SHOULD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION HAVE ANY EFFECT ON META-ETHICS AND IF SO IS MICHAEL RUSE INCONSISTENT IN REJECTING META-ETHICAL REALISM WHILST STILL DEFENDING A FORM OF PRACTICAL MORAL REALISM?

BY

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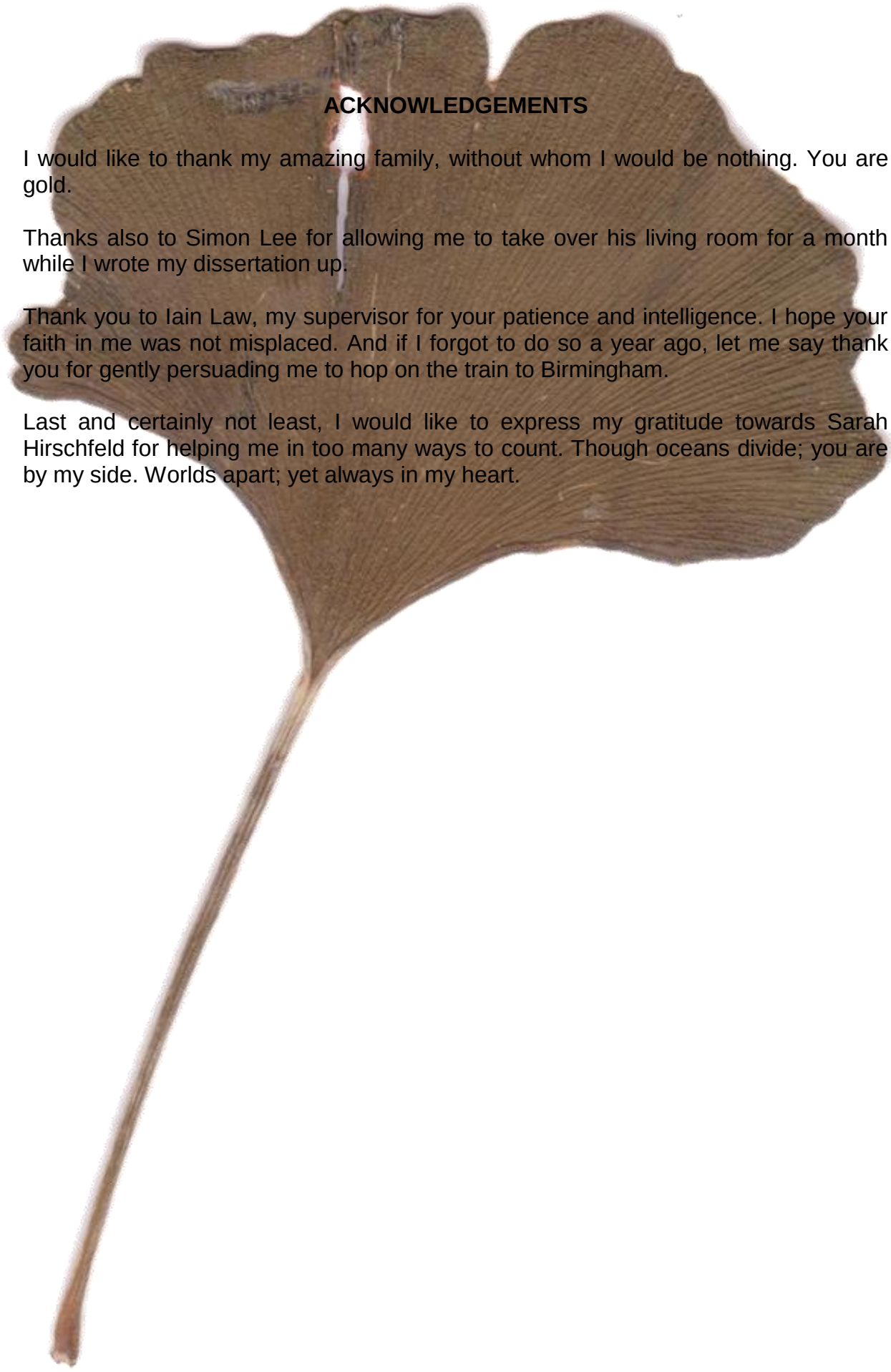
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the implications of seeing moral beliefs and moral behaviour as evolutionary adaptations. In particular, it discusses whether or not an evolutionary explanation of human moral behaviour should lead us to reject the idea of objective moral facts. I agree with Michael Ruse that moral behaviour can be explained in naturalistic terms. However Ruse believes that this should not lead us to reject some forms of moral realism, as morality is a shared adaptation. My arguments against this are twofold. Firstly I believe that if morality is a product of natural forces then there will be variation between individuals' moral sense; which should give us cause to reject all forms of moral realism. My second argument is that Ruse is internally inconsistent, and he is trying to 'sneak' moral facts back into the picture, having previously rejected them.



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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

> I would argue, [that] the most important aspect of human nature – is that we are social animals and that the key to this sociality is that we believe that there are certain ways in which we ought to behave and that there are certain ways in which we ought not to behave. In short, we are moral beings. (Ruse, 1995: 200)

One of the defining features of human nature is the display of 'moral' behaviour. People judge actions, character traits, etc. as right or wrong, good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible. These kinds of judgements also motivate or influence people's actions, making them less likely to steal or cheat for example, than if they did not make moral judgements. Some would argue that the moral judgements which people articulate and follow are based on objectively real rules which exist in the world, independent of human thought - this view is moral realism. Some have even argued that the existence of morality offers proof for the existence of God, as only He can explain how we have the ability to tell right from wrong.

However, following the publishing of *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859, containing the theory of natural selection, many evolutionary psychologists have claimed that morality is merely one of many traits which can be explained in naturalistic terms. In other words, the only reason people make and obey moral judgements today is because the ability to make and obey those judgements has been produced by natural selection because it gave our ancestors an advantage.

If we only think in moral terms because it gave our ancestors a survival advantage, it seems that there is no need to appeal to moral facts to explain such behaviour. Such facts are explanatorily redundant, and so there is no reason to think that they actually exist. Therefore the availability of evolutionary explanations of moral behaviour

threatens moral realism. Serious questions then arise: if there are no moral facts, why should we behave as though there are? Why should we conform to non-existent moral rules?

Michael Ruse believes that he can answer these questions. He agrees with the biological explanations of moral behaviour, but also claims that the truth of such explanations does not necessitate our abandoning moral practices or beliefs. In fact, he believes that the biological explanation of behaviour can support our practical commitment to acting morally.

I believe that Ruse's naturalistic defence of a type of moral realism fails to provide a compelling reason for continuing to act as if moral realism were true. This in turn has some wide reaching consequences for other social practices, aside from morality, because society is linked to human psychology, which itself has a naturalistic explanation.

Before I explain my criticisms of Ruse in detail I will outline the key biological processes involved in natural selection and show how these can produce altruistic (and therefore moral) behaviour. Then I will give a history of the influence the theory of natural selection has had on ethics, before outlining Ruse's views. I agree with much of what Ruse says, however I disagree with his statement that we can be (a limited type of) moral realist because we all have a shared sense of morality. I will make a two pronged criticism of Ruse's work.

The first prong of my criticism is to say that people vary in the level of natural morality they have. Proving this takes up most of my dissertation. I will outline some of the natural pressures which operate on the evolution of moral behaviour to show that we do not all have a sense of morality, and that those of us who do have a sense of morality naturally display great variation in the expression of this morality. Therefore I deduce that a realist conclusion is not logical. I compose a dialectic which could occur between me and Ruse or an apologist of his to defend this position.

The second, shorter, prong is that Ruse hasn't accomplished his goal of coming up with a moral system, according to his own criteria of what it means for something to be moral. Ruse has not actually made a case for preserving the practice of morality; he only appears to have done so, and he has snuck so called 'morality' into his explanation.

The two prongs are intended as stand-alone arguments: the first is an external criticism that Ruse has made a mistake regarding how natural selection works, the second is an internal criticism that Ruse is not consistent with what constitutes an acceptable justification of morality. They both prove that Ruse does not have grounds to defend a position of (practical) moral realism.

2. BIOLOGICAL MECHANISMS

2.1 OVERVIEW OF NATURAL SELECTION

This dissertation is concerned with naturalistic explanations of behaviours; therefore it seems logical to begin with a summary of the theory of natural selection. In their invaluable book on this subject *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett outline the theory as follows:

> *Premise 1:* All individuals of a particular species show variation in their behavioural, morphological and/or physiological traits – their '**phenotype**'. (This is usually known as the principle of variation).
>
> *Premise 2:* A part of this variation between individuals is '**heritable**': some of that variation will be passed on from one generation to the next or, to put it even more simply, offspring will tend to resemble their parents more than they do other individuals in the population (The Principle of Inheritance).
>
> *Premise 3:* There is competition among individuals for scarce resources such as food, mates and somewhere to live, and some of these variants allow their bearers to compete more effectively. This competition occurs because organisms have a great capacity to increase in numbers, and can produce far more offspring than ever give rise to breeding individuals – just think of frogspawn, for example. (The Principle of Adaptation).
>
> *Consequence:* As a result of being more effective competitors, some individuals will leave more offspring than others because the particular traits they possess give them some sort of edge: they are more successful at finding food or mating, or avoiding predators. The offspring of such individuals will have inherited these successful traits from their parents, and 'natural selection' can be said to have been taken place. Through this process, organisms become 'adapted' to their environment. The success with which a trait is propagated in future generations relative to other variations of that trait is called its **fitness**. Fitness is a measure of relative reproductive success – that is, relative to alternative variants of the same trait; strictly speaking, it is a property of traits. (This is sometimes known as the Principle of Evolution). (Dunbar, 1982, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 3 original emphasis).

An example of physical traits being selected in non-human animals can be seen when moths survive because their colouring is similar to that of their environment, as it is difficult for predators to see them. Examples of human physical traits include skin

or hair colour, which is determined by one's genetic makeup, as inherited from one's ancestors.

However traits can be behavioural as well as physical:

> As Darwin pointed out, behaviour is just as important as physique. Adaptation is required in the world of action as well as form ... The antelope fleeing the lion, the battle for mates, the mosquito in search of its feast of blood, these are the commonplaces of evolution (Ruse, 1995: 234).

Behavioural traits in non-human animals include salmon swimming upstream to spawn, birds singing a particular mating song or making their nests in a certain way[1]. Some commentators fail to recognise that humans are born with certain behavioural traits, in the same way that other animals are, but it is crucial to appreciate this fact when looking at evolutionary ethics:

> People who question the abilities of humans to [work out how closely they are related to different members of their community] often have no problem believing that desert ants find their way back to their nestholes using polarised light and trigonometry. With the ant, it is more obvious that natural selection has created animals with this ability programmed into them and that the ant's brain (such as it is) has very little to do with it. However, certain aspects of human behaviour may operate in the same manner (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 6)

Ruse has no such misgivings about human behaviours being innate: "we have certain built-in strategies, hard-wired into our brains if you like, which we bring into play and which guide our actions when we are faced with certain social situations" (Ruse, 1995: 241).

[1] A point of clarification: "Natural selection cannot select for behaviour per se; it can only select for the mechanisms that produce behaviour" (Tooby and Cosmides in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 18). Any references in this dissertation to natural selection 'selecting' behaviours can be taken as meaning natural selection 'selecting' these behaviour producing mechanisms.

An example that Ruse gives of an innate behaviour is that of speech. He believes, as does Noam Chomsky, that there is a natural 'deep structure' to human linguistic abilities.

> The grammar of a particular language … is to be supplemented by a universal grammar that accommodates the creative aspect of language use and expresses the deep-seated regularities which, being universal, are omitted from the grammar itself (Chomsky 1956: 6).[2]

An **Evolutionary Stable Strategy (ESS)** is "any behavioural strategy that, once it dominates in a population, cannot be displaced by any alternative strategies that try to invade the population" (Maynard Smith and Price, 1973 and Maynard Smith, 1982 in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 33). This concept will be used in section 5.3.

In summary, traits in individuals are determined by the expression of one's genes, which come from one's ancestors and are selected according to the pressures of the environment. Traits can be either physical or behavioural:

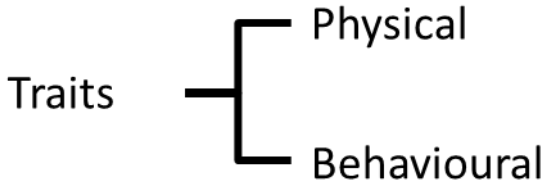

Fig. 1: Traits can be either physical or behavioural. I will add more complexity to this model as the dissertation progresses.

[2] It should be pointed out that Chomsky's theory that speech has a 'deep structure' is a controversial one. However, even if Chomsky's theory were to be disproved, Ruse's theory of a deep structure is not dependent on Chomsky's (there may be a deep structure to ethics even if there is not one to language). Therefore it is at least useful as a comparison, as the structures of the two theories are similar.

2.2 THE EVOLUTION OF ALTRUISM

This section will aim to answer in scientific terms the question: why do individuals act with altruism? After all, giving resources to others would surely reduce one's own ability to survive, thereby reducing the chance that one's genetic material is passed on. Given that each individual organism's interests, whether they know it or not, are in having descendants which will continue their genetic line, why would any organism try and benefit another? It may seem at first glance that helping another human climb out of a ditch may be not be a significant cost to the altruistic individual, but any unrewarded cost in biology, however small, will reduce the fitness of an individual and therefore will make it less likely for that individual's genetic material to be continued. To put it another way:

> **Altruism** can be defined as any act that confers a benefit on the recipient of the act at some cost to the donor. In evolutionary terms these costs and benefits are measured in terms of reproductive success, or, more strictly, fitness. As such, the existence of altruism creates something of a problem for the theory of natural selection since … the latter is based on the notion of competition between individuals rather than noble fellow feeling and self–sacrifice (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 25, my emphasis).

The answer is that a distinction can be drawn between **indirect fitness** and **direct fitness;** together these constitute an organism's **inclusive fitness** (hereafter any mention of 'fitness' without the preface 'direct' or 'indirect' will refer to inclusive fitness). Examples of things that increase an individual's direct fitness include the obvious; bigger claws for fighting, better legs for running, a knack for finding food (the kind of things which one might find useful if one were being selfish). However 'Indirect fitness' is improved by those things that increase the chances of genetic material being passed on in less obvious ways, ways which require altruism (Hamilton, 1964, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 26). There are several different

mechanisms which increase the fitness of altruists; the two main ones are kin selection and reciprocal altruism.

Kin selection: Being an altruist can be adaptive because an individual can preferentially help her relatives[3], and therefore help her genes to be passed on vicariously. This is significant when one considers that one's siblings contain as much genetic material in common with oneself (50%) as one's children. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 26-7). Ruse sums it up by saying "Close relatives share the same units of heredity (genes), and so inasmuch as one's relatives succeed in life's struggles and reproduce, one is oneself reproducing, by proxy as it were" (Ruse, 1995: 235). Hamilton's rule (rB>C) predicts that altruism will occur if the degree of relatedness (r) of the organism being helped to the altruist, multiplied by benefit (B) to the organism being helped, is greater than the cost to the altruist (C) (Hamilton 1964 in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 26).

Reciprocal altruism[4]: According to Trivers "if an individual behaves altruistically but is paid back for their altruistic act at a later date, then both participants will ultimately

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[3] Note that in some cases an individual cannot be sure that one is helping a relative, e.g. uncertainty over paternity might mean that a 'father' was actually caring for another man's children. However, for the most part humans are very good at detecting whether or not someone is related to them, therefore the benefit will go to a relative most of the time.

[4] Terms such as 'altruism' and 'selfishness' should be recognised as being used metaphorically; prairie dogs may bark to warn others of predators but this doesn't necessarily involve a mental process in which they think about what to do and choose their actions. These terms merely refer to the actions that organisms perform, not the mental processes that produce those actions.

The 'selfish gene' is an idea coined by Richard Dawkins to describe the way that genes operate; they act as if they are trying to win at all costs; their sole interests is in replicating the information contained within themselves (Dawkins 1976). Ruse says this about the term the 'selfish gene':

> I think this is a terrific term – it is a brilliant use of language to hammer home a basic point – but note that it is a metaphor. Genes are not selfish – nor are their possessors as such. Selfishness is a human attribute, something which results of thinking only of yourself and not

gain a net benefit" (Trivers, 1971, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 30). Just one example of animals cooperating is that male apes sometimes help each other in courtship by teaming up against a high ranking male; only one of the team-workers gets the girl, but the other will probably get a helping hand with something else later on. These helpful apes will outperform those apes which, all other things being equal, are selfish (Packer, 1977, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 29-30). Different species have evolved ways of identifying cheats, who attempt to get the initial benefit of being helped, without the cost of helping others later. In section 2.3 I suggest that morality is one of the several ways humans achieve this.

The above two mechanisms are the most significant ways in which altruism can be adaptive but several others have been identified; pseudoreciprocity, kinship deceit and parcelling.

Pseudoreciprocity: "an individual, A, performs an altruistic act that benefits another individual, B, but also increases the probability that B will perform an act to benefit itself that incidentally benefits A" (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 32). One example is of colonial cliff swallows who call others over to food, as the prey is so fast moving that one bird couldn't track an insect swarm on its own – it can track the swarm's movements by seeing where the other birds are (Brown et al, 1991, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 32).

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others. I have no reason to believe that ants or bees or wasps ever think, so literally speaking neither they nor their genes are selfish. The point of using the term 'selfish' is to draw attention to the fact that the units of inheritance work in such a way as to benefit their possessor's biological ends, whatever their behaviour (Ruse, 1995: 236).

Kinship deceit: This mainly happens when young are reared by adults who aren't their parents. The young incorrectly perceive said adults as kin and therefore look after them when they are older. This is manipulation of the kin selection psychology of "help those who were nice to you when you were young" (Connor, 1995, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 32)

Parcelling cooperation: Connor (1995) gives the example of organisms grooming each other. The way that an organism in need of grooming, A, signals her need is to approach another individual, B, and briefly groom her. That individual B could "cheat" and go to find another individual, C, for grooming, but they could indicate their need by first grooming C. Therefore it makes more sense to stick with A. This parcelling of bouts of grooming makes it always more profitable for organisms to stay in their pairs (Connor in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 32).

In summary, evolution is able to explain[5] altruistic behaviour[6]:

[5] **Side effects**: In a different vein to the above explanations, Erik Wielenberg suggests that traits can be present in an organism, not because they are evolutionarily valuable in themselves but because they are intrinsically linked with another trait which is fitness-enhancing (Wielenberg 2010: 443). He uses an example by Michael Huemer to demonstrate why some organisms have the ability to see stars, even though this trait is not itself beneficial to them:

> We can see the stars because we have vision, which is useful for seeing things on Earth, and once you have vision, you wind up seeing whatever is there sending light in your direction, whether it is a useful thing to see or not (Huemer, 2005 in Wienberg, 2010: 443-4)

I read Wielenberg and Huemer as claiming that human's complex cognitive capability (useful for social interaction, planning how to find food or a mate etc.) could give rise to a moral psychology as a side effect. I have included this idea as a footnote as it is distinct from the other explanations of the evolution of altruism. However I do not think it necessarily contradicts such explanations, as it could complement such explanations. Weilenberg notes "It is also possible that some moral beliefs have multiple evolutionary explanations." (Weilenberg 2010: 444)

[6] A couple of cautionary notes:

> [W]e should also bear in mind that (some) behaviour is a cultural phenomenon with no (genetically) adaptive function…. There is no reason why cultural practices should be adaptive in the genetic sense; indeed, as several authors have shown, it is entirely possible for cultural

> social cooperation is possible – can indeed be a direct result of natural selection – so long as the individual giving aid benefits biologically, *even if this benefit comes about vicariously*. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 235, original emphasis).

That is why there are some organisms such as worker ants which are sterile. Their altruistic behaviour (working for the benefit of the colony) confers a benefit on their siblings; hence it is actually selfish, in one sense of the word. Because the drones work to support the colony, more organisms will be born which share the drones' genetic material. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 235)

An organism can benefit from exhibiting both selfish and altruistic behaviour, under the right conditions. These benefits mean that various behaviour-producing genes are selected for, creating organisms with a mix of behavioural traits; some traits will be selfish, some will be altruistic.

> evolutionary processes to produce behaviour that is entirely maladaptive (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 83).
>
> It is important to remember that identifying selection pressures that create or maintain adaptations can often be extremely difficult. We should beware of concluding that a trait is maladaptive simply because we cannot see an obvious advantage to it. Sometimes, the selection processes involved can only be identified after a very careful detailed analysis (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 14).

I offer the above notes of caution to point out that due to the complex nature of human society some of my examples may well be disproven but the theory they support should not necessarily be disproven by the same stroke. For example one might want to prove that some innate behaviours regarding sex are adaptive; an example one might use is that some heterosexuals have an innate tendency to feel disgust at homosexuality, and this has the adaptive function of making heterosexuals more likely to try to court members of the opposite sex, thus increasing mating chances and improving fitness. However, even if some heterosexuals do have an innate tendency to feel disgust at homosexuality, there may be a different consequence of this behaviour; perhaps it is actually maladaptive as it decreases the number of friends they acquire, due to their small mindedness owing to their prejudice, and they are less likely to share in group resources. The point is that showing that the above example does not support the theory (that innate tendencies of behaviour regarding sex can increase fitness) does not disprove the theory itself; it merely shows that the example was a bad one. There may be other examples, not stated, which do support the theory. Therefore I ask you not to judge the theoretical points made purely on the basis of the examples I have given. There may be other empirical facts which support the theories; we must keep an open mind when we consider what it is that helps and hinders humans.

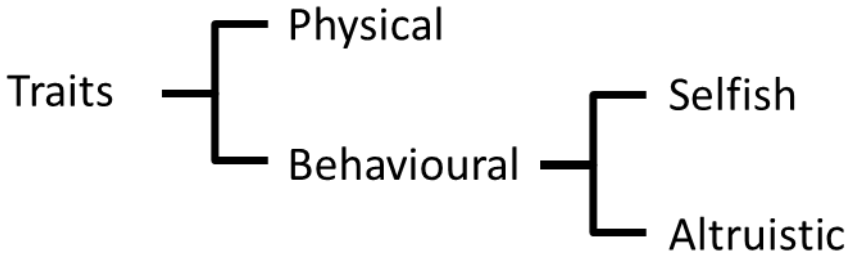

Fig. 2: Behavioural traits can be described as selfish or altruistic.

