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THE NATURALIZATION OF MORALITY

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ABSTRACT

In 1859, Charles Darwin released the *Origin of Species* and inaugurated a revolution in thought of Copernican proportions. While his findings were exclusively scientific, his contemporaries did not hesitate to extrapolate the consequences of Natural Selection into nearly every facet of human existence. Unfortunately, the implications of evolution did not bode well for all disciplines. Tremendous resistance came from the Church. In opposition to divine inspiration, Darwinian Selection suggested the haphazard, organic development not only of our cognitive faculties, but also of our moral sense. This was profoundly unsettling for many, since it required a dramatic reevaluation of man's cosmic significance. Yet, for others, it represented an opportunity to challenge the hegemony of presiding social, religious, and political institutions. The objective of my thesis is to demonstrate that, despite continued opposition from various religious authorities, morality has essentially been naturalized as a result of Darwin's theory. Scientifically, psychologically, and pragmatically concerned, the study of ethics has become an investigation into our fundamental nature, devoid of appeals to the supernatural or divine. The following chapters detail the development of this transition, beginning with the scientific perspective, progressing to the psychological aspect, and concluding with the pragmatic viewpoint. A brief summary of each chapter is included below:

Chapter 1 - The Darwinian Epoch: This chapter explores the scientific foundation that formed the necessary and sufficient conditions for Darwin's discovery of Natural Selection. It also explains Natural Selection and its implications for morality as presented in Darwin's *Descent of Man*. This section concludes with a discussion of naturalized morality from a scientific perspective.

Chapter 2 – The Etiology of Morality: In the wake of Darwinian evolution, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and psychologist Sigmund Freud analyzed morality and religion from an etiological perspective. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche traced the development of 'good', 'bad', 'evil', and 'guilt' through history. Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion* and in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, evaluated religion from a psycho-analytic perspective. Separately, but concordantly, these two concluded that contemporary morality and religion were a hindrance to human progress.

Chapter 3 – Deliberate, Intelligent, and Religious Action: John Dewey, American pragmatic philosopher, continued the project initiated by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud in the social and political spheres. His philosophy was strongly representative of the pragmatic movement in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. His program promoted a practical and intelligent approach to improving the human condition. This chapter is dedicated to an analysis and critique of Dewey's concept of "intelligence," as well as its implications for religion.

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Chapter 1: The Darwinian Epoch

I. Introduction

The advent of Charles Darwin's theory of Natural Selection caused a sea change in scientific, political, and religious understanding that has yet to be fully realized even today. The applications and ramifications of this theory are still being explored, and the destabilizing effect it had on traditional political and religious institutions continues to afford sufficient fodder for debate. Yet, for all the controversy that surrounds the theory, we remain, to an unprecedented degree, the products of a Darwinian revolution.

For denizens of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine a world without evolution, a world orchestrated and attended to by a benevolent God, a world where "special creation," "divine inspiration," and "sin" were tangible and orthodox ideas. Today, we look with jaundiced eye at such seeming naïveté. But before Darwin and the radical advances in geology and cosmology that preceded him, science and religion were considered coincident. In fact, for centuries, natural philosophy or science was considered the handmaiden of theology, and it was not uncommon for members of the clergy to regard themselves both as men of God and as able scientists. They operated under the "two books" theory propounded by Sir Francis Bacon in 1605:

Our savior saith, "You err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"; laying before us two books or volumes to study, if we will be secured from error; first the scriptures, revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing his power; whereof the latter is a key unto the former: not only opening our understanding to conceive the true sense of the scriptures, by the general notion of reason and rules of speech; but chiefly opening our belief, in drawing us into a due meditation of the omnipotency of God, which is chiefly signed and engraven upon his works (God & Nature, 322)¹.

This compromise saved the practice of science by subsumption under religion. Because science as a discipline was not of sufficient standing to challenge the religious institutions of its time, Bacon and other scientists insisted that their work reinforced Church doctrine. The upshot of this compromise, however, was to give science its first solid foothold in the intellectual realm.

While Bacon believed that the word of God must be distinguished from the work of God, he insisted that "the latter is a key unto the former." He endeavored to liberate the practice science as much as possible while remaining ostensibly steadfast in his commitment to established religion. But the intimations of conflict were already present in his thoughts and words:

Let no man upon a weak conceit of sobriety or an ill applied moderation think or maintain, that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works, divinity or philosophy; but rather let

¹ Lindberg, David Charles, and Ronald L. Numbers. *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*. Berkeley: University of California, 1986. Print.

men endeavor an endless progress or proficiencie in both; only let men beware...that they do not unwisely mingle or confound these learnings together (God & Nature, 322).

The difficulty arose when men could no longer endeavor toward “an endless progress or proficiencie in both” without conscious compartmentalization of their beliefs. Gradually, the progress of science became ever more dependent upon its separation from religion, while the tenability of religion became ever more dependent upon the reconciliation of Church doctrine with scientific “truths.” In this fashion, the “Baconian Compromise,” which originally subordinated science to religion, led eventually to an inversion of this relationship.

With the release of the *Origin of Species* in 1859 and the *Descent of Man* in 1871, the questions of faith, God, and morality were questioned with renewed vigor. For many, reconciliation was no longer an option; it became a question of ultimate authority. And to an extent, this dichotomy persists today. On one hand, privileging science implies a host of seemingly unappealing assumptions about human nature and the development of morality. On the other hand, privileging religion, while it escapes a naturalistic account of morality, forces a commitment to faith over science. The objective of this chapter is to explore the foundation and implications of Natural Selection that inform this debate.

II. The Inversion of the Baconian Compromise

While Darwin’s theories represent a watershed moment in the history of science, they were not without significant precedent. Scientifically, advances in geology, biology, and cosmology provided the fodder for the theory of Natural Selection. Societally, the rise of a practice known as “higher criticism” cushioned the reception of the *Origin*. Together, these forces contributed to the inversion of the Baconian Compromise and set the stage for Darwinian evolution.

The first great challenge against the Church came from geology. In 1778, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) published the *Epochs of nature* in which he presented a hypothetical account of physical history. In this work, he proposed that the earth was the byproduct of a collision between a comet and the sun. Earth’s subsequent development was then divided into seven epochs, roughly based on cooling experiments conducted with iron, sandstone, marble, and glass. He estimated the first epoch at 2,936 years and all seven together at over three million years. This was substantially higher than the presiding Biblical figure of approximately four thousand years. Buffon also theorized that man was not coextensive with the history of earth, as suggested by Genesis. Instead, he proposed that earth was initially incapable of sustaining life due to extremely high temperatures. According to Buffon, aquatic life first appeared during the third epoch, terrestrial life during the fourth, and man in the seventh. While this theory did not directly contradict Scripture, it suggested an alternative interpretation of Genesis (*Science and Religion*, 236-7)².

Pierre-Simon, marquis de Laplace (1749-1827) shared Buffon’s drive to eliminate teleological explanations from physical science. Laplace concerned himself with the origins of the solar system and first posited a “solar atmosphere” that, by progressive condensation, cast off

² Brooke, John Hedley. "Visions of the Past: Religious Belief and the Historical Sciences." *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. 226-74. Print.

rings of material which later coalesced into planets. This is why, he explained, the planets rotate around the sun in the same direction that the sun revolves. In the fourth edition of his *Exposition du système du monde* (1813), Laplace incorporated Friedrich Wilhelm Herschel's theory that stars were the product of nebulae which condensed over vast periods of time. This theory further pushed back the moment of divine creation (*Science and Religion*, 238-9).

While Buffon and Laplace's theories gained prominence in geology and cosmology, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) argued for an evolutionary history of life based on his study of marine fossil shells. By organizing fossils chronologically, he demonstrated the apparent similarities between existing creatures and their ancestors. His analysis suggested that life progressed gradually, increasing steadily in complexity. Consequently, he proposed the "organic transformation" of species, which was driven by needs and habits. Moreover, humanity was not excluded from this picture. Lamarck believed that the physiology of the brain and nervous system, as opposed to the Christian "soul," were responsible for man's higher faculties. He also claimed that intelligence was the result of habit. Darwin would later share Lamarck's strict naturalism with respect to human affairs (*Science and Religion*, 241-3).

Continuing this train of thought and influencing Darwin directly was Charles Lyell (1797-1875), a British geologist. In his *Principles of Geology* (1830-3), Lyell advocated a renewed emphasis on deep geological history. He was preoccupied with causal sequences and endeavored to identify the successive states through which the earth had passed. By increasing time estimates, he argued that small gradual changes, instead of catastrophic events like the Biblical Flood, could explain the observed geological phenomena. He also maintained that fossil-bearing strata could be dated by reference to the amount of extant species they contained. Overall, Lyell figured prominently in the debate to liberate geology from religious cosmological interpretation and was considered by his contemporaries a secular hero of science (*Science and Religion*, 248-51).

Coinciding with these scientific theories was development of Biblical criticism. This movement began with Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), a Dutch and Jewish philosopher, who suggested that the Bible be read as a work of human authorship. Spinoza developed a monistic account of the universe in which God was represented by means of natural laws rather than divine interventions. David Hume (1711-1776), a renowned atheist, contributed to this movement by questioning the logical validity of "miracles." Later, the Hamburg professor H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768) went so far as to speculate that Christ's Resurrection was a fraud. Sixty years later, in 1835, David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) pursued this Biblical skepticism and published the critical work *Life of Jesus*. In his book, Strauss revealed numerous inconsistencies among the accounts of Jesus' life from the Gospels and advocated interpreting the Bible in light of its historical context. The result of higher criticism was a humanized Christ, divested of divine constitution and a reinterpretation of God's role in the universe (*Science and Religion*, 266-270).

By the time Darwin was born in 1808, the Baconian Compromise had already begun to disintegrate. Scientists vehemently fought for liberation from the influence of the Church while theologians struggled to maintain control over the interpretation of scientific discoveries. And while these debates continued for decades, the preconditions necessary for a measure of disinterested speculation had been fulfilled.

III. *Natural Selection*

When Darwin published the *Origin of Species* in 1859, he exploded both the scientific and religious scenes of his time, inciting heated debates within and between both communities. Natural Selection, while a simple and intuitive concept on the surface, had and continues to have significant and far reaching implications for science, religion, and ethics. Given its crucial role in defining the relationship between science and religion and its implications for morality, this section details the essential components of Natural Selection as presented in the *Origin*.

Darwin's theory of Natural Selection can be subdivided into three main components: (1) variation, (2) heritability, and (3) selective pressures. While all three of these components act simultaneously on a species, variation and inheritance logically precede selective pressures in the process of Natural Selection.

