

# **Locked into Agency**

## Transcendental Arguments and Darwinian Skepticism

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## **Abstract**

Does our best knowledge of evolutionary theory have implications for moral truth? Moral realists generally argue that the existence of mind-independent moral facts is compatible with the evolutionary data. According to moral antirealists, this is not the case. In this thesis, I argue that antirealism is a more promising way to make sense of the metaphysics of moral truth. However, it will be demonstrated that the dominant antirealist position in the evolutionary debunking debate: Humean constructivism, is no less endangered by the evolutionary data than realism. I will argue that Kantian transcendental constructivism – the theory according to which a commitment to a moral principle is rationally inescapable from the perspective of agents – gives a more promising answer to the evolutionary challenge to morality. Therefore, Kantian constructivism ought to play a much more prominent part in the evolutionary debunking debate than it currently does.

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It is because we are such animals that our practical identities are normative for us, and, once you see this, you must take this more fundamental identity, being such an animal, to be normative as well. You must value your own humanity if you are to value anything at all.

Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*

## **Introduction**

In contemporary philosophy, there is an ongoing debate about what implications (if any) our best knowledge of evolutionary theory has for moral value. The debate is mostly divided between moral realists – who generally argue that the evolutionary data is compatible with the existence of knowable mind-independent moral facts –, and moral antirealists – who deny this claim –. Sharon Street, who belongs to the latter category, has pleaded that antirealism leaves room for a Humean constructivism which has the means to preserve moral truth in face of what she calls 'the Darwinian dilemma'.<sup>1</sup> This dilemma will be spelled out in detail in section 2. For now, it suffices to say that according to the Darwinian dilemma, our best knowledge of the way in which evolutionary, 'Darwinian' forces have influenced the content of our evaluative attitudes suggests that there is no non-question begging way for human beings to know any mind-independent moral truths.<sup>2</sup> While Street's Dilemma successfully debunks realism, she mistakenly believes that her Humean constructivism escapes the Dilemma's horns. Therefore, on pain of succumbing to moral nihilism, another method is needed to lay a foundation for moral value and moral truth.

Kantian transcendental constructivism (i.e. the theory according to which a commitment to a moral principle is rationally inescapable from the perspective of agents) has received insufficient attention in light of this debate. The objective of this thesis is to show that Kantian transcendental constructivism has the means to establish a foundation for moral truth that is resistant to Darwinian skepticism. This is because such a foundation is wholly mind-dependent – thereby dodging the core problems of realism –, and inescapably applies to all agents – which makes it resistant to Humean constructivism's problem of non-objectivity and arbitrariness –.

The setup of this thesis is as follows. The first section is used to clarify the main

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 127:1 (2006), 109-166; Sharon Street, "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?," in *Philosophy Compass* 5:5 (2010), 363-384.

<sup>2</sup> Street's argument is thus of an epistemological nature, and does not try to show that there *is* no- or cannot be an ontological basis for moral truth in the realist sense. For a form of antirealism that is more ontology-based, see: J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Pelican Books, 1977).

concepts that will be used in this thesis. In the second section, I will briefly explain the gist of the Darwinian dilemma. In the third section I will show that the Darwinian dilemma poses a serious problem for realism. I will do so by demonstrating that the Dilemma is resistant to two influential – though very different – realist critiques. The first comes from Michael Huemer, according to which realism – unlike Darwinian skepticism – can explain the global, historical trend toward liberalism.<sup>3</sup> The second critique comes from David Copp, who maintains that evolution made us 'quasi-track' the moral facts. My discussion on realism is mainly restricted to these authors because I consider them to be the strongest opponents of Darwinian skepticism. This, however, does not mean that my conclusions concerning realism are restricted to the particular theories of these authors. Through this discussion, it will become clear that both horns of the Dilemma cannot satisfactorily be grasped by realism in general. In the fourth section, it will be shown that Street's Humean constructivism falls prey to her own Darwinian dilemma, thereby proving that (antirealist) constructivism can also be vulnerable to the Dilemma. In the fifth section, the objective is to find out whether a Kantian transcendental argument can succeed in providing a knowable basis for morality that is resistant to Darwinian skepticism. It will be argued that such an argument can have the means to establish a constructivist foundation for moral truth that is – unlike Street's Humean constructivism and moral realism – resistant to the Darwinian dilemma. Different from realism and Humean constructivism, the evolutionary contingency of our belief-forming mechanisms counts in favor of- rather than against the validity of Kantian transcendental constructivism. Therefore, this position should be considered a major player in the evolutionary debunking debate.

## 1. Laying out the Conceptual Map

Many human beings seem committed to the idea that there is such a thing as moral truth. If we are asked to commit a random act of violence toward a stranger, most of us, I presume, would (at least under ideal circumstances)<sup>4</sup> refuse to do so, because we would deem such an act to be morally wrong. But would this moral judgment be correct? Before this question can be answered, it should be asked whether moral judgments *can* be correct in the first place. Usually, being right about something means that one has successfully arrived at a truth on a certain matter. In mathematics, one is correct in holding that  $3+2=5$ , because this truth holds

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skepticism: The Empirical Case for Realism," in *Philosophical Studies* 173:7 (2016), 1983-2010.

<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to understate the influence that situational factors can have on our moral attitudes. Cf. John M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

in virtue of the laws of mathematics. In natural science, one's being right can be confirmed by means of empirical verification. It is, however, far from obvious what exactly establishes truth, and thereby knowledge, in the moral domain. It thus seems as though it must first be asked what grasping a moral truth consists of – let alone whether the human mind is fit for doing so – before we are in a position to make intelligible what it is that morality requires us to do. In other words: we need a meta-ethical theory before we are in a position to judge whether our moral claims are- and can be correct.

For the purposes of this thesis, I follow Alan Gewirth in defining morality as: "a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action" that is "concerned with furthering the interests [...] of persons or recipients other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker".<sup>5</sup> A central candidate in the debate on the metaphysics of morality is moral realism (hereafter: realism). I understand realism as the meta-ethical position according to which moral truths/facts exist in a mind-independent way.<sup>6</sup> On this account, a moral statement is true only insofar it corresponds to a fact that is not in any way ontologically dependent on anyone's 'evaluative attitudes', as they are referred to by Sharon Street.<sup>7</sup> With this she indicates:

[S]tates such as desires, attitudes of approval and disapproval, unreflective evaluative tendencies such as the tendency to experience X as counting in favor of or demanding Y, and consciously or unconsciously held evaluative judgements, such as judgements about what is a reason for what, about what one should or ought to do, about what is good, valuable, or worthwhile, about what is morally right or wrong, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Realism directly opposes any form of moral antirealism (hereafter: antirealism), according to which either: there *is* no such thing as mind-independent moral truth, or, even if there could be: such truth would not be epistemologically accessible to human beings.<sup>9</sup>

In her influential 2006 article "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value", Sharon Street puts forward a dilemma that purports to debunk realism.<sup>10</sup> A debunking strategy characteristically tries to show that adherence to X forces one to commit to a premise, or premises, which are implausible or untenable.<sup>11</sup> Because the Darwinian dilemma debunks realism, Street suggests that it should be abandoned, and make place for an antirealist, constructivist foundation for moral value which can accept the pervasive Darwinian

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 110; Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer," 1986; David Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism," in *Philosophical Issues* 18 (2008), 187; David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 110.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer," 1983.

influences on our moral values without falling into skepticism.<sup>12</sup> She believes that Humean constructivism (i.e. evaluative moral truth supervenes on one's contingent set of values and beliefs) has the means for doing so.<sup>13</sup>

In the following paragraph, I will argue that the Darwinian dilemma succeeds in showing that it is impossible for human beings to know (the existence of) realistic moral facts, because of which realism should be rejected. This, however, does not mean that Street's antirealist foundation for evaluative moral truth – which uses the method of reflective equilibrium<sup>14</sup> – is therefore correct. In 2014, Elizabeth Tropman put forward a sophisticated argument which means to show that Street's constructivism falls prey to the Darwinian dilemma itself.<sup>15</sup> She argues that even though Street's constructivism avoids the need to account for some core aspects that realism needs to account for, the matter in question – epistemic access to moral objectivity – is endangered by the dilemma on Street's account for the same reasons as realism.<sup>16</sup> It will be shown that Tropman's critique works. This brings me to the main question of this thesis, namely: *is there a knowable objectivist basis for morality that is resistant to Darwinian skepticism?* With 'objectivist basis for morality' I mean a universalistic foundation for moral normativity that is not determined by (personal/cultural/circumstance-dependent) preferences and norms. An observation which should be made is that since the Darwinian dilemma successfully abolishes realism, an objectivistic basis for morality must be of an antirealistic nature. That is, if there is such a thing as moral objectivity, it must in some way be mind-dependent. Since Tropman successfully shows that Street's Humean constructivism falls short of establishing (Darwinian dilemma-resistant) moral truth, another method is needed. In this thesis, it will be examined whether an objectivist moral foundation can be derived from Kantian transcendental argumentation. For now, it suffices to say that a transcendental argument in the moral domain is understood as an argument which aims to establish the validity of X (a moral principle or imperative) by demonstrating that a commitment to X is necessarily implicit in a commitment to some rationally inescapable Y.<sup>17</sup> Since Y must be accepted, X must be accepted. It should be noted that the combination of these themes (i.e. transcendental argumentation and

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<sup>12</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 110.

<sup>13</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 370.

<sup>14</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 110-111.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments: Moral Realism, Constructivism, and Explaining Moral Knowledge," in *Philosophical Explorations* 17:2 (2013), 126-140, 126.

<sup>16</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 126.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Stern, "Transcendental Arguments," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/transcendental-arguments/> (last access: 13-06-18).

Darwinian skepticism) is fairly uncommon. The reason for this may be that the Darwinian dilemma targets realism, while transcendental arguments in ethics do not typically attempt to establish moral objectivity in a realist sense.<sup>18</sup> However, since antirealist, constructivist foundations for moral objectivity can be as vulnerable to the Darwinian dilemma as realism, it seems a worthwhile undertaking to analyze how Kantian transcendental constructivism may fare in face of this dilemma.

## 2. The Darwinian Dilemma

The previous section primarily served to clarify the core concepts of this thesis. I will now give a sketch of Street's Darwinian dilemma.

Street starts from the hypothesis that because selective forces have influenced the content of our ancestors' evaluative attitudes to a tremendous extent, and our evaluative attitudes stem from our ancestors' attitudes, our current evaluative attitudes are deeply influenced by selective forces as a result of human evolutionary development.<sup>19</sup> Consequentially, the introspective, attitude-dependent moral judgments humans make in current times share a fundamental basis with the unreflective, proto-moral-judgments of their remote ancestors.<sup>20</sup> On pain of denying this evolutionary thesis (which would be scientifically implausible), the realist is forced to choose between two horns if she wishes to uphold her position. While Street does not name these horns, I follow David Copp in referring to them as the 'tracking horn' and the 'non-tracking horn'.<sup>21</sup> I will refer to the corresponding stances as 'tracking account' and 'non-tracking account'. The tracking account maintains that there *is* a relation between the selective pressures that influenced the our moral evaluative judgments and the attitude-independent moral truth, in the sense that "natural selection so affected our psychology that our moral beliefs tend to track the moral facts".<sup>22</sup> The non-tracking account holds that there is *no* relation between selective influences on our evaluative attitudes and independent moral facts.<sup>23</sup>

The tracking horn derives its sharpness from the idea that the corresponding tracking-account rests on 'bad science'.<sup>24</sup> Here is why. Evolutionary theory tells us that natural selection disposed our ancestors to make certain evaluative (proto-) judgments rather than

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<sup>18</sup> For an exception, see Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 50-84.

