

# What's wrong with being wrong: part 8—a more than cursory look into evolutionary ethics

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The ethical project, along with origins and the religious search for meaning, is quintessentially human. It distinguishes us from animals.<sup>1</sup> Having previously examined the materialist evolutionary theories for the origin of morality and altruism, in this and subsequent parts, I review evolutionary theories of metaethics. In this paper, I focus on the philosopher Michael Ruse. Ruse argues that genes have deceived us into believing absolute moral standards exist, when in fact they are an illusion. This deception is advantageous for our survival, providing an impetus to behave morally. Other evolutionary moral philosophers will be addressed in up-coming papers.

"Truth, of course, must of necessity be stranger than fiction, for we have made fiction to suit ourselves" (Chesterton, G.K., Mr Bernard Shaw; in: *Heretics*, p. 32, 1905, accessed 10 May 2024).

Metaethics is a subdivision of ethics, concerned with: (i) the meaning and use of ethical concepts (such as ought/ought not, good/bad, right/wrong), (ii) the epistemological (exploring the possibility, justification, and validity of ethical reasoning) (iii) the ontological (whether moral facts exist and their nature). Metaethics asks what is going on in ethical discourse.<sup>2</sup>

Evans and Shah point out its importance:

"Our practice of making these [normative] judgements is central to who we are as human beings, and for this reason alone many philosophers have been driven to explain how it works and why it exists. They want to know what place this practice has in the grand scheme of things ... in the broader order of nature or reality itself."<sup>3</sup>

A principal concern is the conflation of truly moral considerations with instrumental ones. Instrumental reasons never yield genuine morality but aim to (illegitimately) bridge the chasm between what occurs and what non-instrumentally ought to happen. It masquerades as the ethical, substituting qualities such as 'success', 'control' or 'effect' for such non-instrumental predications as 'what's right', 'what's wrong' and 'what's immoral'.<sup>4</sup>

The gravitas of this project hasn't escaped evolution's most sympathetic supporters:

"Darwinian metaethics must take seriously a peculiar feature of moral judgements: that they are supposed to enjoin and condemn certain actions not

just as prudentially advisable or inadvisable, in the light of our interests, but as right or wrong in themselves."<sup>5</sup>

Arguments supporting evolution's ability to justify or ground any metaethic are riddled with logical fallacies. Some doubt that any metaethic can be justified by an evolutionary explanation. Unsurprisingly, this often leads to ethical skepticism or nihilism.

Failure to account for metaethics within an evolutionary framework raises doubt that evolution has occurred. Jerry Fodor candidly stated that if the project proved unsuccessful and moral knowledge was Quixotic castle-building, then "practically everything I believe about anything [would be] false and it's the end of the world."<sup>6</sup>

The literature of metaethics and its relationship to evolution is immense. I've selected a few leading, contemporary philosophers who point out the problems bridging the epistemological gap between evolution and metaethics. What surfaces is a philosophical muddle when a materialist worldview is (incompatibly) coupled to metaphysics. The problems raise similar issues apposite to a Christian metaethic generally, a creationist one specifically. I address these in my final paper.

## Michael Ruse<sup>7</sup>

Michael Ruse's (figure 1) contribution warrants special attention. His key work on the subject, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A naturalistic approach to philosophy* (figure 2), provides a framework of important issues, and shows the weaknesses of a materialist metaethic.

Ruse is no coward. He acknowledges the epistemological consequences of an evolutionary worldview and is less inconsistent than many of his co-believers. While not denying that our ethical sentiments have causal evolutionary



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**Figure 1.** Michael Ruse “(21 June 1940–1 November 2024) was a British-born Canadian philosopher of science” who “worked on the relationship between science and religion, the creation–evolution controversy, and the demarcation problem within science.” (Wikipedia)

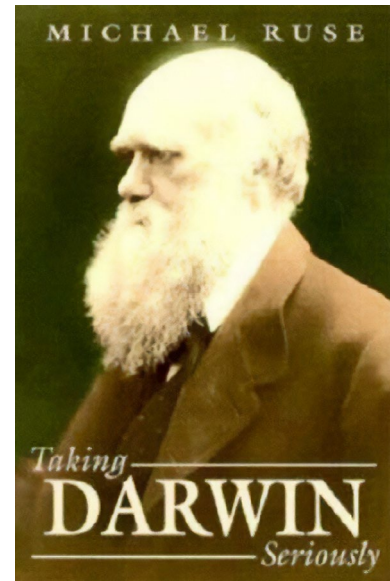
explanations, he nevertheless claims objective values have no ultimate grounding. Blind to his own blindness, Ruse denies “we can know foundations or even that there can be any . . . . There is no ultimate justification for the rules”.<sup>8</sup>

This might offer support for subjective value or a non-cognitivist metaethic,<sup>9</sup> but this is too uncomfortable for Ruse, and so he returns to an ‘objectivity’ of ethics, albeit one tethered to a hugely queer rider. Although his explanation is not particularly complex, it requires a brief preamble.

