

Evolution of Morality Debate on Philosophy Forum, Mar 2004

This discussion eventually wanders into a debate on absolute certainty. All quotations are in red. All responses to quotations by John Donovan unless otherwise noted.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I much prefer Dennett's "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" to Dawkins' "The Blind Watchmaker" by the way. Dawkins is too fond of hyperboles, and his arguments are often weak. Unlike Dennett's.

I enjoy both authors immensely, though it is true that Dawkins sometimes writes in a somewhat pugilistic and shall we say, exuberant tone. But it makes for entertaining reading, for example have you read this very funny piece?

<http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/dawkins.html>

In any case, both Dawkins and Dennett are clearly philosophical "soulmates". I can't imagine two men more in tune with each others ideas on so many issues. Just look at how Dennett has latched on to Dawkins' "memes" concept and applied it to his theory of consciousness. There is a discussion on this here for those interested in the link between language and the evolution of consciousness:

<http://forums.philosophyforums.com/...read.php?t=6031>

Apologies in advance for the thread promotion.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

A characteristic, no doubt, with a strong genetic influence ;-)

Seriously, I think there is something to this. Although I would say a strong "memetic" influence, instead.

It makes sense to consider the idea that religious beliefs, such as the idea that we are the apple of God's eye, or the chosen people or that the universe was created just for us, etc., are all evolved memes that enhance human (social?) survival. I mean if you are wandering in the desert for 40 years, it might help your chances of survival if you believe that there is actually some purpose to it all.

So I would say that we have religious beliefs, at least in part, because these ideas are how our perceptual/cognitive mental systems try to explain/predict/control a fairly random and purposeless environment, but also for the obvious benefit that they provide for the above explained "will to survive". Other religious beliefs/morals, like for example, antigay, anticontraception, antiabortion have obvious Darwinian reproductive incentives.

What is so ironic to me is that so many religious people don't see the evolutionary nature of their religious beliefs. Perhaps, I would argue, because knowing that these beliefs are only beliefs, would not provide the same survival benefit. Sort of a mental placebo effect if you will.

So I would say that the atheist, due to his lesser degree of belief in "purpose" and "specialness", is perhaps less well fitted to survive in the long run. On the other hand, the atheist is not about to become a martyr for any god. So maybe there is a difference in the level of "unnatural" selection between the individual (Dawkins) and the group (Gould) so far as religious belief is concerned.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, you could have warned Einstein, he still believed in God after pondering all of that .

I'm glad you said it was a joke because Einstein certainly did not believe in any sort of a personal god, and could be considered rather atheistic in many ways. Besides arguments from authority are without value, so let's just leave the poor man alone.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The ideas above are quite simply unscientific and unproven (and bad philosophy). In other words, weak. Note how almost nothing of it follows from evolutionary theory -- though Dawkins would like us to believe that it does.

There is no question that this summary of a few of Dawkins more extended ideas consists of some philosophy. But I'm surprised you dislike these ideas from Dawkins, when Dennett's position is almost exactly the same, though it's true that Dennett isn't quite as explicit about it. By the way, I couldn't agree more with the summary, very nicely written.

In any case, these ideas are in part scientifically supported by the very new and growing field of evolutionary psychology. I strongly suggest you read Robert Wright's "The Moral Animal" for a fascinating introduction to the field. I couldn't put it down.

Finally, I'd like to know specifically what statements you disagree with most, in the Dawkins summary you posted, and why.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, it is the relationship between a philosopher that invokes science to support his theories and a scientist who believes that philosophy is silly and science suffices for any reasonable person.

I agree Dawkins is a strong advocate for science- but I have never gotten the idea from him that science is all that "suffices". Quite the contrary- he is a strong advocate of how humans give "purpose" to their lives, through all kinds of altruistic and cooperative behaviors. That these behaviors might have an evolutionary basis or be capable of being studied makes no difference to their value to humans. Much as I was arguing about the evolutionary role of religious belief for humans.

Just because one can understand the physics of the rainbow does not detract one iota from my appreciation of it's beauty. Dawkins uses the same metaphor and he, rightly I think, argues that a scientific understanding of these things can enhance our appreciation of their beauty.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I've been following it since I was a lurker. I just read Searle's "The Rediscovery of the Mind", in which he criticizes (among others) Dawkins' approach... but this is a field of which I'm nothing more than "an intelligent layman", so I don't feel comfortable in butting in. Not now at least . After all, I tend to sympathise with TecnoTut's position, and you don't need another guy like him on that thread .

I understand the **all too intuitively obvious** dualist belief that there MUST be something more to consciousness than just neurons and complexity, but there is no scientific evidence to that belief and much scientific evidence to the contrary. As a biologist I'm sure you've studied the Vitalist debate in the 19th century. To me the current debate on consciousness is much the same, and will have the same outcome- no magic substance.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

P.S. I've read The Moral Animal. It's quite good, too. The difference between Dennett and Dawkins is what I've said above: Dennett is aware that he is defending a philosophical position among many; Dawkins believes that his position is supported by science. Dennett (though wrong in my opinion) is not self-deluded.

I think the case for Dawkins position is stronger than you think. Give me a specific example and we can discuss it.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Basically, the normative statements, such as "The meaning of life is life itself" and "There is no life after death" (well, not a normative statement, but surely not a conclusion of Evolutionary theory).

The point is that he confuses his theory with his metaphysics. Dennett rarely does that.

And that also answers jamespetts. My point is that these two things, theory and metaphysics, are different and must be kept separate in the mind, or the result is muddled thinking.

I think you are right that one has to be careful here. For example statement "The meaning of life" has two very different meanings.

First there is the normal spiritual "meaning" of life that god put us here on earth for his special reasons. But then there is the "meaning" that we give our own lives individually.

Dawkins (and Dennett) are saying that evolution seems to indicate that there is no evidence for a "supernatural" purpose or "meaning" of life on earth. But that does not mean that we can't provide our own lives with personal and social meaning.

The field of evolution and evolutionary psychology could demonstrate (and I think it will eventually) that there is no "intrinsic" meaning or purpose to anything in the universe. But that will not reduce my personal appreciation for existing one bit. As Dennett replied when asked by Alan Alda on Scientific American Frontiers:

ALDA: Do you suppose some people feel that there's a lack of purpose to life if life is only the way Darwin describes it?

DENNETT: I think a lot of people prefer the traditional idea that we get our purpose from on high, somehow. I think that the important idea here is that you want there to be something more important than you are, to give you meaning and to make you happy. My advice if you want to be happy is, find something more important than you are and work for it.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Basically, the normative statements, such as "The meaning of life is life itself" and "There is no life after death" (well, not a normative statement, but surely not a conclusion of Evolutionary theory).

You're not providing any analysis of the specific sort of separation for which you contend. Indeed, the first proposition, "the meaning of life is life itself", is a consequence of evolutionary theory: for it is the theory of evolution that explains not only why there is life, but why there is meaning (and for that matter, purpose and value). As to the second proposition, given a true understanding of the nature of life, there remains no

reason to suppose that any such mystical and unevidenced state such as "life after death" could possibly exist.

Quote:

The point is that he confuses his theory with his metaphysics. Dennett rarely does that.

And that also answers jamespetts. My point is that these two things, theory and metaphysics, are different and must be kept separate in the mind, or the result is muddled thinking.

You have not explained *why* "theory" is distinct from "metaphysics", or indeed why "metaphysics" can tell anybody anything useful about reality. A theory of something is merely a generalised account of the nature of that thing. A theory of evolution is, of necessity, a theory of life as a concept. All propositions that flow from an understanding of the concept of life, including all evaluative propositions (such as those ascribing purpose, meaning or value) cannot be understood without first understanding this essential nature of life.

There is no confusion: the separation for which you contend (but provide no reasons) has no basis in reason.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I already did (we post too quickly around here).

"The meaning of life is life itself"

"There is no life after death"

One normative statement and one descriptive statement; can you defend the notion that any of them is "supported by Evolutionary Theory"?

Note, I'm not criticizing the statements, themselves, but rather the assumption that they are somehow "more scientific" than opposing statements. There is no scientific theory that supports either of them.

Sorry, my mouse is too fast.

I guess what I'm saying is this: if science can explain everything we see in the universe (including why we have religious beliefs) without recourse to the supernatural (and it has a good track record on this so far), does it make any sense to keep on assuming that there is something more (i.e., the supernatural) out there than just what we have explained?

You're right, science can never "prove" that there is no life after death or there is no meaning to life given to us from god on high (just as science can't prove that God created the universe 5 seconds ago), but what is more reasonable? That these are merely evolved beliefs that once helped us cope with unexplained things we didn't understand scientifically, like lightning and thunder, or that everything we don't yet understand must have some supernatural purpose?

I think we ought to face the realization that we have only ourselves to count on in this purposeless existence. But it will probably take another 150 years for that idea to sink in.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

Um, I think that you've misunderstood the concept of a meme. If a tendency to behave in a particular way exists because that tendency is one which has a positive impact on the survival and reproduction chances of a gene or its host (an organism, usually), then the characteristic is genetic.

Ah, yes, but not if the "tendency to behave" **is learned**. Genes are passed by reproduction, but memes are passed on by learning.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

There is no direct evidence of which I am aware to suggest that the tendency to hold religious beliefs is of itself an evolutionary adaptation. It is entirely possible, and indeed more likely, that it is merely an unfortunate byproduct of many other evolutionary adaptations (such as the sense of purpose with which an intelligent mind must be endowed in order to serve its function of controlling the gene-carrying body in such a way as to make it more likely than it would be had it not such purpose to survive and pass on the gene(s) that endow it with such purpose).

Whew, let me read that last sentence again! Oh, yeah, I agree. But see Pascal Boyer's "Religion Explained" for a presentation of the evolution psychology explanation of religious belief. Very good reading.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

I'm not sure why you consider that either the memetic qualities of religion (that they tend to be ideas which take hold and spread because of their own characteristics as ideas, given the environment of human minds to which they have adapted) or the postulated genetic qualities (that the tendency to hold religious beliefs constitutes or is caused by genetic adaptations with gene-survival value) to be anything other than forms of natural selection.

I distinguish between genetic behavior and "learned" memetic behavior as I said above. Of course, due to evolved human brain "plasticity" over the last 500,000 years we are capable of learning better and faster, so the distinction does blur a bit. See the "Baldwin Effect" discussion in the Dennett consciousness thread. If you haven't read Dennett Consciousness Explained yet you should- you are ripe for it.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I can't imagine how; we can't measure meaning or purpose with instruments.

Again, I am distinguishing between human given "meaning of life" a la Dennett and Dawkins and religious or supernatural god given "meaning of life" (and also between Monty Python's given "meaning of life"). Most religious believers believe that belief in god gives their lives meaning- correct me if you do not belong to that category. I'm only saying that if science can explain life on earth and religious belief without recourse to the "supernatural". Why do we need the supernatural explanation? Because it makes us feel better inside?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Giving meaning to our lives is of course a great endeavor. And I don't think it is "given from above". But I also can't see how any discovery about nature can prove or disprove any meaning. Dennett is, indeed, saying exactly that. If meaning is what we make with our lives, then surely there is a meaning for life; what we make of it. If that is the sense in which Dawkins used that statement, then he was merely obscure . I'm sure that most people wouldn't interpret "The meaning of life is life itself" that way.

I think Dawkins (and Dennett) was saying that there is no god given meaning to life, only what meaning we provide to it ourselves. They are speaking philosophically to a degree. But evolution and evolutionary psychology seem to provide some (circumstantial as least) evidence that they are right.

One problem we are encountering here is that the line between behavior (and what we tend to believe) and our genetic makeup is being crossed by the new science of evolutionary psychology. And that doesn't make everyone happy that would like to believe that there is something more to life that genetically programmed

behaviors. And Dawkins and Dennett are saying there is- unfortunately it's mostly memetically programmed behaviors!!!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Sorry, but there is confusion; and it is clear in both Dawkins' comments and in your posts. You are quite close to scientism when you dismiss metaphysics. Dawkins, I'm sure, falls in that trap in some passages of his books -- that was one of my impressions when I read them. The notion that "evaluative propositions flow from an understanding of life" is metaphysical; it is not established by any scientific theory. If it is, you can always explain. But be careful about what Moore called "the naturalistic fallacy" -- the belief that because something is, it ought to be.

You have a point- one has to be careful. But also to avoid the "supernaturalistic fallacy" that whatever we can't explain must be supernaturally explained. And I'll tell you why it's not an even trade. Because in the entire history of mankind, we have not a trace of evidence for supernatural phenomena and much evidence that everything can, in principle, be explained naturally. That coupled with our obvious psychological need for belief in the supernatural pretty much convinces me that it's all wishful thinking. The creation-evolution debate is this problem in a nutshell. The creationist's desperate need to believe in the supernatural completely overwhelms their ability to think critically. I think we have to critically examine any explanatory idea that provides solace and comfort to us poor humans.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

It is not the memes that learn: it is their hosts. The memes that get learnt are those that have the characteristic of being more likely to be learnt, remembered, and passed on. The tendency of a creature to learn (or to learn in particular ways), meanwhile, is genetic.

Partly- see the Baldwin Effect. We have also learned to learn better through our memes. Writing, drawing and language are memes that have enabled us to learn to learn better. One funny aside is Dennett's question: "so who are we? Us or our memes?"

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

Not all learned behaviour can be described as "memetic"; a person can learn something other than by having an existing idea passed on. Indeed, young humans all independently learn a vast array of things millions of times over.

True.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The "supernatural explanation" is not designed to make us feel better inside, quite the contrary (this is probably the most damaging criticism to evolutionary theories of religion). It could be said that evolutionary theories of religion are supposed to make us feel better inside, by dismissing supernatural explanations...

How topsy turvey of you to say that! I hope you are truly kidding!! Two problems- I would have thought that providing a supernatural explanation in place of an unknown natural phenomenon is obviously comforting as the history of supernatural belief indicates. Providing a feeling of self importance or being "chosen" by god also obviously provides much comfort to the human condition. Promising an eternal blissful afterlife provides much comfort as well. Saying god's will or God moves in mysterious ways provides some relief from the sting of arbitrary random happenstance or accident. Your position is contrary to every theologian or sociologist that I can think of. Second, it is also obvious that scientific explanations of many

aspects of the universe fill many people with dismay. In fact, to be totally honest, evolutionary explanations depress the hell of of me. But that's the way it appears to be. The creation evolution debate is only one example of how "dismayed" people are by non-supernatural explanations. Your position is, in short, ludicrous. Apologies if you were only joking.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In other words, how we feel inside is not a good indicator of the truth of a theory. This goes for both scientific and religious theories.

Agreed.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I agree with the last sentence. That's why I don't embrace evolutionary theories of religion . They seem to be designed to provide solace and comfort for us humans; that, in itself, is a bad argument (as I said above), but it makes one suspicious (just as you are suspicious of supernatural explanations).

Now it seems you are not kidding. Your position is absurd if you are claiming supernatural explanations do not provide comfort and scientific ones do. The only comfort I get from scientific explanations is that dragons and witches are not (apparently) necessary.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But I have examined evolutionary theories in quite a bit of detail and found them wanting (though I haven't read Boyer's book, and I hope I'll soon be able to; from reviews -- provided by you -- it seems he makes the same errors that Wright did). To be quite particular, I don't see how natural selection could establish such a trait in a population. Most of the explanations given so far (certainly those in Wright's book) involve group selection or circular reasoning. I don't claim to be any kind of expert in natural selection, but I've taught classes about it (that perhaps is enough to show that I'm no expert) and I like to think I have a firm grasp on what it can and what it can't do. It can (to get back to the topic) generate all kinds of wonderful and diverse biological structures; I don't see how it could generate ethics. No one so far has been able to explain that to me -- certainly not Dennett or Wright's books.

As far as the evolutionary theories of ethics fail to account for the concept of goodness -- and they usually skip it - they'll fall very short of the mark in my opinion. It's not an easy concept, that one. What is goodness? Can you tell me? I sure can't tell you. It is my clearest example of a "supernatural concept". It means, of course, that the supernatural is perceived all the time -- since we perceive goodness all the time. Ethics can't work without it. This is what evolutionary theories of ethics propose, though.

Ah, now you are asking some good questions. It seems that you must have skipped over large sections of Wright, Dennett and Dawkins because all three spend an enormous amount of time explaining why altruistic and cooperative behavior can be evolutionarily selected for in humans. (this is in conjunction with social evolution of social structures that promote cooperative behavior). Maybe you need to re-read the Selfish Gene by Dawkins because this is mostly what the book attempts to explain- why cooperation (what you would call good behavior) is evolutionarily advantageous.

I can't possibly write up the entire thesis here- (I've got to get some work done today), but I will provide this: it's a non-zero sum game. If we both cooperate, we both benefit. Cooperation enhances survival. The math is simple.

I just watched Dersu Urzala (Kurosawa) last night for the first time- amazing movie and by the way, an excellent example of how cooperative behavior in the wild can benefit both yourself and those that you may never meet. It's a "good trick" that early humans learned and why we now dominate the planet (along with the bacteria of course).

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...The fact that ethical behavior (cooperation) is evolutionary advantageous is not enough to select for that behavior, because selection works at the individual level, not at the group level. It's interesting, because ethologists struggled to explain altruist behavior in animals for most of the last century (do a google on "Hamilton's Law" and you'll find some of the most interesting stories of Biology ever; about kin selection and the evolution of social insects). They were quite aware of the constraints that natural selection imposes on the evolution of a characteristics that is good for a group but bad for an individual. Animal ethologists were always aware of that. And when the "evolutionary psychology" came up I thought they had something new to show about this. They hadn't. They gloss over the problem, which is:

how can this trait be established in a population, if the population starts from a non-cooperative (selfish) stance? How can the "genes for altruism" be selected over the "genes for selfishness", if the fitness of the selfishness gene increases as the population becomes more and more cooperative? (If you are the only thief in a population, you get everything).

Dawkins answers exactly this question in the 2nd edition of *The Selfish Gene*. Firstly, the assumption that the population *starts* selfish is flawed (it is known that even bacteria use chemical signaling to coordinate activity when a certain critical mass is reached); the population is taken to start with a variety of characteristics, with those traits that most cause the genes that cause them to become numerous overtaking the population. Where selfish behaviour by the organism towards other organisms does this, then the gene for this behaviour will become more numerous in the population than its allele. Where co-operation best does this, the gene for co-operation will become more numerous.

Secondly, genes for behaviour that increase the survival chance of other organisms that also increase the survival/reproduction chance of the gene causing the behaviour will tend to become more numerous. Dawkins writes of an experiment where computers with different strategies played multiple rounds of "Prisoners' Dilemma" against each other. The one that won played the following strategy: start by co-operating. After that, do whatever the opponent did on the last move. This did better than a large number of, often quite complex, strategies that would start by defecting or would initiate defection.

Quote:

*Yes, the math is simple; and against the evolutionary psychologists. Game theory is also clear about that. I know that, for instance, the evolution of "genes against deceiving your family" is good for your family; but what good does it do *for the individual*? If you are the only thief in your family, you still get everything. How can this gene ever get established? Hamilton's Law offers some answers. But they are not enough.*

Remember, an organism's immediate family shares half its genes. For each gene, there is a 50% chance that an immediate family member of the organism that carries it also carries a copy of that gene. Genes for behaviour, therefore, that benefits a brother, sister, parent or child by more than twice the amount that it costs the individual are likely to become more common in the gene pool.

Quote:

There is a strong, or rather, a STRONG selection pressure against the evolution of those traits. Is it impossible for them to evolve? Heck, I don't know everything there is to be known, and I still suppose someday someone will offer a good explanation. But so far there isn't any; and the "good explanation" will have to explore some new characteristic of evolution, NOT natural selection, working towards that goal.

There is no space between evolution and natural selection.

Quote:

*There are other examples of the same problem, probeman, and I suggest that you should look them up. Like the origin of sex (genders). Sex "promotes genetic diversity", sure enough, but how could it evolve in the first place since it cuts the amount of individuals you produce by reproduction by *half*? There are good explanations for that one; but you'll notice that they do *not* address the "group advantage" of sex, because Evolution doesn't work like that. The fact that sex "promotes genetic diversity" was a lucky outcome of a process that had nothing to do with that (actually, it is also an example of "genetic selfishness", which both you and Dawkins should be acquainted with; the same genetic selfishness that is a major stumbling block in the path of the evolutionary psychologists).*

You have misconstrued the question in relation to sex: the real question is whether a gene for sexual

reproduction is likely to become more common than its allele for asexual reproduction in the gene pool. The gene for sexual reproduction doesn't "care" about the fate of the other genes in the body, whether they are only getting reproduced with half certainty each time, provided that they continue to build for it organisms in which it can continue to survive and make more copies of itself.

If a gene for sexual reproduction increased genetic diversity within a population, increasing the chances that any given individual in that population would, after several generations at least, survive, then that gene would be likely to become numerous in the population as compared to its allele, the gene for asexual reproduction.

What counts is not what benefits *organisms*, but what benefits *genes*.

Quote:

By the way, an exploration of the concept of "good" is still required for any theory of Ethics. If "Good = Evolutionary Advantageous", then we'd rape if we were sure we wouldn't get caught. It's not a simple subject; I doubt it has a simple answer.

Will a complex answer suffice? The origin of the concept of good is indeed the very concept of the evolutionarily advantageous, but that does not mean that the concept of evolutionary advantage cannot create other states of affairs that are good with respect to other decisionmaking systems than natural selection. Human pleasure and pain is one of those systems, that has been created by genes for their own ends, but, in turn, creates a system of value that is different from (and sometimes opposed to) the system of value that operates at gene level.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I was half-joking; but only half. For the truth is that many people find solace in scientific explanations, and many people despair over the religious explanations. Isn't it widely held among many people that the Catholic Church "invented the doctrine of Hell to hold sway over people's hearts?" Whatever the historical veracity of this claim is, it shows that religion is not just bliss.

Yes, religion, like any human social structure, offers both the carrot and the stick. The point being that where else do morals and taboos and ethics come from? You said they don't come "from on high", so that leaves genetic/social memetic interaction as the sole mechanism.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Also, many atheists -- probably most, especially among ex-theists -- experience exhilaration at being "free from religion". This forum is full of examples. They surely don't think that religion is bliss. This is particularly similar to the exhilaration that some religious people experience when they are worshipping.

In other words, to claim that a belief (any belief) is false because it pleases the believer is a weird way of poisoning the well. The observation "religions please religious people" is equivocal and irrelevant; for science pleases scientific people, and we don't think that science is false because of that. This is not the basis of the claim by Dawkins et al.; they also invoke other standards such as the evolutionary advantage (but isn't science also advantageous?).

I'm not saying that religious belief itself is false- it obviously is strongly held by most people and I even think it provides an evolutionary survival advantage, especially by those that are uneducated. But religious belief is not based on evidence- it is based on faith. Faith that fills many with hope. I have no problem with that- they can believe all they want- it is just clear to me that there is most likely a "natural/social" explanation for this all too human need to believe. I'll grant that science provides me with a rational basis for understanding, that in spite of it's complete amorality and purposelessness, the universe does have some rules. Rules that are utterly indifferent to humanity- but rules yes. So a grain of truth? Maybe.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, I read and re-read them searching like crazy for a proposed mechanism.

You must remember from the "Moral Animal" the discussion of game theory and tit for tat?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And I thought you had picked on something I missed... pity. Yes, this is what I saw in their writings. This is group selection, probeman. The fact that ethical behavior (cooperation) is evolutionary advantageous is not enough to select for that behavior, because selection works at the individual level, not at the group level. It's interesting, because ethologists struggled to explain altruist behavior in animals for most of the last century (do a google on "Hamilton's Law" and you'll find some of the most interesting stories of Biology ever; about kin selection and the evolution of social insects). They were quite aware of the constraints that natural selection imposes on the evolution of a characteristics that is good for a group but bad for an individual. Animal ethologists were always aware of that. And when the "evolutionary psychology" came up I thought they had something new to show about this. They hadn't. They gloss over the problem, which is:

how can this trait be established in a population, if the population starts from a non-cooperative (selfish) stance? How can the "genes for altruism" be selected over the "genes for selfishness", if the fitness of the selfishness gene increases as the population becomes more and more cooperative? (If you are the only thief in a population, you get everything).

Amazing how two people can read the same books and get such different ideas from it?

OK, here's the answer (from Dennett and Dawkins and Wright)- it's not strictly genetic nor strictly memetic. If you cheat, you win once. After that one incident, social anti-cheating mechanisms kick in and you are (depending on the severity) marginalized, ostracized, etc. Dawkins is the most anti-group selection scientist there is and he recognizes this simple fact. With humans it not either nature or nurture- it's obviously both. Google "Baldwin Effect" also.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, the math is simple; and against the evolutionary psychologists. Game theory is also clear about that. I know that, for instance, the evolution of "genes against deceiving your family" is good for your family; but what good does it do for the individual? If you are the only thief in your family, you still get everything. How can this gene ever get established? Hamilton's Law offers some answers. But they are not enough.

Wrong again. The good for the individual is that your genes are shared with your kin- hence altruism on a genetic basis. It was difficult to explain non-sexual classes in insect societies until the math of kinship was worked out (and it's slightly different for each species depending on how reproduction is done) but that's been done and it shows that there is a mathematical basis for cooperative behavior for related individuals. In humans, this is extended by social cooperation via game theory to show that cooperation enhances survival even among those not directly related.

I also find it interesting that as a species, humans are more closely related genetically to each other, than almost any other species (less than 0.1% genetic variation). Could this "kinship" have made altruistic social cooperation more likely?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

There is a strong, or rather, a STRONG selection pressure against the evolution of those traits. Is it impossible for them to evolve? Heck, I don't know everything there is to be known, and I still suppose someday someone will offer a good explanation. But so far there isn't any; and the "good explanation" will have to explore some new characteristic of evolution, NOT natural selection, working towards that goal.

Yes, you need to include game theory and social evolution of cooperative mechanisms. Humans have obviously excelled at this "group" cooperation mechanisms (even war is such an example of this "cooperation").

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

There are other examples of the same problem, probeman, and I suggest that you should look them up. Like the origin of sex (genders). Sex "promotes genetic diversity", sure enough, but how could it evolve in the first place since it cuts the amount of individuals you produce by reproduction by half? There are good explanations for that one; but you'll notice that they do not address the "group advantage" of sex, because Evolution doesn't work like

that. The fact that sex "promotes genetic diversity" was a lucky outcome of a process that had nothing to do with that (actually, it is also an example of "genetic selfishness", which both you and Dawkins should be acquainted with ; the same genetic selfishness that is a major stumbling block in the path of the evolutionary psychologists).
I'm amazed that as a biologist you haven't heard of the genetic "diversity" advantage that sexual reproduction offers for finding advantageous phenotypes.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

By the way, an exploration of the concept of "good" is still required for any theory of Ethics. If "Good = Evolutionary Advantageous", then we'd rape if we were sure we wouldn't get caught. It's not a simple subject; I doubt it has a simple answer.

Exactly- you prove my point. WE DO RAPE- IF WE THINK WE WON'T GET CAUGHT. Just look at Rwanda as only one example among thousands. We ARE animals, animals with a veneer of social civilization.

Good = Evolutionary Advantageous exactly. But what is evolutionarily advantageous is not always clear and simple.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I could say the same thing. We are sure that they don't come from evolution, because evolution can't do it; therefore it leaves "from on high" as the sole mechanism . It is again a half-joke, but it shows that false dilemmas aren't useful.

Except that there is evidence for evolutionary source of behavior.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But the premise is good -- natural selection can't produce ethics. If they are evolutionary, there is some other process than natural selection at work.

Depending on how you define ethics, natural selection by itself can't- it requires "social selection" as well.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

*Interesting, but not too relevant, is it? It's a statement of personal faith, that paragraph. Metaphysics. All of it is metaphysics. After all, "you can believe all you want; it is just clear to me that there is most likely a 'natural/social' explanation for this all too human need to believe. I'll grant that science provides you with a rational basis for understanding, that you find comfort in the **belief that the universe is amoral and purposeless**, because you rejoice at finding out that it has some truths".*

Note how the part in bold is not "scientific" in the least -- it is a metaphysical statement without any basis in empirical reality (just like its opposite statement lacks any basis in empirical reality).

I was just granting you your "grain of truth". Jeez.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yep. Game theory establishes why any given strategy would be successful. The challenge is to show how the given strategy could become genetically established. Genes don't plan strategy; they can't plan strategy.

It demonstrates that mathematically it is possible to program success without "strategy".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yep . But at the risk of sounding condescending, I'll say that I probably know more about the subject than you do. And therefore I can see the weak points more clearly. You still can't, even after I've pinpointed them.

You're absolutely right- it does sound condescending.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Again, it skips the point. We are discussing genetic mechanisms here; once we admit to cultural influence, genetic influence becomes less important. But the charge is that ethics are found in mankind because they are genetically advantageous. That is surely bunk; they can be genetically advantageous, but this can't be the reason for its establishment. This is not a shocking conclusion, it is standard genetics; check the example of sex for an illustration of the kind of problem I'm talking about.

It is exactly the point. It is not just genetic.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Once we admit to other influences, we open Pandora's box. Cultural influences, you say -- but where do these come from? It is exactly the same problem -- in a culture where there is no taboos against stealing, or raping, the non-stealer and the non-rapist have a disadvantage. And in a culture with strong taboos against those things, the thief and the rapist have a greater advantage than in the first culture. Culture complicates the matter enormously, especially when it demands the sacrificial goat (throughout the cultures of the world this is seen -- any guesses as to the "genetic basis" of that need?)

Again you prove my point. There are no cultures where stealing and raping are "ok". At least no viable and sustainable cultures. It is disadvantageous to tolerate raping and stealing and other "uncooperative" behaviors.

It is a Pandora's Box- or maybe it's a wonderful opportunity to further our understanding of culture and society. The fastest growing area in anthropology right now is evolutionary psychology- and for good reason.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I know that. So? Again, the advantage of a trait can't be used to explain its evolution.

Reproductive advantage?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'm not amazed that you didn't realize that I was the first to bring that up when I discussed the subject a few posts ago . Your mouse is too fast . But no matter how advantageous sexual reproduction is, it doesn't matter to explain how it became established. I'm not making this up, probeman -- google about it, or I'll have to do it myself. The evolution of sexual reproduction has nothing to do with the diversity advantage. That was a side effect. And this is as foreseen by evolutionary theory, because we can't have an adaptation that "foresees advantage". The immediate effect of sexual reproduction is a drop in 50% in the fitness of the animal; there is simply no advantage that can make up for that.

