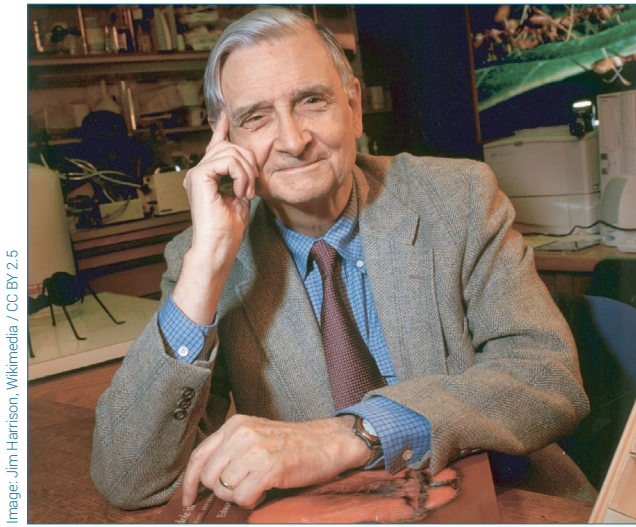


Image: Jim Harrison, Wikimedia / CC BY 2.5

Figure 1. E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: a New Synthesis* has been a seminal work, for proponents and critics alike.

man's fitness for culture and hence may affect culture. The process thus becomes self-sustaining. Biological changes increase the fitness for, and the dependence of their carriers on culture, and therefore stimulate cultural developments; cultural developments in turn instigate further genetic changes. This amounts to a positive feedback relationship between the cultural and the biological evolutions. The positive feedback explains the great evolutionary change, so great that it creates the illusion of an unbridgeable gap between our animal ancestors and ourselves Waddington [ref. cited] has shown clearly that our biological evolution has instilled in us no ethics and no ability to discriminate between good and evil. What the evolution has done is to make us 'ethicizing beings', and 'authority acceptors' particularly in childhood. But what ethical principles or goals we accept as taught by others, or devise for ourselves, comes not from our genes but from our superorganic inheritance, from our culture."⁵

Wilson seems intent on straddling two irreconcilable camps: the contest is between hardcore culture environmentalists, chiefly the Left, and genetic determinists (of which Wilson stands accused of being a card-carrying member by the former). His ostensibly conciliatory middle ground is not a helpful response. No-one denies the impact of culture; the problem surfaces only when fulfilling the epistemic burden of how biology and culture are related. Even more demanding is the weightier challenge of how morality and ethics, the concepts of 'good', 'wrong', 'evil', became merely the spur for individuals or groups to out-evolve their competitors. Morality is neither a glass half empty nor

one half full; it's either there or it isn't. These very details, side-stepped by Wilson (and Dobzhansky), define morality.

The other conundrum for the evolutionist is how genetic determinism overcame genetic determinism to produce genetic information that allowed a creature to overcome its genetically fixed behaviour that one cannot overcome its genetically fixed programming.⁶ Feedback, elegantly and technically persuasive, nevertheless is nothing more than a secular *deus ex machina* given a free pass in order to save the idea.

The backlash against Wilson

The publication of Wilson's *Sociobiology* generated as much controversy as it did praise. It split the evolutionary academic world and unleashed a firestorm of invective-filled accusations splashed through the letters-to-the-editors pages of journals and broadsheet newspapers.

Sociobiology has strong support.⁷ Peter Singer, in keeping with his philosophically God-drained universe, believes the discipline deserves our attention because "once we abandon Divine Creation and accept that homo sapiens is one among several species of social mammals, the key tenet of sociobiology must be taken seriously."⁸

As for detractors, a lengthy list of Harvard⁹ staff co-signed a letter accusing Wilson of using "a number of strategies and sleights of hand which dispel any claim for logical or factual continuity", "biological determinism" and "[using] a speculative reconstruction [sic] of human prehistory".¹⁰ A Leftist coterie, including Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, took aim, grouping Wilson with Herbert Spencer and the Nazi scientist Konrad Lorenz. His accusers claimed "his favorite analogies arise by a twisted process", and that sociobiological theory is unfalsifiable and can only be supported by making up 'just-so' stories.¹¹

Empathy for the Left's scorn is understandable. Wilson occasionally punctuated his animal studies with observations pulled from bizarrely incorrigible and immoral human societies. He draws upon field studies which have noted, for example, the !Kung society has a stratum of people "who never try to make it, live in run-down huts, and show little pride in themselves or their work." He mentions the Ik of Uganda, briefly describing their less-than-animal community structure: children are abandoned at age three, food is the only value and death is amusing because it means more food for survivors.¹²

Such language is, for the Left, invitation for a fight. They accused Wilson of genetic determinism and of upholding the sociopolitical status quo. Wilson did not wait long to return fire against these charges, stridently defending himself in the process. He accused his attackers of 'vigilantism', "judg[ing]

a work of science according to whether it conforms to the political convictions of the judges” and misrepresenting his arguments.¹³

After a close reread of Wilson’s arguments, it remains unclear as to how much of a non-determinist Wilson really is. This especially stands out when he confusingly writes:

“Although the genes have given away most of their sovereignty, they maintain a certain amount of influence in at least the behavioural qualities that underlie variations between cultures Even a small portion of this variance invested in population differences might predispose societies toward cultural differences It is not valid to point to the absence of a behavioural trait in one or a few societies as conclusive evidence that the trait is environmentally induced and has no genetic disposition in man. The very opposite could be true.”¹⁴

The moral rights that Wilson believes are “innate [and] rooted in the ineradicable drives for survival and self-esteem” remain an ambiguity in Wilson’s apologetic. He argues that human values are, by virtue of our biological history, subsumed by our evolutionary requirement to survive. This strikes me as a little baffling. Is he claiming that our survival is, ultimately, the only thing that counts? Does he mean that what brought us to this present point are those qualities which aided our resilience to extinction? If so, this signals a crude Social Darwinism. Wilson hints at such—one reason for the vituperative outbursts against him—when he declares, “For if the whole process of our life is directed toward preserving our species and personal genes, preparing for future generations is an expression of the highest morality of which human beings are capable.”¹⁵ After all, in a moment of cold reductionism he expresses his belief that “in evolutionary time the individual organism counts for almost nothing [and a person] is only DNA’s way of making more DNA.”¹⁶

Wilson doesn’t exactly spell out what form this ‘highest morality’ might conceivably take; nevertheless, linking it merely to the continued existence of humans, at the expense of the weak, as evolution demands, is clearly antithetical to a Christian ethic.¹⁷ If it be granted that Wilson’s is not some recrudescence, unintentional or otherwise, of Social Darwinism, the challenge is to discover what his ‘highest’ morality is grounded upon.