### An epistemological requirement

According to Ruse, evolution has imposed epistemic constraints on how we understand the world. Apodictic (demonstrable, necessary, or self-evident) knowledge of nature is impossible. However, when we say we know something, this less-than-certain knowledge has value because it has allowed us and our ancestors to survive better, thanks to this innate evolutionary gift for unpicking nature. Evolution endowed humans—or more accurately, proto-humans—with rules of reason, such as *modus ponens*<sup>10</sup> and science. He writes:

“... in order to understand why science is as it is—why laws, why predictions, why falsifiability, why consiliences—we need to look at the principles of scientific reasoning or methodology ... these principles have their being and only justification in their Darwinian value, that is in their adaptive worth



**Figure 2.** Michael Ruse’s book *Taking Darwin Seriously: A naturalistic approach to philosophy* shows the weaknesses of a materialist metaethic—despite this not being Ruse’s intended objective.

to us humans or, at least to our proto-human ancestors. In short, I argue that the principles which guide and mould science are rooted in our biology.”<sup>11</sup>

While conceding this is hollow question-begging, “you are surely entitled to a little more than a flat assertion that the principles of scientific reason have their being in human Darwinian needs.”<sup>12</sup> His final justification, nonetheless, relies on an equally misleading set of propositions and Byzantine conjecture.

Ruse admits to the impossibility of demonstrating a step-by-step account of how the requisite genetic information arose *de novo*. Confronted with the challenge of explaining the inexplicable based on a materialist worldview, Ruse falls back on one remaining contrivance: question beg out from under a collapsing argument and spin out, *ad captandum vulgus*, a half-decent just-so story. If you are unable to explain the phenomenon, insert layers of imaginary others that give the appearance of having accounted for it.

Borrowing from E.O. Wilson’s characterization of human development, Ruse believes that positioned between our genetics and culture (the latter held, in Wilson’s words, “on a leash” by our genes<sup>13</sup>) are epigenetic rules, themselves genetically derived. These, James Brown argues, are “genetically based regularities which channel the development of behavioural or cognitive traits.”<sup>14</sup> Natural selection and mutations, the materialist’s twin panacea, magically produced the genetic programming that created

these rules, which has enabled us to think and act logically, thus providing the means to analyze the outside world.

The details, indispensable to real science, are tellingly absent. Ruse acknowledges the unrealistic task of demonstrating how humans acquired the necessary genetic information to develop these epigenetic rules: “it is not necessary to go right back to the beginning, [because] pretending that the very idea that something like science might have a biological substratum is novel to the point of absurdity.”<sup>15</sup>

If I understand Ruse correctly, there is adaptive worth in acquiring science and logic. It makes sense that humans have acquired rules of logic because “one would expect to find [these] valuable in the ongoing struggle for survival and reproduction.” Being in possession of an innate preference for  $2 + 2$  summing to 4, rather than 5, or appreciating the law of excluded middle, provides a selective advantage over those who “question the basic premises of logic and mathematics, sometimes disobeying them.” Whether or not logic and maths are objectively true is entirely irrelevant for Ruse, despite our feelings that they “have a force and reality beyond the contingencies of the struggle for existence.” What matters for him is that we can “‘objectify’ the truths of logic and mathematics, believing them to be above the whims of individual humans.”<sup>16</sup>

The chicken-and-egg dilemma goes unnoticed: how does genetic programming for these epigenetic rules precede the acquisition of its adaptive value when its adaptive value is *only* realized when the organism has the faculty?

Another good test for an epistemology’s robustness is to apply it self-referentially. Ruse doesn’t shy away from this and poses the genuine problem that if our knowledge and methodologies are mere means to an end, then nothing we claim to know is necessarily true and may be false. In a moment of ‘Devil’s’ advocacy, Ruse considers the worst possible epistemic outcome for a naturalistic worldview:

“Rationality hardly has an exclusive franchise in a society where leaders embrace Creationism and supply-side economics. Perhaps, therefore, the deceit of natural selection extends much further than we dream. Perhaps many of our basic principles of methodology are illusory. Possibly the illusion extends right to natural selection itself, the very basis of your case! If it sounds somewhat crazy to suggest that natural selection might be deceiving us about the true nature of natural selection, for our own good, remember it was you who undermined the principles of logic, by lumping them in with your general naturalistic approach’ ... . At the extreme, the Darwinian approach has to admit that everything we believe may simply be false, even unto the very principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory.”<sup>17</sup>