Well in spite of your claim to it's lack of advantage, it certainly seems to have "caught on". I suspect there is an evolutionary advantage all right.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The case of sex is a great illustration of the problem about ethics, because it is the same kind of problem -- which apparently you haven't grasped yet, and which Dawkins/Wright surely know about but glossed over. Evolution can't create an adaptation that results in immediate loss for the sake of a future advantage.

I will agree that we are only just starting to learn more about these things. Let's discuss this again in 25 years and see where things stand.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And we are animals that think that this rape is wrong. This is in conflict with evolutionary ethics -- we would admire a man who rapes and gets away with it if our ethics were purely evolutionary. And if they are not purely evolutionary, it is Pandora's box again.

Your second statement is wrong and your last statement is not an argument

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

To judge by the "Jeez", you didn't like what I said. But I was pointing out that there are metaphysical assumptions in any worldview, including yours. It wasn't supposed to be offensive or to show that any metaphysical assumption is better than the other.

No problem. I think part of the problem is that with fields like brain-mind studies and evolutionary psychology the traditional line between physics and metaphysics is not blurring but maybe shifting.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I know; and I wasn't using strategy in the sense of "a mind planning things", I was using it in the Game Theory sense of a fixed pattern. Mindless if necessary. However, even under that definition, genes can't account for it, precisely because they are selfish .

I agree. What "matters" to genes is only what genes get passed on. The "needs" of the individual organism are irrelevant. If the behavior confers a reproductive advantage then the gene gets replicated. In the case of memes it gets more complicated because the selection may also occur at the social level, but again what "matters" to memes is only that they get replicated, not whether they confer any advantage to the organism.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I didn't like to say it.

You liked it enough. But that's ok- it gives me the "moral" high ground.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If that is "the point", then great, we have agreed . But it was not what you were saying at first. Note also that "memetics" suffer from the same problem -- the memes are selfish entities and can't promote unselfish behavior. I never stated that it had no genetic basis; my contention is that it can't be purely genetic (or memetic, or a mix of both). We can get into anthropology if you wish from here to discuss what exactly is the basis of ethics; but it can't be purely genetic/memetic.

I agree that it's a mix of genetic and memetic (and natural selection and social selection). You don't agree?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I hope they pay attention to the problems I (and others, though not published -- we live in a backward country after all) I have pinpointed here. If they do, I'm sure they'll have good results. If they don't, their results will always be tainted.

If it's science it will be self-correcting.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, immediate reproductive advantage is needed for any trait to spread among a population.

Good. I hope you see the reproductive advantages of cooperative social behavior.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I never said it didn't have an advantage, I said the advantage was a side effect. This is very common in evolutionary studies, probeman -- a positive feedback from an unsuspected side effect of a trait. The origin of sex is the competitive "arms-race" among isogametic organisms, leading to anisogametic organisms in which some had big gametes and others had small gametes. This process had nothing to do with genetic diversity (and it still has nothing to do with it, by the way -- protozoans still have sex without reproduction and reproduction without sex. We could still follow this pattern). The enhanced genetic diversity was a lucky byproduct. Since it was a very good lucky by-product, it "caught on". But the by-product isn't the reason.

I am aware of the side-effect argument. Sexual selection complicates things, no question. I will give you the sex argument because one, I don't know enough to argue with a biologist and second I don't think it's a good analogy with the (social) evolution of morals.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't make arguments with all of my statements . And what is the error of the other statement? The premise is "we approve of what is good". Is that wrong? If the premise is accepted, and "Good = Evolutionary Advantageous", then we ought to approve of the concealed rape. But we don't. What's wrong with that argument?

I hope you see that Pandora's Box is your discomfort speaking- and I don't blame you. If we are all just very complicated robots (and I think there is strong evidence for it) then I am discomforted also. But I'll get over it. I am also discomforted by the very real possibility that organic based life will eventually be

replaced by silicon based life as the dominant life form. But it may happen anyway whether I get over it or not.

The point about rape (did you have to use such an emotionally loaded example?) is that sometimes rape is "approved" (see recent situations in India) and not punished- but in stable and productive societies it is generally punished. I think there is a genetic "basis" to rape (besides the obvious power and control issues)- after all it does spread male genes. Why kill the men and rape the women otherwise? Rape may be a perfect example of genetic behaviors struggling with socially cooperative behaviors.

But we are getting far afield from evolution. I wouldn't mind joining a new thread on the origin/evolution of ethics. You start it and invite us. I'm curious though- where do you think ethics and morals and taboos and etiquette comes from if not "from on high"?

Darwin and Humanity's Place in the Universe

A very short essay by Dennett:

<http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/Lifeessay.htm>

Evolution and Baldwin Effects

Here is a paper in which Dennett discusses how some traits that are not obviously genetically advantageous might still be selected for:

<http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/baldwincranefin.htm>

A quote from the paper:

"It is not that the Baldwin effect accounts for otherwise inexplicable differences in tempo in evolution, but that it accounts, as Maynard Smith so crisply shows, for the evolution, in sexually reproducing species, of traits that theory would otherwise declare to be all but unevolvable- those needles in a haystack that would otherwise be invisible to natural selection. The importance of this issue does not loom large for either Godfrey Smith or Downes. I don't know why. Perhaps it is because they, like many others, have been taught at least to feign discomfort when adopting the adaptationist perspective, or perhaps because they have not encountered much of the bizarre skepticism regarding the evolution of language (and "language acquisition devices") that has haunted the corridors of linguistics and philosophy of mind over the years. Putting the best interpretation on this skepticism (that is to say, ignoring the sometimes highly tempting diagnosis of closet Creationism), it amounts to a general conviction that something as specialized as the imagined "language acquisition device" is just such a needle in a haystack, something that could not evolve gradually but would have to be an almost miraculous saltation, a cosmic accident of good luck-what a Creationist would call a gift from God. Nonsense, say we Baldwin effect supporters. A practice that is both learnable (with effort) and highly advantageous once learned can become more and more easily learned, can move gradually into the status of not needing to be learned at all. It is instructive to note the parallel between this battlefield and the ground on which Waddington mounted his campaign for genetic assimilation: how could the embryonic callosities on ostrich legs (and human soles) be explained by orthodox Darwinism without appeal to Lamarckian mechanisms? In both cases, the initial,

superficially plausible incredulity or skepticism must give way to an appreciation that evolution has a few more tricks up its sleeve than heretofore imagined; there are paths of (non-Lamarckian) orthodoxy leading from adaptative phenotypic adjustments to inherited genetic arrangements. "

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

This is why genes that confer a strong disadvantage (such as "ethically conscious behavior" in an ethical society - the more ethical a society is, the greater are the benefits for deviant behavior) can't be selected.

Yes, it's not just genes as I said before. That's why unethical behavior exists- crime sometimes pays (at least enough to make it a profession for some).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, I agree that this is involved, but it can't be just that. Genetics/memetics can't produce disadvantageous traits by itself.

Who said they were disadvantageous? Maybe undesirable for some/desirable for others. What other mechanism for morals do you propose?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I do; but I hope you see the reproductive advantages of non-cooperative social behavior, especially in a cooperative society.

I do indeed- that's why I said above that crime does pay- sometimes. That's also why morality is fluid. It's a product of genes/memes and from that to social negotiation.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think it is a good analogy of method; what evolutionary ethicists must look for is another mechanism that produces ethics as a side-effect. They can't very well claim natural selection would do it on its own without undermining our understanding of natural selection (i.e., without invoking group selection on a much greater scale than is allowed by theory, bordering on Lamarckism). Natural selection could have fostered some other trait that brought ethics "as a hijacker", just as the evolution of sex brought the diversity advantage into being "as a hijacker".

Well I disagree because sex is genetic and morality is genes/memes.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Not at all . I find it very comforting. The sense of "Pandora's box" was that it would escape simple, causal relationships. I am a Christian, after all, mostly because of that conclusion -- that ethics (and free will) can't be the result of simple causal chains. But here we are going into metaphysics again . I can separate my Christianity from my Biology quite easily; and it is quite possible that if I had not been convinced that causal chains can't explain ethics and free wills in the first place, I'd never have become a Christian.

There is no law of nature that says morality must be "simple"- is there? But I'm not going to start arguing with your beliefs.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think there is strong -- the strongest imaginable -- evidence against it; I think that is self-contradictory. If we are very complicated robots, we can't discover that fact, or believe in it.

Really quite a bald assertion to make based on the history of science and how often so many have made that exact claim. And besides what evidence would that be? Your emotional, religious, intuitive beliefs? I'd like to hear the evidence because the basis of cognitive science is that isn't any magical substance or "soul" (if you will) that creates consciousness. If you are a "dualist", the science is against you.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

That, on the other hand, seems very possible, and I'm not discomforted by it at all. I won't be around to see it anyway.

I hope I don't live to see it either, but we could both be wrong.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

"Approved" and "Not punished" are not the same thing. Approval includes conscious endorsement. I used this example because it makes the point quite clearly -- if our ethics were purely evolutionary, then we would approve of concealed rape. Approve; not merely ignore it or let it go unpunished.

Mariner- I'm not going to repeat myself again: OUR ETHICS/MORALS ARE NOT PURELY GENETIC!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The Christian in me would say "from human nature" (proximately), "from God" (ultimately). The scientist says "I don't have the slightest idea" . But the philosopher agrees with the proximate cause offered by the Christian; ethics comes from human nature, particularly from free will; it flows logically once you accept the concept. That, of course, is the hard-to-accept concept in an evolutionary context -- if free will is a result of evolutionary chains of cause and effect, it is not really free, and ethics are not really ethical -- says the philosopher.

I agree that evolution is a problem for free will. Dennett discusses that in his paper "The Kinds of Free Will Worth Having" (not sure of that title). Here is a link that briefly discusses Dennett's ideas free will as an evolutionary survival mechanism. It makes tremendous sense to me.

<http://astro.temple.edu/~sparacio/d...iladelphia.html>

Another good review of Dennett's ideas on free will:

<http://www.geocities.com/ResearchTr...cus/Elbows.html>

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You mean behavior is fluid; if that, I agree. But morality is NOT fluid.

Do you really think that what we call moral today always has been moral or always will be moral? Look at the big picture.

Morality is fluid. Good is fluid. History shows that. The old testament said it was ok to slaughter and rape. These morals are products of genetic evolution, memetic social evolution and social negotiation. What we all decide as a social group and they change constantly. And because our survival depends to a large extent of these moral behaviors- **they are not as fluid as one might think.**

Slavery used to be a good Christian moral. Burning people at the stake used to be the highest honor to God. Yes, now WE can always from our vantage today, say- well they were wrong- it really wasn't good, but 1000 years from now others may decide that those of us that eat meat today were evil barbarians that murdered animals. We only get to decide our morals today. Morality is indeed fluid to that extent. Just look at the conflict in the Mid East for morality in action. We call them terrorists, they call them martyrs.

What is Good? What we currently believe to be good. Obviously there are limits to moral extremes as when we pursue behaviors that cause our eventual demise. But the fact that those behaviors (like Jonestown) are self-limiting shows that morality has some basis in survival. Not only survival, but based on it.

By the way I picked that Dennett review precisely because it was critical in part. I thought you would appreciate my open mindedness. I still think his position that free will is a product of evolution is very intriguing.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

What they are in reality is up for grabs, but both we and they despise terrorists and admire martyrs. This is an example of the similarity of moralities. That we apply the same morality in different ways is not an argument for the difference of moralities.

And why then "what we currently believe to be good" don't include thieving, raping, cowardice, etc. etc., obviously advantageous behaviors? What we currently believe to be good is still honor, courage, honesty. What is the evolutionary advantage of those compared with their opposites?

I'll just say that applying opposite words to the same actions shows exactly how relative morals are. That some morals e.g., "rape, stealing, cheating" are MOSTLY considered bad in many societies, merely supports the claim that as humans we have evolutionary (genetic and social) constraints on our behavior (for cooperation as survival) as I said before.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Isn't it curious? I thought that approving of the same things and disapproving of the same things supported the claim that morality is not relative. You think it is the reverse of that.

Well I agree it sure would be a lot easier if everyone agreed on what they approve of and what they disapprove of- but they don't, do they?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If you try to define those terms (not as easy as it seems, especially goodness) you'll see that you share the definitions with the cannibal. But he applies the terms to other things than we do. It is this agreement that is startling...

Why is it startling any more than that all humans tend to avoid pain and seek pleasure?

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think it is obvious that we seek pleasure and avoid pain. And therefore I think morality is a problem for evolution.

Not a problem at all- because too much sex and eating and pleasure is also not good for humans. So once again- morality is partly derived from genetic evolution (behavior that enhances survival through reproduction) but also modified by social evolution (behavior that enhances survival through cooperation).

Morality is only a problem for evolution because (as jamespetts has pointed out), you have defined it so poorly.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, this is a startling question in itself.

Why?

Quote:

After all, the point of morality is that it goes against pleasure and in the direction of pain.

That's not a proposition with which Bentham and Mill would agree, and for good reason: the purpose of what you call "morality" (but that we might as well just call "rationality") is to maximise total aggregate pleasure and minimise total aggregate pain. This can mean some people doing painful things instead of pleasurable things, or people withholding from pleasurable things in order to avoid pain in the future. This does not mean that pleasure and pain are not the things of ultimate value.

Quote:

Pleasure/pain are evolutionary products; we get pleasure from eating, drinking, sex, etc. and we get pain from the opposite.

Yes; but one can get pain from doing those at the wrong times or in excess, or cause others pain by so doing.

Quote:

Morality, however, promotes (for instance) courage over cowardice.

Only where doing so tends to increase net aggregate pleasure, and/or reduce net aggregate pain.

Quote:

And this goes against the pleasure/pain principle.

For the reasons explained above, it doesn't.

Quote:

All moral rules are like that. So if you think it is obvious that we avoid pain and seek pleasure, you have found a problem.

As explained above, there is no problem at all.

Quote:

I think it is obvious that we seek pleasure and avoid pain. And therefore I think morality is a problem for evolution.

For the reasons explained above, it is not in the least a problem.

Have a look at the theories of Bentham and Mill on [Utilitarianism](#)

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

How come they know what goodness is?

As I've already pointed out- because what is good is what benefits us- even proto-humans know what is good from the forces of natural selection (we have inherited the "moral" behavior of those that survived), even before social selection forces began to operate. One doesn't have to be a philosopher to know that some things are detrimental to survival and cooperation.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'm aware of them. Are you suggesting that the proto-humans acquired morality because they followed Bentham's notions?

Someone that understands evolution ought to be able to figure out that what behaviors proto-humans "acquired" as a result of surviving and reproducing (and eventually by cooperating), did become the basis for our much more complex and variable moral behavior of today.

What is your objection (besides wishing there to be something more to it than this)? Would it make you feel better if there was a God that actually placed a magic "spark" inside us that you want to call "goodness". You sound like the 19th century Vitalists that wanted to find the "spark" of life. Happily we have "evolved" beyond that point in Biology. But you still want a spark of "goodness" in philosophy, or so it would seem. Though this too will pass.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Apparently, one has . You see, if:

1) genes can't account for it, but only "social evolution" can;

This is contradicted by kinship altruism. Your logic is flawed.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Not only that, I'm blinded by my beliefs . Even so, kin selection can't explain morality, as I have explained quite extensively in my posts here. Have you ever checked Hamilton's Law?

Yes. Here's the first two links (university lecture notes) I found on Hamilton's Law:

<http://bio.fsu.edu/~tfhansen/Pcb467...s/Lecture21.pdf>

<http://www.bio.unc.edu/courses/2003...3/lecture31.htm>

Both of which seem to support my position quite nicely. Thanks for the help!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Thank you, but I "understand evolution" enough to know that this is exactly what it can't do.

Evidently not.

Your position reminds me of the ID creationists who when asked for an alternative explanation, admit they have none- but that they just KNOW it couldn't be evolution. When asked why it couldn't be evolution- they say "well, it's just obvious". Just as you have said.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Your argument, indeed, says that it is something that benefits the group while harming the individual. Which is it? My logic may be flawed, but you haven't found any blatant contradiction in it yet... .

Which is it? Both. Let me make this simple with an example that you yourself raised: a person giving their life for their country. Individual harmed, society benefits. Right?

But besides the obvious inconsistencies in this altruistic behavior (not everyone is willing to give their life for their country), just look at how much propaganda, peer pressure, training and indoctrination by society is required to force an individual to overcome their "natural" genetic aversion to giving up their life! It doesn't come easy. Yes- drill sergeants and muslim clerics are fairly effective in producing martyrs- but it takes a lot of time and effort.

This example of yours in fact supports my argument that morality is a tension/evolution of and between genetic morality (mostly individual) and social morality (mostly group).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

- is Christianity so powerful that it taints arguments without being even mentioned? Is a Christian incapable of making a cogent argument?

Yes. I'd say that religious believers are at a rational disadvantage, especially in scientific areas where the evidence contradicts or seems to threaten their deeply and emotionally held beliefs. I don't of course KNOW why you resist the evidence for the evolution of morality and evolution. Many, many other scientists seem to have no difficulty with these theories. You say it can't be evolution (genetic or social) but you can't say why- except that it's obvious. That is simply not scientific. Sorry- I just call 'em as I see 'em.

Here is a scientific paper that discusses the possibilities and problems of the evolution of morality (and there are many). I think you might actually find it interesting reading:

<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/TEth/TEthByro.htm>

Here is the abstract:

ABSTRACT: Consider the paradox of altruism: the existence of truly altruistic behaviors is difficult to reconcile with evolutionary theory if natural selection operates only on individuals, since in that case individuals should be unwilling to sacrifice their own fitness for the sake of others. Evolutionists have frequently turned to the hypothesis of group selection to explain the existence of altruism; but group selection cannot explain the evolution of morality, since morality is a one-group phenomenon and group selection is a many-group phenomenon. After spelling out just what the problem is, this paper discusses several ways of solving it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

To repeat: I said several times why Evolution couldn't do it. Evolution can't do it because it can't foster altruistic traits in a population. Hamilton's Law (apparently you haven't noticed it) corroborates that.

I quote from one of the lecture note links above:

"#3) Animal behavior is sometimes altruistic
For example, Prairie Dogs warn each other about hawks, etc.
although this increases the death rate of those doing the warning!

Is this contrary to Darwinian evolution!? Can we predict under what circumstances natural selection will favor genes that increase self-sacrificing & risky altruistic behavior?<

In the case of parents protecting their offspring, such behavior doesn't surprise us: because the kids have the same genes as the parents, therefore risky behavior by the parents will improve the chances of those genes being passed on to future generations. Most people have no trouble believing in "Maternal Instincts" or that it is caused by genes evolved by natural selection.

(Although the mother risks her life, genes that increase this behavior will tend to increase in frequency, because they cause more of the offspring to survive)

These genes slightly reduce the "fitness" of the mother animal, but nevertheless are favored in evolution if they cause enough increased survival in related animals that carry many of the same genes. This is the concept of "inclusive fitness".

A non-behavioral example of inclusive fitness sometimes occurs in the evolution of bad flavors in animals; that teach predators not to eat that species any more.

#4) Notice that each parent has ~ 50% the same genes as offspring; Then also notice that brothers & sisters also have ~ 50% the same genes. Therefore why shouldn't evolution favor genes that cause offspring to risk their lives to help each other?<

Prairie dogs have alarm calls, that warn each other of predators.

By making the warning noise, an individual prairie dog risks being caught and killed (reduced fitness),but the instinct evolved anyway.

The theory is that because of the better "inclusive fitness", because the behavior decreases the killing of near relatives that have the same gene that causes this behavior. (but puzzles remain)

Hamilton's law predicts that genes for altruistic behaviors should tend to increase in % when their "cost" (reduced survival of an animal doing the altruistic act) is less than the benefit to other animals multiplied by their coefficient of relatedness ."

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

- 1) *What is the Evidence for evolution of morality?*
- 2) *How can a gene for unconditional unselfish behavior become an established gene in any population?*
- 3) *What exactly is "genetic morality" anyway, that you invoked a while ago?*
- 4) *If "social morality" is morality, then what shall we do with those instances in which moral behavior contradicts social behavior?*
- 5) *What is goodness? (You really have to try that one again, perhaps after reading the work of any philosopher about it -- "survival and cooperation" is obviously wrong -- you asked for that)*

1. Primate social studies

2. When did I say "unconditional unselfish"? Nice try.

3. Evolutionary genetic influences on morality- e.g, male infidelity is more tolerated than female infidelity (as opposed to social evolution).

4. We deal with it everyday the best we can- don't we? That's your question?

5. Oh, obviously. But I stand by my definition of goodness. Universal "goodness" (in humans at least) can only be based on what we humans ALL share in common. That would be species survival and social cooperation for starters. There are probably other factors.

What do you think morality is based on? Hmmm?

Here is a book I think I'm going to buy that debates this topic:

<http://www.imprint-academic.demon.c...s/morality.html>

And again, here is a scientific paper that discusses the possibilities and problems of the evolution of morality (and there are many). I think you might actually find it interesting reading:

<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/TEth/TEthByro.htm>

Here is the abstract:

ABSTRACT: Consider the paradox of altruism: the existence of truly altruistic behaviors is difficult to reconcile with evolutionary theory if natural selection operates only on individuals, since in that case individuals should be unwilling to sacrifice their own fitness for the sake of others. Evolutionists have frequently turned to the hypothesis of group selection to explain the existence of altruism; but group selection cannot explain the evolution of morality, since morality is a one-group phenomenon and group selection is a many-group phenomenon. After spelling out just what the problem is, this paper discusses several ways of solving it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Good paper. Read it very carefully and you'll understand all that I have been saying here. Especially the three-way conclusion:

- a) We must change the theory of Evolution*
- b) Morality didn't evolve*
- c) Our notions of morality are incorrect*

The author is quite clear that we have to pick one of these to have even a chance of explaining morality. He states it much more beautifully than I could .

Also, pay attention to the fact that the author glosses over the (very serious) problem of the naturalistic fallacy. In other words, even by ignoring a major challenge to evolutionary ethics, it is unfeasible unless we change either Evolution or Ethics.

I liked it too. Since we have much evidence for evolution, I suspect, c), our concept of ethics is wrong. That is- there is no "universal" morality. It is instead a fluid, evolving and negotiated contract between the individual and different societies. And finally, of course, between different societies.

Makes sense to me.

What is it exactly that bothers you about a naturalistic explanation of morality? You want a supernatural explanation?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Also, that paper notices what you haven't noticed about Hamilton's Law -- that it requires kinship. It only works within groups, not among different groups. But morality is not like that. Hamilton's Law is a straitjacket -- if the conditions are not met, altruism doesn't evolve.

Wrong again. It says: most strongly when kinship is involved. That altruism extends beyond kinship (but notice only sometimes and nowhere near as often) is the social contribution to morality. Why do you keep insisting it has to be either genetic or social? You keep referring to this either/or strawman. I'm saying it's BOTH genetic and social.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It's part of the definition of morality -- isn't it? Or is morality conditional, or selfish?

Yes morality is conditional and selfish. Or hadn't you noticed there is a real and messy world out there?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

More tolerated is one thing; more correct is another. Is it more correct?

It's more correct if it's more tolerated. Yes. By your "everyday" morality definition.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, that is not my question. The question is how can an obviously anti-social behavior (such as Schindler's behavior) fit into your theory.

Because he wanted a movie made about him. Why is a criminal anti-social?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, that is progress. Universal goodness is based on what humans share. Ok by me. But we also share bipedalism, hairlessness, etc. etc. Just because all humans share species survival and social cooperation, it doesn't mean morality is linked to that. But this is a perverse way to study morality -- why can't we just look at moral behavior and see what it is, and what it isn't? Much more precise (and scientific) than trying to derive what it is from theories.

Perverse? To you, OBVIOUSLY it is!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have no idea. I answered that before.

Just checking. Remember, science works with the best theory it has at the time. It may not be perfect (it never is) but that's how science works. Your refusal to offer an alternative theory of the evolution of morality indicates to me that either you are hiding something or you aren't playing by the rules of science (competing theories).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, my challenge is still around -- can you pinpoint where I "raised the issue of religion"? You would do well to debate with a person instead of with a phantom.

You brought up the "naturalistic" fallacy didn't you? What's the alternative? Supernatural, right or wrong?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, it is a real and messy world, in which good is always good. That is the enigma. Once you pay attention to these two facts (messy world, constancy of goodness), you'll see that there is an enigma.

I see a difference between what people say is good and what people do as good. That is hardly constant is it? Some have argued that language was devised to deceive others. That might explain much in the case of "saying" goodness versus "doing" goodness.

I also don't agree that goodness is universal- what goodness actually is varies (yes, not the word translation itself) from society to society. That was the point of that one paper by the way. Maybe there is no universal, absolute morality. I would tend to agree with that statement. So if true, that would answer your point above, wouldn't it?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Nope. Behavior and correctness are disjointed. Or else people would never make mistakes. This is another facet of the enigma.

I said more tolerated by society is therefore considered more correct by society (by everyday definition). I didn't say that that our behavior never is incorrect! Obviously!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If there is no theory, then there is no theory. To invent one that contradicts the facts is not scientific. I'm not in the field of inventing theories. If I were, I surely would pay attention to the facts instead of to my beliefs before stating any theory.

I thought all scientists were in the business of inventing theories? As scientists that's what we do. Invent a theory to explain the observations. You can claim that evolutionary ethics doesn't explain the observations, but it seems that there are theories out there that attempt to explain the observations. See the book link:

<http://www.imprint-academic.demon.c...s/morality.html>

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

That is a technical term offered by G.E. Moore. It is not religious (as anyone who knows his work can attest). Supernatural and religious are not synonymous. Goodness is a metaphysical concept. There are others. They don't require any religion.

Supernatural and religion are not synonymous? - Maybe, but I'd say that one can't exist without the other.

Ok, you get the last word. Take care. I have enjoyed this today.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'm aware of them. Are you suggesting that the proto-humans acquired morality because they followed Bentham's notions?

No. One does not need to understand the nature of what one is doing, or why one is doing it, in order to do something. In any event, many people are not rational; many people follow (evolved) instincts as to how to behave instead of rationally calculating which sort of behaviour would lead to the greatest happiness.

Quote:

A moral theory is not the same thing as moral behavior. A moral theory, indeed, tries to establish "what is goodness"; it presupposes the existence of goodness; while the question is "where did that concept come from".

Without value, there would be no choice; what is the basis upon which any creature can make any choice but that the options chosen tend to be more valuable than the options not chosen, either in the sense of being the sort of choice that tends to increase the likelihood that the creature will survive to reproduce, or that it will increase some other state of affairs (in conscious decisionmaking systems, we call it "pleasure") that tend to coincide with things conducive to survival and reproduction?

Indeed, any theory of the universe that does not include a theory of the evolution of life has very great difficulties in explaining how any entity could ever act in a particular way because of the nature of the consequences of its actions.

Quote:

Try to imagine how you would act without the concept of "goodness" to guide you. This concept is not utilitarian, deontological, virtue-based or any of the other speculations about the basis of moral behavior; it just is. People know what goodness is without worrying about moral theories.

People knew that holding things above the ground and dropping them would cause them to fall before Sir Isaac Newton discovered the theory of gravity. That doesn't show anything. My point is that only a process of evolution is capable of explaining how it can be the case that any entity is capable of making any sort of decision at all; value, or "goodness", as you will, is merely the term for those properties of those states of affairs that entities that cause states of affairs to be brought about in consequence of those same properties of the nature of those states of affairs.

Quote:

And this is the problem. How come they know what goodness is?

In the same way that you can tell red and blue apart without knowing the first thing about wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation.

By James Petts

Evidence for biological basis

Mariner asked for evidence of an evolutionary basis of morality and though I only searched for a few minutes on the web I found a number of interesting scientific papers published. Here's one that finds that there is an apparent evolved mechanism for kin recognition (for incest avoidance) based on co-residence, that appears resistant to cultural influences or beliefs about whether there is a actual kin-relationship or not.

<http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/...andmorality.pdf>

I've also ordered the book:

Evolutionary Origins of Morality
Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives
Edited by Leonard D. Katz
March 2000, xvi + 352 pages
ISBN 0 907845 07 X (paperback), \$24.95 / £14.95

"Thoughtful and informative, ... a good basis for appreciating what has been achieved, and what the prospects might be, in a domain of inquiry that is of fundamental importance for understanding of our essential nature." Noam Chomsky

which is a collection of papers from different disciplines on the question of the title subject, so I look forward to seeing what this has to offer.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Small world, Probeman: literally minutes before I read your post with that link to the paper on kin recognition and incest avoidance, I had just skimmed through it myself!

The Wason test also indicates some kind of biological basis for morality—the test demonstrates that there are brain modules specifically designed to police cheating in social exchanges. Those areas of the brain (involving the bilateral limbic system), when damaged, produce various kinds of impairments to social reasoning.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

P.S. For Faustus -- if there are areas of the brain focused on preventing cheating, how did these areas evolve?

Cheating is advantageous for the individual. This is just another example of the problem at hand. How would a structure designed to minimize an advantageous behavior evolve?

I'm sure Faustus can answer this himself better than I can, but I have to say it because I've been saying it for pages and pages and you still don't get it.

Cheating is advantageous for the individual, yes. But it's not advantageous for social cooperation among humans (you do see that don't you?). This is because (for the umpteenth time), morality is both genetic (mostly the selfish and kin-altruistic survival mechanisms) and social (cooperation and sharing mechanisms). They **both** create the dynamic and fluid thing that we today call morality.

I should add that cheat detection could have easily evolved genetically from sibling and parent-child rivalry.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yeah, I'm just stupid. Silly me. I thought brain structures were genetically determined.

Perhaps now you will "get it". When one says that brain structures are involved, one is talking about genes. Not about memes. I don't need pages and pages to state this.

Wrong again. (You can turn down the sarcasm I think)

Brain structures are not only physical and genetic. Human brains have been considered to have a certain "plasticity" and are capable of LEARNING by "software" modifications. These improved software modifications can improve reproduction of those individuals that are already "hard-wired" slightly closer to the "good-trick" by virtue of the fact that it might be easier for them to learn the "good-trick". In fact, it is very plausible that human brains have genetically evolved **to learn to learn better** over the millions of years since our common ancestor with the chimp (especially since the development of language). This is called the "Baldwin Effect" and I suggest that you read the 4 or 5 posts here:

<http://forums.philosophyforums.com/...07&postcount=33>

that are chapter summaries of Dennett's Consciousness Explained where it is spelled out. It would also be useful for you to check these links on the "Baldwin Effect":

<http://www.cs.bath.ac.uk/~jjb/web/baldwin.html>

<http://arxiv.org/ftp/cs/papers/0212/0212036.pdf>

where you will learn to learn better (!) that you don't know everything. Note the actual mechanisms of the Baldwin Effect are still not completely understood.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Is the Baldwin effect a genetic effect? Yes or no? If it is, then we're talking about genes. Genes can't foster unselfishness. It's that simple.