<sup>19</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 113 - 114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

<sup>21</sup> Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 191.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 123.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.



others because making such judgments most effectively led to their reproductive success.<sup>25</sup> This also goes for those evaluative judgments which we would refer to as moral judgments (e.g. I ought to protect my child from harm). The proponent of the tracking account may incorporate this in her theory by maintaining that natural selection has made it so that the ability to grasp moral facts is reproductively advantageous for humankind in the same way that, for instance, having a long neck is advantageous for giraffes.<sup>26</sup> To quote Street: "surely it promotes one's survival (and that of one's offspring) to be able to grasp what one has reason to do, believe, and feel."<sup>27</sup> The tracking-theorist may take this as evidence for humans having a non-coincidental, naturally induced ability to grasp realistic moral truth through attitudinal evaluation.<sup>28</sup> While there definitely is some truth to this story, its conclusion does not follow. Surely, the ability to recognize that the presence of danger, for example, constitutes a reason to seek protection is reproductively advantageous for humans only insofar it is *true* that humans can be subject to danger. However, it does not seem to be the case that the tendency to make certain evaluative *moral* judgments rather than others is reproductively advantageous only insofar these judgments correspond to attitude-independent moral facts.<sup>29</sup> According to Street, our best knowledge of evolutionary theory rather supports what she calls *the adaptive link account*, which teaches us that:

[T]endencies to make certain kinds of evaluative judgements rather than others contributed to our ancestors' reproductive success not because they constituted perceptions of independent evaluative truths, but rather because they forged adaptive links between our ancestors' circumstances and their responses to those circumstances, getting them to act, feel, and believe in ways that turned out to be reproductively advantageous.<sup>30</sup>

It would thus be implausible to assert a relation between realistic moral facts and the selective influences on our evaluative moral judgments once the adaptive link account is accepted.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, with respect to moral truth, it seems unlikely that we can rely on our evaluative attitudes being on the right track without begging the question.<sup>32</sup>

Alternatively, as has been said, the realist may hold that selective influences had no influence on our ability to track the moral facts. According to Street, such a realist must hold that "forces of natural selection must be viewed as a purely distorting influence on our

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. William J. FitzPatrick, "Why There is No Darwinian Dilemma for Ethical Realism," in Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (eds.), *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution* (2014), 238-241.

<sup>30</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 127.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 134.

evaluative judgments, having pushed us in evaluative directions that have nothing whatsoever to do with the evaluative [moral] truth".<sup>33</sup> If it turns out that we have grasped an attitude-independent moral truth by relying/reflecting on our evaluative attitudes, this can only have been a matter of pure chance. Since there is a practically infinite amount of logically possible moral truths (e.g. 'I ought to scream at purple things'),<sup>34</sup> it is extremely unlikely that we will ever be that lucky.<sup>35</sup> The problem with denying a relation between the selective influences on our evaluative attitudes and moral truth is that it deprives the realist of any means to attain moral knowledge. An appeal to rational reflection would not help the realist, because one does not stand apart from her evaluative attitudes by rationally reflecting on them. Therefore, it cannot serve as an 'uncontaminated tool' to separate the true evaluative judgments from the false ones.<sup>36</sup> How so? Because "[r]ational reflection must always proceed from some evaluative standpoint [...] it must treat some evaluative judgments as fixed [...] as the assessment of other evaluative judgments is undertaken".<sup>37</sup> Since rational deliberation cannot serve as an unaffected tool to objectively distinguish between true and false evaluative judgments, one is forced to appeal to their evolution-contaminated evaluative attitudes one way or another in order to reflect on what they morally ought to do.

The dilemma now stands. The realist cannot rely on evaluative attitudes without begging the question against the Darwinian skeptic, but can neither neglect them without depriving herself of the means necessary for moral deliberation. Because of this, Street argues that the realist-project should be abandoned, and that an antirealist, Humean constructivist method is better suited for making sense of the ontology of moral truth.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.1. Is Non-Tracking Realism Endangered by the Darwinian Dilemma?**

In the previous paragraph, I have explained the general gist of the Darwinian dilemma. I will now argue that there is good reason to believe that it successfully debunks realism. Many realists have raised different kinds of concerns about its accuracy. It would be far too much to discuss all of them here. Instead, I hope to be able to draw some general conclusions about the dilemma's validity by demonstrating that it withstands substantive criticism from a non-tracking realist perspective (Huemer) and a tracking-account (Copp). I will start with Huemer.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 110.

In his 2016 article: "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skepticism: The Empirical Case for Realism", Michael Huemer gives an ingenious defense of realism against Darwinian skepticism.<sup>39</sup> Instead of arguing that realism can, after all, account for the things the Darwinian skeptic<sup>40</sup> says she cannot, Huemer turns the tables by claiming that since the Darwinian skeptic cannot account for a phenomenon that realism can account for, realism is more likely to be true than Darwinian skepticism.<sup>41</sup> An inference to the best explanation would thus support realism rather than Darwinian skepticism. Huemer points out that there has been a gradual, ongoing universal shift to liberalism in many countries over the course of recent human history.<sup>42</sup> This process immensely accelerated over the last two centuries – especially during the last fifty years.<sup>43</sup> Liberalism is defined as a 'very broad ethical orientation' which: "(i) recognizes the moral equality of persons, (ii) promotes respect for the dignity of the individual, and (iii) opposes gratuitous coercion and violence".<sup>44</sup> Globally, attitudes towards matters such as war, murder slavery, democracy, women's suffrage, racial segregation, torture, execution and colonization have vastly changed in this liberal direction.<sup>45</sup> Huemer thinks this poses a problem for the Darwinian skeptic, because the evolutionary story lacks the scientific means to account for this relatively recent global shift to liberalism. The Darwinian skeptic must either hold that (i) liberal values are adaptive; (ii) liberal values are not adaptive, or (iii) liberal values are adaptive in modern societies but not in earlier times.<sup>46</sup> Since (i) and (iii) are scientifically problematic, whereas (ii) leaves the Darwinian skeptic without an explanation for why liberal values are widespread in modern times, the Darwinian debunking strategy is debunked.<sup>47</sup> A better explanation would be that liberalism is the objectively correct moral stance. I quote:

Why was slavery abolished? Because slavery was unjust. Why has democracy spread to ever more countries over the past two centuries? Because democracy is better than other systems of government. Why have human beings become increasingly reluctant to go to war? Because war is horrible. Why has liberalism in general triumphed in human history? Because liberalism is correct. These, I suggest, are the most simple and natural explanations.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer," 1987.

<sup>40</sup> Huemer, throughout his article, refers to what I call 'the Darwinian skeptic' as 'the Debunking skeptic'. However, since only his response to skepticism of a Darwinian kind is relevant for this thesis, I chose to stick close to terminology that I found to be most fitting with regard to the issues at stake.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1988.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1992.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1993-1994.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1996.

According to Huemer, an accurate interpretation of history shows that globally, people gradually become better at recognizing the correctness of liberalism as time passes. Because humans generally have a desire to abolish unjust practices and endorse just practices (when recognized as such), it is likely that humankind will gradually proceed to move in the liberal direction, and thereby in the morally right direction.<sup>49</sup>

For the sake of argument, I will assume that Huemer is right about the facts. Regardless, his argument relies on at least three problematic assumptions. The first is that the Darwinian skeptic owes the realist an answer with regard to the trend toward liberalism; secondly, the idea that the Darwinian skeptic's options to reply to Huemer's challenge are restricted to the three alternatives he mentions; thirdly, the belief that the global trend toward liberalism counts in favor of liberal realism being true.

(i): It poses no threat to the Darwinian skeptic to claim that the evolutionary story does not account for the recent shift to liberalism, because there is no conflict between the two in the absence of such an explanation. The evolutionary story entirely leaves open the possibility that different norms and moral ideas may arise from evolution-influenced evaluative attitudes.<sup>50</sup> Street only claims that when we deliberate, *one* big reason for why we tend to arrive at some evaluative judgments rather than others is that evolutionary forces influenced our evaluative attitudes to a significant extent. It seems unwise to discard the idea that "had the general content of our basic evaluative tendencies been very different, then the general content of our full-fledged evaluative judgements would also have been very different, and in loosely corresponding ways".<sup>51</sup> Street, however, also acknowledges that the capacity to reflect on one's evaluative tendencies provides a lot of evaluative wiggle room for humans, and that cultural/sociological factors also have a very significant impact on the evaluative judgments we tend to hold.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the actual content of our moral beliefs is not by any means *determined* by the evolutionary impact on our evaluative attitudes. To hold the contrary, Street rightly claims, would be to step in one of the biggest pitfalls of evolutionary theorizing, namely the danger of "assuming that every observable trait (whether cognitive or physical) is an adaptation resulting from natural selection, as opposed to the result of any number of other complex (nonselective or only partially selective) processes that could have produced it".<sup>53</sup> While it would be an intriguing question what exactly explains the trend toward liberalism,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 120.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 113.

its existence does not contradict the evolutionary story. As will become clear, there is good reason to believe that an explanation can be given without having to rely on realism.

(ii) By making the Darwinian skeptic choose between liberal values being 'adaptive' (in modern societies) or not, Huemer is attacking a straw man. The Darwinian skeptic would choose neither of these options. She only has to maintain that in both the present and the (remote) past, moral (proto-) values – insofar they are based on evaluative attitudes – are/have been tremendously influenced by evolutionary forces. It is important to note how this is different from the claim that (liberal) moral values are *adaptive* in either/both the present or/and the past. In saying that a moral evaluative judgment *J* is heavily shot through with evolutionary influence, one says that an important aspect for why *J* strikes one as reasonable is to a large extent due to the basic evaluative attitudes underlying *J* being a result of natural selection (which can be as old as mankind itself). Conversely, by claiming that *J* is adaptive at time *T*, one states that the reason why *J* strikes one as reasonable at *T* is because valuing *J* is factually fitness-enhancing at *T*. Let us call our ancestral past *T1* and the present *T2*. According to the trilemma posed by Huemer, the Darwinian skeptic must either hold that liberal values are fitness-enhancing in both *T1* and *T2* (which, Huemer says, is scientifically untenable); neither fitness-enhancing in *T1* nor *T2* (which supposedly leaves the skeptic without means to account for why liberal values *are* widespread in contemporary times), or fitness-enhancing in *T2* but not in *T1* (also scientifically untenable).<sup>54</sup> But the Darwinian skeptic does not need to make this choice. Again, what she must maintain is only that both the illiberal values in *T1* and the liberal values in *T2* are – insofar they are upshots of attitudinal evaluation – to a significant extent saturated with evolutionary influence, regardless of whether they *factually* maximize fitness under specific circumstances. Huemer does not show that this idea should be rejected. Instead of forcing the Darwinian skeptic to choose between options she should not have to choose from, Huemer needs to demonstrate how the fact that liberal values are increasingly widespread contradicts the *actual* evolutionary story. Until this is done, it appears that Huemer has given no good reason to assume that the Darwinian skeptic is really stuck between the horns of this supposed trilemma.