2.3 THE EVOLUTION OF MORALITY

Section 2.2 explained the evolution of altruism due to natural pressures; the challenge now is to bridge the gap between straightforward altruism and the arguably more complicated phenomenon of morality.

> In our everyday experience, we tend to leap in and give help to those who need it without a second thought, and it seems difficult to reconcile this with the hard-nosed economic approach that an evolutionary analysis entails. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 67-8)

Moral statements tend to be expressed in terms of things you 'ought' to do, without further justification beyond the idea that something is simply right or wrong. For example 'you ought to be kind to others', as opposed to 'you ought to be kind to others where rB>C'. While the rules of common sense morality do allow for exceptions to rules (e.g. that lying is wrong but it's sometimes acceptable to lie), such rules are generally expressed in blanket terms, rather than the limited terms one might expect if those rules exist solely for the benefit of the people who create and promote them.

There is evidence to suggest that morality may be a way of indicating a person's (personality) traits to other people. It has been suggested that:

> By advertising oneself as an altruist, individuals will be more inclined to act favourably toward you, even if they have not directly benefited from your altruistic acts ... An altruistic reputation means that individuals are more likely to trust you not to defect, and provide a necessary precursor to embarking on cooperative endeavours (Trivers, 1971, and Alexander, 1979, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 70-71)

> [Furthermore] reciprocal relations may extend across generations, and be inherited by the [individual's] descendants (Palmer, 1991, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 71)

Studies have shown that the human brain has the capacity to remember around 2,000 faces; and that people tend to maintain a group of around 150 people "that one knows well enough to ask a favour of" (Dunbar, 1993 and 1996, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 245), a "sympathy group of 12-15 people (Buys and Larsen, 1979, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 247) and a "support clique" of roughly 3-5 people (Hays and Oxley, 1986, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 249). Given the importance of remembering cheats in determining whether or not we should be altruistic to them, it seems plausible that morality is a shorthand way for humans to remember who can be trusted and who cannot. In other words, it is a cost effective cognitive technique for remembering large quantities of social information.

Some ethicists, known as emotivists, believe that the statement 'killing is wrong' translates as "a report on feelings, perhaps combined with a bit of exhortation. 'I don't like killing! Boo Hoo! Don't you do it either!'". (Ruse, 1995: 254) Ruse thinks (and I agree) that this does not have enough force behind it. It is my view that morality isn't a mere expression of preference; it is also a powerful social marker. For example we are less inclined to want to work with or date people who are immoral, all other things (e.g. their other talents and abilities) being equal. The ability to detect cheats is key to preventing collective action failures caused by freeriders (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 255-6). It seems highly plausible that morality represents both part of this mechanism of freerider detection, and a means of communicating the results of said detection to other people. Note that even individual freeriders (one could call them immoral people) would to some extent use such a system; they are not interested in other cheats prospering, as they are also potential competitors. Hence, the 'pot can call the kettle black', so long as the pot doesn't get caught out as well. This would in

fact be a case of someone cheating the cheating detection system, for which there is a specific moral remedy – our dislike of hypocrites.

Interestingly there is ‘honour amongst thieves’; in most criminal communities there is the understanding that certain actions are acceptable (e.g. stealing) and that others are not (e.g. informing on other members of the criminal community). I would like to suggest that the innate morality humans are born with is a base from which they can shape the world around them. Their specific moral codes are like a building constructed on top of this innate moral foundation. This explains why moral statements are expressed as blanket normative dictates; the people at whom they would traditionally have been directed at would be those people in the speaker’s network (either the 150 people or the larger, 2000 strong group).

The idea of tolerated theft is that when prey comes in packets (i.e. large mammals which can be hunted) it makes sense for the best hunters to allow theft of some of their own resources, as they satisfy their own hunger with their first few servings, then have little need for the rest of the resource; they can allow others to take it. Hopefully at a later stage others will reciprocate. (Blurton-Jones, 1984, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 75) I theorise that this type of interaction over resources could have been the genesis of morality in human society. It is in the interests of all concerned to share (as fighting would have fitness costs and no benefits to anyone) therefore it makes sense that the individuals involved in such interactions would evolve a sense of altruism. It makes sense for the worse hunters as they want the better hunters to share, because they therefore get more of the resource. It also makes sense for the better hunter to phrase the action as ‘giving’ rather than

‘tolerated theft’ as the former implies a reciprocal duty from the weaker hunters at a later stage.

Ruse believes that

> [W]e think that killing is wrong because it seems to us that killing is wrong. Somehow, whatever the truth may be, the foundation of morality does seem to be something ‘out there’, binding on us (Ruse, 1995: 254).

“To use a useful if ugly word of Mackie (1979), we ‘objectify’ morality” (Ruse, 1995: 254). In other words, morality has a great deal of motivating force because we are genetically determined to behave as though our moral beliefs correspond to some objective truth in the world. Let us refer to peoples’ innate tendency to objectify moral ideas as Natural Objectification of Morality (NOM). I will return to this tendency and its implications in section 5.4 onwards.

The naturalistic explanation of morality could explain why normative statements are expressed in the way they are. I have been asked if it makes sense for us to have evolved to have an ‘ought’ based morality, versus a ‘must’ based morality. I.e. ‘I **must** dive into the water and save that drowning child (because that child is likely to be a relative)’. Surely ‘must’ is more likely to produce action than ‘ought’? My answer is that an objective but ignorable morality is a great way of balancing the different needs that one has. Evolution can link some needs to physical pain or discomfort, such as a lack of food causing our stomach to ache, but some other needs cause psychological (i.e. moral) discomfort. An equivocal morality is therefore an excellent way of balancing our needs. We feel morally that we ought to share our food with others, but if we are really weak from lack of food then our body will send us messages that doing so would be a bad move:

> We also need to remember that evolution is always something of a compromise: at any one time there are numerous selection pressures acting on different traits in many different ways, with the result that a given adaptation may not always be the perfect solution to the to the problem in question. The classic example here is that adaptations designed to enhance reproductive capacity are inevitably compromised by those geared towards enhancing survival. For example, a male could have enormously high fitness if he did nothing but mate all day, but his mating activities are likely to be curtailed prematurely if he doesn't spend some time feeding (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 23)

Ruse expresses a similar view on evolved behaviours "often what one wants in biology is a quick and dirty solution – something which works pretty well, pretty cheaply, most of the time – rather perfection with its attendant price" (Ruse, 1995: 240). This explains the way that moral discourse is replete with seeming moral contradictions and competing intuitions:

> Biological life is a matter of compromise, building the best that you can with the materials that nature has dealt you. Ethics is a good adaptation, but sometimes it simply breaks down, and cannot function. The oddity is to think this a surprise rather than an exception (Ruse, 1995: 246)

The naturalistic explanation also helps explain why some moral questions seem insoluble, e.g. the 'right to life' versus 'the right to choose' in the abortion debate. Evolution does not produce perfect solutions; otherwise humans wouldn't be so vulnerable to back complaints (which are a product of our developing bipedalism).

> [I]f people do not behave strictly according to the dictates of kin selection or sexual selection … it does not mean that their behaviour is maladaptive. It may just be a consequence of attempting to solve a wide range of adaptive problems at the same time. Generally speaking, most organisms are jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 23)

> We may have to make a decision, because life must go on, but there is no uniquely compelling right answer. We are going to feel badly, whatever we do. (Ruse, 1995: 246)

This idea of morality being just one of many competing demands on humans (along with hunger, sexual needs etc. is one I will return to in section 4.1 when I consider whether or not there is a distinction to be drawn between 'moral' and 'selfish' behaviours.

Another way in which morality may be adaptive to an individual human is through **competitive altruism**; where individuals compete to be the most altruistic, therefore they are viewed as good mates because they can provide for young, or because the altruistic behaviour is a **handicap:**

> [M]ale traits are selected for precisely because they lower male viability and therefore act as a reliable signal of male quality. If a male has managed to survive to sexual maturity despite the cost of the handicap he bears in the form of an exaggerated trait, then clearly he must be a very high quality male and in possession of good genes (Zahavi, 1975, and Zahavi and Zahavi, 1997, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 42)

For example, the female barn swallow is more likely to choose a mate with a long tail than a short one, even if the tail itself gives the male no advantage, or even a disadvantage, in agility. Tail length in males correlated negatively with offspring parasite load, i.e. males with longer tails tend produce healthier offspring than those with short tails. (Møller, 1990, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 40-43). It seems plausible that human morality could also be a handicapping behavioural trait. For example male Arabian babbler birds use altruism as a means of advertising themselves to potential mates: "unrelated 'helpers' as well as parents help to provision young nestlings with food. The helpers compete with each other for the privilege of providing nestlings with the most food" (Zahavi and Zahavi, 1997, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 71).

An example of morality being linked to human mating behaviours is an experiment where beggars, and the situation of those donating to them (e.g. male / female, single / accompanied etc.) was recorded. The results: “lone men were more likely to give to female beggars than to male beggars, and … lone men were more likely to give than those accompanied by a woman” (Goldberg, 1995, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 87). Common sense morality would say that these factors (gender, if accompanied or not) are not morally relevant. There are two ways one could interpret the disparity between thought and action; either a) one’s moral psychology is actually different to what we think it is or b) there are other mental processes which interfere with our moral thought processes. By a) I mean that perhaps one’s true feelings might not be the ones reported; like people who lie in exit polls before an election because they are embarrassed about voting for the party they chose. If a) then this is an interesting result insofar as it adds to the confusion when trying to examine moral psychology; perhaps stated morality is one removed from true internal morality. By b) I mean that perhaps (as mentioned above) individuals have several competing needs, perhaps in the beggar experiments there were non moral psychological mechanisms (e.g. mating desires) influencing the participant’s actions.

So although we might not realise it, our moral behaviour has many adaptive functions, and these functions are related to such basic biological needs as securing resources, finding a mate and ensuring one’s relatives are looked after (so they pass on one’s genes vicariously):

> [F]indings suggest that most people behave in a manner consistent with a system of enlightened self-interest, rather than in a truly altruistic fashion. Even such apparently selfless acts as blood donation may operate through a desire to be seen as an altruist by others, rather than merely the desire to help others who are less fortunate (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 86-7)

Therefore moral behaviour can arise from those selfish genes which allow for altruistic behaviour. I see the different types of behaviour as being labelled as follows:

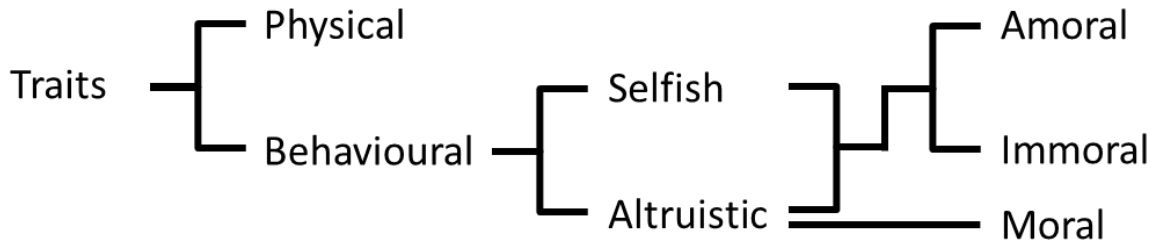

Fig. 3: Some altruistic human behaviours can be described as moral whereas some selfish and altruistic behaviours are described as immoral or amoral. Note that I cannot think of a selfish moral behaviour. I welcome any suggestions for this category; I can't think of a reason why one shouldn't arise, I just can't think of one that has! Therefore I have omitted that link from the model for now, but I am happy to be corrected if an example can be found. In the previous iterations of the above diagram, all the terms had a strict biological definition of how to classify different traits. However, the latest three branches are social constructions i.e. they refer to values that people have placed upon certain traits or behaviours. The (im)morality of the above traits refers to the way that the individual doing said actions perceives them, rather than wider society. For example if a gay woman who is a liberal starts a relationship with another woman, she would probably see this action as amoral (or moral, as it adds value to her partners' life), although some fundamentalist Christians would see such an action as immoral.
Examples of each of the above combinations of behaviours include:
Selfish, amoral: Getting out of bed in the morning; eating food to stay alive.
Selfish, immoral: stealing to benefit yourself; cheating on your partner.
Altruistic, amoral: having children.
Altruistic, immoral: giving your children cushy government jobs although they are not the best qualified people to hold them; covering up a crime that one's friend has committed.
Altruistic, moral: helping a stranger without thinking about reward or conscious ulterior motive; donating to charity (although with both of these actions one may unconsciously be exhibiting a handicap behaviour which makes one more attractive to potential mates. This motivation will be relevant in section 4.1, when I argue that one should not draw a distinction between 'moral' and 'selfish' behaviours)[7].

[7] It should be mentioned that certain readings of what it means to be (im)moral would not put the above examples in the same categories. For example David Benatar says that having children is an immoral thing to do (Benatar, 2006: 95-102); Peter Singer certainly comes close to saying that no action is amoral, or at least that a lot of actions (e.g. meeting some of our 'needs') we think of as neutral are in fact immoral because they prevent us from helping others (Singer, 1972). However, what I am talking about is a common sense morality, rather than the more rarefied philosophical arguments that exist.

SUMMARY

Natural selection means that certain physical and behavioural traits will be selected for, depending on the environmental pressures acting on organisms. The kind of traits that will be selected for are those which make an organism's genes more likely to be replicated.

Replication of genes can be done by an organism reproducing, or they can reproduce 'by proxy' by assisting their relatives. This means that natural selection can lead to altruistic behaviours being selected for.

There are several different natural explanations for humans having moral behavioural traits. It is likely that one or more of the methods outlined above explain the existence of morality.

> In the language of the evolutionist, therefore, morality is no more – although certainly no less – than an adaptation, and as such has the same status as such things as teeth and eyes and noses. (Ruse, 1995: 241)

3 HISTORY OF EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS AND RUSE'S CRITICISMS OF DESCRIPTIVE EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

Before I describe some of the different theories in evolutionary ethics and Ruse's criticisms of them, I will set out the definitions of some key terms in evolutionary ethics.

Morality: For the purposes of this dissertation, the term kind of morality I am interested in is normative morality, i.e. prescriptive morality. That is to say, statements which contain a statement of what ought to be (done), or how something ought to be judged.

Within evolutionary ethics William Fitzpatrick identifies three separate strands of thought:

> **Descriptive Evolutionary Ethics**: appeals to evolutionary theory in the scientific explanation of the origins of certain human capacities, tendencies, or patterns of thought, feeling and behavior. For example: the appeal to natural selection pressures in the distant past to explain the evolution of a capacity for normative guidance, or more specifically the origins of our sense of fairness or our resentment of cheaters…
> **Prescriptive Evolutionary Ethics**: appeals to evolutionary theory in justifying or undermining certain normative ethical claims or theories. For example: the appeal to evolutionary theory to justify free market capitalism or male-dominant social structures, or to undermine the claim that human beings have a special dignity that non-human animals lack….
> **Evolutionary Metaethics**: appeals to evolutionary theory in supporting or undermining various_metaethical theories (i.e., theories *about* moral discourse and its subject matter). For example: the appeal to evolutionary theory to support a non-cognitivist account of the semantics of moral judgment (the idea that moral judgments do not purport to represent moral facts but instead just express emotions, attitudes or commitments), or to undermine the claim that there are objective moral values, or to cast doubt on whether we could have justified beliefs about such values. (Fitzpatrick, 2008, Original emphasis)

I have been looking at Descriptive Evolutionary Ethics in sections 3 and 4; explaining in naturalistic terms why we think morally. In this section I will outline a brief history of naturalistic moral philosophy, i.e. some of the arguments which say that natural explanations of behaviour (particularly natural selection) should or should not have an effect on ethical theories, and Ruse's criticisms of some of these explanations. I start with those theories which are examples of prescriptive evolutionary ethics, and then move onto metaethical discussions about Richards, and Ruse's response to his work. I agree with Ruse's criticisms, but in section 4.2 I will explain the differences between Ruses' evolutionary metaethics and my own.

Ruse catalogues some examples of prescriptive evolutionary ethics. He says that cultural values have always been incorporated into science: "There is no doubt that, through the ages, evolutionists … have held cultural values and have put such values into their science" (Ruse, 1995: 204). These include such notorious examples as the justification of the idea of Aryan racial supremacy espoused by National Socialism in Nazi Germany (Ruse, 1995: 207), and the 'Social Darwinism' of Herbert Spencer, who believed that the poor in society should not be supported by the state; in this way their inferior genetic material would be eliminated from the gene pool. (Ruse, 1995: 205). Ruse suggests that "if you can name a morally or ideologically offensive cultural value, you can be sure that it has been incorporated into evolutionary thought at some point" (Ruse, 1995: 203). However, natural selection was also used by businessman Andrew Carnegie to justify the building of public libraries to give poor but gifted children a better chance in life (Ruse, 1995: 208-9), and by E.O. Wilson as a reason to get involved in the conservation movement, as we need "diverse nature around us. Else, we wither and die" (Wilson, 1984, in Ruse, 1995: 211).

Regardless of whether or not one feels comfortable with the prescriptions of the above theories, it is the methods used to get to these prescriptions which I am interested in. The above theories use evolutionary facts to justify moral claims. A key assumption in these kinds of theories is that one can move from talking about facts about the way the world *is* to the way people *ought* to behave. In the context of evolutionary ethics this move is referred to pejoratively as the **naturalistic fallacy**[8]**;** the attempt to gain normative values from natural facts (Moore in Ruse, 1995: 229). "In Moore's language, goodness is a non – natural property, and one simply cannot define or explicate it in terms of natural properties, like happiness or the course of evolution" (Ruse, 1995: 229). The naturalistic fallacy is when one derives claims about the way about the way one ought to behave, e.g. 'found public libraries', from claims about the way things are, e.g. evolution works to preserve the fittest'.

Most prescriptive evolutionary ethical theories are appealing because of the tendency to assume that humans represent the pinnacle of evolution, that we are 'better' or 'more evolved' than other species. This is known as the "'anthropic principle' – the world seems as it is because of the way that we view the world. In evolution, we have

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[8] Note that some philosophers believe that the naturalistic fallacy and the is / ought gap are not the same thing. For example in his book on G.E.Moore, Tom Baldwin points out:

> Moore's theory is often taken to involve a 'fact/value' gap of the kind Hume is supposed to uphold; indeed it is common to accuse those who think one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is' of committing the naturalistic fallacy. But since Moore holds that obligations are derivable from intrinsic values, and that there are necessary connections between the properties definitive of kinds of states of affairs and their intrinsic value, it follows that he is committed to necessary 'is/ought' connections. In his reply to his critics he explicitly admitted, then, that at least one natural property is 'ought-implying' (PGEM p. 604). So it is a mistake to conflate Moore with Hume' (Baldwin, 1990: 86)

However as most philosophers, including Ruse, do not draw such a distinction, nor will I for the purposes of this dissertation.

a built-in tendency to read the record in a progressivist manner" (Ruse, 1995: 220). Ruse sees 'progress' as one of the lingering values which permeates evolutionary thought (not just ethics) (Ruse, 1995: 218 -220).

The idea that the human race is more advanced than other species is questionable;

> [H]owever you classify us, we humans have had a pathetically short life span compared to the 150 million years that the dinosaurs ruled the globe; and, given our weapon of mass destruction, who would dare say that we will last into the future to outstrip the success of those extinct brutes? (Are) humans … more successful than, say the AIDs virus? (Ruse, 1995: 232)

Robert Richards is an evolutionary ethicist who disagrees with the claim that moving from biological facts to moral values is a fallacy. He believes that it is inescapable that human beings will have moral demands placed upon them:

> *the evidence shows that evolution has, as a matter of fact, constructed human beings to act for the community good; but to act for the community good is what we mean by being moral. Since, therefore, human beings are moral beings – an unavoidable condition produced by evolution – each ought to act for the community good* (Richards, 1987 in Ruse, 1995: 276-7, Richards' italics).

Ruse makes two criticisms of this line of reasoning, the first being that Richards has not actually produced a moral ought, he has only come up with an 'instrumental ought' e.g. if you want to win at chess you ought to move knight B5; we like music, therefore we ought to listen to it (Ruse, 1995: 277).

Ruse's second objection is that Richards has only achieved 'conventionalism'; he is actually just appealing to what people believe, and not to a moral reality, independent of those beliefs (Ruse, 1995: 277-8).

SUMMARY

Several contributors believe that we can determine moral values by examining natural facts, but Ruse and others argue convincingly that these attempts fall foul of the naturalistic fallacy. Richards attempts to get around the naturalistic fallacy by pointing out that humans are naturally disposed to act morally, therefore people ought to keep acting in a moral manner. Ruse criticises this on the grounds that Richards has only achieved an instrumental ought, and it is one that it not distinct from our (innate) beliefs. In the second prong of my argument (section 6) I criticise Ruse for doing exactly these two things!

4 RUSE'S POSITION

4.1 AREAS OF RUSE'S WORK WHICH I AGREE WITH

Ruse has been writing on this area (the biting point between morality and biology) for years. In this section I will set out his ideas on the subject which I agree with.

Ruse isn't trying to prescribe a new kind of ethics, he is trying to describe the ethics we currently have, and bring it into line with science:

> The job of the moral philosopher is not to prescribe some new morality, but to explain and justify the nature of morality as we know it. This, of course, may involve showing that our present beliefs are inconsistent (Ruse, 1995: 242)

Note that Ruse and I agree that there may be objective ethical facts, but we cannot be sure we have accurately identified what those facts are, therefore there is no point in acting as if such facts exist. As Ruse says:

> Suppose an objective ethics does exist, making body of claims X. There is no guarantee that we will ever believe or know X, or that what we believe might not be radically different from X. That is the whole point about the non-directedness of evolution. (Ruse, 1995: 272)

I am very much in agreement with Ruse when he says:

> I simply doubt that there are *moral* principles 'out there', waiting to be discovered (as apparently, Fermat's last theorem was waiting for the right moment). I am prepared to concede … that perhaps there is an ideal formal situation or system … I am prepared to concede that we humans are significantly far from this state… My worry is whether that formal system would be moral… you have to have something else, a sense of moral oughtness, added. (Ruse, 1995: 286)

The reason Ruse thinks that our minds are not necessarily set up to detect objective moral truths (if they exist) is that one can explain moral behaviours in evolutionary terms, i.e. our behaviour is evolved so as to maximise our fitness, rather than

establish moral reality. Our specific psychological foibles can explain much of our philosophical preferences; e.g. he sees fairness as a key natural behaviour; hence the intuitive appeal of Rawls' system of fairness and the success of Christianity (Ruse, 1995: 243-4).

