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Need Evolutionary Debunking Arguments Rely on a Particular Metaphysical Construal of Evaluative Facts?

Christopher Foster

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NEED EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING ARGUMENTS RELY ON A PARTICULAR
METAPHYSICAL CONSTRUAL OF EVALUATIVE FACTS?

by

Christopher Foster

Under the Direction of Eddy Nahmias, PhD

ABSTRACT

Sharon Street's evolutionary debunking argument—her Darwinian Dilemma—is meant to challenge value realists to reconcile the evaluative attitudes we tend to hold, shaped as they are by evolution, with the attitude-independent evaluative facts that realists posit. Ramon Das argues that Street's argument relies on illicit metaphysical assumptions about evaluative facts, and that these assumptions beg the question against a particular form of value realism called naturalist realism. I argue that Street makes no such metaphysical assumptions, and that her argument requires no particular metaphysical construal of evaluative facts to work. I further argue that any objection of the kind Das raises—those that turn on the metaphysical underpinnings of evaluative facts—is unlikely to succeed against Street's Darwinian Dilemma.

INDEX WORDS: Value realism, Value antirealism, Evolutionary debunking argument, Sharon Street, Darwinian Dilemma

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METAPHYSICAL CONSTRUAL OF EVALUATIVE FACTS?

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1 INTRODUCTION

Like anyone else, I am variably pleased by, indifferent to, annoyed by, disappointed in, or just plain horrified by the behavior of other people. I wonder how they could be looking at the same world I am—sometimes from what seems to be a similar viewpoint—and yet respond so differently. I wonder, too, how one might encourage, convince, or even force some of those people to change their behavior. I take such concerns to be at the heart of the metaethical debate about whether some form of evaluative realism—the thesis that there are objective, attitude-independent evaluative facts—is true.

That different persons have at least somewhat different sets of values seems obvious, as does the fact that those differing values, along with differing circumstances and understandings of the world, lead those persons to engage in a wide variety of behaviors. Yet I doubt the usefulness of believing that my values and my behaviors are *right* or *good* (in any objective sense), and that at least some other values and behaviors are *wrong* or *bad*. Employing evaluative realism to explain human behavior seems to me to be distracting and misleading. If I believe that some corrupt politician is simply a *bad person*, I may be discouraged from looking for the full psychological, social, and political causes of her behavior, and thus my understanding of her behavior may suffer. If I want to change this politician's behavior, or reduce such corrupt behavior overall, I again doubt that the employment of value realism will be effective. Chances are that the politician either already believes her behavior to be wrong (but somehow justified), or is at least aware that the majority of other people believe it to be so. Realists will balk at this caricature, and rightly so; I use it to describe only briefly what I believe is at stake in the debate about evaluative realism, and explain part of why I defend evaluative antirealism.

On its own, evaluative realism is something of a toothless claim. The thesis isn't worth much unless realists explain how we can know what the evaluative facts are, or at least how we would know we are making progress toward the evaluative facts. Evolutionary debunking arguments (EDAs)—Sharon Street's Darwinian Dilemma, for example—point to evidence that natural selection has had a significant effect on our evaluative psychology, challenging realists to explain the congruence between the evaluative facts that realists tend to defend and the evaluative attitudes that would have increased our ancestors' reproductive success. The key idea is that if evolutionary forces best explain the evaluative attitudes people hold (including any observed convergence among those attitudes), then the realists' purported evaluative facts seem superfluous. Parsimony, Street's argument goes, suggests evaluative antirealism (Street, 2006, 129).¹

Resistance to EDAs by evaluative realists has been significant, but inconclusive. Some argue that we don't know enough about the processes by which evolution has shaped our psychology to draw conclusions about the (non)existence of objective evaluative facts (Shafer-Landau, 2012). Others attempt to incorporate evolutionary influences into their explanations of objective evaluative facts (Enoch, 2010). In this essay, however, I turn to what is meant to be a new critique of EDAs, due to Ramon Das (2016). He examines four EDAs, objecting that each relies on implicit metaphysical assumptions about the nature of evaluative facts—assumptions which illicitly cut off realist options for explaining how we can know those evaluative facts. For the purposes of his project, Das adopts a form of naturalist realism—the position that there are objective evaluative facts, and that they supervene on natural facts—for it is this form of

¹ Evaluative antirealism has implications that many find disagreeable, including providing a foundation for an evaluative subjectivism that threatens to undermine at least one of the bases for moral responsibility. I do not take such implications to tell against the accuracy of the position.

evaluative realism that he thinks is given short shrift by EDAs. Das concludes that the argumentative force of the EDAs he examines is due largely to these illicit metaphysical assumptions, and not to any epistemological worries raised by an evolutionary explanation of our evaluative attitudes. In this essay I will focus on one of Das's targeted EDAs—Sharon Street's Darwinian Dilemma (2006)—arguing that once her full argument is brought to bear on the naturalist realist position, it is clear that no particular metaphysical construal of evaluative facts is required for her EDA to work, and that Das's objection can thus be dismissed. I will then argue that Das's failure suggests that any objection to Street that turns on the metaphysical underpinnings of evaluative facts is unlikely to succeed. My conclusion is that Street's EDA is successful at putting pressure on all forms of evaluative realism, including naturalist realism, leaving these positions just that much more difficult to defend.