Ruse’s response to skepticism is unconvincing. He provisionally rejects a correspondence theory of truth, initially opting for one of coherence. The former states that a proposition is true just in case it agrees with reality to the

extent that what we believe to be true is objectively true. One problem with this approach is that there is often a disjunct between our justified belief and that which it refers to in the external world. In other words, we may have excellent reasons for believing some fact about the world, but they may be false. Coherence acts as a bulwark against skepticism by claiming that a belief or proposition is true if it is strongly compatible with a whole system or class of propositions or beliefs and does not so much as aim for a match with the real, external world but rather has it more-or-less hang together.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his early boast that a coherence system is resilient, Ruse nonetheless confesses: “Because we are the product of a long, directionless, evolutionary process, we are forced to accept that there is something essentially contingent about our most profound claims.” Given his atheism, there is no other grounding available which would confer a reason to believe his senses and thought processes are trustworthy beyond his implied hollow pragmatism. Thus, ideas merely ‘hanging together’, as a coherence structure entails, proves insufficient: “Obviously, working within the common-sense level, the Darwinian is just as much of a correspondence thinker as anyone else.”<sup>19</sup> No doubt, but surely this question-begs evolution’s being able to provide one iota of correlation between what we *believe* about something “out there” and the thing as it truly is. However, something far worse emerges.

Ruse’s commitment to evolution cannot cocoon his epistemology from the possibility that all is illusion. Having his “house empty, swept and put in order”, Ruse’s wavering encourages the reappearance of Descartes’ wicked genius,<sup>20</sup> providing traction for the ultimate epistemological cul-de-sac, the Pyrrhonic intimation that you and I (or possibly only I!) are brains in a vat (figure 3). As Nozick explains, “If one of these things [like the brain-in-a-vat scenario] was happening, your experience would be exactly the same as it now is. So how can you know none of them is happening?”<sup>21</sup>

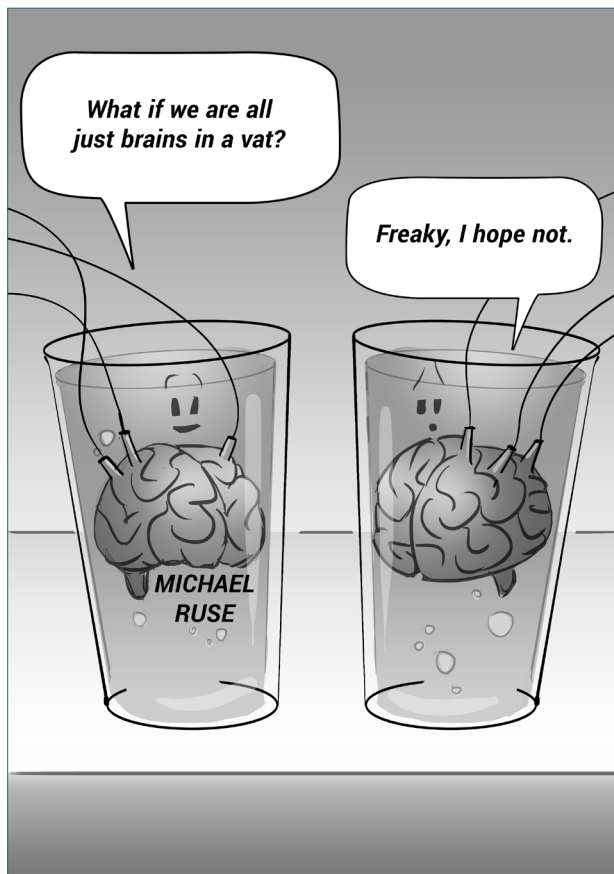
Karl Schafer points out the inevitable circularity of evolution’s mooted capacity to reliably unify our perceptions with objective truth. Despite his realism and special pleading, Schafer concedes:

“... even if evolutionary theory can deliver [a sort of vindication of our perceptual faculties], it can do so only by relying on these very faculties. Hence, even if evolutionary theory should increase our confidence in our perceptual faculties, it does not give us any reason to do so that is independent of a reliance on these faculties ... for it is [still] possible that the best explanation of these faculties’ development might call into question their reliability.”<sup>22</sup>

### Epigenetics: *asylum ignorantiae*<sup>23</sup>

Drawing from this epistemological argument, Ruse cobbles together an explanation for the appearance and development of ethics:

“... we have genetically based dispositions to approve



**Figure 3.** Two brains in vats supposedly communicating is the well-known thought experiment in analytic philosophy.

of certain courses of action and to disapprove of other courses of action ... . Here we start to move towards genuine morality and its evolution—from ‘altruism’ (in the biological sense of working harmoniously together, thus promoting reproductive ends), to altruism (in the literal sense, demanding genuine sentiments about right and wrong) ... . Epigenetic rules giving us a sense of obligation have been put into place by selection, because of their adaptive value ... . In science, the claim was that human reason has certain rough or broad constraints, as manifested through the epigenetic rules. The application of these leads to the finished product, which in many respects soars in to the cultural realm, transcending its biological origin. In the case of ethics, the Darwinian urges a similar position. Human moral thought has constraints, as manifested through the epigenetic rules, and the application of these leads to moral codes, soaring from biology into culture.”<sup>24</sup>

Possessing the same role as they do for knowledge, these rules stand as the “intermediaries between the genes and human thought and action”.<sup>25</sup> They incorporate the proscriptions found in morality and counter the purely selfish

emotions and actions that would be expected to flourish in a crude and untweaked Darwinian survival of the fittest.

Ruse, in a single flourish of intellectual hubris, imaginatively constructs the full historical sequence for morality according to the following *evident* (Ruse’s word choice!) chronology:

“... ensembles of genes have evolved through mutation and selection within an intensely social existence over tens of thousands of years; they prescribe epigenetic rules of mental development peculiar to the human species; under the influence of the rules certain choices are made from among those conceivable and available to the culture; and finally the choices are narrowed and hardened through contractual agreements and sanctification.”<sup>26</sup>

As to the reality of moral epigenetic rules, Ruse admits there is no firm evidence for their existence, though there should be if materialism were true: “The rules in some form are *presupposed* by all types of gene/culture investigation [emphasis added].”<sup>27</sup>

### Ruse’s metaethical choices

Ruse rejects moral objectivism, whereby moral facts, norms, standards, and the like are sourced in God, independent of human will and beliefs. His rejection of this universal yardstick revisits the straw man of Plato’s Euthyphro dilemma (figure 4). Plato’s interlocutor proposed either (i) something is good because God decreed it good, making goodness an arbitrary choice of God, or (ii) something was already good, God approved it, and so goodness can be known without God’s determining it. Thus, Plato attempted to demonstrate that at the heart of any theistic metaethic lay an unresolvable paradox at best, or, at worst, self-refutation.

Although often used as an argument against Christian metaethics, the Euthyphro fails to accurately reflect the Christian epistemic. (I’ll address its shortcomings in an upcoming paper; for now, however, without including the biblical grounding that God’s ontology is love, for example, 1 John 4:8, any Christian metaethic will be susceptible to the Euthyphro.<sup>28</sup>)

Subjectivism<sup>29</sup> also receives short shrift. Ruse recognizes that any metaethical theory lacking an independent source of right and wrong will fail because it is relativistic. To drive this home, he flags pedophilia and asks how the difference of his thinking “sex with young boys and girls is wrong and [your] think[ing] sex with children is morally acceptable” could be resolved. He finally agrees that

“With no external criteria by which to judge and be judged in moral matters, there seems no way of escaping from the relativity of individual inclinations [and so] ultimately ethics seems to have lost its crucial

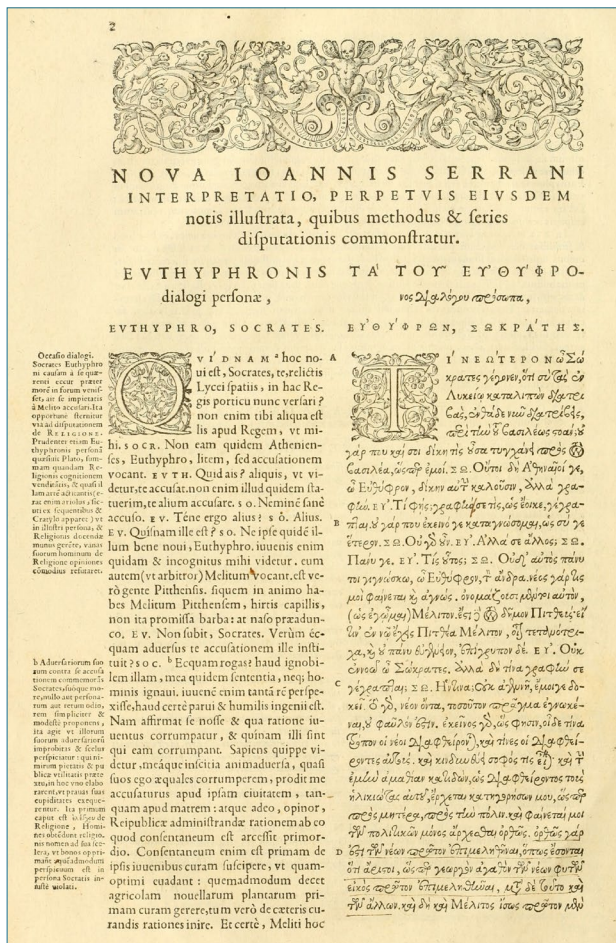


Figure 4. Plato's *Euthyphro* is a dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro that discusses the meaning of piety and justice.

essence and *raison d'être*.”<sup>30</sup>

In fact, Ruse (with co-author Wilson) goes one step further. Because his ultimate bedrock is genetics, to genetics he returns—and this is when the cat does escape from the bag, and we see how poorly his worldview explains morality.