Natural Selection is predicated first and foremost on variation. Without variation, "selection" would make no sense. Interestingly, Darwin's rhetorical strategy in proving variation was demonstrative rather than argumentative. He appealed to common knowledge of variation in plants and animals under domestication and analogized this with nature at large. However, while Darwin asserted the existence of variation, he reached no conclusions as to its origin or scope. He wrote,

I believe that the conditions of life, from their action on the reproductive system, are so far of the highest importance as causing variability. I do not believe that variability is an inherent and necessary contingency, under all circumstances, with all organic beings, as some authors have thought. The effects of variability are modified by various degrees of inheritance and of reversion. Variability is governed by many unknown laws, more especially by that of correlation of growth. Something may be attributed to the direct action of the conditions of life. Something must be attributed to use and disuse. The final result is thus rendered infinitely complex (*Origin*, 50)³.

Despite his lack of certainty, Darwin conspicuously and consciously never implicated Divinity. Instead, he explained variation as a confluence of random and variable factors.

Heritability is the counterpart to variation; without heritability, "profitable variation" could not be accumulated. Conducting his studies well before the advent of modern genetics, Darwin had no comprehensive theory of heritability. He acknowledged that variations, profitable or otherwise, were not always inherited by subsequent generations and that many species often exhibit a tendency to reversion. Nonetheless, through his own studies of pigeons and barnacles and his interactions with breeders and breeding literature, he concluded that, on average, parents pass on many of their traits to their children.

The final component of Natural Selection is the selective pressures that drive the process. These pressures include competition between members of the same species, between varieties of the same species, and between the species themselves. In the struggle for existence, resources are limited and profitable variation is selectively advantaged. In Chapter III, "The Struggle for Existence," Darwin presented the clearest exposition of this principle:

³ Darwin, Charles, and David Quammen. *On the Origin of Species: The Illustrated Edition*. New York: Sterling, 2008. Print.

Owing to this struggle for life, any variation, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding if it be in any degree profitable to an individual of any species, in its infinitely complex relations to other beings and to external nature, will tend to the preservation of the individual, and will generally be inherited by its offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection (*Origin*, 75).

Complementing the power of Natural Selection and often subsumed under it is sexual selection. Sexual selection, Darwin remarked, "...depends, not on a struggle for existence, but on a struggle between the males for possession of the females; the result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring...Generally, the most vigorous males, those which are best fitted for their places in nature, will leave the most progeny" (*Origin*, 101-2). Thus, the theory of Natural Selection is composed essentially of variation, heritability, and selective pressure where selective forces include competition, limited resources, sexual selection, and climate.

IV. The Moral Sense

In the *Origin*, the onus was on Darwin to prove the superiority of Natural Selection to Intelligent Design. For years, complex and seemingly perfect structures like the eye and honeycomb were thought to be products of divine artistry. However, Darwin demonstrated that these phenomena could be accounted for by the assiduous application of Natural Selection over large expanses of time. Hence, the strongest arguments for Intelligent Design became the meritorious badges of Natural Selection. Yet, *prima facie*, these debates were still confined to the biological realm.

To many of his contemporaries, the intellectual capacities of man were of a distinct class, separate from our corporeal nature. Moral sense and Reason were nearly unimpeachable faculties, divine in origin and operation. Attempting to explain such exalted features through any sort of biological or environmental process was considered base, if not altogether blasphemous. Yet Darwin hazarded just such a proposition in *The Descent of Man*. He argued that morality and intelligence could be explained, and even better understood through the evolutionary process. The privilege given to such faculties, he claimed, was merely an indication of our inherent bias. "If man had not been his own classifier," he wrote, "he would never have thought of founding a separate order for his own reception" (*Descent*, 155)⁴.

Pregnant in the title of this work, *The Descent of Man*, are two claims: (1) man was not divinely inspired and (2) man has evolved from an ancient progenitor, where the latter is the key unto the former. Similar to the methodical approach used in the *Origin*, Darwin subjected man to the same historical and analogical analyses that he did the eye and honeycomb. Determining our origin, he believed, would also provide valuable insights into the operations of our cognitive faculties. He was so confident in this endeavor that on the third page of the introduction, he crowed, "It has often and confidently been asserted, that man's origin can never be known: but

⁴ Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998. Print.

ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science” (*Descent*, 3).

The majority of the *Descent* is dedicated to the corroborating the claim that man has descended from a lower form. In depth, he labored to explain the significance of homologous structures, rudimentary structures, and miscellaneous points of correspondence between humans and animals, as well as various comparisons between the mental traits exhibited by each. By the final chapter, he felt confident in asserting the validity of his theory. He declared,

The main conclusion here arrived at, and now held by many naturalists who are well competent to form a sound judgment, is that man is descended from some less highly organized form. The grounds upon which this conclusion rests will never be shaken, for the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance,-- the rudiments which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable,-- are facts which cannot be disputed (*Descent*, 629).

While this conclusion was certainly scandalous, as it clearly impugned humanity’s divine origin, his critics were more concerned with its particular religious and moral implications. But Darwin made no secret of those either. In fact, he constructed an entire theory of morality premised on the idea that man had evolved from a less advanced ancestor.

The first tenet of Darwin’s moral theory was that man had developed through Natural Selection a variety of “moral instincts.” The most rudimentary of these moral instincts were the social instincts. And these instincts, he believed, were an extension of parental and filial relationships. On this subject, he wrote,

It has often been assumed that animals were in the first place rendered social, and that they feel as a consequence uncomfortable when separated from each other, and comfortable whilst together; but it is a more probable view that these sensations were first developed, in order that those animals which would profit by living in society, should be induced to live together...The feeling of pleasure is probably an extension of the parental or filial affections...and this extension may be attributed in part to habit, but chiefly to natural selection. With those animals which were benefited by living in close association, the individuals which took the greatest pleasure in society would best escape various dangers, whilst those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers (*Descent*, 108-9).

These social instincts, in turn, Darwin believed, provided the necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of a moral sense. “The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable – namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts...would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man” (*Descent*, 101).

Darwin’s ‘moral sense’ is composed of or motivated by four factors: (1) sympathy, (2) memory, (3) public opinion, and (4) habit. He struggled slightly with the notion of “sympathy.”

On the one hand, he agreed with economist Adam Smith and contemporary Alexander Bain who claimed that "...the basis of sympathy lies in our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure" (*Descent*, 109). When one individual witnessed another suffering, he proposed, this incited similar feelings in the observer and motivated him to mitigate or alleviate those feelings through cooperative action. However, he also recognized that such sympathetic responses tended to be limited to members of the same community. He noted that, "...No tribe could hold together if murder, robbery, treachery, etc., were common; consequently such crimes within the limits of the same tribe 'are branded with everlasting infamy;' but excite no such sentiment beyond these limits. A North American Indian is well pleased with himself, and is honored by others, when he scalps a man of another tribe; and a Dyak cuts off the head of an unoffending person, and dries it as a trophy" (*Descent*, 120-1). Thus sympathy, while it constitutes an essential aspect of our 'moral sense,' is not without internal inconsistency.

Darwin never explicitly used the term 'memory' to describe the second aspect of the 'moral sense,' but his language clearly indicated something commensurate. He observed, "...as soon as the mental faculties had become highly developed, images of all past actions and motives would be incessantly passing through the brain of each individual: and that feeling of dissatisfaction, or even misery, which invariably results...from any unsatisfied instinct, would arise, as often as it was perceived that the enduring and always present social instinct had yielded to some other instinct..." (*Descent*, 101). Hence any lasting displeasure that arose from the previous satisfaction of various instincts, most notably those that overpowered the social instinct, would inspire different behavior in the future. In other words, this intellectual faculty becomes a clearinghouse for impulses.

The third aspect of Darwin's 'moral sense' is public opinion. "[A]fter the power of language had been acquired, and the wishes of the community could be expressed," he remarked, "the common opinion how each member ought to act for the public good, would naturally become in a paramount degree the guide to action" (*Descent*, 101). Without an acute sense of sympathy and a method for recording previous experiences, however, public opinion would be rendered impotent. In a qualifying statement, he added, "But it should be borne in mind that however great weight we may attribute to public opinion, our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy, which, we shall see, forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone" (*Descent*, 102).

The last ingredient in the 'moral sense' is habit, which served a dual purpose for Darwin. Superficially, habit performed the necessary function of reinforcing behavior that promoted the survival of an individual. In context of morality, however, the correct use of habit could stimulate individuals to behave in accordance with established social norms, i.e. foster obedience. For social creatures, reinforcing sympathetic actions through habit would increase collective fitness and the chances of survival for the whole community.

While moral progress was in some respects tantamount to the development of obedience for Darwin, it was also a question of scope. The extension of sympathy to other humans and creatures outside the immediate community, he thought, was an even stronger indication of moral advancement. He noted, "...as man gradually advanced in intellectual power, and was enabled to trace the more remote consequences of his actions...as he regarded more and more, not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men...his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races, to the imbecile, maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals, --so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher" (*Descent*, 129). Furthermore, by universalizing this idea, Darwin concluded

that the extension of sympathy logically led to the formulation of the Golden Rule. In other words, the maxim “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” was the inevitable product of naturally selected sympathetic tendencies.

Darwin’s theory was a devastating blow to the pride of man. Not only was he no longer divinely inspired in constitution, but also his intellectual and moral capacities became the natural product of selective pressures. Perhaps partly in jest, but highlighting the cosmic dislocation implied by his theory, Darwin commented in the final chapter, “...we can...recall in imagination the former condition of our early progenitors; and can approximately place them in their proper place in the zoological series. We thus learn that man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World” (*Descent*, 632). Far from being created in the image of God, humans, according to Darwin, were probably descended from small, hairy monkeys. Moreover, all our seemingly divine faculties, most notably Reason and Moral sense, could be demonstrated to have developed through gradual, environmentally conditioned processes. In this fashion, Darwin challenged the fundamental beliefs about what it meant to be human and forced a reevaluation of our world-historical perspective.

V. *Naturalized Morality*

Since Darwin’s original exposition of “higher” or moral instincts in the *Descent*, naturalized ethical theories have become more prominent. In *Science and Religion: A Historical Perspective*, Edward Davis and Robin Collins define scientific naturalism as “...the conjunction of naturalism – the claim that nature is all that there is and, hence, that there is not supernatural order above nature – with the claim that all objects, processes, truths, and facts about nature fall within the scope of the scientific method” (*Science and Religion*, 322)⁵. Subsumed under scientific naturalism are anthropological naturalism, which states that humans are wholly part of nature; epistemological naturalism, which states that nothing can be known other than natural entities; and methodological naturalism, which states that science should only explain phenomena in terms of entities or properties that fall within the natural realm. Essentially, scientific naturalism constrains the research and interpretation of humanity to scientifically observable and testable principles.