(iii) Huemer argues that if ethics is "a genuine field of objective knowledge",<sup>55</sup> we should expect to find a similar historical developmental pattern (i.e. becoming more subtle, detailed and complex over centuries) to other disciplines which are capable of producing objective knowledge (e.g. mathematics, physics, cosmology, geology, psychology, and

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<sup>54</sup> Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer," 1993.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1997.

biology).<sup>56</sup> He says that this is exactly what we find, because as our moral judgments liberalize over time, the further we distance ourselves from our evolution- and culture induced biases, and the more we tend to embrace moral values that are more justifiable through rational deliberation.<sup>57</sup> It thus seems as though Huemer asserts an explanatory relation between our tendency to make certain evaluative judgments and realistic moral truth. After all, if it is the case that the ever-growing trend toward liberalism indicates that liberal realism is true, it must be so that there is some link between the ever-growing universal tendency to make liberal evaluative judgments and liberalism being the attitude-independent correct moral stance. Perhaps there is such a relation. William J. FitzPatrick, for instance, argues that if there is good reason for the realist to believe that the extent to which evolutionary forces influenced our moral belief-forming mechanisms is not pervasive enough to render us incapable of 'autonomous' moral reflection (i.e. moral reflection that is *not* influenced by selective forces), the realist may legitimately hold that selective influences have not handicapped us in our ability to access moral facts.<sup>58</sup> If we only need to maintain that "[i]nsofar as natural selection in the evolutionary past has specifically shaped *some* of our current moral beliefs to *some* extent, by shaping to *some* extent the moral belief-forming dispositions of ancestral humans, it did so in a way that was unguided by the moral facts as such",<sup>59</sup> the possibility of 'independent' moral reflection may be preserved in a way that is:

*[R]elevantly guided by apprehension of the moral facts as such [...] Our independent, culturally developed reflection, enriched by novel experience and improvements in relevant background knowledge, may well have led to our grasping some moral facts as such and thus forming new, reliable moral belief-forming dispositions shaped by responsiveness to the moral facts as such.*<sup>60</sup>

Our question, then, should be whether the selective impact on our moral belief forming mechanisms renders us incapable of 'autonomous/independent' moral reflection, and thereby the possibility for our reasoning-abilities to be 'guided by the moral facts as such'. If not, it seems as though there is room for Huemer to legitimately assert the relation he seems to be asserting (provided that liberal moral deliberation is the kind of deliberation that is responsive to- guided by the moral facts as such). There is, however, good reason for the Darwinian skeptic to be skeptical about such a supposition. The Darwinian dilemma is, after all, centered exactly around this subject. The realist must either hold that selective forces pushed us toward

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1996-1997.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 1999.

<sup>58</sup> FitzPatrick, "Why There is No Darwinian Dilemma," 243.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 243.

the moral truth, or neither away from- nor toward it. At this point, it is clear that Huemer (like FitzPatrick) is a realist of the latter kind. It seems plausible, then, to assume that Huemer believes liberal moral deliberation to stand independent of selective influences to an extent to which it is responsive to attitude-independent moral truth. It is difficult to see how this responsiveness to moral truth should be understood on Huemer's account, because he does not say particularly much about how he understands this relation, apart from it being of a certain *a-priori*, 'rationally intuitive' kind.<sup>61</sup> For our current purpose this poses no fatal problem, because the evolutionary story nibs the idea of 'autonomous/independent' moral reasoning in the bud. Even though moral beliefs can strongly diverge in content and complexity, and can be results of many complicated, intertwined factors apart from natural selection, we should wonder why certain questions (i.e. am I justified in using violence?) *do* tend to manifest themselves as moral questions and why others (i.e. ought I to scream at purple things?) do not.<sup>62</sup> Even if the answers we tend to give to such questions are as time- and culture dependent as Huemer says, there certainly is something fundamental about moral judgment that has remained the same irrespectively. Let us call this the general locus of morality. According to Street, it can be historically observed that the following pattern concerning moral judgment has been a part of human existence across time and cultures:

- (1) The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason in favor of it.
- (2) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.
- (3) We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.
- (4) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return.
- (5) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.
- (6) The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment.<sup>63</sup>

Even if liberal conceptions of, for instance, wrongdoing and well-treatment (and ideas concerning appropriate praise and punishment) are more sophisticated, reasonable and complex than illiberal accounts, both have in common that well-treatment is deemed to provide a (moral) reason for praise, whereas wrongdoing is deemed to offer a (moral) reason for punishment. The adaptive link account gives a scientific hypothesis for why the general locus of morality has been- and remains to be centered around such matters rather than

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<sup>61</sup> Huemer, "A liberal Realist Answer," 2004-2005.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 115.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

something's purpleness providing a moral reason to scream at it. That is: natural selection steered our ancestors into making moral judgments which enhanced their chances of survival, and matters of, for instance, well-treatment and wrongdoing happen to be subjects about which a certain type of moral judgment-making had fitness-enhancing results.<sup>64</sup> Since Huemer is the type of realist which denies a relation between selective influences and moral truth, it stands to reason that the overlap between the selective- and liberal realism's locus of morality (supposedly arrived at through 'autonomous/a-priori' reasoning) can be nothing short of a pure coincidence on his account. After all, if our evolution-influenced attitudes cannot be relied upon as a guide to moral truth, the general locus of morality could go in any possible direction. Let us grant that, since it is not logically impossible for such a coincidence to exist, it may be true that the overlap holds in virtue of sheer coincidence. Why should we accept Huemer's claim that liberal realism is the most 'simple and natural explanation' of the trend toward liberalism? According to Huemer:

At any given point in history, there will be some individuals who are less biased and more morally sensitive than average (but not entirely unbiased). These individuals will push society toward what they, the sensitive individuals, consider morally correct, which will generally mean pushing society at least a little bit closer to the moral truth.<sup>65</sup>

This is a very questionable statement. Why, for example, could the trend toward liberalism not be an indication of liberalism being the most coherent upshot of (wide) reflective equilibrium, and that influential, intelligent people tend to popularize such values upon recognition?<sup>66</sup> Perhaps Huemer does not even deny that this is the case, but clearly no commitment to realism is needed to embrace this position. One can perfectly use the method of reflective equilibrium to deliberate about *mind-dependent* beliefs/attitudes alone. Also, it stands to reason that naturalistically, it is easier to explain the trend toward liberalism in terms of (influential) people becoming gradually better at cognitively arriving at an equilibrium between their moral (theoretical) principles and intuitions which, for instance, best suits certain people's interests, than (influential) people becoming gradually better at recognizing attitude-independent moral truths which are somehow *a-priori* accessible to them. For starters, the antirealist does not need metaphysically obscure non-naturalistic moral facts to play a causal role in the trend toward liberalism. Huemer thinks that these facts must be assumed in order for the trend toward liberalism to not remain a mystery. Jeroen Hopster claims, legitimately, I think, that this is blatantly mistaken. Seeing as different societies from

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. John Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7:1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1-25.



all over the world vastly influenced each other as global information-exchange increased, it would have been almost miraculous if people did not started to largely conform in their moral outlooks. I quote:

Rather than being developments that were driven by internal social dynamics, there is ample evidence that many of the convergences Huemer cites are actually due to the fact that societies have pushed each other in certain directions [...] In a world with a global traffic of goods and information [...] it should not come as a surprise that they also come to adopt a roughly shared moral outlook. Indeed, given that social conformity is a very common phenomenon in moral reasoning [...] and that people often internalize norms from their cultural environment, it should have come as a surprise if, after centuries of globalization, we would *not* have seen a value shift in a roughly shared direction.<sup>67</sup>

What is more, these considerations are only relevant for the matter at hand when it is assumed that the ongoing spread of liberal values provides a *prima facie* reason for suspecting a connection between this convergence and liberal realism. This, however, is not evident at all. One may, for example, reject the appeal of such a connection by maintaining that broad *divergence* rather than agreement should be expected if realism is true, because discovering truths in any area capable of producing objective knowledge usually requires an extreme amount of scrutiny by professional investigators. On such an explanation, virtually universal agreement on fundamental moral values would mean bad- rather than good news for realism. I shall not argue for such a position here.<sup>68</sup> What is of importance is that the relation Huemer asserts between the global spread of liberal values and liberal realism is at the very least highly contestable.

In the absence of a good explanation for why the historical data supports liberal realism rather than, for instance, liberal constructivism, Huemer has given no reason to accept that the global trend toward liberalism is an indication for liberalism being the attitude-independent correct moral stance. If we combine this point with the unlikelihood of liberal values being upshots of attitude-independent evaluation (because of the extreme amount of luck that would be required for the selective- and liberalism's general locus of morality to overlap), together with the non-damage Huemer's empirical data does to the Darwinian Dilemma and the evolutionary story, it seems adequate to conclude that Huemer does not defeat the Darwinian Dilemma, and his attempt to provide an empirical basis for realism is impaled by the Dilemma's non-tracking horn. In sum: I have argued that Huemer (1): fails to demonstrate that the empirical findings concerning the global, universal trend toward liberalism pose a problem for the Darwinian Dilemma, and (2): fails to show that these

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<sup>67</sup> Jeroen Hopster, "Explaining Historical Moral Convergence: The Empirical Case Against Realist Intuitionism," (Utrecht University, May 5th, 2018) [Unpublished manuscript], 7.

<sup>68</sup> Thanks to Hanno Sauer for pressing this point.

findings support his goal of making an empirically motivated case for realism.

Huemer is, of course, only one among many capable defenders of realism.

Nevertheless, I believe there is a general lesson which can be drawn from our discussion of Huemer (and FitzPatrick). That is: any attempt to ground realism in a non-tracking account should be greeted with skepticism when its asserted moral facts bear a close resemblance to what most humans intuitively consider to be morally valuable/appropriate. Seeing as that there is a practically infinite amount of logically possible moral facts, we should expect strong divergence between the moral facts common moral judgment. Therefore, a plausible hypothesis is that any non-tracking account which leads to broad similarities between these factors is likely to implicitly incorporate evolution-contaminated evaluative attitudes in its explanation of (how we can have access to) the moral facts, thereby failing to be a genuine non-tracking account.

### **3.2. Is Tracking Realism Endangered by the Darwinian Dilemma?**

In the previous section I have argued that Huemer fails to give an adequate response to the Darwinian dilemma, and concluded that non-tracking realism in general is vulnerable to the Dilemma. I will now show that a discussion on Copp's 'society-centered theory' will reveal that there is little reason to believe that tracking-realism fares any better in face of this challenge.

If I am right about the predicament of non-tracking realism, a more promising realist approach may be to assert a relation between the selective influences on our evaluative attitudes and the attitude-independent moral facts. Copp's society-centered theory is a well-known response to Street's dilemma that can be identified as such a strategy. According to Copp, selective forces are both generally responsible for our moral beliefs, as well as a main reason for why our moral beliefs tend to 'quasi-track' the moral facts.<sup>69</sup> With quasi-tracking Copp means "tracking to an epistemically sufficient degree".<sup>70</sup> More elaborately:

The quasi-tracking thesis is basically the thesis that the effect of all influences on the content of our moral beliefs, including Darwinian influences, has been such that rational reflection can in principle correct sufficiently for any distorting influences so as to undermine [Street's] skeptical worry.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism," 186 - 206.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 196.