Ruse is offering an epistemological argument, which aims to debunk the idea that we can know moral truths. Wielenberg describes an epistemological debunking argument as follows:

> the existence of an evolutionary explanation for a given moral belief implies that even if the belief is true, it is not knowledge (Wielenberg 2010: 442)

According to this theory there may be moral facts in the world or there may not be. If there are moral facts then people cannot be sure that they are detecting them, because human psychology is set up to maximise fitness, not to detect moral truth. Ruse would agree with this, and adds that our belief that we are in fact detecting moral facts is itself an evolved psychological trait (Ruse 1995: 254). In support of this argument Ruse points out that the way in which we come to conclusions is important for determining whether or not we should trust said conclusions, e.g. if one wants to find out how many people there are in a room, one can count the people present, or one can pick a number at random. Either method gives us an answer, but we are more likely to trust the latter method than the former (Ruse 1995: 270). Similarly Ruse notes that if one wants to know whether or not a loved is in heaven, one could ask a spiritual medium. If that medium claims to be talking to one's relative from heaven, but is subsequently found to be a fraudster (i.e. because other 'dead' people she 'spoke to' have turned up alive), one would doubt that that the medium's testimony was reliable. However, such doubt would not necessarily mean that one's loved one was not in heaven. But it would mean that one has no means of

establishing that fact. In a similar way, human intuition on morality is no basis for establishing moral truth (Ruse 1995: 249-50 and 271). I am in agreement with this argument. However, as I go on to discuss in section 6, I believe that Ruse is inconsistent in the application of this argument, as I believe he wrongly contradicts this idea (that humans are not disposed to detect genuine moral truths).

There have been recent works which resist Ruse's arguments, such as Wielenberg (2010), which argues against epistemological debunking theories. Wielenberg assumes that there are moral truths. He claims this does not conflict with an epistemological debunking theory (p447), which I agree with, as epistemological debunking theories are noncommittal on whether there are moral truths or not (they merely claim that we cannot be sure that we know such truths). Wielenberg criticises Ruse for saying that two worlds could be identical with the one exception being that in one world there are moral facts, but in the other there are not (human behaviour being the same in both, as per an epistemological debunking theory). Wielenberg claims that as moral properties supervene on nonmoral properties, these two worlds cannot have people with identical behaviour in them. Wielenberg therefore thinks that Ruse is wrong to reject hypothetical moral realism. I will not be defending Ruse from such criticisms, as the aim of this dissertation is to criticise Ruse's support for a practical form of moral realism.

4.2 AREAS OF RUSE'S WORK WHICH I DISAGREE WITH

Some would argue that Ruse's naturalistic explanation of morality as being "an illusion foisted upon us by our genes" (Ruse, 1986: 253) should lead him to endorse moral relativism. **Moral relativism** is the idea that there are no such things as moral truths which are objective and distinct from our opinions. Ruse sees moral relativism as leading to the rule "if it feels good to you, then that's OK" (Ruse, 1995: 253) when deciding on a course of action. Ruse believes that he can escape committing to a position of relativism; I believe he is mistaken. Ruse aims to reject moral relativism by endorsing a form of moral realism. He attempts to endorse this version of realism on the grounds that morality is a shared adaptation (Ruse, 1995: 254).

Ruse is emphatic in his claim that he is not a moral relativist. He acknowledges that he is a subjectivist. **Subjectivism** "allows that moral facts exist but holds that they are, in some manner to be specified, constituted by our mental activity. The slogan version comes from Hamlet: 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Joyce, 2009). I.e. there are such things as right and wrong, and whether or not something is morally right or wrong depends on what we think. It is this line of argument which leads me to conclude that Ruse is a practical moral realist (see below).

Ruse believes that he can avoid becoming a moral relativist because morality is a shared adaptation, i.e. all members of the human race have a similar moral psychology bred into them by years of natural selection:

> I am a subjectivist of a very distinctive kind. For a start, the whole point about having morality as an adaptation is that it has to be a *shared* adaptation. If I am

> moral and you are not, then you will win and my blood-line will soon be eliminated. Morality (in the sense of normative ethics) is a social phenomenon, and unless we all have it, it fails. (Ruse, 1995: 254 original emphasis)
>
> I believe that ethics is an adaptation, put in place by our genes as selected in the struggle for life, to aid each and every one of us individually. Because it is a social adaptation, I believe that essentially we (societies, but at some ultimate level the whole human species) share the same ethics, and that charges of relativism are ill-taken. (Ruse, 1995: 257)

It is crucial to identify two distinct meanings of the term 'relativism'; practical and metaethical (also known as theoretical, the terms will be used interchangeably in this dissertation).

> **Metaethical** [or **theoretical**] **Moral Relativism:** The truth or falsity of moral judgments, or their justification, is not absolute or universal, but is relative to the traditions, convictions, or practices of a group of persons (Gowans, 2012).

Practical moral relativism: in everyday interactions it does not make sense for humans to act as if there are moral truths which are objective and distinct from our opinions.

"What I want to argue is that there are no foundations to normative ethics" (Ruse, 1995: 248). Ruse likens ethics to a game, say basketball. There are rules, but they don't correspond to any necessary features of reality outside of that game. His position is that of ethical scepticism (about the foundations, *not* the prescriptions). Ruse says he cannot commit the naturalistic fallacy, because he is not justifying anything. He is doing an end run around, rather than trying to drive straight through[9], the naturalistic fallacy (Ruse, 1995: 249)

> I also believe that ethics is genuine in the sense that people really do do things because they think them right (and conversely), and connected with this I would

[9] This is a sporting metaphor (Ruse, 1995: 249). I take Ruse to mean that he is taking an unconventional approach to avoiding committing the naturalistic fallacy.

> argue that there is a real difference between the language of ethics and the language of other aspects of human life, specifically those about matters of fact. However, my claim is that ethics is without justification or foundation – in this sense, I am a non-cognitivist – although I do think that an essential component of ethics as an adaptation is that we believe that ethics does have a real foundation (we 'objectify') (Ruse, 1995, 257).

Ruse uses the analogy of mediums claiming to talk to the spirits of those departed. He compares this to normative ethics, and says we have a collective illusion drawing us in. Interestingly he says that we all have this illusion, "except the "morally blind" (Ruse, 1995: 248-250), although unfortunately he does not elaborate what he means by this. I say unfortunately because many of my criticisms of Ruse focus on the variations which I believe exist between the natural morality that people have. Ruse seems to be endorsing this view, but no more detail is given. It is equally likely that he is talking about people who have been *nurtured* to be morally blind, given that he talks about moral blindness in the context of a child being nurtured to be morally blind (Ruse, 1995: 253).

One difficulty in reading Ruse is that he does not specifically identify the two distinct strands of relativism (practical and theoretical / metaethical). The most likely reading of Ruse is that he is a metaethical relativist through and through, but when he says that he is not a relativist he is talking about practical relativism – although he does in fact commit himself to this position, albeit in a very limited form: he admits that he subscribes to intergalactic relativism because human morality is not the same as would be produced by aliens. Therefore in trans-planetary interactions we should be practical relativists because those aliens (presumably) would not have the same moral adaptation that us humans do (Ruse, 1995: 254). I see this as a crucial concession, as in section 3 I criticise Ruse's assertion that humans have a shared

morality. If humans do not have a shared morality, then Ruse would have to accept relativism in human interactions as well as trans-planetary ones.

In section 5 I will go on to explain the errors Ruse has made in rejecting practical moral relativism. As set out in section 2.3 Ruse believes, as I do, that individuals show great variation in the (non moral) behaviours which they naturally display. I will extend this argument in sections 5.1 – 5.3 to show that individuals' natural moral behaviour also varies, and in section 5.4 I will sketch out several ways in which this variation could manifest itself. I believe that this variation means Ruse cannot resist moral relativism by saying that we are all moral beings. This is important because this claim (that we are all moral) is central to Ruse's defence of practical moral realism. I have two aims a) to explore different things that Ruse might mean by saying that we are all moral and b) prove that whatever he means, he is incorrect. To achieve a) I ask in section 5.4 whether he means that we all naturally have the same types of moral beliefs, the same amount of moral sentiment or the same belief in the objective nature of moral facts. To achieve b) I then go on in section 5.5 to show that none of the three possible claims suggested in 5.4 can be defended. With these potential claims rebutted, in section 5.6 I show how this means that Ruse cannot avoid practical moral relativism by saying that we are all moral.

Note the use of the terms 'practical moral relativism' and 'practical moral realism'. Ruse says that he is able to avoid moral relativism by defending a form of subjectivism (Ruse, 1995: 254), which one can read as being equivalent to 'practical moral realism'. He says that he is able to do this because we "share the same ethics" (Ruse, 1995: 257). It is the claim that we are all moral that I seek to disprove, as

disproving moral realism will in turn commit Ruse to a relativist position. It may be pointed out that I am missing an opportunity to attack Ruse; one could argue that if he does successfully defend moral realism, this does not automatically allow him to reject an equivalent version of moral relativism. While this argument may hold some merit (and I believe it does) for the sake of space I will not explore this idea. I believe I am able to disprove Ruse's argument without reference to this move from realism to relativism, hence I will use the terms 'proving realism' and 'disproving relativism' fairly interchangeably in this thesis for the sake of space.

5 MY POSITION

5.1 OVERVIEW OF MY POSITION

Having set out Ruse's position in the previous two sections I now explain why I think he is mistaken in rejecting moral relativism. Much of his analysis is excellent and I agree that morality may have a 'deep structure' (Ruse, 1995: 254). What I disagree with is his assertion that this structure is found in all people, and that it is found equally in all people. "particular manifestations of the norms may vary according to circumstance, while the underlying structure remains constant" (Ruse, 1995: 254). However, Ruse is not clear on what form this deep structure takes. Therefore in section 5.4 I will propose three different forms this deep structure could take. In section 5.5 I will prove that none of the three forms supports Ruse's conclusion that practical moral realism is true.

As evidence for the fact that everyone has a sense of morality Ruse points out that "If I alone am moral and you are not, then you will win and my blood line will soon be eliminated" (Ruse, 1995: 254). My complaint is that Ruse has pointed out that morality is adaptive, but he has not proved that it is only adaptive if a) everyone has the same level of altruism or even b) everyone has some kind of altruism. For example, a dark skin pigmentation for people is adaptive for living in high UV climates, however not everyone on earth has the same skin pigmentation. There are individuals with different pigmentations all the way down a spectrum; and some people (albinos) lack pigmentation altogether. However, albinos and people with light skin colour have not been eliminated in the course of human history.

Bringing the discussion back to morality, one could be a psychopath, yet observe other people acting as if they are moral and start manipulating them based on their (moral) psychology, even though they don't have any similar beliefs. Less extremely, someone with few moral scruples could interact on a moral level with someone who has a keen sense of right and wrong, e.g. a CEO of a company might attempt to brand her company as 'green' in order to cynically entice ethically conscious consumers into buying her products rather than her competitors'. The point I am trying to make is that Ruse has not proved that there aren't great differences between the moral sensibilities of individuals. And why shouldn't there be? In all other respects humans show a great deal of diversity, e.g. people are born with different levels of athletic ability and intellectual and emotional capabilities, yet these styles of communication do not break down. Why should morality be any different?

The flaw in Ruse's argument is that he has taken only two extreme strategies, moral and amoral. Richard Dawkins has run computer simulations on populations involving two behavioural strategies (not moral and amoral, his are called 'sucker' and 'cheat') 'sucker' helps others indiscriminately and 'cheat' never helps others, even if they have been helped by them in the past. Dawkins concludes (echoing Ruse) that in such an environment, cheats will always do better than suckers. However, if we introduce a third strategy, namely that of 'grudger' (helps others, unless they have been cheated by them in the past), the results are quite different. In a population where all three strategies are being used, the grudger can end up as the only type left (dependent on the right conditions being present). Hence I believe that Ruse is oversimplifying things by talking about a scenario where only the binary strategies of moral / amoral individuals are present. The key thing to note is that during Dawkins'

experiment the ratios of the different behaviours present fluctuated wildly; hence there was more than one behaviour operating. The grudger behaviour initially crashed, but then made a comeback to outbreed both of the other two strategies, although the cheat behaviour persisted at a low level for some time thereafter (Dawkins, 1976: 198-201). And this variation happened with only three strategies in play! When one thinks of just one's work colleagues and considers the numerous personalities (one could say strategies) displayed, it isn't hard to imagine that people with different behaviours could exist in relative harmony. In the same way, someone who is naturally very moral could survive and thrive for very different reasons to someone who is naturally very amoral.

To represent our differences, let us imagine that different individuals' **Natural Moral Psychology** (NMP) can be compared graphically:

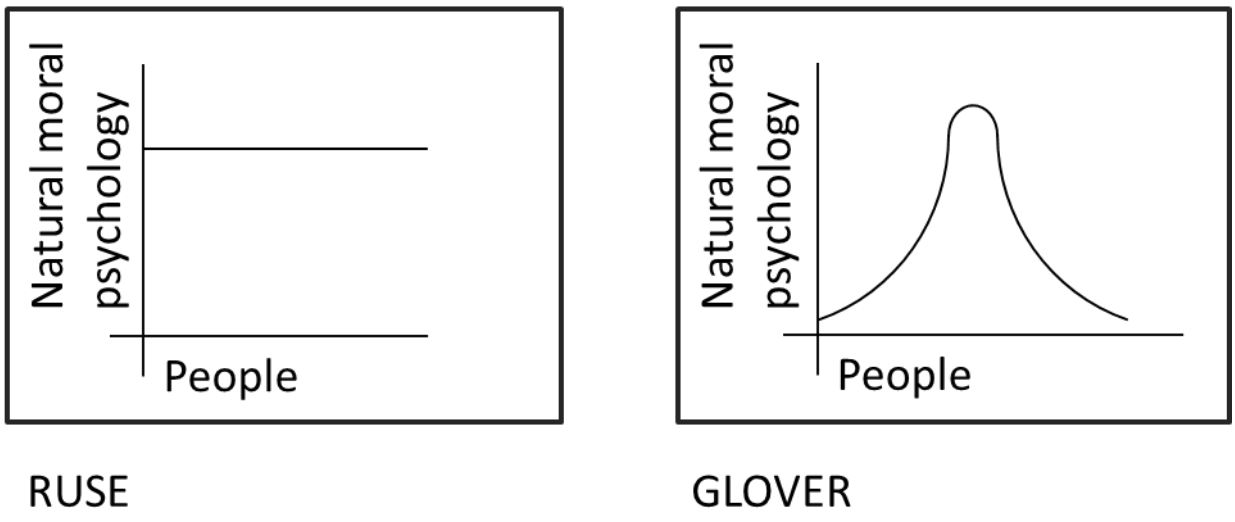

Fig. 4: The difference in how Ruse and myself view the distribution of natural moral psychology. Note that the graphs are not representative of actual real life values; they are merely to show the difference in overall view between myself and Ruse. As you can see from the left hand graph, I read Ruse as having the view that people are similar in their NMP, as represented by the flat line. The right hand graph is my view, that some people (psychopaths) have no moral intuition (as represented by the small area on the left of the

graph where the ‘morality’ level of some people is at zero). The bell curve indicates that some people have a higher level of morality than others.

On what basis do I believe that there is significant variation between the NMP of different members of the human race? Essentially I believe that morality is a behavioural trait that can vary according to selective pressures, just like any other trait, e.g. aesthetics, humour, sexual attractiveness.

5.2 SOURCES OF VARIATION IN NATURAL MORAL PSYCHOLOGY BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS

Thus far I have claimed that Ruse is wrong not to adopt a position of moral relativism, because he is mistaken in saying that we can avoid it due to morality being a shared adaptation. Therefore the next task is for me to show why humans do not have an equal share of the moral trait.

To explain the different sources of variation in individual moral psychology I will draw up some definitions of different elements of moral psychology. Note that these definitions are ones that I have constructed in order to explain the way I see different pressures operating on human psychology.

Moral psychology: The way that individual humans think about morality.

Natural moral psychology: The way that individual humans think about morality, as determined by a combination of their genetic moral psychology, environmental factors and developmental factors.

Genetic moral psychology: The way that individual humans think about morality, as determined by their genetically inherited behavioral traits (section 2.3 explained why 'moral' traits exist). For example, there is empirical evidence to suggest that we have evolved to feel we ought to assist our relatives because of kin selection. Variation between the genetic moral psychology of individuals can be due to heritable or non heritable traits.

Heritable moral traits: It has been empirically established that some behavioural traits can be inherited. For example many psychologists believe there are genetic dispositions for psychological conditions such as depression and schizophrenia; it seems plausible that there could be other (moral) phenomena which have a basis in one's genes and that these genes can vary at the level of the individual. Therefore you may be born with a saint-like level of potential to be moral, but your neighbour may be born with the genetic moral psychology of a sinner.

Non heritable moral traits: Some moral behaviour has a genetic basis, but is not inherited from one's parents. As an example of a non heritable trait (albeit not a moral one) Downs Syndrome is when an error occurs when copying the genetic material of an embryo.

Developmental / Environmental factors: An individual's traits can be affected by the developmental (whilst in the womb) and environmental (after birth) processes that that individual goes through. An example of a developmental process which can affect one's thought processes would be Foetal Alcohol syndrome, where an expectant mother consumes too much alcohol during pregnancy, leading to psychological (as well as physical) abnormalities in the baby. Environmental factors include certain brain traumas which affects one's personality. For example Phineas Gage was a railroad worker who was unfortunate enough to have a tamping rod accidentally lodge in his brain. The damage caused "a defect in rational decision making and the processing of emotion" (Damasio et al. 1994, abstract). Similarly a radio DJ called Peter Tripp famously stayed awake for 201 hours:

> [He] became psychotic towards the end of his ordeal. Following this event, those close to him felt that his personality had permanently changed. He lost his job, had difficulties settling and his wife divorced him. Since then others have broken the world record for staying awake but all of them had serious cognitive and behavioural changes during their attempts (Jana et al, 2010)

Nurtured moral psychology: The way that individual humans (and potentially organisms from other species) think about morality, as determined by the influence that nurture has had on them. This incorporates such elements as the culture one lives in, the education one experiences growing up and the things one's friends and family tell one. As examples of (non moral) nurtured psychology, people tend to dress and talk similarly to their peers, and to the people they see on television. As examples of nurtured moral psychology, people in feudal times were encouraged by their society to respect the authority of their king and of the noblemen, whereas in liberal democracy it is often seen as right and good to question those in power and hold them to account. As an example of beliefs constructed from interactions with ones' peers, members of organised crime syndicates would tend to see being a police informant as being immoral, but covering up a crime a friend had committed as moral (in contrast to the more widely held belief that keeping the law is generally good).

For ease of reference nurtured moral psychology can be viewed loosely as consisting of two elements; a) the overt moral doctrines an individual is exposed to and b) any other nurturing input an individual receives. Examples of a) include such influences as the religion someone is raised in and the kind of values instilled in them by their family and friends. The b) element of nurtured moral psychology is the 'other' element of human nurturing; all those things which one learns and affect one's psychology without being seen as overtly moral. An example of b) would be the

factual discussion as to whether the king is literally appointed by God to rule one's country (the divine right of Kings). The distinction between a) and b) is one that will not be used extensively in this essay, but is included here to point out that nurtured moral psychology encompasses both overt moral inputs and less obvious ones.

Moral codes: A set of moral prescriptions that an individual creates and promotes. This is a product of one's natural and nurtured moral psychology (and also potentially the choices that an individual makes, but for the sake of this dissertation I will not get into the question of free will and determinism).

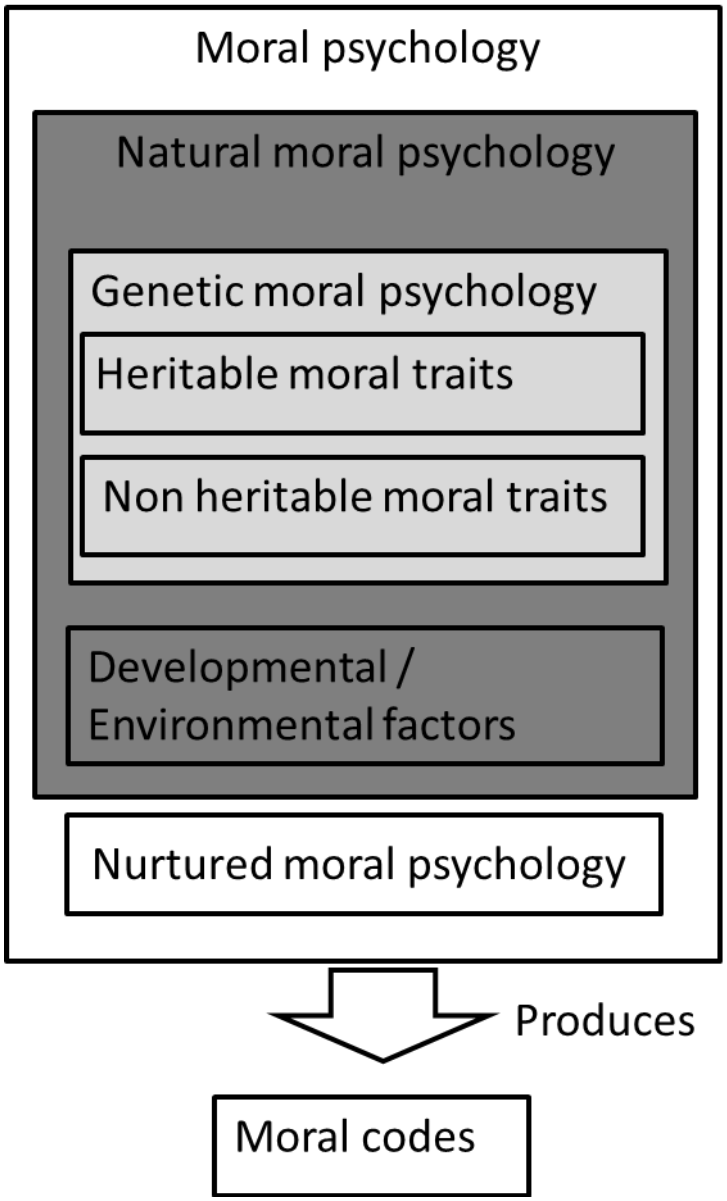

Fig. 5: The relationship between different causes of an individual's moral codes.