According to the essay “Darwin in moral philosophy and social theory” by Alex Rosenberg, professor of philosophy at Duke University, combining scientific naturalism with Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection leads to two broad ethical programs: “Darwinian morality” and “Darwinian metaethics.” Darwinian morality is a specific variety of normative ethics, which presumes the absolute existence of qualities like “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “bad,” and “just” and “unjust.” These qualities are said to exhibit “ethical internalism,” which means that they are right or wrong in themselves, independent of human subjectivity. This doctrine is also referred to as moral realism.

Moral realism, in general, posits the self-contained existence of moral properties and asserts that ethical theory should be considered an accurate description of “moral reality.” In the Darwinian morality program, these properties or principles are identified through the Selection process. Peter Railton, professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan and moral realist,

⁵ Ferngren, Gary B. "Scientific Naturalism." *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002. Print.

suggests that these properties are selected because they are rationally desirable, not from a subjective perspective, but from the “social perspective.” The principles, he explains, are rational insofar as they approximate the objective interests of the entire social group. His reasoning is as follows: the objective interests of the social group are those interests that promote its collective fitness. Hence, any action that increases the collective fitness of the group is rational, and any action that engenders dissent and decreases a group’s collective fitness is irrational. Over time, then, Natural Selection operates on these communities and, according to the theory, yields increasingly egalitarian societies (*Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, 348-9)⁶.

Unfortunately, Darwinian morality faces strong opposition. Some opponents cite the free-rider problem and argue that intragroup selection for non-egalitarian principles may outweigh intergroup selection for this moral framework. In other words, those individuals who benefit from exploiting their society’s egalitarian tendencies will be selectively advantaged until the moral system is destroyed. Others state that it remains to be proven whether egalitarian principles increase collective fitness and are actually selectively advantaged. The greatest challenge to moral realism, however, was issued by G.E. Moore, Cambridge professor of philosophy, in 1903. In his *Principia Ethica*, he wrote of the ‘naturalistic fallacy.’ According to Moore, asking whether a quality, such as pleasure, happiness, or love, is good is always an ‘open question.’ Something that is good may necessarily be pleasurable, but something that is pleasurable is not necessarily good. Similarly, just because a society exhibits egalitarian tendencies does not mean that it is intrinsically good. On the basis of this argument, Moore argued that all attempts at the naturalization of normative ethics are ultimately futile (*Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, 347-9).

Darwinian metaethics, as opposed to Darwinian morality, abandons the effort to prove that the moral systems which have developed are the morally “right” ones. Instead, metaethics aims only at a descriptive account of moral development. According to Rosenberg, most metaethical theories are non-cognitivist, which means that they deny moral propositions the values of “true” and “false.”

Allan Gibbard presents a compelling non-cognitivist metaethical theory. According to Gibbard, morality is based on coordinated emotions, which enable coordinated action. A moral judgment, he argues, is a judgment about which emotions or feelings are rational. Rationality, in turn, is determined by the accepted norms of a social group. And the accepted norms of societies have evolved through the subjection of emotional responses to selective pressures. In other words, the emotional responses that have produced the most favorable results have become norms, and the rationality of actions is determined by how closely they approximate given norms. Thus, the coordination of emotions produces accepted norms, which determine rationality and define moral judgments. The advantages of this view are several. First, this theory avoids the difficulties involved with ethical internalism. Second, it allows for the Darwinian Selection of societal norms. Third, it explains how feelings of ethical objectivity arise, namely, through strong acceptance of societal norms. The difficulty with this theory is explaining how and why coordination arises, since altruistic tendencies appear to disadvantage those who exhibit them (*Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, 352-5).

Returning to the free-rider problem, it seems as though altruism is an evolutionary unstable strategy. Ostensibly, individuals who continually perform unilateral altruistic acts, like monkeys that sound an alarm to warn other monkeys of a predator, increase the fitness of others while selectively disadvantaging themselves. In order for altruism to gain a foothold in the

⁶ Hodge, Michael J. *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 2006. Print.

evolutionary process, it must be reciprocated. From an analysis of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, however, it appears as though reciprocal altruism is an evolutionary possibility. Metaethicists argue that, while the dilemma indicates that the best strategy in a single iteration is to exploit the opponent, multiple instantiations of this dilemma create a different picture. Robert Axelrod demonstrated with his computer simulation that the optimal strategy in an iterated prisoner's dilemma is to follow the tit-for-tat strategy, cooperating in the first round and selecting the opponent's previous choice for all subsequent rounds. Through the selective process, this simple tit-for-tat strategy could easily have become a genetic predisposition, creating the potential for cooperation.

Overall, metaethics offers a revealing and compelling perspective on human morality. However, despite its scientific appeal, the naturalization of morality forces us to reconsider our understanding of morality. If it is true that morality evolves according to a Darwinian selection process and that the objectivity of morals is based only on how strongly certain societal norms are accepted, does it carry the same ethical thrust? A naturalistic account of morality implies that ethics is entirely a product of chance and "justified" only insofar as it is applicable to ecological context which produced it.

VI. The Compartmentalization of Belief

William James, the famous psychologist and pragmatist, once said, "Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality'" (*Pragmatism*, 198)⁷. The trouble, he notes, is defining the terms 'agreement' and 'reality.' Approaching the debate between advocates and critics of evolution, we find the same metaphysical question at heart: "What is the nature of ultimate reality?"

Curiously, we have come no closer to an answer than Darwin's contemporaries. In order to spare ourselves the mental agony, we have instead compartmentalized our beliefs. Today, we no longer recognize the blatant contradiction in maintaining both Darwinian evolution and the central tenets of our religious and juridical beliefs. We simply appeal to whichever system can provide the greatest practical, logical, or emotional benefit in a given situation. When we desire explanatory power, substantiated by empirical evidence, we turn to the biological determinism implied by Darwinian evolution. On the other hand, we tend to neglect such rigorous inquiry when the subject matter is cathected. For us, the beliefs in free will and an absolute moral code are more than just an intellectual hangover; we have a vested interest in maintaining these ideas. We believe, or at least want to believe, that we have absolute control over our destinies, and we are loathe to admit any principle which suggests that our behavior can be predicted or determined with absolute certainty. Whether this dichotomy in thought is warranted, and our beliefs justified, however, remains to be proven.

⁷ James, William. *Pragmatism, A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Lexington: Forgotten, 2010. Print.

Chapter 2: The Etiology of Religion and Morality

I. Introduction

In his more optimistic moods, Darwin viewed Natural Selection as a positive, progressive force: “When reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply” (*Origin*, 88)⁸. But by the time he produced the *Descent of Man*, his perspective had become more tempered. “We must remember that progress is no invariable rule,” He wrote, “It is very difficult to say why one civilized nation rises, becomes more powerful, and spreads more widely, than another” (*Descent*, 145-6)⁹. By severing humanity’s connection with divinity and exorcising teleology from nature, he had effectively marooned mankind on a disinterested, often hostile planet. In the conclusion to the *Descent*, he opined, “We must acknowledge...that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system – with all these exalted power – Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” (*Descent*, 643). This dramatic reversal of man’s cosmic significance weighed heavily on the conscience of Darwin who died a confirmed atheist.

The psychological void created by Natural Selection was not, however, received so bleakly by all. For a small coterie of educated individuals, evolution represented liberation. It became the opening salvo against centuries of religious, moral and political hegemony. Volcanic in nature and scope, Darwin’s revelation became the fountainhead for scientific inquiry in fields previously fettered by social and religious mores. Taking advantage of the hysteria and the theologians’ inability to respond with a consistent message, stalwart soldiers of human solidarity emerged, excoriating the Church and other previously sacrosanct institutions. The violence and vehemence of these diatribes burst forth with the nauseating brilliance that characterizes all great revolutions in thought.

Perhaps the most controversial, yet admirable figure to arise in the wake of Darwinian evolution was Friedrich Nietzsche. Educated originally as a theologian, and later as a philologist and philosopher, perhaps no greater advocate for man’s Dionysian instincts has ever existed. The strident tone and cutting language of Nietzsche pierced through the carefully fabricated veils of religious rhetoric and the mists of theological obfuscation of his time. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, he attempted a historico-philological analysis of morality. And in his most scandalous production, *The Antichrist: A Criticism of Christianity*, he railed against the Christian institution, accusing it of encouraging the enervation of our species.

In an equivalent, yet more measured fashion, Sigmund Freud assailed theology and religious ideals from the psycho-analytic perspective. Freud treated religion as a psychological illness. He classified it as a neurosis, and vacillated between calling it an infantile illusion and an insidious delusion. In the *The Future of an Illusion*, he traced the development of religious ideals

⁸ Darwin, Charles Robert., and David Quammen. *On the Origin of Species: The Illustrated Edition*. New York: Sterling, 2008. Print.

⁹ Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998. Print.

in much the same fashion that Nietzsche traced the evolution of morality. Then, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, he pointed to the mercurial disposition fostered by contemporary religion, as well as to a potential remedy through the redefinition of the relationship between the state and religion.

Regardless of their bent and mode of presentation, both Nietzsche and Freud treated the study of morality and religion as etiology, rather than theology or philosophy. The consequences of this were twofold. First, it privileged physiological and psychological interpretations of human behavior. Second, it suggested that ‘religion’ and the traditional conceptions of morality closely associated with it could be ‘cured’ like any other disease. The purpose of this chapter is explore Nietzsche and Freud’s arguments and to understand why they viewed religion and morality with such a jaundiced eye.

II. *The Origins of Good, Bad, and Evil*

Repulsed by what he deemed the “pity-morality” dominating Europe, Nietzsche declared the need for a revaluation of all morality. He announced, “...we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values* is for the first time to be called into question – and for this purpose a knowledge is necessary of the conditions and circumstances out of which these values grew, and under which they experienced their evolution and their distortion...” (*Genealogy*, xxii)¹⁰. At the heart of this debate, Nietzsche believed, lay the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ He queried, “Under what conditions did Man invent for himself those judgments of values, ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’? *And what intrinsic value do they possess in themselves?*” (*Genealogy*, xix).

The English, Nietzsche believed, had come the closest to an impartial review of morality. He admired their dogged impertinence: “These English psychologists – what do they really mean? We always find them voluntarily or involuntarily at the same task of pushing to the front of the *partie honteuse* of our inner world, and looking for the efficient, governing, and decisive principle in that precise quarter where the intellectual self-respect of the race would be most reluctant to find it” (*Genealogy*, 1). At the same time, however, he cited their cardinal flaw: the imprudent use of pregnant terminology. According to Nietzsche, the English believed that the term ‘good’ arose from the beneficiaries of altruistic acts. Those for whom these acts were useful recompensed the agents with praise. Then, “...the origin of this praise was *forgotten*, and altruistic acts, simply because, as sheer matter of habit, they were praised as good, came also to be felt as good – as though they contained in themselves some intrinsic goodness” (*Genealogy*, 2). But this analysis, he rejoined, presupposed an entire value system through its use of the terms ‘utility,’ ‘forgetting,’ ‘habit,’ and ‘error.’ Accordingly, Nietzsche called for the divestiture of all preexisting historically overdetermined language.