2 STREET'S DARWINIAN DILEMMA AND THE NATURALIST REALIST RESPONSE

Natural selection can explain why we hold (at least some of) the evaluative attitudes we do: they influence our behavior in ways that are likely to have promoted our reproductive success.² We tend to protect rather than neglect our young, we tend to repay kindness with kindness, and we tend to seek punishment against those who cheat us. Those who didn't share these evaluative attitudes, our best scientific explanation goes, were less likely to have descendants, and that is why we observe a cross-cultural convergence toward such attitudes today. Street observes that “we can expect there to have been overwhelming [selective] pressure in the direction of making

² Street and Das both use the terms ‘evaluative attitudes,’ ‘evaluative judgments,’ and ‘evaluative beliefs’ synonymously. Nothing in either Street's or Das's essay turns on which term is used, and the same is true for my essay. I will refer consistently to evaluative attitudes. Likewise, both Street and Das use the terms ‘evaluative truths’ and ‘evaluative facts’ synonymously. I will refer consistently to evaluative facts.

those evaluative judgements which tended to promote reproductive success (such as the judgement that one's life is valuable), and against making those evaluative judgements which tended to decrease reproductive success (such as the judgement that one should attack one's offspring)" (2006, 114-5). Notably absent in this evolutionary account of our most commonly held evaluative attitudes is reference to the realist's attitude-independent evaluative facts. It is not, on Street's account, valuable to care for one's offspring unless one actually finds it appealing—that is, if one holds the appropriate evaluative attitudes. If I were to value neglecting my offspring instead, then *that* is what would be valuable to me—I cannot be objectively wrong about caring for or neglecting my offspring.³ This is the basic metaethical constructivist position.⁴

Street argues that realist theories of value—which she defines as those whose central claim is that “there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes” (Street 2006, 110)—are incompatible with an evolutionary account of value of the kind I sketched above.⁵ The evaluative realist, according to Street's “Darwinian Dilemma,” must say either that: (1) evolution *has not* steered us toward the evaluative facts; or that (2) evolution *has* steered us toward the evaluative facts. On (1), evolution is insensitive to the evaluative facts, so if we accept that evolution has had a strong influence on our evaluative

³ Though I may be wrong in relation to one of my more deeply held values. For example, if my most deeply held value is the survival of my offspring and I happen to believe that neglecting my offspring will improve their chances of survival, then I might come to value neglecting my offspring. One might say that I am mistaken in my belief that neglecting my offspring will improve their chances of survival. If that is true, then I could be said to be wrong in my valuing neglecting my offspring, but only in relation to my more deeply held value of the survival of my offspring.

⁴ See Street's “What is constructivism in ethics and metaethics?” (2010).

⁵ It is vital not to confound Street's phrase “independently of all our evaluative attitudes” with the common shorthand “mind-independent.” Naturalist realists, for example, hold that evaluative truths are not *mind*-independent, and yet that they are still objective—they depend in no way on our evaluative attitudes. Such theories are targeted by Street's EDA just as much as theories that posit mind-independent evaluative truths.

attitudes, then there is no reason to think the attitudes we tend to hold correspond to the evaluative facts:

On this view, allowing our evaluative judgements to be shaped by evolutionary influences is analogous to setting out for Bermuda and letting the course of your boat be determined by the wind and tides: just as the push of the wind and tides on your boat has nothing to do with where you want to go, so the historical push of natural selection on the content of our evaluative judgements has nothing to do with evaluative truth. (Street, 2006, 121)

Realists tend not to argue for the existence of evaluative facts that are completely aside from our held evaluative attitudes. Therefore, if a realist chooses (1), they will need to explain what guides us toward the evaluative facts. Here the realist might suggest that our capacity for rational reflection could overcome evolutionary influence and guide us toward the evaluative facts. Over time, the story goes, we cull the evaluative attitudes our reason tells us are false, and replace them with attitudes that are hopefully a little closer to the evaluative facts. Yet, as Street points out, rational reflection “must always proceed from some evaluative standpoint; it must work from some evaluative premises; it must treat some evaluative judgements as fixed, if only for the time being, as the assessment of other evaluative judgements is undertaken” (Street, 2006, 124). Since whatever evaluative attitudes one chooses as fixed must themselves have been influenced by evolution, using them to guide one’s rational reflection will only yield results that are also influenced by evolution. Enoch, for example, posits “survival is good” as a fixed evaluative attitude that one may use, along with rational reflection, to determine other (objectively true, let us not forget) evaluative attitudes (2010, 430). Street’s point is that one cannot start with an evaluative attitude so obviously influenced by evolution as “survival is good” and then say that the other evaluative attitudes one generates are not themselves influenced by evolution. If this picture is right, then rational reflection, Street argues, cannot guide our evaluative attitudes away from evolutionary influence and toward the evaluative facts (Street, 2006, 124).