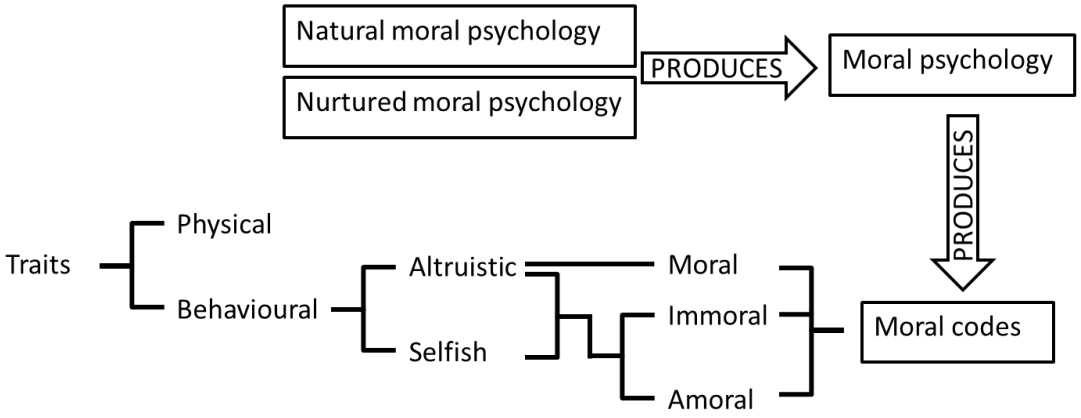

Fig. 6: How Fig.s 3 and 5 relate to each other. The box in Fig. 5 labelled 'moral codes' is a behavioural trait. I have drawn having moral codes as being a moral / immoral / amoral trait because there is some potential for debate as to whether it is good, bad or neither to have opinions about moral issues (not least because I conclude this dissertation by saying that there are no moral facts!). Remember that in the above diagram the (im)morality of an action or trait depends on the opinion of the actor in question. For example some people may claim that their having moral codes is a good thing as it shows an interest in their fellow man, but some may claim that thinking about moral issues is an amoral activity because such codes are a mere product of natural forces. The outcome of this debate is not one I am interested in; I am more interested in showing that our moral codes cause our moral actions (e.g. people tend to give to charity partly because they see it as morally right to do so).

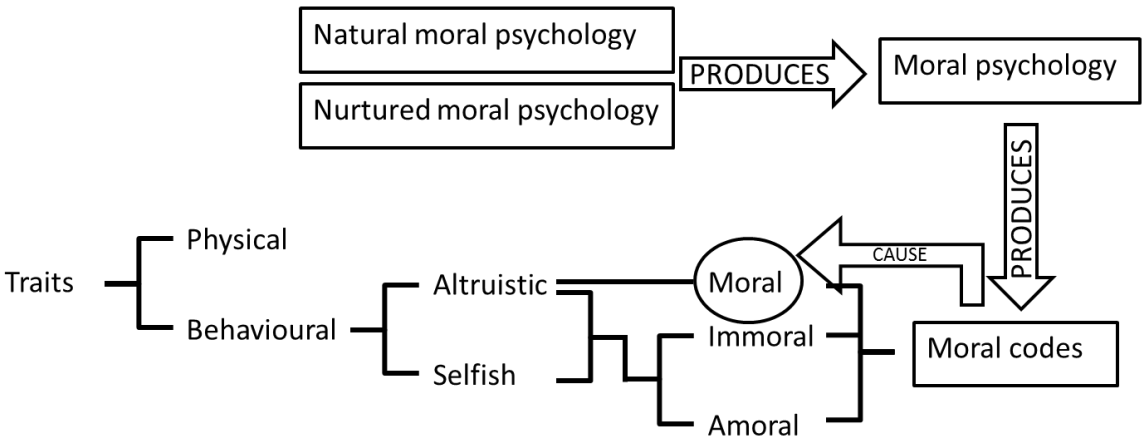

Fig. 7: Our moral codes cause us to do those actions we see as moral. Note that the above arrows merely spell out how one's behaviour (namely morals) come about. One could legitimately add another set of similar boxes, showing natural and nurtured aesthetic sense, leading to an aesthetic sense, which caused aesthetic codes, and in turn caused some of our (moral / immoral / amoral) behaviours.

5.3 PROOF THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR HUMANS TO VARY IN THEIR NATURAL MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Ruse sees all variation between individuals' moral codes as being due to nurture:

> No one denies that there is variation from society to society. The significance is that, biologically and ethically, we bring shared universal second-order principles to bear on particular situations – and as the situations differ, so the first-order principles differ, so the first order principles will differ (Ruse, 1995: 259)

However, as I outlined in section 5.2, I see both nature and nurture playing a part. If I can prove that this is the case, I can disprove Ruse's ideas about humans being able to escape relativism on the grounds that morality is a 'shared adaptation'. As evidence, Ruse says: "If I am moral and you are not, then you will win and my blood-line will soon be eliminated" (Ruse, 1995: 254). Would an amoral person necessarily 'win' in a competition to have their genetic material passed on? Granted, an amoral person (let's call her Helen) would benefit from being selfish and not sharing her food, as she will therefore be likely to survive to have a mate. She can also accept the food that the altruist (let's call her Rachel) shares with her. However, Helen will lose a lot of evolutionary goods by not sharing her food with others, as she is missing out on the indirect fitness (i.e. kin selection and reciprocal altruism). So Helen's genes are more likely to be passed on via them having more offspring, but Rachel's genes are more likely to be passed on via her relatives. In this way, both behaviours could persist within a population.

Having taken the trouble to point out that there are vicarious benefits to altruism, it seems strange that Ruse would fail to acknowledge this key element of evolutionary psychology in the above quote.

The kind of scenario Ruse seems to be thinking of is a 'prisoner's dilemma'. In this thought experiment two prisoners are asked to confess to a crime. If neither confesses then the sentence will be minor for both (e.g. 1 year in prison each), if one confesses but the other doesn't, the confessing one would get 0 years and the silent one 15 years, if both confess then they would each get 5 years. The original conclusion was that the rational thing for each prisoner to do would be to confess (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 31).

However, depending on how the variables are set in the prisoner's dilemma, altruism can be the successful strategy:

> The answer lies in the frequency with which individuals meet. If individuals only ever encounter each other once, then the best thing to do is cheat. However, if there is a high probability that you are likely to meet the same individuals time and time again, then cooperative strategies prove to be the better option. Under these circumstances, it pays to cooperate on all the early interactions (since the pay off is larger), and cheat only when the series of interactions reaches its end. If the two individuals don't actually know when the last interaction will be, then cooperation can continue indefinitely (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 30).

Singer agrees that the discussion of the prisoner's dilemma does not have to end with the conclusion that two egoists will end up getting the worst possible outcome; altruists will thrive in other variations of the game (Singer, 1981 in Ruse, 1995: 267-8). In a prisoner's dilemma scenario where there are many interactions between the same people the Evolutionary Stable Strategy (ESS) is a 'tit for tat' strategy of always helping on the first move and then replicating the last move done against oneself (Axelrod, 1984, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 30-31).

Ruse and I agree that the behavioural strategies displayed by different individuals will depend on two things: on the environmental pressures that act on one's genes, and on the role society plays in shaping one's psychology. If one's behaviour can vary depending on the environment one's ancestors existed in, this means that one's (moral) behaviour can vary in accordance with one's ancestor's environment. Let me propose a thought experiment to illustrate this idea: the planet Girth. Stewmans (very similar to human beings) live on this planet; at some point in their existence one land mass breaks away from another, and the stewmen on each begin to evolve slightly differently, due to the different environments on the two continents. On the Eastern continent interactions between the same stewmen are frequent, so they evolve to be altruistic; but on the Western island the terrain is such that the same two stewmen rarely see each other; hence they evolve to be selfish. One day the two continents reconnect and the two populations mingle; under such a situation you would have both selfish and altruistic individuals. This is an extreme example, but it helps to illustrate how natural variations can arise in natural moral psychology.

Ruse does agree that humans could have developed a very different moral psychology to the one they currently have (and I take him here to mean this could be due to a biological, evolutionary mechanism, rather than a socialised, nurtured one). He says we could have got a "John Dulles" model of morality where it is moral to hate others[10] (Ruse, 1995: 251). The difference between Ruse and myself is that he believes that we have all been born with roughly the same moral sense. However, I think he is being inconsistent as he asks

[10] This model is named after John Foster Dulles, American secretary of state during the Cold War, who thought he had "a moral obligation to hate the Russians. But he realized that they felt the same way about him. Therefore, they had a very successful system of reciprocation" (Ruse, 1995: 251)

> [W]hy should not the John Foster Dulles way of doing ethics not have become the biologically fixed form? (Perhaps it has, albeit in a kind of minor sub-variety) (Ruse, 1995: 255).

This is significant, as Ruse seems to be allowing that there is a dominant moral strategy, as well as several 'sub varieties'. This conclusion supports my position that there is not a 'shared morality' that all humans innately have.

In support of the idea that there can be more than one behavioural type in society is the practical example of producers and scroungers:

> [I]n theory everyone does best if everyone produces, in reality a mix of scroungers and producers will be found: it will always pay at least a proportion of individuals to cheat all the time, or for individuals to cheat at least some of the time. Scrounging is more likely to occur in large groups than small groups (Winterhalder, 1996, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 76)

I should point out that the above passage could either be interpreted as saying that nurture or produces the ratios of different strategies in a population, or it could refer to nature (via genes) producing said ratios. If morality is a heritable trait, then it would make sense for the various individual's genes to produce a mix of strategies, so that their possessors could occupy the various social niches.

Returning to the example of tolerated theft mentioned in section 2.3, it is in both the good hunter's and poor hunter's interests for there to be few cheats, as it costs them resources, for no gain (as the 'cheats' will steal from both of them). However it doesn't make sense for the cheater to evolve strong 'morality genes' as this would lessen their likelihood of cheating; by definition they don't have the urge not to cheat

(or rather, it is overcome by other factors). However, by using the *language* of morality the hunters can ostracise cheats, and work together to stop them from stealing the resource without contributing with their own kills.

> [A]bove average producers might well put up with a high level of unbalanced transfer because they are better off in a group that practices TT [tolerated theft] than they would be alone (Winterhalder, 1996, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 78)

Therefore I would like to suggest that there is nothing in natural selection to suggest that individuals within the same population should have a shared morality, in fact the evidence suggests that there is great variation between behavioural traits and more than one ESS can persist in society (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett: 2002: 263). Ruse has given no reason to think that morality is an exception to the rule of variation between individuals.

5.4 WAYS IN WHICH THERE IS VARIATION IN THE NATURAL AMOUNT, TYPE AND STATUS OF INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY.

The previous section focussed on what *causes* variation in individual natural moral psychology. The two following definitions are terms which refer to the way in which these variations can *manifest* themselves. I believe that there are three elements which make up natural moral psychology; Natural Amount of Morality (NAM) Natural Type of Morality (NTM) and Natural Objectification of Morality (NOM) as mentioned in section 2.3). This section will argue that people vary in these three ways, and this is a problem for Ruse's 'shared adaptation' idea.

NAM: how 'much' moral sentiment one has. E.g. at one end of the scale psychopaths are born with little or no ability to act morally, but at the upper end of the scale some individuals naturally feel a great desire to help other people.

NTM: specific moral beliefs that one is born with, as opposed to beliefs one learns.

We have already seen in section 2.1 and 2.3 that there are examples of animals and humans evolving specific behaviours, e.g. mosquitos and ants navigational behaviours, and humans' speech and facial recognition. These are not examples of moral behaviours, but if one agrees with Ruse that morality is a behaviour which is produced by natural selection then it follows that moral behaviours can vary between individuals in the same way as other behaviours. For example, people tend to believe one has special obligations to one's family.

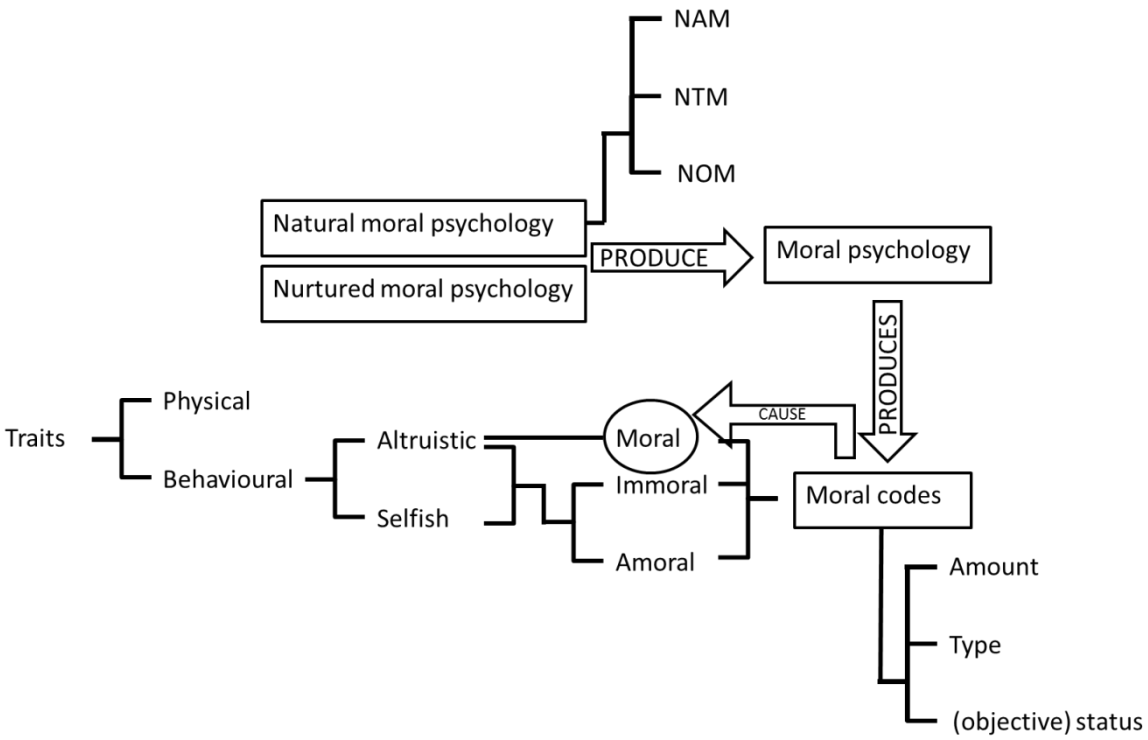

Fig. 8: The relationship between different elements of an individual's traits, including the ways in which their moral psychology can be different to another individuals (it can be different in NAM, NTM and NOM). In other words, people can have a different *amount* of innate moral feeling (how much they care), a different idea of the *type* of innate moral feeling (e.g. is fairness good? Are one's relatives worth more than strangers?) and the *status* of moral propositions (are they objective or not?). These innate tendencies end up influencing our moral opinions and our actions, as shown in the diagram by our moral codes varying in amount, type and (objective) status.

When Ruse talks about morality being a shared adaptation, what precisely does he mean? As he does not make a distinction between amount, type and status as I do, it difficult to establish which part(s) he is referring to. There is some evidence that he means NOM is the shared adaptation: "the level at which my science does suppose that there is a direct genetic causal input. It is in the structuring of our thinking such that we believe in moral norms" (Ruse, 1995: 253)

Yet in the same paragraph he seems to be also endorsing the view that there is a direct genetic input into the specific beliefs (NTMs) one has, and that our NTMs are shared equally. “Moral choice comes into whether we obey the rules of morality, not whether we choose the rules themselves. We are not free to decide whether murder is wrong. It is!” (Ruse, 1995: 253) By identifying murder as wrong he appears to be giving an example of something which he believes is universally innately held to be wrong by all human beings.

A hint that Ruse might be saying that NTMs vary, whereas NOM remains constant, is that he acknowledges that there can be great natural variation in what is seen as right or wrong: “depending on the way that evolution has gone, good and bad could be different according to the circumstances of the case” (Ruse, 1995: 290). He makes this statement in comparison to our (subjective) perception of colour, but does not question the idea that we will all talk in terms of colours. So although our individual perceptions of colours might vary, the fact that we recognise colours does not. Although he does not explicitly say it, this sounds very much like he is endorsing a universal distribution of NOM.

In some places he seems to be arguing for conformity and universal distribution of specific moral principles, like when he considers the problems of poor relationships between step relations as opposed to biological relations “I am not sure that any of this has involved the teaching of new ethical principles as such. Rather, as happens in moral discourse, new facts have been unearthed which allow us better to apply those moral principles we have had all along” (Ruse, 1995: 281). However, at other times he acknowledges that there can be natural variation between moral principles;

Ruse agrees that there is variation in the specific altruistic (by which he can be taken to refer to moral) behaviours we have. He says that most mothers display care and affection towards their children, but there are 'freaks' who are born without this tendency, in just the same way as some people are born without two legs. (Ruse, 1995: 239). This example seems to refer to NTM.

As Ruse does not talk in terms of the three features of morality I have identified, in the next section I will show that there is evidence that individuals vary in all three of the elements mentioned in Fig. 8. At times it may seem like I am making straw man arguments against Ruse, i.e. I am putting forward a less than charitable formulation of his position. In particular, one interpretation of Ruse's work is that his view of evolutionary psychology does not allow for the existence of psychopaths, or the significance of such psychopathic individuals existing. To be clear, I do believe that his writings fail to acknowledge the existence of psychopathic individuals in society, and even if he does acknowledge them he also fails take into account their significance (as I will go on to say that this also means that his writings fail to take into account the existence of other variations in moral belief). Whilst it may sound unfair to say that Ruse does not allow for the existence of psychopaths, I believe that I can support this interpretation. Ruse says

> [T]he whole point about having morality as an adaptation is that it has to be a *shared* adaptation. If I alone am moral and you are not, then you will win and I and my blood - line will soon be eliminated. (Ruse 1995: 253-4)

Ruse believes that (over a long enough time scale) a population cannot consist of both moral and non – moral individuals. His above quote shows that he believes that only one psychological type can survive. It is manifestly obvious that there are people in our society whom Ruse or I would call moral (i.e. believe there are moral facts, and

act upon this belief). Therefore logically if Ruse's above assertion is true, there cannot be any people who are non – moral in our population, otherwise they would 'win' and eliminate the 'moral blood – lines'. This conclusion is incompatible with the empirical observation that there are psychopaths in society, hence I believe Ruse is wrong to say "...essentially we (societies, but at some ultimate level the whole human species) share the same ethics..." (Ruse, 1995: 257).

Ruse goes on to say "Morality (in the sense of normative ethics) is a social phenomenon, and unless we all have it, it fails" (Ruse 1995: 254). However, we do not 'all have it'. Psychopaths are a clear empirical exception to this rule, and I believe this creates problems for Ruse. It means that there are variations between individuals in the morality which they naturally possess (because some [most] of us are born non - psychopathic, whereas some of us are born psychopathic) as I will go on to explain in section 5.5. So even if I am being uncharitable to Ruse in saying that he is committed to denying the empirical fact of the existence of psychopaths, there are still problems for him. He may want to acknowledge that there are a very few psychopaths in society, existing as a statistically tiny sub-group, not threatening to out breed the whole population, and vice versa. Such a scenario would suggest that in a population there is more than one successful psychological type (i.e. not just 'moral), which causes problems for Ruse.

Therefore the two above interpretations of Ruse both cause him problems. If there are no psychopaths then he is denying an empirical observation. If there are any psychopaths then this challenges his assertion that we 'all have' morality. In section

5.5 I illustrate this theme with graphs on page 60, showing how the existence of psychopaths suggests variation in moral psychology.

To be clear, what I am doing is arguing against every possible argument which Ruse (or an apologist of his) could conceivably put forward. As mentioned in section 4.2 I have two aims in answering all possible formulations of Ruse's position a) I hope to explore a wide range of possibilities concerning what might be meant by morality being a shared adaptation, i.e. which bit. And b) I wish to prove that whatever is meant by morality being shared, it is a flawed viewpoint. Hence why I have left no stone unturned in rebutting Ruse, however I believe I have devoted most of my time to the formulation of his argument which I find it most plausible to attribute to him, and which I find it hardest to criticise (namely NOM, see section 5.5).

5.5 CRITICISMS OF RUSE'S VIEW OF 'SHARED ADAPTATIONS'

If Ruse is saying that moral relativism can be avoided because we all have the same NTMs, this approach is fraught with difficulties. It would mean saying that we all possess the same natural specific beliefs about morality, e.g. that it is important to look after one's family or that murder is wrong. The problem with such an approach is that moral training or re-alignment is possible, which means that the natural tendencies will not prevent variation of moral thought. For example, there is the belief in many societies that homosexuality is wrong. However large sections of society in the UK do not hold this belief, in spite of it being much more widespread a mere century ago (and bear in mind that homosexuality was illegal, too!). This suggests that innate beliefs can be altered by nurturing influences.

With regards to NAM, I would make a similar point to the one above regarding NTM (that moral training is possible). Authors like Singer encourage us to care more about other people, and show this concern e.g. by donating to charity. The publishing of his article *Famine Affluence and Morality* saw donations to the charity Oxfam double in the following month (Wollard, 2010). Ruse agrees that that moral sentiments can change; he uses the example of his own sentiments regarding 3rd world problems changing over time (Ruse, 1995: 281).

Ruse seems to be assuming that we live in a world where an ESS of human (moral) behaviour has been established. If there is an ESS where all humans have the exact same NTMs then his statement that morality is a shared adaption would be true, at least as regards NTMs. However, what if an ESS hasn't been reached? In such a

situation there would be variation between individuals' NTMs. For example, even in the simplistic computer model (mentioned in section 5.1) which involved just three strategies, Dawkins notes that the 'cheat' strategy could persist undetected for some time because a few selfish individuals could hide amongst the wider population of grudgers (Dawkins, 1976: 198-201). In the same way some individuals with a low NAM or NTMs which were different from the majority of the population could exist and thrive within a wider population of people with a more standard NMP.