Nietzsche also inveighed against the English for positing such a psychologically ignorant origin of ‘good.’ The origin of ‘good,’ he asserted, was the good themselves. It was, “...the aristocratic, the powerful, the high-stationed, the high-minded who have felt that they themselves were good, and that their actions were good, that is to say of the first order, in contradistinction to all the low, the low-minded, the vulgar, and the plebian” (*Genealogy*, 3). The strong arrogated the right to create values and define terms. The effects of this are evidenced by a philological analysis of the terms associated with power in early society. He remarked, “...everywhere

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Horace Barnett Samuel. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2006. Print.

‘aristocrat,’ ‘noble’ (in the social sense), is the root idea, out of which have necessarily developed ‘good’ in the sense of ‘with aristocratic soul,’ ‘noble,’ in the sense of ‘with a soul of high caliber,’ ‘with a privileged soul’ – a development which invariably runs parallel with that other evolution by which ‘vulgar,’ ‘plebian,’ ‘low,’ are made to change finally into ‘bad’” (*Genealogy*, 5). The question then became, *why* did the aristocrats consider themselves ‘good’? What attribute or trait characterized the aristocratic soul?

Superficially, the aristocrats often indicated their superiority through titles of power, i.e. the lords, the commanders, or through the most apparent symbol of their superiority, i.e. the rich, the possessors. However, Nietzsche hypothesized that they also referred to themselves by a core, “characteristic idiosyncrasy.” The Greek aristocrats, for instance, considered themselves “the truthful.” Etymologically, the word “*esthlos*,” meant “‘one who *is*,’ who has reality, who is real, who is true; and then with a subjective twist, the ‘true,’ as the ‘truthful’” (*Genealogy*, 6). This latter sense of the word was adopted and emphasized by the ruling class. In contrast, the terms which referred to the plebian class became more closely associated with cowardice and weakness. From this analysis and others, Nietzsche concluded, “Above all, there is no exception...to this rule, that the idea of political superiority always resolves itself into the idea of psychological superiority...” (*Genealogy*, 7).

Gradually, however, the aristocracy began to bifurcate. From within the knightly class arose the priestly class. This class, separated from the martial activities of the warrior class, developed its own characteristic values. The knightly-aristocratic values, Nietzsche asserted, “...are based on a careful cult of physical, on a flowering, rich, and even effervescing healthiness, that goes considerably beyond what is necessary for maintaining life, on war, adventure, the chase, the dance, the tourney – on everything, in fact, which is contained in strong, free, and joyous action” (*Genealogy*, 9). The priests, who were envious of the knights, developed a schema of values in contradistinction to them. Their weakness, Nietzsche hissed, “...causes their hate to expand into a monstrous and sinister shape, a shape which is most crafty and most poisonous. The really great haters in the history of the world have always been priests, who are also the cleverest haters...” (*Genealogy*, 9).

While the knightly-aristocrats continued to express their vibrant strength, the priests committed themselves to subterfuge. The consummation of all priestly thought Nietzsche attributed to the Jews, who first pressed for a “transvaluation of values.” “It was the Jews who, in opposition to the aristocratic equation (good = aristocratic = beautiful = happy = loved by the gods), dared with a terrifying logic to suggest the contrary equation...‘the wretched are alone the good; the poor, the weak, the lowly, are alone the good; the suffering, the needy, the sick, the loathsome, are the only ones who are pious, the only ones who are blessed, for them alone is salvation’” (*Genealogy*, 9). The ‘bait,’ for this transvaluation of values, Nietzsche speculated, was Jesus, the archetype for all priestly values. And the ingenious move was Jesus’ crucifixion: “...that Israel himself must repudiate before all the world the actual instrument of his own revenge and nail it to the cross, so that all the world – that is, all the enemies of Israel – could nibble without suspicion at this very bait...could...any human mind...invent a bait that was more truly *dangerous*?” (*Genealogy*, 11).

That the priestly values were able to attain hegemony Nietzsche also ascribed the characteristic insouciance of the warrior class. The knightly-aristocrats acted forcefully, spontaneously, and creatively. They welcomed, so as to further accentuate their power, weaker foils. This class spent no time defining ‘happiness,’ as they felt and declared their own happiness. This proud, arrogant disposition fostered “...too strong an admixture of nonchalance, of

casualness, of boredom, of impatience, even of personal exultation, for it to be capable of distorting its victim into a real caricature or a real monstrosity” (*Genealogy*, 13). True enemies of the knightly-aristocrats were admired, not despised. And those unworthy of the titles compatriot or enemy were simply relegated to the status of ‘bad,’ where ‘bad’ meant merely that they were poor imitations of more robust originals.

On the other hand, the priestly class, saturated with hatred, conceived the concept of ‘evil’ to define their stronger counterparts. Rather than in distinction, the warrior class was presented in *opposition* to the priestly class. This transformation of ‘bad’ into ‘evil,’ Nietzsche noted, was merely a reflection of the classes equivalent contrary conceptions of ‘good.’ While ‘good’ for the warrior class represented strength and excess, ‘good’ for the priestly class represented febrility and prudence. Thus, in striking fashion, the ‘good’ of the knightly-aristocrats became for the priests the very essence of ‘evil.’ More important, however, were the psychological ramifications of such a reversal in valuation.

The first despicable product of this transformation was the identification of weakness with merit. Nietzsche repined, “...this dismal state of affairs...has...come to masquerade in the pomp of an ascetic, mute, and expectant virtue, just as though the *very* weakness of the weak – that is, forsooth its *being*, its working its whole unique inevitable inseparable reality – were a voluntary result, something wished, chosen, a deed, an act of *merit*” (*Genealogy*, 20). With characteristic pith, Nietzsche quipped in response to the priests’ righteous claims, “...they tell me that their misery is a favor and distinction given to them by God, just as one beats the dogs one likes best” (*Genealogy*, 21). But more than the misattribution of praise, Nietzsche condemned the inevitable proclivity of this class to posit an existence *after* this one, and to privilege that existence. Heaven, the Last Judgment, the Kingdom of God, he claimed, became the sole source of solace against the troubles of life. Only in order to realize this redemptive blessed state, eternal life was necessary. And eternal life could only be realized through an earthly existence devoted to faith, piety, and hope. Thus, the system sanctified its own weaknesses and rewarded their proliferation.

III. The Origin of Guilt

Coincident and concordant with the distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ was Nietzsche’s investigation into the origin of ‘guilt.’ The morality of the priestly class, he argued, was difficult to implement. While the noble virtues of the knightly-aristocrats expressed themselves freely and effortlessly, the priestly virtues required the development of a faculty previously neglected: memory.

Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘forgetfulness’ and ‘memory’ echoed his distinction between the knightly and priestly classes. For him, the ability to forget was the mark of a healthy individual. Forgetting permitted an individual to “digest” his experiences, to “incorporate” them, and to cleanse his consciousness. He considered active forgetfulness the “very sentinel and nurse of psychic order” (*Genealogy*, 29). Conversely, the incapacity to forget caused a pollution of the present, a distraction, and a hindrance to natural action.

Memory, in opposition to healthful forgetfulness, constituted the active refusal to rid oneself of an experience. The advent of memory was spurred by the desire to recall previous acts of the will. The result: “...that between the original ‘I will,’ ‘I shall do,’ and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*, we can easily interpose a world of strange new phenomena, circumstances, veritable volitions, without the snapping of this long chain of the will” (*Genealogy*, 30). There

were advantages and disadvantages to such a faculty. First, Nietzsche emphasized its negative aspect. It represented, he claimed, the “origin of *responsibility*,” and strove to make man consistent in action: “man, with the help of the morality of customs and of social strait-waistcoats, was *made* genuinely calculable” (*Genealogy*, 31). On the other hand, Nietzsche conceded, it generated the “sovereign individual.” The power of this individual was increased by his ability to promise. “[W]ith the mastery over himself he is necessarily also given the mastery over circumstances, over nature, over all creatures with shorter wills, less reliable characters...” (*Genealogy*, 31). This capacity became the standard of value by which the sovereign individual identified others worthy of his trust and respect. In time, mastery of the ability to promise, to remember, became known as “conscience.” Unfortunately, Nietzsche observed, this conscience did not arise peaceably and did not always contribute to an increase in power.

Memory, for Nietzsche, was the product of malevolent forces. The most potent mnemonic, he claimed, was pain. He cited the following axiom: “‘Something is burnt in so as to remain in his memory: only that which never stops *hurting* remains in his memory’” (*Genealogy*, 32). For five or six “I will nots,” he argued, centuries of sacrifices and deadly rituals were required: stoning, breaking on the wheel, dart-throwing, tearing, trampling by horses, boiling in oil or wine, flaying – all were implemented with the intent of instilling in their victims a memory. He also glibly remarked that this is how man obtained ‘Reason.’

Having established the history of memory, Nietzsche then shifted to the question which motivated this discussion: how did *bad* conscience arise? While fear of punishment was a natural reaction to such a deplorable mechanism, the origin of remorse was not so apparent. The answer, he determined, lay with the relationship between ‘ought’ and ‘owe,’ and ‘debt’ and ‘guilt.’

‘Ought,’ Nietzsche claimed, originated from the concept of ‘owe.’ Only later, he insisted, was the will implicated through such terms as ‘intentional,’ ‘negligent,’ ‘accidental,’ and ‘responsible.’ “Throughout the longest period of human history,” he asserted, “punishment was *never* based on the responsibility of the evildoer for his action...on the contrary, punishment was inflicted for...the same reason that parents punish their children even nowadays, out of anger at an injury that they have suffered...” (*Genealogy*, 35). When compensation could not be provided for injury, corporeal punishment was administered. In fact, Nietzsche noted, “...*legally* sanctioned schemes of valuation for individual limbs and parts of the body” were used in the settlement of debts (*Genealogy*, 36). And eventually, this procedure evolved into contract law.

Nietzsche conjectured that the ideas of ‘guilt’ and ‘duty’ arose with the advent of contract law. Previously, the notions of guilt, responsibility, and consideration were foreign; the powerful aristocratic class simply expressed their will. However, with the development of complex, organized societies, the “instinct of freedom” was forced inward. It was “trodden back, imprisoned within the itself, and finally only able to find vent and relief in itself” (*Genealogy*, 56). This became the germ of bad conscience in the psyche of man.