According to Copp, "Darwinian influences are not relevantly independent of the moral facts",<sup>72</sup> and do in fact tend to push us in ways that correspond closely to the moral facts.<sup>73</sup> How can this be? The society-centered theory gives a moral functionalistic answer to this question. Naturalistically, a disposition to comply with normative constraints was adaptive via securing cooperative gains in an environment of intergroup competition.<sup>74</sup> Since cooperation and peaceful/productive behavior are necessary conditions for a society to flourish, morality fulfills its function by initiating governing rules/norms that, when sufficiently internalized, motivate a society's members to act in ways that fulfill these needs.<sup>75</sup> From this, Copp says, it follows that a moral proposition is true insofar a corresponding norm would be beneficial for a society to meet its needs.<sup>76</sup> I quote:

[T]he theory says that a basic moral proposition, such as the proposition that torture is wrong, would be true only if the moral code that would best serve the function of enabling society to meet its needs included or entailed a relevantly corresponding norm, such as a prohibition on torture.<sup>77</sup>

If Copp is right about the facts – which I assume to be the case, as I did with Huemer – the Darwinian skeptic may be in trouble. Why? Because the society-centered theory seems to make it easy to see how the overlap between the moral facts and the selective influences on our evaluative attitudes can be explained. The adaptive link account teaches us that our moral beliefs are heavily shot through with the same reproduction-enhancing instincts that our ancestors had; it is (and was) reproductively advantageous for humans to live in a stable/functional society; for a society to be stable/functional, peaceful, cooperative behavior is required among its members; the function of morality is to create stability and cooperation within society by means of norms/rules that motivate its members to act peacefully and cooperatively. Therefore; evolutionary forces induced humans with moral beliefs that roughly correspond with the moral facts (i.e. moral codes that successfully establish behavior to make a society fulfill its needs).<sup>78</sup> If Copp's society-centered theory works, he has successfully made a case for tracking-realism that is fully compatible with the adaptive link account – thereby diffusing Street's main argument against tracking-realism –. Unfortunately, I do not think this is so.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

In 2008, Street wrote a critique of Copp's response to her Darwinian dilemma.<sup>79</sup> This critique is only partly accurate. Her basic claim is that:

[E]ither the explanation Copp offers fails, or else his theory doesn't construe morality as objectively binding in the way one might have thought a realist theory aspires to, or indeed in any way that wouldn't be perfectly acceptable to an antirealist about normativity, who holds that things are required ultimately because we take them to be.<sup>80</sup>

There are thus two ways of reading Copp, according to Street, which are equally problematic.

(1) One option is that the society-centered theory is a purely descriptive account of the nature of morality, and thereby no version of *normative* realism (i.e. the reason why we are ultimately obliged to behave in certain ways is grounded in mind-independent moral facts).<sup>81</sup>

The Dilemma intends to attack normative realism, and is fully compatible with a naturalistic/biological explanation of what our moral behavior consists in. Provided that this is the correct reading of Copp, the society-centered theory does not touch upon the issues that are raised by the Dilemma, because it says nothing about whether (we can know if) there are mind-independent reasons for how we ought to live.<sup>82</sup> On this reading, to quote Street:

[T]he Darwinian Dilemma is no more directed at the society-centered theory than it is at an anthropologist's or historian's analytical theory about the function of Jim Crow laws in the American South. Such theories may be correct, but they do not by themselves speak to the question of how to live or whether there are any truths about this question that hold apart from our evaluative attitudes.<sup>83</sup>

Since the Darwinian dilemma indeed targets normative realism, Street is entirely correct in claiming that – on this reading – Copp does not respond to the Darwinian dilemma. I shall set this reading aside. If, however, (2) the society-centered theory *is* intended as a version of normative realism – and thereby takes a stance on how we morally ought to live –, Street says that it "merely reasserts, without in any way explaining, the coincidence between the independent normative truth and what evolutionary causes led us to believe".<sup>84</sup> I believe this is false. Copp neither seems- nor needs to assume that the overlap between the moral facts and our evaluative attitudes is sheer coincidental. After all, if morality's natural function is to create stable, reproduction-enhancing societal circumstances, it is precisely *no* coincidence that evolutionary causes made us quasi-track the moral facts. Therefore, there is no coincidence that needs to be explained. This is not to say, however, that the society-centered

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<sup>79</sup> Sharon Street, "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About," in *Philosophical Issues* 18 (Ridgeview Publishing Company, 2008), 207-228.

<sup>80</sup> Street, "Reply to Copp," 211.

<sup>81</sup> With 'normative' I mean *moral* reason-giving.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

theory is free of problems on the normative reading.

The claim that we are (factually) morally required to live in a way that is ultimately beneficial to society calls for justification, and it is hard to see – on the normative reading – whether Copp gives an actual justification at all, let alone one that refers to mind-independent moral facts. Copp, it seems to me, would have to bridge the is/ought-gap between the biological function of morality and us having factual moral reasons to live. That is, we need an answer to the question how (we can know that) the biological function of morality binds us to factual moral principles.

Copp may reply that if we really want to know what we are morally required to do, a good – if not the best – starting point would be to obtain an understanding of the evolutionary function of morality. Perhaps, when we find out that the biological purpose of morality is to stimulate society-beneficent behavior, we have learned something about what morality *in fact* requires us to do: to behave in accord with moral codes that enable our society to meet its needs. Our biology thus gives us factual, mind-independent reason to be moral. The best way for the Darwinian skeptic to react to this supposition would be to ask: how? There can be many reasons for me to believe that I ought to be moral. I may believe that this is what God demands of me; believe in the intrinsic value of human beings; believe that I am bound by a categorical imperative, and so forth. If the society-centered theory provides a *factual* reason to be moral, one should expect that it ought to take precedence over any non-factual reasons for being moral I may have. But how does an evolutionarily contingent feature of human development – the biological function of morality – put moral restrictions- and demands on my behavior any more than other reasons for being moral? How does it necessarily provide a reason at all? It would not be helpful to bang the table and insist that it does because it corresponds to the moral facts. After all, this is exactly what is being called into question. For the society-centered theory to necessarily provide me with factual, mind-independent reasons for being moral, it must be the case that there can be mind-independent reasons for action (i.e. reasons that we have independently of our evaluative attitudes) in the first place.

In 1981, Bernard Williams made a persuasive case for rejecting the possibility of mind-independent reasons for action.<sup>85</sup> There is no space to spell out this account in detail here. What is of importance for the subject at hand is the following. According to Williams, a reason for action has to be a possible explanation for action from the perspective of the

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<sup>85</sup> Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101-113.

agent.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, something can only be a reason for action for me if I can end up considering it as such after having sufficiently assessed my set of beliefs and (moral) values (Williams calls this my subjective motivational set) and the relevant non-normative facts.<sup>87</sup> Why? Because if nothing in my subjective motivational set can figure as an explanation for why I should  $\phi$ , it is impossible to see in what sense I have reason to  $\phi$ .<sup>88</sup> In order for something that is completely alien- or opposed to an agent's subjective motivational set to provide him with a reason for action, it would have to be the case that "if the agent [purely] rationally deliberated, then, whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to  $\phi$ ."<sup>89</sup> It is virtually impossible to see how this could happen, because "there is no motivation for the agent to deliberate *from* to reach this new motivation".<sup>90</sup> Suppose that nothing in one's subjective motivational set indicates that one should care about the needs of society. On Williams' theory of reasons, – which, I think, is entirely plausible – this implies that one has no means whatsoever to let 'the needs of society' be an explanation (or, maxim, if you will) of one's actions. This would pose no problem for the society-centered theory if it were true that 'caring for the needs of society' is necessarily significantly part of an agent's subjective motivational set, but this is clearly not the case. The only way, then, in which the society-centered theory can be preserved is by allowing for the possibility that one can have no reason to act out of the needs of society, but nevertheless *ought* to consider the society centered 'moral facts' as morally authoritative. This, it seems, is too implausible to be true, because it seems virtually impossible to understand 'A ought to do X for E' if not as 'E is an authoritative reason for A to do X'. Also, it is clear that Copp does not want to commit himself to this position on the normative reading, since the moral facts are supposed to be factually reason-giving.

It should be granted that Copp effectively shows that tracking-realism can be defended in a way that is – at least in principle – compatible with the adaptive link account. Street is thus mistaken in claiming that tracking-realism is irreconcilable with science.<sup>91</sup> This, however, does not change very much for the Darwinian challenge to tracking-realism. After all, it is one thing to show that tracking-realism is compatible with the adaptive link account, and another to show that tracking-realism is not scientifically superfluous. For this to be so, it has to be the case that the adaptive link account requires tracking-realism in order to provide a

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<sup>86</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 102-103.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 103-113.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>91</sup> Street, "Darwinian Dilemma," 154.

(more) complete explanation for why evolutionary forces disposed humans to make certain moral judgments rather than others.<sup>92</sup> It should be asked, then, whether the truth of humans being disposed to quasi-track factual normative reasons to live adds anything significant to the adaptive link account. The answer seems to be no. After all, it seems a long stretch to think that our ancestors were evolutionarily disposed to make fitness-enhancing moral judgments *because* fitness-enhancing moral judgments (quasi-) correspond to the moral facts. It neither seems plausible that evolution influenced our ancestors in this way for fitness-enhancing reasons, *in addition to* the reason that it is factually moral to hold/act upon certain normative beliefs. Why? Because the adaptive link account has the means to explain its subject matter without needing to infer such tracking-realist rationalizations. This makes tracking-realism scientifically superfluous with regard to the question: *why has evolution disposed our ancestors to hold certain moral beliefs rather than others?*

I conclude that Copp fails to make a convincing case for (quasi) tracking-realism. The non-normative/descriptive reading of the society-centered theory is compatible with the Darwinian dilemma, while the normative reading fails to establish an adequate foundation for mind-independent moral facts. I have stated two main objections against the normative project (which is the philosophically interesting reading of Copp). The first is that reason-externalism is required for the society-centered theory to bridge the is/ought gap between the biological function of morality and humans having mind-independent, factual reasons to live. That is: it must be possible for humans to have reason to live in accord with the society-centered 'moral facts', even though nothing in their subjective motivational set/set of evaluative attitudes indicates that they should. Reason-externalism, however, should be rejected because it fails to demonstrate how something can be an authoritative reason for action without being a possible explanation for action.<sup>93</sup> My second objection applies more generally to tracking-realism as such. That is: the adaptive link account does not require tracking-realism to give an adequate explanation for why evolutionary forces disposed our ancestors to make certain moral judgments rather than others. Therefore, tracking-realism should be considered scientifically superfluous.

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. Richard Joyce, "Evolution, Truth-Tracking, and Moral Skepticism," in Richard Joyce, *Essays in Moral Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142-158.

<sup>93</sup> For an attempt to counter this skeptical conclusion, see Derek Parfit and John Broome, "Reasons and Motivation," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 71 (1997), 99-146.

#### 4. Why (Street's) Humean Constructivism is Vulnerable to The Darwinian Dilemma

With realism off the table, let us take a look at (Street's) Humean constructivism and how it aims to preserve an account of evaluative normative truth. I will argue that insofar the Dilemma works against realism, it also works against Street's constructivism, because of which constructivism should also be considered vulnerable to the Dilemma.

It may be tempting to think that if realism is untenable, this entails there can be nothing more to morality than mere subjectivism or cultural relativism.<sup>94</sup> According to Street, this is not the case. While she agrees with proponents of tracking-realism that there is an explanatory relation between moral truth and the selective influences on our evaluative attitudes, a fundamental difference between them is what Street refers to as the *direction of dependence*. The tracking-realist understands "evaluative truths to be prior, in the sense that evolutionary causes are understood to have selected us to track those independent truths. The antirealist [...] understands the evolutionary causes to be prior, in the sense that these causes (along with many others) gave us our starting fund of evaluative attitudes, and evaluative truth is understood to be a function of those attitudes".<sup>95</sup> Therefore, according to Street: "the truth of the evaluative judgement that 'X is a reason for agent A to [ $\phi$ ]' is a function of A's evaluative attitudes".<sup>96</sup>

So, by which means is it possible, on Street's account, to determine whether a moral judgment is true or false? While some antirealists may hold that any endorsed moral normative judgment J is true for A in virtue of A endorsing J, Street's constructivism leaves room for evaluative error. According to Street, the judgment that X is a reason for A to  $\phi$  is true *iff* this judgment would be among A's evaluative judgments in reflective equilibrium.<sup>97</sup> As Tropman effectively summarizes: "[m]oral truth, for Street, is a function of what we would believe were we internally consistent and not misinformed about the non-moral facts."<sup>98</sup> On this view, it is possible for A's judgment that she has reason to  $\phi$  to be mistaken, because it can be inconsistent with her overall set of values and beliefs, or rely on a false belief

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<sup>94</sup> Street is comfortable with referring to her position as a form of moral relativism. However, with this she means that things can only be morally good or bad relative to an agent's thought. She thus embraces 'agent-relativism' rather than cultural relativism. See Sharon Street, "How to be a Relativist about Moral Normativity," [Unpublished manuscript], 1.