The baldwin effect is both a genetic and a memetic effect because it describes the reproductive advantage of variation in individual learning ability. It sounds like you didn't read the links. You should- it might even make what I'm trying to say clear to you.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

....solution, that morality developed because it is good for society. But this means that proto-humans were Benthamites. You are even explicit here that this is a learned (therefore conscious) behavior.

Learning has nothing to do with consciousness, except that consciousness is an advantage to learning more quickly.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Utilitarianism is a failed theory if you ask my opinion, but this is not relevant. What is important is that you are

defending the theory that morality is learned because it is good for society. This is Utilitarianism at the proto-human level. Be my guest if you want to believe in that. I guess your faith in materialism forces you in that direction. Unfortunately, it does not correspond to the facts or to morality as we know it. Heck, Utilitarianism fails even today, never mind for proto-humans; but your explanation of it demands that Utilitarianism works. This then becomes a purely ethical (i.e. non-scientific -- horrors!) debate about Utilitarianism. Do you want to go into that?

Utilitarianism isn't my argument- it's was jamespetts. But his argument sounded reasonable to me.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

(Note also how you assume that humans are "hard-wired" in the direction of the "good trick" of morality -- this is in conflict with genetic selfishness. If anything, humans would be hard-wired in the opposite direction. Bottomline: you haven't shown that the moral sense is adaptive. You haven't even shown that moral behavior is adaptive, but my concern here is the moral sense. You -- and evolutionary ethicists -- have a long road to follow, and a fruitless road if they won't even acknowledge that there is such a thing as the moral sense. It is a theory of colors that refuses to acknowledge the existence of light.)

You didn't read the Dennett and Baldwin links I see. The "good" trick isn't referring to a moral goodness (though it could). It refers to any learned skill that enhances reproduction.

The biological evolution of the moral sense against incest is exactly explained by the link in post 564. I'll paste it here again:

<http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/...andmorality.pdf>

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

P.S. For Faustus -- if there are areas of the brain focused on preventing cheating, how did these areas evolve? Cheating is advantageous for the individual. This is just another example of the problem at hand. How would a structure designed to minimize an advantageous behavior evolve?

If memory serves correctly, you and Probeman have already gone over various models that attempt to explain the evolution of morality, and I don't have much more to contribute. That morality has a partially biological basis seems well supported by the evidence of evolutionary psychology and neurology. What models best explain this fact. . . well, that's another question.

Perhaps you find this issue so puzzling because of the curious way you frame it: as evolution acting to minimize beneficial behavior. That isn't what I see at all in the case of cheater-detection. I see an arms race, with evolution favoring both effective cheating strategies and effective methods of detecting and punishing cheating, both of which can exist in one and the same individual with no need for evolution to impair either.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **probeman**

Yes, I've read about that last item too, now that you mention it, but I had forgotten it (so much for my great mind!). Do you have a reference for it?

Here is a link to a paper which mentions the Wason selection experiment in the context of describing evolutionary psychology generally. I think a discussion of it occurs in Wright's *The Moral Animal* as well.

<http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/cep/primer.html>

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, they were first published by Aristotle if I'm not mistaken, and all philosophers corroborate it in the following 2200 years. How's that for peer review?

Scientifically worthless. The sun doesn't go around the Earth as you probably heard, though according to Aristotle and many philosophers since then, it did.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But our perception of morality would be different in that case. We wouldn't experience the notion of morality. Cheating would be good in some situations, bad in others -- which is in accordance with a purely selfish appraisal.

And that is exactly what we see in the world today!!!

Here's an everyday example: A friend of mine thinks that President Bush's actions in Iraq are totally immoral. I consider my friend to be a very moral and religious person and many other people would seem to agree with him. However, President Bush by every indication is also a very moral and religious man who sincerely seems to feel that he is doing the moral thing in Iraq and many other people would seem to agree with him too.

People who consider themselves to be deeply moral beings, both disagree as to the morality of a very serious situation- morality is therefore... what? Universal?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

We have a "theory of goodness" that doesn't admit exceptions; where did that come from?

I'd be inclined to think that theories of goodness are a cultural product codifying the moral impulses evolution installed in our biology.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Both are instances in which the beneficial behavior is frowned upon by everybody (including the agent). Why?

Apparently, the ability to detect cheating and enforce non-cheating as an expected norm won the arms race, evolutionarily. This isn't something that even requires culture or language, either. Can't remember the title, unfortunately, but years ago I was reading a book by an animal cognitive ethologist about morality in the animal kingdom. One example from primates was very telling in this context. Primates occasionally form rival alliances, and in once case, a member of one such alliance was being treated roughly by members of another. When she signaled to one of her buddies to help, and he ignored her (violating a social contract; that is, cheating), she forgot about the fight she was having with the other chimps and attacked him in a rage.

As I mentioned before, I don't know much about which models best explain the circumstances that would have favored the evolution of a moral sense, but it clearly exists. The most interesting attempts I've seen involve game theory and variants on the prisoner's dilemma. Simulations involving the evolution of artificial life that involve the competition between various nasty, not so nasty, and nice strategies have shown that there are circumstances in which cooperative strategies proliferate.

Since this is an evolution issue and you say you can't imagine how evolution could produce moral behavior, let's start at the beginning. The following is a partial summary of Dennett's chapter on the evolution of consciousness. Which I think you might agree, is probably a necessary ingredient for a human morality. Note the passages bolded below.

2. Early Days (Genesis)

"In the beginning, there were no reasons: there were only causes. Nothing had a purpose, nothing had so much as a function; there was no teleology in the world at all." -D. Dennett

This is because there was nothing that actually had "interests." But after a while there emerged simple replicators. Though they had no inkling of their interests and it would be proper to say they indeed had no interests, we, looking back from our "god-like" perspective can assign them certain interests by defining them an "interest" in self-replication. Of course their replication didn't really matter to anyone and really made no difference whether they replicated or not (though perhaps we might be grateful they did replicate), but we can say that if these simple replicators are to survive and replicate in the face of increasing entropy (disorder), their immediate environment must be conducive to replication at least some of the time.

To put it anthropomorphically: if these simple replicators want to replicate they should "hope and strive" to avoid "bad" things and seek "good" things. The "good" for such an entity (by our non-teleological definition) is to, however primitively, avoid its dissolution and decomposition. This is the simple replicator's "point of view" if you will. In this "point of view" there are three kinds of world events: the favorable, the unfavorable and the neutral. Any behavior, even simple chemical causes, of these simple replicators that improves its replication, is a reason or interest in our limited sense, however "unself" recognized that behavior might be to the organism itself.

Now as soon as something is in the business of (preserving) self-replication, boundaries start to become important. **Simply because if you are preserving your replicating self, you don't want to waste your energy on preserving the rest of the universe. So you need to draw a line. The replicator becomes, in a word, "selfish".**

Obviously this primordial "selfishness" does not have most of the variety and breadth of human selfishness, but this "selfishness" is distinctly different from non-life. A piece of granite can in no sense imaginable, be said have an interest in where its boundaries are. Nothing "works" to protect a fracture boundary, no mechanism pushes the boundary back to preserve itself. All things biological have the imperative- "me against the world". Not just ingestion and excretion, respiration and transpiration but also other processes. Consider the immune system, with its millions of different antibodies arrayed in defense of millions of alien intruders. The fundamental problem that the immune system must deal with is: "recognition" of what are "friendly" forces (belonging to the organism) and what are "unfriendly" forces (those seeking its dissolution). It is worth pointing out that this "army" of the immune system is an army without generals, without headquarters, or even a description of the "enemy." The antibodies represent their enemies only in the way a million locks represent the keys that open them.

Several other points are worth noting here:

1. Although evolution depends on history, Mother Nature doesn't "care" how the organism acquires its prowess, just as long as the job gets done. This has important implications for later in the explanation of consciousness.

2. Because evolution is "blind", as in "undesigned", there is no way to "foresee" evolutionary or especially phenotypic side-effects. Most genetic evolution is so haphazard from an engineering point of view, that side-effects are plentiful and sometimes these side-effects have serendipitous effects, especially in combination with other functional systems, that are then effective in dealing with a problem in a new way. As Dennett puts it:

"Multiple functions are not unknown in human engineered artifacts, but they are relatively rare; in nature they are everywhere, as we shall see, one of the reasons theorists have had such a hard time finding

plausible designs for consciousness in the brain is that they have tended to think of brain elements as serving just one function each.”

To sum up our primordial facts so far:

1. There are reasons to recognize. (replication itself is a primitive sort of reason)
2. Where there are reasons, there are points of view from which to recognize or evaluate them. (survival of replication, "intentional" or not, implicitly defines a "point of view")
3. Any agent must distinguish “here inside” from “the external world.”
4. All recognition [of boundaries] must ultimately be accomplished by myriad “blind, mechanical” processes.
5. Inside the defended boundary, there need not always be a Higher Executive or General Headquarters.
6. In nature, handsome is as handsome does; origins don’t matter (where a mechanistic process is co-opted from, does not matter so long as it provides a survival advantage)
7. In nature, elements often play multiple functions within the economy of a single organism.

Next Dennett looks at the evolutionary survival value for a new "trick". That is “producing” or more simply, predicting or anticipating (no matter how primitively), the future. There are many ways to survive- an organism can armor itself liked a tree or a clam and “hope for the best” or it can develop methods for getting out of harms way. If you perform this latter strategy, you are an animal, and the question on your mind is always: Now what do I do?

To do this, you need a nervous system, to control your activities through time and space. For navigating through the sea for a suitable home the sea squirt has a rudimentary nervous system. But once rooted, it eats its brain since it is not needed anymore. Brains are anticipation machines. Even the armored clam cannot always stay closed- it snaps shut as a crude but effective harm-anticipator/avoider.

For more primitive organisms, simple withdrawal and approach responses are tied to bad things (recoil) or good things (engulf). How these two classes of events are discriminated, is of course the job of the perceptual system, which at the lowest level may be a simple chemical reaction. Organisms are “wired” for these responses at the some primitive level and these pre-wired circuits are present in subtle and not so subtle ways even in our advanced human brains.

These early nervous systems depended on avoiding noxious contacts and seeking out nutritious bits (and mating opportunities once sex had appeared, of course), but this could still be improved upon by short range anticipation processes.

The ducking from looming object response is hard wired in us and other animals. It can be observed in newborn infants and is a gift from all our (human and non-human) ancestors that learned to duck “instinctively” and survive to reproduce We are also hard wired to be sensitive to vertical axes of symmetry. Why? Because this type of visual perceptual pattern usually means another animal is looking at us. Maybe to eat us, so it’s better to have an alarm go off that you are being looked at by another animal, as opposed to waiting until you feel its teeth digging into you. Of course, sex adds new dimensions to this type of alarm response too.

An important point Dennett makes, that is crucial for understanding human brain functions, is that there is always a tradeoff between “truth and accuracy” and “speed and economy” in perceptual or anticipatory brain processes. This vertical symmetry detection is one example of an “orienting” response which has been interpreted as a sort of “all hands on deck” alarm for the brain. That is, “we just got an alarm from a crude and specialized harm avoidance circuit, so take us out of auto-pilot and let’s do a sensor scan and see what’s out there.”

Now these brief episodes of brain process interruption and heightened activity are not themselves episodes of human-style “conscious awareness” (as people redundantly say). But they probably are precursors in the evolution of our human/primate conscious states.

Once this "all hands on deck" alarm circuit existed, it cost little or nothing to keep it turned on all or most of the time (though I myself wonder if this extra duty cycle time is involved in the increased need for sleep of mammals). So regular vigilance could evolve to regular scanning or exploration, and hence a new strategy evolved: gathering information for information's own sake. But this new brain process of gathering information was itself cobbled out of existing systems and this evolutionary history has left its emotional and affective overtones on our consciousness (as cognitive science has discovered in the mammal brain). That is, the innate links of informing states to withdrawal and engulfment, avoidance and reinforcement were not thrown away, but only attenuated and re-directed.

The dorsal/ventral division of these brain process labors were developed further in the primates into the celebrated right-hemisphere/left hemisphere specializations: the global right brain and the analytic left brain.

My point being that if you accept that evolution can produce selfishness, then why can't you believe that evolved social cooperation can create limits on that selfishness?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

They can't -- and this is not a poor Mariner's opinion, it is the consensus of game theory.

No, this is wrong. Game theory demonstrates that in simulations of **iterated** tit for tat and endless variations thereof, mutual cooperation is always a winning strategy. Consistent cheating is not a winning strategy for a society.

Here is a quote from The Evolution of Cooperation By Robert Axelrod

"Mutual cooperation can be stable if the future is sufficiently important relative to the present. This is because the players can each use an implicit threat of retaliation against the other's defection - if the interaction will last long enough to make the threat effective....as the shadow of the future becomes smaller, it stops paying to be cooperative with another player - even if the other player will reciprocate your cooperation....This conclusion emphasizes the importance of the first method of promoting cooperation: enlarging the shadow of the future. There are two basic ways of doing this: by making the interactions more durable, and by making them more frequent (i.e., specialize your business so it interacts with only a few other organizations, group employees working on related tasks together, in bargaining context - break the issues into small pieces to promote more frequent interactions)." p. 126-132

Much more at:

http://www.plexusinstitute.com/edge...in_filing6.html

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If you save a stranger's life after risking your own, chances are you'll mention it to your wife proudly. If you cheat on your wife, you will never brag about it -- even if you rationalize all you can that "your wife neglected you, you were stressed, the girl was too enticing, the flesh is weak", etc. You know what is right, and you know what is wrong -- what you actually do, how you behave, doesn't touch upon that. And this is completely unexpected in an evolutionary scenario. To state it again -- we should consider those behaviors that foster individual survival and reproductive fitness to be good, and those which go against that, to be bad. But we do the opposite (as these examples show). And all of us do that. And in all cultures we do that.

Even if probeman will laugh about the end of that paragraph, it's how humans think of goodness. Laughing won't make it go away. Theorizing won't do it either.

I will instead cry, because once again you continue to trot out the "nature only" strawman explanation of morality.

The man cheats on his wife because of evolution (enhance reproductive chances). He will feel bad about it because of social contracts and mechanisms designed to increase cooperation of partnership and in child rearing.

So what is morality if it's not the dynamic tension between selfish nature and cooperative social mechanisms? What is YOUR explanation?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In other words, game theory predicts a scenario in which several competing strategies co-exist. Isn't it curious that this is exactly what the chimp researcher detected? There was a chimp who flatly refused to enforce a social bond -- i.e., a cheater. But in human cultures, there is no one who believes that cheating is right.

But both humans and chimps **do cheat all the time**. Why is that?

So now your "theory of goodness" argument rests on the unproven assertion that chimps don't think that cheating is wrong. **But from the outrage of the female that was "cheated", it would seem that she did think it was wrong.** Of course we can't ASK the chimps if what the male chimp did to her was wrong, because they don't have language. But I suspect that if we could ask them- chimps would agree that cheating is wrong too.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

A wonderful quote, for which I thank you. It establishes the great difference between "evolutionary goodness" and our Goodness (with a capital G just to make a point). As for your question -- I would gladly believe it, if it did that. But it doesn't "create limits for that selfishness". It says that "this selfishness is plain wrong -- period".

Thanks for the compliment. Now we get to the point. You (and many other humans) really do want to believe that there is "Goodness" with a capital "G". I can understand that. It would be nice. But actions speak louder than words. The world appears to be a battle ground between selfishness and cooperation. I find it interesting that while everyone claims to be good (if you ask them), there is plenty of both good behavior and bad behavior.

Social mechanisms attempt to place limits on individual selfishness and encourage cooperation between individuals and groups. This is a genetic and social evolutionary arms race. Not pretty, in fact rather messy- just look at the news today from the Sudan where militiamen (**following what I'm sure they firmly believe is the just and moral course**) are offering parents the choice to have their children shot or burned.

Yes, we all say we are "Good", that we want "Good", but maybe that's just what we want to believe. Maybe all we really have, is what we actually see.

I think that both genetic evolution and social evolution, the purposeless, messy and inefficient mechanisms that they are, explains why the world is purposeless, messy and inefficient. Not a happy thought for many people, including myself- but that might be the way it actually is whether we like it or not.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

A commendable faith. It's a pity that it is not in accordance with the facts. But it's not the first time that a believer refuses to even open a book that deals with the matter because he's afraid his most cherished beliefs will be destroyed.

That's right, laugh it off. Yes, laughter is a wonderful defense mechanism- when reason fails.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Meanwhile, in the real world, people know Goodness (with a capital G). Independently of how they act. The "real" world- you mean the one where everyone SAYS they are good- but do what they can get away with? Spoken like a true believer! Yes, that's your belief. Unfortunately you can't (or won't) explain how you know this "Goodness" exists. Evolutionary psychology attempts to explain WHY there is no "Goodness" with a capital "G", as I and several others have tried to explain to you in this thread- but your dogmatic beliefs are resistant to reasoning.

I'm sorry you fear that science is unraveling your metaphysics- but many philosophers (going back 2000 years as you like to point out) are in the same boat as yourself. Welcome to the 21th century!

I look forward to more results from evolutionary psychology (like the incest paper), while we will continue to await your "theory" of "Goodness".

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Meanwhile, in the real world, people know Goodness (with a capital G). Independently of how they act.

Then why have moral philosophers had such a hard time defining what value is ; why is there so much disagreement on the subject?

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

That is a very good and interesting question. Our difficulties in defining Goodness in the history of philosophy surely merit attention. Most of the pitfalls were some sort of the naturalistic fallacy.

I do not agree with Moore that evaluative naturalism is fallacious; his reasoning is flawed. If you want to know why I think that, I shall paste an excerpt of a paper that I'm writing on that very point.

Quote:

However, if philosophers disagree on the definition of something, it is because they believe that this thing exists.

Apart from the sceptics, of course. And most moral philosophers would deny that they are disputing nothing more than the "definition" of goodness; they are, for the most part, debating its very meaning and essence, and the extent to which it does exist.

Quote:

The theory "there is no Goodness" is palpably false -- and you don't have to be a philosopher to know that, you just have to walk around the streets.

That some things are better than others may be uncontroversial, but the *reason* that some things are better than others, or which things are better and which things are worse, are not uncontroversial at all.

What do you contend is the meaning of one state of affairs being better than another, in the abstract?

Quote:

I find it curious that philosophers are accused of "living in the clouds". This description surely fits the priests of scientism, especially when they deny facts confirmed by all people.

The number of people who believe in the truth of a proposition is irrelevant as to whether the proposition is, in fact, true.

Nonetheless, I agree that there is such a thing as value; I do not agree that it is not wholly constituted and caused by physical states of affairs of the universe, which can be understood, like all physical states of affairs of the universe, by deductions from observations.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

However, if philosophers disagree on the definition of something, it is because they believe that this thing exists. The theory "there is no Goodness" is palpably false -- and you don't have to be a philosopher to know that, you just have to walk around the streets. Only the most stubborn of the cave-dwellers (an allusion to Plato's myth, probeman)

I agree that almost everyone in the world (most especially the average man on the street), holds the sincere belief that an absolute and universal standard of "Goodness" exists, almost everyone that is, except most biologists, sociologists, evolutionary psychologists, animal behaviorists, zoologists and many cognitive philosophers like Dennett, Clark and Quine that work on issues related to evolutionary and sociological explanations of consciousness and ethics.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

As for "failures of reason", probeman, I find that the best symptom of that is when the speaker begins to address motivations and make ludicrously false analogies. When you question my religious beliefs, or say that you are right because Aristotle believed that the sun goes round the earth (and you haven't provided a source for that by the way), it's easy to know where reason is failing.

Here (you are wrong again):

"Major Greek philosopher, student of Plato, and founder of the Lyceum in Athens, who argued vehemently against the pluralistic teachings of atomism. "The world must be unique," he wrote. "There cannot be several worlds." He justified this stance on a number of grounds. For example, in his Metaphysics, he explains the motion of the planets and stars (around the Earth) as due to the "Prime Mover" acting at the periphery. If there were other Earths, there would have to be a plurality of Prime Movers, an idea he rejected as philosophically and religiously unacceptable. In Aristotle's cosmology, the Earth was located at the center of a nested system of crystalline spheres to which were attached the Moon, Sun, planets, and stars."

from:

<http://www.daviddarling.info/encycl.../Aristotle.html>

The point being (besides your ignorance of philosophy,) that most "results" from philosophy are not very robust. In my "dogmatic" approach, as you like to call it, I prefer theories tested by empirical data as opposed to introspection. Just my "religious" nature, I suppose.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Meanwhile, in the real world , people are studying and thinking about many subjects without dogmatic beliefs to hinder them. I hope you'll join us someday.

As soon as you present your theory of "Goodness" and the data supporting it, I will consider it. Well? That's how science works, isn't it?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In the abstract, I'd say "a state of affairs is better than another if it is more in agreement of how the world ought to be".

"how the world ought to be"?

And who, my good friend, gets to decide "how the world ought to be"?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...to say the least, cuckoo. (As cuckoo as saying that something is correct because lots of scientists believe in it).

Now we've descended into name calling. Sigh... I can't say I'm surprised though- once reason fails this is usually the next step. By the way... I would never insist that a theory is "correct *because* lots of scientists believe in it". I would always say **probably** or **more likely** correct *because* lots of scientists believe in it. As opposed to what the average man on the street thinks. I'm just prejudiced that way.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...I just asked you for a source. I never doubted that Aristotle believed in that.

Why then did you ask for a "source"? Forgive me if I begin to suspect your veracity, sir.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Please do .

This is the relevant extract from my paper:

"Evaluative naturalism is only fallacious *if* it is true that it is non-tautologous to enquire whether pleasantness is the same as goodness; yet, it is the task of a theory of value to answer, amongst others, that very question. That people believe it to be non-tautologous cannot establish anything of itself: a true theory of a thing is that against which people's beliefs about the nature of that thing can be judged; it is not the case that the truth of a theory of something is determined by its congruence with people's beliefs about it¹. Although, because of the conceptual complexity of value², it may not be immediately apparent, this theory sets out to demonstrate that it is indeed tautologous to ask whether pleasantness is of ultimate value for human conscious minds, in the same way that, whilst not immediately apparent, it is tautologous to ask whether or not our sun is a star. "

I have also started a thread on this subject in the ethics section.

Quote:

In the abstract, I'd say "a state of affairs is better than another if it is more in agreement of how the world ought to be".

I'm afraid that you've missed the point: defining goodness in terms of how things ought to be tells us nothing about the nature of value, since "ought" is as much an evaluative concept as "good". In turn, no doubt, you'd write that a state of affairs ought to be if so being was good, in which case you've just defined the relationship between the good and what ought to be, without explaining what either of them mean.

To give an example, I can write "States of affairs are more blabby when those states of affairs have little blobby in them", which would define both "blabby" and "blobby" in relation to each other, but not in relation to anything else.

In order to be meaningful, any attempt to explain the nature of evaluative concepts in general must explain them without reference to other evaluative concepts. Evaluative concepts include "ought", "right", "good", "important", "purpose", "value" "design" and "benefit".

Quote:

Agreed. But it is not irrelevant as to whether the proposition merits an exam. If you believe that the proposition is

not true, then you can explain why you think that. But to say that it is wrong *because* philosophers thought is, to say the least, cuckoo. (As cuckoo as saying that something is correct *because* lots of scientists believe in it).

Of course, I was not one who claimed such a thing...

Quote:

Doesn't that make the problem even worse? If it can't be deduced from observation, how can evolution (genetic or cultural) enforce it? If Goodness not wholly constituted and caused by physical states (I agree with that), then neither natural selection nor memetic development can "aim" at it. It's not part of the fitness landscape.

I'm afraid that my double negative has confused you: my contention was the opposite of what you seem to understand it to be.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You are forgiven. Even after I admitted my mistake you doubt my veracity. Go figure.

If you thought about it, you might have suspected that I was writing that post, while you later edited yours to admit that you could see where I might "have derived" the idea, that you asked me for a source that Aristotle believed in the "geocentric" theory. I accept the apology.

Here's the original post to clear it up:

Quote: Originally Posted by probeman

"Scientifically worthless. The sun doesn't go around the Earth as you probably heard, though according to Aristotle and many philosophers since then, it did. "

Quote: Originally Posted by mariner

"You lack jamespetts wonderful gift for analogy . Please mention where Aristotle stated that, for starters. "

Yes, I can see why I might have "derived" you not believing me when I said Aristotle held the geocentric theory. You were citing him as a philosophical authority- weren't you? Or do I need to pull that post forward too?

The point is: philosophy untested by empirical science does not produce very many useful "results".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Me. You. Each of us. And the surprising thing is that we agree on most of it.

Are you now agreeing (be still my heart), that individuals and society decide what morality "ought" to be? And that possibly because we are all one species with similar individual needs, we "agree on most of it"?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamespetts**

...defining goodness in terms of how things ought to be tells us nothing about the nature of value, since "ought" is as much an evaluative concept as "good". In turn, no doubt, you'd write that a state of affairs ought to be if so being was good, in which case you've just defined the relationship between the good and what ought to be, without explaining what either of them mean.

James, may I just bold that? Thanks in advance.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You believe that it is a tautology to say that pleasantness is of ultimate value for us; like saying that the sun is a star.

Given that, do you endorse hedonism? If not, how can you escape it? This is practically a definition of hedonism.

If by "hedonism" you mean Benthamite and Millian utilitarianism, then yes; if by it you mean something else, then probably not. Do you have a good reason for supposing Benthamite/Millian utilitarianism is false?

Quote:

"Ought" and "good" can't be defined *in the abstract* in the terms of a state of affairs. It's hard to promote such a negative claim, but it's easy (on the other hand) to disprove it – all we have to do is to come up with such a definition of goodness.

That something is hard to establish doesn't let you off the hook in establishing it - you picked a claim that you knew when you picked it was hard to prove. Now that you've claimed it, it is your responsibility to provide reasons to substantiate the truth that you claim of it. Do you have any; if so, what are they?

Quote:

Have you got one? Is it "pleasantness"? Apparently you believe it is, but I'll wait for clarification, especially on the matter of hedonism.

We need to distinguish two points - firstly, the logical structure of value in the abstract, and secondly, that which is of value to conscious minds. That the latter is pleasure is entailed by the meaning of the former, and the meaning of what it is for an entity to be a conscious mind.

Quote:

Indeed, that is the point -- the impossibility of defining goodness in a purely physicalist/materialist way. The impossibility of deriving "ought" from "is".

This is a commonly made proposition, yet I have never seen any sensible reasoning behind it. Do you have any?

Quote:

If he is in fact a hedonist, well, I'll have to reach back to my copy of the "Principia Ethica" to recall the complete refutation of hedonism offered there.

It is that "refutation" that I seek itself to refute, and did so by posting a passage from the paper (do you recall that part?).

In it, (above) I explained why the concept of the naturalistic fallacy merely assumed what it set out to prove, namely that value ("goodness") is not identical to any natural property.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The first is correct; the second isn't, and this is shown by observation. We don't agree that "what is good is what fits our similar individual needs". We agree on what is good, period. I don't know why, but neither do you --

unless you can offer a definition of goodness that is related to an actual state of affairs. "Survival" and "Cooperation" do not fit the bill (because we know instances in which "goodness" is not either of them -- they don't fit the bill even if you accept both at the same time, which is surely a tenuous position since both are so often contradictory)

I think this is real progress.

So if you now agree that individuals and societies decide what morality is (aside from possible examples of proto-morality of other primates) - how exactly is it decided? What social mechanisms come into play in this process of creating human morality? I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

On the second "contradiction" issue, I think the answer is clear- humans, at some point, started to "learn" the "trick" that social cooperation enhances individual survival. Of course this could even be completely unconscious behavior, like social cooperation among ants. In any case it is likely to have coevolved with consciousness. In the beginning, this may have meant only cooperation in hunting and then later cooperation in early agriculture and irrigation, but that would be enough to supply a reproductive advantage over those individuals and societies that did not learn the "trick" of cooperation in times of general need (and hence didn't pass on their genes and "selfish" memes). Does that make sense to you?

By the way, it's very interesting that it has been suggested that meme transmission could be a Baldwinian mechanism. That is, the reproductive advantage of learning to learn better.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It does make sense. I never disputed that cooperation is adaptive. I dispute that cooperation is synonymous with goodness. Why do you think it is? When I've provided many examples to the contrary?

This is definite progress.

So you agree that cooperation is "adaptive". Why exactly do you think cooperation is "adaptive"? Would you agree because it provides a "benefit" to the individual?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, by hedonism I mean the doctrine that states the pleasure is the only good. Utilitarianism differs from that in postulating a "general good" which is more important (i.e. "better") than pleasure -- what Bentham called "Happiness" (and he was using that term in a different way than most people). What is it that prevent you from being an hedonist if you think that it is tautologous to claim that pleasantness is our ultimate value?

You misunderstand utilitarianism, at least Bentham and Mill's version of it. Bentham wrote,

“Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it” (Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, ch. 1 (1)).

Mill wrote,

"...Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure" (Utilitarianism, ch. 2);

and,

"...Pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and... all desirable things... are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain" (ch. 4);

and,

"Questions about ends are... questions what things are desirable. The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end..." (ch. 4).

It is quite clear therefore that utilitarianism, as Bentham and Mill understand it, is that pleasure is the only good. Clearly, according to these theories, nothing can be better than pleasure except more pleasure.

Quote:

As for the good reasons for criticizing Utilitarianism, right off the bat I can think of two, one technical, one metaphysical:

1) How can we compare different kinds of Happiness? Or, as a social planner might look at it -- should we build sport stadiums or hospitals?

How is this a criticism of utilitarianism? If pleasure is of ultimate good, then it may be unfortunate that it ends up being hard to work out how to maximise it, but that does not mean that this is capable of being a reason why pleasure is not, in fact, of ultimate value to conscious minds.[/quote]

Quote:

2) Why is "general Happiness" better than individual Happiness, or than nihilism, or than any other proposed explanation for goodness? Bentham and Mill assume that this is obvious, they never defend it.