If the realist accepts (2)—that evolution *has* steered us toward the evaluative facts—she must explain why those among our ancestors whose evaluative attitudes tracked the evaluative facts would have greater reproductive success than those whose attitudes did not track the evaluative facts. Street grants, provisionally, the realist’s main claim: that there are evaluative facts that hold independently of our evaluative attitudes. The challenge the Darwinian Dilemma poses is thus not meant to be metaphysical, but epistemological: it is meant to put pressure on the realist to explain how we could know which of our evaluative attitudes match the evaluative facts, or even whether we are moving closer to the evaluative facts.

This challenge, of course, is nothing new for the evaluative realist. What EDAs such as Street’s bring to the table is that they narrow the conceptual space within which the realist must work. The likely implausibility of such explanations, on Street’s view, comes from the fact that the realist must argue that our ancestors had greater reproductive success *because their evaluative attitudes tracked the evaluative facts*, and not because those attitudes materially helped them survive and reproduce. Here is why. Street’s position is that the reason we see today the commonly-held evaluative attitudes that we do is that those are the attitudes that improved our reproductive success—those who held different evaluative attitudes would have tended not to successfully reproduce. If the realist says, for example, that holding certain attitudes increased our reproductive success, *and also those attitudes happen to correspond with the evaluative facts*, then it would seem that is essentially Street’s position with the amendment that there are evaluative facts, and that particular evaluative attitudes correspond with those facts. *If* Street’s evolutionary account can explain the evaluative attitudes we tend to have, without reference to any evaluative facts (and thus without requiring any explanation of how we might come to know those evaluative facts), then it would seem the realist’s account is at a disadvantage in terms of

parsimony, for evaluative facts do not seem to be playing an integral explanatory role. It is worth noting that even an unchallenged EDA would not *disprove* evaluative realism (perhaps nothing can)—Street’s conceit is only that antirealist theories of value do not struggle with the Darwinian Dilemma in the way that realist theories do. Without a satisfactory explanation of how we can know the evaluative facts, the realist position loses what would seem to be an important advantage over competing metaethical positions: the potential to resolve moral disputes by providing a way to know which of competing evaluative attitudes is correct.

Realist responses to the Darwinian Dilemma are of two main types: attempts to delegitimize the challenge Street poses and attempts to answer that challenge. An example of the first type is the claim that for EDAs to operate as advertised, *all* our evaluative attitudes must be shown to be adaptive, since the prevalence of attitudes that appear to be non-adaptive might be best explained by reference to evaluative facts (Shafer-Landau 2012). For example, let’s say I donate to charity because I value anonymously helping faraway strangers. This behavior and its associated evaluative attitudes are not obviously adaptive. It is possible, the argument goes, that I adopted those evaluative attitudes—and thus broke away from evolutionary influence—because of my ability to track some evaluative truth (perhaps that it is good to help others, and especially so when I have the means to do so easily). Another attempt to delegitimize EDAs is the argument that if EDAs debunk our knowledge of response-independent evaluative facts, they may *also* debunk philosophical, mathematical, and even perceptual knowledge (Enoch, 2010; Shafer-Landau, 2012; Das, 2016).⁶ While such concerns must be addressed by evolutionary debunkers, I mention them here mainly to provide context. Of more direct relevance to this essay are realists’

⁶ If realists pursue this tack in earnest, they may find their antirealist opponents all too willing to abandon the *objective* truth of even perceptual knowledge. Street flirts with this conclusion in her 2009 essay, “Evolution and the normativity of epistemic reasons.”

attempts to answer the challenge of the Darwinian Dilemma directly—and in particular, the naturalist realists’ prospects for doing so. I will ultimately argue that Das’s objection to Street does not improve them.