Coupled with man’s internalized instincts was the elevation of debt to a transcendental realm. On a communal level, he argued, people considered themselves indebted to their ancestors: “...just as mankind inherited the ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ from race-nobility...so with the heritage of the racial and tribal gods it has also inherited the incubus of debts as yet unpaid and the desire to discharge them” (*Genealogy*, 59). Moreover, the “...feeling of owing a debt to the deity has grown continuously for several centuries, always in the same proportion in which the idea of God and the consciousness of God have grown and become exalted among mankind” (*Genealogy*, 59). This sense of debt was made even more acute in the western

religions by Jesus' crucifixion. That God sacrificed himself to reconcile the debt of man, ironically, solidified his debt and exacerbated his sense of guilt.

From internalization of destructive instincts and the introduction of eternal debt, man developed what Nietzsche considered a psychological "madness." He regarded absurd "...man's will to find himself guilty and blameworthy to the point of inexpiability, his will to think of himself as punished, without the punishment ever being able to balance the guilt, his will to infect and to poison the fundamental basis of the universe with the problem of punishment and guilt, in order to cut off once and for all any escape out of this labyrinth of 'fixed ideals,' his will for rearing an ideal – that of 'holy God'..." (*Genealogy*, 62). This entire schema, the whole of religion and morality, he viewed as the product of man's sickly, weak, and febrile aspects.

IV. Religious Sentiments and the Manufacture of Ideals

Freud initiated his project with the same intent as Nietzsche: to emancipate humankind from an oppressive and psychologically unstable entity. While his animosity for the Church was not quite as palpable as Nietzsche's, his arguments were of equivalent import. Freud, like Nietzsche, was concerned with the future. "When one has lived for long within a particular culture and has often striven to discover its origins and the path of its development," he wrote in the opening line to *The Future of an Illusion*, "one feels for once the temptation to turn one's attention in the other direction and ask what further fate awaits this culture and what transformations it is destined to undergo" (*Illusion*, 7)¹¹. Evidently, Freud considered institutional religion to be one of the greatest threats to progress, and one which was becoming increasingly attenuated by the advance of science. He viewed it as an antiquated institution, psychologically pertinent in a previous age, but now outmoded and incongruent. He corroborated this claim with a psycho-analytic analysis of religious sentiments and ideals.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud attempted a precursory analysis of the "religious feeling." He recounted the description of a friend: "It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, 'oceanic'. This feeling, he adds, is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it is no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by various Churches and religious systems..." (*Discontents*, 11)¹². Predictably, Freud remarked, "From my own experience I could not convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling. But this gives me no right to deny that it does not in fact occur in other people" (*Discontents*, 12). So, he endeavored to discover the genesis of such a feeling.

Freud theorized that this "oceanic" feeling was the residual byproduct of psychological development. "An infant at the breast," he observed, "does not yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of sensations flowing in upon him" (*Discontents*, 13). In other words, a child did not differentiate between himself and the surrounding universe. However, this continuity was shattered as the infant discovered that certain aspects of his environment were beyond his control, like his sources of pleasure. "One comes to learn a procedure by which, through a deliberate direction of one's sensory activities and through suitable muscular action,

¹¹ Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. Trans. W.D. Robson-Scott. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010. Print.

¹² Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, and Peter Gay. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. Print.

one can differentiate between what is internal – what belongs to the ego – and what is external – what emanates from the outer world” (*Discontents*, 14-5). Hence, the formation of the mature ego, according to Freud, was the product of a negative process, whereby the individual determined what was *not* part of his self. Yet, the mind, Freud argued, retained a vestige of the former universal-ego feeling, and this became the source of religious sentiments. While this concludes Freud’s speculation on the origin of religious sentiments, he continued to maintain an emphasis on developmental psychology in his broader theory.

By and large, Freud considered religion a phenomenon which necessarily developed in tandem with civilization. And as civilization advanced, religion evolved to satisfy the accompanying psychological demands. Freud defined civilization as “...the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes – namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations” (*Discontents*, 42). Civilization’s counterpart was culture, which consisted of man’s “psychical possessions” or its judgments about its most ambitious accomplishments. These possessions Freud deemed a society’s “ideals.” Ideals provided a community or nation not only with a source of pride, but also with a source of enmity for other, discordant cultures. And the most potent among these ideals, Freud proffered, were the religious ideals.

The principal threat to man in the early stages of civilization was nature. In order to guard against that which threatened his existence, he banded together with other humans, i.e. created culture, and humanized nature. The humanization of nature, Freud suggested, was the first step in the direction of organized religion. “Nothing can be made of impersonal forces and fates; they remain eternally remote. But,” Freud qualified, “if the elements have passions that rage like those in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous, but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature we have about us beings who resemble those of our own environment, then indeed we can breathe freely, we can feel at home in the face of the supernatural, and we can deal psychically with our frantic anxiety” (*Illusion*, 28-9). The substitution of a psychological explanation for scientific one served to provide both immediate relief and a step toward mastery of the situation.

The next step in the evolution of religion implicated another inherent psychological tendency. As a child, Freud remarked, man was helpless. For the satisfaction of all his needs he depended on his parents. His first love-object was his mother who satisfied his hunger and protected him from the dangers of the outside world. Gradually, however, his mother was supplanted by his father. But toward this father he maintained peculiar ambivalence. The father was both a source of security and apprehension; he was feared and admired for his power. In the final stages of psychological development, then, this attitude toward the father figure was transferred to the gods. “Now when the child grows up and finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, and that he can never do without the protection against unknown mighty powers, he invests these with the traits of the father-figure; he creates for himself the gods, of whom he is afraid, whom he seeks to propitiate, and to whom he nevertheless entrusts the task of protecting him” (*Illusion*, 42).

The gods, according to Freud, served three primary functions: (1) to exorcise the terrors of nature, (2) to reconcile one to the cruelty of fate, and (3) to make amends for the sufferings and privations imposed by culture (*Illusion*, 30). As science progressed, however, and nature became more autonomous, the gods were distanced. Consequently, the role of the gods became increasingly concentrated on the third task, and morality became their exclusive domain. It became, Freud wrote, “...the business of the gods to adjust the defects and evils of culture, to

attend to the sufferings that men inflict on each other in their communal life, and to see that the laws of culture, which men obey so ill, are carried out. The laws of culture themselves are claimed to be of divine origin, they are elevated to a position above human society, and they are extended over nature and the universe” (*Illusion*, 31-2).

The upshot of the deification of natural forces and the universalization of morality was the implication that existence was purposive. Mundane events became imbued with cosmic significance, since every act expressed the intentions of a superior Intelligence. Furthermore, man concluded that “...over each one of us watches a benevolent, and only apparently severe, Providence, which will not suffer us to become the plaything of the stark and pitiless forces of nature; death itself is not annihilation...but the beginning of a new kind of existence, which lies on the road of development to something higher” (*Illusion*, 33). Thus, religion satisfied not only man’s need for security, but also his intense desire for meaning.

While Freud acknowledged that religion clearly served a valuable function for primeval man, he asserted that the psychological construction had far outlived its utility. And the meager defenses offered in its defense by contemporary advocates were patently suspect. “They [religious ideals] deserved to be believed,” he uttered on behalf of their advocates, “firstly, because our primal ancestors already believed them; secondly, because we possess proofs, which have been handed down to us from this very period of antiquity; and thirdly, because it is forbidden to raise the question of their authenticity at all” (*Illusion*, 45). These three arguments, however, could not be at greater variance with modern man’s *modus operandi*.

“The third point,” Freud wrote, “cannot but rouse our strongest suspicions. Such a prohibition can surely have only one motive: that society knows very well the uncertain basis of the claims it makes for its religious claims. If it were otherwise, the relevant material would certainly be placed readily at the disposal of anyone who wished to gain conviction for himself” (*Illusion*, 46). The other two arguments he also dismissed with great dispatch. Our ancestors, Freud pointed out, believed in a myriad of phenomena and entities which we have long since been discredited. Today, he noted, we are reluctant to believe even the most mundane facts unless they can be substantiated; “We should not be able to bring ourselves to accept anything of as little concern to us as the fact that whales bear young instead of laying eggs, if it were not capable of better proof than this” (*Illusion*, 46). Similarly, the proofs maintained by our ancestors “...bear every trace of being untrustworthy. They are full of contradictions, revisions, and interpolations; where they speak of actual authentic proofs they are themselves of doubtful authenticity” (*Illusion*, 46). Yet, Freud observed, many still felt “duty bound” to believe, and many eminent thinkers endeavored to justify religious beliefs.

Two more recent attempts to evade the “proof” of religion, Freud added, were the “*Credo quia absurdum*” and “as if” arguments. *Credo quia absurdum* rested on the belief that religion and faith stood above reason. According to the argument, religious sentiments were inwardly felt, and did not require comprehension. But, as Freud aptly responded, “Am I not to be obliged to believe every absurdity? And if no, why just this one? There is no appeal beyond reason” (*Illusion*, 49). On the other hand, according to the ‘as if’ argument, religious ideals were held because of the practical function they served in the maintenance of society. But Freud considered this merely the sophisticated product of philosophers. Most people, he responded, did not entertain religious ideals or “fictions” because of the practical significance they had for society.

Having rejected all the proofs offered in support of religion, but recognizing its persistence, he classified religion as an ‘illusion,’ which he distinguished from ‘error’ and ‘delusion’. Aristotle’s belief that vermin were born from dung, Freud stated, was an error. The

belief could be and was disproved. Illusions, on the other hand, cannot by nature be disproved. And contrary to delusions, in which a belief conflicted with reality, the “reality value” of illusions cannot be determined. Moreover, it was “...characteristic of the illusion that it is derived from men’s wishes...” (*Illusion*, 54). In this fashion, Freud relegated religion, perhaps the most potent psychological construction known to man, to the status of a self-serving psychological expedient whose continued espousal was of doubtful utility at best.

V. *A Shift of Emphasis*

Undoubtedly, the analyses of Nietzsche and Freud engendered no small measure of intellectual dyspepsia among their contemporaries. But lest their message be discounted, we must realize that both Nietzsche and Freud were philanthropes, not misanthropes. They defied the conventions of their time and abandoned all concern for personal welfare in order to voice what they considered significant concerns for the future of humanity. They desired a freer future for our species, a future unencumbered by the weight of ancient decrees and driven by an ardent desire to seek out the ‘truth’. In advocating such a policy, however, they cautioned that it would not always yield the most pleasant results.