Sociobiology’s meta-ethics¹⁸

Wilson collaborated with philosopher Michael Ruse to crudely dismiss moral objective realism. In its place arrived a poorly conceived, fallacy-ridden scientism. Utterly seduced by materialism, they failed to notice their enterprise was nothing more than an atavistic rehash of logical positivism, a philosophy long ago refuted on its own fundamental



Image: Mehmet Karatay, Wikimedia / CC BY SA 3.0

Figure 2. Wilson argues that morality’s source can be ‘historically’ traced from ant colonies and other ‘altruistic’ insect life.

epistemological criterion.¹⁹ Their belief was that “implicit in the scientific interpretation of moral behaviour is a conclusion of central importance to philosophy, namely that there can be no genuinely objective external ethical premises. Everything that we know about the evolutionary process indicates that no such extrasomatic guides exist.”²⁰

Although the second proposition ostensibly presents as one developed from a lengthy and exhaustive investigation of nature, it would appear that the initial premise is not much more than a clever, but disingenuous, refashioning of positivism’s most important axiom, a rejection of metaphysics.²¹ Of course, this rejection itself assumes the unmistakable form of a metaphysical proposition. Positivists boasted of the death of metaphysics by *metaphysically* limiting knowledge to the empirically verifiable or tautologies. Not only does it shoot itself in the foot by this claim, it also question-begs the truth of its antimetaphysics proposition.²² Indeed, as Putnam underscored, “The difficulty, which is faced by all versions of positivism, is that positivist exclusion principles are always self-referentially inconsistent. In short, positivism produced a conception of rationality so narrow as to exclude the very activity of producing that conception.”²³

How might such an epistemology be justified? One attempt comes from among their own ranks. Stephen Jay Gould pointed out what he thought was a category error. Science and religion, he complained, had no genuine communication between each other, labelling this the concept of non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA).²⁴

However, a well-informed Christian can do far better. Sociobiology’s striking vulnerability lies neither in its infinitely adjustable just-so stories nor in its alleged scientific

appeal to nature’s experiments, what biologists would term field studies. Where Wilson and the others are most exposed is in their project to account for what it means to be moral. Cracks begin to appear once sociobiology’s attempts to set out a meta-ethic are examined.

Wilson sanctions a non-cognitivist meta-ethic.²⁵ Wilson (like David Hume), believes ethics is sourced in emotions, which are ultimately biological. As a consequence, Wilson argues the ethical debate be removed from philosophers and biologized, looking for clues within the non-human order of nature:

“The biologist, who is concerned with questions of physiology and evolutionary history, realizes that self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions—hate, love, guilt, fear, and others—that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers, if not epistemology and epistemologists, at all depths.”²⁶

He, with Ruse, elaborates: “human beings function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking that there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which all should obey.”²⁷ In other words, Wilson, like Ruse, holds that our best genetic interests are to be aligned with the *belief* that morality is objective, despite not being so. What’s more, a looming relativism finds its footing: “ethical laws can be changed, at the deepest level, by genetic evolution. This is obviously quite inconsistent with the notion of morality as a set of objective, eternal verities. Morality is rooted in contingent human nature, through and through.”²⁸ Notwithstanding this sanguine expectation, Wilson’s rejection of genuine objectivity comes with an awful price tag. Roll those genetic dice and what results is Isaiah’s foresight of “those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

Ruse and Wilson are not blind; they really do comprehend the logical, unpalatable fall-out from a meta-ethic which rejects ethical absoluteness: “A common argument raised against the materialist view of human nature is that if ethical premises are not objective and external to mankind, the individual is free to pick his own code of conduct regardless of the effect on others.”²⁹

Having so economically unpacked their opponents’ rejoinder, one would expect their comeback to actually engage with it. Unfortunately, what is served up is a mangled

question-begging reworking of some quite uninspired get-out-of-jail excuses:

- evolution is confirmed as fact and so moral objectivism is false
- appearances to the contrary and notwithstanding all their differences (read, specialpleading), human moralities really converge (read, when cultures are at complete odds with each other, they aren’t), and
- saving the evasively best and most morally drained to last, “the materialist view of the origin of morality is probably less threatening to moral practice than a religious or otherwise non-materialist view, for when moral beliefs are studied empirically, they are less likely to deceive.”³⁰

“Be wary of the probable: start by believing the incredible”
(Émile Gaboriau, *Monsieur Lecoq*, 1869, ch. 8).

The critics respond

Critics were quick with rejoinders, unfortunately replacing some rather muddled reasoning with even more obtuse reasoning.

In his book-length attack, Philip Kitcher, although himself an evolutionist, called sociobiology’s extension of animal studies to human behaviour a ‘new philosophers’ stone’, relabelling it ‘pop’ sociobiology because it “advance[s] grand claims about human nature and human social institutions.”³¹ Kitcher doubted sociobiology could demonstrate that an animal group’s behaviour would maximize its fitness. Despite not applying his methodological fault-finding to evolution, Kitcher nevertheless noted the dearth of rigorously critical analysis in the sociobiology project. His lengthy list of doubts and flaws includes:

- whether the base assumptions relying on prior knowledge of the behaviour were precisely formulated
- if all animals in a group were behaving similarly
- if there was question-begging (“if evolutionary assumptions are being smuggled in via descriptions of behaviour that identify a function for it”)
- the use of vague or ambiguous language
- how tight a fit with the actual observations the models employed were, and
- whether a more promising analysis better captured the history of selection.³²

Kitcher challenged Wilson as to whether his explanation of the supposed history of how humans acquired ethical thinking necessarily eliminated any claims to moral objectivity. He wrote:

“Nor should we believe that to reconstruct the history of ethics, say by showing how ethical

principles originated in myths used to buttress social arrangements (for example, the myth of a deity who would punish those who violated the precepts), is to cast doubt on the objectivity or the correctness of the principles we espouse Wilson is far too hasty in assuming that the evolutionary scenario he gives for the emergence of religious ideas—a scenario that stresses the adaptive advantages of religious beliefs and practices—undercuts the doctrine that religious statements are true.”³³

Kitcher insightfully pointed out that Wilson’s subjectivist meta-ethic must introduce entirely disparate moral standards for different communities. Within a Wilsonian emotivism meta-ethic, an epistemic formulated to disinterestedly differentiate between the morally perverse and a bad oyster is illusory:

“Ethical statements turn out to be on par with statements we make when moved by our gastronomic preferences. Just as there is no objective standard against which those who like lutefish are to be judged, so too there is no objective appraisal of those who disagree with us about the propriety of killing innocent children. Their hypothalamic-limbic complexes incline them to different emotional responses. That is all.”³⁴

Notwithstanding his unease at the implications of a Wilsonian moral epistemology, Kitcher nonetheless acknowledged the real existence of widely discordant ethical principles, but attempted to minimize this uncomfortable truth. In a confused defence for his rejection of Wilsonian ethics, and clearly wishing to erect a robust epistemic barricade against the egregiously wicked, Kitcher nevertheless failed. Misleading in his presumptive depiction of the moral arena as ‘objective’, his rejection falls apart at the first hurdle:

“There are numerous areas of human inquiry in which theoretical disputes persist unresolved, and in which we do not abandon the idea that there is an ultimate possibility of objective solution. Just as the fact that there have been . . . large theoretical disputes in evolutionary biology does not tell against the existence of a consensus on all kinds of important claims about the history of life, so too the presence of rival philosophical theories of the foundations of ethics should not blind us to the substantial areas in which reflective people agree in their moral appraisals.”³⁵