<sup>95</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 154.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>98</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 132.



concerning a non-moral fact. It should be noted that this account does not satisfy the conditions for moral objectivity, because it aims to preserve normative truth in a way that is ultimately dependent on one's contingent set of beliefs, values and preferences. As a result, it is logically possible for Agent A and B to hold deeply conflicting moral beliefs and both be right about the moral truth. Nevertheless, Street may be right that Humean constructivism is a promising way to make sense of moral truth in face of the evolutionary data. I do not think this is the case.

According to Tropman, "constructivists find themselves in the same boat as realists when it comes to explaining moral knowledge".<sup>99</sup> With 'constructivists', Tropman refers to constructivists such as Street, which trust in the constitutive efficacy of reflective equilibrium.<sup>100</sup> Tropman's general idea is that constructivists are in the same predicament as tracking-realists with regard to explaining how moral truth can be attained through non-moral belief-forming mechanisms. I quote:

Constructivists must agree that we do not employ the methods of reflective equilibrium because they yield true moral beliefs. The explanation of our employed moral methods will be nonmoral, along the lines of the evolutionary one [...] Yet, of all the various methods we could have employed in moral thinking, it seems miraculous that evolutionary pressures would have selected for the very method that reliably indicates moral truth. This is analogous to the constructivist's complaint with realism that of all the moral beliefs evolutionary forces could have pushed us toward, it would require a significant stroke of good luck for these beliefs to correspond to [...] moral truth.<sup>101</sup>

It may seem as though Tropman misrepresents Street's constructivism. It could appear as if her correspondence-language presupposes a realist understanding of how moral beliefs must stand in relation to moral truth, which would of course beg the question against constructivism. This, however, is not how I understand her at this point.<sup>102</sup> Here, I rather interpret her as stating that Street, like the tracking-realists she criticizes, cannot justifiably hold that moral truth can be attained by means of a reflective method that evolutionary forces pushed us toward. To begin with, Tropman notes that on Street's constructivist account, there is – as is the case with realism – a crucial independence between our actual moral beliefs and the moral truth.<sup>103</sup> Our moral beliefs do not automatically constitute moral truth. Instead, moral knowledge is attained when our moral beliefs survive the process of reflective equilibrium. It should be considered very good news for Street, then, that we just so naturally happen to use reflective equilibrium when assessing the quality of our moral beliefs. This explains why we

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>102</sup> At another point, she does seem to presuppose this. I come back to this in section 5.2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 133.

have a shot at recognizing truths in the moral domain.<sup>104</sup> However, if it would be overly convenient for Copp if mind-independent moral truth happens to closely correspond with our evolution-induced moral beliefs, it would be equally convenient for Street if constructed moral truth can be reliably attained through an evolution-induced method of moral thinking. As Tropman says: "[t]he fact that we just so happen to use those methods which guarantee [constructed] moral truth calls for explanation".<sup>105</sup> If Street acknowledges (as, for scientific reasons, she should) that the reason why humans tend to use reflective equilibrium is an incidental byproduct of our evolution, and thereby not 'designed' to track/construct moral truths, it seems as though Street's coincidence-objection to the realist may apply to her constructivism as well. After all, why should we trust that the method of reflective equilibrium – of all logically possible methods to construct moral truth – which is not by any means designed to construct moral truth is fit to reveal true moral reasons for action? Why must it be a coincidence if we arrive at realist moral truth by relying on evaluative attitudes, but no coincidence for us to arrive at constructed moral truth by deliberating in the way that evolution pushed us toward? Perhaps the correct way to construct moral truth is, as of yet, unknown to us or cannot be known by us.<sup>106</sup> Just as our moral beliefs can stem from fitness-enhancing instincts without tracking realist moral facts, we can be evolutionarily disposed to use a moral deliberative method that bears no relation to (constructed) moral truth. Street thinks that she is immune to this objection because her constructivism is a meta-ethical theory which, unlike Copp's society-centered theory, does not need to rely on substantive evaluative judgments.<sup>107</sup> To this Tropman replies that Street presupposes a too clear-cut distinction between meta-ethics and normative ethics. She argues that Street's constructivism can be perfectly understood as a substantive normative claim about morality.<sup>108</sup> But why should we believe that this is how we should do morality/meta-ethics?

Admittedly, Tropman's coincidence-objection would lack any force if Street gave a convincing reason for why Humean constructivism *also* happens to be a good way to make sense of moral truth, even though the reliability of reflective equilibrium had no effect in humans being inclined to use it. Coincidences exist, after all. Street's reason, however, is that given our evolutionary predicament and the supposed falsity of Kantian constructivism,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>107</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 163.

<sup>108</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 134-135.

Humean constructivism is "what we are forced to".<sup>109</sup> Given the truth of constructivism, according to Street, moral conclusions must follow from the practical standpoint of normative judgment. Therefore, moral substance "must ultimately be supplied by the particular set of values with which one finds oneself alive as an agent".<sup>110</sup> It seems to me, however, that this can be admitted without holding that reflective equilibrium – the way in which we happen to be evolutionarily disposed to deliberate about morality – must be the way to go. If there is no further reason for Humean constructivism being correct apart from this being our evolutionary predicament, Tropman is right that there is an unjustified coincidence at play with regard to Humean constructivism being the true meta-ethical position. Granted, if mind-dependence is a precondition for the ontology of moral truth, it seems plausible to think that discovering moral truth is to discover something about oneself – from the perspective of a valuing being –.<sup>111</sup> Like Street, I am sympathetic to this idea. We can ask, however, whether reflective equilibrium can really serve as a model to discover whether we have *moral-* rather than *prudential* reasons for action with regard to others. I think it is merely the latter.

It should be clear that the categorical obligatory aspect of morality is off the table on Street's account.<sup>112</sup> After all, the truth of us having obligations towards others ultimately depends on whether correct assessment of our contingent (moral) beliefs and the non-moral facts would yield the conclusion that we do. It is thus not some morally relevant feature about the recipient of one's actions that makes it that we ought to behave in a certain way, but our contingent *belief* that there is reason to act in this way. Even without a philosophical theory in the background (or a theory of morality, for that matter), it is hard to shake the feeling that Street's constructivism lacks 'moral oomph', because it entails that no moral mistake is made when morally disinterested persons genuinely believe that they can do as they please with the recipient of their actions (even if they act on this belief). This makes it hard to see in which sense moral reasons for action are relevantly different from prudential reasons for action. Why? Because a correct answer to the question: 'do I have reason not to murder my child?' depends on the same truth-criteria as: 'do I have reason not to eat this pie?': correct assessment of that which one already happens to believe and value. Street states that this possibly counterintuitive aspect of her position is a bullet she is willing to bite.<sup>113</sup> However, it seems to me that if a theory of moral value- and truth cannot clearly explain the difference between

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<sup>109</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 370.

<sup>110</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 154.

<sup>111</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 370.

<sup>112</sup> See section 1 for my definition of morality.

<sup>113</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 370.

moral- and prudential reasons for action, it is doubtful whether such a theory has really provided a definition of moral truth. While I can see that reflective equilibrium can be fit to reveal prudential/hypothetical reasons for action, it fails to get us into the moral domain.

When we combine Street's idiosyncratic notion of moral truth with the point that it is unclear how her method escapes her own coincidence-objection against tracking-realism, it becomes hard to see in what sense we are really 'forced' to embrace Humean constructivism rather than follow Tropman in claiming that, given our evolutionary predicament, it would be more reasonable to reject the possibility of moral knowledge. I quote:

The more reasonable conclusion to draw is that there simply are not any moral facts involving moral properties for us to know. Indeed, positing constructed moral facts – ones that miraculously correspond with the outputs of an evolutionarily shaped belief-forming process – starts to look like a desperate last resort to save moral knowledge in the face of impending skepticism.<sup>114</sup>

While some Darwinian skeptics – such as Richard Joyce – would be sympathetic to Tropman's suggestion and deny the existence of moral truth- and knowledge altogether,<sup>115</sup> I am more optimistic about the compatibility of moral truth with the evolutionary data. Before I turn to a defense of this compatibility, I want to finish this section by saying the following.

If there is such a thing as moral truth, the 'direction of dependence' Street proposes between evaluative moral truths and our evaluative attitudes (i.e. evaluative moral truths are a function of our evaluative attitudes) strikes me as plausible in face of the evolutionary data. After all, if realism is not a tenable option, it seems reasonable to think that if there is such a thing as moral value- and truth, it has to be a human 'invention' of some sorts. However, because of the reasons discussed in this section, another explanation than that of Street is needed on *how* moral truth supervenes on our evaluative attitudes. To improve on Street's explanation, a clear, Darwinian dilemma-resistant justification is needed for the method we use to arrive at moral truth from our evaluative attitudes. This means that it has to be shown how moral truth can be attained by assessing attitudes that were not evolutionarily 'designed' to do so. It is my hope that the next section satisfactorily shows that Kantian transcendental constructivism has the means to do justice to this challenge.

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<sup>114</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 135.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Joyce, "Evolution, Truth-Tracking".

## 5.1. What is Kantian Transcendental Constructivism?

So far, I have argued that there is good reason to believe that both realism as well as Street's Humean constructivism fall prey to the Darwinian dilemma. This reveals the relevance of investigating whether Kantian transcendental constructivism provides more fruitful results in face of Darwinian skepticism. In the upcoming subsections, I will argue that it does away with the evolutionary problems of the other positions. By using transcendental argumentation, Kantian constructivism provides a foundation for moral truth that is both wholly mind-dependent (thereby immunizing itself to the core problem of realism), and objective (which gives it the required 'moral oomph' and non-arbitrariness Humean constructivism lacks). This subsection serves to clarify how Kantian transcendental constructivism should be understood.

There is much common ground between Humean- and Kantian constructivism. Street explains this well when she says that: "what unites them is their conviction that normative truth does not outrun entailment from within the practical point of view".<sup>116</sup> In other words: both positions are antirealist in nature, though not skeptical about normative truth. The positions disagree with each other on *how* normative truth can be attained from the practical point of view.

What, then, is Kantian transcendental constructivism? A good starting answer may be: a version of Kantian constructivism that is fundamentally based on transcendental argumentation. In this respect, the position differs significantly from non-transcendental forms of Kantian constructivism, such as that of John Rawls. According to Rawls:

Kantian constructivism holds that moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed point of view that all can accept.<sup>117</sup>

Throughout his career, Rawls famously proposed several methods by which one can arrive at universally acceptable moral judgments such as the veil of ignorance<sup>118</sup> and reflective equilibrium.<sup>119</sup> Unlike Street, Rawls was confident that reflective equilibrium can be used to arrive at universally acceptable moral beliefs. In this sense, Rawls used the method for Kantian- rather than Humean purposes. I have many reservations about the efficacy of these methods, but I will set these aside. What is of importance here is that where Rawls thinks the

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<sup>116</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 371. See also Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>117</sup> John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," in Samuel Freeman (ed.), *Collected Papers* (Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 1999), 303-358, 307.

<sup>118</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>119</sup> John Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7:1 (1987), 1-25, 5.

goal of Kantian constructivism is to find moral ground which all *can* reasonably accept, Kantian *transcendental* constructivism aims to find moral ground which all agents *must* accept. The transcendental project is thus more ambitious in providing a moral foundation that is stringently objective and inescapable. It is this version of Kantian constructivism I am interested in for my current purposes. Therefore, I will refer to Kantian transcendental constructivism as Kantian constructivism for the remainder of this thesis.