3 DAS’S DEFINITION OF NATURALIST REALISM

Das claims that Street’s Darwinian Dilemma contains question-begging metaphysical assumptions about the nature of evaluative facts. He further argues that Street relies on these assumptions to defeat naturalist realism by declaring the position not to be genuinely realist. I will argue that Das misunderstands Street’s EDA and consequently underestimates its force against the naturalist realist position. To get there, I’ll first need to explain the naturalist realist position as Das sees it, explain why Street thinks the naturalist realist position cannot answer her EDA, and then explain why Das thinks Street is wrong. In order to avoid begging the question against the naturalist realist (which is the basis of Das’s objection to Street), it is important that I describe the position as accurately as I can. It is my hope that this exercise will yield a definition of the naturalist realist position in its strongest form. If I can show that Street’s EDA answers this version of naturalist realism, then her EDA can be taken to answer any version of evaluative realism that shares its features.⁷

Das (2016) discusses several different versions of what he calls “moral naturalism,” but we are concerned with the version that he claims Street does not treat fairly. Das says that he intends to argue that Street “effectively denies that evaluative facts, realistically construed, could nomologically supervene on natural facts” (Das, 431). The position that Das claims Street denies

⁷ Das’s complaint is that Street’s illicit metaphysical assumptions have excluded naturalist realism as a contender to defeat her EDA. My main claim is that Das is wrong, and that Street does give naturalist realism a chance. While I explain in sections 7 and 8 why Street thinks Das’s naturalist realism fails against her Darwinian Dilemma, it is not the aim of this essay to fully defend that part of her argument.

is genuinely realist is the position that Das adopts. On this version of naturalist realism, the main claims are that attitude-independent evaluative facts exist, and that they nomologically supervene on natural facts. What does it mean for an evaluative fact to be attitude-independent? First, we mustn't take attitude-independence to mean that evaluative facts exist independently of the existence of creatures capable of evaluating the scenarios to which the evaluative facts pertain. That is, naturalist realists aren't committed to the claim that evaluative facts would exist without humans. Instead, attitude-independence means that the evaluative facts exist regardless of any particular person's attitudes. The evaluative facts are, in this sense, objective, and thus one can be right or wrong about them.

These evaluative facts, according to the naturalist realist, supervene on natural facts. Supervenience is itself the subject of some debate, but we can mostly set this aside by focusing only on the features of supervenience relevant to the naturalist realist position. Street describes the naturalist realist position as one that "holds that evaluative facts are identical with or constituted by (certain) natural facts" (2006, 112). Street does not use the word "supervenient," but I take her phrasing here to stand in its place. Das seems to do the same. While he takes issue with her construal of the precise metaphysical nature of the identity of evaluative facts and natural facts (or the constitution of the former by the latter), Das does not argue with the depiction I've just quoted, nor does he call attention to the fact that Street does not specifically use the word "supervenient." Das adds, however, citing Jackson (1998), that supervenience may be understood as the idea that "there can be no change in the supervenient moral facts without a change in the subvenient natural facts" (Das, 431). I will return to this construal of supervenience below, as it is central to why Das thinks Street doesn't give naturalist realism a fair shake. Finally, because he is interested in the force of Street's argument against Cornell realists (of

which Sturgeon is one), Das adds two features to the naturalist realist position from Sturgeon (1985): “(1) that the exact nature of the identity between moral facts and natural facts remains largely unknown; and (2) that in trying to determine this identity, we have no alternative but to make use of our ‘best moral theory, together with our best theory of the rest of the world’” (Das, 431). Street is aware of these features herself, as she cites them elsewhere in (2006, 139), though Das seems to think that Street has misunderstood or overlooked them.

Having considered the relevant features of supervenience, let’s consider the role of natural facts in this discussion. We already know that naturalist realists believe that some natural facts, but not others, are subvenient to the evaluative facts. We also know that Das acknowledges that the only way to determine which natural facts are subvenient to the evaluative facts is to use our “best moral theory.” Since agreement on which moral theory is best may be difficult to come by, naturalist realists in the meantime might do well to consider sketching out at least one further detail of their position: the group of natural facts which are *candidates* for subvenience under the evaluative facts. Specifically, we may wonder whether the candidate natural facts include facts about human psychology generally, psychological facts about particular humans, both, or neither. My counterarguments against Das do not turn on this question, yet I find it curious that he does not give a careful answer.⁸ Sturgeon comes closer than Das, referring to our “best theory of the rest of the world”—which must include human psychology—and suggesting that the study of human psychology as it relates to various moral theories might yield the identities of natural facts that correspond to the evaluative facts (Sturgeon, 212). However, Sturgeon is silent, as far as I can determine, on whether specific human psychologies—and their specific evaluative attitudes—might play some (non-causal) role in the naturalist realist story. Das, as mentioned,

⁸ Perhaps Das is trying to remain as inclusive as he can of different versions of naturalist realism.