Recall that evolution, via epigenetic rules, manufactures human morality. A problem immediately surfaces. If evolution necessarily involves change, then there is no guarantee a rule would be stable, and so morality is fluid. This is exactly what Ruse concedes: “It is thus entirely correct to say that ethical laws can be changed, at the deepest level, by genetic evolution.”<sup>31</sup> Surely, by any standard, this is relativism.

Ruse resorts to special pleading his way out from under this flaw. Defending himself against the accusation that materialism yields moral relativism,<sup>32</sup> he counters that human cultures “tend to converge in their morality in the manner expected”, given their common evolutionary genetic history. Anticipating the howls of protest—just think Pol Pot, Hitler, Ted Bundy, Stalin, Enron, Islamic homicide

bombers, etc.—arising if such an incoherent explanation were proffered in a public forum, Ruse grudgingly squeezes out a half concession to reality:

“Nevertheless, because ours is an empirical position, we do not exclude the possibility that some differences might exist between large groups in the epigenetic rules governing moral awareness.”<sup>33</sup>

Fancy that: some people act morally differently from others!

### Ruse's ruse<sup>34</sup>

While claiming to reject subjective morality, Ruse nevertheless acknowledges the need of an objective yardstick. Concomitant with his atheism, he must reject God as that unwavering verity.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding his tautological insistence that “We feel that we ought to help others and to co-operate with them, because of the way that we are [and t]hat is the complete answer to the origins and status of morality”,<sup>36</sup> Ruse retrieves what is useful from both metaethical camps. He claims morality can be reduced to complex emotions that have evolved over millions of years, but these require backup beyond the mere sentiment which drives us to feel we are bound by them. For morality to function, this ‘backup’ must operate as an objective standard would, but without making any claims to genuine objectivity, since, according to Ruse, none exists. Humans must believe morality is objective, despite it not being so:

“Darwinian theory shows that, in fact, morality is a function of (subjective) feelings; but it shows also that we have (and must have) the illusion of objectivity ... therefore, morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes.”<sup>37</sup>

The rules of morality are

“... genetically based processes of development that predispose the individual to adopt one or a few forms of behaviours as opposed to others [and] are rooted in the physiological processes leading from the genes to thought and action ... we think morally because we are subject to appropriate epigenetic rules [and] give the illusion of objectivity to morality.”<sup>37</sup>

If I can make some sense of his argument, it would be something like this. Mind is, for the materialist Ruse, an epiphenomenal activity of brain originating from the complexity of its genes. This creates an internal war in the human genome: one set of genes tricking another. With respect to morality, there are genes that make ‘you’ believe that doing good to people is objectively right. Of course there is no ‘you’ apart from your genes; so one set of genes is deceiving another, deceiving yet another, and so on. Furthermore, other genes program the human ‘machine’ to ‘believe’ mind has a real ontology independent from any material existence and that this is the real ‘you’. Of course, on Ruse’s argument, this

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deception is the result of genes programming the ‘person’, or those deceived genes, to believe that there is such a thing as incorporeal mind.

But why stop there? Surely there could be another set of deceptive genes programming Ruse into falsely believing that there is no objective morality, and so on *ad infinitum*!

This loss of freedom and non-awareness that humans are being duped by their biology is presented as a survival advantage:

“... 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.”<sup>38</sup>

This anamorphosis<sup>39</sup> includes faith in God, though a ‘god’ only as real as the ethical illusion the genes have conjured up. I.e., ‘god’ works because ‘god’ “serve[s] an extremely useful biological purpose”, instrumentally aiding us to continue believing that morality is really objective.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

Michael Ruse removes God and then attempts to construct a metaethic without ethical absolutes. While denying their real existence, he’s not blind to their necessity. This has led him to conceive of a matrix in which what is really true is mere illusion. Evolution, he argues, has enabled nature to fix a Platonic ‘noble lie’ in human consciousness (and conscience), a falsehood which pushes us to believe that morality has its absolutes, when, in fact, it has none. While an invention, it nevertheless is pragmatically productive for the continuation of our species. Of course, Ruse can’t consistently abide by his own belief. When he claims that rape and paedophilia are wrong, he attacks depravity using an absolute. Creationists have, here in Ruse’s fable, yet another component to their apologetic arsenal against evolution.