In order to further clarify Kantian constructivism, it must be explained what a Kantian transcendental argument is. In the first section, I defined a moral transcendental argument as an argument which aims to establish the validity of a moral principle/imperative: X by demonstrating that a commitment to X is necessarily implicit in a commitment to some rationally inescapable Y. It is now time to give content to the Y as well. What makes a Kantian transcendental argument characteristically Kantian is that Y figures as the phenomenological experience of understanding oneself as an agent.<sup>120</sup> A Kantian transcendental argument, in its most general form, can thus be defined as a self-reflexive (rather than assertoric<sup>121</sup>) argument which says that each agent must claim: 'I, as an agent, have to maintain to be bound by a moral imperative, because doing so is logically implicit in my necessary self-understanding as an agent'.<sup>122</sup> Because there is no contingent factor apart from my having to understand myself as an agent *on account of my being an agent* that reflexively binds me to a moral principle, *each* agent – on pain of contradicting herself – must maintain that the moral imperative applies to her.<sup>123</sup> It is in this sense that Kantian constructivism aims at a moral foundation that is both mind-dependent, as well as objective. It is mind-dependent because each agent, as an agent, legislates the moral law to herself rather than some moral principle obliging her 'from the outside'. The criteria for moral objectivity, on the other hand, are satisfied because categorical moral self-legislation is non-optional for agents insofar they are agents. There are subtle differences regarding the definition of 'agent' between Kantian constructivists, although a crucial aspect which they all have in common is

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. Stern, "Transcendental Arguments." URL:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/transcendental-arguments/> (last access: 13-06-18).

<sup>121</sup> That is: a transcendental argument deduces its conclusions from that which has to be accepted from the viewpoint of persons, rather than from the assumed properties of things. See Deryck Beyleveld, *The Dialectical Necessity of Morality: An Analysis and Defense of Alan Gewirth's Argument to the Principle of Generic Consistency* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15.

<sup>122</sup> Even though Korsgaard tends to emphasize the importance of 'humanity' rather than agency, the structure of her argument corresponds well to the way I present Kantian constructivism here. See Korsgaard, *The Sources*, 93.

<sup>123</sup> Gewirth, *Reason*, 22-23.

that agency consists of the capacity to freely, voluntarily act for self-chosen purposes.<sup>124</sup> By way of illustration, I will give two examples of Kantian transcendental arguments. The first one comes from Alan Gewirth, the other from Christine Korsgaard.

In his book *Reason and Morality*, Gewirth's objective is to provide a transcendental justification for what he calls: The Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). More precisely, Gewirth's main thesis is that:

[E]very agent, by the fact of engaging in action, is logically committed to the acceptance of certain evaluative and deontic judgments and ultimately of a supreme moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency, which requires that he respect his recipients' necessary conditions of action.<sup>125</sup>

Gewirth aims to show that the moral authority of the PGC must be accepted by every agent as a matter of dialectical necessity. That is: insofar an agent is rational (i.e. insofar an agent adheres to the criteria of deductive and inductive logic<sup>126</sup>) she (implicitly) *has to claim* – on pain of self-contradiction – that she agrees with certain subjective premises, which altogether logically entail that she must agree that the PGC applies to her.<sup>127</sup> I summarize Gewirth's inference to the PGC as follows:

On pain of self-contradiction:

- I must claim, in virtue of my (planning on) engaging in action: I am a prospective purposive agent (i.e. a being with (future) ends, who aims to reach its ends through free, voluntary behavior). Therefore:
- By (planning on) engaging in action, I must claim: I (plan to) do X for purpose E. Therefore:
- I must claim: insofar E is the end of my action X, I (instrumentally) ought to do X. Therefore:
- I must claim: I ought to have the necessary conditions for action: freedom and well-being<sup>128</sup>
- Insofar I am a *prospective* purposive agent, I must claim: I ought to have the generic conditions for action in general (lest I will have no chance to succeed in reaching any end whatsoever). Therefore:
- I must claim: because I am an agent, I have a right to the necessary conditions for action.<sup>129</sup> Therefore:
- I must claim: other agents must claim a right to the necessary conditions for action. Therefore:

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<sup>124</sup> Korsgaard, for instance, also conceives of agency as the ability to constitute oneself through action, whereas Gewirth simply understands agency as the capacity for free, voluntary, purposive behavior. See Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 189-199; Gewirth, "Reason and Morality," x.

<sup>125</sup> Gewirth, *Reason*, x.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, xi

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-63.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-103.

- I must claim: agency is a sufficient condition for a claim-right to the necessary conditions for action. Therefore:
- I must claim: insofar an agent is the recipient of my actions, I ought to respect his or her necessary conditions for action.<sup>130</sup>

There is much that can be said about this argument. Gewirth's inference to the PGC has been criticized by many philosophers from many different angles.<sup>131</sup> To discuss all criticisms would take up way too much space. This does not matter, however, because for my current purposes, it is merely important that Kantian constructivism *as such* is a method that is fit to provide an argument for morality against Darwinian skepticism. Instead of focusing on the logical details of the transcendental arguments by Gewirth and Korsgaard, I will zoom in on the question how Kantian constructivism may fare in the evolutionary-debunking debate. For the purposes of this thesis, it is thus of primary importance that the strategy is resistant to Darwinian skepticism.

In order to better bring the characteristics of Kantian transcendental argumentation into picture, I will now give a reconstruction of Korsgaard's Argument for the value of humanity.

In *The Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard aims to show that (1) valuing one's humanity is a necessary precondition of agency; (2) reasons are public, because of which one ought to value humanity in general; (3) having to value humanity in general provides one with moral obligations towards other human beings.<sup>132</sup>

Step 1:

- As a human being, I must have reasons for action.
- In order to have/make sense of reasons for action, I need to commit myself to a practical identity.
- It is implicit in my need for reasons to act that I am psychologically necessitated to value things from my practical self-understanding. Therefore:
- I am an inescapably valuing being.
- Since my humanity is a precondition for my practical identity, I must value my humanity if I am to value anything at all. Therefore:
- I must value my humanity.<sup>133</sup>

Step 2:

- Reasons are public/shared (not private).

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 104-198.

<sup>131</sup> For a substantive overview of these objections, see: Beyleveld, *The Dialectical Necessity of Morality*.

<sup>132</sup> *The Sources of Normativity* is not Korsgaard's latest work. I chose to focus on it nevertheless, because her transcendental argument plays a much more prominent part in it than Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>133</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources*, 120-125.



- If I must value my humanity, I must value humanity in general.
- I must value my humanity. Therefore:
- I must value humanity in general.<sup>134</sup>

Step 3:

- Having to respect humanity in general puts me under moral obligations to respect the humanity in others.
- I have to respect humanity in general. Therefore:
- I am morally obliged to act in accord with respect for humanity.<sup>135</sup>

There are some important differences and similarities between Gewirth and Korsgaard. However, since I spelled out both accounts to get a clearer picture of Kantian constructivism as such, I will only focus on their similarities. First of all, both Gewirth and Korsgaard begin their argument from the first-person perspective. This is a significant characteristic of Kantian transcendental argumentation. By starting from (and, in Gewirth's case, staying within) the first-person perspective, the aim is to reach a conclusion that is *phenomenologically* necessary. There may be no reason at all for being moral from a third-person perspective. I may not even be an agent from a third-person point of view. The external world need not even exist apart from my experience. Nevertheless, morality remains inescapable for me on account of me having to legislate a moral law to myself as a necessary condition of my self-understanding. Secondly, the experience of agency plays a central role. Indeed, it is precisely *because* of our capacity to engage in agential action (hereafter: action) that the problem of the normative arises in the first place. Korsgaard explains this well in the following way:

[O]ur capacity to turn our attention on to our own mental activities is also a capacity to distance ourselves from them, and to call them into question. I perceive, and I find myself with a powerful impulse to believe. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I believe? Is this perception really a *reason* to believe? I desire and I find myself with a powerful impulse to act. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I act? Is this desire really a *reason* to act? The reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire, not just as such. It needs a *reason*. Otherwise, at least as long as it reflects, it cannot commit itself or go forward.<sup>136</sup>

Through reflective endorsement, we make an action *our own*, rather than some movement that is merely a consequence of naturalistic causes that happen *to us*.<sup>137</sup> It is precisely because we are reflexive that we *need* to rationally endorse our ends, as well as the means we choose to reach our ends. If our attention would be merely 'fixed to the world' rather than self-

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 125-140; See also Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 191-206.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 131-166.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 93.

conscious, the question 'what ought I to do?' could not even arise. Our perceptions, as Korsgaard says, would be our beliefs and our desires would be our will.<sup>138</sup> It is precisely *because* we are reflexive that the normative question *must* arise. This, of course, does not imply that because one is an agent, one cannot help but act for moral reasons. One can rationally endorse all kinds of reasons for action. What is of importance here is the mere fact that we, in virtue of the self-conscious beings we are, face the problem of normativity. Agency is what makes moral questions intelligible to us, and is a precondition for us to be bound by a moral law.<sup>139</sup> This is why Kantian constructivism takes the phenomenological experience of agency as its starting point.

There is, of course, much more to be said about Kantian constructivism. However, I believe I have explained enough to clarify how the position may fare in the evolutionary debunking debate. It will now be discussed whether Kantian constructivism has the means to respond to the challenge I posited in section 4. I will call this the challenge from evolutionary contingency. That is: can Kantian constructivism provide an account of moral truth by assessing evaluative attitudes that were not evolutionarily 'designed' to do so?

## **5.2. Kantian Constructivism and Evolutionary Contingency**

In the previous subsection, I sketched a general outset of Kantian constructivism. This subsection will be used to demonstrate that the position is resistant to Darwinian skepticism. A necessary requirement for this is that Kantian constructivism can give an adequate response to the challenge from evolutionary contingency. My aim is to show that the evolutionary contingency of agency should be considered a strength- rather than a weakness of Kantian constructivism.

In section 4, I argued that Street's Humean constructivism falls prey to her own Darwinian dilemma, because like tracking-realism, it illegitimately presupposes that the way in which evolutionary forces influenced us to deliberate about morality reliably generates moral knowledge. It may seem as though Kantian constructivism is in no better spot than its Humean counterpart to make claims about moral knowledge. Kantian constructivism may, like reflective equilibrium, be understood as a version of coherentism. That is: the thesis according to which "a belief [...] is justified, or justifiably held, just in case the belief coheres

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Korsgaard, 93.

with a set of beliefs".<sup>140</sup> Kantian constructivism, after all, uses the principle of self-contradiction in order to appraise the truth-value of a moral judgment. In an important sense, the position thus maintains that agents are morally required to act coherently with some of their beliefs, and can obtain moral knowledge by correctly assessing their beliefs. In this sense, it is true that Kantian transcendental argumentation bears some similarity to reflective equilibrium. However, the difference between Kantian- and Humean constructivism is more outstanding than this similarity. Where Humean constructivism focuses on coherence within one's contingent, particular set of beliefs, Kantian constructivism focuses on beliefs which one cannot coherently deny to have while remaining consistent with the way in which one necessarily understands him- or herself.<sup>141</sup> If Kantian constructivism works, this is because morality is inescapable for each agent in virtue of each agent necessarily *having to hold* certain moral beliefs insofar he- or she remains to be an agent.