More pleasure is better than less pleasure; the most pleasure is achieved if the good of all is considered the right for each; to act in such a way (and co-operate with others in forcing people who are inclined to be selfish to act in that way) is more likely than acting selfishly to maximise the good for each.

Quote:

Are you meaning that I *ought* to provide reasons? Hehe. Look at the vicious cycle coming up. I "ought" to provide reasons -- this is how the world should be according to you. Can you establish any reason for that?

There is no disagreement here about whether there are "ought"s, and (I certainly hope) that one of them is that one ought to provide reasons to substantiate an argument or a disputed claim to truth: what the dispute is about is the nature and genesis of "ought"s in general.

I am afraid that it really looks like you are trying to evade the question, since you have not said a thing to substantiate the positive claim to truth that you make that no "ought" can be derived from any "is". Of course, that appearance would be proven to be entirely illusory if you were to provide such reasons in answer to this post.

Quote:

This is analogous to the problem of the First Cause in Aristotelian metaphysics. The "ought" buck has to stop somewhere. I don't know where it stops if I ignore metaphysics (i.e. if I take a strictly physicalist/materialist approach).

The mere fact that you do not know the answer given the constraints of reality is not by itself a reason to suppose that the constraints of reality are not constraints after all.

Quote:

I have a very good (very *good*, hehe) answer if God is allowed into the equation.

It would only be good if you could show, independently from your ought/is argument, that there could and does exist a deity. Can you demonstrate that to the same degree of conclusiveness, as, say, that Saturn has rings?

Quote:

But the point is to show that without an external source of Goodness, we can't have goodness.

To what must the source be external, and why must it be external to it? The mere inability on your part to explain how goodness can exist without such "externality" is, of course, incapable by itself of constituting any such reason.

Quote:

Goodness can't come from ourselves or from our history or from our cultures, because the question "why *ought* this to be good?" always lingers.

You misconceive what it means for something to be good; if a thing is only good because it ought to be good, and a thing only ought to be if it is good for it to be, then neither concept is capable of having any meaning. Either the good is prior to the right, or the right is prior to the good: they can't both be prior to each other.

Quote:

Also, moral theories of what "ought to be" (such as Utilitarianism) can't explain how did the "ought feeling" come into being.

You misconceive what a theory of value (such as utilitarianism) is. A theory of value is a theory that determines what it means for something to be good; it cannot be evaluated any more than one can ascribe a financial worth to the concept of money or measure the size of bigness. A theory of value cannot be good or bad; only true or false. Of course, acting according to a true, as opposed to false, theory of value might be good, but this does not in itself mean that the truth of a theory of value is no more than that goodness.

Quote:

Please explain that. It seems as if you are saying that pleasure is of value to a conscious mind because of the consciousness of that mind. No quarrel here. But the question is not whether pleasure is pleasant, or whether pleasure is good; it is whether pleasure is the sole source of Goodness. Is that what you are claiming? That is hedonism.

I really don't care what name is given to the theory, provided that it is true. What I am claiming is this: although the concept of value can be applied to things other than conscious minds, that which is of ultimate value to conscious minds is necessarily pleasure.

Quote:

Observation, not reasoning. I haven't been able to come up with any good derivation of "ought" from "is".

That is neither observation nor reasoning: you are claiming that your lack of ability to explain how value can be derived from physical states of affairs in the world is a reason for believing that it is not, but ignorance can never be a reason: I do not know exactly how my computer works, but this does not provide any reason whatever to believe that it is powered by miniature fairies.

Quote:

Have you?

I'm working on a paper on that very subject...

Quote:

To ask for a general demonstration of an observation that is confirmed without any exception is odd.

What, precisely, is confirmed without exception? That you cannot think of how to derive value from physical states of affairs in the world? What I am requiring is a reason why your ignorance is capable of being relevant to the truth. Do you have any?

Quote:

As long as you don't offer a good derivation of "ought" from "is", the principle stands.

Does that mean that, if you can't tell me every last detail of the functioning of my computer, the proposition that it is powered by fairies stands? That would be absurd. You are making a positive claim to truth: there is no reason to believe it to be true until you can provide one. You have failed as yet to attempt to do so.

Quote:

No, you didn't refute the naturalistic fallacy, and even if you had done that it has nothing to do with Moore's refutation of hedonism. It's a different subject. What you did is to offer your opinion that it is tautologous to say that pleasantness is of ultimate value for our minds, and that *if this is correct* then the naturalistic fallacy is refuted. But you haven't shown why this is correct.

You misunderstand; I explained that Moore's naturalistic fallacy assumes what it sets out to prove, and is therefore a bare assertion. Being a bare assertion, it does not provide any reason to suppose that what it asserts is true. You were claiming that it did provide such a reason; its capacity to supply that reason is what I have refuted.

Quote:

And the naturalistic fallacy didn't set out to prove anything; it set out to pinpoint mistakes in other reasonings.

These are not two distinct things. It sets out to establish the truth of the claim that it is fallacious to hold that value is reducible to a natural property. It fails to provide any reasons why this should be so.

Quote:

Because deriving "ought" from "is" is impossible, and many philosophers, even while accepting that, allowed some kind of this derivation to percolate into their ethical theories.

Again, you have merely asserted that such derivation is impossible. No reason has been advanced as to why this should be so. Moore, as I explained, merely assumed, rather than established this proposition, and the best that you have come up with in your reasoning is that you cannot think of any way to derive an "ought" from an "is". That, of course, is not a reason at all.

Quote:

That is a fallacy (i.e., if you accept Hume's proposition about "ought" and "is", you can't avoid agreeing with Moore about the naturalistic fallacy).

Of course: but I don't agree with Hume.

Quote:

The naturalistic fallacy didn't set out to prove that goodness isn't identical to a natural property; it accepted that as an observation and proved that many ethical theories were flawed by ignoring that observation.

It did not accept such a thing as an observation: it assumed it. What can such an assumption be an observation of?

Quote:

And to summarize Moore's reasoning in a nutshell: why is Utilitarianism good?

As explained above, it is incoherent to evaluate a theory of value.

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Cooperation among humans is mostly based on altruistic reciprocity, which is based on long-term recognition mechanisms (just as game theory predicts). It is adaptive for the individuals, not for society, else it wouldn't be successful. I guess that's what you want to hear .

Yes. Almost exactly. I agree that society/culture is a memetic mechanism for enhancing individual reproductive success.

So therefore would you agree that cooperative behavior in human societies benefits the individual-genetically in the case of genetic human kinship and memetically in the case of cooperation between less related individuals as in early hunting and agriculture/irrigation practices? Of course this genetic/memetic mechanism gets blurred somewhat due to Baldwin Effects and also because in early communities proto-humans were pretty well all related genetically to each other to a greater or lesser degree, therefore more easily providing a genetic benefit to the evolution of such cooperative behaviors for the whole community.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have a very good (very good, hehe) answer if God is allowed into the equation.

I knew it would come to this. And you gave me a hard time earlier when I questioned whether you had a religious basis for your convictions.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Sure. There is no disputing any of that. The problem is when you equate cooperation with goodness. Schindler comes back to haunt us when you do it .

Ok, we are almost there. So cooperation is good because it provides a benefit to the individual and therefore the society. Now there are many different ways for societies to cooperate, are there not? When a societal group bands together to fight a war on another societal group and wipes them out- whose cooperative behavior (and morals) survive as the cooperative behavior and morals we see around us today?
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Nope. Cooperation is adaptive because of that. Adaptive and good are not the same thing. (and this "therefore the society" is questionable).

If cooperation results in enhanced reproductive capabilities- that's "good" isn't it? I mean if you're interested in surviving as a species, that is.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Should I rape a woman or should I give alms? Which is more pleasurable?

To whom?

Quote:

I know Bentham and Mill's answer to that. They'd say I should give alms. That's because though the fundamentals of their doctrine are as you say, they refine it into a doctrine of "general happiness", in which I should take into account the happiness of the raped woman and of the beggar before I act.

Mill is clear that "happiness" is just another word for pleasure.

Quote:

And that's a good thing to do; and it's not hedonism. What is *your* answer to that question? Because if one takes the Bentham and Mill quotes at face value and agrees with them, one must assuredly rape the woman.

Why?

Quote:

Again, I'm not denying that pleasure is of ultimate value. I'm denying that it is the sole source of ultimate value.

That is a flat contradiction: if something is of ultimate value, then no form of value is prior to it. That is entailed by the notion of a thing being of ultimate value.

Quote:

But you ask "how is this a criticism". Well, a theory that can't be followed is hardly useful; that's why I called this criticism "technical". Even if Utilitarianism is right, if we can't compare different kinds of happiness, it's useless.

It is not useless in determining what value *is*, which is the purpose here. But, as I explained, a theory of value cannot be evaluated, for the same reason as the concept of money cannot have financial worth: because, in order to evaluate a theory of value, one would have to assume either the truth or falsity of the thing that is being evaluated: the answer is a foregone conclusion, and is not derived from any evaluation. You are confusing the (incoherent) idea of a theory of value itself being good or bad with the (meaningful) concept of living one's life according to certain theoretical structures being good or bad.

Quote:

Note how the part in bold is in no way expressed in your Bentham/Mill quotes; it is superadded to those quotes (thankfully).

I didn't claim that it was. You didn't ask about Bentham and Mill's position on agent neutrality. You asked about my position on the same, so I answered in my terms. The purpose of the Bentham/Mill quotes was to establish that they believed pleasure to be of ultimate value, which you had denied.

Quote:

But even so the theory of value *must* be subjected to a value analysis, even though you claim this is inconsistent (without explaining why).

I explain why above. But you tell me: how is it different to evaluate a theory of value than to ascribe a financial worth to the concept of money?

Quote:

Why is that theory better than the theory "humans are the scourge of the earth, they should all be killed" (I've listen to radical environmentalists proclaim that)?

It is not "better" than that theory; it is just true, whereas that theory is false.

Quote:

You say that I should provide reasons for saying that "oughts" can't be derived from "is". I have provided a very good reason in my opinion -- no one ever did it, so far.

You merely claim that that is a good reason; it is not, in fact, capable of being a good reason. Only recently was it discovered just how bumble-bees are able to fly. Before that, nobody truly understood how it was that they managed to stay aloft. Nonetheless, it would have been entirely irrational to have held, before this discovery was made, that bumble-bees defied the laws of physics, and therefore that the laws of physics were not universal, and that a proposition that contradicted the laws of physics may therefore very well be true; yet this is exactly what you are claiming in relation to value.

Quote:

You can say this is just my (or mankind's collective) ignorance, but you won't have come any closer to establishing *your* view, that it is possible to do it.

The burden of proof rests with you, since you are the person who is using the claim that "oughts" cannot be derived from "is"es to attempt to substantiate your claim that life came to exist by being created by some deity, and not through a process of natural selection. You first raised the claim to advance your side of the

debate; for that reason, a failure on your part to provide reasons is a failure to do what you set out to do by raising the issue in the first place.

Quote:

Who is evading the question? Why do you think this is possible? You just assume it is and shift the burden of proof.

I am not "shifting" the burden of proof. As I explained above, that burden has always lain with you. You have as yet not even attempted to discharge it.

Quote:

But you haven't come up with any examples, and this has been the fate of all philosophers who tried to do that.

Examples of what, exactly?

Quote:

Perhaps I'm misunderstanding you again, but you are the one who are supposing that the constraints of reality are not constraints after all. You are the one who is offering an opinion that goes against the collective experience of mankind, without any example.

It is a non-sequitor to suggest that, because nobody has yet conceived of how value can be derived from physical states of affairs of the universe (I disagree with this, by the way, but I will take it arguendo for this point), that demonstrating that it can "goes against the collective experience of mankind"; the researchers who discovered how the bumble-bee flies were not in any meaningful sense "going against the collective experience of mankind" when they established something that nobody had been able to demonstrate this before. Do you have any reason whatever to suppose that matters are different in relation to value? If you have, what is it?

Quote:

I think that the fact (and it is a fact until you contradict it)

That's nonsense - it is a mere assertion until you provide reasons contending it to be true. Your methodology is seriously flawed; there is no more reason to treat that as a fact than to treat its converse as a fact.

Quote:

...that we can't derive "oughts" from "is" is a good argument in favor of a deity. [hard to believe this guy calls himself a philosopher and scientist!]

You should know perfectly well that this is circular and incoherent. You cannot hold that the truth of proposition A is a reason to believe in the truth of proposition B, where B is the only reason that you have to believe in A (where A and B are, in this instance respectively, value non-derivationism and the existence of a deity). You have provided no reason to substantiate the *set* of beliefs constituted by (1) that value cannot be derived from physical reality, and (2) that there exists a deity.

Quote:

And the inability on your part to explain how goodness can exist *at all*, whether external or internal, is incapable of constituting any such reason.

It was my very point that anybody's inability to explain anything can never by itself count as a reason why the thing not explained is necessarily false.

Quote:

You haven't offered a theory of goodness yes, jamespetts. You have just offered an opinion, and you expect me to agree with it. Why? Why is your opinion good?

I have already explained why a theory of value cannot be evaluated. I am writing a paper on my empirical theory of value, but it is not yet complete.

However, before we get into my theory of value, let's agree methodological parameters.

First of all, what are the success criteria for a theory of value? How do we test whether such a theory is true?

Quote:

A good argument. What is prior to each other according to you? According to me, good is prior to ought, because we have a notion of goodness even when we don't know how to achieve it.

I agree that the good is prior to the right (but not for that reason), but you have just contradicted yourself.

You wrote earlier,

Quote:

Goodness can't come from ourselves or from our history or from our cultures, because the question "why ought this to be good?" always lingers.

You are now denying (as I deny) the meaningfulness of the question "why ought this to be good?". Do you now accept that this argument that you presented above is, for that reason, false?

Quote:

To your dilemma, I deny the first part -- I never said that a thing is good because it ought to be good.

The quote immediately above shows otherwise.

Quote:

It's good because it is good. "Oughts" come later -- they indicate what goodness is, but they are not goodness itself.

"Oughts" do not indicate what goodness is; they are entailed by what goodness is.

Quote:

A theory of goodness must be true, but that doesn't prevent it from being good or bad. I refer to the radical environmentalist position again -- a true statement, and a true theory, but not a good theory.

In what sense is it true?

Quote:

The truth of a theory of goodness is in its fitness to reality;

What does it take for a theory of goodness to be fit to reality?

Quote:

and this is what I criticized about the usefulness of Utilitarianism.

You fundamentally misconceive the very nature of reality by confusing truth with usefulness. A theory of value is true if it correctly identifies what value is, not if it provides useful guidance on what to do. Because of its truth, a true theory of value is likely (but not certain) to provide better guidance as to what to do than a false theory of value, but this is not the inherent success criterion for such a theory.

Quote:

If we can't follow the theory with our human knowledge, then it is unfit for humans.

Why are you confusing "following" a theory (whatever that means) with determining its truth?

Quote:

But even if a theory is true, there is a judgement of value applied to the theory itself. That's what allows us to criticize environmental nihilism as described above.

Why should environmental nihilism be capable of being open to any other criticism than that it's false? I don't agree that any other criticism is meaningful.

Quote:

But you are either (a) redefining pleasure in a non-neurological way or (b) endorsing full hedonism (and rape over almsgiving).

Why do you suppose that "rape over almsgiving" follows from a neurological definition of pleasure? There is less pleasure in the world if people are raped; there is more pleasure in the world if people give alms.

Quote:

Another scenario: if one has the money and is harming no one, does that make it good for him to spend all his money on drugs?

Which drugs? It all depends on whether the principle according to which one is seeking to act is one according to which, if everyone followed, everyone would be happier (have more pleasure). In the case of the illegal drugs to which I suspect that you are referring, there would be less pleasure in the world, overall, if people took them, since they tend to do more harm (to pleasure) than good.

Quote:

You don't know how your computer works, and I don't know, but some people (computer engineers I suppose) know.

And we're back to the bumble-bees.

Quote:

We are not required to be absolute specialists about all fields of knowledge. My claim is not one of personal ignorance --no one can derive is from ought. You haven't done that yet.

And nobody had, before the discovery, found how bumble-bees fly. Yet that was no reason to suppose that they defied the laws of physics.

Quote:

I'll wait for it.

While you're waiting, we can resolve the methodological issues (above).

Quote:

Sure. It is the accumulated ignorance of mankind, not merely my own ignorance. That's why I say it is so easy to disprove -- any tiny example to the contrary will do the trick. Have you got any?

Ignorance of reason for falsity is not reason for truth.

Quote:

I addressed the computer analogy.

And I replaced it with a better bee analogy.

Quote:

But you are the one making a positive claim to truth, James Petts, not I. You are claiming that something is possible, I am claiming that it isn't.

This is an incoherent analysis: how is a claim of possibility a claim to truth, and yet a claim to impossibility not a claim to truth? They are both claims to truth. For the reasons outlined above, you are the one with the responsibility to provide a reason, otherwise the point that you are making in relation to evolution fails.

Quote:

I'm ready to change my mind if one example is offered, but I can't understand how one may be positive about it without any examples.

What would count as an example, exactly?

Quote:

It reminds me of those analogies by atheists (not you!) about pink flying elephants. I haven't seen any of those around; I haven't seen any derivation of "ought" from "is" either. I'll wait until I see one of them before I believe in them.

But you also haven't "seen" a demonstration that it's impossible to derive an "ought" from an "is", and yet you are claiming that such an impossibility (rather than an uncertainty of possibility) represents the truth. You have provided no reason for so doing.

Quote:

No, you haven't refuted it, you have provided the conditions in which it will be refuted.

As I explained and you ignored, I refuted its capacity to supply a reason to believe that the is/ought dichotomy is true. It merely assumes it: it does not establish it.

Quote:

You haven't established yet that it is tautologous to claim that pleasantness is the only ultimate value for conscious

minds.

And yet I have established that Moore failed to establish that pleasantness cannot be the only value for conscious minds: he merely assumed it.

Quote:

And again, the fallacy wasn't aimed at proving that "ought" can't be derived from "is", that was a premise. The fallacy aimed at showing the shortcomings of other ethical theories.

By assuming, without reason, that "oughts" cannot be derived from "is"es.

Quote:

It provides a good reason -- that "ought" can't be derived from "is".

This is not the reason for the conclusion: this is the conclusion itself.

Quote:

If you can disprove that, then the fallacy will crumble. You haven't done it yet.

The fallacy cannot have force standing on a mere assumption. Proof is not required to unseat a bare assertion.

Quote:

And why is it that your belief that you can, in fact, derive "ought" from "is" any more established? Moore and I have the common experience of mankind to back us up.

The experience is not experience of impossibility: the experience, in so far as it does, indeed, consist of not deriving oughts from ises, is merely of non-occurrence. Non-occurrence can never by itself entail impossibility.

Quote:

What about you?

We'll get to my theory when we're agreed on the methodology.

Quote:

Why? That is the crux.

As above.

Quote:

No, you didn't do that. It is self-contradictory to believe it anyway. A theory of value must be applied to itself; any theory of value that (for instance) frowns upon ethical musings is self-contradictory.

In the same way as a concept of money that holds that the idea of money is worthless is incoherent; but one still cannot ascribe a financial worth to it.

Quote:

This does not mean that a theory of value must not be true; it must, and it must be true before it is even considered for evaluation.

Once it is accepted that it is true, the outcome of the evaluation is a foregone conclusion.

Quote:

But we must evaluate it nonetheless, or the theory will remain self-contradictory.

How is it contradictory *not* to evaluate a theory of value?

Quote:

(Which is the main criticism of the radical environmentalist position -- it is self-contradictory).

Why is that the main criticism? Surely the real criticism is that it is false?

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And I suggest to you that the same may be happening with you . There is no reason why you should believe what you believe about science's powers. It's a sort of religious conviction.

Why do you suggest that? What do you think that he *does* believe about "science's powers", exactly?

Quote:

You are probably right, by the way. I always liked Truth (note the capital T) and there is no surer thing than the fact that those who strive for that will find it, if they stop at no prejudices and preconceptions in their road.

What would you consider to be a "prejudice or preconception" for these purposes? How is the truth about which things are prejudices and preconceptions to be discovered?

By James Petts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

My concern is whether such a metaphor, if it can be found, could legitimately and consistently be considered as at least a two sided coin representing the same essential substance---one side being the "God-will" of moralists, the other side being the "Unified Building Block-cause" of scientists.

I've heard the "two sides of the same coin" metaphor before. Based on the fact that "intuition" is where science begins and religion ends, I would rather use an "opposite ends of the spectrum" metaphor for describing the relationship between two.

These two areas are about as diametrically opposed as I can imagine. Now there are some scientists that say religion and science are compatible, like Mariner. I disagree. Religion to me is dogmatic, authoritarian, and not evidence based, whereas science is anti-dogmatic (creation, falsification, and revision of theories), anti-authoritarian (skeptical and challenging of the status quo) and evidence based (based on tests using quantitative measurement). Furthermore, religion claims absolute truth, while science merely claims approaching the truth (reality), though always with uncertainty. By the way, I would be very surprised if many people would find science as a religion, to be very enticing- given the tentative nature of scientific knowledge.

Most religious (and creationist) believers would like to attempt to have some of science's high esteem and success rub off on them by mere association. But that is unethical- if one wants to be held in high regard and be successful, one has to earn it. Science has worked hard for this success- religion hasn't.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **kkawohl**

Creation and evolution work in unison. The former can not survive without the latter. In a basic sense, if a man and woman desire a child, they set into motion processes of creation and evolution....

Well you are right. God could have created the big bang (but who or what created God?). Or God could have "just" set the "seed" in motion 3.8 billion years ago. Or he could have created hominids and all life on Earth, along with the sparse fossil evidence we see, 1 million years ago. Or he could have created everything 4000 years ago as the creationists believe. He could even have created you and me with all our

memories and everything in the universe 5 seconds ago.

There is no way to prove or disprove any of these assertions. So pick your favorite most comforting supernatural assertion- they are all equally without evidence.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

First, I would agree that many religious traditions are dogmatic and overly specific. But, I think many others are not; certainly, spiritual faith need not be dogmatic as opposed simply to being open to possibilities.

You are right. Some religions become so non-specific and metaphysically vague (holistically chaotic) to avoid confrontation with science that they don't say anything religious at all.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Second, I do not see many logical or scientifically final answers to many of the concerns that seem fundamental to human philosophy. Again, maybe you could share if you have access to them. If not, then I fail to see how science has "earned" the right to push faith to the far end of any spectrum that considers moral values.

I think that morality is a socially evolved mechanism designed to promote cooperation between individuals with a genetic evolutionary basis. Now, having said that, I should say also there is a difference between knowing or explaining the mechanism for something versus using or enjoying the mechanism. I know what sex is for (reproduction), but that doesn't remove one iota of it's enjoyment for me. Just like I understand what physically causes a rainbow, but I still appreciate it's beauty.

Knowing that morality is a socially evolved mechanism with genetic evolutionary origins does not change the fact that it is a very human and precious aspect of making our lives more successful and enjoyable.

If you should read the last 4 or 5 pages of this thread you will learn a little about the fascinating science of evolutionary psychology. The evolutionary basis for some of our behavior.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Third, if you will look at the first post, I think you will see that it is captioned, "Creation or Evolution."

Right. I'm arguing against "Creation".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Fourth, the way we bring our faiths in moral values together has a tremendous influence on the evolution of our culture. Anyone with the least appreciation of chaos theory understands at least that much.

Chaos Theory? Chaos Theory? Don't make me laugh. And I suppose you think that the Axiom of Choice demonstrates abortion rights.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Finally, I would suggest that it is not valid to be so quick to assume that one cannot learn anything of value from non-scientists.

I suggest that we are in agreement on this last point.

Edited: I would however, suggest that it might be difficult to learn science from non-scientists.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

...Nothing can "create" Him. Yes, this is all presuming that God exists.

So you know for a fact that nothing can create "him", but you don't know if he exists? It always amazes me how people can claim know so much about something, they know so little about.

The only thing I see as necessary about God is the need for humans to believe in him. I suspect the reason for this is that religious belief has an evolutionary survival benefit not unlike the Placebo Effect.

Anyway, let's leave God out of this- or do you want to take the creationist side of the argument?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I again invoke environmental nihilism as a respectable ethical theory: "Humans are the scourge of the earth, all of them ought to be killed"

I suspect that environmental nihilism is a self-refuting "morality".

After all, the only morality that "survives", is the morality of those that survive and pass on those morals. How else could morality exist except by those beings that continue to practice it? Therefore survival itself defines morality.

Do you really think, that if all humans went extinct, human morality could still be said to exist?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

There wouldn't be human morality. But I can't prove to anyone that it wouldn't be a good state of affairs. Perhaps a world without morality is a good state of affairs.

Yes, a world without humans is a world without human morality, but it can't be "good" for humans (though "good" for large carnivores probably). After all, humans going extinct can't be "good" for humans, pretty much by definition.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Without our choice, morality makes no sense.

Thank-you.

Yes, our moral choices shape our survival as individuals, our survival as societies composed of individuals, and ultimately our survival as a species. And since the only morals that survive, are the morals of those who survived by practicing them- the morality we have today (or any day) is the evolved selection of all those moral survivors.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Probeman, Quote:

Think about all the time, effort and resources that have been squandered in the name of religion and then ask: what has the human race gotten for it?

Response:

Given whatever we are---whether by virtue of genetics, evolution, or some fundamental relation to a spiritual essence---I do not think hard history can reasonably suggest that a lack of religion would have made our society or world better or more advanced than it is today.

I was not attempting to predict how history would have been different had religion been left out of the mix. I was just asking what do we have to show for all the time, labor and wealth that has been devoted to religious belief. Like asking whether we could have solved world hunger with all the effort that was instead put into the making of the movie Lord of the Rings. It was a rhetorical question really.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

I admit, given the prevalence of fundamentalist-mind-control b.s., it may not be a clear call. But, have atheistic countries really fared all that well, in terms of self fulfillment, freedom, arts?

I do not think there has ever been a truly atheistic country. Maybe modern Europe today comes closest to that description. What one normally thinks of when this question arises are communist countries- but they have only replaced God worship with Stalin or Mao worship. All authoritative Father figures.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

In terms of "brains falling out," have you surveyed the despair posted in threads of some of the nihilists and/or persons who refer only to science and their genes as the only ultimate guides for values?

I do not agree that we should "refer only to science and their genes as the only ultimate guides for values". I think that science is underutilized for some problems that have been thought of as traditionally unscientific and I suspect that that the origins of morality are evolutionary and that the development of morality is the struggle between selfishness of the individual and cooperation with society.

I agree that religion provides solace and probably even an evolutionary survival benefit. After all- if you are wandering in the desert for 40 years, it probably helps your survival chances if you BELIEVE that there is some purpose to it all. I think religious beliefs acts in a way that is very similar to the Placebo Effect. A benefit so long as you believe it provides a benefit. I personally prefer reality (even if it does not comfort me), but that personal preference may not be optimum from a social or evolutionary perspective. In fact, I'm pretty sure it is not.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

*Perhaps other words may be preferred, but physicists seem to postulate that great changes may have occurred in a hypothetical beginning upon the appearance of a merest irregularity. It seems that things that seem *minor* from one perspective might be quite great from a different perspective.*

*I expect there may be better analogies, but I think that just being open to the possibility of a general spiritual source, while it may seem *minor* or trite, can in fact have rather great significance.*

I have no idea of what you are trying to say here.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Radrook**

Any creationist that says that God created everything 4000 years ago doesn't know Bible chronology. Man himself is approx 6,000 years in existence according to the Bible. So 4,000 years is a clear unscriptural conclusion.

The sad part in all this is that one need not reject the geological age of the earth in order to believe in the Genesis account. Those doing so are putting themselves in a very difficult position quite unnecessarily since the Bible account makes room for the 3 billion or so old earth and the 13 billion to 15 billion year-old rest of the universe concept.

Duane Gish and the people at ICR (that you quote so much from) disagree vehemently with you. Perhaps you should go talk with them?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **SocraticIrony**

The main problem i have is with the existance of the soul. My current opinion is that we do not have one. It seems to me as if people are almost tricked into thinking that there is something more to us than a physical being. When i say tricked i do not mean intentionally. I would argue that our 'consiouness' is nothing more than the culmination of our base instincts (survival) and emotional reactions to our environment as interpreted by our brain through

reason.

Why is it necessary to have a soul. Why cannot we simply exist as we do, then when the time comes, cease to exist. Our memories stored in molecular bonds in our brain, our personalities embeded in the physical structure of our grey matter, it appears to me as if we have everything we need right inside us. No purpose, no significance, only a giant walking double helix that thinks it has life (in the more spiritual sense than pure functionality).

I hate to say it but there are many comparisons that can be drawn between a computer and a human being or indeed any other creature. What happens if 1000 years in the future, presuming our race does not get trigger happy, the fields of robotics, cybernetics, mechatronics and numerous other areas of research dedicated to imitating the human, become so advanced that their products resemble us exactly physically and are able to learn at a rate comparable to our own brain. We find ourselves faced with an android/robot that as far as we can tell is human. This robot may be as in touch with its inputs as we are, and reacts to them in such a complicated way that it creates the illusion of being self aware. Where does that leave humans and their brain.

Its not that i think the robot will attain life, but that i do not think we have life in the common sense.

You should read Dennett's "Consciousness Explained" if you haven't already. There are a couple of threads on the forum in Metaphysics and Epistemology with summaries of the chapters and discussion of the book.

Dennett's point would be- what could it matter what material a brain is made out of? Your brain is made out of last week's meat and potatoes.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

Sure Probeman, ask me a bunch of questions and then say you don't want to talk about them.

What amazes me is that your statement there is completely irrelevant to what you quoted. I'm not a 100% sure that God exists. There. So? Are you 100% that he doesn't exist? In fact, are you even sure, at all, that the physical universe exists? How would you go about testing that? Hey, maybe we could use the religion of science. Well, then, I humbly suggest that you do a little research on the concept of a Supreme Being and maybe a little modal logic. The Supreme Being would have necessary existence; if He were to exist, He would have ontological perfection. Are you denying this? If you don't want to talk about God, then that's fine - you brought it up, and you are pursuing the debate. One who didn't wish to continue wouldn't. Oh wait, there's no free will.

I'm not very interested in discussing the questions because I still remember our previous discussion. But I will reiterate: the probability of god existing is exactly the same as ghosts, demons, spirits, goblins, other gods and fairies. I devote as little thought to the implications of god existing as I do of the others existing. I am very aware of the modal ontological argument and it is clear to me that god is being premised into logical existence by the argument. If you really agreed with the premises of the argument you would be 100% sure. The fact is nothing is ever proven logically because premises can never be proven. Results require empirical evidence.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

A definition which you chose. And which a radical environmentalist (a human being) disagreed with.