In the ninth part, I will further examine Ruse and other philosophers who extend his ideas.<sup>41</sup>

## References

- As was pointed out in part 2, considerable weight is placed on a ‘proto’-morality in animals. Unless an evolutionist throws caution to the wind and asserts that humans were the source of even a proto-morality, let alone a full-blown de novo morality, it’s to be expected, even demanded, that animal studies must furnish the ethical bridge. Notwithstanding these advocates’ enthusiasm, the enterprise is not without its detractors, their criticisms bearing relevant force.
- Metaethics should be sharply distinguished from *descriptive ethics*—more of a sociological understanding of moral attitudes and behaviours—and *normative ethics*, which provide systems that guide and inform actions and attitudes about what one ought or ought not to do generally or with regard to particular ethical issues. For a more detailed discussion of metaethics, see Moreland, J.P. and Craig, W.L., *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, pp. 393–405 passim., 2003. For a brief history, see Couture, J. and Nielsen, K. (Eds.), *On the relevance of metaethics: new essays on metaethics*, 1995 *Canadian J. Philosophy*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary Canada, pp. 1–30, 1996.
- Evans, M. and Shah, N., Mental agency and metaethics; in: Shafer-Landau, R., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 7, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 85–86, 2012.
- This confusion leads to some highly disquieting counterfactuals. Thornhill and Palmer, biologist and anthropologist respectively, have proposed that *not* controlling one’s sexual urges makes for a more successful human because rape is a gene-promotion strategy. (Thornhill, R. and Palmer, C.T., *A Natural History of Rape: Biological bases of sexual coercion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000.) Despite the considerable criticism this generated, it is not clear why it is unreasonable, given, on some accounts, that evolution is fundamentally about the ‘selfish gene’. See Thornhill and Palmer’s responses to their critics in: Rape and evolution: A reply to our critics, *Psychology, Evolution & Gender* 4(3):283–296, 2002; and Straw men and fairy tales: evaluating reactions to a natural history of rape, *J. Sex Research*, 40(3):249–255, 2003. For an overview of the evolutionary account for rape, paedophilia and the like, see Quinsey, V.L. and Lalumière, M.L., Evolutionary perspectives on sexual offending, *sexual abuse: A J. Research and Treatment* 7(4):301–315, 1995. For a more bizarre attempt to ‘legitimize’ rape, see Shields, W.M. and Shields, L.M., Forcible rape: an evolutionary perspective, *Ethology and Sociobiology* 4(3):115–136, 1983. The paper includes a chart with the hypothetical payoffs of various combinations of mating, the most productive strategy, in terms of progeny, being a combination of matrimony, seducer and rapist: “We suspect that during human evolutionary history, males that possessed a mating strategy that included rape as a facultative response were favored by natural selection over those that did not ... As with any evolutionary hypothesis, we are assuming that genes contribute to the control of rape ... our model assumes a genetic substrate that permits and promotes rape.” *Ibid.*, p. 123, 128.
- Rosenberg, A., Darwinism in moral philosophy and social theory; in: Hodge J. and Radick, G. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 312, 2003.
- Fodor, J., Making mind matter more; in: *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, p. 156, 1992, as cited in Wielenberg, E.J., On the evolutionary debunking of morality, *Ethics* 120:442, 2010.
- Creationists will remember Ruse earning a degree of notoriety arising from his participation in the 1981 trial as a key expert witness appearing for the plaintiff against the Arkansas state school system, which permitted the teaching of creation science.
- Ruse, M., Response to Duke naturalists; in: Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (Ed), *Moral Psychology*, vol. 1: *The evolution of morality: adaptations and innateness*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 33–36, 2008; p. 34.
- Strictly speaking, Ruse is a non-cognitivist, a metaethical theory that argues there are no moral facts, that moral statements are neither true nor false, have no ontological implications, and thus genuine moral knowledge is absent. And this is why Alan Gibbard maintains “normative judgement mimics the search for truth.” (Gibbard, A., *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A theory of normative judgement*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 218, 1990.) More or less synonymously used is the term moral ‘nonrealism’ or, more lately, ‘irrealism’. Cognitivism holds that moral facts are real, have ontological implications and, at least in theory, can be known, often for quite conflicting reasons.
- Or affirming the antecedent: if P, then Q; P is true, therefore Q. Its companion is *modus tollens* or denying the consequent: if P, then Q; not Q, therefore not P.
- Ruse, M., *Taking Darwin Seriously: A naturalistic approach to philosophy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 155, 1987.
- Ruse, ref. 11, p. 161.
- Wilson, E.O., *On Human Nature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 167, 1978.
- Brown, J.R., Critical Notice of Michael Ruse, Taking Darwin seriously: a naturalistic approach to philosophy, *Canadian J. Philosophy* 20(1):132, 1990.
- Ruse, ref. 11, p. 161. Denis Alexander has a brief but worthwhile criticism of epigenetic rules in his *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Lion Publishing, Oxford, pp. 360–372, 2001; pp. 369–371. Despite his apposite comments, Alexander is a chest-thumping theistic evolutionist and leaves very little room for God as Creator. His creation theology, if it can be labelled as such, is indistinguishable from common garden-variety monistic paganism, where the creative ‘forces’ are in nature and God is, for all intents and purposes, a mostly absent landlord. For example, in a bizarre attempt to criticize, of all people, Paley for utilizing the analogy of a watch requiring a watchmaker, Alexander writes that his mistake was “bringing God into his account of the natural order as if he were a physical entity within the universe interacting with other physical entities” (*Ibid.*, p. 331). And, in what I suspect is a backhand repudiation of creation science, “We cannot therefore reduce God to being a ‘scientific explanation’ for anything, for in that case God would become part of our casual explanatory net and, at the same moment, would cease to be the God portrayed in traditional theism ... The biblical descriptions of God contain many rich metaphors but ‘designer’ is not one of them” (*Ibid.*, p. 331–332).
- Ruse, ref. 11, pp. 161–162, 172. The problem of unity and diversity, or, as some put it, universals and particulars, can only make sense if there is something