What initially appears as rejection of a subjectivist-styled ethics, Kitcher opened his own Pandora’s box by suggesting “moral goodness [could be] equated with the maximizing of human happiness.”³⁶ This is a version of utilitarianism, and, stripped of all the prolific discussion concerning its merits, failings, and the inestimable pain-and-pleasure calculi, when applied society-wide, it remains essentially a winner-take-all normative theory. Any sociopolitical system basing itself

on maximizing people’s happiness or welfare can only tally opposing and supporting factors, which is just another way of saying the majority popular opinion wins. To put it even more starkly, each individual’s assessment of his own pain or pleasure is *subjective*, and a tally of these doesn’t magically sum to something *objective*; it is just an even bigger collection of people’s personal likes and dislikes.³⁷

When it comes to satisfying the ethical objectivist skeptic’s query as to what form the unchanging moral realm takes, Kitcher tacitly admits ignorance, replacing a cogent defence with an (inapposite) analogy. He gestures towards mathematics, reminding us this discipline can be regarded as objective because it can be carried out quite successfully without agreement concerning the reality of an objective realm of abstract entities, such as numbers and sets. Rational people can surrender a belief that mathematical statements are objectively true or false without harming their belief concerning the objectivity of mathematics. Similar responses can be levelled against moral scepticism:

“[We can possibly] give up the idea of objective truth or falsehood for ethical statements in favour of the notion that some statements are objectively *justified* while others are not. Thus we may try to work out the view that, strictly speaking, ‘Killing innocent children is morally wrong’ is neither true or false.”³⁸

While here is not the place to take sides concerning the merits or flaws of the objectivity of mathematics dispute,³⁹ it would seem Kitcher commits the Fallacy of the False Analogy.⁴⁰ Mathematics enables bridges to be built, facilitates cancer cures and sends probes beyond our solar system. Whether mathematics is objective and relies on an actual Pythagorean or Platonic World of numbers or is eternally true because it’s sourced within the Triune God is irrelevant because no-one would rationally disagree with mathematics’ instrumental value. On the other hand, rejecting the absoluteness of ethical statements, particularly in more emotionally laden areas, while opting for mere instrumental justification, is not only meaningless, but outright parlous. It is relativism by stealth.

How to justify that it is wrong to kill innocent children, if going on current evolutionists’ (failed) projects to do so, serially begs the question that it is. The absence of any external irreducible, unchanging, human-independent standard is the crux of the issue. And in confronting the evolutionist on this issue, given the materialist metaphysic of evolution, there remains the thorn of how to impart sense to the notion of moral objectivity. Kitcher’s backing for a flaccid moral objectivism is curious, not because it succeeds where other materialists have failed to enlighten us, but because he says so little in actual support.

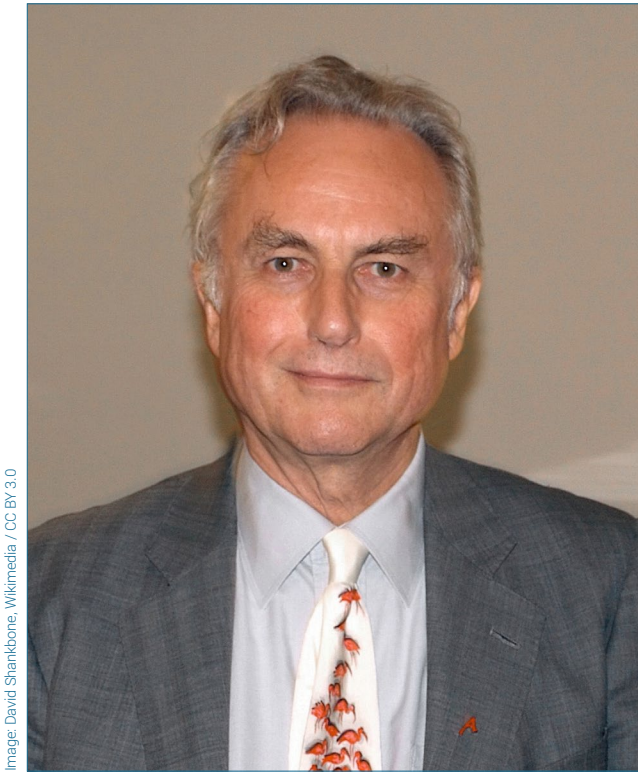


Image: David Shankbone, Wikimedia / CC BY 3.0

Figure 3. Dawkins, like Wilson, holds to a materialist worldview according to which God is an epistemological superfluity and morality is merely a means to an instrumental genetic end.

The best Kitcher offers is a partial tweaking of John Rawls' much cited and influential 'impartial perspective' theory or 'original position' as set out in his *A Theory of Justice*.⁴¹ Rawls argued that if people were hypothetically placed on a level playing field, what he terms a 'veil of ignorance', blind to their own interests and actual privileged position of being, say, rich or powerful, then on the basis of *rationality* alone, all participants would seek equal justice for all.⁴²

Having used what he found worthwhile in Rawls, Kitcher then discards him and returns to his evolutionary base, declaring:

"To the extent that people can be viewed as maximizing their own inclusive fitness through cooperation with others, apparent conflicts of interest may be diagnosed as situations in which all the parties maximize their inclusive fitness by coordinating their behaviour."⁴³

And what about the workplace psychopath or the everyday, run-of-the-mill, dishonest person? Some of these miscreants may just still secretly cherish a winner-take-all approach to ending conflict, and no amount of rational argument on the basis of cooperation can dissuade them

from the belief that cooperation leaves you with less rather than more.

Despite his open repudiation of any traditional religious solution to moral objectivity, Kitcher nevertheless maintains moral objectivity can be sustained, ending his book with an equally, though unexamined, religious metaphysic: "Sociobiology has nothing to offer. There is no higher standpoint than [biology and no] impartial perspective."⁴⁴ Of course, biology is just his scientific guise for naturalism, nothing more, nothing less.

In the end, Wilson and Kitcher are really saying the same thing. In all of his nit-picking of Wilson, it's easy to overlook the fact that Kitcher's own 'historical' account does not seem to wander too far from Wilson's. What applies to Wilson can apply with equal vigour to Kitcher. His own just-so explanation reads as follows:

"Somewhere in hominid evolution came a step that provided us with a psychological device for overcoming wantonness. I am inclined to think of it as part of what made us fully human. Perhaps it began with an awareness that certain forms of projected behaviour might have troublesome results ... I suspect that it was linked to the evolution of our linguistic ability. As I envisage it ... [a]t this stage, I conjecture, there began a process of cultural evolution. Different small bands of human beings tried out various sets of normative resources—rules, stories, myths, images ... perhaps they offered greater reproductive success ... increased cooperation ... Most of this process is invisible ... perhaps ... or perhaps Whichever alternative one selects, these phenomena reveal an increased capacity for cooperation and social interaction Whether or not we can ever do more than guess."⁴⁵

And so on.⁴⁶ It comes down to this: One just-so story is preferred over a competitor's.