Hence the relativistic nature of morals.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Nihilists everywhere would say that being is worse than non-being. It is apparently a central concept of Buddhism (I don't know enough about Buddhism to say that with certainty). Nihilists and Buddhists are human beings. So as you see there is room for disagreement .

Nihilists that take their own arguments seriously are self-refuting from an evolutionary perspective- so they can disagree all they want. The morals of those that survive are the morals that we have today.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

disagrees with what I was saying. I said that morality without our choice makes no sense; you are trying to say that it makes sense, based on the concept of survival, whether or not we choose it. What is it that you believe about this anyway? Does morality without choice make sense, or doesn't it?

These are questions worth discussing. I think that we have choices within some evolutionary limits. See Dennett's "The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting".

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/t...=glance&s=books>

This gets back to: the reason that we don't all behave like Schindler is because altruistic behavior is genetically beneficial only to those that are genetically related to ourselves. Altruistic behavior to non-kin has to be instilled by social mechanisms and therefore is only replicated by those social mechanisms- not by those that died behaving altruistically.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

If there is an "ultimate" unrationalized-rational basis for guiding morality, values, truth, beauty, purpose---in short, all the things that most relate to what it means to be human---I would like to hear what it is.

Are you saying: Our genes trick us into thinking and feeling that our existence is of value, but that rational values would require us to ignore that or not to ignore that? If you say that rational values do not require us to disbelieve our genetic inclinations, then do you mean our "enlightened" genetic inclinations? If so, what do you mean by enlightened genetic inclinations, other than rationalized values?

I'm not sure what exactly what you are asking. But I'll take a shot and you tell me what you think.

Our morals have evolutionary an basis in the sense that survival of a species is good, if anything can be considered good for that species. So some (maybe 1/3) of our behavior can be seen as directly shaped by evolutionary pressures. The remaining behaviors are individual and socially evolved mechanisms, like gift giving.

However I don't think that our genes control all our behavior. We can decide to thwart our genes and use contraception (well not Christians, but they're socially less evolved, of course).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Probeman, I agree with you that, undoubtedly, a god-concept has a placebo effect. But, an ordinary placebo effect is also discoverable. A generalized god concept, on the other hand, is not falsifiable. Neither does "reality" falsify god.

The placebo effect of religious belief has been tested I believe.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Folks who worry about how some concept of "ultimate free will" may factor seem to ignore that we have no choice but to make choices. You appear to want to base your life as much as possible on what is "rational." Yet, you also seem to appreciate that you have no rational way to disprove god---or, for that matter, your more humdrum aesthetic choices that you necessarily make countless times each day---whether you articulate them or not.

Since you seem to think you want to restrict your life to rational choices, as opposed to rationalized choices, I assume you have found (or are searching for—good luck) a way to apply logic, science and rationality to all your aesthetic choices. If so, can you share how it is that you rigorously exclude rationalization from your choices?

I hope I never suggested that I only make rational choices! I'm only human after all!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Personally, I think what is "good" is what we are able to rationalize as good. I am not sure that we can ever "prove" that a particular thing is absolutely good. But, in the process of social interaction, our empathies seem often to attract to a common, self-fulfilling perception of "goods." That empathy, I believe, is enhanced by a

shared perennial, moral philosophy, even if it is based only on generalized notions, such as the golden rule. In those ways, we each get to participate in inventing what our society will call good. To me, that seems to invite quite a bit of freedom to invent ourselves---in other words, to choose what we wish to rationalize about what is good. Nothing in that idealistic process requires that we ignore scientifically derived, rational, logical predictions about materialistic effects. Maybe I just tend to see human life from more of an aesthetic perspective of "freedom" than you do.

I'm not sure what the last sentence means because I generally agree with everything you said in the above section. What we decide is "good" is up to us (all of us). Yes. I just don't think it is encoded in the fabric of the universe. If humans go extinct- so does human morality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Probeman, I agree with you that, undoubtedly, a god-concept has a placebo effect. But, an ordinary placebo effect is also discoverable. A generalized god concept, on the other hand, is not falsifiable. Neither does "reality" falsify god.

Of course not. Nothing supernatural is falsifiable by definition- but do you believe in every supernatural concept imaginable? If you don't believe in all possible supernatural possibilities, than what cognitive criteria do you use to distinguish between your belief in them or not?

If you say to me: I believe in X without a rational basis then I won't argue with you. I never argue with belief.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

Sorry I was unclear. I meant that the inability of an ordinary placebo to have effects other than as a placebo is testable. Whether the god-placebo has effects independent of being a placebo may not be as readily tested.

They have done some testing of prayer efficacy. I think it's a waste of time to research, but interesting to read about.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

You said: "If you don't believe in all possible supernatural possibilities, than what cognitive criteria do you use to distinguish between your belief in them or not?"

My answer would be aesthetics. I do not see a giant-squid-god as necessary, helpful, or aesthetic. I do see a general belief that supports a notion of moral interconnectedness as being aesthetically helpful. Why do you or I choose a suit? Because we think it will fulfill our interests and, hopefully, others who may not wish to see us otherwise. I think you already agreed that our aesthetic choices and beliefs do have real consequences.

If you agree that supernatural belief is a strictly aesthetic choice (with consequences to humans) then I have no beef with you at all. But most other religious believers would disagree, saying that these supernatural or moral choices are absolute and come from a really existing god or some other deity or force for "goodness" and that people can obtain specific guidance from this entity.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I sure hope that you realize that you're simply saying that "the evolutionary perspective is what is good". This is a refined version of 19th century Social Darwinism. You can probably find criticisms of Social Darwinism everywhere in the net. My own beef with your belief is that it is unproven and unbacked by evidence. Why is Goodness = Evolutionary Perspective?

There is nothing scientific about racist and sexist Social Darwinism as you well know. Are you now saying that Evolutionary Psychology is racist and sexist? Of course you have some basis for this attempted smear (also used by the anti-science nurture only leftist PoMos)?

And once again, I never said that goodness is ONLY genetic evolution. I said it's the basis for socially evolved morality. If you have to reduce my idea down to a worthless abstraction, I would prefer **Survival + Cooperation = Goodness**.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't mind you having beliefs, as long as you admit that they are beliefs, unproven and unbacked by evidence .

Wrong again. I already gave you evidence, for example kinship altruism and incest avoidance behaviors. Did you read the paper yet? Dreamweaver posted it in HTML for you. You've already admitted that social cooperative behavior is adaptive. Why is it adaptive? Because it enhances individual reproductive success and as an individual/social side benefit (as James Petts might say) it also enhances "pleasantness". That sounds pretty "good" to me.

Your constant assertions of "no evidence" and "unproven" remind me of the creationists that keep asking for more transitional fossils. Besides the fact that nothing in science is ever "proven" (you should know that), maybe now you will explain to us your own evidence based theory of morality. Ah, you say you have no evidence and no theory? - just like the creationists.

I received the book yesterday: Evolutionary Origins of Morality edited by Leonard Katz, published by Imprint Academic Press, UK. Noam Chomsky and Daniel Dennett provided comments to the Editor. It consists of four principle papers entitled:

1. Any Animal Whatever: Darwinian Building Blocks of Morality in Monkeys and Apes by J. Flack and F. de Waal.
2. Conflict and the Evolution of Social Control by C. Boehm.
3. Summary of Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of UnSelfish Behavior by E. Sober and D. Wilson.
4. Game Theory, Rationality and Evolution of the Social Contract by B. Shyrms.

Also are some 10 papers in each section commenting on each principle paper and a response to the comments by each original author. I look forward to reading this and will try and quote some of the more interesting ideas for you.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **larrye2001**

The question of evolution is simple to answer, G_D made it all or G_D does not exist.

I completely understand his feelings. When the Copernican heliocentric theory was introduced it caused repercussions that are still dying away today. That the Earth is not the center of the universe was an idea that was devastating to many at the time. Darwin's theory of evolution has repercussions far beyond the mere development of life of Earth, that are even more unsettling. The idea that Man is not the center of the universe fills many with dismay and trepidation- I can understand that fear.

What many people find even more unsettling are the personal and moral implications of Darwin's theory with regard to human purpose and meaning. These fears are real. Most scientists try to avoid these issues as they are simply too disturbing for most people. Be aware however that based on evidence and explanatory power, the theory of Darwinian evolution by natural selection is about as firmly established in the scientific framework as the theory that the Sun goes around the Earth. Evolutionary psychology is the early scientific

steps in understanding how we ourselves as human beings have been shaped by evolutionary forces (not just genetically). Darwin did foresee that the application of evolution to human existence would be the most difficult for many. That is why *The Origin of Species* barely mentions humanity at all and in later editions he toned these suggestions down even more. The best book that deals with these very disturbing implications is the very readable "**Darwin's Dangerous Idea**" by **Daniel Dennett**. I highly recommend it. It gives one intellectual vertigo.

One difference between Copernicus and Darwin is that by the time the general uneducated public was exposed to the heliocentric theory, all the scientific squabbles had been dealt with and people were able to accept the "geometric" implications fairly easily. But when Darwin presented his theory, because of the much more widespread and rapid dissemination of information in the 19th century, the entire scientific controversy (remember Darwin didn't even have a genetic mechanism at the time) was exposed to public scrutiny thereby giving to some the desperate hope that Darwin's idea would be refuted. That, however, will not happen.

In fact I suspect that it will take another 100 years for most of the implications of Darwin's ideas to be grasped by the general public. But humanity will survive- maybe with a little less pride and fewer false hopes, but survive we will.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

Probeman, regarding your last post to me here, I do not think that the MOA proves the existence of God. I think it might, but there are quite a few loose ends that I feel need tidying up. Nevertheless, I didn't say anything about the MOA. I was specifically referring to Modal Logic so that you might check the different modal states of different beings. The Supreme Being having Necessary existence.

As I said, I see nothing "Necessary" about it except the need for some to believe a supernatural being exists. Capitalization doesn't make it any more "necessary".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

On another note, it doesn't "infer God into existence". It might seem like that, but that is the nature of an a priori. So, it doesn't "infer him" into existence" since that is logically impossible and is not what it is done; if it did prove God's existence, it would simply verify it.

I disagree. I don't care whether you call it "a priori" or "premise", it's a mere assumption for the purpose of "proving" the assumption. For this reason logic cannot "verify" anything about the real world. Even science can only get tentative and uncertain verification (though it can falsify with confidence).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

With regard to Mariner's question of "unproven" evidence, I don't think that he was referring to you proving evolution or other scientific things. I think that he was referring to your stance on God, which, I believe is that He does not exist. He posited that your beliefs in such a thing are unproven and are not backed up by empirical evidence. I'm not concerned with other creatures which you or I think to be imaginary, we're talking about "scientific evidence" here. Surely, science would stay secular on the matter unless it had reason to believe otherwise. Do not you?

Yes, science is exactly and equally secular about the existence of both gods and fairies.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I didn't use either the word "racist" or the word "sexist". The fact that Social Darwinism was used by racists/sexists is not enough to disprove it, and it is not the theory's flaw. Poor Spencer was neither, as far as I know. They can also use mathematics, and I still believe in mathematics.

Social Darwinism was clearly racist and sexist. So your implication is clear.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The problem with Social Darwinism, however, is the same problem with your theory. It is not that it is liable to be used by racists/sexists, but that it is based on an unproven, unbacked assertion, that "what Nature does" is "what is good". Try to answer to that point in your next post.

I already did but you obviously didn't read it. You are AGAIN distorting my position by the use of the quotation "what Nature does" is "what is good" (which I NEVER said). I have explained it carefully already but here it is again:

And once again, I never said that goodness is ONLY genetic evolution. I said it's the basis for socially evolved morality. If you have to reduce my idea down to a worthless abstraction, I would prefer Survival + Cooperation = Goodness.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yep. The author didn't incur in the same error as you are doing here. Why invoke him, then?

Because you asked for evidence that morality has (genetic and social) evolutionary origins.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And this is the weak point. It sounds pretty good to you. By now I have mentioned several systems of thought that disagree with you, and your only answer is that "this is the best system from an evolutionary perspective, therefore it is the best system, period". It is this "therefore" that is unproven and unbacked. "Unproven" = no evidence for it, "unbacked" = no reasoning for it. Can't you provide at least a reasoning, proven or not?

My "therefore" is unproven?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If you will reason by association instead of logic, it's no wonder you'll get bad results .

The evolutionary origins of morality is a better scientific theory than your non-existent theory.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

We are not discussing science. I asked you a very simple question, quite outside the domain of science: "Why is the evolutionary perspective the standard of goodness?" You are reacting just like a Social Darwinist (which is not to say like a racist/sexist, mind you :rolleyes, by saying that "if nature does it, then it is good, period". A fantastic example of the naturalistic fallacy.

I am unimpressed with your defense of Moore's "Naturalistic Fallacy" with James Petts. But I can see why it appeals to you.

Once again, for the billionth time- I never said ""if nature does it, then it is good, period". You are quoting **yourself** in an feeble attempt to strawman me.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I also recommend Dennett's book, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea", very highly. It can do wonders for anyone who is afraid of Darwin . I agree very much with probeman when he says that we will eventually learn to live with

Darwin's idea; I think this applies to both materialists and theists. They love to misapply Darwin's ideas, and Dennett (though a materialist to the best of my knowledge) describes Darwinism very neatly and well.

Mariner, I'm glad you agree. It is a great book and I wish that other's in this thread would read it. I'd love to discuss the implications of what Dennett calls Darwin's "universal acid".

Yes Dennett is about as materialist as one can be. But Dennett would agree that morality (and consciousness) are evolved. You find the idea that morality could have evolved to be unacceptable. Do you also find the idea that consciousness could have evolved, also unacceptable?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Or will you ever answer to my question addressing the link between adaptive and good?

I have endlessly answered it. Here yet again I will answer it:

If adaptive behavior (genetic or social) enhances reproductive survival then it is "good" for the species.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It depends on what you mean by "consciousness". I think higher animals have consciousness (apes, dolphins). It's not an easy-to-define term. But I think that free will can't have evolved. The conclusion from those premises is clear -- as long as animals lack free will, their mental abilities probably evolved; when we find free will in a being, its mental abilities related to free will didn't evolve (and before you ask, no, I don't know how it may have appeared, and yes, I think God is involved).

I think I've never seen a better example of the "Supernaturalistic fallacy".

Why is it, that since the dawn of time, whenever science doesn't have a complete natural explanation of something- it must therefore be God? Then next ask yourself if the constant progress in scientific explanations of the universe over time indicates that maybe, just maybe, we should not be so confident that everything we don't currently understand is due to god? As a Christian, you are aware of the "god of the gaps" problem- aren't you?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

So, my stance depends on the belief that we have free will. I've seen that questioned around here. What do you think?

I think you should read Dennett's "The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting", since the concept seems central to your problems with the evolution of morality and the evolution of consciousness. But since you now admit (thank god) that your argument is basically "god did it". I won't argue with your beliefs. I never argue with belief.

Thanks Mariner, I appreciate your candor in this last post and I've enjoyed the debate. Take care.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Why? Think back to Buddhists and nihilists and answer that. I know that is your belief, I'm asking why, not "what is your belief".

I've already mentioned that a serious nihilist is genetically self-refuting- therefore Nihilism is not good for enhancing reproductive success, so I think that answers that part. On your "why" I tried to answer it already. But I will try to answer the question again: **Because the morality of a species cannot exist without the species, the goodness of the morality of that species is tied to the survival of that species.** In other words, if the morality of that species is good for the species, then it is a good morality for that species.

It seems obvious to me that we have the morality that we have survived to have. Moral behavior that doesn't enhance reproductive success is self-limiting. That's one reason individual selfishness still exists in the world.

Social mechanisms can encourage non-kin moral behavior (like dying for your country) that enhances the reproductive success of the group (that's why men are generally considered expendable as cannon fodder but women and children are not).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'm more humble. I think that everything that we don't understand... we don't understand. I don't fool myself. I don't think that it must be God because we don't understand it. I have other reasons to believe in God. But whatever one believes in or not, when we don't understand something, then we don't understand it. To imagine great theories that lack any reasoning or evidence in their support is self-deceiving.

I suggest that it is you that are self deceiving. You've already admitted that you think God is responsible for free-will and previously implied to James Petts that God is responsible for human morality, but you have zero evidence for these assertions (aside from your so called "everyday observations"). I'm not "imagining great theories" all by myself. Evolutionary psychology is just beginning as a science but already the evidence is impressive and compelling to many scientists and philosophers, (I have posted just a few examples throughout this thread). You can try to continue to ignore this body of scientific knowledge by mocking me, but our knowledge in this area is only going to grow.

You can be humble if you like (though to claim that you know what God does or does not do, doesn't seem very humble to me). Sounds like belief to me. I won't argue with it.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

...Perhaps, materialists might prefer an aesthetics that accuses idealists of being open to "giant-squid-gods." But, idealists might prefer an aesthetics that accuses materialists of being open to "squid duplications of all of Shakespeare." If the test of choice reduces to one of aesthetics, I personally do not see any rational superiority of "squid duplication of all of Shakespeare" over "giant-squid-gods".

If the only guide to theory selection in science was "parsimony" we would indeed be in trouble. But except for events prior to 10^{-37} seconds we do have an enormous amount of physical evidence in support of cosmological and life evolution. Although untested but mathematical treatments of those early events (string theory and some of Hawking's theories) might be charged with "parsimony" issues (though what is parsimonious about 11 spatial dimensions?), I still think that scientific investigation will make more progress in the future than navel gazing.

The other infinity that you did not mention (I think) is that of an infinite universe with a random distribution of matter (the Standard Model). Recent earth astronomical and COBE measurements for matter

distribution and curvature of space agree with this standard model within precision. If this model is correct then simple randomness (as you mentioned) means that some $10^{10^{29}}$ meters from here (a long, long way) there is an exact copy of you reading this post but picking his nose (I assume that **you** are not picking your nose). This conclusion is simple statistics.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

But, aesthetics does not support an argument that evolution has not always been "hand in glove" with an interactive designer. Parsimony does not favor an original God creation, but neither does it require that evolution has not always been guided by God (as opposed to a squid duplication of all of Shakespeare).

I think a universe without God is more parsimonious- but that's just my belief in the beauty of minimizing unnecessary entities.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Dlanorrenrag**

To find inspiration to transcend what history has demonstrated to be our very dangerously competitive natures, we will need to better appreciate not only the inspiration of science, but also the inspiration of aesthetics. Science will need all the help it can find from an aesthetics of a sort of golden rule that enlightens our genetic impulses— that is, if we hope to discover harmony beyond overpopulation, pollution, degeneracy, and loss of binding traditions and values. I do not think that evolutionary history supports that reliance on unguided competition and capitalism will sustain our species, either spiritually or physically.

All living things are dangerously competitive. I also think that there is a firm scientific (and moral!) basis for education (critical thinking- not regurgitation of test answers), reducing population levels and protecting the environment. And that is: that our survival may depend on doing these things.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You say a nihilist is self-refuting -- no, he isn't, if he kills himself (for instance).

If he kills himself (or we make ourselves go extinct) he (or we) have just refuted that morality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

How can a social mechanism encourage dying? A genetic mechanism, perhaps, but a social one? Social mechanisms work with tangible rewards for the individual, such as wealth, honor, fame, etc. Dead people don't get rich. (Also, where did the notion of "country" -- a collection of non-related people -- come from? And while we're at that, where did the notion of "mankind" come from?)

If a social mechanism can cause a group of men (though some may die) to wipe out another group (think Bible stories), I'd say that the winners have enhanced the reproductive success of their group.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Can you show one little piece of that "impressive evidence", particularly one that addresses my question of "why is adaptive linked to good"?

As you well know, this becomes a philosophical (non-evidenced) issue because of the way that you have defined "good". However I can say that if "adaptive" means a change that enhances survival, then from a strictly utilitarian point of view- that is good for the species almost by definition. For the more extended and nuanced meaning of good that you are looking for, it does get more complicated but maybe an example will do: It is wrong to kill, except in self-defense. Why is it wrong? Because Charlton Heston came down from the mountain- no, because murder does not tend to promote cooperative social behavior. But why is it ok in self defense? Because genetically it is necessary for the survival of the individual.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Then don't argue; answer the question . Don't repeat the principle "if it resulted in survival, then it is good; if it did not result in survival, then it must be bad". Explain the principle. Why is that principle good?

Because we wouldn't be here to argue about it if it weren't!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

"Why is adaptive synonymous with good?" Not such a complex question, apparently. If I can give you a nudge in the direction of the answer, note that this is a teleological question -- you can't answer it without a sense of purpose. Yet no evolutionary phenomenon is teleological. Just another way to show the contradiction in evolutionary ethics. Ethics must be teleological. If one proposes a non-teleological ethics, one is proposing a non-

ethics.

The purpose of evolutionary adaption is survival (or to put it another way: survival is evolutionary adaption). That mechanism provides the basic purposeful structure for morality, which in humans is enhanced by social cooperation. Simple questions deserve simple answers.

If you insist that morality must be teleological, I won't argue with you. But I'm reading "The Evolutionary Origins of Morality" right now and it's really good. Here's a quote from the preface by Leonard Katz:

"...our eye contributes to our survival and fitness mainly through the single function of sight; a long history of adaption under uniform constraints of optics and physiological possibility have led to a fairly uniform result. To the extent that human morality is the result of specific adaptations for human social life, which has varied between groups, times and environments, we may expect their contributions to our capacity for this social life to be more various and facultatively variable. We may wonder with Darwin how exactly to divide the credit for morality between natural selection, culture and learning, but suspect like him that, especially at the later stages of the evolution of morality, culture and learning, both individual and social, had the larger roles (1871, pp. 80-81, 166, 394, 404)... **Minimally, morality has roots in our mammalian social nature, which goes back to the mother-child bond** (Midgley, 1991, p. 8) and this may be as deeply rooted on both sides as anything in our evolved psychology is."

Also:

"Morality, however, may be a product of natural selection without having been itself selected as a functional adaption (Flack and de Waal, Response this volume, p. 74), by being an outcome of tendencies and capacities that were. Individual learning may organize moral competence from these, by adaption to a human environment shaped by social learning and cultural evolution- as these 'adaptive processes, operating at different levels and timescales' interact (Skyrms, Response this volume, p. 335). "

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by Mariner

Nope. Extinction may be better than survival. You refuse to consider that possibility, and that is the crux of the matter. Why?

Extinction may be better for you- but not for me! Here is a good simple article of the evolution of altruism:

<http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/~strone01/altruism.html>

By the way, reading the book "Evolutionary Origins of Morality" over the last two days has revealed to me that there is much more evidence and many more published scientific papers in support of the evolution of morality than I had realized. I haven't really pursued this subject for the last 10 years and I am amazed at the progress made since my last review of the subject.

Mariner, you should really read this book. Quite amazing. Here is the link again:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/t...=books&n=507846>

Here is Review 1:

"This one is easy to review: If you want to know the state-of-the-art on scientifically-informed thinking about ethics, buy this book. It is superb.

Now, in one sense, science doesn't have a whole lot to say about ethics--science has to do with what is, while ethics has to do with what we ought to be and do. But to know what we ought to be and do, it helps to know something about what we are. If, for instance, we are all by nature altruistic and generous, we probably need a different kind of ethic than if we are rather more self-seeking.

By looking at the possible evolutionary and genetic bases of proto-ethical behaviors, these scientists and scholars help us get some intelligent orientation on the question of what we are, so far as our ethical proclivities go.

To understand ethics, you need to know more than our proto-moral genetic inclinations--you need to know a lot of history, cultural studies, and philosophy, for instance, not to mention religious studies. But in this day and age, you cannot rightly claim to understand the state of the art if you know less. This book is a treasure. "

By Bob Fancher

Review 2:

"There are two virtually undiscussed background assumptions to this volume, which consists of four major papers, each with a set of ten or so expert, cross-disciplinary, commentaries. The first is that there is a characteristic human morality that is exhibited in almost all societies, from the simplest hunter-gatherer society to the most complex high-tech market society. The second is that one studies morality not by abstractly theorizing on the basis of logic and intuition alone, but by treating morality as a material force and studying it scientifically as an evolutionary and structural phenomenon.

The first paper, by Jessca Flack and Frans de Waal, argues that some basic elements of human morality are prefigured in primate behavior.

The second paper, by Chris Boehm, argues that the basis for our morality of cooperation and punishment come from the evolutionary history of humans in consciously egalitarian (though violent) foraging groups.

The third paper, by Eliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, argues that human prosociality takes the form of evolutionary and psychological altruism that developed through a process of group selection over the history of hominid evolution.

The final paper, by Brian Skyrmes, studies evolutionary game theory, which underlies the arguments of each of the previous papers, contrasting this form of game theory from its classical counterpart.

Perhaps I am biased, since I contributed two of the commentaries, but I found the papers to be a fair reflection of the authors' often extensive writings on the subject, and I found the commentaries to be useful and at times extremely interesting in terms of their suggestions for future research.

This book is accessible to the general reader, while offering lots of interesting material for the professional researcher. "

By Herbert Gintis

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dantsull**

What I am trying to express is that I don't understand why things do not live longer, and longer, and longer...I understand that in this theory bacteria etc. evolve to so that might begin to explain why things still fall ill, but what about old age?

Mariner is right. We are not immortal, but our genes are- at least those that are passed on. After all, a chicken is just an egg's way of making another egg!

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Here is a section from the link (near the end) that I posted above (by Eric Strong) :

"Altruism in Humans

It is only logical that one might now be inclined to take these theories of altruism and apply them to our own species, especially considering that man is the most altruistic animal of all. Altruism pervades every aspect of our society, whether in the form of food sharing, helping the sick, gift giving, or even the sharing of knowledge through education. The use of money may even be seen as the prime example of reciprocal altruism in modern man, as money itself has no intrinsic value other than the assurance that another person will trade valuable goods for it at some point in the future.

It is easy to see how altruism in man could have evolved through kin selection. Bands of early hunter-gatherers during prehistory were almost certainly composed mainly of close kin. Also, through language and an increased mental capacity, early man had a much greater ability than other primates at not only recognizing kin, but also at distinguishing between subtle differences in degrees of relatedness. **As evidence of the operation of altruism by kin selection, J. Rushton has showed that humans are more likely to favor not only those they definitely recognize as kin, but also those with whom they share genetic traits. Through a series of extensive studies, he demonstrated that on average there was greater genetic similarity between friends than between strangers, and he also made the remarkable discovery that sexually interacting couples were more likely to share similar blood markers than would be expected by chance alone. The idea that human behavior between two individuals may be**

governed by genetic similarity is profound, and its implications stretch far beyond a discussion of altruism.

Although there is no doubt that kin selection plays an important role in the formation of altruism in human societies, reciprocal altruism is generally more prominent. Our species easily fits the conditions for the rise of reciprocal altruism: long lasting relationships, an increased memory to distinguish reciprocators from non-reciprocators, and a method of punishing non-reciprocators. It has been hypothesized that some of man's more complex emotions may have evolved to improve upon the system of reciprocal altruism. Gratitude and sympathy may increase one's chances of receiving altruism by implying an increased chance of reciprocation, while guilt serves to discourage the non-reciprocator and causes him to demonstrate that he does not plan to refuse reciprocation in the future. **On top of the development of emotions, Trivers even suggests that in a complicated form of coevolution, the combined selective pressures of finding subtler ways of cheating one's neighbors and increasing one's ability to detect such subtle cheaters may have contributed to the expansion of man's mental capacities and led to his current state of high intellectual ability."**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Oh, but we are exploring the question of what is Goodness, not of what you, particularly, perceive as Good. If your position is that survival and spreading your genes is your personal goal, and nothing else, then I wish you luck, and a harem .

And why do you think harems have been so popular?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But then you can't conclude that this is the general morality of the species, or that this should be the general morality of the species. Please note the two different approaches in this last sentence: I think there is plenty of evidence to the effect that the general morality of the species is what you propose, but even if it were, you would have to offer a completely different justification (not a description) to answer the question of whether this should be the morality of the species.

But it is our morality. As to whether I think it should be or not is up to all of us- as you once pointed out.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'll try, but buying foreign books is not that easy around here . I don't think I'll be able to do it before the end of the year. But please note how the reviewers reinforce many of my points:

Amazon Brazil? Really, try to buy it. At least you will agree that the science of evolutionary psychology is making some interesting observations, as seen in the observations by Rushton about people being more cooperative with those people that physically resemble themselves (hence a biological basis for racism?).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Note the sharp distinction between description and justification. Sure, the more we know about who we are, the better we will be able to act. But even if we had absolute and complete knowledge of our history and make-up, ethics wouldn't be touched by it. Science can help our description of the universe, but not our justification for our actions.

Science can (and will I think) explain what the instinctive mechanisms are for the behavior we try and justify. That ought to be useful, I think, in a discussion of ethics. **If we understand why we instinctively react against people that are physically different or why we instinctively oppose birth control or gay people, that might help us to question whether those reasons are really the reasons we want to use to justify our behavior.**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Kudos to them . For instance, males are more inclined to be unfaithful than females (let's take this as a fact) -- surely that knowledge helps both males and females in reaching the ethical goal of faithfulness.

You took the words right out of my mouth!

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Again, very promising. The first sentence in bold is one which you have disputed several times in this thread -- if

the scholars have agreed to the truth of that, my feeling is that they'll make progress. The second sentence is again what I am asking of you: to look at morality as a phenomenon instead of theorizing (from Evolutionary premises) what morality should be.

I never said that evolution says what morality ought to be- I said evolution partially explains why it is the way it is. Don't put words in my mouth.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But as I said above, biology (the description of the universe) is not the final step. Even if we had a perfect description, the question "why is this, and not that, good" would still loom.

Of course- that's why it's fun to be human. We get to decide some of these things by thinking about them. The problem is that most people don't realize how much of their behavior and "thinking" is genetically programmed.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Full agreement. Even though no system of ethics that I know of uses "instincts" to justify behavior, if any system does that, surely a better knowledge of what are our "instincts" (a word to cover our lack of knowledge) will help. And even for ethics that don't use instincts for justification, a better knowledge of instincts will be great to understand human behavior (as not all, and not even most, human behavior follows an ethical theory).

Yes. Almost all human morality is based on evolutionary and social "instincts" (that is without rational thought). I suspect that even various "system(s) of ethics" are just instincts dressed up with fancy words.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...you just have to point out where I'm mistaken in that interpretation. But surely from where I stand it seems that (a) you believe that survival and spreading of genes is our morality and (b) this is what our morality should be.