- eternal that provides a secure foundation. Christianity does so through the cumulative evidence for the Trinity. Why  $1 + 1$  can only equal  $2$ —and  $2 + 1$  etc.—is because the members of the triune Godhead possess the eternal, and ‘internal’, logic for this to be always true. That is, mathematical truths are not something contingent or invented. The demands of logic (i.e., laws of identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle) are, likewise, guaranteed through the same eternal foundation. In his debate with Tony Flew, Terry Miethe brilliantly sums up the epistemic force of one of the laws: “A rationally inescapable position is coercive only if one wishes to make peace with the principle (or law) of noncontradiction. It is the only possible position one can hold if one wishes to be logical.” Miethe, T. and Flew, A., *Does God Exist?: A believer and an atheist debate*, Harper San Francisco, NY, p. 179, 1991.
17. Ruse, ref. 11, pp. 200–201.
  18. Ruse’s rejection of correspondence sets his epistemology inside postmodernism. Rejection of God as the ultimate ground for knowledge logically leads to silence. Of course, man can’t live in a universe emptied of meaning; thus, the adoption of coherence theory. John Thompson explains: “It is a common tendency among philosophers to analyse this idea [of truth] in terms of a relation of correspondence: simply put, to say that a sentence is true is to say that it corresponds to a fact. It seems to me, however, that this apparently plausible account is less than satisfactory, not only because it has proved exceedingly difficult to say anything interesting either about the relation of correspondence or about the nature of the facts to which true sentences are supposed to correspond, but also because it is hard to see how anything *could* be said about this relation which was itself *true*. In view of these difficulties, it seems to me to be advisable to set aside the correspondence theory and to search for an alternative analysis which would capture our intuitions about truth.” (Thompson, J.B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 142, 184.) The solution is to return to enquiry concerning first order principles, namely: why is there something rather than nothing? The Christian metaphysic provides the answer: reality was brought into existence by a rational Creator producing a creation, the constituent parts of which have rational and truthful connection.  
For a more detailed examination of these theories of truth and their problems, see Moreland and Craig, ref. 2, pp. 135–144. For a brief historical description, and the main players involved, of how coherence became increasingly more relied on over correspondence, tacitly accompanied by a reduction in the belief in metaphysical realism, see Johnson, P.E., *Reason in the Balance: The case against naturalism in science, Law & Education*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, pp. 111–131, 1995.
  19. Ruse, ref. 11, pp. 202, 206.
  20. For the deceiving demon, see Descartes’ Second Meditation: The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than the body, pp. 3–8, [descartes1641.pdf](#), accessed 20 May 2024.
  21. Nozick, R., *Philosophical Explanations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 167, 1981.
  22. Schafer, K., Evolution and normative skepticism, *Australasian J. Philosophy* 88(3):471–488, 2010; p. 487.
  23. Latin for ‘sanctuary of ignorance’. An obscure concept or method, not open to critical scrutiny, used to disguise one’s ignorance or lack of critical reflection.
  24. Ruse, ref. 11, pp. 221, 223. I would suggest that epigenetic rules, to some extent, function as a surrogate for soul. Souls exist and so actually do something, that something being the source of uncaused causes or free choices. Write them out of existence by an *a priori* adherence to materialism, and something has to be invented to take over their role. Hence the contrivance of epigenetic rules.  
Ruse ignores the fact that all novelty comes with a genetic cost and load, especially if it is a disadvantage to the individual and group. Ruse does not address how the ‘testing’ of emergent rules that do not give an advantage occurs and how acute each ‘misfire’ of a trial ‘rule’ has to be to impair the creature. I thank David Green for pointing this out.
  25. Ruse, ref. 11, p. 221.
  26. Ruse, M. and Wilson, E.O., Moral philosophy as applied science, *Philosophy* 61(236):180–181, 1986. For a discussion on the proposed feedback ‘mechanism’ linking genes, epigenetic rules and culture, see also Lumsden, C.J. and Wilson, E.O., *Promethean Fire: Reflections on the origin of mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Ms, pp. 117–118, 152–154, 1983.