Perhaps this does nothing to remove Tropman's worry concerning constructivism. I think she would object as follows. 'Even if we grant that transcendental argumentation reflectively binds one to the moral conclusions you say it does, surely Kantian constructivists must maintain – on pain of being scientifically backwards – that the *reason why* agents must necessarily understand themselves as moral beings is not *because* this yields true moral beliefs. Certainly, the reason for this is that evolutionary forces designed our belief forming mechanisms in a certain way, and the result just so happens to be that we cannot help but self-legislate a moral law in virtue of our necessary conditions for self-understanding. While moral self-legislation may be non-optional from the perspective of agents, it remains entirely contingent in another way: evolutionarily. It is as Street said: "had the general content of our basic evaluative tendencies been very different, then the general content of our full-fledged evaluative judgements would also have been very different".<sup>142</sup> Seeing as my self-legislated moral law is the upshot of evolutionarily contingent belief forming mechanisms, it appears as though there is insufficient reason to believe that I am *truly* bound by a moral law. In order for this to be the case, it must be so that there is *moral* reason for my moral beliefs. That is: my moral beliefs must be caused by moral facts'.<sup>143</sup>

This is an interesting objection. Rather than arguing that morality *is* in some way

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<sup>140</sup> Erik Olsson, "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/justep-coherence/> (last access: 13-06-18).

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Sem de Maagt, "Reflective Equilibrium and Moral Objectivity," in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 60:5 (Routledge, 2017), 443-465, 461-462.

<sup>142</sup> Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma," 120.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 136-138.

escapable for agents, it tries to show that phenomenological inescapability should be considered morally irrelevant, because there is merely an amoral, evolutionarily contingent reason for why we must conceive of ourselves as agents. Therefore, agency does not inescapably provide agents with *normative* reason to be moral. This raises the challenge from evolutionary contingency. That is: the Kantian constructivist must be able to show that his- or her position is not endangered by the evolutionary contingency of agency.

The way in which I suppose Tropman would respond to Kantian constructivism (hereafter: Tropman's critique) can be understood as an evolutionary twist of David Enoch's critique of Kantian constructivism.<sup>144</sup> Sem de Maagt effectively summarizes Enoch's view of what a transcendental argument must look like in order to be effective as follows:

- 1) X is [phenomenologically] inescapable for A.
- 1\*) X is also normatively inescapable for A, i.e. A has reason to X.
- 2) Y is a necessary condition for the possibility of X.
- 3) Therefore, A must Y.<sup>145</sup>

X stands for agency in this reconstruction. Like Enoch, Tropman believes that in order for 1\* to be the case, it must be so that moral realism is true.<sup>146</sup> What Tropman's critique adds to Enoch's argument is an additional reason for skepticism. Not only is Kantian constructivism normatively parasitic upon moral realism, but its phenomenological inescapability is also irrelevant on account of it being an upshot of amoral, evolutionarily contingent human development.<sup>147</sup> Tropman's critique thus consists of two intertwined parts: (1): Enoch's challenge to Kantian constructivism, and (2): the challenge from evolutionary contingency. In order to effectively respond to Tropman's critique, Enoch's view must be spelled out in further detail.

In his 2006 article "Agency, Shmagency", Enoch famously compares the normativity of agency with the normativity of chess. His reason for doing so is to demonstrate that, in the same way that I only have reason to checkmate my opponent insofar I care about playing chess, I only have reason to be an agent insofar I care about being an agent. I quote:

If a metanormative (or metachess) theorist [...] comes along, explaining to you that attempting to checkmate your opponent is constitutive of the game of chess, so that unless you engage

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<sup>144</sup> David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What is Constitutive of Action," in *The Philosophical Review* 115:2 (Duke University Press, 2006), 169-198.

<sup>145</sup> Sem de Maagt, "Constructing Morality: Transcendental Arguments in Ethics," in *Quaestiones Infnitae* 99 (Utrecht University, 2017), 108.

<sup>146</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 135; Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency," 194-195.

<sup>147</sup> Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency," 194-195.

attempts your activity will not be classifiable as chess playing, it seems to me you are perfectly justified in treating this information as normatively irrelevant. After all, what is it to you how your activity is best classified? If you have no reason to be playing chess, then that some aim is constitutive of playing chess gives you no reason at all, it seems to me, to pursue it, and this whether or not you are in fact playing chess [...] If a constitutive-aim or constitutive-motives theory is going to work for agency, then, it is not sufficient to show that some aims or motives or capacities are constitutive of agency. Rather, it is also necessary to show that the "game" of agency is one we have reason to play.<sup>148</sup>

There is, of course, an important difference between chess and agency. While playing chess is optional, agency, according to Kantian constructivism, is a game we necessarily play. Does this fact on its own not already provide normative reason to be an agent? According to Enoch it does not, because even if we have to be an agent, we do not have to attach any value to this predicament:

[A]ssume that sacrificing a pawn is the thing you have most chess-related reason to do [...] Well, do you have reason to sacrifice a pawn? Not, it seems to me, if you don't have a normative reason to play or win the game, and this even if you can't quit. For you can continue playing or "going through the motions," grudgingly, refusing to internalize the aims of the game. And absent some normative reason to play the game, there need be nothing irrational about such an attitude.<sup>149</sup>

First of all, it is not straightforwardly clear what Enoch means by a normative reason for agency. He accepts, for the sake of argument, that an agent is rationally necessitated to implicitly embrace the judgment that she is an agent.<sup>150</sup> True, this is a matter of phenomenological necessity rather than normative necessity. The question remains, however, in what sense an agent does not inescapably have normative reason for being an agent if she implicitly has to maintain that she ought to have what it takes to be an agent. Does the chess player not have normative reason to play chess if she must implicitly believe that she ought to have the necessary means for playing chess? According to Enoch, the uninterested agent is perfectly justified in claiming that she has no reason to play the game of agency, because there is no reason for her to care about the necessary preconditions of action. Why should she act at all? She could be perfectly happy with being a 'shmagent' who 'shmacts'. I quote:

Perhaps I can't act without aiming at self-constitution, but why should I act? If your reasoning works, this just shows that I don't care about agency and action. I am perfectly happy being a shmagent- a nonagent who is very similar to agents but who lacks the aim (constitutive of agency but not of shmagency) of self-constitution. I am perfectly happy performing shmactions- nonaction events that are very similar to actions but that lack the aim (constitutive of actions but not of shmactions) of self constitution.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 179.

It may seem as though this objection can be relatively easily met by the Kantian constructivist by simply continuing to insist that agency is non-optional. Either 'shmagency' and 'shmaction' linguistically refer to the same things as 'agency' and 'action', or they do not. If they do, nothing non-trivial changes for Kantian constructivism. If they do not, nothing changes at all, because whatever a shmagent may be, she nevertheless has to understand herself as an agent who values agency. After all, a person claiming to be uninterested in being an agent would simply contradict herself, because the utterance of that claim alone is a free, voluntary speech-act, which can only be intelligible insofar he or she attaches positive value to the necessary agential means for undertaking that act.<sup>152</sup>

Things are, however, not that simple. As we have seen, Enoch maintains that Kantian constructivism remains in trouble even if we *must* play the game of agency. Seeing as this is the case, a better way to interpret Enoch's objection would be that 'I ought to be an agent' is not synonymous to- nor follows from 'I ought to have the generic conditions for agency'. With this difference in place, the tension becomes clear. While my having to value agency is inescapable from my perspective as an agent, this inescapability remains normatively irrelevant, according to Enoch, in the absence of a normative reason to *be* an agent (a being which must claim/value certain things from his or her first-person perspective) in the first place. How should the Kantian constructivist respond to this objection?

De Maagt takes the right strategy by questioning whether there really must be normative reason for being an agent in the sense intended by Enoch.<sup>153</sup> According to De Maagt, the question 'why should I be an agent?' poses a problem for Kantian constructivism only insofar there is good reason to think that we need mind-independent reason for being an agent. It is difficult to see why this should be so if we think that mind-independent reasons are unnecessary, ambiguous things in the first place. As De Maagt says:

In the absence of a commitment to moral realism, it seems to be sufficient to show that, from her first-person perspective, any agent necessarily has to accept the necessary preconditions of agency [...] [T]he only person who will think that this is insufficient is the moral realist, who believes that normativity has to come from mind-independent facts.<sup>154</sup>

Recall Williams' theory of internal reasons, according to which something can only qualify as a reason insofar it is a possible explanation of action. On this account, there can be no such thing as a mind-independent normative reason in the first place. In the absence of a relevant pre-existing motivation or belief in A's subjective motivational set, rational deliberation

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Gewirth, *Reason*, 22-63.

<sup>153</sup> De Maagt, "Constructing Morality," 115.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

cannot get A to believe any 'reason-statement' (i.e. 'R provides reason for A to  $\phi$ '). Therefore, in the absence of a pre-existing motivation or belief, (rational assessment of) R cannot generate a reason for A.<sup>155</sup> When we apply this to the matter at hand, *there can be no* reason to be an agent in a way that is external to the first-person perspective of agents. If Williams is right – which he is –, Enoch's realist normativity-criterion cannot be met.

The Darwinian dilemma shows that there is good reason to be skeptical of realism, whereas Williams shows that "the only real claims about reasons for action will be [mind-] internal claims".<sup>156</sup> Once this is acknowledged, it may seem as though Tropman's challenge from evolutionary contingency can be fairly easily met. Instead of the evolutionary contingency of agency being a reason for skepticism, it may be insisted that it is exactly *because* our evolutionary development has locked us into agency that moral rights and duties (can) meaningfully apply to us. Why? Because human psychology just so happens to have developed in a way that makes it possible for humans to have inescapable, categorical reason to be moral. Had our psychology developed in a slightly other way, we may not have been susceptible to morality at all. Unlike Street's constructivism, Kantian constructivism should thus not be understood as a "desperate, last resort to save moral knowledge in the face of impending skepticism".<sup>157</sup> Instead, we should be skeptical about the way in which realism attempts to make sense of moral knowledge- and the metaphysics of moral reasons.

This is indeed part of the response I want to give. There is, however, more that needs to be said for this response to be justified. Up to now, it has been argued that reason-internalism shows that reasons for action cannot be ultimately caused by mind-independent facts, and must always be part of one's subjective motivational set. While this shows that a realist foundation for morality cannot be given, Tropman's critique remains unanswered. After all, even if realism puts (cognitively) impossible demands on moral knowledge, it may nevertheless be so that these demands need to be met for there to be moral knowledge. If this is true, the appropriate response would be to endorse error-theory/moral nihilism rather than constructivism.<sup>158</sup> The challenge is thus to show that there need not be mind-independent reasons for agency in order for Kantian constructivism to have normative force. When this challenge is met, the challenge from evolutionary contingency is answered as well. If agency is fit to get us into moral territory, it should not matter how agency comes to be.

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<sup>155</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 111.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>157</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 135.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Mackie, *Ethics*; Wouter Floris Kalf, *Moral Error Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Jonas Olson, *Moral Error Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

First of all, it must be noted that Kantian transcendental argumentation, unlike reflective equilibrium, is not a deliberative method that evolutionary forces pushed us toward. Sure, a major reason for why we can do transcendental argumentation is because we have evolutionarily inherited this capability. My point is that most of us are not naturally inclined to evaluate our moral beliefs by means of a transcendental argument. Unlike reflective equilibrium, transcendental argumentation is an 'unobvious' way to approach morality.<sup>159</sup> While this may be considered an argument against the method in other contexts, it counts in favor of Kantian constructivism in light of the challenge from evolutionary contingency. Because transcendental argumentation is not a method which we 'just so happen' to be evolutionarily disposed to use in assessing our moral beliefs, Tropman's coincidence-objection does not apply to it. Of course, it must still be justified why Kantian constructivism, of all logically possible forms of constructivism, is correct. This, however, is not an impossible project. Kantian transcendental argumentation is – unlike Street's belief concerning reflective equilibrium – not a method we are 'forced' to resort to on account of being evolutionarily hindered to achieve anything more substantial. Instead, Kantian constructivism stems from a deep conviction that morality ought to be rationally justifiable in order to not be redundant.<sup>160</sup> In recognition of this, a method which shows that every agent has rationally inescapable reason to act in accord with respect for others is something to be embraced rather than disposed. If there is reason to be optimistic about the idea that moral reasons are rationally entailed by the preconditions of agency, it seems that there is reason to think that the realist criterion for moral truth should be considered normatively unnecessary, and, as Street says, "not to the point anyway".<sup>161</sup> Is there reason for optimism about this idea?