Scientifically, Nietzsche and Freud’s program required that we subject ourselves to the same scrutiny we do nature. Freud declaimed, “Nothing need keep us from applying observation to our own natures or submitting the process of reasoning to its own criticism” (*Illusion*, 59). And based on his own psycho-analytic work in this vein, he determined that religion is, in many respects, similar to a neurosis: “This historical residue has given us the conception of religious dogmas as, so to speak, neurotic survivals, and now we may say that the time has probably come to replace the consequences of repression by the results of rational mental effort, as in the analytic treatment of neurotics” (*Illusion*, 77). Commensurately, Nietzsche called for greater involvement of the biological sciences in the moral sciences: “...all tables of values, all the ‘thou shalt’ known to history and ethnology, need primarily a *physiological*, at any rate in preference to a psychological, elucidation and interpretation; all equally require a critique from medical science” (*Genealogy*, 27). Hence, if we subscribe to their program, we must be willing, like the English psychologists Nietzsche admired, to discover the efficient, governing and decisive principle of our lives precisely where our self-respect is most reluctant to find it. This commitment to science, however, is only the first step toward even greater revolution.

On a much more profound level, Nietzsche and Freud’s objective was to effect a shift of emphasis in how we lead our lives. They advocated science not for itself, but for what it represented: a progressive, liberating force. Conversely, they decried religion because they considered it a restrictive, oppressive force. That it posited and privileged a life *after* this they found ludicrous. “Of what use,” Freud asked, “is the illusion of a kingdom on the moon, whose revenues have never yet been seen by anyone?” (*Illusion*, 86). And Nietzsche remarked, “...we cannot shut our eyes to the prospect of the complete and eventual triumph of atheism freeing mankind from all this feeling of obligation to their origin, their *causa prima*” (*Genealogy*, 60). This existence, they compellingly argued, should be the focus of our lives and efforts. In a final, provocative reverie, Freud speculated, “...by withdrawing his [future man’s] expectations from the other world and concentrating all his liberated energies on this early life will he probably attain to a state of things in which life will be tolerable for all and no one will be oppressed by culture any more. Then with one of our comrades in unbelief he will be able to say without regret: ‘Let us leave the heavens / To the angels and the sparrows’” (*Illusion*, 86-7).

Chapter 3: Deliberate, Intelligent, and Religious Action

I. Introduction

John Dewey, perhaps the greatest representative of pragmatic philosophy in 20th century, believed first and foremost in the improvement of human life through intelligent practice. And in this, he was not alone; he was caught up in a historical moment with other prominent figures such as Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the American Transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In fact, Thoreau wrote in his *Walden* the following passage:

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts (*The Portable Thoreau*, 342-3)¹³.

While Thoreau passed away only a few short years after Dewey's birth, this vein of thought would persist in the latter's philosophy. The emphasis on the *human* capacity to *improve* the conditions of existence through *conscious* endeavor encapsulates the main thrust of the pragmatic movement and the core of Dewey's philosophy.

Dewey develops the idea or method of intelligence throughout his works. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, this idea finds its first expression in the notion of deliberation. Later, in *The Quest For Certainty* and in *Ethics*, the process becomes known as "intelligent" action and "reflective morality." Finally, in *A Common Faith*, Dewey broadens the notion "religious" action to include these other ideas. In fact, "religious" or "moral" action ultimately becomes nearly identical to "intelligent" action.

Because Dewey's work essentially defined the pragmatic movement in the United States, this chapter is dedicated an analysis of his ideas, and its objective is threefold: (1) to trace and critique the development of the concept "intelligence" through the aforementioned works, (2) to explore its relations to morality, and (3) to understand the effects and issues associated with the naturalization of morality.

II. Deliberation

In *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Dewey offers his most extensive treatment of deliberation, the precursor to intelligent action and reflective morality. Influenced no doubt by the psychoanalysis of Freud, the biology of Darwin, and the pragmatism of James, Dewey operates from a distinct foundation in history. Exploring this foundation will inform his ideas on habit, impulse, and deliberation.

¹³ Thoreau, Henry David, and Carl Bode. *The Portable Thoreau*. New York: Penguin, 1982. Print.

The most essential aspect of Dewey's philosophy is that it is grounded in the sciences; physiology, medicine, anthropology, psychology, physics, biology, economics – all are pertinent to the study of human nature and morality. Dewey also rejects the supernatural and stresses the natural. He envisions man as continuous with nature, not separate and distinct from it. He writes, "The traditional psychology of the original separate soul, mind, or consciousness is in truth a reflex of conditions which cut human nature off from its natural objective relations. It implies first the severance of man from nature and then of each man from his fellows" (*HNC*, 85)¹⁴. First, we are part of the biological kingdom, participating as animals, developed on evolutionary standards like all other existing beings. Second, we are subject to the conditions of our social, economic, and political age. Dewey observes, "Native human nature supplies the raw materials, but custom furnishes the machinery and the designs" (*HNC*, 110). However, Dewey does not wish to impose a dichotomy between nature and society. Rather, both are integral and continuous. Human nature, he notes, "...exists and operates in an environment. And it is not 'in' that environment as coins are in a box, but as a plant is in the sunlight and soil" (*HNC*, 296).

While Dewey already makes great strides by defining man positively as a product of and agent in his environment, the negative aspect of this conception is equally useful. Dewey decries the supernatural and ideal. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, he writes, "But no matter how much men in authority have turned moral rules into an agency of class supremacy, any theory which attributes the origin of rule to deliberate design is false" (*HNC*, 3). Dewey's genealogy of the supernatural can be found in *The Quest for Certainty*, but, roughly speaking, he believes that gods or spirits in their incipient forms were the products of man's ignorance of nature and its proceedings. Unexplained and seemingly unexplainable phenomena were attributed to supernatural causes. However, now that man has significantly advanced his understanding of nature and achieved a much higher degree of security in his existence, the ideals formed in previous epochs no longer satisfactorily serve the same functions. In fact, in many instances, they become hindrances to progress. He laments,

...persistent preoccupation with the thought of an ideal realm breeds morbid discontent with surroundings, or induces a futile withdrawal into an inner world where all facts are fair to the eye. The needs of actual conditions are neglected, or dealt with in a half-hearted way, because in the light of the ideal they are so mean and sordid. To speak of evils, to strive seriously for change, shows a low mind. Or, again, the ideal becomes a refuge, an asylum, a way of escape from tiresome responsibilities (*HNC*, 7-8).

Dewey desires to shift emphasis from the supernatural, ideal realm to the immanent, physical realm. And escapism, he adds, is not the only product of recurrent emphasis on the supernatural. Unquestioned adherence also subjects one to the manipulation of spiritual leaders. He remarks, "Ignoring the fact that truth can be bought only by the adventure of experiment, dogmatism turns truth into an insurance company. Fixed ends upon one side and fixed 'principles' – that is authoritative rules – on the other, are props for a feeling of safety, the refuge of the timid and the means by which the bold prey upon the timid" (*HNC*, 237). For Dewey, neither the scientist nor the clergyman can claim absolute certainty or authority. Everything is subject to revision. This idea, in turn, dovetails nicely with his theories of impulse and habit.

¹⁴ Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. New York, NY: Cosimo, 2007. Print. (Referred hereto for parenthetical purposes as "*HNC*").

Impulse and habit form the middle ground between the influence of environment and the role of deliberation. Dewey starts with a very strong definition of habit, identifying it with the will. He asserts, “The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts. It means will” (*HNC*, 42).

I would first like to emphasize that Dewey believes habit to be an *acquired* disposition. The origin of this habit lies with instinct and impulse. Instincts are an inherent part of our genetic constitution. Impulses arise from and are determined by our native instincts, acquired habits, and environment. They are reinforced and developed when mentally rehearsed or actually practiced. The second aspect of habit that requires close attention is the fact that it actually modifies experience; it increases “sensitiveness or accessibility” to stimuli. The more habits are cultivated, the more refined and effective they become. Consequently, repeated experience of various events causes them to become deeper and more meaningful. The development and modification of these habits form the foundation for the discussion of deliberation and morality.

In order for morality to exist, there must be a way to direct habit. For if habit were entirely fixed or determined by the environment, then opportunities for deliberation and moral reflection would not arise. The opportunities that provide access to the modification of habit Dewey terms impulses. Impulses, he writes, “...are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality” (*HNC*, 93). Moreover, Dewey resists the belief that human temperament is harmonious and stable. He remarks, “There is no one ready-made self behind activities. There are complex, unstable, opposing attitudes, habits, impulses which gradually come to terms with one another, and assume a certain consistency of configuration, even though only by means of a distribution of inconsistencies which keeps them in water-tight compartments, giving them separate turns or tricks in action” (*HNC*, 138). Thus, the self or the will is a constant interplay of habits and impulses, a dynamic medium capable only of relative fixity. The purpose of deliberation then is to expand and enhance this flexibility, while reinforcing or refining certain desirable habits.

In the broadest sense, Dewey likens deliberation to a “dramatic rehearsal” of competing alternatives (*HNC*, 190). This activity manifests through “intra-organic channels” within the imagination, and a choice or decision takes place when deliberation ceases, resulting in action (*HNC*, 191). The antithesis of deliberation is incorrigibility. Dewey declares, “Deliberation is irrational in the degree in which an end is so fixed, a passion or interest so absorbing, that the foresight of consequences is warped to include only what furthers execution of its predetermined bias. Deliberation is rational in the degree in which forethought flexibly remakes old aims and habits, institutes perception and love of new ends and acts” (*HNC*, 198). Thus, deliberation becomes a sort of clearinghouse for impulses and habits¹⁵.

While the notion of deliberation garners significant intuitive appeal, its precise operations remain unclear. This confusion is exacerbated when Dewey makes comments like the following: “We may shift from the biological to the mathematical use of the word function, and say that natural operations like breathing and digesting, acquired ones like speech and honesty, are functions of the surroundings as truly as of a person. They are things done *by* the environment by means of organic structures or acquired dispositions” (*HNC*, 14). Is deliberation a specific

¹⁵ Similar to Darwin’s rendition of “memory” in the *Descent*.

faculty or capacity -- distinct from habit and impulse -- or is it merely an expedient, a label for the hierarchy of habits that determine our actions? If the former, how does this faculty retain the necessary separation required for “choosing” between certain habits and impulses? If the latter, why not just define the ratiocinative function as the struggle for dominance between competing habits? Dewey seems to partake in both aspects of deliberation. Tending toward the former conception, he writes, “Deliberation needs every possible help it can get against the twisting, exaggerating and slighting tendency of passion and habit. To form the habit of asking how we should be willing to be treated in a similar case – which is what Kant’s maxim amounts to – is to gain an ally for impartial and sincere deliberation and judgment” (*HNC*, 247). Here, Dewey seems to distinguish deliberation from “passion and habit.” On the other hand, he states, “Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. ‘Consciousness,’ whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization” (*HNC*, 177). From this discussion, it appears as though Dewey must either concede that we are not entirely determined by our habits and impulses or he must relegate deliberation to the status of habit. While this issue is not expressed as poignantly in his *Ethics* or in *A Common Faith*, it remains an undercurrent tension.