(a) is half correct as I have been telling you ad nauseum (morality is not just genetic in origin!!!!), Jesus I get tired of correcting your strawmen (b) is incorrect.

I think that evolutionary psychology will eventually, conclusively show how morality has evolved genetically and socially in humans from mammal and primate origins. I also think that armed with this knowledge humans will be able to make better decisions about what our morality should be- since I think it is us that decides what our morality ought to be through a messy process of conflict between selfishness and cooperation.

I've a question for you: as a biologist you are impressed enough with the scientific evidence to agree that biological evolution naturally and actually occurred. *If* evolutionary psychology did eventually demonstrate that entirely natural and human social evolution processes could also explain the morality that we have today- would you be inclined to agree that there is no need for teleology in the evolution of morality, just as there is no need for teleology in the evolution of life?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I infer (a) from the fact that you admitted to it in the last two posts addressing me. I infer (b) from the fact that when I ask you for a reason why people should follow (a), you don't answer the question; it seems that you can't even imagine a different morality being better than (a). If you can't imagine nihilism being better than (a), then surely you agree with (b).

A better morality would be one not dictated by our genes or based on unconscious or instinctive negotiation between selfishness and cooperation. I suggest knowledge and consideration of our genetic influences and rational conscious consideration of our individual motives and the needs of society as a whole, as a better basis for morality. Is that specific enough?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You'll have to come to grips with the question of teleology, eventually, probeman. No system of morality ignores teleology. If you are studying morality as a phenomenon, and not as an armchair philosopher would do it, you'll have to examine that.

If by teleology you mean God- I ignore it. I've come to grips with ghosts and goblins long ago my friend. I'm certainly not going to base my morality on fantasy- even though many others do.

If by teleology you mean some absolute standard of "goodness", I fear that belief more than anything in humanity. **For history repeatedly shows what happens when some one or some group believes they have access to an absolute standard of "goodness"**.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Ethics only deals with the part that isn't genetically or socially programmed. A simple sentence that is sure to open a can of worms .

But I suspect that most (all?) of what philosophers call ethics is just "warmed over" genetic and social programming (e.g., religion) is my point.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I can agree with that too. But you seem to miss the internal contradiction between "morality is determined by impersonal forces (genes + culture)" and "we decide what our morality ought to be". The first sentence precludes the second. We decide nothing if we are not free. You claim that systems of ethics are instincts with a fancy clothing. What is it that precludes evolutionary theory from being instincts with a fancy clothing? How can we ever get free from deterministic forces like genes and culture if we lack free will; and if we don't lack free will, why are ethical systems instincts in fancy clothing?

Great questions and the short answer is that for most people I suspect that instincts, emotions and intuition (genetic and/or social programming) determines what is moral. Note that Damasio proposes that emotions are some of our most primal behavioral motivators.

I believe that we can only get free of our intuitions, emotions and instincts through the only endeavor that humanity has ever shown to be able to break free of these behavioral programs. As you probably guessed by now, science. Let's face it- science frequently forces us to abandon our intuitive and "obvious" notions about the universe and ourselves whether it be in cosmology or medicine. Before your blood starts boiling let me hasten to add, I'm not suggesting that we base ethics on science, but maybe ethics should be informed by science.

For example, if we can scientifically show (and I think the evidence is good) that human racial prejudices are the result of genetic programming that induces us to respond more favorably to people with similar appearances (as discussed previously) or that anti-gay attitudes springs from social programming to ensure maximum reproductive capacity, maybe, just maybe we might rationally question whether these moral issues should be decided by our instincts or our minds.

For the first time in the history of life on Earth, humans have the power to decide against our genetic (and even our social programming) and decide to do what we decide is right. What is right? Whatever we, in the messy struggle between the selfish and cooperative, decide is right. We can use our instincts or we can use our rational minds to make those decisions. I suggest rational choices informed by science. It's the only technique we have found that can successfully and reproducibly resist our all too emotional, intuitive and instinctive responses.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, hurray! You have offered me a teleology. Your purpose is furthering "individual motives and the needs of society as a whole". Two questions for you -- if they contradict, which is the most important? and the ubiquitous "why?; Why are those goals the supreme goals?"

Because I (we) can decide that they be. Evolution has shown that there is no purpose or meaning to life other than that which we decide to give it. That purpose can be 1000 Hail Marys a day or it can be discovering a cure for cancer. It's my (our) choice to choose programming or rationality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But we must work with a standard. Your standard is "individual motives and the needs of society as a whole". You have to justify it now.

No, there is no "standard". That is once again merely the desire for absolute certainty, which as you know causes misery.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And what is the difference between philosophy, religion, and science, if we lack freedom? If we don't lack freedom, why can't philosophy and religion hold some truth?

I never said we lack freedom- you said that. If one is driven only by their emotions, instincts and intuitions (I heard a guy last night that said he always flips his lucky coin on every important decision in his life), then yes, they are not free. They are only responding to their genetic and social programming. But we don't have to only respond to our genetic and social programming- we can try to be rational and informed by science.

By the way- I am not a very good example of the kind of rational morality that I am proposing here- though I occasionally have moments.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The problem is (to get back to Evolution, the subject of the thread), it is hard to explain how "freedom" could evolve out of a deterministic chain of causation.

You agree? I've got to try and be more disagreeable!

But first of all, how can you call evolution "deterministic"? Are you being metaphysical here? Because physically, evolution is about the least predictable (non-deterministic) natural process on Earth that I can think of. But in any event, metaphysically I can say that, "freedom" can have many meanings, and maybe in the distant past when the first animal evolved and could for the first time decide to move "there" or maybe instead "there", that was the beginning of "freedom" as we now know it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

This is not like the "vitalist" debate, in which we imagined a property of living beings and then couldn't corroborate our imagination with experiments. We don't "imagine" freedom, we experience it, more than anything else that we may experience. It's much more logical to doubt Evolution than Freedom -- perhaps all the billions of data in favor of Evolution are flawed, but if I deny my freedom I deny my knowledge of anything. I can't both deny freedom and affirm Evolution.

It's not black and white (like the real world- it is a gray in between kind of thing). Just as you seemed fixated earlier that it MUST be genetic or it MUST be social- it is actually both forces that program our behavior. Now imagine a third force- rational scientific and critical thought. This is the latest "good trick" in human evolution (though it may also lead to our eventual undoing). That way, I believe, promises freedom from both our genetic and social programming. I believe that evolutionary psychology and cognitive studies may provide the keys to understanding our real (unprogrammed) freedom.

But many will not accept the implications of Darwinian evolution (and their fears are justified)- that the traditional (religious), intuitive and instinctual meaning and purpose we would like to believe in, does not actually exist in nature or ourselves.

To the extent that one acts according to their intuitions, instincts and emotions then they are NOT free. We can only be free by overcoming these genetic and social programmings.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

(This is a problem for theories of consciousness as well; any theory of consciousness that concludes that consciousness is a completely determined effect (as opposed to "influenced by") of physical causes has this problem).

Again- it's not black and white- one or the other.

Two quotes from "Evolutionary Origins of Morality" (I wish I could quote whole pages to you- it's that good):

"...Darwin himself perceived absolutely no contradiction or dualism between the evolutionary process and human moral tendencies (e.g, de Waal, 1996b; Uchii, 1996)..."

"Acknowledging that morality may have a social function and stressing that it may have emerged from such a social contract does not require that we accept this kind of 'actual' social contract as the medium through which we decide what is moral. Nor does it suggest that we revert to some form of Social Darwinism, an approach to deciding what we ought to do, that was based on a misconceived, red-in-tooth-and-claw representation of natural selection, but worse, also on the idea that this interpretation of 'nature's way' should be used to guide (and justify) our own behavior. Although we need to recognize that the social contract does in fact often represent the process by which we come to agree (as a group) what is acceptable, we also need to recognize that this is probably the case because the social contract is useful from an evolutionary perspective because it enables individuals in groups to reach consensus with minimal, if any, need for explicit co-ordination."

By Proberman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But who or what is doing the overcoming? Is it a genetic effect? Is it a social effect? Can genetics overcome genetics, or society overcome society?

Scientific, rational and critical thought is capable overcoming our genetic and social programming. Someday there may be other ways- but that is, I think, the only option currently we have for becoming "free" agents.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, I was using "deterministic" in a metaphysical sense, though I don't know of any other, to be frank. "Predictable" is not a synonym.

Deterministic and predictable are mathematical and physical concepts for describing certain processes. A process can be deterministic but not predictable. You don't need quantum mechanics to get unpredictable processes. The weather is a good example. Evolution I think is another deterministic but unpredictable process.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Evolution is fully determined by the laws of physics (i.e., there are no miracles in Evolutionary theory -- you agree with that, don't you? Though I don't agree that we can say that there can be no miracles in practice).

Just because there are no miracles in evolution does not mean that it is a predictable process. As you well know, due to "sensitivity to initial conditions" - rewinding the tape of life and replaying it would undoubtedly produce a totally different outcome.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Now, let's apply it to a moral agent, a human, trying to "overcome his genetic/social upbringing". His body is fully determined by the interplay of the laws of physics. So is his mind (if you are a materialist). So is his society. So is his culture. The end result of all that is that we don't choose anything, what seems to be a choice is the result of fixed, extrinsic causes. We are not free.

Due to your confusion between metaphysical "determinism" and physical determinism you have trapped yourself into a philosophical dead end.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have stated my objections against this view in the last few posts, but you'll find many threads in philosophyforums that take that view as real. If you want to explore it in more detail, check them out, the threads with names like "why we have no free will".

I don't agree (as stated before). Our free will depends on using science and rational thinking to overcome genetic and social programming.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The point of all that is to show that if determinism is true -- and Evolution is deterministic, since it follows the (deterministic) laws of physics -- then there can be no "overcoming" of anything, because the "overcomer" is also determined by genetic/social factors. There is only one way to allow an individual (a self) to "overcome" anything -- by postulating freedom at the intellectual level. Not "operational freedom", but rather real, metaphysical freedom: freedom from the deterministic chain of causation. However, this freedom can't be produced by deterministic causes (or it will be deterministic freedom, an oxymoron). Evolution is composed only of deterministic causes. Therefore, evolution can't produce freedom from the chain of causation (being itself within the chain of causation).

Again: Due to your confusion between metaphysical "determinism" and physical determinism you have trapped yourself into a philosophical dead end.

The "overcomer" is only "determined" by genetic and social forces if they allow themselves to be and do not use the only tool we have for discovering "reality" (that is, not colored by our intuitive, instinctive and emotional programming). That tool is science and rational, critical thinking.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And if "science and rational thought can overcome genetic and social programming", then science and rational thought can't be determined by genetic and social programming. This is my point. If you agree with it, you must discard the idea that "science and rational thought" is a result of genetic and social programming. If it were, it couldn't overcome it.

Think well about that. "That tool is science". Where does science come from? Is it genetic programming? Is it social programming? Or is it something else, something free, something not determined? I think that the third answer is correct. But the third answer separates rational thought from the evolutionary process; rationality is no longer a result of evolutionary processes.

Why does a cat decide to sit there as opposed to here? Life is not completely programmed (predictable), even for a cat.

Yes, rational thought is not "determined" by genetic and social programming- but it is an outcome of that

programming since science is a human invention (or do you think science is a gift from gods or aliens?). But notice how difficult it is to overcome that genetic and social programming- it takes years of education and learning to resist those all too seductive and easy emotions, intuitions and instincts. Rational thought is very "unnatural" for humans- it is not our nature to be rational. We have to struggle to learn to be scientific.

As far as your question goes- Why do we struggle against our programming and nature to create rational thought? Because we BENEFIT from it. Science provides material comfort and also answers the endless child questions in all of us- why is the grass green, why is the sky blue, where did we come from? This latter purpose replaces all the answers that we used to get from religion and stories or angry or vengeful (or compassionate) gods.

But now that we know from evolution that there is no pupose or meaning to life other than that which we create- we can leave behind those fears and realize that it's up to us, and us alone- no gods, demons or ghosts to guide us or haunt us in our struggle against entropy.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But it should be, if determinism is all there is to it. For both cats and humans. You affirm the existence of a non-deterministic principle throughout your last posts, even while you deny it. Curious. Think well about it and you'll see that you're already well advanced on the road to destroy materialism in your own worldview

Whenever you say that "we" (what is "we"? The product of blind forces?) produce meaning and purpose, you are debunking materialism.

Yeah right.

Once again you confuse metaphysical determinism with physical determinism- emphasis on the "confused".

Yes, the human species (and all species) are the product of "blind forces". Or are you now becoming a creationist? Pretty soon you'll be thumping the bible with radrook?

Again it comes down to the supernaturalistic fallacy- because you don't understand (or can't imagine) how evolution can create extended consciousness or how through the painful, hardwon and slow progress of learning and critical thought, we can see beyond our genetic and social programming- you think there must be something supernatural going on.

You really ought to read Dennett's "The Kinds of Free Will Worth Wanting". He discusses these exact issues at length. Your position is exactly equal that of the Vitalists in the 19th century. Because they couldn't understand- it had to be supernatural. Start reading and learning or science will leave you and radrook with your superstitions.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But it should be, if determinism is all there is to it. For both cats and humans.

I am probably being too hard on you- so I'll add that determinism can be either mean predicatable or unpredictable. Just because it's deterministic does not mean that it's predictable.

Philosophically, one might think of science as analogous to evolution in the sense that in evolution, random mutations are selected for by natural selection- the environmental reality is the test. In science our "random" or at least arbitrary instincts, intuitions and emotions are selected for by empirical evidence- the

natural reality is the test. Hence blind processes in both cases can (through selective and cumulative changes) cause events to occur that are very much successful in a struggle against entropy and randomness.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You are defending a contradictory worldview here. "we can overcome the process of programming" and "we are all the result of the process of programming, and no other ingredient comes into our makeup" are so obviously contradictory that I marvel that you don't realize it. Ask any programmer .

Well it would be contradictory of me- if I had actually said that. But even though you used quotation marks, I didn't say that. I never said it's only programming- as I've already said- rational scientific learning (in humans at least) also has evolved to create real free will- but only to the extent that we inform ourselves using science. Everytime you imply the supernatural you fall back on your superstitions. Rational thinking means using more than your emotional supernatural reflexes.

Marvel away.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And I never claimed it was, in fact I said the contrary You are arguing with a figment of your imagination. Read what I wrote, and think about it. Don't let your automatic kneejerk response to what is perceived as superstition and religion win over you. Exercise your freedom, man! Think about it, as a free agent should.

Just as you have no rational theory of the origins of morality- you also have no rational theory of free will. You should consider carefully why it is that you have no scientific theory of these problems. All you have is your certainty that it can't be just material.

So if it's not material- what is it? Hmmmm...?

I know. You could answer the question if you were allowed to "bring God into the equation". And that, my friend, is a direct quote from YOU.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Please, pray tell, where does rational scientific learning come from?

Pray tell? Let me guess- from God?

Or do you prefer the 2001 Space Odyssey story? A black monolith from space programmed an early hominid to use a big stick?

Or how about this: Baldwinian evolutionary processes. Think about it yourself- man of faith.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Not quite. All I have is an argument that haven't been answered by you or by anyone else in this thread, that states that rational thinking (and morality) can't be caused by blind forces (such as evolutionary process). Hey, it may look as a small thing, but an argument that can't be refuted seems rather big to me.

Now, if you'll accept the argument (big laughter in the sidelines), you may try to explain this phenomenon in any way you like. Me, I like God. I can't prove it, but it explains all the data. You can believe in aliens, fairies, or something like that if you wish. But the point is, you can't believe that purely deterministic processes did it.

Of course, you can also try to refute the argument. Good luck (and I mean it). I have tried to do it for some years, now.

I can't refute the argument that God created the universe 5 seconds ago. Can you? No, I thought not. So why do you believe evolution occurred? Because supernatural explanations ARE NOT NECESSARY for evolution to ACTUALLY have occurred.

And if you read evolutionary psychology- I particularly recommend "The Evolutionary Origins of Morality" as an excellent review book on the subject, you will find defended a completely naturalistic explanation of primate and human morality. Yes, God could have created morality with Moses and the 10 commandments- but is that necessary?- no. It could have evolved naturally and materialistically (and there is reams of scientific data in support of this theory), so we don't need to invoke burning bushes and other "miracles" to explain how it occurred.

And if you read cognitive studies by Dennett, Clark and the Churchlands, you will find defended a completely naturalistic explanation of consciousness. Could god have created consciousness?- sure he could- according to men of faith he can do anything (by definition only of course). But is it necessary to believe in "vitalistic sparks" or other fairy tales anymore? No.

Your god is merely a god of the gaps- what you don't understand- must be supernatural. I suppose that when science has finally a full and complete natural description for human morality and consciousness, you will simply have to find something else to attribute to god. Good luck to you and all men of faith.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

This is a deterministic process, right? Then it can't do it.

As for the choice between Gods and Monoliths, it's a personal matter . Heck, you may even choose nothing at all and label it "a mystery". But what you can't do is to say that a deterministic process does it -- that you can't state without contradiction.

Well that's your belief anyway. Science on the other hand has evidence that it did occur naturally through mammalian and primate genetic and social evolution. Read "Evolutionary Origins of Morality" edited by Leonard Katz if you are interested in empirical, detailed and referenced scientific studies on this subject, my man of faith.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Can you refute that you are using rational thought? This is what you are doing, probeman. This is the extent of your contradiction. If it doesn't bother you, it bothers me.

Me using rational thought? Well thank-you. I do try but usually don't succeed.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Forget about science and evolutionary psychology -- and even Evolution itself. This argument is logical, not scientific. It therefore has more weight. You can't make experiments that prove that A is not-A, but this is what you are claiming to be the goal now. To establish scientifically what is a contradiction.

No- I like evolutionary science. It has facts in support of it's ideas. Logic on the other hand is far inferior to science- it rests upon unproven premises as opposed to evidence. That's why philosophers never get results.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

By the way, forget about God either (you really have some issues with God, the mere mention of Him makes you mad). God is also not involved in the argument.

Thank God.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Originally Posted by probeman

Logic on the other hand is far inferior to science- it rests upon unproven premises as opposed to evidence. That's why philosophers never get results.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The most superstitious sentence I've yet seen in this forum (and probably in my life). You really should think about it before you post things like that.

I stand by the above statement 100%. Well maybe 99% - but I can't think of any "results" from pure philosophy offhand. That doesn't mean that philosophy is worthless- as philosophers like Daniel Dennett have demonstrated, philosophy INFORMED by science can be wonderfully useful.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

Science is always unproved. Anything proved by induction and empiricism, can only be shown to be probable in the future. It never provides certainty.

I agree 110%. But logic based on unproven premises (e.g. it is possible for God to exist) are worthless.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dreamweaver**

This has been your intent from the very beginning. You didn't even consider Mariner's refutation of your argument, you started talking about the Religion that he adheres to, which is completely irrelevant. Like I said, the issue here is evolution.

Wrong- I wanted to discuss the scientific basis of morality. He disagrees with that position without any scientific basis. Look, the guy has no theory, the guy has no evidence. He only has his beliefs. That is the kernel of this debate. Sorry to say.

It's just like the creationists that just KNOW it couldn't be blind natural forces. ID'ers use this same approach. They don't mention God- but the implication is clear enough. Mariner is one step on the road to

understanding- he does accept the evolution of life. But he balks, as do many, at the further implications of darwinian selection. That evolution, through Baldwinian and social and language processes is capable of evolving morality and consciousness.

The scientific fields are there, research is done everyday, amazing results are constantly forthcoming in these two areas. I'm not making this up- but one has to be willing to do the reading and learning. Even philosophers will have to eventually have to come to grips with these new ideas. The best place to start with someone like you might be "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" by Dennett. He discusses in detail the fears and unsettling implications of Darwinian selection in these traditionally religiously or philosophically explained areas of human activity. As Dennett says, the shock waves of Copernicus are just fading away today, and it will take as long for the shock of Darwin's ideas to sink into the human psyche. First with man's place in the evolution of life and finally to the evolution of our own consciousness and morality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Sorry to say, I have an argument, you have nothing. Only your beliefs. Which were at first quite misguided, including many errors about genetics and group selection (you can't say you haven't learned something from our posts). Now they are closer to the consensus position of evolutionary scientists.

Oh I've learned a lot- and that is my purpose in this thread since I will be teaching some courses on these issues. So thank-you. I also expect you have learned that morality has an evolutionary (genetic and social) basis that could be improved through a scientific understanding of those origins. I even think that you learned that group social cooperation can have an evolutionary benefit.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

However, I still believe (man of faith that I am) that you'll get to the issue instead of complaining about my faith, my superstitions, my height, my bad breath...

You have bad breath too? You poor guy.

Well my suggestion is that you stay home and read "Evolutionary Origins of Morality". I find it to be very well put together. For example, from the first essay by Flack and Waal:

"Darwin (1871, 1872), who was familiar with the thinking of Hume and Smith, advocated a perspective on human morality in line with these ideas in that he saw human nature as neither good nor bad but neutral. He recognized that moral systems enable individuals to reconcile what Hume saw as two sides to human nature-- the dark, competitive side, which is dominated by greed and competition, and the 'sentimental,' co-operative side, which is marked by social instincts and compassion. To Darwin, this dualism in human nature arose from the evolution of two strategies (the individual and the social) that together provided a method by which individuals can obtain limited resources. Thus Darwin recognized that moral systems not only govern the expression and use of these strategies but also reflect their interaction."

Wow. I think I said something just like that a few pages ago.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

While we're at that, how can a process that is the result of evolutionary processes aim at "results"? Shouldn't it aim at survival?

Survival is definitely a result I would say. In fact I would say that enhanced survival is one nice result of (and probably reason for) science.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Good luck down there, within the cave, probeman. I'll see you tomorrow. Perhaps you'll eventually convince

yourself to avert your eyes from the shadows in the wall and look at the real world .

How poetic. So you've never had evidence on your side, and now you've run out of arguments as well?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Sorry to say, I have an argument, you have nothing. Only your beliefs.

I just re-read this I and had to laugh. Yup, I have nothing but my beliefs. And of course all the web articles, papers and books that I have cited, quoted and/or referred you to. And have you cited one article or paper to support your position? No.

You have already admitted you have no theory- just a God did it "explanation".

It's funny that you assert it is I that only has beliefs, when it is you that has provided no theory, and no evidence. Don't you think that it's time to admit to your instinctive, emotional, intuitive supernaturalistic fallacy. The fallacy that prevents you from considering the empirical evidence for the evolution of mammalian and primate morality through social and language mechanisms into human morality? From my quotes one can see that even 150 years ago Darwin knew this much. What is your excuse today with so much more evidence in support of this idea, through evolutionary psychology and cognitive science?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Thanks, but that was Plato, not me. And I only need one argument, if it is unrefuted; that's all it takes.

Should I ask for a source? After all you screwed up your Aristotle.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

By the way, the difference between the "no one can prove the universe is 5 seconds old" argument and this one is that the former has no practical consequences. If you want to believe that the universe is 5 seconds old, be my guest, it won't change any opinions. But if you want to believe that deterministic processes (including, but not limited to, Evolution) engendered rational thought, then you'll have to refute the argument, or indulge in contradiction.

The contradiction is only in **your** head. You desperately need to hold God and Science together somehow. But one is uncertainty with evidence and the other is certainty without evidence. Guess which is which.

So now you claim that rational thought requires the supernatural? Man, you are pathetic. No evidence again I suppose of course?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In a sense, for one to have faith in Reason, one must have faith in God, and this is why Science is a child of the Christian West (a little thing for you to bite). Science is a product of Christianity, and of the view of the ordered universe supported by Christianity.

Your Greek philosophers were Christians? And now I suppose one has to be Christian to do science? You scare me more than the creationists.

It is not I that is trying to make science into a religion- I know that science is just a tool for determining when our intuitive, emotional and instinctive programming has mislead us.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Summing up, belief in science is not logical without belief in God. (I'm pushing you to the limit here, hehe). Induction is not foolproof, but science is based on induction alone. It is only the underlying assumption that the world is understandable and that beings like ourselves can understand it (assumptions that need God to hold water) that sustains Science. Try to justify Science logically without those two assumptions; try to explain why those two assumptions are true.

"science is based on induction alone"? Now you've lost it completely. Belief in God (just another word for "I don't understand something") doesn't explain why those assumptions are true. It only explains your need to have certainty- and that, my friend, is incompatible with science. That's your contradiction, not mine.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Note, this does not mean that science can't work unless there is a God. It means that for science to be believable, the God hypothesis must be accepted, even if unconsciously (as is obviously your case)

Oh, obviously.

Well, you just blew your rational credentials with me on this last statement here. So I guess all those 95% of Nobel Laureates that are atheist are just deluding themselves, because you say it's obvious they actually believe in God? Jesus Christ, I feel sorry for you and your need for "caveman" superstitions. Fortunately your God of the gaps continues to shrink as scientific knowledge advances. I look forward to the day when it disappears completely and humanity steps fully into the light of rationality without the fear of what they will see.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, if that's the best you've got -- an unsubstantiated complaint of my "confusions", and to be frank such a muddled complaint that I can hardly believe you read the posts -- then it is a sad day for Atheist/Materialist Science.

It's the most I'm willing to waste my time at the moment. Read "Evolutionary Origins of Morality"- and then let's talk again. (I had to laugh when Dreamweaver claimed that my referencing of published papers and other works showed how weak my argument was. I would have thought that the mere existence of such an active and fruitful area of scientific research on this topic shows that I'm not just making this up- but not to believers in the supernatural I guess.)

As for your failure to understand how evolution could deterministically but unpredictably create the diversity of life and proto and human consciousness and proto and human morality you should consider Dennett's "Darwin's Dangerous Idea". I know you claimed to have read it- and that you said it's excellent. But since Dennett (and Darwin) is so clearly a materialist- how do you reconcile this contradiction? Is Dennett also an "unconscious believer in god"?

The fact that rational thought and science is clearly capable of enhancing human survival (and at 6.4 billion clearly has), and that the proposed mechanism for the evolution of these "good tricks" of consciousness could be "evolution" through Baldwinian and evolving social processes is something that you have completely avoided answering.

Is that muddled enough for you?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

If your concept of free will depends, somehow, on processes that are essentially magical in nature, then of course you would have to conclude that mindless, directionless, somewhat deterministic evolutionary processes can't produce it. That would be true merely by definition—big freakin' deal. The religious conception of free will is often such a thing, conceived as the ability of an immaterial soul to essentially pilot the physical body while not being subject to the causal powers of matter itself.

If you have no such concept of free will, and define it as a collection of talents a creature possesses to get

by in the world, then things are different. So it's really a matter of definition. Probeman and myself chose to understand these concepts naturalistically, and (apparently) Mariner does not.

Big freakin' deal. It has nothing to do with science, and everything to do with philosophy. The point, then, wouldn't be to beg questions by citing or refuting scholarly works on evolution. Instead, it should be a matter of why someone would choose one concept of free will over the alternatives.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If you "define free will as a collection of talents a creature possesses to get by in the world" (a definition that would include fins and wings :eek) you abdicate the possibility of reaching truth. And then your definition of free will is false, since you have just abdicated the possibility of reaching truth.

What in carnation are you talking about???? Since when is the concept of free will linked somehow to the concept of "reaching truth"? Or is this eccentric gem something you cooked up in a previous post? If so, can you give me the number? I'm being a very bad boy and doing all this in between tasks at work, so I can't go back and search through all the posts.

And yes, I understand free will to be no more than a vague term we wave about when referring to various cognitive talents, so I would see it exactly on par with fins and wings.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote by Probeman: It is you that needs to research the rapidly expanding scientific field of evolutionary psychology and see that there is already impressive evidence for the evolution of human morality from mammalian social structures starting with the mother-child bond and evolving through primate proto morality and with the development of language and social cooperation.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And yet, hope still lingers... perhaps probeman will eventually realize that Mariner does not disagree with anything that was said here in this paragraph, but that he is saying something completely different. Who knows? Hope springs eternal!

Let me get this straight. You now concede to my point that human morality has evolved origins, but you are changing the argument to saying that the human mind or human thought can't have an evolutionary origin?

This just gets stranger and stranger...

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Refer back to when we agreed that males are more likely to be unfaithful than females, because of genetic propensities. Morality is influenced by genetics and society, but it isn't determined by them; if it is determined by

them, it isn't morality.

I can see where this is going. Into an argument about when does "determined by" grade into "influenced by". Even worse, you are arbitrarily defining morality as something that only humans do. In any case, I think that you might be surprised at how much of the behavior in humans (that you imagine is rationally decided), is actually pre-programmed "short-cut" mechanisms (determined or influenced, take your pick).

Why do these "short-cuts exist? (E.g., you get what you pay for, therefore if it's expensive it must be good.) Because in the real world it is impossible for an animal to have all the information necessary to make a 100% confidence level decision. It would be wasteful of time and other resources (think evolved social behavior) for all of us to become experts in buying turquoise jewelry. That is why when a dealer accidentally MARKED UP the price on some cheap turquoise- it sold like hot cakes. "Gee Marge, this is really expensive- it must be the high quality stuff". This example is from a great book called "Influence: Science and Practice" by Robert B. Cialdini.

The point being that nothing behavioral is strictly DETERMINED in genetic/social evolution (even in chimps). We base our behavior on evolved emotions to situations, "click-whirr" shortcut mechanisms, and (especially in the case of humans) learned "good-tricks". Yes, these are genetic influences and pre-dispositions that are modified through Baldwinian selective learning processes for enhancing human survival (and more recently for enhancing pleasantness, as James Petts pointed out).

Would it make you feel better if I add religious laws, taboos and all the other attempts by humans to negotiate morality through recorded history as examples of social evolution of morality? Why exactly is it do you think, that most religious people consider the use of birth control or gay sexual behavior immoral? Where do you think these examples of rational, thoughtful, human morality came from? Was it determined, influenced or rationally decided? I'd like to know what you think.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Just as rational thought can't be determined by genetics and society, and if it is determined by genetics and society, it isn't rational thought.