quotes Sturgeon, and so we might imagine that Das shares Sturgeon's views on this matter. However, Das also argues, we'll see shortly, that "our having the evaluative attitudes we do depends on the evaluative facts, which in turn depend upon (or are identical with) the natural facts" (Das, 432). This suggests that for Das, our evaluative attitudes (and the psychologies in which those attitudes are contained) are *not* candidates for the natural facts on which the evaluative facts are supervenient (since the natural facts come earlier in Das's explanatory chain than our evaluative attitudes).⁹ This position, if I'm getting Das right, is surprising considering that, in attempting to answer the Darwinian Dilemma, Das is trying to show that naturalist realism fits well with what science can tell us about evolution. On the other hand, if the evaluative facts are meant to be attitude-independent, perhaps the subvenient natural facts must also be attitude-independent—that is, they could not be facts about the *contents* of our specific attitudes. The upshot is that since Das doesn't discuss whether the candidate natural facts include facts about human psychology, we may safely set aside such considerations in our examination of his position.

The important features of the naturalist realist position, per Das, are:

1. Attitude-independent evaluative facts exist (i.e., evaluative realism is true).
2. The evaluative facts supervene upon—are identical to or are constituted by—(certain) natural facts. There can thus be no change in the evaluative facts without a corresponding change in the natural facts (i.e., naturalism is true).
3. The nature of the supervenience relation between the evaluative facts and the natural facts is (at least for now) unknown.

⁹ I suppose Das could argue that natural facts about the general nature of our evaluative attitudes are among the natural facts that play a role in determining the evaluative facts, and that the *content* of our evaluative attitudes is then determined by those evaluative facts. If he has this in mind, he does not discuss it.

4. Our best (and perhaps only) tools for determining the nature of this supervenience relation are our “best moral theory” and our “best theory of the rest of the world.”

With a clearer definition of the naturalist realist position in hand, I will now explain why Street thinks the position cannot answer her Darwinian Dilemma.

4 STREET’S ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALIST REALISM

(PART ONE OF TWO)

Recall that Street’s Darwinian Dilemma (2006) offers the realist two unsavory options: Either (1) evolution *has not* steered us toward the evaluative facts, and thus our evaluative attitudes, having been affected by evolution, are unlikely to track the evaluative facts; or (2) evolution *has* steered us toward the evaluative facts, in which case the realist must explain why those persons whose evaluative attitudes tracked the evaluative facts would have had greater reproductive success (*due to their fact-tracking*) than those whose attitudes did not track the evaluative facts. Of the theories of value that are commonly *called* realist, the two horns of Street’s dilemma target many of them, but not all. Street takes special care to explain how at least one construal of the naturalist realist (she calls it value naturalist) position fares against her EDA:

Suppose the value naturalist takes the following view. Given that we have the evaluative attitudes we do, evaluative facts are identical with natural facts N. But if we had possessed a completely different set of evaluative attitudes, the evaluative facts would have been identical with the very different natural facts M. Such a view does not count as genuinely realist in my taxonomy, for such a view makes it dependent on our evaluative attitudes *which* natural facts evaluative facts are identical with. (Street, 2006, 136)¹⁰

¹⁰ Note that if we count our evaluative attitudes, dependent as they are on our psychology, as candidates for the natural facts upon which the evaluative facts depend, then this construal of naturalist realism is consistent with the formulation that there can be no change in the evaluative facts without a change in the natural facts. However, on this construal, the naturalist realist position is similar in many respects to Street’s brand of metaethical constructivism, and in any case, does not count as realist on Street’s definition.

Street supplies this version of naturalist realism in order to demonstrate that it is not genuinely realist on her definition: “*genuinely realist versions of value naturalism* hold that *which* natural facts evaluative facts are identical with is independent of all our evaluative attitudes” (Street, 2006, 139). The version of naturalist realism just described is thus not a target of the two horns of her dilemma. Street goes on to say, “Genuinely realist versions of value naturalism are vulnerable to the Darwinian Dilemma” (Street, 2006, 139). In what follows, it may be helpful to think of Street’s dilemma as a trilemma: The evaluative realist must answer one horn of the dilemma *or* the other *or* their position isn’t realist on Street’s definition. There may of course be metaethical positions that some philosophers call realist that nonetheless do not qualify as such on Street’s definition. Those philosophers may take Street to task for her definition of realism if they like, but it is important to note that this is not Das’s aim. He does not dispute Street’s definition of realism, but, as we will soon see, her construal of naturalist realism.