III. Intelligence and Reflective Morality

While Dewey certainly does not wish to deemphasize the connection between intelligence and habit, the concept becomes increasingly subtle and distinct in his later works. In *The Quest for Certainty*, he writes, “Intelligence...is associated with *judgment*; that is, with selection and arrangement of means to effect consequences and with choice of what we take as our ends” (*QC*, 170)¹⁶. Intelligence is also differentiated from the reason of the ancient Greeks. While reason, according to Dewey, deals with *a priori* axiomatic principles, intelligence deals with empirical evaluation. “A man is intelligent not in virtue of having reason which grasps first and indemonstrable truths about fixed principles, in order to reason deductively from them to the particulars which they govern, but in virtue of this capacity to estimate the possibilities of a situation and to act in accordance with this estimate” (*QC*, 170). This method of empirical estimation is further extended in Dewey’s *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. According to Michael Eldridge’s book *Transforming Experience: John Dewey’s Cultural Instrumentalism*, Dewey defines “inquiry” in this later treatise as “...the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (*TE*, 24)¹⁷. The faculty of judgment and the capacity to form a “unified whole” seem *prima facie* distant from the concrete notions of habit and impulse espoused in *Human Nature and Conduct*.

In the discussion of ethics, the term intelligence finds its counterpart in the terms “moral judgment” and “reflective morality.” In Chapter 14, “Moral Judgment and Knowledge,” of *Ethics*, he defines moral judgments as “...as species of judgments of *value*. They characterize

¹⁶ Dewey, John, Jo Ann Boydston, Harriet Furst. Simon, and Stephen Edelston Toulmin. *The Later Works, 1925-1953. The Quest for Certainty*. Carbondale (Ill.): Southern Illinois UP, 2008. Print. (Referred hereto for parenthetical purposes as “*QC*”).

¹⁷ Eldridge, Michael. *Transforming Experience: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1998. Print. (Referred hereto for parenthetical purposes as “*TE*”).

acts and traits of character as having *worth*, positive or negative” (*Ethics*, 263). Value, in turn, is determined by the consequences that result from an action. The evaluation of consequences, however, is carried out through the use of what Dewey deems “principles” and “rules.” A principle, he argues, “...evolves in connection with the course of experience, being a generalized statement of what sort of consequences and values tend to be realized in certain kinds of situations” (*Ethics*, 276)¹⁸. Conversely, a rule is something “ready-made” and “fixed.” Moreover, a principle is primarily intellectual and secondarily practical, whereas a rule is only practical (*Ethics*, 276). This distinction is sharpened when he proclaims, “*Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things. But principles are intellectual; they are the final methods used in judging suggested courses of action*” (*Ethics*, 280). In this fashion, the intellect is allied with principles and habit with rules. Thus, despite his best efforts, Dewey occasionally appears to separate the functions of intellect from habit.

While Dewey’s discussions of intelligence in *The Quest for Certainty* and in Chapter 14 of *Ethics* are informative, his most relevant discussion lies in Chapter 13, “The Nature of Moral Theory.” It is in this section that he differentiates between customary and reflective morality, defines a moral act, elaborates on conduct and character, attempts to reconcile motive and consequences, and delineates how moral theory should proceed. Essentially, this section fleshes out the implications of intelligence when applied to morality and forms the precursor for “religious adjustment” and “natural piety” expounded upon in *A Common Faith*.

In this section, intelligence is associated with reflection, and habit with custom. The opening line of this chapter reads, “The intellectual distinction between customary and reflective morality is clearly marked. The former places the standard and rules of conduct in ancestral habit; the latter appeals to conscience, reason, or to some principle which includes thought” (*Ethics*, 162). “Moral theory” is associated with the latter, and arises only when there is conflict between existing values. Interestingly, this specific claim closely parallels Dewey’s discussion of conflict in *Human Nature and Conduct*: “Conflict is acute; one impulse carries us one way into one situation, and another impulse takes us another way to a radically different objective result. Deliberation is not an attempt to do away with this opposition of quality by reducing it to one of amount. It is an attempt to *uncover* the conflict in its full scope and bearing” (*HNC*, 216). Here, moral theory approximates deliberation and impulses values. Another parallel obtains between this discussion and that of principles and rules in Chapter 14. Dewey sums up the difference between customary and reflective morality when he asserts “...definite precepts, rules, definitive injunctions and prohibitions issue from the former, while they cannot proceed from the latter” (*Ethics*, 165). Thus, customary morality resembles the “rules” and reflective morality the “principles” explicated in the subsequent chapter. Having established the terminology, Dewey proceeds to delineate the jurisdiction of moral theory.

Dewey defines the nature of a moral act indirectly, taking a detour through the concept of volition. In doing so, he avails himself of Aristotle’s description from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He declares, “The formula was well stated by Aristotle. The doer of the moral deed must have a certain ‘state of mind’ in doing it. First, he must *know* what he is doing; secondly, he must *choose* it, and choose it for itself, and thirdly, the act must be the expression of a formed and stable *character*. In other words, the act must be *voluntary*...” (*Ethics*, 166). From here, he segues into the nature of a moral act by asking whether a voluntary act can be morally neutral or amoral. At first, this seems entirely plausible. However, upon sustained reflection, we realize that

¹⁸ Dewey, John, and Jo Ann Boydston. *Ethics, The Later Works, 1925-1953*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1985. Print.

this position must be qualified. Many of the mundane actions we perform every day – watching the news, going to work, crossing the street, etc... – seem entirely devoid of ethical content. However, if we were to neglect *in toto* all these activities, moral consequences become evident. For instance, if a doctor sleeps in rather than attending to the emergency room, a portfolio manager neglects the stock market for an extended period of time, or a construction worker disobeys protocol on a construction site, consequences with serious ethical implications may arise. Hence, while each of these acts is insignificant in isolation, they contribute to a series of actions, which is always potentially moral in character. Thus, reflection or intelligence is potentially implicated in every act we perform.

The notion of a series of actions is expanded in his discussion of conduct and character. The word “conduct,” he writes, “...expresses continuity of action...not simply a succession of disconnected acts but each thing done carries forward an underlying tendency and intent, *conducting*, leading up, to further acts and to a final fulfillment or consummation” (*Ethics*, 169). Moral development thus consists in our becoming aware that all acts are connected. The more comprehensive our understanding of these connections, and the more consistent our judgment, the more stable and formed our character. This ecosystemic conception of conduct resembles the transactional relationship between habit, impulse, and the environment in *Human Nature and Conduct*. By recognizing the consequences of our actions, we can modify, through reflection or deliberation, our behavior in order that it may be more moral. Dewey takes advantage of this opportunity to reintroduce the notion of habit, which, he proffers, “...signifies a building up and solidifying of certain desires; an increased sensitiveness and responsiveness to certain stimuli, a confirmed or an impaired capacity to attend to and think about certain things...in other words the very make-up of desire, intent, choice, disposition which gives an act its voluntary character” (*Ethics*, 171). Unfortunately, despite Dewey’s insistence that habit gives an action its voluntary character, it still seems to lack a certain quality expressed by the concepts of deliberation and reflection. The actions associated with habit and conduct are either reinforced or impeded through deliberation and reflection. If these functions were identical with habit, then habit would guide habit, and the term “voluntary” would be rendered superfluous.

This issue also resurfaces in the subsequent section when he attempts to collapse the dichotomy between motives and consequences. With respect to these theories, Dewey summarizes, “One theory puts sole emphasis upon *attitude*, upon *how* the chosen act is conceived and inspired; the other theory lays stress solely upon *what* is actually done, upon the objective *content* of the deed in the way of its effect upon others” (*Ethics*, 173). However, he claims, “We are dealing not with two different things but with two poles of the same thing” (*Ethics*, 173). In his attempt to resolve this dichotomy, he rehabilitates the notion of will, which becomes a clumsy conflation of the terms “motive” and “intent.”

Motives, according to Dewey, correspond only vaguely to feelings, which are transient and spontaneous. They are the expression of dispositions or tendencies to act in a certain fashion. Anger, for instance, is a “...tendency to act in a destructive way towards whatever arouses it” (*Ethics*, 174). Dewey argues that the angry person no more experiences a feeling of anger than the ambitious person experiences a feeling of ambition. Motive for Dewey is “...but an abbreviated name for the attitude and predisposition toward ends which is embodied in action...” (*Ethics*, 175). Unfortunately, while Dewey’s intent in providing this distinction is clear – to suggest a connection between motive and habit – the diminished role played by emotion proves unsatisfactory. Many would doubtless argue that anger and ambition are significant emotions corresponding to and aiding in the formation of the dispositions that give rise to action.

Intention, in supposed contradistinction, Dewey declares has often been associated with our dispassionate capacity for rational foresight. However, he finds this definition unsatisfactory. He argues that all actions must somehow be motivated by desire. Desire provides the impetus, while deliberation determines the method for the realization or denial of that impulse. He then abruptly concludes, “The distinction between motive and intent is not found in the facts themselves, but is simply a result of our own analysis, according as we emphasize either the emotional or the intellectual aspect of an action” (*Ethics*, 175). However, the relationship between motive and intent ultimately bears striking resemblance to the relation between habit and deliberation. And while Dewey exhibits no reservations in conflating the two, the problematic nature of doing so persists. Consequently, his effort to gloss over the issue by defining will as the “...unity of impulse, desire, and thought which anticipates and plans” lacks conviction. In fact, by defining will so broadly, he sacrifices its explanatory power.

The last crucial insight into intelligence provided by his discussion in *Ethics* relates to his consideration of what qualifies as viable material for reflection. Here, Dewey returns to his scientific roots. History becomes for him a giant dataset to be mined. He suggests four sources for the development of moral theory: (1) codes of conduct, (2) judicial and legislative activity, (3) contemporary science, and (4) the theoretical methods of European and Asiatic history. Codes of conduct, while they tend to dogmatism, reflect the presiding social and economic values. Legal history reflects the States’ best attempts at conflict resolution and the direction of human conduct. Sciences such as biology, physiology, and psychology can be used, if not to discover solutions, then at least to more clearly define our problems. Finally, the theoretical moral systems provide systematic approaches to moral questions in a variety of contexts.

Overall, in *The Quest for Certainty* and *Ethics*, Dewey is successful insofar as he clarifies the notion of intelligence and expands its application. However, he continues to struggle with its relation to rules, habits, and motives. Unfortunately, this picture only becomes more complicated with the introduction of and attempted assimilation with “religious” action.