Even Ruse himself acknowledges that it's possible for a sub section of humans to have a distinct NMP from the rest of the population, as mentioned in the previous section on the "John Foster Dulles" belief system (Ruse, 1995: 255). This and other concessions which Ruse gives to the 'variation' side of the argument are what lead me to believe that he is probably not referring to NAM or NTM. However, his position seems muddled. He identifies a specific moral belief which he says is wrong: "We are not free to decide whether murder is wrong. It is!" (Ruse, 1995: 253) Therefore, Ruse's writings are confused as to whether we can vary in our specific moral beliefs or not.

Thus far I hope I have given a convincing account of the variation between human behavioural traits and coupled this with Ruse's acceptance that morality is an evolved behaviour to show that NTMs and NAMs do vary. Therefore if Ruse is referring to NTM and NAM when he says that we share the adaptation of morality, I have cast doubt on this assertion. But I believe that what is really at stake here is whether or not there is variation between NOMs held by different people. The reading

of Ruse which I find hardest to criticise is to interpret “If I alone am moral” (Ruse, 1995: 254) as meaning ‘if only I believe in moral realism’.

The first way I would like to suggest that humans vary in their NOM is by pointing out that in all other physical and behavioural traits there is variation between individuals; natural selection is a continually operating process under which change is an ever present factor. If, as Ruse says, ‘objectifying’ our moral beliefs is adaptive, then is it not also possible to imagine a situation in which seeing morality as not quite objective could be adaptive for some individuals? In the same way as a moth in environment A may survive because it is brown in colour, and a different moth in environment B may survive because it is green in colour; mightn’t some humans (e.g. cops) succeed because they have a strong sense of NOM, whereas others (e.g. robbers) prosper because they have a weak sense of NOM, giving them social advantages? It may be adaptive for some people to be born with a lower sense of NOM to other people, as evidenced by it being possible for there to be more than one strategy at work within a society. Some people may be born with a weaker belief that there are moral facts, because this makes it easier for them to freeride on society (e.g. falsely claim benefits) than those with a definite sense that there are moral facts.

The first objection which might be raised against the idea that there can be weak and strong conceptions of NOM is that perhaps NOM should be regarded as binary rather than being on a spectrum. In other words you either feel that there are objective facts, or there are not; there is no middle ground where you ‘kind of’ believe in objective facts.

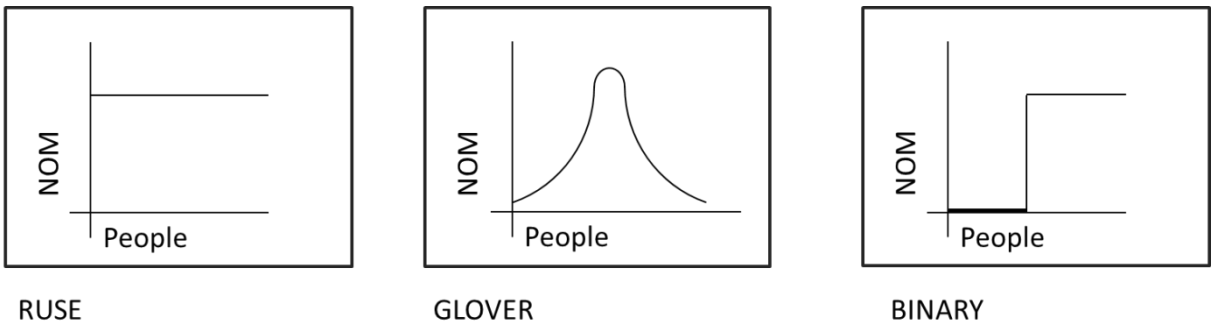

Fig. 9: The difference in how Ruse, myself and someone who sees possession of NOM as binary view the distribution of NOM. Note that the graphs are not representative of actual real life values; they are merely to show the difference in overall view between the different positions.

I have two answers to this objection: the first is that the objection (if accurate) does not disprove my theory that there can be variation; at best it merely means that variation may be less likely to occur. I concede that variation may be less likely to occur because there would be fewer social niches that can be filled if there are only two possible NOM settings an individual can exhibit. For example, if someone is completely devoid of any NOM, it seems likely that they would be easily spotted by the rest of society as the freerider this practical moral relativism could cause in them (as they may be more likely to cheat, lie and steal).

However, I would also say that such a hypothesis ignores the possibility of there being no correlation between NOM and the kind of supposedly moral behaviour a NOM–lacking individual could exhibit, i.e. one could pretend to be moral, and believe in moral realism, but internally be a relativist. Therefore the benefit of being a NOM–lacking individual is that it allows one to exploit the moral behaviour of others, which could make up for the risk of being discovered not to actually possess NOM and the social exclusion which may be associated with such a discovery.

My second answer to the claim that NOM may be binary instead as being on a sliding scale is that such a claim does not appear to tally with some other elements of human psychology. In section 2.3 I noted that organisms have numerous competing claims on them, and also that an 'ought' based morality (rather than a 'must' based one) may be the best way of ensuring that one type of claim did not dominate humans' decision making process (e.g. if we feel weak from hunger we may be less inclined to dive in and save a drowning child, even though we feel we ought to). Consider a few different areas of human psychology (by no means an exhaustive list) where we seem to have an innate idea that there are objective facts in the world, independent of our perception of them. In aesthetics, sexuality, humour and religion it seems that humans naturally feel that there are matters of fact, if only because of the way opinions are stated in these matters. It is frequent to hear someone claiming, not that they like listening to the band Jedward more than they like listening to the Spice Girls, but that one is better than the other. Hume agrees that there is no objective quality of beauty, external to individual thought processes:

> [A] thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek in the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter (Hume, 1965: 2).

Hume is saying that beauty is a conventional term, rather than one that can be measured outside of one's subjective perspective. I agree, and the same is true of ethics. This is an idea which I will return to in section 6.

Ruse explains why genes for cheating aren't prevalent in humans: "The way in which biology avoids this happening is by making moral claims seem as if they were objective!" (Ruse, 1995: 254). I believe that one could legitimately replace 'morality' with humour, sex appeal or aesthetics. Why would biology want us to mean something objective by aesthetics, for example? It could well bring social benefits, i.e. someone who is a persuasive arguer (because they have a strong sense that their view on aesthetics is objectively right) is more likely to attract a mate than someone who lacks a belief in the objectivity of their opinions (imagine it as being a display of mate quality or of aggression; whereas some animals raise their hackles, humans sometimes demonstrate their intellectual superiority). What could have started as a weak intuition that one's aesthetic beliefs are objective could therefore have grown as a result of an 'objectivity arms race' as mates were selected on the basis of their persuasiveness and self–assuredness.

If people naturally subscribe to realism outside of the sphere of morality, then why are no wars fought over the 'right' form art takes, whereas there are arguably plenty of wars fought at least partly for moral reasons? I propose that the evolutionary function of believing in aesthetic realism, say, is different to the function of a belief in moral realism. We (or rather our ancestors) benefitted from believing in a weaker form of aesthetic realism than moral realism.

What this suggests is that there are different degrees of 'objectification' that people can ascribe to a set of beliefs, therefore the above claim that NOM can only exist as a binary feature of human psychology is called into question. Furthermore, if people have a complex system of several different areas of thought, and each area is

regarded as having different degrees of ‘objectification’, this implies that there are different benefits to believing in the different degrees of objectiveness. Therefore different individuals could thrive because they have different behaviours as a result of these different statuses. Perhaps Jimmy is killed for standing by his principles and not flinching in the face of danger; whereas Benjamin gains from compromising on his morals, because he does not feel any natural belief that there are moral facts to be taken into account. The numerous character types in societies around the world which succeed or fail at different times and in different situations would seem to support my idea that there are people with different belief systems when it comes to deciding on a course of action.

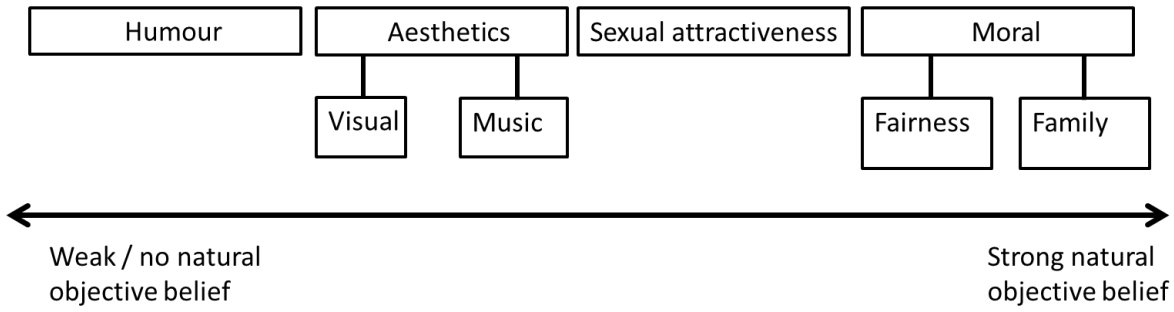

Fig. 10: Four examples of different types of beliefs humans naturally have, represented on a continuum. We believe more strongly in the objective status of some types of beliefs than others. Within those types, there are sub-types of beliefs which we believe have different degrees of objectivity to each other. Four examples of sub-types of beliefs are shown on the diagram (e.g. we might believe that caring for one’s family is more objectively important than being fair). Note that the positions of the above boxes does not relate to any actual values in the real world, they are positioned only to show that there is a difference between different types of belief (although I do happen to believe that morality is the type we most strongly believe has an objective status).

At this stage an opponent of mine may object that another way of interpreting our different attitudes to the various types of realism we believe in is to say that we have the same level of theoretical (or metaethical) realism, and therefore never compromise on our theoretical commitments to any metaphysical facts, but we are naturally inclined to be more or less willing to compromise on the practical realism in the face of argument. Hence why some people are able to accept that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' (aesthetics), or 'each to their own' (sexuality), but seem much less willing to surrender their belief that there are such things as moral rights and wrongs. Even if correct, this objection would not contradict my idea that there is variation between individuals in their NOM. Using my idea of a spectrum from Fig. 10; it is possible that individuals have evolved different natural tendencies to compromise on their commitments to different types of practical realism. In other words, some (cheating) people may feel as strongly about compromising on morality as most people feel about compromising on their beliefs about art or music. Both mechanisms sketch a variation in NMP which contradicts Ruse's 'shared adaptation' idea.

In support of his 'shared adaptation' idea, Ruse uses the analogy of speech; he says "In this respect, morality is like speech where, without shared comprehension, it is pointless" (Ruse, 1995: 254) He notes that there are lots of different expressions of speech, similarly there are lots of different moral codes in different societies. If Ruse wants to compare morality to speech, this only strengthens my argument that there is a variation of moral behaviours between people. People can naturally vary in the speech equivalents of NAM and NTM – some people have a fantastic innate grasp of the spoken language whereas others do not; some are better at learning foreign languages and others are natural poets.

Another problem with the speech analogy is that there is no equivalent term in speech for NOM. NOM is the innate metaphysical notion people have that there are such things as objective moral facts in the world; I can think of no corresponding suggestion that humans innately hold beliefs about the metaphysical status of speech. Therefore the analogy does not help Ruse to prove that humans have an equal innate sense that there are objective facts in the world. The operative word Ruse uses is 'comprehension'; this has very different meanings in the context of speech and morality. In the former it means that one can understand the concepts that are being communicated. In the context of the latter it means that we can understand that other people refer to moral facts in the world when they use words like 'ought'.

So while all (or most) humans can 'do' speech and can 'do' morality, this is not to say that the same process is going on. Where I say 'do' morality here, I mean in a very limited sense; we can all produce behaviours which are judged by others as moral, and we can all engage in moral discourse. However some people may actually be presenting the outward appearance of morality, whilst secretly feeling that there is no objective need to do so, in much the same way someone could pretend to acknowledge the 'fact' that the singer Justin Beiber is great at singing in order to fit in with one's friends, but internally know that ideas of fact in aesthetics are a myth.

In my opinion, a far better comparison than that between morality and speech is between morality and humour. People's sense of humour seem to show the kind of natural variations I sketch out with morality, i.e. humour has the equivalent of NAM

and NTMs (some people have a large sense of humour, others a modest one; some people find satire and black comedy funny whereas others prefer slapstick and farce). Both are also expressed in objective terms, in that there is a point past which no explanation can be given, i.e. ‘that is just wrong’ / ‘that’s just not funny’.

The interesting thing about humour is that there do seem to be genuine areas of disagreement of objective fact between people, i.e. although there is broad agreement about what is funny, sometimes people will refuse to accept that what one person finds hilarious, is in fact funny. E.g. ‘Q: why did the chicken cross the road? A: To get to the other side’. One person (let’s call her Freya) may find the joke funny, while her friends fail to laugh. To her friend Ruth, Freya may explain that the humour comes from the unexpected anti–climax when the punchline is delivered; perhaps this will convince Ruth that there is some humour in the joke. But if some of Freya’s other friends refuse to accept this explanation, there is ultimately no additional explanation that Freya can give, beyond the statement that she and others find it funny. This ‘realism loggerheads’ (where both sides believe that there is a fact of the matter, but disagree on what that fact is) is an idea which I will explore in the next section.

5.6 PROOF THAT VARIATIONS IN NATURAL MORAL PSYCHOLOGY CONFIRM THE THESIS OF PRACTICAL MORAL RELATIVISM.

The previous section showed how moral thought varies between people; this section will show the problems this poses to Ruse. As I read him, Ruse agrees, as I do, with the thesis of hypothetical moral relativism. In this section I will explain how variations between NTM of individuals suggest that practical moral relativism (PMR) is true, then how variations in NAM suggest PMR is true. Lastly I shall set out three arguments which show that variations in NOM confirm the thesis of PMR.

One problem with there being variation between individuals' NTMs is that this could potentially cause 'realist loggerheads' as mentioned in section 5.6. To return to the analogy of humour, one person may find satire a hilarious form of comedy, but a different person may only enjoy farce. They are definitely not going to enjoy watching the other's favourite comedians, and there isn't any room for compromise. Similarly, if I just feel innately that only liberty matters, whereas you believe that minimising physical pain for everyone in the world is what matters, we are not going to be able to have a meaningful conversation about morals. These are extreme examples, but a less extreme one can be just as compelling. For example, I may have a natural tendency to think that fairness is the most important thing, while your natural tendency is to feel compassion for the family and make sure they are looked after. We might agree that both are important, but not be able to agree on the most important one. This is the problem of emotivism; that one feels no reason to accept or reject the 'feelings' of the other party. As Ruse puts it: "this is simply not strong enough" (Ruse, 1995: 254)

This point on ‘realist loggerheads’ leads into potentially my most important criticism of Ruse. I believe one can make the leap from metaethical to practical moral relativism. Let us start with an analogy; I see it as quite an immature position to believe that there are objective facts in some of the other spheres I have mentioned. For example, does it really make sense to keep insisting that a joke is funny in the face of someone expressing the opposite opinion? Eventually we learn that the sentence ‘this joke is funny’ actually translates as ‘this joke is funny to me’[11]. What is important to note is that, although we have changed the meaning of the sentence in our head from objective to subjective, the statement is still expressed in objective terms. This is the same way we express our moral statements, yet Ruse claims that we always mean them that way as well as stating them that way. I believe that at least some people are able to break past this correlation of phrasing and meaning, invalidating the standpoint that we all have the same idea of what ‘morality’ means (i.e. we aren’t restricted to the same NOM). Therefore, when we show variation and disagreement over variation in our individual NTMs, we also demonstrate the ability to compromise on (and therefore vary in) our view on the status of our morals.

Another example of something which arguably does have a basis in the real world, is expressed in objective terms, but we can choose to ignore, is our natural views on sexuality. Arguably heterosexuals are born with the tendency to see heterosexuality as the appropriate way to behave, because this is evolutionarily adaptive. The statement of such views tends to be objective, yet heterosexuals have the ability to

[11] There are other potential implications of this sentence, e.g. someone may also be saying ‘this joke is funny to lots of people’ or ‘this joke will be funny to you once you hear it’. Let us ignore these for the sake of this discussion and focus on the core meaning of ‘to me’.

reject the theoretical and the practical belief that there is a 'right' way to do sexuality. The mere fact that one's innate beliefs relate to the facts of the world does not in itself mean that they relate in a way which is relevant or offers justification of such a belief.

The first thing that should be a cause for concern for those who believe in practical moral relativism on the grounds that there is no variation in NOM, is the problem of *deniers*. There are people who simply refuse to acknowledge the existence of moral facts. If someone were to deny flat out that there are such thing as moral facts, how would Ruse, or an apologist of his, be able to counter this viewpoint (bear in mind the 'shared adaptation' hypothesis)? They could offer one of three explanations for someone denying moral realism: either natural, nurtured or choice. For each response I believe I have a counter argument which disproves it.

One may wish to say that the deniers are not actually denying because of natural causes; their denial is actually due to nurtured causes (e.g. they have been raised to not believe in morality). Ruse acknowledges that someone could be raised to be 'morally blind':

> I am not denying that a mad psychologist could probably rear a child to be morally blind. Hence, even here I am allowing – demanding – an environmental causal input…" (Ruse, 1995: p253)

Not all moral anti-realists are 'morally blind'. Ruse himself is a type of moral anti-realist, yet is able to have 'real' moral thoughts. However, all morally blind people must be moral anti-realists; if one is raised to have no concept of what morality is,

then one can hardly believe in moral facts. Therefore Ruse's above claim entails that it is possible to be a moral anti-realist via nurture.

However, if Ruse is allowing this, then why does he put so much weight on the 'shared adaptation' idea? If this adaptation can be bypassed by nurture, then how can it explain practical moral realism? I suspect that it is because he is imagining it occurring in a very unlikely, statistically anomalous case (hence 'mad psychologist'). But I doubt that we need a mad psychologist to make us doubt our intuitions about the objective status of morality, I believe that this belief in moral facts can be eroded by moral discourse, in the same way that beliefs in the nature of humour can be changed by discussion on humour.

One may wish to say that the deniers are denying due to natural causes (e.g. they were born without the moral behaviour – causing gene; they suffered brain trauma which destroyed the part of the brain which causes a belief in moral realism). This claim leaves a problem of motivation, i.e. if some people naturally believe that there are moral facts, but some do not, then what would make the non–believers agree with the believers? Non–believers may well be in the minority, but this in itself does not make them incorrect. This is what I have in mind when I say that Ruse is wrong to say that morality is a shared adaptation.

One could leave nature and nurture out of the equation, and claim that people who deny moral realism are *choosing* to make such a claim. The appeal of this position seems to be that it means that NOM can be equal amongst individuals, and all that varies is what people choose to say. Therefore the deniers can be ignored, because

they are actually not representing their true beliefs. However, this runs into the problem that we cannot know what it is that is causing deniers to say what they say, therefore we cannot rule out the possibility that they are saying it because of natural or nurtured causes. Therefore, we have to act *as if* nature or nurture are causing their behaviour.

Note that some people may claim that I am trying to have it both ways – I claim that some people refuse to change their lack of belief in morality, whereas in other places I claim that moral training is possible. Firstly I would point out that I am talking in many places about different elements of one's moral sense, i.e. NAM / NTM / NOM, hence some of these may be flexible whereas others are concrete. Secondly, it is possible that some people have a flexible moral sense, whereas other's sense is set in stone. This is not a problem, as I am trying to prove that there are variations, and the very fact that people can vary in their ability to vary is evidence that people do not have the same natural morality.

SUMMARY

Although Ruse is not always clear in his terminology, he appears to be saying that variation in moral codes are due to nurture, rather than nature. He believes that as morality is a shared adaptation it makes sense to talk as if moral realism were true (he probably means this in the practical sense; in the theoretical sense he seems to reject moral realism). I break natural morality down into three different elements and show that all three of these elements vary between people. I also show that there are other things which humans talk about in objective terms (e.g. aesthetics, humour),

and these vary in the strength of feeling people have about them, thereby showing that we do not necessarily ‘share’ moral feeling.

6. SHOWING THAT RUSE IS INCONSISTENT IN HIS CRITERIA OF WHAT CONSTITUTES 'MORALITY'

I believe that Ruse is inconsistent in his criteria of what constitutes 'morality', and this inconsistency means that his justification of practical moral realism fails. One reason this is significant is that, without moral realism (either theoretical or practical) being true, moral dialogue becomes an exercise in instrumental, rather than normative, arguments. If one conflates instrumental morality (which is produced by genes) with morality based on moral facts, then one risks losing sight of the difference in behaviours that the two types of morality will produce.

Note that when one talks about 'morality', there are several different things the word could mean. The different types of morality which come up in this section are a) a formal system b) an instrumental system c) a set of objective moral facts, independent of human thought d) a set of facts which are not independent of human thought, but operate as if they are. Ruse explicitly rejects a), b) and c) and supports d). However, I believe that d) does not work, and is in fact a form of a) or b), both of which Ruse rejects.

The version of morality Ruse endorses is one that Kant would describe as a 'categorical', as opposed to a 'hypothetical' imperative. A hypothetical imperative is linked to a particular end; whereas a categorical imperative is not linked to an end one wants to achieve; it is seen as desirable purely from the nature of the action (e.g. because it is honest or charitable).

> All imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former present the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else which one desires (or which one may possibly desire). The categorical imperative would be one which presented an action as of itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end. (Kant, 1959: 96)
>
> If the action is good only as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical; but if it is thought of as good in itself, and hence as necessary in a will which of itself conforms to reason as the principle of this will, the imperative is categorical. (Kant, 1959: 96)

Ruse does not use the term 'categorical imperative' but it is clear from his language that he endorses this view on ethics, i.e. that morality is something which is something that 'just is'; it does not require or look for external justification. He says that "[A] defining mark of moral claims is that they really do seem to be different – there is a sense of obligation that is missing from a simple factual statement" (Ruse, 1995: 245) and "normative ethics is ... not justified by progress or anything else of a natural kind, for it is not justified in this way by anything!" (Ruse, 1995, 249).