5 DAS CRIES FOUL

Street’s construal of one version of naturalist realism above (that she thinks is not genuinely realist) describes the evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relation as varying with our evaluative attitudes. Yet in our compiled list of what Das considers to be important features of the naturalist realist position, there is no mention of evaluative attitudes causally determining the identities of evaluative facts with natural facts. In fact, according to feature 3, “The nature of the supervenience relation between the evaluative facts and the natural facts is (at least for now) unknown.” Das makes much of Street’s construal of the naturalist realist position and how it differs from his (and Sturgeon’s): “Street makes use...of a familiar realist criterion—mind (or attitude) independence—but in an illegitimate way that effectively denies the possibility that the

evaluative could nomologically supervene upon the natural or non-evaluative” (Das, 432). Street’s construal of naturalist realism above has the evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relations depend directly upon our evaluative attitudes. That is, if we were to have different attitudes, then different natural facts would be the subvenient basis for the evaluative facts, and these different evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relations would result in different evaluative facts. For example, if I held the evaluative attitude that some particular shade of blue is the noblest color, then my holding that attitude would determine which natural facts were the subvenient basis for the evaluative facts (perhaps facts about certain wavelengths of light and my emotional reaction to those wavelengths), and thus what the evaluative facts would be. Yet if I held a different evaluative attitude—such that some shade of red is the noblest color—then a different set of natural facts would be the subvenient basis for the evaluative facts. Das wants to tell a different story (one he takes to be genuinely realist): “Roughly, our having the evaluative attitudes we do depends on the evaluative facts, which in turn depend upon (or are identical with) the natural facts” (Das, 432). By assuming that the evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relations depend on our evaluative attitudes, Das continues, Street “ignores the possibility that the direction of metaphysical dependence runs in the opposite direction: from our evaluative attitudes, via the evaluative facts, onto the natural facts” (Das, 432). Das’s wording here strikes me as counterintuitive: he simply means to say that Street ignores the possibility that our evaluative attitudes are metaphysically dependent upon the evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relations. Das goes on to observe that since Street’s position

...apparently involves denying that robustly realist evaluative facts could nomologically supervene on natural facts, it seems reasonable to suppose that she is tacitly making a very strong metaphysical assumption about the nature of the evaluative, hence the nature of the moral. Specifically, she seems to be tacitly assuming that on any robustly realist account of evaluative facts, such facts would have to be utterly different from or non-continuous with natural facts. (Das, 432)

If Das's reading of Street is right, then he seems to have demonstrated that her EDA does rely on an illicit metaphysical assumption in order to deal with at least one evaluative realist account: the naturalist realist position as Das describes it. Having framed Street's EDA as a trilemma, we can put Das's complaint more precisely: Street relies on an illicit metaphysical assumption to send one kind of naturalist realism—a strong contender, on Das's view, to escape both of the first two horns of her trilemma—to the third horn by branding the view as not genuinely realist. If Das's naturalist realist *is* genuinely realist, then it deserves its chance to defeat the Darwinian Dilemma. The problem for Das is that he misunderstands Street's view. As I'll explain in the next section, not only does Street not rely on any illicit metaphysical assumptions to handle Das's naturalist realism, she explicitly deals with a position much like the one he describes.

6 STREET'S ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALIST REALISM

(PART TWO OF TWO)

Street (2006) devotes a lengthy section to answering the naturalist realist (though again, she calls the position value naturalist). Her approach is first to distinguish between the versions of naturalist realism that are genuinely realist, and those that, according to her criteria, are not. One of those criteria, as I mentioned previously, is that the evaluative fact–natural fact identities, whatever they may be, must hold independently of our attitudes. Street then presents a version of naturalist realism wherein the evaluative fact–natural fact identities are determined by our attitudes (that is, if we were to have different evaluative attitudes, then the evaluative fact–natural fact identities would be different). Street presents this version of naturalist realism (as I mentioned) in order to demonstrate that it is not genuinely realist according to her criteria.

However, Street does not suggest that this analysis applies to naturalist realism as a whole—that is, Street does not assume that no version of naturalist realism is genuinely realist. In fact, she explicitly allows for a genuinely realist version of naturalist realism, and describes the fate of any such position: it faces one of the first two horns of (what I’ve called) Street’s trilemma. Das appears either not to have read the relevant parts of Street’s arguments, or not to have fully understood them. Street describes her criteria for a naturalist realist position that would be genuinely realist:

...in order to count as realist, a version of value naturalism must take the view that facts about natural-normative identities (in other words, facts about exactly which natural facts evaluative facts are identical with) are independent of our evaluative attitudes. On the kind of view I have in mind, evaluative facts are identical with natural facts N, and even if our evaluative attitudes had been entirely different, perhaps not tracking those evaluative/natural facts N at all, but instead tracking some very different natural facts M, the evaluative facts still would have been identical with natural facts N, and not natural facts M. (Street, 2006, 137)