IV. Religious Adjustment and Natural Piety

In *A Common Faith*, Dewey strives once again for the middle road. According to Eldridge’s *Transforming Experience*, Dewey wrote in a letter, “My book was written for the people who feel inarticulately they have the essence of the religious with them and yet are repelled by the religions and are confused – primarily for them, secondarily for ‘liberals’ to help them realize how inconsistent they are” (*TE*, 147). He strove to access those who were neither “conventionally religious nor those who were antireligious” (*TE*, 148). He continues to use traditional religious language, but he dramatically redefines the terms religious, ideal, and God. The upshot of this is the naturalization of religion. By grounding religion in humanity, rather than in the supernatural, he submits the practice of religion to intelligent scrutiny and direction. How Dewey arrives at this conclusion, however, determines the success of his project and merits further investigation.

One of Dewey’s principle aims is to remove the supernatural elements from religious practices. The first distinction he makes is between “religion” and the “religious.” In order to liberate the term “religious” for his own designs, he first attempts to debunk the term “religion.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Dewey writes, religion is defined as, “Recognition on the part of man of some unseen higher power as having control of his destiny and as being

entitled to obedience, reverence and worship” (CF, 3)¹⁹. He then presents three difficulties with this definition. First, he notes the ambiguity of “unseen powers.” These powers, he writes, “...have been conceived in a multitude of incompatible ways. Eliminating the differences, nothing is left beyond the bare reference to something unseen and powerful” (CF, 4). He provides a litany of these variations, which includes the Kami of Shintoism, the fetish of Africans, the impersonal ultimate principle of Buddhism, the unmoved mover of the Greeks, the Providence of Christianity, and the Will of Moslemism, etc., in order to buttress this claim. Second, he declares, there is “...no greater similarity in the ways in which obedience and reverence have been expressed” (CF, 4). Practices have ranged from the worship of animals, ghosts, and ancestors to reverence expressed through sexual orgies, exorcisms, and sacrifices. Third, Dewey remarks, “...there is no discernible unity in the moral motivations appealed to and utilized” (CF, 5). He observes, “They have been as far apart as fear of lasting torture, hope of enduring bliss in which sexual enjoyment has sometimes been a conspicuous element; mortification of the flesh and extreme asceticism; prostitution and chastity; wars to extirpate the unbeliever, persecution to convert or punish the unbeliever, and philanthropic zeal; servile acceptance of imposed dogma, along with brotherly love and aspiration for a reign of justice among men” (CF, 5). His point in deconstructing this definition is twofold: (1) to prove that the “religion” *per se* does not exist, that it serves merely as an aggregate for a variety of disparate practices, and (2) to suggest that religions should be interpreted in terms of their historical and cultural contexts.

By demonstrating the essentially human aspects of religion, he believes he has sufficiently prepared the grounds for a distinction between “religion” and “religious.” He writes, “...a religion...always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization...In contrast, the adjective ‘religious’ denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs” (CF, 9). The “religious” denotes an attitude, a disposition toward objects and ideals. And religious experiences are not distinct or marked off from esthetic, scientific, moral and political experiences. “It is the polar opposite of some type of experience that can exist by itself” (CF, 10-11). Instead, “The actual religious quality in the experience described is the *effect* produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the matter and cause of its production” (CF, 14).

Religious experience is spurred and directed through ideals. However, in Dewey’s system, ideals are not otherworldly prescriptions imposed from outside nature. Rather they are hypostatized desires. He writes, “it [the ideal] emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action...The idealizing imagination seizes upon the most precious things found in the climactic moments of experience and projects them. We need no external criterion and guarantee for their goodness. They are had, they exist as good, and out of them we frame our ideal ends” (CF, 48). Curiously, this idea finds an analog in Sigmund Freud’s work through the principle of wish-fulfillment. In fact, Freud’s treatise on religion, *The Future of an Illusion*, was published in 1928, six years before Dewey delivered the Terry Lectures contained in *A Common Faith*. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud makes the following Deweyan observation:

¹⁹ Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1934. Print. (Referred hereto for parenthetical purposes as “CF”).

...it would be an indubitable advantage to leave God out of the question altogether, and to admit honestly the purely human origin of all cultural laws and institutions. Along with their pretensions to sanctify the rigid and immutable nature of these laws and regulations would also cease. Men would realize that these have been made, not so much to rule them, as, on the contrary, to serve their interests; they would acquire a more friendly attitude to them, and instead of aiming at their abolition they would aim only at improving them” (*The Future of an Illusion*, 73)²⁰.

While Dewey does not reject God as explicitly as Freud, his repackaged God serves nearly the same function.

Dewey approaches the subject of God as carefully as he can, given his rejection of the supernatural. He gently proposes, “Suppose for the moment that the word ‘God’ means the ideal ends that at a given time and place one acknowledges as having authority over his volition and emotion, the values to which one is supremely devoted, as far as these ends, through imagination, take on unity” (*CF*, 42). Shortly thereafter, he inquires more boldly, “We may well ask whether the power and significance in life of the traditional conceptions of God are not due to ideal qualities referred to by them, the hypostatization of them into an existence being due to a conflux of tendencies in human nature that converts the object of desire into an antecedent reality...with beliefs that have prevailed in the cultures of the past” (*CF*, 44). God becomes for Dewey a symbol of the unity of desires or ideals created by a culture to be intellectually coordinated so as to promote progress. In the end, Dewey concedes, “Whether one gives the name ‘God’ to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision” (*CF*, 52).

Dewey’s reconfigured religious attitude is referred to as “natural piety.” He writes, “Natural piety is not of necessity either a fatalistic acquiescence in natural happenings or a romantic idealization of the world. It may rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose, having the capacity to strive by their aid to bring conditions in to greater consonance with what is humanly desirable” (*CF*, 35). However, just like “religious adjustment” and the unification of ideals through “God,” natural piety is merely another instance of intelligence dressed in religious garb. On this point, Eldridge remarks, “...I think that the Deweyan process of adjustment, of transforming experience [religious experience], is better understood as intelligence generally or specifically as the secular form of cultural criticism that he understood to be philosophy” (*TE*, 169). Thus, despite Dewey’s careful stipulation of religious terms, Eldridge comments, the use of terms like “God” only invites misunderstanding.

The implications of Dewey’s naturalization project are manifold. First, as Eldridge appropriately declares, Dewey made “...no use or limited use of many elements that are often thought central to religion, including revelation, prayer, immortality, separate institutions, and even distinctively religious experience” (*TE*, 127). By attempting to reconcile religion with intelligence, Dewey may have tossed the baby out with the bathwater because the “religion” he ultimately espouses is merely another instantiation of deliberation, intelligence, and reflection. God, the ideal, and the religious are divested of their seemingly essential spiritual, supernatural, and sublime elements. They become instead the product of hypostatized wishes. And while these

²⁰ Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. Trans. W.D. Robson-Scott. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010. Print.

wishes or ideals may be useful in orienting our actions, they certainly would never be referred to as religious in the traditional sense.

V. Conclusion

Consonant with the opening quote by Thoreau, Dewey's objective in all his work is to elevate the human condition through the intellectualization of practice. Whether he speaks of deliberation, intelligence, reflection, or natural piety, his message remains the same: work toward understanding the causes and consequences of your behavior so that you may more harmoniously and effectively direct future action. His theory is not for those who intentionally eschew intellectual exertion or perversely maintain absolute principles. Everyone and every institution must be open to change and subject to constant scrutiny. In fact, for Dewey, progress, morality, and intelligence are defined more by their methods than by their overt consequences.

The only question that remains is whether we are ready to permit intelligent action the free reign desired by Dewey and his predecessors. Are we prepared as a nation, as a civilization, as a species to question our most cherished beliefs in the name of progress? Many of the cultural and religious attitudes we maintain today may not yield the most fruitful or practical results, but some would argue that they fulfill certain psychological needs. On the other hand, as Freud observed, "So long as man's early years are influenced by the religious thought-inhibition and by the loyal one derived from it...we cannot really say what he is like" (*The Future of an Illusion*, 83). In the end, what these men – Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and Dewey – have shown us is that the only way to be certain is by challenging and testing these beliefs.

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EDUCATION **The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA
Schreyer Honors College, Graduation: August 2011
Smeal College of Business & College of Liberal Arts
B.S. in Finance with Honors and Highest Distinction
B.A. in Philosophy with Honors and Highest Distinction
B.S. in Spanish, Business Option with Honors and Highest Distinction
Italian minor

COURSEWORK **Honor's Thesis – "The Naturalization of Morality"**

- Researched the effects that evolutionary biology has had on moral theory since the 19th century with a focus on the psychological and pragmatic consequences

EXPERIENCE **Kaplan Test Prep & Admissions**

GRE Instructor, SAT Premier Tutor

State College, PA

Aug. 2009 - Present

- Teach bi-weekly GRE preparatory classes of 5 to 15 students in 4 or 8 week sequences
- Prepare lesson plans and devise alternative explanations for more difficult questions and concepts based on the specific needs of each class or tutoring student
- Participate in and contribute to teacher workshops and marketing campaigns, which led to 850 leads and 15 immediate sign-ups for the 2010 "Back To School" campaign

Johnson & Johnson Summer Internship

Finance Intern

Irvine, CA

May 2008 – Aug. 2008

- Reviewed documentation control matrices for Sarbanes-Oxley compliance
- Tested Sarbanes-Oxley compliance measures and reported results to management with suggestions for improvement
- Collaborated with documentation control matrix owners to create test scripts required for testing procedures

Penn State Investment Association

Telecommunications Lead Analyst

University Park, PA

Jan. 2007 – Aug. 2008

- Presented pitches, which consisted of research based on comparable company analysis and discounted cash flow valuation, to all fund administrators and to the Penn State Investment Association's general body (150+ students)
- Managed \$160,000 of investor money and outperformed the S&P 500 Telecommunications' index fund by 12% in Spring 2008
- Constructed informational PowerPoint lessons and taught weekly sessions to the members of the telecommunications sector

ACTIVITIES **Shotokan Karate Club**

Assistant Instructor, Black Belt

University Park, PA

Sep. 2002 – Present

- 3rd place at 2008 Nationals in brown-belt kumite (individual free-sparing)
- 2nd place at 2008 Nationals in collegiate team kata (group routine)
- 1st Place at 2008 East Coast Championships in brown-belt kata (individual routine)

Cross-country Motorcycle Trip

U.S., ME, CAN

- Toured the United States; Baja California, Mexico; and Ontario, Canada for 48 days, traveling over 12,000 miles

July 2010 – Aug. 2010

- Explored local cultures and engaged in a variety of thought-provoking and insightful discussions with people from all over the country, as well as in Mexico and Canada

Study Abroad

Guanajuato, ME

- Traveled throughout Mexico while learning about the effects of NAFTA and the transformation of its informal economy
- Lived with a host family and learned subtleties of the Mexican culture and familial structure

May 2007 – June 2007

AWARDS

Shibley Award for Philosophy, Evan Pugh Scholar Award, President Sparks Award