  27. Ruse, ref. 11, p. 278.
  28. For the full Socratic dialogue, see *Euthyphro by Plato*, classics.mit.edu, and for a thoroughly misguided analysis of God’s relationship to goodness, see Richards, J.R., *Human Nature After Darwin: A philosophical introduction*, Routledge, London, pp. 188–192, 2000. It escapes Richards’ attention that the dilemma only has traction if you disallow the minimal concession that God is eternally love. Once that Christian ontological reality is conceded, the atheist rules no longer rule.
  29. With respect to ethics, subjectivism is “the view that evaluations depend for their truth-value on the existence of certain opinions or attitudes”, Mautner, T. (Ed), *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, Penguin Books, London, p. 546, 2000. Although it contains elements with which a Christian would disagree, James Rachels’ little book on the subject is a tight summary of the various metaethics. Rachels, J. and Rachels, S., *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn, McGraw-Hill, NY, 1986. Though somewhat overextended, Hare makes an insightful observation concerning subjectivism. He writes that its adherents have “denied the rationality of morals, because they thought (wrongly) that it was a restraint upon freedom”, (Hare, R.M., *Freedom and Reason*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 3, 1967.)
  30. Ruse, ref. 11, p. 217.
  31. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 26, p. 186.
  32. That is, “the individual is free to pick his own code of conduct regardless of the effect on others” (Ruse and Wilson, ref. 26, p. 188).
  33. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 26, p. 188.
  34. I cannot take ownership of this delightful pun. James Ryan included it in his appraisal of Ruse’s work in: Taking the ‘error’ out of Ruse’s error theory, *Biology and Philosophy* 12:385–397, 1997.
  35. John Maynard Smith comes to a similar fork in the epistemological road. In a review of Dennett’s *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Smith confronts the metaethic of “decid[ing], with certainty, which actions are right”. He concedes that there is no way unless “you hold some book, for example the Bible, is the word of God”. Expanding on his rejection of Christianity and his complete acceptance of evolution as the epistemological panacea, Smith, in what appears like a moment of nihilistic despondency, admits that “If a person is simply the product of his or her genetic makeup and environmental history ... there is simply no source whence absolute morality could come ... this does not exempt us from making moral judgements: it only means that we cannot be sure that we are right.” Smith doesn’t seem to understand that the non-existence of absolutes, by definition, means that there is no such ‘thing’ as ‘right’, and so not being “sure that we are right” is nonsense. (Smith, J.M., *Genes, Memes, and Minds*, nybooks.com, accessed 30 Aug 2023.)
  36. Ruse, ref. 11, p. 252.
  37. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 26, p. 180.
  38. Ruse and Wilson, ref. 26, p. 179.
  39. *Anamorphosis* is a perspective technique that presents a distorted image to the viewer unless it is seen from a specific vantage point.
  40. Ruse, ref. 11, p. 254. In what appears to be an exculpatory aside, and what is perhaps Ruse’s supreme ironic hypocrisy, is his admission that he was sending his children to private Anglican schools at the same time he was appearing as an expert witness for the ACLU in the Arkansas Creation Trial (p. xii). By way of a counterpoint to Ruse’s metaethic deliberation, to illustrate the infinitely accommodating potential for evolutionary ethics, note the following response from Joshua Greene. While fully supportive of an evolutionary explanation for our morals being originally formed from intuitive emotionally laden situations embedded in our deep ancestral past, he urges us to rid moral discourse of any moral realism because a “world full of people who regard their moral convictions as reflections of personal values rather than reflections of ‘the objective moral truth’ might be a happier and more peaceful place than the world we currently inhabit.” Greene, J., From neural ‘is’ to moral ‘ought’: what are the moral implications of neuroscientific moral psychology? *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* 4:850, 2003. Perhaps Greene believes Pol Pot, Mao, and Stalin had objective morals. Conscious of Godwin’s Law, note I didn’t include *that* Austrian in my list.
  41. I want to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggestions and helping my paper read (hopefully) clearer.

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