Street does not deny “the possibility that the evaluative could nomologically supervene upon the natural or non-evaluative” (Das, 432); nor does she assume that “on any robustly realist account of evaluative facts, such facts would have to be utterly different from or non-continuous with natural facts” (Das, 432). If we return to the four important features of the naturalist realist position according to Das, we see that Street’s criteria comfortably accommodate the position he describes. Her criteria include (and furthermore demand) attitude-independent evaluative facts, thus accommodating feature 1. Those evaluative facts are “identical with” (shorthand for “identical with or constituted by”) some natural facts, thus accommodating feature 2. Finally, Street’s criteria do not demand that the realist describe the nature of the supervenience relation between the evaluative facts and the natural facts (other than that the relation must allow for attitude-independent evaluative facts), nor that the realist describe the tools by which he might begin to determine this relation, so features 3 and 4 are also allowed. Das should thus be satisfied that his version of naturalist realism is acknowledged by Street, and that she properly describes

the position as realist. Does any of this suggest that Das's naturalist realism succeeds (or fails) against Street's Darwinian Dilemma? No—it only shows that Street's EDA does in fact account for the position Das describes. However, recall that Das's objection to Street is that she “effectively denies the possibility that the evaluative could nomologically supervene upon the natural or non-evaluative” (Das, 432). I hope I have made it clear that Street does no such thing. It should also be clear that her EDA does not rely on illicit metaphysical assumptions about the nature of evaluative facts (at least no assumptions of the kind Das describes). I conclude that once Street's full position on naturalist realism is taken into account, Das's objection can be dismissed.

7 HOW DOES DAS'S NATURALIST REALISM FARE AGAINST THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA?

Now that we understand that Das's naturalist realism is accommodated by Street's EDA, we can determine how the position fares. Recall the position's features: attitude-independent evaluative facts exist, and they have some supervenience relation to (certain) natural facts. There can be no change in the evaluative facts without a corresponding change in the natural facts, and while the nature of the evaluative fact–natural fact supervenience relation is (for now) unknown, we may use our “best moral theory” and our “best theory of the rest of the world” to attempt to determine those identities. Das is convinced that Street dispenses with his position by calling it antirealist (an assessment which I've just argued is incorrect), and thus he does not consider how his naturalist realism would fare against either of the first two horns of Street's trilemma. We may subject his naturalist realism to Street's EDA on his behalf, but we will need to consider two

possibilities: The naturalist realist must either use a moral theory to begin filling out some of the evaluative fact–natural fact identities (thus making the naturalist realist position substantive), or choose not to.

I will address the second option in the next section. Street addresses the first option:

The genuinely realist value naturalist posits that there are *independent facts about natural-normative identities*. But the value naturalist also holds that in trying to figure out what those identities are, we will have to rely very heavily on our existing evaluative judgements. Yet, as we have seen, those evaluative judgements have been tremendously influenced by Darwinian selective pressures. And so the question arises: what is the relation between evolutionary influences on our evaluative judgements, on the one hand, and the independent truths about natural-normative identities posited by the realist, on the other? (Street, 2006, 140)

The naturalist realist will have to rely on his evaluative attitudes when attempting to determine which evaluative fact–natural fact identities are the right ones, even if that amounts to relying on those attitudes to choose and apply some moral theory to get the job done. At that point, the attitudes the naturalist realist relies upon would themselves be subject to the first two horns of Street’s trilemma. That is, attempting to apply a moral theory to determine the evaluative facts ultimately falters for the same reason that attempting to apply rational reflection falters. A moral theory chosen according to one’s evaluative attitudes cannot escape evolutionary influence if those evaluative attitudes are influenced by evolution. Or so Street’s argument goes. The application of Street’s EDA that I’ve just described is the standard application—that is, once we work past Das’s complaint that his naturalist realism is treated unfairly, there is nothing special about his position. It is not my intention to fully defend Street’s EDA—only to show that she accommodates positions such as Das’s without relying on illicit metaphysical assumptions.

8 DOES THE NATURALIST REALIST HAVE TO IDENTIFY THE EVALUATIVE FACTS?

Das might object that he needn't spell out which natural facts are the subvenient basis for the evaluative facts—this is the second option in the preceding section.¹¹ Such a position might look something like a second-order ethical (metaethical) position with a question mark where its first-order ethical contents would normally be. In plainer language, Das might say that there are some evaluative facts that have a supervenience relation with some natural facts, and that while he may have some ideas about which natural facts those are (and what the resulting evaluative facts might be), he needn't spell out those ideas as part of a defense of naturalist realism as a metaethical theory. This is a perfectly reasonable position, and one that is arguably realist on Street's definition, for Das would be positing attitude-independent evaluative facts while simply declining to propose what those facts are.