Even when attempting clarification in response to the barrage of received criticism, Wilson remained ambiguous. Just how much moral behaviour is underwritten by genes and how much can be measured by the force of culture remains a mystery. Regardless of the answer—assuming there is one—morality, within a materialist worldview, requires being jump-started by genes, or, at least, something acting as their proxy (figure 3). Whatever is claimed can't be merely descriptive; it has to actually be seen to perform work. That is, the solution must be functional.⁴⁷

Flanagan makes the astute argument that despite Wilson's dependence on inclusive fitness, reciprocal altruism and selfish genes to explain morality's origin, they are "vacuous and diversionary" because these are "unhelpful ... in trying to explain [an individual's] actual moral sense". Illustrating this point, Flanagan contrasts and compares two individuals,

Wittgenstein and the Ayatollah Khomeini. His initial criticism is that inclusive genetic fitness is a universal, and so the only apposite factors influencing differing moralities, facts about individuals' cultures and their life stories lie outside of sociobiology's field of influence: "it is all the other facts, the only things which vary, which do the explaining, not inclusive genetic fitness [because it is] perfectly controlled and universal from the start."⁴⁸

Burian upbraids Wilson for "tell[ing] a logically satisfactory story to account for any behaviour one chooses [but] the untestability and arbitrariness of the components prevents it from being of genuine explanatory interest." Without any recognition of its irony, Burian further criticises sociobiology's adherents for not testing alternative tales and thus failing to realize "that a better story may yet be invented which can eliminate the current survivor." Burian suggests Wilson deliberately chose only the stories which did not conflict with the sociobiological framework, "and then maintain[ed] that the evidence is consistent with the proposed hypothesis."⁴⁹ In other words, Burian implies that it was rigged from the outset, Wilson having question-begged the truth of his explanation.

Where to from here?

Far more concerning—underscored, ironically, by his Marxist-inspired academic detractors—is that Wilson's sociobiological aspirations seem to be lifted from the script of a Huxleyan world. He appears sold on a vision that our genes will be eventually manipulated to achieve a form of Nietzschean moral *Übermensch*:

"The transition from purely phenomenological to fundamental theory in sociology must await a full, neuronal explanation of the human brain. Only when the machinery can be torn down on paper at the level of the cell and put together again will the properties of emotion and ethical judgment come clear. Simulations can then be employed to estimate the full range of behavioral responses and the precision of their homeostatic controls Cognition will be translated into circuitry. Learning and creativeness will be defined as the alteration of specific portions of the cognitive machinery regulated by input from the emotive centers. Having cannibalized psychology, the new neurobiology will yield an enduring set of first principles for sociology. The role of evolutionary sociobiology ... will attempt to reconstruct the history of the machinery [of the brain] and to identify the adaptive significance of each of its functions. Some of the functions are almost certainly obsolete Others may prove currently adaptive at the level

of the individual and family but maladaptive at the level of the group—or the reverse. If the decision is taken to mould cultures to fit the requirements of the ecological steady state, some behaviours can be altered experientially without emotional damage or loss in creativity. Others cannot. Uncertainty in this matter means that Skinner's dream of a culture pre-designed for happiness will surely have to wait for the new neurobiology. A genetically accurate and hence completely fair code of ethics must also wait."⁵⁰

If that fails to communicate Wilson's future dystopian vision, the following surely clears away any misunderstanding:

"'Soft-core' altruism ... is ultimately selfish. The 'altruist' expects reciprocation from society for himself or his closest relatives. His good behaviour is calculating, often in a wholly conscious way, and his manoeuvres are orchestrated by the excruciatingly intricate sanctions and demands of society. The capacity for soft-core altruism can be expected to have evolved primarily by selection of individuals and to be deeply influenced by the vagaries of cultural evolution. Its psychological vehicles are lying, pretence, and deceit, including self-deceit, because the actor is most convincing who believes that his performance is real Human beings appear to be sufficiently selfish and calculating to be capable of indefinitely greater harmony and social homeostasis True selfishness, if obedient to the other constraints of mammalian biology, is the key to a more nearly perfect social contract."⁵¹

"Nothing is so easy as to deceive oneself; for what we wish, we readily believe" (Demosthenes 384–322 BC).

Conclusion

Wilson's sociobiological thesis is consistent with the materialist worldview that humans are nothing but evolved animals. Morality must, somehow, have its source in a non-human genealogy. With Wilson its origin begins in the insect world.

Parallel with this belief is his rejection of an objective, cognitivist meta-ethic. In harmony with Ruse, Wilson pushes the indemonstrable: genes have tricked 'us' to believe we possess an objective morality when in fact no such creature exists. Worse still, his repudiation of genetic determinism notwithstanding, Wilson's ultimate reliance on remaking neurobiological man in the image of a God-expelled secular humanism heralds an atavistic restocking of the 20th century's

political and social experiments, which marked it out as the most bloodied century the world has witnessed.⁵²

Some final thoughts. Wilson, due to his belief that evolution never ceases because the underlying genetics which programs and fosters morality is fluid, is forced to face up to the difficulties that this brings to the surface. In a very limited, final few pages he concludes that a form of moral pluralism—what else could he do?— is the only justified socio-political alternative. However, one suspects that this conclusion, while fuelled by his evolutionary bias, is not entirely the product of it. Lurking behind this coda there seems to be a rejection of anything resembling a Judeo-Christian ethic:

“If there is any truth to this theory of innate moral pluralism, the requirement for an evolutionary approach to ethics is self-evident. It should also be clear that no single set of moral standards can be applied to all human populations, let alone all sex-age classes within each population. To impose a uniform code is therefore to create complex, intractable moral dilemmas—these, of course, are the current condition of mankind.”⁵³

Wilson doesn’t elaborate on this intractability—he merely expects the reader to take his word for it. ‘Pluralism’ is newspeak for cultural and moral relativism, no matter how ‘successfully’ ethics is ‘biologized’; and it suffers just as much from the usual, and quite logical, criticisms any form of ethical relativism attracts. Just how convincing Wilson’s censure of, say, pedophilia would be, given his dismissal of actual and transcendent ethical absolutes, is not too hard to gauge.

When accounting for a behaviour, phenotype or moral faculty, sociobiologists have a tendency to reify their well-spun Kiplingesque tale (something common to all evolutionary explanations!). What begins as a protatic ‘possible’ or a cautious ‘imagine’ terminates in the apodictic. Although trumpeted with a confabulatory confidence that their construction entails the same evidentiary stature as the events at Runnymede or Pearl Harbour, the air-drawn nevertheless demands a body. Fischer labelled this the Fallacy of the Hypostatized Proof: “this form of error commonly occurs when a historian reifies a historiographical interpretation and substitutes it for the actual historical event it allegedly represents.”⁵⁴

How is this at all possible? One sociobiologist apologist provides a justification:

“Numerous philosophers of history have claimed that there are a number of additional criteria that distinguish stories and myths from history. For example, there is near unanimity of opinion about the claim that among the properties possessed by history, as opposed to stories and myths, are internal

consistency, the avowed intention to produce a ‘factual’ account of past events, and the willingness of historians to test their accounts against publicly available forms of evidence. Stories normally lack all of these characteristics. If such criteria can be utilized to distinguish history from stories, myths, and fables, then surely sociobiological accounts count as history, not stories. Sociobiological explanations of the incest taboo, homosexuality, panhandling among humans, and inheritance patterns among persons in various cultural settings are constructed so as to be grounded in an established theory ... to be ‘factual’, and to be testable by publicly available evidence But the real point at issue is that many sociobiological accounts do approximate the classificatory standards for being understood as history (perhaps false history but still history) operative in the social sciences and human history, which is probably all that can reasonably be asked of sociobiological hypotheses on methodological grounds at this point in time. While sociobiological accounts of the origins of social behavior may indeed be slap-dash or false, they are patently not fictions or fables.”⁵⁵

So, the evolutionary history of, say, altruism, or the rise of morality more generally, need not be true or accurate; and if they are neither, the explanation is not necessarily a work of fiction. Go figure!