There is no question that the most successful rational process on the planet (science) is filled with irrational and emotional human behavior. Are you so sure that "rational thought" is anything more than an imaginary idealism of yours? But again- you have merely defined a problem out of existence by making up your own exclusionary (non-scientific) definition. Let's see how someone else might discuss this issue of the origin of morality (from EOoM):

"But, while there is no denying that we are creatures of intellect, it is also clear that we are born with powerful inclinations and emotions that bias our thinking and behavior. It is this area that many of the continuities with other animals lie. A chimpanzee stroking and patting a victim of attack or sharing her food with a hungry companion shows attitudes that hard are to distinguish from those of a person taking a crying child in the arms or doing volunteer work in a soup kitchen. To dismiss such evidence as a product of subjective interpretation by 'romantically inspired naturalists' or **to classify all animal behavior as based on instinct and human behavior as proof of moral decency is misleading (see Kummer, 1979). First of all, it is uneconomic in that it assumes different processes for similar behavior in closely related species. Second it ignores the growing body of evidence for mental complexity in the chimpanzee, including the possibility of empathy.**"

I guess my question to you is: how (based on the amazing evidence for the similarities between animal and human "moralistic-like" behaviors), can you be so sure that there is anything so fundamentally different between them?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

The notion that reason and truth finding are impossible in a world where thoughts have material causes is utterly absurd. I've gone over the original post arguing for this idea time and again, and while there is plenty wrong with it, I think I've isolated the worst move Mariner makes.

The conjuring trick basically occurs here, between:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If the D-hypothesis is true, then there is no link at all between thoughts and reality except for the causal chain, and we may as well get ready to think a completely different thought once the causal chain is tinkered with.

And the next sentence:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In other words, if the D-hypothesis is true, then no thought can be said to be true.

That's quite a leap to make, especially without an argument to back it up. Mariner offers a skeleton of an argument, but doesn't follow through with the necessary steps.

One part of the skeleton is the assertion in one of the introductory propositions: the idea that thoughts are true or false only if they refer to the real world. As a sort of sound-bite epistemological principle, it's fine as it is. But the conjuring trick referenced above has no hope of getting off the ground unless Mariner can also show that truth-making "reference" to the world is incompatible with material causes.

A weak attempt to do this comes with the true-enough observation that when we discuss our beliefs, we reference not the voluminous causal chains in the world which lead to them, but give reasons (1 + 1 = 2 because mathematicians have defined it so). Mariner's conjuring trick asks us to believe that we talk this way because causes and reasons are different things, standing in a relation of mutual contradiction. But this bald assertion needs to be backed up, not simply accepted at face value. At any rate, I can show why it is false.

I'll take an example from my addiction to video games, which often keeps me away from more intellectual pursuits like this wonderful forum. Lately, I've become hooked on the massively multiplayer superhero game, *City of Heroes* (the reason it's taken me so long to respond, quite honestly). So there I was, on a mission as the dark vigilante, Necrodyne, and I approached a thug who was stealing some lady's purse. He turned around, the woman ran away, and he came at me with an ax.

Here are two true sentences which could be said about this event:

The animated image of an imaginary thug turning around and attacking me was caused the changing pixels on my monitor, and those changes were in turn caused by (. . .long technical description of changing magnetic and electrical nodes taking place in my computer's memory and CPU. . .).

The virtual thug turned around and attacked me because I got too close and he noticed me. Oh, plus, he's a virtual criminal and I'm a virtual crime fighter, so we have an adversarial relationship.

Both of these descriptions are accurate, but no one but a programmer would have any use to use the first one—the second's language much more efficiently captures the patterns we most often care about. Indeed, the thug's reactions are certainly caused by deterministic events in my computer and the server, but simultaneously, they are also quite sensible reactions, given the state of affairs in the game's virtual world: Necrodyne is a threat to the thug's virtual interests, and the thug truthfully perceived that Necrodyne was creeping up on him, then reacted accordingly (and fatally, as it turned out; he was no match for me).

Now, I'm not trying to say that computer AI of this kind has beliefs, desires, and perceptions in any robust

sense. That is not my point. But, whether playing against a virtual thug, virtual soldier, or chess playing machine, it is always your best bet to grant such intentional states, to treat such systems as if they had genuine desires and beliefs, because doing so will aid you: it will help you bring out real patterns worth paying attention to, and make predictions about what such systems will do next. It is always possible-in-principle to make the same predictions from the purely physical stance, just needlessly complicated. Intentional language does the job much more efficiently.

Virtual thugs and soldiers, despite having behaviors being obviously caused by deterministic events, successfully perceive, track, and deal with events in their imaginary worlds. I've been chased by bots who "saw" me, they've "figured out" that when I ran behind a wall I didn't just disappear, and they've accurately shot in my direction even as I moved. In other words, their AI—when it is good AI, which is rare—is able to give them truthful judgments about virtual reality. And if being deterministically caused is no barrier to accurate belief states in a virtual world, then it is no barrier in the real world, either.

In other words, a thought can easily represent affairs in the world even while being caused by events in that world. This is essentially the heart of a philosophically pragmatist approach to epistemology and truth: a belief is said to accurately represent, or be true, only to the extent that it helps an organism get by in life, whether its goals are mating, finding food, or avoiding danger.

And here, by the way, is where we circle right back to evolution: pragmatism as a philosophy has, more than any other school of thought in the field, always been concerned with evaluating old philosophical ideas in light of the notion that we are evolved animals. To the pragmatist, true beliefs really are like fins and fur, caused by and meant to deal with events in the material world. The mistake Mariner has made, at heart, is to treat different techniques people use to talk (giving reasons versus giving causes) as if each technique somehow matches up with a different part of reality. The actual situation is that each technique serves different ends, but ultimately refers to the same events in the world, highlighting different patterns in each case.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Mariner, I gave an alternate vision of what truth amounts to which is immune to every point you've just made: true beliefs are true by virtue of their effectiveness in helping an organism deal with its environment. This way of understanding truth applies whether we are dealing with a virtual or real world, and doesn't lead us to foolishly reject the "D-hypothesis" (which at any rate is tantamount to rejecting neurology and embracing a supernatural vision of the mind).

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Is this post of yours true, or effective in helping an organism deal with its environment?

Well, yes—and in this case, we being well educated language using animals, that environment consists of ideas and conflicting theories.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You also speak of "accurate belief states". Another conjuring trick, it seems. What makes a belief state accurate?

The same thing—helping an organism achieve its goals in whatever environment it finds itself in.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Defining truth as purely subjective defeats itself, Faustus. You should know that. A pragmatic definition of truth is self-contradictory.

First off, where is the subjectivity in my definition? By locating truth right in the interactions between an organism and its environment, I make it as objective as possible. Secondly, if there is a contradiction involved, then it should be easy to point out what the two conflicting claims are and where I made them. Just calling something a contradiction is lazy.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I just said they are different things, and we can't derive reasons from causes. Can we? Care to explain how?

This is utterly beside the point. Reason-talk and cause-talk can about the same things at different levels of analysis whether or not one can derive one from the other. In some cases it might just be effectively impossible, and in others literally so. Big deal. Can you derive the next move of a chess playing computer by an analysis of the changing microscopic picture of the CPU? Maybe, but it's just easier to think of it as an agent actively attempting to win the game, and work from that stance instead, where the concepts involve reasons, beliefs, and intentions, not physical causes.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The question then is, 'is the universe a virtual universe, and are you a virtual human?'

Oh, so that's the question now? I couldn't care less about such purely academic issues. That's the sort of thing that amazes freshmen philosophy students while they stay up late smoking dope. I left that stage behind decades ago, but it was indeed fun for a while.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Try to phrase a programmer's description of the programmer's description and you'll see the problem.

Didn't understand what they heck you were getting at the first time, either. Nothing has changed.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

How can you know that your statement relates to the universe, if you are right?

Because Probleman and I aren't sitting around confusing ourselves about evolution, morality, truth, and free will, whereas you are. Your view leads to mystery, befuddlement, and (tacitly) an appeal to forces that, in the end, must be supernatural. Ours does not, and so is the more effective approach. (What is the rejection of the "D-hypothesis", ultimately, but an all out rejection of neurology and biological causality as we know it? The fact that materialism has been invoked as bad-guy demonstrates that a fear of scientific contradiction of religious belief is involved at some level.)

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

"I just said they are different things, and we can't derive reasons from causes. Can we? Care to explain how?"

"Thanks for making the point of the argument really clear. The question then is, 'is the universe a virtual universe, and are you a virtual human?'"

"Try to phrase a programmer's description of the programmer's description and you'll see the problem."

"How can you know that your statement relates to the universe, if you are right?"

We have already given you a material mechanism for determining "reasons"- species survival and social pleasantness. You keep saying that's not enough, but saying that material causes can't create reasons is like saying metabolism can't create hunger and therefore we can't have created fine dining. You base every decision you make everyday using these mechanisms (consciously or not)- the fact that you (and other religious believers) purport to base your decisions on some undemonstratable supernatural "reasons" is merely the "placebo" effect of religious belief (itself a survival mechanism and meme).

The main problem with your supernatural "causes" is that, as Laplace once said to Napoleon, "he found that hypothesis unnecessary". Today we are beginning to find that even morality and consciousness are explainable in solely materialistic terms. If science does continue to find mechanisms to explain these aspects of humanity, your supernatural "reasons" will become even more limited in application, just as they have for the last 500 years. What will you be left with then?

I realize this idea is unsettling to all of us: that humans (and all animal) are nothing more than very complicated organic based self-replicating computers- but this is the ultimate implication of Darwin's "dangerous idea" and all the scientific evidence points that way. Here is a conversation Dennett had with Alan Alda on PBS on this question:

ALDA: I can see how that's a revolutionary idea. Why is it dangerous?

DENNETT: Because a lot of people believe, and not foolishly, that if that's true then somehow life has no meaning. They're afraid that their own lives won't mean anything, that morality will evaporate, that the whole pageant of human existence somehow depends on not giving up this sort of top down idea.

ALDA: And yet there's this process that it relies on, which seems to be as great and supervising a power, in a way, as the old handyman's idea was.

DENNETT: Well, you can't get something for nothing. Design is expensive. There are costs to developing something wonderful, and what Darwin saw was that those costs could be distributed over billions of years, and all you needed was this one little ratchet of Darwinism, which is, when you get a little bit of good design, you hang onto it. That's the principle of natural selection. The whole process of natural selection is itself wonderful. It has to be wonderful because it makes wonderful products. But it is composed of elements that are themselves mindless, just little patterns of order in the universe that makes this possible.

ALDA: Do you suppose some people feel that there's a lack of purpose to life if life is only the way Darwin describes it?

DENNETT: I think a lot of people prefer the traditional idea that we get our purpose from on high, somehow. I think that the important idea here is that you want there to be something more important than you are, to give you meaning and to make you happy. My advice if you want to be happy is, find something more important than you are and work for it.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

First of all, nice to see you back here .

Thanks. I enjoyed the discussion between you and Faustus.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The problem with that analogy with metabolism and dining is that you don't dine in order to explain dining. However, you are using reason in order to explain reason. Therefore, when you explain reason, you are implicitly affirming that you are right about it. But if reason is a trick to foster species survival and social pleasantness, then it is not right at all. And yet you claim that it is right.

Nice try, but the analogy works just fine. Why is it not "right"? If anything is to be considered "right", then survival must be a part of determining that. In other words- the only morality that survives is the morality of that which survives.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The fact that you can't seem to understand the (quite simple) contradiction that this entails is proof of the placebo effect of scientific belief -- and I'm not being merely facetious when I say that (ok, I'm being facetious, but I also have a point). Science, according to your view of reason as a useful trick, is forcefully no more than a belief.

I see no contradiction. I may not be very bright but it seems to me that any useful trick, including morality, consciousness and rationality, that enhances survival is not merely a belief because it has been tested in reality. This is what Faustus seemed to be trying to say earlier. That scientific theories and rational thinking (and emotional thinking for that matter) succeed in being useful to enhancing our survival shows that these are not merely arbitrary beliefs. Even most religious beliefs are not entirely arbitrary (just your silly metaphysical ones of course). Religious prohibitions on limiting reproduction are excellent examples of evolution creating morality that enhances survival. Daimasio makes an interesting point that even emotions are essentially involved in rational decision making processes in humans.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Perhaps you don't realize the consequences of that sentence. It means that if the hypothesis is necessary, then one must accept it. Are you ready to do that, probeman? Be honest with yourself and ask this question. You don't have to answer it here. You may even believe that this hypothesis may never be proven necessary (which is a belief, unbacked by anything). But my question is, "assuming that the hypothesis is proven to be necessary, would you accept it?" Really accept it?

I'm not worried in saying that if science demonstrates that supernatural processes are required to explain morality or consciousness then I would certainly accept that. I would have to as a scientist. But since no human can apparently (even in principle) suggest an experiment to demonstrate the necessity of supernatural mechanisms, I am not worried.

Remember your total lack of a theory or evidence for your idea of absolute morality? There's a reason for that.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'll probably be left with the same contradiction that I pointed out to you, that shows quite conclusively that reason can't be explained in materialistic terms -- it can't be the result of a cause-and-effect chain. Morality is, as I've said, a subset of this conclusion. If a scientist said that he had proven that A is not-A, I'd shrug it off -- though this is more likely to come from post-modernists than from scientists.

Conclusively? Sorry- I see the assertion- but no evidence in support of your position. Why can't reason be evolved for? It enhances survival after all.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

There is only one group being "unsettled" here, probeman, composed by you and Faustus. I would be unsettled, too, if my whole worldview was shown to be based on a contradiction. As a matter of fact, I was unsettled when I realized that, though I had the good sense of never believe in materialism; even before I had any religion in me, the sentence "all things can be explained in material terms, and this is obviously and unquestionably true so that any hypothesis to the contrary is ridiculous" -- a good summary of materialism (and the position that it generates in devout believers) -- seemed to be... ridiculous. But I was unsettled, all the same. Truth has this knack for being unsettling.

You mean Christian Truth? I laugh in your general direction.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Go, Dennett! Surely right. It makes "wonderful products". It can't be said to produce "all that is found in the universe". To find something that is not the product of natural selection is no slight on poor Darwin.

So we're back to "goddidit" are we?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, according to you, if this advice is true advice, then it is merely a tool for increasing survival. But "finding something more important than you are" is apparently at odds with that, isn't it? What is more important than you are may quite well contradict with survival. (As well as being a bit of metaphysics thrown in for good measure by a materialist, since "importance" is hardly a material concept). So this piece of advice is, according to your definition of truth, false .

Not at all. Creating a cure for cancer is greater than myself. From a survival perspective of course.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Two points (which were already made earlier): survival is not morality (empirically -- look at human behavior and you'll see it), and survival can't be "right" because "being right" is a metaphysical property, related to Truth. Tell me, how can a molecule "be right"? How can a bone "be right"? Or rather, how can a molecule/bone "be wrong"?

A bone can be wrong if it's a broken bone. It does not enhance survival. A morality that enhances survival is "right" by the very fact that the surviving moral behavior gets replicated.

I look empirically at humanity and I see people doing whatever they have to, in order to survive- be that selfishness, cheating, honesty, cooperation, polygamy, murder or even genocide. Whatever they can get away with. This view of whatever it is that we decide to tolerate or to punish, actually is our morality, explains what we see in the world. The fact that some profit by cheating and some profit by honesty (very few it would seem), merely shows how negotiated and subjective morality actually is.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The fact that some thoughts are wrong disproves the position that thoughts are a result of causes. Molecules and bones are the result of causes. Thoughts aren't. Tell me, what does it mean when you say "this thought is wrong"? Does it mean that "it does not foster survival"? Then your theory is wrong . After all, religious people reproduce more than non-religious people .

Really Mariner, how pathetic an attempt to avoid the issue. Yes, religious people understand unconsciously the importance of the Darwinian imperative. The morality of the survivors, is the morality that survives.

Why is it do you think that religions encourage reproduction? This time don't avoid the question.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But "tested in reality" is what all thoughts are, constantly. The fact that it is "tested in reality" simply means that the thought exists. You have to explain why some thoughts are closer to reality and others aren't. Your theory of thoughts doesn't allow for that distinction, all of them are the result of blind causation, including your theory of thought, and therefore there is no ground for any conclusion about the correctness of a thought.

Totally wrong. "Tested in reality" means that it works to enhance survival or usefulness (same thing usually), not just that "it exists". Did you really mean to say this? Some thoughts are closer to reality because they seem to actually produce results and predictions consistent with observations of nature. This is philosophy of science 101.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Consider that your theory is right. Any thought is right in the proportion that it fosters survival. Then "knowledge" must only be practical, never theoretical. But your theory is (not surprisingly) theoretical! The conclusion is that

your theory is only right if it fosters survival. But how can one judge this? Surely not by "criteria of correctness", what fosters survival is measured by the results in the coming generations. So we can't know what is right (=fosters survival), except retroactively.

There are so many bad assumptions in your extrapolation of evolution to morality that I don't know where to start. So I'll just point out that humans often learn retroactively- just look at plane crashes. But the point is that we can make predictions- and they are often right if they are scientifically grounded. Airplane crashes are a perfect example of morality in action. Some airplane maintenance supervisor somewhere at this moment is weighing his future pay raise received for cutting costs with the increased risk in component failure and trying to decide how to optimize both.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

So, if your theory is right, it is without any grounds to be pronounced right. This is the contradiction. (And probably, as I joked above, religion is "righter" than this theory anyway, since religious people reproduce more).

I agree that rational intelligence is an experiment in gene/meme survival that may not pan out. It would appear to be better to have billions of starving believers than a few well educated and well fed non-believers so far as gene or meme replication is concerned. This is exactly what most religions are counting on. Of course educated non-reproducers are also competing in this meme survival game by teaching rational ideas like science to the sons and daughters of the uneducated masses. Which because these ideas confer a survival advantage also- is eagerly sought after.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

To link truth to survival, as (I hope!) you see by now, is a self-defeating move. It means that we have got no truth. (Remember, environmental change may happen at any moment, and your theory -- even if true (which is impossible, since it denies "truth") -- can be disproven tomorrow. What then? Was it ever a true theory?)

Just as science seeks "truth" but not "Truth", humans seek "morality" not "Morality". Just as there is no absolute "Truth", so there is no absolute "Morality". Your search for purported absolutes in the universe is merely an attempt to force your provincial and chauvinistic beliefs on others, just like divine kings, Nazis and infallible popes, by claiming that only they have access to the absolute, unquestionable "Truth".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Because if reason evolved, it couldn't conclude, with certainty, that reason evolved. An evolved reason can't ever reach certainty, about anything (including the axioms of logic).

That's right- nothing is 100% certain. But given that, some things are less probable than others.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

My only point, throughout this thread, is that it can't be Natural Selection, because Natural Selection is a subset of mechanistic cause-and-effect, and mechanistic cause-and-effect couldn't have done it.

Why exactly?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I make no claims as to what did it. I have my theory, involving God, but you don't like it, so I won't bore you with it. Remember, God was never proven by experimentation not to exist, so you should keep an open mind .

Of course one can't disprove a negative. But yes, because God is just as likely to exist as ghosts, goblins and fairies I'll be sure to keep an open mind for his appearance any day now.

Your "theory" involving God"? Why use the word "theory" if you have no evidence? As I said before, saying "God" is merely another way of saying "I don't understand, but I need to believe that I do". It doesn't actually explain anything at all except your discomfort with uncertainty and the full implications of Darwinism.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Oh, you also accept the notion of "importance"? Be careful there. It is a (shudders) metaphysical notion. It implies a gradation of values. And a gradation of values was explored by us before -- it isn't quite compatible with "survival" (remember the environmental nihilist).

I have no problem with a gradation of "values". Why do you think it's worse to murder someone than just to poke their eye out? Because ultimately, a one eyed man can still provide for his family and reproduce.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Another good quote from Evolutionary Origins of Morality

On the evolutionary origin of human law (by Gruter and Morhenn)

"While complicated contracts such as technology licensing agreements- you can use X if you pay me Y- are obviously far more complex than the systems of calculated reciprocity among certain non-human primates, the predisposition to have and enforce certain expectations about behavior is significant to legal theory nonetheless. One might say that natural selection has given us the raw material from which to build laws. At the same time, however, the law must also cope with other innate tendencies, such as *inter alia*, deception and self-deception. In this way, the complexity of law as we presently know it is both facilitated by and also necessitated by our innate predispositions. Add to this pot-pourri the enormous influence of a constantly changing environment, education and culture and it is easy to see how humans have come to create laws which are highly complex and not always effective."

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Eh? That's Philosophy 101, probeman. This sentence is obviously wrong. Let me ask you this: "is the sentence, 'nothing is 100% certain', true?"

Not with 100% certainty. Just like the theory of evolution could be wrong, but probably isn't- so could I.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You still reject all other gradations (such as that of the murderer and, most particularly, that of the environmental nihilist) without any explanation.

You just lost me.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And by the way, the fact that you are here posting to disprove me disproves your theory of thought. Unless you really think that this is improving your survival. I mentioned that to Faustus as well, but you and him apparently have a knack for ignoring what was said, and the questions that were asked. Honestly, if you try to answer those questions, you'll see the problem.

Wrong again. This debate is improving my survival because (as I said earlier) I'm using you (without payment) to sharpen my debating skills for a seminar that I'll be teaching this Fall (and getting paid for).

Thanks.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I never refused to answer anything that you asked. Probably because I'm interested in Truth, not in survival .

I agree. You want absolute certainty (Truth)- but I'm smart enough to realize that the best we can do is to only approach reality with uncertainty, as has been shown by science.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And it this answer of yours 100% true?

No, but very close to it. As Richard Feynman said:

"A scientist is never certain. We all know that. We know that all our statements are approximate statements with different degrees of certainty; that when a statement is made, the question is not whether it is true or false but rather how likely it is to be true or false. 'Does God exist?' When put in the question form: 'how likely is it?' It makes such a terrifying transformation of the religious point of view, and that is why the religious point of view is unscientific. We must discuss each question within the uncertainties that are allowed. And as the evidence grows it increases the probability perhaps that some idea is right, or decreases it. But it never makes absolutely certain one way or the other."

What you should ask yourself, in the light of the history of science and the steady progress made and continuing today in understanding the natural evolution of life, the natural evolution of consciousness, and the natural evolution of morality, what is more likely? 100% certainty that it's supernatural or almost 100% certainty that it's natural?

My question then to you is- is your faith in absolute supernatural morality 100% certain?
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Mariner, perhaps you aren't aware of what a genuine contradiction in someone's ideas actually is. I suspect that, like a lot of people I've interacted with on debate forums, you just like to use the word "contradiction" as a place holder for "wrong". Alas, in real life, very few people really make contradictions, because they are so darned easy to spot and point out.

To find a contradiction in my ideas, you've got to essentially find me endorsing A and not-A at the same time. But all your technique amounts to is to issue forth statements like, "if rational thought is the product of causes, then the thought 'rational thought is the product of causes' is not rational," which commits the fallacy of begging the question. At issue is the very truth and coherence of that proclamation, so simply asserting it in different ways over and over misses the point, and reinforces the idea that your approach to this subject has no basis.

So, until you actually do the work, I will take your claims about contradictions in our ideas to have been defeated for lack of trying (sort of like not showing up to small claims court means you lose).
By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yawn. Is this sentence by Feynman 100% true?

Probably.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Really, probeman, you should take a look at Tecnotut's signatures. There are some things that are 100% true in this world of ours. Whether you realize it or not.

And what would those be? Your beliefs? Yes, I agree that there are some things that are very, very likely to be true. So likely to be true that I would not risk very much of value in opposition to them. For example, natural explanations seem to very likely to be true, and supernatural explanations do not, so I pay much attention to natural phenomena and little attention to supernatural phenomena. But the real problem with your type of position through the ages has been, once we assume that any explanation is absolutely 100% true without question, then we have stopped doing science and started doing religion.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You should ask yourself why you talk about those things as if they were 100% true . Especially if rational thought is just a trick for increasing survival.

Wrong again. I do not talk about them as if they were 100% true. Rational thought is no longer "just a trick for increasing survival" but it does seem, given the evidence we have today, to enhance survival and that probably explains why it evolved in the first place. It is also probable that consciousness, rationality and morality could have naturally evolved through Baldwinian genetic/social/memetic learning mechanisms. I think these things are, just like the theory of evolution, very likely to be true. I don't need 100% certainty- though you do, or so it would seem.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes. And this sentence of mine, "yes", is 100% certain -- there is no doubt in my mind that I am 100% certain about it . Do you want to know why I am 100% certain? It is not because "God did it", or because "the Bible says so". It is because the denial of that results in contradiction, and I'm 100% certain that contradictions don't happen.

Well that's belief for you. I see a world full of contradictions. Yes, it is a messy and uncertain world- it's not pretty, which is probably why people like you seek absolute confidence in your simple and certain supernatural beliefs.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You're welcome. And it's not a race, you know.

Ah, but it is so far as our genetic programming is concerned. As you even pointed out- religious people know that (even if unconsciously)- that's why they prohibit behavior that limits reproduction.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And is it absolutely true that it is probably true?

Yawn. Not absolutely.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Do you absolutely agree with that? Or only probably agree with that?

Yawn. Probably.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Again the dichotomy. There are other things besides science and religion. And I'm not saying that "an explanation" is 100% true, you have complained again and again that I have no explanation. No, I said that a contradiction is 100% false. Not 99% false. This is the basis of human thought -- the basis of philosophy, the basis of religion, and yes, the basis of science. If you reject this absolute truth: "A contradiction is 100% false", you reject thought itself.

In a discussion of evolution vs. creationism the dichotomy is clear- science vs. religion. I do not reject thought- I reject 100% certainty of thought- so does every scientist. Have you ever noticed that logic is not empirical data? Your definitions or premises in your "contradiction" could be suspect. One cannot be 100% certain that one's assumptions are correct. This is why scientists prefer evidence. Because even your hero, Aristotle, and his iron clad logic, couldn't help him figure out that the Sun doesn't revolve around the Earth.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Oh no, I don't. I have no idea of the mechanisms that created free will and rational thought. However, I am 100% sure that material causes can't do it.

You have no idea, but you are 100% certain. And what exactly is your evidence for this 100% certain belief? That you now have a philosophical contradiction?

I know that science doesn't care about your philosophical problems, they are doing just fine and making good progress on understanding the evolution of consciousness and morality- and besides that, somehow I doubt that Nature cares much about your crisis of faith either.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Tell me about one. If it is "full", it shouldn't be hard. (You are the one using "contradiction" in the colloquial sense, the fault that Faustus found in my posts... curious).

That humans claim to have absolute certainty of what God says, but of course they disagree with each other on what that is. That God is love, but they kill each other over their beliefs. That they are moral and kind, yet they do whatever they think they can get away with. These are contradictions for anyone that thinks they have 100% certainty. For me they are not contradictions because I understand the natural and messy evolutionary basis for consciousness, rationality and morality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yeah, my simple belief, that neither you nor Faustus yet managed to grasp. While you seek refuge in psychoanalysis, you won't get any closer to it. You must understand that my motivations are completely irrelevant for the correctness of an argument, and that the fact that you continually bring them up is evidence of the weakness of your position. Whenever you feel the need to resort to phony psychoanalysis of your opponent, you've lost the debate (a tip for your seminar).

Yes, your motivations are irrelevant for the correctness of your argument. But since your argument seems to have retreated to the point that it now merely consists of a simple philosophical misunderstanding that science cannot be 100% certain in it's findings, I had moved on to your motivations for wanting 100% certainty. Yes, I think it's important and helpful to understand the psychological motivations of creationists, when arguing with them. Have you read Tower of Babel: The Evidence Against the New Creationism by Robert Pennock? He has a nice section on the psychology of supernatural explanations and the need for 100% certainty by believers.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Is this a contradiction? how? What is the relationship between what God is and what men believe? Can't men have false beliefs about that?

Not if they claim to be 100% certain like you.

By the way, I do suspect your premises. You say $A = A$, but that's assuming that A is not actually B. Therefore we can't be certain **in the real world** that $A = A$. In the ideal, 100% certain world that you imagine that you inhabit- I guess one can.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

What you are saying above is that rational thought is perhaps lacking some trait which I am affirming that it has. It's possible. Identify the trait, and show the error.

Yes, rational thought is imperfect. It doesn't always lead to the right answer. That is why we rely on science- itself a messy and imperfect method, but it does seem to eventually produce results- always uncertain, but seemingly closer approximations to the truth.

You are trying to disprove the scientific possibility that consciousness and morality could be naturally evolved by citing a philosophical argument that depends on unprovable premises like: natural processes can't produce rational thought therefore rational thought can't have evolved. Where is your evidence that natural processes can't produce rational thought? Determinism? There you simply conflate philosophical "determinism" and Newtonian "determinism". Scientists have known for over 100 years that simple deterministic processes can produce unpredictable and complex outcomes. Even the simplest life forms are deterministic but unpredictable. Humans are much more complex life forms than a bacteria. Does it surprise you that even though our behavior is based on these same "determined" atoms, it is even more unpredictable? In any case, I suspect that science will proceed in spite of your 100% certainty in philosophical contradictions.

Answer this: How is the chimp that comforts another chimp after being attacked differ from the human that comforts another human after being attacked? Why do you need to create a supernatural mechanism for the human behavior in addition to the natural mechanism for the chimp behavior, when the natural explanation works just fine for both?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Science uses rational thought, probeman... or at least scientists do . There can be no science without rational thought. The premise that rational thought necessarily, always, leads to the right answer is needed for science.

This is your main objection to the argument, and it is clearly contradictory, because every time that you say "rational thought is not perfect", you are saying it as a conclusion of rational thought.

The contradiction between assuming that it can and realizing that if the assumption is right, then the assumption is wrong, because then "rational thought is not perfect". That's "the evidence", though that's putting it mildly. I'd say that's the proof.

Your reasoning is incorrect. If this type of reasoning was correct then we would have to say that evolution could not occur because evolution does not always produce perfectly "designed" creatures. **Rational thought doesn't have to always give the "right" answer to be useful, just as a rudimentary eye is better than no eye at all. There is no contradiction at all in assuming that rational thought can be**

uncertain and imperfect and still provide an evolutionary/social survival benefit. This is the basic error in your so called "contradiction".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Let's say it doesn't differ. So what? Influence vs. determinism, probeman... The chimp is (possibly) determined by material causes, but the human is not. With 100% certainty.

Spoken like a true believer! It must be nice to be 100% absolutely certain with no doubts whatsoever (though I can't but help consider how many times have such claims (e.g., 19th century Vitalists) have been proven wrong by scientific experiment). Consider- if science eventually creates a computer that passes the "Turing Test" what will you do? Of course you will say that this is not possible, but if they do succeed you will have to claim that it's really not intelligent- it just "seems to be" intelligent. But the same problem applies to any human- we only "seem to be" intelligent so we have to assume we are.