I disagree with Ruse when he says that this 'categorical' conception of morality can be defended if evolutionary explanations of behaviour are true.[12] As I will go on to argue, Ruse has already stated that morality is produced by our genes. Therefore,

[12] Note therefore that the criticisms in this section need not trouble authors such as Philippa Foot, who reject the idea of a categorical imperative:

> Kant['s] ... faulty [psychological hedonist] theory of human nature was one of the things preventing him from seeing that moral virtue might be compatible with the rejection of the categorical imperative.
>
> If we put this theory of human action aside, and allow as ends the things that seem to be ends, the picture changes. It will surely be allowed that quite apart from thoughts of duty a man may care about the suffering of others, having a sense of identification with them, and wanting to help if he can. ... If this is what he does care about, then he will be attached to the end proper to the virtue of charity (Foot, 1972: 142)

Foot would not be troubled by my conclusions, as she believes that people do care for others as an end. Therefore actions intended to help others would be a hypothetical, rather than a categorical, imperative. Her conclusion is actually rather similar to mine, but for a different reason. She says that all motivations are hypothetical imperatives, whereas I dig down a little further and say that all moral behaviour is genetically motivated. Either way, there is no room left for a categorical imperative, even though some actions may *feel* categorical in nature.

any moral sentiment expressed by an individual is in fact an expression of that individual's gene's interests (metaphorically speaking, as genes are not actually interested). In addition, the 'categorical' nature of any moral sentiment is also the expression of some gene's interests. This means that all moral discourse becomes an exercise in the statement of competing genetic interests. Once we break down human motivation far enough we see that there are no categorical statements, only a formal system of interacting evolutionary desires.

Ruse states that a mere formal system is not moral:

> As I and other Humeans have stressed again and again (as against the Kantians) a purely formal system in itself is not moral - you have to have something else, a sense of moral oughtness, added (Ruse, 1995: 286)

However, as we have already seen, our moral beliefs are created by nature and society, and natural selection has essentially snuck an 'ought' into our psyche because it is adaptive for us to believe in such an 'ought'. How, therefore, can Ruse claim that we can talk in terms of morality being 'real'?

Bear in mind that (as per section 4.2) Ruse is almost certainly thinking about morality on two different levels; on the theoretical level he wants to acknowledge that a natural morality does not correspond to any objective external reality, but on a practical level he wants to say that one can talk as if there are moral facts. However I believe that he slides between the different levels, and does a kind of sleight of hand, where he 'sneaks' objectivity back into morality. He has this to say in response to those that make this kind of argument:

> [N]ote that I only want to claim that ethics is untrue – 'a collective fallacy' – in one sense, namely that of having an objective human-independent existence. I most certainly claim that within the ethical system one can speak of 'true' and

> false'. I reject entirely the gripes of those … who complain that this is not an option open to me; that in some way I am trying to have what I have given away (Ruse, 1995: 271)

Ruse compares the rules of morality to those of a game, say baseball. (Ruse, 1995: 271) The problem with this comparison is that it is obvious to most observers that rules of a sport were constructed for that game, but do not have any objective basis in fact outside of the parameters of that game, in a way which is not obvious with morality. The rules of baseball, we all understand, were written by humans and can be changed by them too. One can think of many failed attempts to claim something exists in metaphysics without there being a corresponding natural belief in that thing, e.g. the divine right of kings or the tooth fairy. Therefore, when one talks about something being true or false in baseball, one understands the contingent and limited use of the word, but one does not naturally recognise this in morality. After all, most people have not been on the enlightening journey through evolutionary ethics which thinkers such as Ruse have.

Moral rules appear to humans to be categorical in a way that the rules of baseball do not. We are born with moral rules (or rather, the belief that there are moral rules), but the rules of a game exist within that game, and only within that game. Our 'objectification', (one could say, 'categorical – isation') of moral beliefs is the perspective or prism through which we see the world. The same cannot be said for overtly constructed rules like those of a game. Therefore the analogy between baseball and ethics breaks down. They are dissimilar in many significant ways, for example the rules of a game are overtly constructed, consciously written, can be rewritten at will, have a particular aim [i.e. create an enjoyable / fair / entertaining game]. None of the above can be said about the rules and ideas about morality and

it's status which we are born with. Therefore it is not useful to point out the way in which the rules of baseball have been written, as everyone understands that they are not categorical. However, it is useful to show the genetically self interested way in which ethics operates, as people do not naturally realise that they have these underlying genetically selfish motivations.

I think that Ruse is using the difference between our natural perspectives on the two systems to sneak objective status back into morality. He also plays us off against our innate feeling that some things are wrong, e.g. when he asks "could one imagine a case where rape is not always wrong?" (Ruse, 1995: 249); he is relying on our natural feelings that rape is wrong to overrule our rational thought that morality is an adaptation and does not correspond to any external truth value.

Part of the way that Ruse tries to justify objectivity in moral discourse is by saying that the way in which a conclusion is reached is significant for determining whether or not we should trust that conclusion. He uses Elliott Sober's example of working out how many people are in a room by either guessing or counting; both answers may be right but we trust the latter over the former. (Ruse, 1995: 270) While I agree that how a conclusion is reached has a bearing on the trust we put in said conclusion, Ruse has not shown that our having evolved to have a certain moral standpoint is relevant to that viewpoint being trusted. Natural selection has its own agenda (not literally, as natural selection isn't conscious). I believe that the comparison Ruse gives is flawed. Sober's example is of 'Ben' drawing a number at random from an urn, versus 'Cathy' counting how many people there are in the room, where both Ben and Cathy are trying to determine how many people there are in the room (Sober, 1994, in Ruse

1995: 270). Ruse agrees with Sober that the way in which we get to a conclusion is relevant (i.e. we should trust Cathy's solution more than we trust Ben's) (Ruse 1995: 270). However, I would argue that our evolved sense of morality isn't reaching a conclusion in the same way as either Ben or Cathy. It's not coming up with the end product at random, but it certainly isn't counting all the morals in the room either. A third method is used: it is selecting for individuals which are fit. Ruse has given no grounds to say that a system which purely deals in the currency of fitness is a system which supports the thesis of practical moral realism.

Ruse compares our belief in trains to our belief in morality; we are aware of the train because of our evolved organs and senses, but this in itself doesn't give us cause to doubt the existence of the train. (Ruse, 1995: 250-1) I don't think this is a fair comparison because we 'know' there is a train in this example (as Ruse has told us that there is one there). As a more similar comparison between sensing danger and sensing ethics, consider someone who has evolved to think they see a predator when shown visual stimulus X (maybe the silhouette of a lion's head). Let us imagine that in the wild, 99 out of 100 times that visual stimulus X is shown there actually is a predator present, and the individual flees to safety. However 1% of the times that visual stimulus X is shown there is not a predator present (e.g. there could be a butterfly which is deceiving the viewer with the patterns on its wings) and the individual flees for no reason. On aggregate, the belief that visual stimulus X means a predator is nearby is adaptive, even though it does not always correspond with reality. Therefore, the mere fact that our sensing apparatus has evolved does not mean that we should assume that it necessarily produces trustworthy beliefs. After

all, we do not dive out of the way when we see a ‘train’ bearing down on us in the cinema! (see below)

Ruse says that the difference between belief in what we see and what we believe morally is that ‘trains kill’. But I would counter that not believing in an objective morality also kills, just in a less obvious way. Not believing in an objective morality would kill one’s genes, because it would lead us to not cooperate, so our genes and our relatives’ genes wouldn’t be passed on, as set out in section 2. It is more immediately obvious that trains kill, but when we examine the social utility of morality (as we did in section 2) we realise that not having a belief in morality could kill us too. So there might be no externally existing predator or objective morality but it is motivating, and therefore adaptive, to believe in the presence of predators / have a categorical belief in moral rules. In any case Ruse concludes (and I agree with him) that an objective ethics is redundant as you would naturally act as if there is an objective ethics in any case. However, I would go on to say that this natural tendency can be overcome, indeed Ruse agrees that this is possible when he talks about psychologists raising a “morally blind child” (Ruse, 1995: 253). Once again Ruse is being inconsistent; on the one hand he says that we are unable to crawl out from under morality, yet at other times he allows that one could be reared to be ‘morally blind’ (as I explored in section 5.6). Ruse is saying that we are destined to believe in morality, yet we can be educated to ignore it!

Another issue for Ruse can be found in the distinction he sometimes makes between self interest and morality. Ruse says:

> I do not see … self-interest as being necessarily a normative principle – certainly not a new one – and even if you do claim it as a normative principle, it is certainly not a moral principle. It is true that one might dress it up as a moral principle… But generally, I think this is just a gloss (Ruse, 1995: 282)

Ruse uses 'self-interested' and related terms in two distinct ways, which he is not always perfectly clear about: he sometimes seems to want to have it both ways. He goes to great lengths to map out how morality is explicable in evolutionary terms, that is, self interested terms. For example: "we co-operate flat out and because we do co-operate we succeed mightily in surviving and reproducing" (Ruse, 1995: 237). However he then seems to ignore this in other places, e.g. "Mother Theresa is not helping the sick and dying out of self-interest. She is doing it because it is right" (Ruse, 1995: 245)[13].

I think that what Ruse might be trying to say, in an unclear manner, that there are two different levels one can view Mother Theresa's behaviour on; the practical and the theoretical. Ruse is trying to say that theoretically her behaviour is naturally determined, hence it can be broken down into self interested motivations, but in practice it makes sense to talk in terms of her actions being moral.[14]

[13] Remember that (as per section 2.2) when I refer here to self 'interest', I am talking metaphorically, as genes are not conscious or possessing of interests per se. Also (for the sake of simplicity) when I talk of 'self' interest, I am actually referring to the interest of units of genetic material, not necessarily the interests of the individual who possesses those genes (although their interests may well overlap).

[14] This is similar to a distinction that Joel Feinberg draws. Feinberg would likely say that giving an evolutionary story of why an individual acts in a certain way is distinct from explaining that action in terms of the reasons (or motive) that the agent had for acting, which might not make any reference to evolutionary considerations.

> It is not the genesis of an action or the *origin* of its motives which makes it a "selfish" one, but rather the "purpose" of the act or the *objective* of its motives; *not where the motive comes from* (in voluntary actions it always comes from the agent) but *what it aims at* determines whether or not it is selfish. (Feinberg, 2013: 169)

What I read Ruse as most usually meaning by 'self interest' is consciously benefitting from one's actions (as opposed to unconsciously, be it advertising to a mate or aiding one's future children). If he is happy to say that consciously benefitting is not morality, why does he make a special exception that it is moral when what you receive is unconscious, hidden from us by our genes? My claim is that all behaviours are in some sense self interested, and some behaviours (i.e. moral ones) are merely less obviously self interested than others. Feinberg and Ruse appear to be happy to say that so long as the agent's consciously acknowledged reasons are not self-interested, we should not accuse them of being self-interested, but this is a claim I want to resist. Consider Goldberg's experiments, mentioned in section 2.3, in which "lone men were more likely to give to female beggars than to male beggars, and … lone men were more likely to give than those accompanied by a woman" (Goldberg, 1995, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 87). Many of the participants in these experiments were willing to help others, and on these occasions of apparent altruism they would have consciously acknowledged only altruistic motives. They were unaware that they had a higher tendency to act in this 'altruistic' way when there was something in it for them, than when there was no potential gain to themselves. Let us consider a man who only gives to female beggars, and only then when he is single. Rather than think of such a man as a genuine altruist, I suggest that we think of him as someone who is deceived in thinking of himself as not being moved by self-interest. If the explanation of action in terms of self-interest really is true, as Ruse

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Therefore in the case of Mother Theresa, her reasons for her actions were, let us assume, related to alleviating suffering etc., but it remains possible for evolutionary psychologists to explain why people like her act for reasons like that in terms that end up appealing to some sort of gain for the agent, or her genes.

wants to claim, it's not so easy for him to say that the resulting behaviour is genuinely moral.

Incidentally, one of Feinberg's criticisms of the idea that all actions are self interested is that many commentators make mere assertions that all actions are self interested, and "empirical evidence of the required sort is seldom presented in support of [the idea that all actions are self interested]" (Feinberg, 2013: 168). What I hope to bring to this topic is relevant empirical evidence (which I presented in section 2) that 'altruistic' and 'moral' actions actually have their roots in self interest.

One may object that Feinberg is not talking about the underlying evolutionary reasons which cause people to act, instead he is concerned with the reasons that people give for acting. In talking about evolutionary processes some might claim that I am missing his point, and to engage with his arguments I should be talking about the mental processes that people feel they go through. However, that is exactly what I am doing; I am explaining the *reality* of people's mental processes, rather than just what they *think* they are thinking. Feinberg wants to say that one can genuinely desire the good of other people. My argument is that the only reason one desires the good of other people is because of some (unconscious) evolutionary benefit that desire gives you, therefore that desire is self interested at it's core. Perhaps some people will remain unconvinced by this line of reasoning, and will still want to claim that people genuinely act for the good of others. However I believe that the empirical evidence I have given casts doubts on such claims.

A further point is that as mentioned earlier, Ruse sees moral relativism as leading to the rule “if it feels good to you, then that’s OK” (Ruse, 1995: 253). But what does he mean by ‘feels good’? As I sketched out in section 2.3, morality is one of the many ways our genes get us to do something which will likely lead to their replication (other examples being making us hungry when we don’t eat, or by pumping hormones through our body when we see an attractive mate). So, Ruse seems to be saying, although it might feel good to eat that cake (even though it doesn’t belong to you) or sleep with that person (even though they are someone else’s partner), you should listen to your moral senses and refrain in such cases. However, I would like to ask; how do our morals encourage (in)action in us? By making us feel bad (or good)! Ruse has not explained why the one kind of ‘feeling good’ (satisfying hunger) should have a different epistemic status to another kind (satisfying moral intuitions). After all, I am sure that a philanthropist like Albert Schweitzer would have said that it ‘felt good’ to help the sick and dying. By doing what ‘feels good’ to him, would he not be conforming to the definition of relativism which Ruse has described?

It may be objected that we do not act morally merely out of a desire to avoid feeling bad. Ruse would likely agree that this would not constitute genuine moral behaviour. However, remember that natural selection is a subtle operator; it is thanks to natural selection that humans have all sorts of unconscious desires and beliefs; just one desire being (in most people) to act morally. Viewed through the prism of genetics, it makes sense to see acting morally as acting in one’s own interests.

This poses two problems for Ruse, firstly it means that Ruse does not satisfy his own criterion that a ‘sense of moral oughtness’ be added. Once we pick apart human

psychology, we realise that we merely *feel* that an 'ought' has been added, without any corresponding 'ought' existing. Secondly, on a very practical level, making a distinction between self interest and morality risks missing out on a key element of human psychology, which in turn would hamper any attempt to produce coherent moral codes. As an example consider Goldberg (1995), mentioned in section 2.3 where individuals reacted differently to a beggar, depending on the genders involved and whether or not the individual potentially donating was accompanied by their partner or not (in spite of common sense morality saying that these things should not be morally relevant) (Goldberg, 1995, in Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 87).

> In our everyday experience, we tend to leap in and give help to those who need it without a second thought, and it seems difficult to reconcile this with the hard-nosed economic approach that an evolutionary analysis entails. Nevertheless, the data …[suggests] that people do tend to behave in a manner which is consistent with evolutionary theory. (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett, 2002: 67-8)

I propose that we should at least recognise that we *are* being influenced by our genes, otherwise we will not understand why we have some of our moral intuitions. Ruse himself makes a similar point about cultural values. In response to the general criticism of evolutionary ethics that it claims to be value free, but is in fact infected by cultural values, he says that "one must surely look at people's work against which they were writing. This does not deny cultural values in science; it affirms them." (Ruse, 1995: 207). For example, Darwin was a rich Victorian, hence his misogynistic views should be ascribed to the trends in the society in which he lived. In a similar way I want to acknowledge the natural moral tendencies we have and how this affects the status of morality. Ruse praises Popper for his phrase "knowledge without a knower" (Popper, 1970 in Ruse, 1995: 203). However to look the other way while

an individual's belief about the status of values creeps into our dialogue is to allow this dislocation between knowledge and knowers to be undone.

I noted in section 3 that Ruse believes that we have the built in tendency to see progress in evolution, due to the 'anthropic principle'. He believes we will eventually be able to eliminate this tendency from our thought (Ruse, 1995, 219-220). This is an example of a behaviour with a natural cause, which is not picked out of a barrel at random (i.e. it is produced via interaction with the world), yet Ruse thinks that we can and should eradicate it from our theories and thoughts, if at all possible, because it does not relate to a real fact in the world. He is also glad that cultural values have been ejected from science and replaced with epistemic ones (Ruse, 1995: 215-8). In the same way, I see no reason that a society would not one day agree that our NOM is a value which does not correlate to anything in the real world, in the same way as, for example, large sections of society in the UK has accepted that there is no right or wrong sense of humour or sexuality (as mentioned in section 6).

Following on from this point, I would say that this does not have to be the end of the enquiry (although it is for Ruse). I think his conclusion is valid if one is talking about people who haven't yet reached said conclusion. They will act as if there is objective morality whether there is or not. However I think that once you become aware of the fact that morality mayn't have an objective status, you can start to evaluate your beliefs and therefore change your actions. Analogously, once we realise that some 'trains' don't exist we deal with future examples of 'trains' differently (in fact, this exact thing happened when cinema first came out! One of the first cinema reels featured a train pulling into a platform (towards the camera) and audience members tried to run

away as they though a real train was about to smash into the cinema!). If someone were told convincingly that they have no reason to believe that past examples of 'trains' were objectively existing trains would they necessarily continue to act in the same way? He says that "one cannot compare a belief in the love commandment in precise analogy with a belief in the existence of a downward-bearing speeding truck" (Ruse, 1995: 271) – but this is (partly) true because it assumes the truck is real, it is also questionable because if one is put in a virtual reality machine one may still flinch when one sees a 'truck' bearing down on you, even though you know it isn't really there. Therefore I feel that Ruse's assertion that people will still believe in morality (or trucks) is something of a whitewash; people's belief systems are more complicated than he is imagining.

As we saw in section 3, Ruse criticised Richards for using a natural explanation of ethics to justify a moral 'ought'. One objection was that such an ought is in fact an instrumental ought; another was that Richards is appealing to 'conventionalism', and therefore hasn't provided proof of moral facts, external to one's beliefs (Ruse, 1995: 277). I believe that Ruse makes both of these errors in his own work.

Ruse claims that Richards makes an instrumental ought: "Since… human beings are moral beings – an unavoidable condition produced by evolution – each ought act for the community good" (Richards, 1987 in Ruse, 1995: 276-7). I think Ruse is making precisely this kind of instrumental ought when he says that we as human beings ought to behave as if (practical) moral realism is true because we have evolved to believe it to be true. It's like saying that because we all have an idea that something is 'funny' we *ought* to make and watch comedy.

The second objection Ruse made of Richards was ‘conventionalism’; Richards is merely describing what people believe, rather than referring to any kind of external, objective moral facts. I think that both authors have slipped their language from a circular logic which runs something like ‘because nature has made us believe that there are objective moral rules and that we should obey them, *it is inescapable* that we will act in accordance with said beliefs’ to the normative ‘because nature has made us believe that there are objective moral rules and that we should obey them, it is *morally right that* that we will act in accordance with said beliefs’. The use of the word ‘moral’ in such a context is a sleight of hand, as Ruse defines it technically (i.e. it’s an adaptation and we have no reason to believe it correlates to any moral facts), but then uses it in the broad, common sense of the word.

Ruse calls my conclusion (practical moral relativism) a ‘moral contradiction in terms’. He says that we can’t simply shrug off the feeling that some things are and are not moral (Ruse, 1995: 283). His justification seems to be twofold. Firstly he asks if anyone would want to try and cheat our friends or loved ones (Ruse, 1995: 283). I agree that we probably won’t want to do so (as doing so has large social and evolutionary costs). The main aim of ‘de-objectifying’ ethics is to change the status of ‘ethics’ so that it can be recognised for what it is, a mere evolved (self interested) behaviour. The actual resultant change in behaviour would probably not be quite as seismic as Ruse suggests, as it is frequently in our interests not to cheat. The second justification is that, when there *is* disharmony between our self-interest and morality, we can’t “suppress our feelings at the dictate of our reason” (Ruse, 1995: 283). Firstly I would say that making a distinction between our self-interest and our morals

is a false one. It is like trying to draw a distinction between our self-interest and our hunger. Hunger and morality are both *elements* of our self-interest (just one is more obvious than the other as being self-interested). Once people (as a society) become aware of this feature of human psychology, I believe that there would be a change in the language used to discuss 'ethical' matters, and potentially other matters which involve 'objectified' statements.

SUMMARY

Ruse's analogy of the rules of morality being like the rules of a game is misleading, as a crucial difference between the two is that one recognises the contingent nature of a game, in a way that one does not naturally do with morality. Ruse's comparison between different ways of finding out how many people are in a room, and establishing moral 'truth' is also flawed. Hence Ruse is not able to show that our moral codes being produced by natural selection is a good reason to talk about them in objective terms.

My other criticisms can be explained with reference to the following quote by Ruse on our tendency to objectify our moral statements:

> We think that we ought to do certain things and that we ought not to do other things, because this is our biology's way of making us break from our usual selfish or self interested attitudes and to get on with the job of co-operating with others. In short, what I am arguing is that in order to make us 'altruists' in the metaphorical biological sense, biology has made us altruists in the literal, moral sense (Ruse, 1995: 241)

Firstly, he defines moral behaviours as a 'break' from being selfish, however he has previously noted some of the benefits of moral behaviour. Secondly, he has snuck

the term ‘moral’ back into the discussion, in the ‘literal’ sense (not the technical sense if it being a behaviour with no relation to moral facts, external to one’s beliefs), in spite of saying previously that there is no reason to believe in objective moral facts.

Furthermore, Ruse has only produced an instrumental ought; in the above quote he acknowledges that biology is using ethics as a means of getting us to do something. Any ought produced in such a manner will be an instrumental one, linked to the needs of our genes, rather than any externally motivating moral ‘facts’.

Lastly, I wish to criticise his lumping of ‘metaphorical’ and ‘literal’ (I would say common-sense) meanings of altruism. To imply that they are equivalent is to overlook some of the potential outcomes of having a morality based on evolution instead of moral facts (as I showed with the ‘beggars’ experiment, where charity was influenced by factors not considered relevant to a ‘facts’ based morality, but relevant in a ‘biology’ based morality).

My conclusion could have implications for ethics and other areas of human interaction involving ‘objectified’ statements. For example it could end up lessening homophobia if one sees one’s objections to homosexuality as subjective and based on evolved behaviours. Similarly, there are implications for humour and aesthetics; perhaps we would all be a little more relativist about the opinions we offer. Maybe we would start prefacing our statements with phrases like “In my opinion” when talking about matters of opinion.