According to Tropman, the problem of trying to illustrate how our moral beliefs are accurate despite not being caused by morality is that, in explaining how our beliefs are related to morality in another way, this relationship must be "ad hoc, miraculous, and too convenient to be believed" given the evolutionary data.<sup>162</sup> This critique, however, simply seems to presuppose that constructivism *as such* must be a weird, ad hoc way to make sense of moral truth given the evolutionary story. Why should we suppose that this is so? Is it really that implausible to understand morality as a human construct? That our beliefs bear a constitutive, rather than a corresponding relation to moral truth? I, at least, would be tempted to think that

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<sup>159</sup> Cf. Street, "What is Constructivism," 369.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Gewirth, *Reason*, x; Korsgaard, *The Sources*, 36; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, 686, A823/B851.

<sup>161</sup> Street, "What is Constructivism," 380. Street takes a similar strategy in defending Humean constructivism against the realist-criterion for normativity.

<sup>162</sup> Tropman, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," 135.



if there is such a thing as moral truth, it must be a function of valuing beings rather than some metaphysically obscure phenomenon 'in the world' (*especially* in light of the evolutionary story). But this an intuition, whereas we need an argument for why the 'moral' reasons revealed by Kantian constructivism should be considered genuinely *moral* reasons regardless of their evolutionary origin. I will give the conclusion of my argument up-front: provided that a Kantian transcendental argument is logically correct, it either shows that (1) there are categorical moral reasons for action, or (2) there are no such things as reasons for action, or (3) moral reasons for action must be unlike any other reasons for action.

Consider the following scenario. Albert cares about personal hygiene. He knows that in order for his mouth to remain sanitary, he needs to regularly brush his teeth. Does Albert have reason to regularly brush his teeth? The answer seems to be yes. The means of toothbrushing for the sake of personal hygiene perfectly makes sense from the perspective of Albert: someone who cares about personal hygiene. What, then, about this scenario? Albert cares about personal hygiene. He does not know that in order for his mouth to remain sanitary he needs to regularly brush his teeth. Does Albert have reason to regularly brush his teeth? The answer is, perhaps a bit less obviously, yes. To illustrate why, I shall, once again, refer to Williams with an example on how one can be mistaken about there (not) being a reason for him or her to  $\phi$ : "The agent believes that this stuff is gin, when it is in fact petrol. He wants a gin and tonic. Has he reason, or a reason, to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it?".<sup>163</sup> Since the answer is no,<sup>164</sup> Williams infers the following conclusion (read  $S$  as subjective motivational set<sup>165</sup>): [a] member of  $S$ ,  $D$ , will not give  $A$  reason for  $\phi$ -ing if either the existence of  $D$  is dependent on false belief, or  $A$ 's belief in the relevance of  $\phi$ -ing to the satisfaction of  $D$  is false".<sup>166</sup> We can ascribe this in a third-person manner to the respective agent, because this is also what he would ascribe to himself if he deliberated correctly.<sup>167</sup> This reasoning also goes the other way around. There may be reason for  $A$  to  $\phi$  of which he or she is unaware.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, Albert has reason to brush his teeth, even though he is unaware that doing so is beneficial for his personal hygiene. What this shows is that Albert's actual belief regarding the normativity of brushing his teeth plays no role in him having a reason to do so. All that matters is that an epistemically ideal Albert (an Albert that is not misinformed about

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<sup>163</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 102.

<sup>164</sup> If the answer would be yes, our model for reasons would be merely concerned with movement-explanation, and bear no connection to an agent's rationality, which it should. See Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 102-103.

<sup>165</sup> For the definition of subjective motivational set, see section 3.2.

<sup>166</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 103.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>168</sup> There may, after all, be reason for  $A$  to  $\phi$  to the satisfaction of  $D$  which he or she simply does not know about.

his beliefs, values and the relevant facts) would come to the conclusion that he has reason to regularly brush his teeth. It should be clear, then, that in the absence of any *D* in Albert's *S* which indicates that he should care about personal hygiene, Albert would not in any way be mistaken in claiming that he has no reason to brush his teeth.<sup>169</sup> I do not see why this model of reasons could not apply to the moral domain as well.

It may seem as though this part is building up toward a defense of reflective equilibrium. This is not what I intend to do. As far as I am concerned, all that has been established at this point is that constructivism about reasons for action is correct. What about moral reasons? Given the definition of morality that is used in this thesis, a moral reason for action is understood as a categorically obligatory requirement to act in a way that either furthers- or does not damage the interests of the recipient of one's action. As I said in section 4, one reason for why Humean constructivism fails to get us into moral territory is because of a lack of 'moral oomph'. This can be spelled out more elaborately. Assume for a moment that constructivism is fit to generate moral reasons for action. According to Kantian- and Humean constructivism alike, an agent has reason to be moral insofar there is some *D* in her *S* which provides her with such a reason. The reason why Kantian- rather than Humean constructivism can make this claim in a way that provides agents with *categorical* reason to be moral is because the Kantian account only needs basic *D*'s that each agent necessarily has (i.e. the preconditions of action), whereas each person-contingent *D* can be of equal moral relevance on the Humean account.<sup>170</sup> Kantian constructivism thus aims to reveal categorical moral reasons that apply to each agent, whereas on the Humean account, each agent ends up with a 'morality' of their own. If constructivism about moral reasons is true, it thus has to take the shape of Kantian constructivism. We can drop the assumption that moral constructivism works. This will now be established.

Consider a situation in which Albert wants to murder his spouse. He thinks that it is perfectly fine for people to murder each other under certain circumstances. He thinks that this particular scenario qualifies as a such a circumstance. Does Albert have reason to murder his spouse? In some sense, he does. If Albert happens to murder his spouse, "we not only have an explanation of his doing so [...] but we have such an explanation which is of the reason-for-action form".<sup>171</sup> However, provided that a Kantian transcendental argument is logically correct, there is also inescapable, categorical reason for Albert to refrain from murdering his

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 105.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Street, "What is Constructivism," 370.

<sup>171</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," 102.

spouse. If Albert would correctly assess the transcendental argument, he would have to come to the conclusion that he ought to respect his spouse's necessary conditions for agency. There is a way in which this reason is very similar to- though nevertheless different from his reason for murder. The transcendental reason is similar in the sense that it exists, like the murder-reason, as an upshot of coherent deliberation on Albert's *S*. The transcendental reason is different in the sense that it is non-optional, and unchangeable from Albert's perspective, regardless of whether he likes it or not. Albert may generate many different (contingent) beliefs and values throughout his life which lead him to adopt (or give up) his belief that there is reason to murder his spouse. The transcendental reason, however, remains a part of Albert's *S* for as long as he remains to be an agent. Regardless of whether Albert acknowledges or acts in accord with it, there will always be reason for him to respect the necessary conditions for action of others. Now, is this transcendental reason a moral reason? Well, what would it take to deny that a preference-independent, categorical reason to respect the agency of others should be understood as a moral reason? I see two ways of doing so. It must either be held that there are no reasons for action at all, or that moral reasons have to exist in a fundamentally different way than non-moral reasons. By embracing the first option, one says that there are no moral reasons on account of there being no reasons for action in the first place. This may be appealing for the skeptic, because if Kantian constructivism is right, a moral reason must be conceivable as a reason for action from the perspective of the agent in the same way as non-moral reasons. If this model of reasons is inaccurate, the model of moral reasons is inaccurate. The first option, however, makes no sense, because it is indisputably clear that we act for ends, which entails that we act for reasons. The second option, which seems like something Tropman is saying, is equally unattractive. We should turn the tables on Tropman on this point. Instead of it being constructivists who try to establish an ad hoc connection between our moral beliefs and moral truths, it is skeptics/realists like her who are ad hoc in supposing that moral reasons, of all possible reasons, need to bear some special relationship to us. The only motive, it seems, why one would think that moral reasons must be mind-independent anyway is that constructivism fails to harbor moral objectivity. The truth of Kantian constructivism would disprove that supposition. In addition to that: even if there were knowable mind-independent moral facts, they could only be categorically authoritative for us insofar we have to conceive of them as morally reason-giving. While an explanation of this sort is perfectly available for the Kantian constructivist with regard to mind-*dependent* moral facts, it is hard to see how realist moral facts could establish such inescapable normativity. The main point of this section is this. Since there is good reason to think that moral reasons,

like all other reasons, must be mind-dependent (because it would be ad hoc to suppose this is not the case), agency does not need to be valuable apart from an agent's first-person perspective in order for Kantian constructivism to come off the ground.

Unlike before, I am now in a position to claim that it is precisely *because* human psychology has evolutionary developed in the way it has that agency necessarily provides us with reason to be moral. It is perfectly conceivable that humans may have evolved as non-agents, or, perhaps, as agents which do not need to conceive of themselves as such. If this were the case, there would not have been reason for us to be moral at all. Because the existence of categorical moral truth ultimately depends on our psychological composition having evolved in such a way that it provides us with non-optional reason to be moral, the evolutionary contingency of agency should be considered a strength- rather than a weakness of Kantian constructivism.

I have not been concerned with providing a defense of the logical consistency of Kantian transcendental argumentation. Suffice it to say that I am particularly optimistic about Gewirth's attempt to infer the PGC from the generic conditions of action. An adequate defense of this theory, however, would take up another paper. What has been of importance here is that where both realism and Humean constructivism are epistemically troublesome positions in light of the evolutionary data, these problems do not apply to Kantian constructivism.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has covered a lot of ground. To begin with, it intended to show that the Darwinian dilemma successfully debunks the dominant positions in the evolutionary debunking debate: realism and Humean constructivism. In recognition of this, it has attempted to demonstrate that the method of Kantian constructivism can provide a more promising answer regarding morality in light of this dilemma. Kantian constructivism should therefore play a much more prominent part in the evolutionary debunking debate than it currently does.

In the absence of a discussion about the dominant positions in the evolutionary debunking debate, the objective of this thesis would not have come off the ground. If realism were likely to be true, Kantian constructivism would fail because it aims to do too little. If Humean constructivism were true, Kantian constructivism would be morally superfluous because it tries to achieve more than is necessary. It is by demonstrating that the dominant positions are untenable in light of the evolutionary data that this thesis sought to create an

opening for a Kantian stance in this debate.

If anything, I take this thesis to have shown that realism is not by any means a necessary condition for moral normativity being real in the relevant sense. Moral normativity, according to the Kantian constructivist, is both wholly mind-dependent, as well as categorically binding. While the Darwinian dilemma blocks realism and Humean constructivism, it is fully compatible with Kantian constructivism. By relying on the method of transcendental argumentation, Kantian constructivism does not need to make use of controversial metaphysical claims concerning the nature of moral reasons and their epistemic accessibility, while preserving the 'moral oomph' Humean constructivism lacks.

It would be an understatement to say that this thesis leaves a lot to be discussed about Kantian constructivism. Do we have duties to non-agents? (e.g. babies, non-human animals, nature); can a Kantian transcendental argument find tenable application in practice without losing its rational necessity?; can a Kantian transcendental argument be successfully established at all?; and so forth. This has been intentional. It is my hope that a demonstration of how well a Kantian constructivist account, unlike realism and Humean constructivism, may fare in the evolutionary debunking debate will blow new life in taking Kantian constructivism seriously as a meta-ethical theory that deserves extensive philosophical scrutiny.

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