In the next part I will review a number of other attempts to explain morality’s origin according to evolutionary dogma.

References

1. Wilson, E.O., *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MS, p. 22, 2000. Arguably the first appearance of a connection between sociology and biology was in 1967 with the publication of Bruce Eckland’s article, unimaginatively titled Genetics and sociology: a reconsideration, *American Sociological Review* 32(2):173–194, 1967. Wilson’s initial exposure to the general public was enormous. He gave interviews to *The New York Times Magazine*, *House and Garden*, *People*, as well as having articles written about sociobiology, *inter alia*, in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Playboy* (the article’s title was, predictably, “New science tells us why men cheat on their wives”), *Mother Jones*, *Omni*, and *Boston*. For reference details see the introductory editors’ note to the special double issue of Leeds, A. and Dusek, V. (Eds.), *The Philosophical Forum* XIII(2–3):iv–xv, Winter-Spring 1981–1982. Like most evolutionary explanations for morality’s rise, sociobiology has suffered the same fate of becoming an historic relic. Notwithstanding this, it would be wrong to say that Wilson’s original ideas have lost all influence. After all, man and all other life are connected through a common biological history. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.
2. Wilson, E.O., Dialogue. The response: academic vigilantism and the political significance of sociobiology, *BioScience* 26(3):183, 187–190, Mar 1976; p. 189. It should be pointed out that any other explanation, apart from the material, is not given a second look. Nothing could be made clearer than Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox’s boast that “We have confidently asserted that identifiable propensities for [human] behaviour are in the wiring. Unless we look to divine intervention, these got there by the same route as they got into the wiring of any other animal: by mutation and natural selection.” Tiger, L. and Fox, R., *The human biogram*; in: Caplan, A.L. (Ed.), *The Sociobiology Debate: Readings on the ethical and scientific issues concerning sociobiology*, Harper and Row, NY, p. 57, 1978. The authors are referred to in a positive light by Wilson in his *Sociobiology*, ref. 2, pp. 547–550.

3. Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1, pp. viii–ix.
4. Barkow, J.H., Culture and sociobiology, *American Anthropologist* 80(1):5–20, Mar 1978; p. 9. The enormous plasticity of evolutionary explanation on this speculative wiring history can be witnessed in the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive views. Writing in 1971, Tiger and Fox claimed that “The theory used to be that, for some reason or other, at some time or other, the human brain expanded to the point where it was capable of producing first symbols and then culture. This no longer seems plausible. [In reality i]t was after they started doing cultural things that the brain grew in size and complexity.” Tiger, L., and Fox, R., ref. 2, pp. 58–59.
5. Dobzhansky, T., Anthropology and the natural sciences—the problem of human evolution, *Current Anthropology* 4(2):138, 146–148, Apr 1963; p. 147.
6. On top of all that, the possibility has also been suggested that cultural evolution, once emancipated from biology, reduces the fitness of the group. Durham, in passing, points to this possibility: “Although the resulting process of cultural selection would normally result in adaptive phenotypic attributes, I should point out that it actually easier to conceive of cultural influences getting ‘off track’ in the evolution of a phenotype than it is for biological influences. Maladaptive cultural practices can [emphasis in original] be maintained at substantial frequency in a population, particularly when [human biases or forces that keep culture on track of the adaptive optima] are overridden or prevented from functioning. ... Maladaptive behaviors can also recur through the conscious or deliberate choice of individuals to behave counter to their reproductive interests.” (Durham, W.H., Toward a coevolutionary theory of human biology and culture: in: Caplan ref. 2, p. 435.) Further, on the premise that not all behaviour is genetically determined, it is worth considering the havoc a selfish individual or individuals (cheats) may impose on group fitness. I would think many of the communities cited and described in Robert Edgerton’s *Sick Societies: Challenging the myth of primitive harmony*, The Free Press, NY, 1992, would support this criticism.
7. To what degree it is true now is difficult to assess but, soon after the time of its publication, Wilson’s ideas were taken up by the European Far Right, despite Wilson’s profession of “a fairly orthodox academic liberal political stance”. Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1, pp. ix ff. These editors point out that although sociobiology in the US “is academically part of the liberal mainstream”, some American neo-conservatives have used Wilson’s theory to justify a range of their beliefs. Sociobiology’s ecumenical net is no better illustrated than “Guy Hocquenghem. Hocquenghem was a gay activist who wrote for the French ‘Maoist’ journal, *Liberation*, at the same time the New Right surfaced, and who, oddly, was sympathetic to its biologism and even some of its racism.” Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1, p. xi.
8. Singer, P., Ethics and sociobiology, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11(1):42, Winter 1982. It should be noted that Singer’s praise, however, is accompanied by some criticism.
9. Up to 1996 Harvard was the university to which Wilson was tenured.
10. Allen, E., Beckwith, B., Beckwith, J., Chorover, S. et al., Against ‘sociobiology’, *The New York Review of Books*, pp. 182, 184–186, 13 Nov 1975.
11. Dialogue (The Critique), Sociobiology—another biological determinism, *BioScience* 26(3):182,184–186, Mar 1976. All of these accusations would, of course, strike any creationist as quite rich given they comprise the same methodological and philosophical faults creationists time and time again level against evolutionary theory generally and its just-so stories specifically. As noted by Leeds and Dusek, “An interesting sidelight on this dispute is that some critics of the unfalsifiability of sociobiology have been led by their own criticism to examine more carefully those parts of evolutionary theory which are, to some extent, guilty of the faults which they first noted most glaringly in sociobiology, especially concerning the concept of adaptation and adaptational stories” (ref. 1, pp. xvii–xviii). Leeds and Dusek have a useful summary of the main academic criticisms on pp. xi–xii, and following this the negative reception in the popular media and political sphere.
Pushed into a corner, sociobiology quickly defaults to a theory-saving plasticity. In an article aimed to rescue Wilson’s ideas from his detractors, Barkow recounts a conversation he had with the evolutionary psychologist, Daniel Freedman. Addressing the counterfactual that falling birth rates in Western countries seem to undermine Wilson’s theory that we seek to maximize our inclusive fitness, the salient anomaly is matter-of-factly brushed aside. Barkow boasts that “Even if we are [working against our fitness], such a situation would in no way put sociobiology in question [because] sociobiology is indeed sufficiently flexible to be applied to human behavior without automatic contradiction.” Flexing this flexibility, Barkow contends that the effects of evolutionary adaptation, while experienced now, were created in a distantly past environment. Observed in certain animals, the ability to restrict birth rates is connected to maximizing parental investment where “total living space or resources are limited or in which without parental care no offspring will survive [or] by having no offspring at all”. Western families, too, once acquired this convenient ability: “Apparently[sic], our own ancestors lived with an ecology in which it maximised inclusive fitness to limit offspring and at times even to have none” (Barkow, J.H., ref. 4, p. 9).
12. See Wilson ref. 1, pp. 685–686. The studies Wilson cites, in addition to the adequacy of their authors’ training, have been called into question. One place to start is Robert B. Edgerton’s *Sick Societies: Challenging the myth of primitive harmony*, The Free Press, New York, pp. 6–8, 1992. See also [1k people | wikipedia](#), accessed 7 Oct 2022.
13. The response: academic vigilantism and the political significance of sociobiology, *BioScience* 26(3):183,187–190, Mar 1976. Gould, in a later, more irenic, review of Wilson’s work, still uncompromisingly pointed out Wilson’s flawed arguments. See Gould, S.J., Biological potential vs biological determinism, *Natural History Magazine*, May 1976; in: Caplan, ref. 2, pp. 343–351. Peter Singer also threw his hat into the ring and, siding with Wilson, argued that “sociobiology does not necessarily lead to biological determinism. On the contrary, because we are beings capable of knowing the consequences of our actions and choosing accordingly, we can play tricks on evolution. Sociobiology can contribute to the success of our trickery by telling us more about what evolution is up to; the better we understand evolution, the better we can outfox it.” Singer, P., Ethics and sociobiology, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11(1):40–64, Winter 1982; p. 61.
14. Wilson, ref. 1, pp. 686–687. According to Leeds and Dusek, this obfuscation riddles sociobiology’s apologetics: “Sociobiologists assert a strong biological determinism in human nature both in their technical work and in speaking to popular audiences. When challenged by their critics, they shift to a notion of ‘tendency’ or ‘propensity’. When criticized still further, they claim that culture is ‘10% biological and 90% social’, which is hardly informative. At times, they retreat to the claim that biology is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for culture, a claim which the critics could agree with. But of course, this last claim would make sociobiology vacuous and hardly the basis for the more daring theories and claims.” (Ref. 1, p. xvii. References provided in original.)
15. Wilson, E.O., *Biophilia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, p. 121, 1984. Some incipient pre-Wilsonian hint of this Social Darwinism is found in ethologist Niko Tinbergen’s work. He concludes that the solution to man’s ethical problems is to do “our utmost to return to a reasonable population density [and] we must pursue the biological study of animal behavior for clarifying problems of human behavior of such magnitude as that of our aggression, and of education.” Tinbergen, N., On war and peace in animals and man, p. 96; in: Caplan, ref. 2. Tinbergen’s piece was originally published in *Science* 160(3835):1411–1418, June 28, 1968.
16. Wilson, ref. 1, p. 21.
17. The Apostle Paul alludes to this poles-apart worldview, writing, “while we were still helpless, Christ at the right moment dies for the ungodly. Why, it is scarcely conceivable that any one would die for a simply just man, although for a good and loveable man perhaps some one here and there will have the courage even to lay down his life’ but God gives proof of his love to us in Christ’s dying for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:6–8).
18. Meta-ethics is the philosophical study of the semantic concepts, judgments, arguments and epistemological criteria involved in ethics. Contrary to normative ethics, it does not tell you what ought to be done; e.g. whether it is actually moral or immoral to abort a baby. Rather, it analyzes the logic and meanings of the terms used in an argument concerning the morality of abortion.
19. Nagel had obviously seen the problem when he remarked that “It is usually a good strategy to ask whether a general claim about truth or meaning applies to itself. Many theories, like logical positivism, can be eliminated by this test.” Nagel, T., *The Last Word*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 15, 1997.
20. Ruse, M. and Wilson, E.O., Moral philosophy as applied science, *Philosophy* 61(236):173–192, Apr 1986; p. 186.
21. As Hilary Putnam pointed out, according to the Positivists, “the ‘scientific method’ exhausts rationality itself, and testability by that method exhausts meaningfulness” (Putnam, H., *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 105, 1981).
22. Paraphrasing another philosopher, Ayer, despite his allegiance to logical positivism, comments that “the man who is ready to prove that metaphysics is impossible is a brother metaphysician with a rival theory of his own” (Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth and Logic*, Dover Publications, NY, p. 34, 2014 (1946)).
23. Putnam, H., Why Reason can’t be Naturalized, *Synthese* 52(1):3–23, Jul 1982; pp. 18. Often we must read between the lines to identify a veiled positivist epistemic. William Casebeer writes, “Only the most stalwart anti-naturalist would think that facts about human beings and how they reason have absolutely no bearing on normative concerns, and only a small number of contemporary moral philosophers have taken this position [and] we can at least maintain that the biological and cognitive sciences can constrain moral theorizing by identifying the realistic limits of our biological and moral capacities” (Casebeer, W., *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, connectionism, and moral cognition*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, p. 33, 2003). Read in isolation, Casebeer’s words seem impartially reasonable. However, his project is dedicated to a marriage of Deweyian pragmatism and Aristotelian virtue ethics undergirded by a maximizing of evolutionary considerations. Positivism by another name!