7. CONCLUSION

I have drawn up the biological and social mechanisms via which morality is an adaptive behaviour; it exists because it provides individuals who possess it numerous evolutionary advantages. Morality is a behavioural trait (as opposed to a physical one), in the same way that methods of finding food is an innate trait to many animals. I believe that the phrasing of moral statements (as 'ought' statements) is useful in a biological sense because it allows individuals to weigh up different considerations (e.g. hunger, sex drive, morality). 'Ought' beliefs give us motivation to act, but not such a strong motivation as to overpower our other interests.

Ruse agrees that morality (he would say 'altruism') can be explained in naturalistic terms. One of the most important features of morality is that evolution has produced individuals who naturally believe that their moral thoughts are not self serving and that there are such things as objective moral facts.

Another behaviour that evolution has produced in humans is the egotistical tendency to believe that humans are more progressed than other lifeforms. This is known as the "anthropic principle" (Ruse, 1995: 220). As a result, some ethicists have claimed that it is morally desirable that 'progress' in evolution be encouraged, for example through laissez-faire economics. However the idea of 'progress' in natural selection is a questionable one, as natural selection is a process which produces beings which survive, it isn't aiming at any target. For this and other reasons, attempts to justify ethical theories via biological facts cross the is / ought divide.

As moral behaviour can be described in purely biological terms, this makes the idea of objective moral facts explanatorily redundant, and calls their existence into question. Furthermore, even if there are moral facts, our evolution has shaped our psychology in order to improve our fitness, not in order to detect and moral facts. Therefore even if moral facts do exist, we do not have the capacity to detect them. It could be argued that this should lead to moral anti–realism. However, Ruse believes that one can retain a commitment to moral realism (I read him as meaning this commitment is at the practical level; he appears to concede that moral realism is impossible at the theoretical or metaethical level).

As justification of (practical) moral realism, Ruse claims that morality is a 'shared adaptation', hence it makes sense to talk in moral terms. I have made a two pronged attack on his ideas, firstly on the idea that everyone naturally has the same sense of morality, or indeed any sense of morality, and secondly I claim that even if we do have an equally shared 'morality', we should still not endorse practical moral realism.

As evidence for my first prong I have shown that adaptive behavioural traits vary greatly between different individuals. Therefore it seems unlikely that all humans possess the same natural moral psychology, as different environmental pressures could produce different traits, depending on what was adaptive in the various environments. Also, complex human societies allow different behavioural types (e.g. scrounger vs producer) to thrive, within the same population.

It seems likely that Ruse is referring to NOM when he says that we all share morality. In which case an opponent of mine might object that morality is a binary option: you

either have it or you don't (unlike say, skin pigmentation, which can vary in degrees). However, I propose that variations could occur even if the possession of NOM is a binary setting, but furthermore there are several other behavioural traits (e.g. aesthetics, sexuality, humour) which are expressed in objective terms (in common with morality) but have less motivating power and are easier to find compromise on than morality. This suggests that there could be a variation in the 'objective-ness' that different people feel about their morality.

The conclusion of the first prong of my argument is that there is natural variation between in the moral psychology which people express, hence one should not talk about a shared human morality. As this justification is no longer available to Ruse, he cannot use it to claim that we should continue to talk in moral terms.

The second prong of my argument is that Ruse has not actually created a moral system, according to his own standards of what constitutes 'morality'. Firstly, he tries to make a distinction between moral behaviour and self interested behaviour, but we have already established that moral behaviour is in fact self interested (as it brings social and evolutionary benefits to its possessor). Therefore Ruse is making an instrumental, rather than a moral point, which is exactly what he accuses Richards of doing.

Ruse is adamant in his belief that we cannot help but believe in morality because we naturally believe in it objectively. However, he also notes that other naturally occurring beliefs (e.g. the anthropic principle, cultural values) can be expelled from

our enquiries, therefore it is inconsistent for him to claim that moral beliefs will necessarily persist.

I believe that Ruse fails to make a defence of practical moral realism. He is refuted by the way that evolution causes variation in behaviours and he is internally inconsistent with what it means to be moral, hence he only produces an instrumental ‘ought’, not a moral one.

I believe that if my conclusion is correct, there are implications for how we perceive the status of ethics. I do not believe that our behaviours will undergo a continental shift towards everyone becoming a cheat, as cheating is rarely a successful strategy in society, and it rarely fulfils an individual’s goals. What I think could change is the language used in moral discourse; there may be a greater recognition of the subjective nature of moral intuitions. People may see morality as being more akin to humour or sexuality as than they currently do, in terms of being willing to compromise and recognise individual differences.

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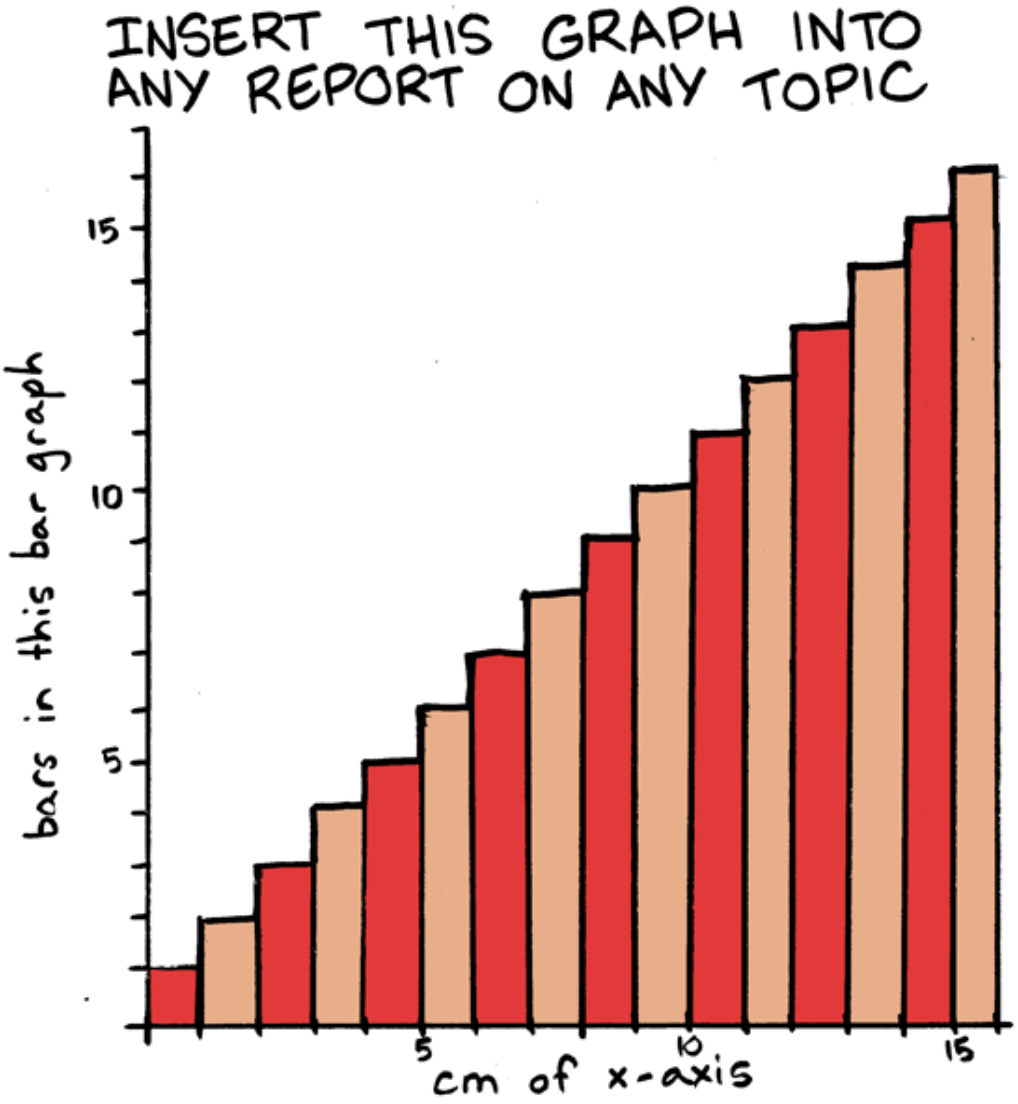
EASTER EGG

You found it!

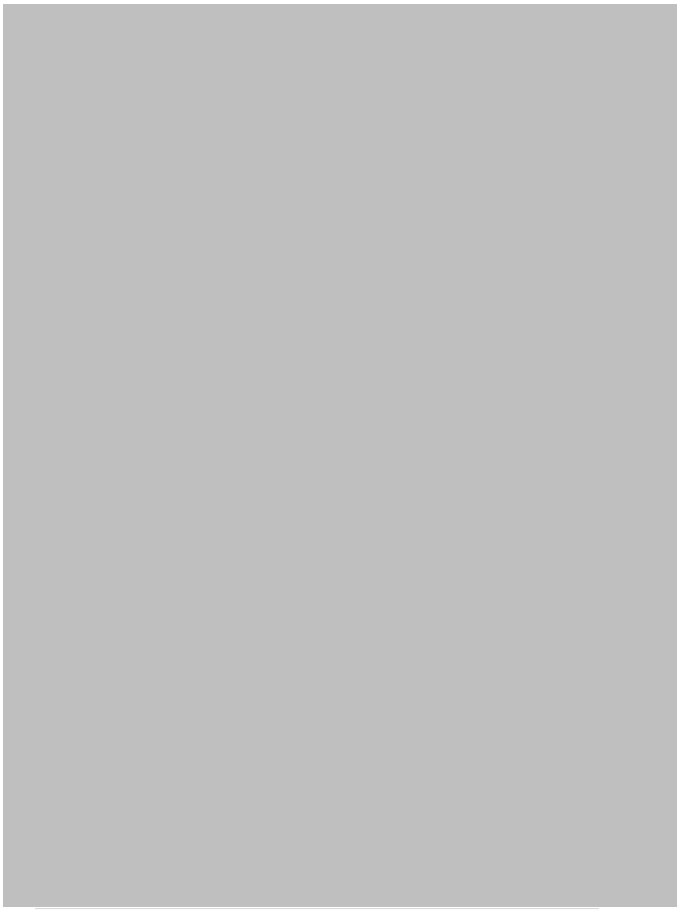
While researching my thesis I was distracted by the following cartoons (and others). Happily, bringing them together here gives me another way to present my dissertation, graphically. After all, as you have probably realised from the last 96 pages, I am something of a visual thinker. My usual approach to explaining things goes something like this:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=872#comic

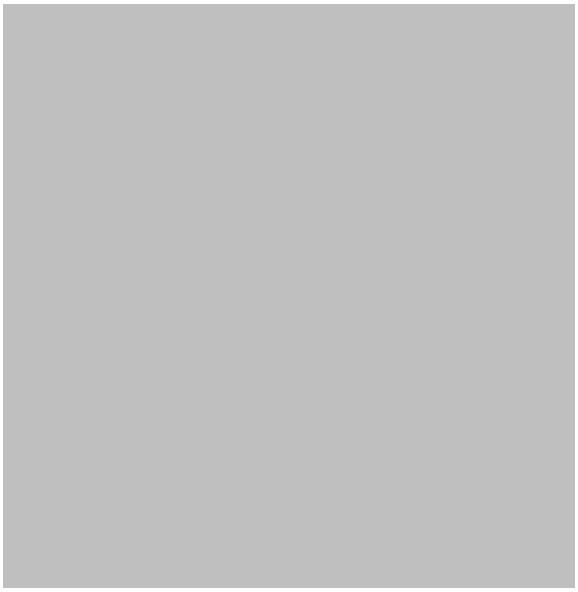
INTRODUCTION

So, my ideas. Well firstly, why is my question interesting? Here is one way of making your findings interesting:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1181#comic

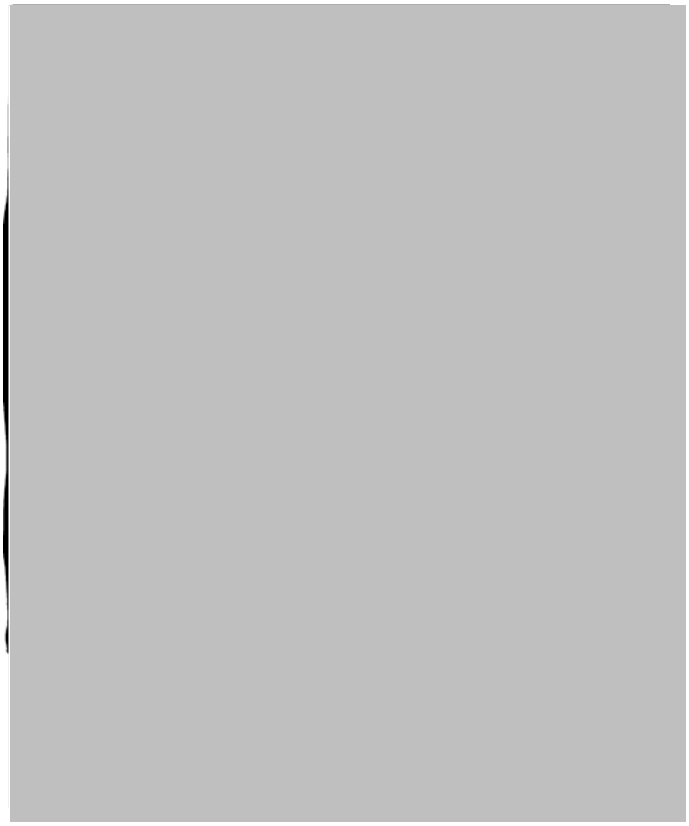
But in my case, my dissertation is interesting because it's important to know where morality comes from. After all, some people say that morality comes from God; if I can disprove them then maybe I can disprove the existence of God. On the other hand:



http://www.religifake.com/professor-thompson-religion-proof-that-god-exists-religion-39.html

BIOLOGICAL MECHANISMS

My first section is all about biology. I found loads of evidence from well researched sources to back up my empirical claims:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=601#comic

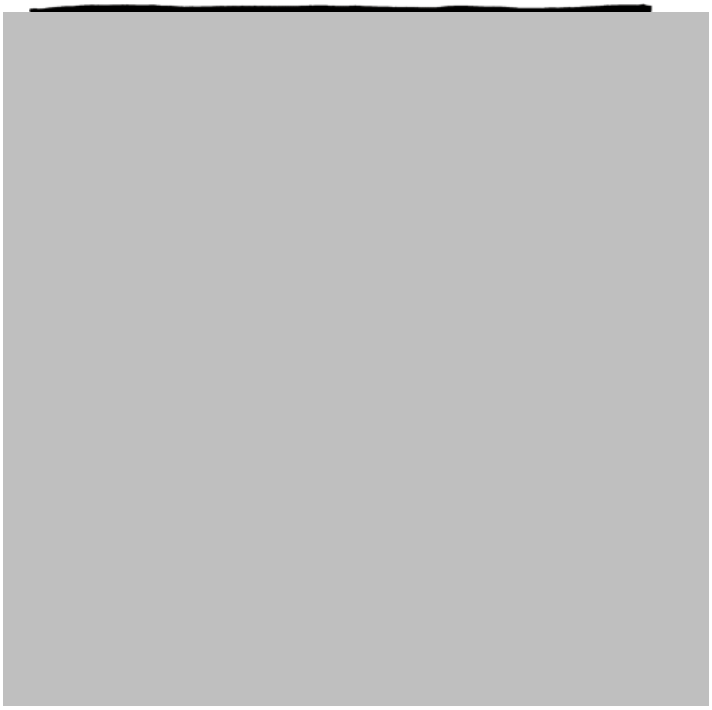
So, the science; natural selection tells us that physical traits can be passed on to one's children:

http://imgace.com/pic/tag/soft-serve-ice-cream-cone-marries-light-bulb-and-they-have-spiral-fluorescent-bulb-child/

And animals can be born with psychological traits as well:

http://pandawhale.com/post/6606/i-must-barf-and-then-eat-that-barf

Organisms evolve altruism because it helps pass on one's genes vicariously. That's why we like to look after our relatives.



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1264#comic

And it's nice to have children because they look after us when we are older:

http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1175#comic

Ethics probably arose because it's useful to be able to spot liars, remember their faces, and attribute negative feelings towards them. We are actually quite good at spotting liars:

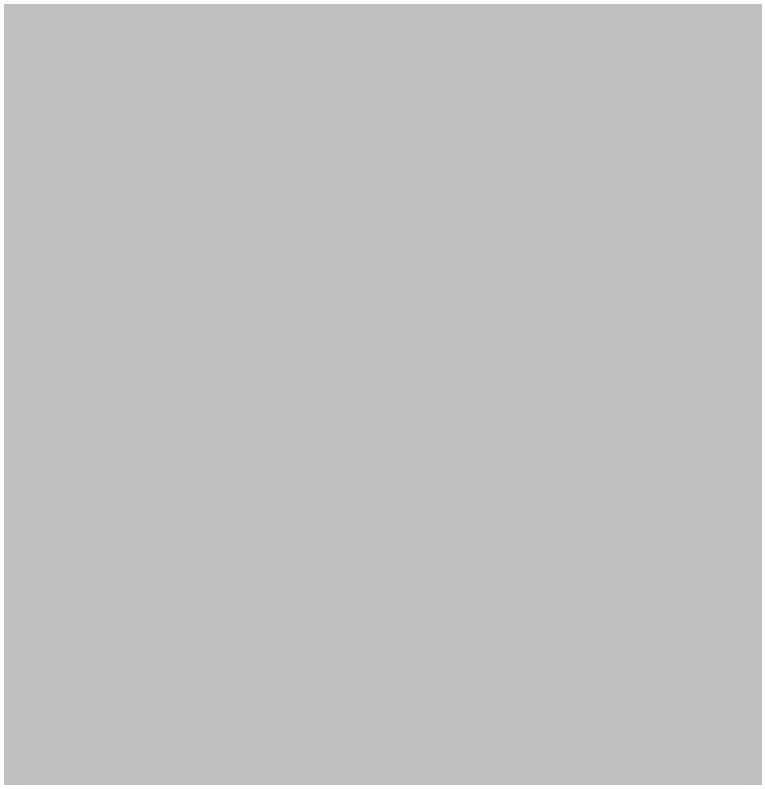
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1219#comic

RUSE'S POSITION AND WHERE I AGREE AND DISSAGREE WITH IT

There aren't many cartoons about Michael Ruse.

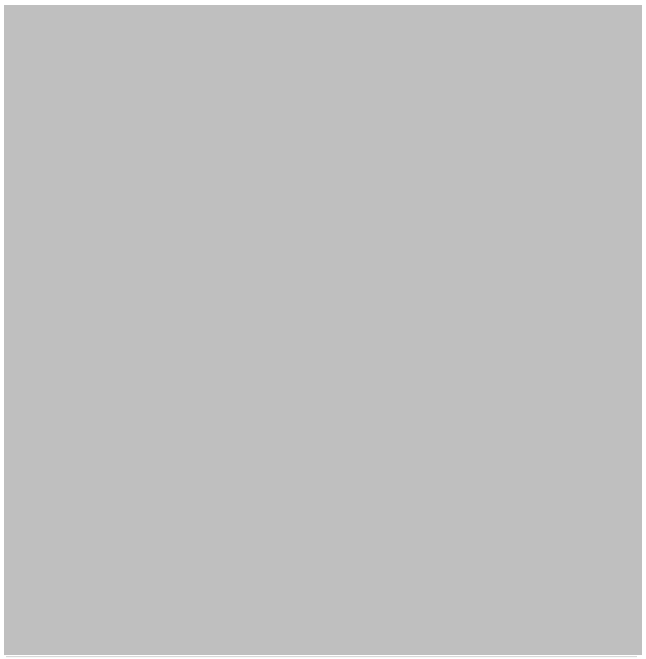
Or his interpretation of evolutionary ethics.