However, this would not be a substantive ethical theory. If the theory says nothing about which natural facts are the subvenient basis for the evaluative facts, then it would seem that it says nothing about what is, in fact, right and wrong. Lacking any specific evaluative facts, it is not a target of Street's Darwinian Dilemma—but neither can it be said to have escaped her Dilemma. Street's challenge to the realist, remember, is to explain the coincidence of our evaluative attitudes with the realist's posited evaluative facts in a way that accounts for the influence of evolutionary forces. She is thus arguing that a scientific theory (evolution) says something about our first-order ethics (our evaluative attitudes are those that have tended to promote reproductive success), which in turn suggests something about our metaethics (that at the very least evaluative antirealism is easier to square with evolution and our first-order ethics

¹¹ Considering that Das has not spelled out which natural facts are subvenient under the evaluative facts, we might guess that he has such an approach in mind.

than evaluative realism is). “The challenge for realist theories of value is to explain the relation between...evolutionary influences on our evaluative attitudes, on the one hand, and the independent evaluative truths that realism posits, on the other” (Street, 2006, 109). The realist cannot accept Street’s challenge unless he identifies at least some of those independent evaluative truths. Whenever Das (or whomever) is ready to do so—that is, the moment any first-order ethical contents are revealed—it will be subject to Street’s EDA.

9 CONCLUSION: DAS’S FAILURE IS INSTRUCTIVE

Das argues that Street, by making illicit metaphysical assumptions, unfairly deemed naturalist realist positions such as his not to be genuinely realist. I’ve shown that Street makes no such metaphysical assumptions, and can in fact account for Das’s brand of naturalist realism. Das’s failure is instructive, however, because it suggests that *any* objection to Street’s EDA that turns on the metaphysical underpinnings of evaluative facts is likely to fail. The reason is that Street not only (provisionally) grants to her realist opponents that evaluative facts exist, she allows her opponents to posit any sort of metaphysical basis for those facts that they like. Street asks for three things from a value realist who wishes to accept the challenge of her Darwinian Dilemma: (1) The theory of value must be genuinely realist—that is, it must posit attitude-independent evaluative facts. (2) The theory’s proponent must either deny or assert a relation between the posited evaluative facts on the one hand, and the evolutionary forces that have influenced our evaluative attitudes on the other. (3) By combining 1 and 2, the theorist should at least aim to produce an explanation of our observed evaluative attitudes that is more plausible

than the evolutionary (constructivist and antirealist) account that Street offers.¹² Other than these three constraints, the field is wide open for naturalist realists and non-naturalist realists alike.

There are numerous potential vulnerabilities in Street's argument. We may find that evolution does not function in the way she needs it to for her EDA to succeed. One could argue that her definition of realism is too restrictive. One might show (as I previously mentioned) that her EDA debunks some kind of knowledge that is necessary for the EDA to work, and thus show that the EDA is self-defeating.¹³ Finally, one might simply decide that a given realist theory of value more plausibly accounts for our evaluative attitudes than Street's evolutionary account. I have merely argued that Street is not vulnerable to the charge that she illicitly forbids viable challengers to her Darwinian Dilemma by prohibiting any particular metaphysical configuration of the evaluative facts. Street targets realist theories of value, and in her examples, she focuses on theories with certain kinds of metaphysical foundations (the kinds that tend to be the bases of realist theories of value). However, the force of her attack comes not from poking at the metaphysical foundations of those theories, but from asking the realist to give an explanation of the evaluative facts—whatever their metaphysical construal—that accounts for the influence evolution seems to have had on our evaluative attitudes.

I doubt very seriously that any dyed-in-the-wool evaluative realist will be convinced by the Darwinian Dilemma to let go of his evaluative facts. However, I would not take the number of

¹² “According to metaethical constructivism, there are no facts about what is valuable apart from facts about a certain point of view on the world and what is entailed from within that point of view. Normative truth, according to the constructivist, does not outrun what follows from within the evaluative standpoint, but rather consists in whatever is entailed from within it” (Street, 2010, 371). Such a position sidesteps the Darwinian Dilemma because it posits no evaluative facts.

¹³ For example, de Cruz et al. argue that evolutionary accounts “according to which human cognitive capacities are so deeply biased and defective that knowledge is ruled out are self-undermining. There would be no good reason to assume that scientific theories are justified, or that philosophical reflection and argumentation (such as an EDA) provides us with sound conceptual knowledge” (de Cruz et al., 525). Sterpetti (2015) offers resistance to the argument that EDAs are self-defeating.

openly defecting realists to be the appropriate measure of Street's success. Her EDA, along with several underwhelming attempts to disarm or defeat it (Copp, 2008; Enoch, 2010; Das, 2016), will serve as signposts to those who are coming of age in an increasingly chaotic world in which the sciences are telling us more about ourselves than we'd perhaps like to know. Evaluative realism may offer comfortable answers, but I suspect that the intellectual leaders of the coming generations will not be seeking such comfort. If we really are going to figure out how to live with one another, the first step may be to let go of the idea that *we* are right and *they* are not.

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