24. I am in no way suggesting evolution *is* science and, under the appropriate conditions, I cannot agree, by definition, that one discipline cannot inform the other. I only present Gould's criticism for the sake of my argument against evolutionists' claim that science always trumps questions integral to matters of religion. Similarly—and I don't think too many people would have a problem—I take a very broad view of religion to the extent that it is more than adequately up to the task of covering morality as a subdiscipline. In fact, religion has a long, venerable, and continued tradition of being the only epistemically viable and relevant vehicle to convey moral truths. Of course, Gould's comment must be cast against the fact that he was a staunch opponent of sociobiology.
25. Non-cognitivism maintains that there are no stance-independent ethical facts denoting objective right and wrong. Something of the vagueness and person-centred lack of objectivity inherent in non-cognitivism can be gathered from the following version of this meta-ethic. Gilbert Harman explains: "According to impartial spectator theories, to say that an action is wrong is to say that it is the sort of action that impartial spectators would disapprove of under conditions that are further specified in various ways in different versions of this sort of theory. Jane believes Albert was wrong, because she finds herself disapproving of his conduct and believes this disapproval is based on a knowledge of the facts and is not the result of some special stake she has in the matter at hand. We can explain Jane's disapproval of Albert's conduct by treating it as an instance of a more general regularity. Jane disapproves of Albert's action because it is the sort of act that spectators tend to disapprove of and Jane is the relevant sort of spectator. In other words, the act has certain properties which incline informed impartial spectators to disapprove of the act, and those properties incline Jane to disapprove of the act in much the way they incline other informed impartial spectators to do so. Since the action's wrongness consists in its being of a sort of which spectators in general disapprove, there is a sense in which Jane believes Albert's action is wrong because of the wrongness of that action" (Harman, G., Moral explanations of natural facts—can moral claims be tested against moral reality? *The Southern J. Philosophy* 24(S1): 57–68, Spring 1986; p. 65). Although it is of little relevance, Albert's 'crime' was that he loved to torture cats. Swap out animal cruelty and substitute the unwarranted taking of human life (let's call it abortion), then on Harman's impartial spectator criterion, it's awfully difficult to eliminate any one actor's not having a stake in the issue (and which meta-impartial spectator will decide who's in and who's out?). And how do you, and who will, weigh up the rather nebulous 'knowledge of the facts'?
26. Wilson, ref. 1, p. 16. The full statement is: "Scientists and humanists should consider together the possibility that the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized" (p. 701). Michael Ruse has echoed Wilson's scientism by imploring that a "naturalistic approach [to ethics] means ... one puts oneself in the hands of scientists. These would include primatologists, students of comparative cultures, game theorists, evolutionary psychologists, economists" (Ruse, M., 'Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible (And If It Is, Is It Well Taken)?'; in: Boniolo, G. & De Anna, G., *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 14, 2006).
27. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 20, p. 179.
28. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 20, p. 186. Arguably Ruse's most infamous iteration of this meta-ethic is from his seminal *Taking Darwin Seriously: A naturalistic approach to philosophy*: "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes ... the illusion lies not in the morality itself, but in its sense of objectivity" (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 253, 1986). His chimeric speculation certainly fits the bill for having his ethical cake and eating it too! I examine Ruse's meta-ethics in greater detail in an upcoming paper.
29. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 20, p. 188. And what about normative ethics? Can sociobiology say anything about what the good act is? Carla Kary sees sociobiology in almost religious terms, crediting it with the ability to 'redeem' normative ethics. See Kary, C.E., Sociobiology and the redemption of normative ethics, *Monist* 67(2):161–166, Apr 1984. Convinced that moral philosophy is incapable of any fruitful or intelligent insight into its commission, Kary believes that sociobiology has reinvented moral philosophy to the degree it "seems capable of reaffirming the hope men have had in looking to moral philosophy for the answers to moral quandaries" (p. 161).
30. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 29. I think it's important to respond to their quasi-delusional epiphany that materialism is more congenial for moral behaviour than, say, a Christian one. In 2015 the Chinese government, an entity about as materialist as one could imagine, annulled its one child policy. Good news—at least for this present generation of young people starting out in married life. The bad news that accompanied this announcement was so simple and yet so shocking it takes you some time to come to terms with it. In the three plus decades of this policy, the Chinese government ordered the murders of up to 400 million of its unborn. Throw in the tens of millions of adults who died under Mao and what you have is the single biggest example, by far, of a philosophy's ability to cause more harm to the citizens of the country that promulgates it than has ever happened before. Materialism, the very belief that Ruse and Wilson have extended to the West, has killed more than anyone, yet these two either live in a state of mendacious denial or they just don't care.
- This Ruse- and Wilson-type turbid 'exculpation', involving a thorough inversion of the historical facts, is eloquently summed up by Roger Scruton. In his masterful book-length attack on materialism and its Marxist-inspired academics, he writes that "all those mystifying technicalities have the purpose of confiscating reality from our ordinary human understanding" (*Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left*, Bloomsbury Continuum, London, p. 275, 2019). Attacking the disingenuous rationalization for the impossible-to-comprehend atrocity numbers perpetrated under materialist ideology, such as the French Revolution, Mao's Great Leap Forward, and the like, Scruton, commenting on one Leftist justification for the murders, stated, "Crime ... isn't crime, if the goal is utopia ... The statistics are irrelevant ... reduced to the square root of minus one—a purely imaginary number ... In the urgent need to believe, to find a central mystery that is the true meaning of things and to which one's life can be dedicated, nonsense is much to be preferred to sense. For it builds a way of life around something that *cannot be questioned*. No reasoned assault is possible against that which denies the possibility of a reasoned assault. And thus it is that utopia stepped again, unchallenged, into the place vacated by theology" (*Ibid.*, pp. 258, 268, 271).
31. Kitcher, P., *Vaulting Ambition: Sociobiology and the quest for human nature*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 241–243, 1985. Despite its amusing title, see a completely serious critique of Wilson's thesis in Falk, D., Is sociobiology neophrenology?; in: Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1, pp. 109–118.
32. See Kitcher's entire eighth chapter in ref. 31 for a detailed address of these issues, including a (cautiously) worthwhile discussion attacking Wilson's support for homosexuality as natural.
33. Kitcher, ref. 31, pp. 418–419.
34. Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 421. Alasdair MacIntyre defined emotivism as "the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character" (*After Virtue*, University Of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp. 11–12, 2007). As Trueman critically notes, "emotivism is a theory not of meaning but of use ... emotivism presents preferences as if they were truth claims" (Trueman, C.R., *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural amnesia, expressive individualism, and the road to sexual revolution*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, p. 85, 2020). Note Trueman's analysis of the homosexual marriage debate in the USA, the proponents of the legal cases aimed at overthrowing the Defence of Marriage Act and how emotivism was "used polemically to dismiss arguments for DOMA" (p. 309, but also pp. 302–315.) On an interesting side note, Trueman writes that MacIntyre argued that the Bloomsbury Group's philosophical guru, G.E. Moore, was the man most responsible for promoting emotivism (p. 86). Bloomsbury was an egregiously decadent and sexually immoral London Bohemian group. One of the leading figures in Bloomsbury was the author Virginia Woolf. Woolf was the great-granddaughter of James Stephen, a true evangelical and an abolitionist. Leslie Stephen, E. Michael Jones writes in his chapter, Homosexuality as subversive, that Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, "lost his faith in the 1860s as a direct result of the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species ... His solution to the problems that loss entailed was to turn religion into an ethos" (*Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, p. 57, 1993).
35. Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 422.
36. Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 424.
37. For a tight but comprehensive overview of the different versions and the implications of utilitarianism see Moreland, J.P. and Craig, W.L., *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, pp. 433–444, 2003. Thomas Nagel remarks that, under utilitarian considerations, "Everyone is treated equally as a source of inputs to the calculation of value, but once that is done, it is total value rather than equality that takes over as the goal [and that it] may have problems supplying a usable common measure of well-being for combinatorial purposes." Contrasted with this is a Kantian categorical approach, so that such "accords to everyone not equality of input into the totality of value, but equality of status and treatment in certain respects" (Nagel, T., *The Last Word*, Oxford University Press, NY, p. 123, 1997).
38. Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 423.
39. Readers may wish to begin by looking at articles at CMI, for example, [God and logic | creation.com](#), and Sproul, R.C., *Not a Chance: The myth of chance in modern science and cosmology*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, pp. 149–164, 1994.
40. Kitcher also makes a sophomoric oversight by calling Hume's Is-Ought Fallacy the Naturalistic Fallacy. See ref. 31, pp. 428–431. I explore these two paralogsms in greater detail in an upcoming part, but, suffice for now, Kitcher correctly notes Wilson's lapse in logic by deriving a prescriptive 'ought' from a descriptive or factual 'is'. The Naturalistic Fallacy, championed by G.E. Moore, working in an opposing direction, is critical of attempts to reduce the (moral) good to any natural property or thing.

41. Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005 (revised from the original 1971 publication).
42. In this regard it resembles the Prisoner's Dilemma I discussed at length in part 4. Rawls is an idealist and has been appropriately criticized for his pie-in-the-sky theory of justice. Despite his use of Rawls, Kitcher does raise one epistemological problem for Rawls' account, namely a need to respond to the following: "Why should the conclusions reached by parties in an ideal situation, the original position, prove binding on actual people?" (Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 433). Rawls attempts to counter this and other criticisms in his lengthy paper titled 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory' (*J. Philosophy* 77(9):515–572, Sept 9, 1980). However, it's abundantly clear that Rawls is single-mindedly intent on considering only naturalistically informed beliefs, though not necessarily undergirded by science, psychology, or social theory. To this end he writes, "The search for reasonable grounds for reaching agreement rooted in our conception of ourselves and in our relation to society replaces the search for moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine, an order apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves Apart from the procedure of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts" (p. 519). I guess the best way to sum up his project is to describe it as a book-length rationalistic thought experiment. For some general criticisms of Rawls' idealism and his Enlightenment-dependent credo that political liberalism would dissolve "men's propensity to injustice", see Berkowitz, P., *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NY, pp. 24ff, 1999. Interestingly, for a contemporary atheist, Rawls believes, among other things, that intact two-parent families bring the best rewards for the public good.
43. Kitcher, ref. 31, p. 434.
44. Kitcher, ref. 43. Kitcher dismisses God solely, so it seems, on the presumed efficacy of Plato's Euthyphro problem. I deal with this in an upcoming part.
45. Kitcher, P., *Ethics and evolution: how to get here from there*; in: de Waal, F., *Primates and Philosophers: How morality evolved*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pp. 136–137, 2006.
46. I hope my whole-hearted scepticism is overlooked, but it is clearly obvious that telling a, or any, good story, in the hope that something sticks, is not a historical account. After all, Wilson believes sociobiological explanations are the ultimate, life-forming myth and "the best myth we will ever have" and "the only mythology that can manufacture great goals from the sustained pursuit of pure knowledge." Wilson, E.O., *On Human Nature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 207, 1978.
- As Burian pointed out, Wilson's theory is entirely flexible: "The power of the theory resides in the richness of the explanatory stories it allows, the system of retreats to alternative stories To put the point cynically: it becomes a highly amusing parlor game to see who can devise the best evolutionary account showing how an arbitrary chosen behaviour could have become fixed in a given population." Burian, R.M., A methodological critique of sociobiology, p. 382, in: Caplan, ref. 2. Also note Burian's swipe at Wilson's understanding of the rise of altruism, though this can quite easily be directed to any evolutionist's belief on the matter: "Are we really supposed to believe that the first Good Samaritan appeared as a rare mutant" [p. 180 of Wilson's book] and that kin and group selection preserved the fortunate mutation?" (p. 379). The key, I may suggest, is Wilson's inclusion of the evocative 'Imagine'. Elsewhere Burian lays out in detail the conceptual confusion Wilson and his followers have regarding the very nature of altruism. Burian also points out that Wilson ignores that population genetics, rather than fixing alternative alleles, eliminates them, thus making it impossible for the 'Imagine' to be even imagined!
47. Epigenetic rules have been suggested. I address this solution, so-called, in an upcoming part. These 'rules' are granted an undeserved ontological status out of philosophical exigency, rather than one based on empiricism. I argue that they're really not much more than a disingenuous surrogacy, a non-material theoretical replacement for the work that soul or non-reductive mind, the non-material entity, achieves.
48. Flanagan, O.J. Jr., Is morality epiphenomenal? The failure of the sociobiological reduction of ethics, pp. 211, 213; in: Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1. Bizarrely, but perhaps not unsurprisingly, one of Flanagan's disparate ethical precepts he cites from Khomeini's legal code is "the dietary laws covering sodomized ewes" (p. 211).
49. Burian, R.M., A methodological critique of sociobiology; in: Caplan ref. 2, p. 383.
50. Wilson, ref. 1, pp. 715–716. His American Marxist critics' disquiet arose from, accurately or otherwise, sociobiology's perceived genetic determinism which erased the liberal idea of man's freedom. In other words, they visualize man as something special in nature. The irony is that Christians have proposed the same starting value about man, yet, to the unregenerate person, it is greeted with howls of derision because of affording man his special place in the universe based on their axiomatic undergirding that man is made in the image of God. Other critics have noted the fallout from the weakening of Christianity's objective morality.

Although favourable to many of sociobiology's claims, Bernard Davis points out that with the loss of the transcendent moral realm, specifically due to evolution's undermining it, there is no longer moral consensus, and moral relativism seems to be the default position. See his guarded criticisms in Davis, B.D., *A middle course between irrelevance and scientism*, pp. 315–318; in Caplan, ref. 2. Davis's piece was originally published in the Hastings Center Report, October 1976.

51. Wilson, ref. 46, pp. 155–157. For further criticism of Wilson, see Gould, S.J., Biological potential vs biological determinism, pp. 343–351; in: Caplan, ref. 2; Allen, E. *et al.*, Against 'sociobiology', pp. 259–264; in: Caplan, ref. 2; Sociobiology study group of science for the people, sociobiology—another biological determinism, pp. 280–290; in: Caplan, ref. 2; and Lewontin, R.C., Sociobiology—a caricature of Darwinism, *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1976(2):22–31, 1976. For a response to these criticisms, see Ruse, M., Sociobiology: a philosophical analysis, pp. 363–368; in: Caplan, ref. 2. For an in-depth, critical analysis of Wilson's use of, *inter alia*, kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection, see Edelman, M., Human behavior and sociobiological models of natural selection, pp. 1–42; in: Leeds and Dusek, ref. 1.
52. See, for example, Courtois, S. *et al.*, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, terror, repression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999.
53. Wilson, ref. 1, p. 704.
54. Fischer, D.H., *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a logic of historical thought*, Harper Perennial, Harper Collins, New York, p. 56, 1970. Wilson provides a sterling example of this fallacy. Drawn to illustrate "the threshold of autocatalytic social evolution two million years ago", his artist's 'speculative reconstruction' includes all the apposite information which would convince even the most recalcitrant that this is a historical snapshot. His account tells what these 'men' were doing (foraging for food and "driving rival predators from a newly fallen dinother"); their prey's status ("succumbed from exhaustion or disease, its end perhaps hastened by attacks from the animals closing in"); what was on the sidelines and how they reacted ("a female sabertooth cat (*Homotherium*) and her two grown cubs have been at least temporarily intimidated and are backing away. Their threat [*sic*] faces reveal the extraordinary gape of their jaws."); the height of these two-million-year-old men ("quite small, less than 1.5 meters"); and the non-participating animals ("The herbivore populations were dense and varied, as they are today. In the left background are seen three-toed horses (Hipparion), while to the right . . ."). (Wilson, ref. 1, p. 711.)
55. Caplan, A.L., Say it just ain't so: adaptational stories and sociobiological explanations of social behavior, p. 153; in: Leeds, A. and Dusek, ref. 1.

Marc Kay has a bachelor's degree in philosophy, religious studies and Indo-Malay; postgraduate certification in TESOL. He was previously a teacher and mental health and youth worker. He is now a fulltime stay-at-home dad while his wife pursues her academic career. He commits any free time to street evangelism.