But he does claim not to be a moral relativist, but I think he should be. A bit like this:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1127#comic

Ruse likens a belief in objective morality to a belief in spirits of departed loved ones. I.e. they probably don't exist, and even if they do exist, then we won't be able to detect them. It's a reasonable position, but not necessarily a very comforting one:

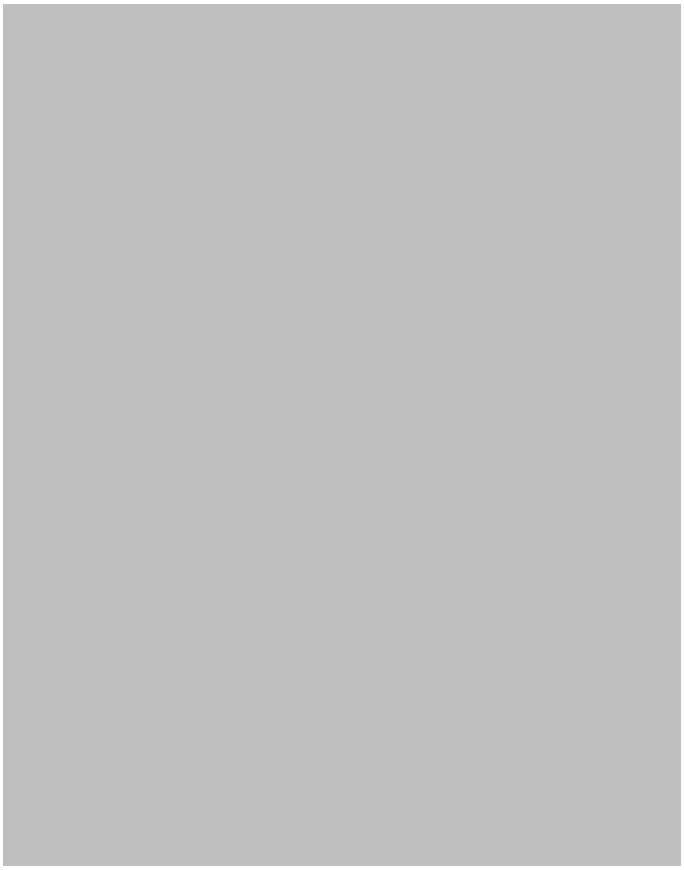


http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=535#comic

Ruse and I agree that nurturing is very important in our moral psychology:

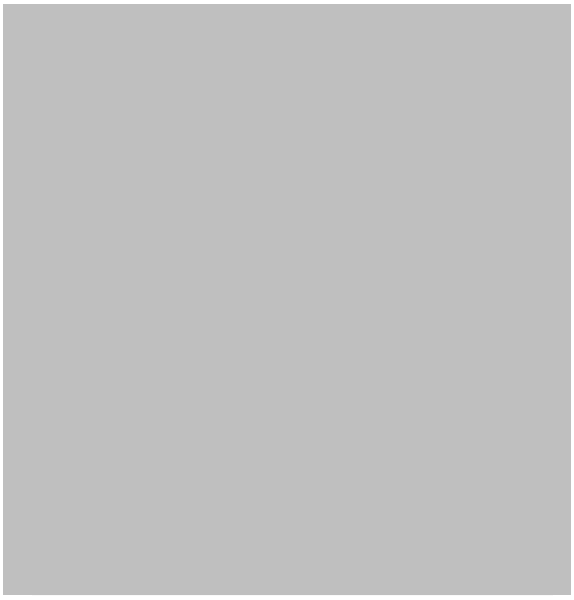
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=784#comic

He says that someone could be raised to be morally blind, but later seems to change his mind on this, and says that our natural moral urges are inescapable. I have an issue with this, perhaps there is some way to re – align our moral feelings, perhaps nurture can overcome nature:



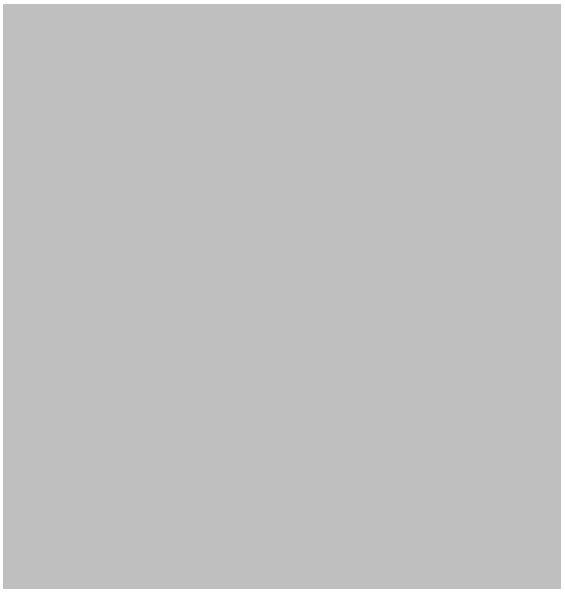
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1259#comic

I also have an issue with Ruse's assertion / assumption that because we have all evolved a moral sense, then it must be an **equal** moral sense. Maybe groups of people could inherit different moral beliefs to other groups of people, making the practice of morality impossible:



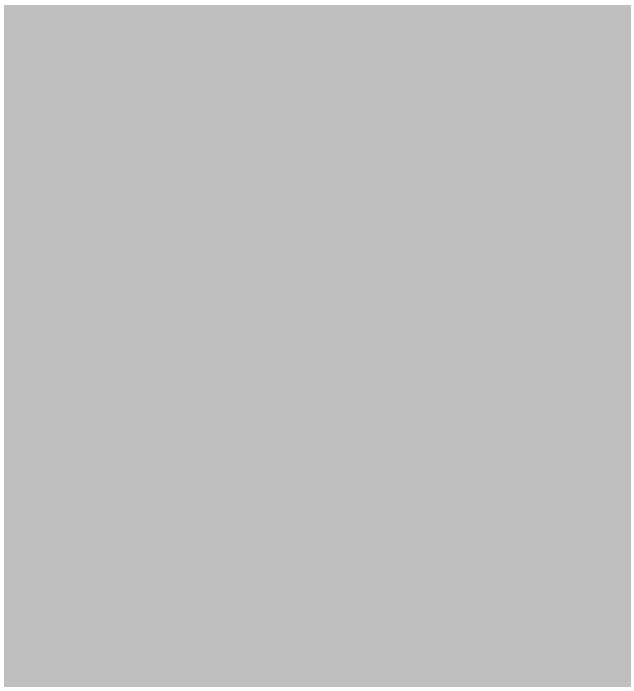
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=671#comic

Also, think about people who have suffered brain trauma. They could easily have their 'objective belief in ethics' part of the brain destroyed. Brain trauma can have terrible consequences:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=580#comic

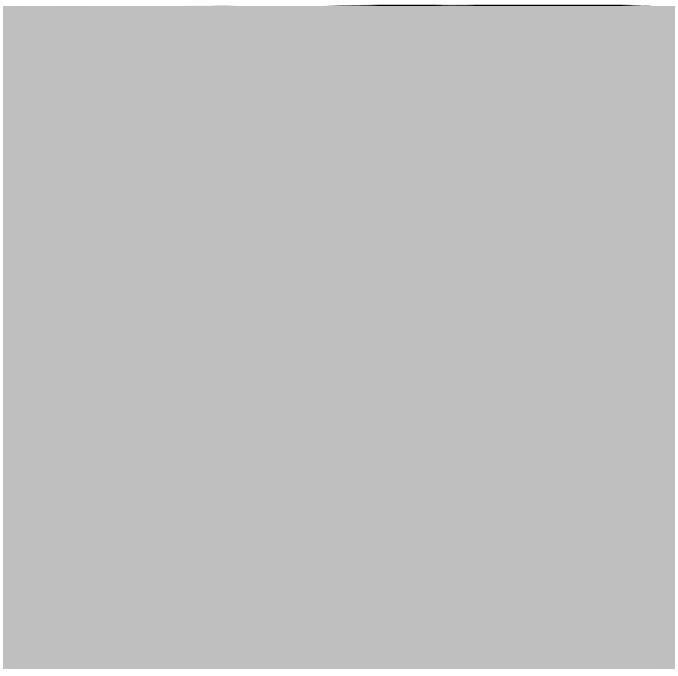
Ruse claims that our belief morality is objective, therefore we cannot perceive it as otherwise. However, I point out that there are other areas of belief which seem objective, but we are able to compromise and accept that other people's 'objective' views are valid (so maybe humans can be trained to do the same with ethics). For example, most people can agree to disagree on matters of aesthetics, to do otherwise would be weird:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=806#comic

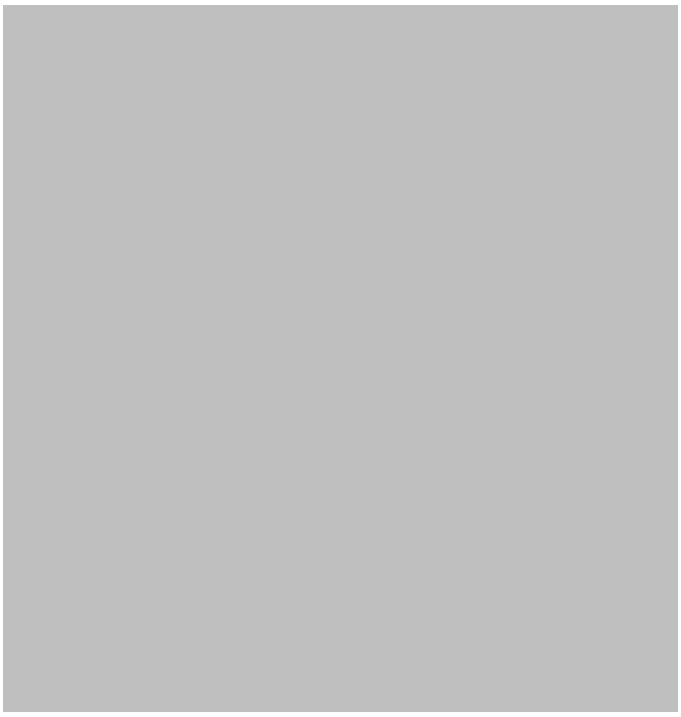
SHOWING THAT RUSE IS INCONSISTENT IN HIS CRITERIA OF WHAT CONSITUTES 'MORALITY'

We now get into a semantic question about whether or not questions of ethics become instrumental questions, if they are biologically motivated. Semantic questions can be extremely tiresome:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=834#comic

But what Ruse thinks he can do is avoid ethics being an instrumental exercise, whereas I think that it **is** instrumental, like a game of chess (i.e. "**if** you want to intimidate your opponent **then** use the Ponziani Opening"):

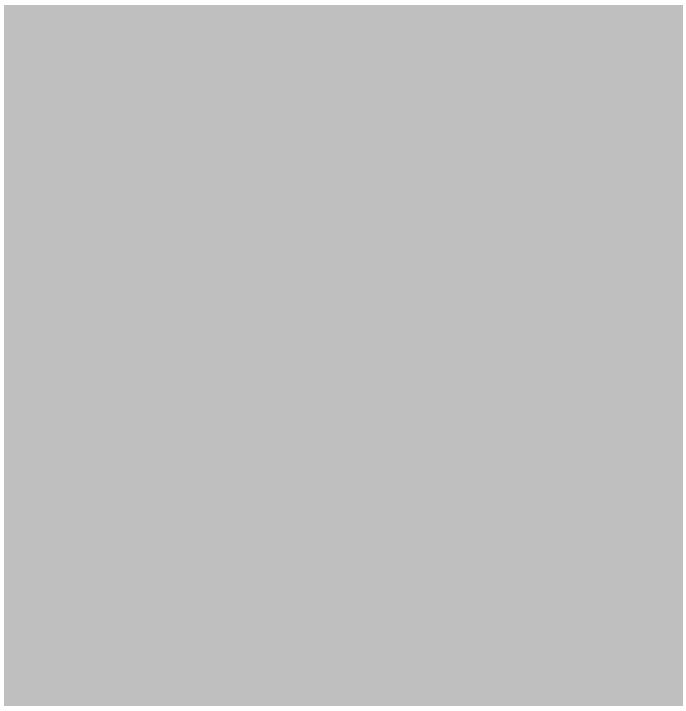


http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=809#comic

Ruse supports his argument by comparing morality to a game. I think this is a poor comparison, as the rules of morality are made by man, and can be consciously, overtly changed by man:

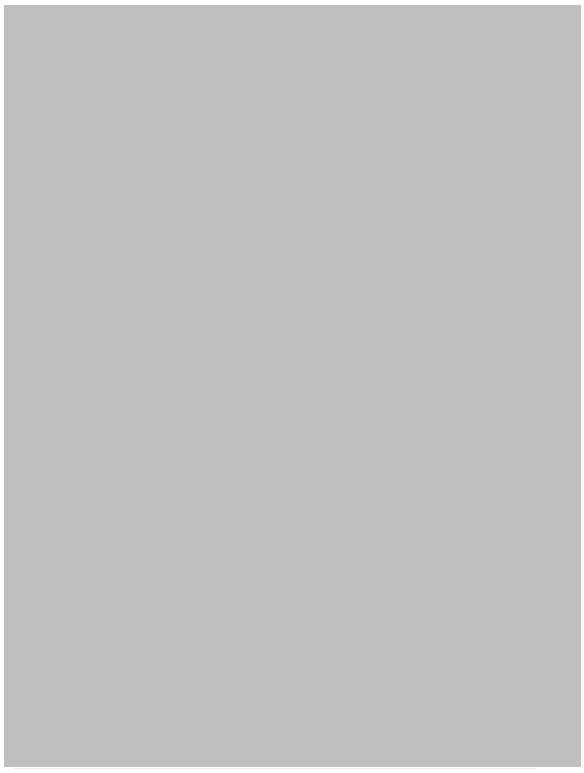
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=883#comic

Ruse says that having a belief in oncoming trains is dissimilar to having a belief in ethics because 'trains kill'. However I maintain that not having a belief in ethics can be just as fatal **to ones genes**, because if we don't care about our family we won't try and preserve them (and therefore vicariously preserve our genes):



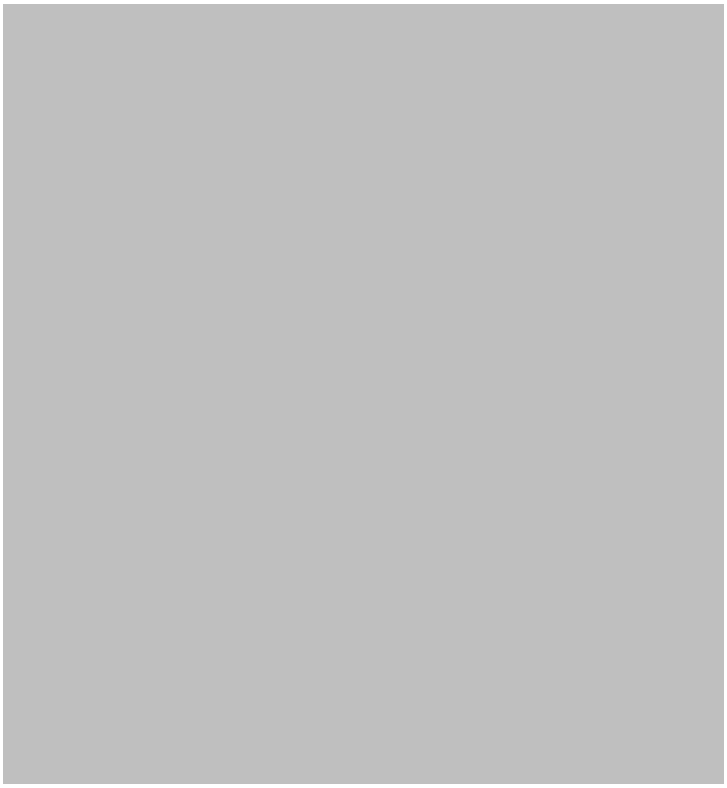
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1258#comic

I believe that Ruse is making an error in trying to draw a distinction between self interest and ethics. After all, when we try and do nice things for strangers, we may actually be subconsciously signalling our suitability as a mate to others. So 'ethics' is actually self interested, as Santa knows:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=742#comic

After all, human psychology is very complex and often has ulterior motives:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1267#comic

Incidentally, Feinberg criticises contributors on this topic for not providing evidence of their claims about human psychology. With the empirical studies mentioned earlier, I believe I have provided exactly the kind of evidence he is talking about (e.g. that men are more likely to give to beggars when it increases their chances of impressing a potential mate). I have made sure all my evidence is accurate and precise, for example this devastatingly accurate pie chart:

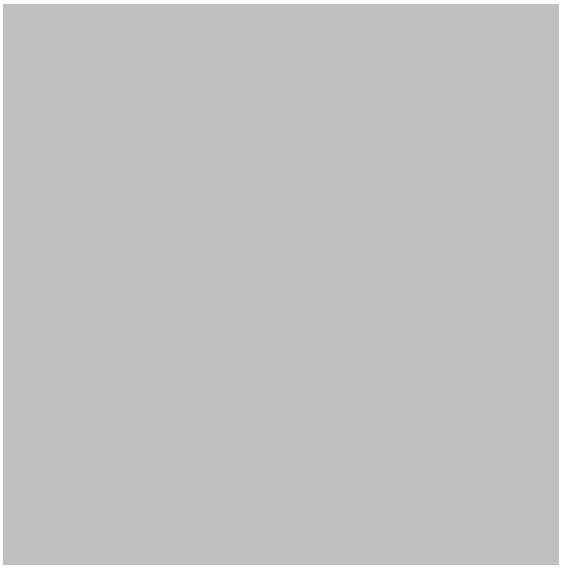
http://www.buzzfeed.com/sarahmorgan/worlds-most-accurate-pie-chart-d8

CONCLUSION

Humans are affected by natural selection, i.e. their (ethical) behaviours are shaped by nature:

http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1260#comic

Even when we think we are being ethical, we are always subconsciously trying to advance our own genetic material's success. We display a lot of different behaviours to achieve this:



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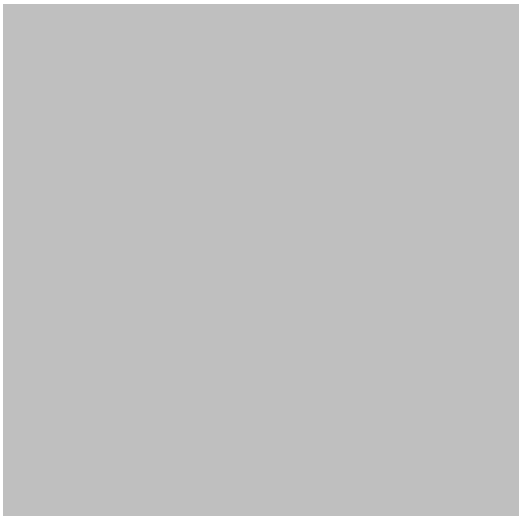
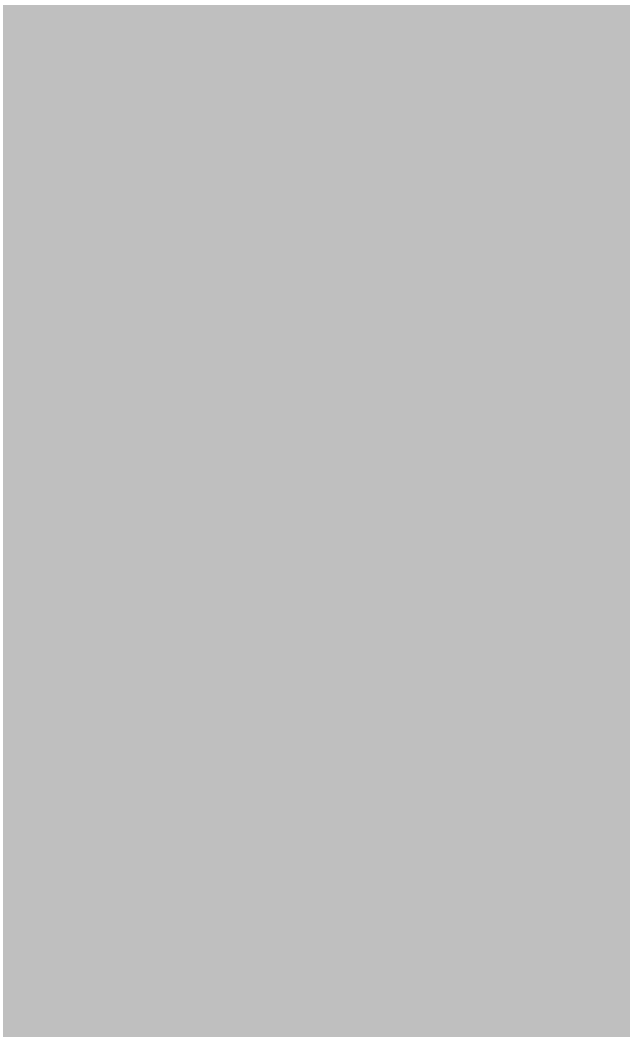
I think all the above means we should be moral relativists, which Ruse says is a logical fallacy. However:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1122#comic

Just because we **call** our actions moral doesn't mean that they are moral. After all, lots of things have misleading names:

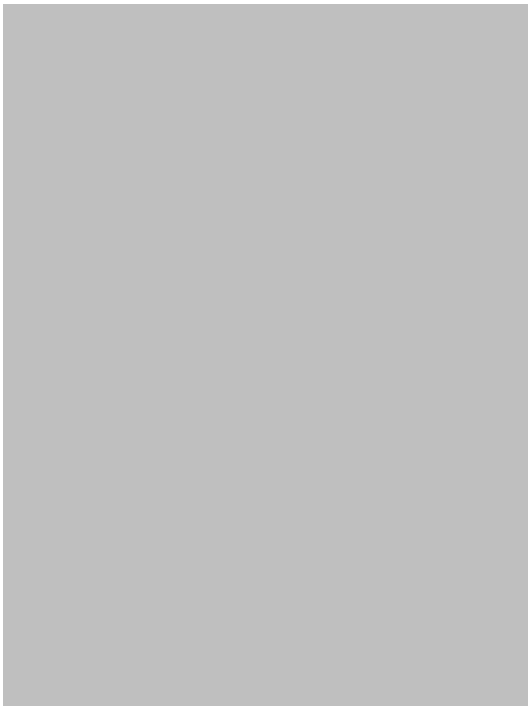


http://laughingsquid.com/animals-with-misleading-names/

We could have developed lots of different psychological strategies for surviving in a society, therefore Ruse can't be sure that the distribution of morality is equal. After all, nature isn't fair:

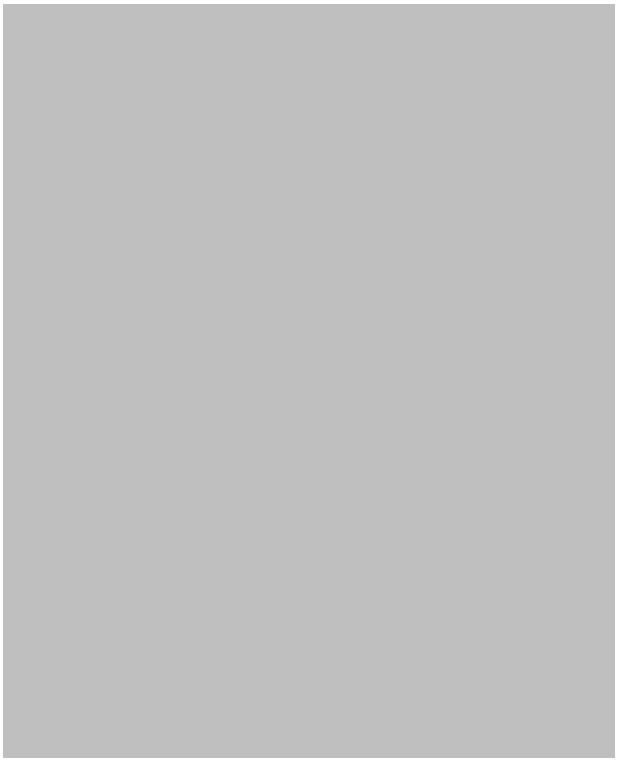
http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1240#comic

And there will always be those whose psychological strategies are less than perfect, the individuals who display them will fall behind in the race of life:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=1007#comic

So not only should we think differently about morality, but we might start to question some of our other 'objective' beliefs:



http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=847#comic

So finally, let's return to the original question. Does what I've discovered mean that atheists are right to reject God? Well, actually atheism may not be as simple as all that...

http://www.smbc-comics.com/?id=798#comic

Hope you enjoyed the cartoons as much as I did ☺

Nathan

P.S. Please try to be a good person, whatever you think that means.

> I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again (Stephen Grellet)