In other words, no one can prove that humans aren't simply very complicated organic computers. And it really doesn't matter- if humans or advanced computers "seem to be" intelligent, we have to treat them as though they are.

Slavery throughout human history has been justified by the same type of argument that you are making, that they only "seem to be" human- but they really don't have that special unobservable quality which makes them truly human. I further find it amusing that you can be so certain about humans, but unsure about chimps. So chimp behavior might (possibly) be determined by supernatural causes also? What about lemurs? What about rodents? Don't you see where this leads? You are a Creationist after all.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Logic trumps science, whether you like it or not.

Ok, you win. Aristotle's logic was infallibly right- the sun goes around the Earth after all.

Once again- science doesn't lead to "right answers", it leads to tentative, uncertain, but apparently useful answers. It does this in spite of the fact that humans are fallible and imperfect, just as the process of evolution is fallible and imperfect. We don't need perfection to be rational- just an advantage.

We don't need a supernatural explanation for the evolution of consciousness, morality and rationality because there is or is not a philosophical contradiction, but because we don't need to multiply unnecessary entities. We can see the fundamental and sometimes complex roots of reciprocity, use of social norms, understanding of intentionality, system of rewards and punishments, and empathy in non-human primates. Closely related behaviors in closely related species don't need separate explanations, especially an additional explanation that is completely unscientific and without any empirical evidence in its favor, except of course human conceit.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

(Note how you still use reasonings. Quite deluded, you. I thought they didn't lead us to truth).

Reasoning doesn't have to lead to absolute 100% certain truth to lead to evolutionary useful results. Reason can evolve just like the eye. We can reason with less than 100% certainty and still discover new knowledge and understanding. Are you are saying that if we can't know things with 100% certainty, then we can't know anything at all. Who is the skeptic now?

The fact is that science has no need for 100% certainty- actually it depends on being less than 100% certain at all times. Progress is impossible if one believes something with 100% certainty. The fact that you claim

100% certainty merely suggests that you are dogmatically trying to hold back the tide of science from washing away your supernatural beliefs. Good luck- you'll need it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

a) Vitalist arguments were scientific (that's why they were refuted by experiment). This argument is not. Actually they were philosophical- actually religious god of the gap explanations. They assumed that because they couldn't synthesize organic materials from inorganic materials, there must be something supernatural to their creation- which is essentially your argument. That is: because we can't synthesize intelligent computers, there must be something supernatural to their creation. Are you sure you want to base your beliefs on what we don't completely understand yet?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

b) You don't use the eye to reason, but you use reason to reason. That's why you have to trust reason in order to reason (as the exercise above shows -- even if you swear by all Gods that you don't trust logic, you will be trusting logic).

Yes, I can use my brain to reason, just as I use my eye to see. So?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

c) I can prove that humans are not complicated computers. In fact, I just did. The contradiction shows it. If humans were complicated computers, they couldn't know it.

And indeed we don't know whether we are complicated computers- though the scientific evidence from Dennett and Clark and others strongly suggests it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Before I lose the knack for this sort of stuff, is the sentence above 100% true?

No, but it seems likely based on the evidence.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Is it 100% true that it seems likely?

No, but it probably is.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Reasonings demand 100% certainty, as you see (or probably you don't), among other reasons because language demands it, and we reason "in language". Any language. Including mathematics or any other language you want. The principle of Identity must be 100% true, or we wouldn't be able to think. (Same for the principle of Non-Contradiction).

If that were true, then how could we ever be uncertain?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I said that reason is 100% certain

I think you mean dogmatism is 100% certain. Of course in your mind dogmatism and reason probably are the same thing.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**
Is this sentence 100% true?

Are you 100% certain that you are 100% certain that reason is 100% certain? If so how? Are you 100% certain that your premises are true? If so how?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...we're thinking "1+1=2" (Identity), and that we can't think that "1+1=2" and "1+1 does NOT equal 2" at the same time (Non-contradiction).

I see. Because $1 + 1 = 2$, therefore morality and consciousness cannot have an evolutionary basis. A sad day for philosophy it would appear.

Meanwhile back in the real world of science, evolutionary psychology will continue to make new discoveries and understanding in the evolution of human behavior in including consciousness and morality- in spite of your 100% certainty that they can't.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

It's a matter of salesmanship versus science. Mariner has dropped appeals to science and evidence, and has entered the realm of armchair philosophy, where the goal is to try to sell your interlocutors on the idea that they should start defining and using words the way you do. I can't stress enough that once you confine yourself to that armchair, disputes are not about facts—not about how the world is—but are instead about choices to use words certain ways.

Mariner, then, has to sell us on the notion that we are better off understanding the concept of reason so that a) if it ain't perfect, it ain't reason, and b) if it has causes, it ain't reason. So far, the strategy to accomplish this seems to be that often employed by advertising agencies: repeat that something is the case often enough, and people will believe it. Obviously, it isn't working, because Probeman and I are going to continue to use the concept of reason so that it is understood to be imperfect and situated squarely in the natural order; ie, part of the causal stream, like everything else. Until Mariner can show that reason is less mysterious when understood otherwise, that is.

And just by coincidence, yesterday I was cleaning the apartment and discovered a book I had purchased months ago and forgotten. I think it's time to give it a read.

Here's a quote:

"From antiquity, various philosophies of logic have been proposed to explain the origin and character of rational thought. Some have given rise to elegant formal symbolic systems that allegedly codify precise logical principles, most prominently the various classical logical calculi. The foundations of the systems have laid on motivating ideas ranging from faith in a rational intuition to theories of truth and semantics. Without necessarily discarding any of these considerations as irrelevant, we have suggested that there may be a more comprehensive approach to the foundations of logic in which logic is developed as a subsience of evolutionary theory.

Such a development is feasible if it can be shown that the principles of logic can be derived directly from evolutionary propositions. That this is possible is a hypothesis called here the Reducibility Thesis. It states that the laws of logic, or at least of classical logical and certain generalizations of it, are reducible to evolutionary biology in a standard sense: The terms of the logical theory are definable in evolutionary terms and logical assertions are deducible from evolutionary assertions.

If the Reducibility Thesis has merit, the principles of rationality are so deeply embedded in evolutionary

theory that their foundations cannot rigorously be investigated independently of it. . .the underlying rules of reasoning are themselves recodifications of the properties of . . .[evolutionary] processes."

--The Evolution of Reason: Logic as a Branch of Biology, by William S. Cooper.

I've just started reading it, but the introduction lays out his strategy: he attempts to first show how evolutionary theory implies life-history strategy theory, which implies decision theory, leading to inductive logic, implying deductive logic, which leads finally, to mathematics. And (or so it will be argued) you can take each higher level domain and reduce it to the one just below.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yeah, logic is now reduced to salesmanship. It at least fits your belief that logic is not 100% certain.

The problem as I have said is that in the real world, logic cannot be 100% certain because its premises, whatever they are, cannot be proven with 100% certainty. For example, in the world of logic one can make the statement that $A = A$ with 100% certainty and we can all accept that, but in the real world one can never say with 100% certainty that $A = A$, because one of the "A" might actually be a "B" (you will agree that uncertainty exists in identification of real objects). In the real world we can't have 100% certainty because we can't have 100% knowledge (only God has that remember?).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I haven't dropped anything. Can you show that I have? Have I denied any scientific principle, or any result of an experiment?

You have denied that the evidence from evolutionary psychology, cognitive science, and neurophysiology explains the possible evolution of consciousness, morality and reason. Even though animal and human studies in these fields show enormous similarities with human behavior and biology. Maybe it's time that we did give chimps and other animals the concept of a "soul" in proportion to their cognitive abilities? Maybe that implies that a hypothetical alien with greater cognitive abilities than us has an even greater soul? Is that possible according to your belief scheme?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If logic evolved, it isn't apodictically right. If logic isn't apodictically right, the conclusion "logic evolved" isn't apodictically right. Gosh, this is so easy to understand.

Easy if the real world was based on logic- too bad it's not.

I think though, I see what your problem is. You would agree I think that animals have evolved to make decisions based on less than 100% certainty. If our early hominid ancestors waited around for 100% certainty they would probably have been eaten. Now if that's true, then I think you would ask- where did 100% certainty come from? Your answer is: if not evolution then God.

To explain your "supernaturalistic" fallacy I think the best way is to point out that, as Faustus's quote tried to do, is to show that decision making in the survival process could possibly have been a prototype for modern pure logic and reasoning. If for example an early hominid can consider the possible outcomes from certain actions by using proto-reason ("if I approach the herd with the wind in my face they don't usually run away before I can get close enough to kill them"), then one can see how once society was civilized enough to afford activities not directly related to survival (though still useful, like 1 ear of corn plus 1 ear of corn equals two ears of corn), that the effort to develop pure and more refined math and reasoning could be pursued for reasons even less related (though still useful) for survival.

So less than proto-reason can be selected for and evolve into more abstract (though still useful) logic skills

for enhancing survival. Anyone that has seen the impact of science and math in the "art of war", can see that even "pure" math has effects on survival for societies.

Your argument really boils down to the argument from ignorance with a generous redefinition of the terms to support your assertion.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Edmund Dantes**

A molecular biologist recently was boasting before God saying: "you're not so great! I can create a human just like you did."

God smiled and said "Alright go ahead."

So the biologist reached down and picked up a handful of dirt.

God said gently "No, no. Get your own dirt."

This joke is older than "dirt".

Be aware that Mariner is only a partial ally of yours. As a biologist he fully accepts the evolution of life on Earth through natural selection. He does balk at the natural evolution of consciousness and morality though.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Also agreed. But by now you're dealing with beings that have apodictic certainty. A barrier has been crossed; a barrier that material causation couldn't cross.

The barrier that has been crossed is that logic does not apply to the real world in the 100% certain manner that you assert. Your vaunted logic (and math) is merely an useful abstraction of normal evolutionary evolved reasoning in humans, probably a result of early agriculture and the need for greater cooperation and sharing of work and resources. The abstraction of logic and math are themselves socially learned and evolved mechanisms for enhancing survival from these early social interactions. So when did this non-material barrier get crossed? 0 BC?

The point is, logic itself is often useful and that we can find advantage in utilizing it. You seem to agree that logic has evolutionary origins. But logic does not prove facts about the natural world. Only science does that.

By the way- I attack all premises of logical arguments, not just yours. Because logical premises cannot ever be proven or demonstrated (if they could be, they wouldn't be premises). Because of this fundamental real world uncertainty in the logical method, logic is very limited in applications outside of the rarified realms of philosophy and math that they were designed for. That's why one rarely sees logical arguments in scientific papers. It is too easy to be lead astray by logic and faulty premises. The evidence from evolutionary psychology is more convincing than 1000 philosophers- especially since philosophers never seem to agree on anything.

By the way please state your argument's premises if you would- then I might decide to attack them.

In any case no rational being in the real world has to be 100% certain about anything in order to survive and I would argue that we never really are 100% certain (except for the evolutionary recent development of dogmatism). Your philosophical arguments and religious beliefs can be 100% certain, but they can never

actually prove anything. The important (and useful) work being done by scientists, is that if science can demonstrate that consciousness, morality and reason and logic could have evolved genetically and socially (and you don't deny the evidence do you?) through Darwinian and Baldwinian mechanisms- there is no need for any other explanation. Simple isn't it?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

A nice, self-contradictory fantasy, disproven in this thread.

That's what you keep asserting- but nobody is convinced. I guess only Mariner is truly enlightened.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, if you want to know when the formalization of the concepts involved happened, it's more like the 4th century BC. But Aristotle only described human thought, he did not invent it. For as long as people have been thinking rationally, they have been using logic, with 100% certainty. I'd guess (conservatively) some 80,000 years at least.

I see very little in human history to support the claim that those claiming 100% certainty have actually been right more often than not. Actually I see the exact opposite. Now if your argument is that religion provides for 100% certain dogmatism I will agree.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I didn't agree that logic had evolutionary origins. In fact, I proved that it hasn't. Your dichotomy between logic and science is -- you guessed it -- contradictory (as well as bordering on the insane). Science can't work without logic. It's much worse than asking science to work without instruments.

Science works just fine without 100% certainty. As do humans in general. In fact, I'd say that belief in 100% certainty is the problem and is responsible for more human misery than any other single factor. That you merely redefine reason to mean 100% certainty doesn't change that.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, logic was not "designed for" anything -- unless you are saying that God designed it. Logic is how people think, probeman. Including you. If you attack logic, you attack your own thinking.

I do not attack logic- it is useful as I said. I attack those that make it into a God- as you have.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Sorry, there is not one scientific paper, not one page of a scientific paper, not one sentence of a scientific paper, that is NOT based on logic. You have to re-examine your notion of logic.

Yes, and still science is not 100% certain- why is that do you think?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, it is a nice admission that all you've done here in this thread, since the argument was presented, was skipping the issue. Thanks for the admission. I won't repeat the argument one more time, though. I did it for Faustus, I clothed it in so many different sentences, you should be bored to death by now -- if you were really paying attention.

I haven't skipped the issue. You have skipped stating your premises. Do I detect fear? Come on- state your logic (I just went through all your posts since you switched talking about morality and then reason and most recently logic and see that you have successfully avoided ever stating your premises and argument). Let all of us see your logical premises and deductions that prove your point that morality, reason and logic cannot have a natural explanation. You'll get the Nobel Prize in Math if you can prove that several major fields of science are just wasting their time. You'll be famous.

Come on. State your premises and logic clearly. You've written so much already- don't hide behind "I'm too tired now".

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **rpj2004**

But it seems like the passing down is not even close to the way Darwin thought it would be since these are behaviors, not actual physical traits.

It's not just genetic. There are Baldwinian social learning mechanisms that can be selected for as well. Consciousness itself is a survival advantage for animals, especially in primates. Cooperation is a survival advantage. Morality and religion are also mechanisms in humans that enhance survival. Reason and logic are mechanisms that are clearly advantageous for survival.

Now the question is- if one accepts that these various mechanisms involving (some including some non-human primate and) human consciousness are advantageous for survival/reproduction and therefore can be selected for- then one has to explain how they could NOT have evolved. If something is advantageous it would have to be selected for by natural selection. This is one fact that Mariner's 100% logic overlooks.

I'm reading a great book related to this right now: "Evolutionary Origins of Morality" edited by Leonard Katz. I had no idea until recently how good the evidence for the evolution of human morality was until I started reading this book. Of course believers in the supernatural have significant problems with science that demonstrates natural explanations for those human qualities that they dearly want to hold on to as proof of God.

It's been happening ever since Darwin published.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Some definitions of reason from a couple online dictionaries. First, the approach of a dictionary of philosophy:

The intellectual ability to apprehend the truth cognitively, either immediately in intuition, or by means of a process of inference.

Next, a regular dictionary with several ways of thinking about the word and concept:

n 1: a rational motive for a belief or action; 2: an explanation of the cause of some phenomenon; 3: the capacity for rational thought or inference or discrimination; 4: the state of having good sense and sound judgment; 5: a justification for something existing or happening; 6: a fact that logically justifies some premise or conclusion; v 1: decide by reasoning; draw or come to a conclusion; 2: present reasons and arguments; 3: think logically.

Golly gosh darn, it seems as if Mariner's concept of reason is really every bit as eccentric and disconnected from normal English as Probeman and I have been suspecting—nothing like Mariner's view appears, no matter where I look.

Mariner, perhaps you are on the cusp of a revolution that will change philosophy and science forever. I recommend you start by sending your ideas over to scientists involved in the field of evolutionary epistemology (that's our subject). Impress them with your grasp of both science and philosophy. Marvel

them with your unique take on reason and the amazing ability of armchair thinking to trump experimental evidence. We'll watch from the sidelines and see what sort of reception you get.
By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Improve your reading skills. I haven't said logic is a God. And you attacked logic, whether you acknowledge it or not. Are you saying now that logic is 100% correct? If you think it is, we can talk. If you think it isn't, it's a waste of time.

Logic is 100% correct if the premises are true. Since in the real world premises are generally suspect, I think that your "logical" conclusion that morality, reason and logic cannot have natural evolutionary origins is suspect. I've argued with your conclusion only, since your argument has been vague and your premises have never been offered.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Imperfection of data, as you well know.

So your data, like God's, is 100% complete and perfect? I suggest that you are merely human and that your 100% certainty is mere dogmatism based on pseudo-philosophy and faulty (and unstated) premises.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Improve your reading skills. As you see, I'm cranky now. I surely don't have time to repost all I've said about this matter. You attacked this "unstated argument" for a long time, probeman, don't tell me you've been just posting for kicks.

I've been presenting the evidence for the evolution of morality and consciousness for all these pages. You've added "reason" and "logic" to the mix, but I see no evidence for them not being products of social learning that also improve our survival. You've given up on the scientific argument (though you started there) and now you've retreated to a vague philosophical conclusion that because $1+1=2$, then morality and reason cannot have evolutionary origins. State your premises and logical deductions if you can't argue based on science and I'll look at your 100% certain logical argument.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Nobel Prize in Math? Hehe. That doesn't exist.

That was the irony of the joke.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

So as I'm making my way through this book (*The Evolution of Reason: Logic as a Branch of Biology*), I thought I'd post some occasional outlines of William Cooper's points along with some nifty quotes. Primarily this is for Probeman's amusement, as most others here are uninterested in science or ideologically predisposed to reject ideas from the armchair.

What follows are simplifications that I would grade with a C or D if they occurred in a term paper on the book. But this is an internet forum, so there.

The first step the author takes is to describe "life history strategies," which are mathematical models showing various pathways the phenotype of a population can take, given various disjunctions in the environment. At each junction, the alternatives are proposed ("shell" versus "dig and hide" for example),

and the fitness improvements or debits are calculated, leading to a prediction about which phenotypes will be the most fit, and thus which genotypes will eventually come to dominate the population. Experimentation and observation can confirm how close the fitness estimates are to reality.

The next move is to approach decision theory, which it turns out involves mathematical structures that are isomorphic to the mathematics of life history strategies, despite having been developed independently. The example given is a decision by a smuggler: do I buy a new speedboat for my next run, since it will help me flee the coast guard more effectively, despite the fact that it will reduce my overall profit and also attract more attention? The mathematics used to determine the most rational choice are the same used to predict the most fit body plans/behaviors in a population, even though the focus is now on individual choice. Cooper's thesis is that this is not a mere coincidence.

Next we move onto a formalized part of decision theory called "Savage rationality"—after a guy named Savage. It defines a type of rational choice strategy mathematically within decision theory. As it turns out, there is another isomorphic link which can be demonstrated, this time between Savage rationality and strategies that are ESS according to Maynard Smith's notion of impervious-to-invasion. At this point my jaw hit the bus floor.

I'm now beginning the section where this last point will be translated into the most primitive levels of inductive logic.

A quote from page 81:

Savage irrationalities, being structural, can be detected internally without reference to sensory input. A capacity to avoid them on that basis could be expected to evolve. A capacity to avoid irrationalities could seem, to the organism, to be a priori knowledge, in the sense that no immediate information about the current environment is needed to obtain it. It is "logical" knowledge that could seem to its possessor to have nothing to do with probabilities or fitnesses, and to concern only things internal or mental. The rule "Avoid intransitivities!", for instance, could seem to its possessor like a rational intuition without empirical content. Yet from a biological viewpoint such rational knowledge is full of empirical significance and has everything to do with probabilities and fitnesses. In fact such internal rules of reason presumably evolved in response to a connection with the environment of the very sort described by the theorem.

The involvement of rational coherence with objective environmental probabilities and fitnesses is disguised for the organism because for the organism they always enter into the decision logic in a universally quantified manner ("no matter what the probabilities may be. . ."). Entities that are always universally quantified need not be taken up individually, nor even recognized as individuated entities, by the cognitive system. . . .

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Premise 1: Truth is apodictically true.

Premise 2: Material causation -- by definition -- is, itself, dependent on causes.

Premise 3: Humans have access to truth.

These are the premises. This is the argument:

1. If a thought is caused, it is dependent on other causes (premise 2).

2. A thought dependent on other causes can't be apodictically true (since it may be changed with a change in the causes, and apodictic truth doesn't change).

3. The thought "thoughts are dependent on other causes" claims to be apodictically true (as all absolute statements)

2 and 3 are contradictory. Therefore, 1 is false.

Your problem is premise 3. Our inability to know absolute truth does not falsify the absolute truth of everything we think we know. If it did, I could prove that god does not exist simply by demonstrating that you think he does - clearly an absurdity.

The correct conclusion is that it can not be apodictically known whether or not "thoughts are dependent on other causes" is true or false. This isn't a weakness of the premise though, since by argument point 2, all conclusions fall into this same category.

The inability to claim knowledge of absolute truth has driven philosophers mad for ages. We generally just accept it and move on as if we could know absolute truth, with the nagging suspicion that perhaps we are insane.

BTW, the inability to claim knowledge of absolute truth is not limited to causal thought processes. If our thoughts are happening in some metaphysical world and all this is some kind of an illusion, then you have even less reason to trust your thoughts, as they are clearly deceiving you. Fun isn't it?

By spamspamspamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I see. "The intellectual ability to apprehend the truth" doesn't fit the bill, according to you.

Yes, the ability to apprehend "truth" is not the same as being able to apprehend "Truth". We can not have 100% certainty in our "truth" judgements because we cannot have 100% knowledge of reality. That is the basis of science. In any case evolution has shown that we do not need 100% certainty for understanding. We only need to be right some of the time for an adaptive advantage. Whether that be genetically or socially or intellectually.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, I'm loath to re-state the premises of the argument to guys who can't understand a dictionary definition. Will it be useful? Will it be worth the waste of time? Probably not. But I'll do it anyway. It's the romantic in me.

Don't be so grouchy. Since this argument has now descended from a scientific discussion of the possible origins of morality and consciousness (which you now appear to concede does have evolutionary origins), to a argument of philosophical "certainty" I will try to respond to your "logic" though as you say- it may only be a waste of my time. Frankly I'm just pleased that (over time) you have at least come to concede to the possibility of evolutionary origins (or influences as you like to say) for these fascinating animal attributes of behavior.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Premise 1: Truth is apodictically true.

Premise 2: Material causation -- by definition -- is, itself, dependent on causes.

Premise 3: Humans have access to truth.

These are the premises. This is the argument:

1. If a thought is caused, it is dependent on other causes (premise 2).

2. A thought dependent on other causes can't be apodictically true (since it may be changed with a change in the causes, and apodictic truth doesn't change).

3. The thought "thoughts are dependent on other causes" claims to be apodictically true (as all absolute

statements)

2 and 3 are contradictory. Therefore, 1 is false.

I still don't really understand your philosophy here, but it seems to me that both premise 1 and 3 are suspect. Why should truth be self-evidently true? Except that you continue to jump between your strange definition of Truth (100% certainty) and normal human attempts at "truth". It seems to me that real truth is difficult to determine and never 100% certain. Religious truth (what one wants to believe with 100% certainty) does not have any basis in reality. Once more that is your confusion between "Truth" and "truth".

Premise 3 again appears to conflate "Truth" with "truth". Yes, humans have access to "truth" with less than 100% certainty, but we do not have access to "Truth" with 100% certainty. You can only believe that you have access to 100% certain Truth. So you are simply defining your argument's result into existence with premise 3.

Premise 2 is sly because it attempts to hide the fact that mere "material" causes can create properties that are totally, in principle, unpredictable (that is, uncertain). Like the Three Body problem. This problem in gravitational attraction has nothing to do with problems of precision, it is, by its mathematical nature, uncalculatable (that is, unknowable except in approximation). The fact that all causes could be material does not mean they are predictable or knowable or understandable, even assuming we had 100% knowledge of the events. That leaves a lot of wiggle room for real choices and free will, it seems to me.

Like the 100% certainty and logic of Aristotle's "geocentrism" and Zeno's "motion is impossible", science continues to show where 100% certainty isn't as certain as was believed.

In summary, I think the main weakness of your argument is that we can't gain rational understanding because we can never be 100% certain. Scientific progress shows that is not true.

On the issue of free will being "caused" by material forces there is a very good article in the latest issue of Sceptic magazine where Phil Mole' compares Zeno's Paradox to the Free Will Paradox. Here is a quote:

"We do not have to choose between complete determinacy and complete chance, or believe that free choice necessitates complete isolation of the world of causes and effects. Instead we can explore the way that chance and order combine in physical laws to allow free will to exist.

The First thing that we need to do is to clarify what "free will" really means. It clearly cannot imply total freedom to do whatever we want, because few people worry about their inability to suddenly become lighter than air. Most people willingly accept that the nature of our human bodies imposes limits on our actions. To claim we have free will, then, is merely to claim that we have some possible range of possible choices. The mere presence of limits on our choices does not negate our freedom so long as real choices still exist...

If the tradeoff between freedom and limitations is not all or nothing, nether is the tradeoff between freedom and deterministic probability...

One reason that determinism does not imply an absence of alternatives is the role of emergent phenomena in complex systems. An emergent phenomenon is nether a property of any individual component of a system, nor simply the result of summing the properties of all components. Emergent phenomena are novel, and unpredicted by our knowledge of the system..."

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Don't be impressed by the likes of probeman and Faustus -- they talk a lot, but they really don't understand either evolution or materialism. They are not the same thing; evolution does not depend on materialism to be correct. Evolution, remember, deals only with the modification of living organisms through time. It doesn't deal with cosmology, or the origin of life, or the origins of morality, even if some of its defenders think it does.

I agree that the theory of evolution limits itself to the materialistic development of life. It does not call upon supernatural intervention for any of its explanations. Are you sure that you understand this point?

As to your belief that consciousness, morality and now rationality and lately "free will" cannot have evolutionary (and materialistic) explanations, I will only say that just because a problem has so far been outside the realm of scientific research does not mean that it will always remain outside of scientific inquiry and explanation.

Once lightning was considered God's wrath and outside of scientific explanation (the Amish still believe this and therefore do not use lightning rods- which is why they have so many barn raisings). Now however, we know that lightning is inside the realm of scientific explanation, even though Benjamin Franklin was chastised from the pulpit for his experiments.

In the same way, you are now trying to protect your religious beliefs (100% certainty) about morality and reason from scientific explanation by using a philosophical argument that merely defines itself into existence. I don't argue with belief, but I'll enjoy seeing what the other philosophers here think of your "logic".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Another hypothesis is that the form of the argument is wrong. I don't know how, but perhaps you'll see something that I missed.

But wait- I thought you said you were 100% certain of your logic?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Problem One: Premise One.

Of your three premises, at least the first is problematic, despite the fact that you think it's just obvious. (If it were so obvious, it would be a common belief; I've majored in philosophy, and I can't name anyone who thinks the way you do about truth. Can you? Please provide citations.)

"Apodictically" is typically defined as "Necessarily or demonstrably true; incontrovertible; expressing or of the nature of necessary truth or absolute certainty." Pretty much every definition I've come across stresses the idea of necessary truth, so that's what I'll stress as well.

Translated, then, premise one is "Truths are necessarily true" or less awkwardly, "Only necessary truths are really true."

The classic case of a necessary truth is "A bachelor is an unmarried male, Faustus is an unmarried male, therefore Faustus is a bachelor."

Since necessary truths are true by virtue of the meanings of words, very little that we are accustomed to calling "true" will measure up to Mariner's bizarre standards. In fact, Mariner's premise will ONLY permit logical and mathematical propositions to be true. Forget science—science requires making falsifiable claims that need investigation and are often modified or rejected outright over time; you don't sit back and do biology by contemplating the meanings of words and doing logical calculus, which is exactly what you

would expect if biological truths were in fact necessary truths. Similarly, you can forget ethics, aesthetics. . .forget pretty much anything to which you were accustomed to thinking had at least some truth to it: unless something is typically known to be true by logical analysis of the meanings of terms, Mariner won't let you call it "truth".

Either that, or Mariner just doesn't understand the meaning of "apodictically" and thought using big words was going to impress someone.

But on the plus side, premise one is trying to capture an essential feature that all truth claims have: at least at the time we make them, we are always very sure about them and don't expect to be contradicted. It's just that in Mariner's ideological zeal to keep rationality and morals safe from science, premise one goes to eccentric extremes no one outside of an internet forum would ever propose. And here is where Mariner needs to start practicing salesmanship—since premise one is a highly unusual way of defining truth, the advantages of switching over to it need to be outlined.

The next goofy move comes with step two, which is really just another premise: "A thought dependent on other causes can't be apodictically true (since it may be changed with a change in the causes, and apodictic truth doesn't change)."

First, a technical point—the quality of being apodictically true is something that can only apply to propositions in some kind of language, whether it be a natural spoken language or a formal one (like logic or math). So, only language using animals can have thoughts that have any hope of being apodictically true, and if we are inclined to still accept premise one's strict view of truth, then no creature lacking language can ever have true beliefs. Call your dog's (correct) conviction that you are hiding its ball in your right hand justified, but calling it true is verboten.

There are plenty of good arguments calling for limits on the sophistication of animal minds, but none I've encountered go as far as what you'd get here by accepting the consequences of premise one and step two together. So, once again, we have an extremely eccentric and usual view on parade here. That by itself is not a damning characteristic, of course, but Mariner seems to think the ideas proposed in this thread are just obvious, and widely shared. Quite the opposite is the case, which is why some attempt must be made to justify them that goes beyond simply repeating that they are true.

Anyway, step two's mistake is merely that Mariner is once again committing the classic fallacy of begging the question: step two is the very point being debated, and must be the conclusion of the argument, not one of the assumptions. A very simple thought experiment can expose its falsity. I have a belief that I am a bachelor. I was caused to have this belief when the meaning of the word "bachelor" was first taught to me. The causal chain may have differed from what it actually was—I could have learned the meaning of the word from a friend, a teacher, a parent, from reading a book. I may have misheard the explanation and come to a false belief about "bachelor". And in another twist, I may have come to believe the true sentence "Faustus is a bachelor" but only because I falsely believe that "bachelor" means being Caucasian, at least 40 years old, with long hair. In all these cases we can point to the causes of my belief, whether the language we use is intentional, or descends to the level of physics, or hovers somewhere in between.

Step three also has problems, but they aren't quite as bad. The assertion here is that "The thought "thoughts are dependent on other causes" claims to be apodictically true (as all absolute statements)".

This step is merely a logical consequence of premise one. If one never accepted premise one to begin with, then one can happily claim that, in fact, one never believed "Thoughts are dependent on other causes" was apodictically true, thus avoiding contradiction with step two. However, step two is exactly the move Probeman and I refuse to buy, so we have considerable freedom to either accept or reject step three with no consequence. One could, in fact, argue that it is part of the meaning of "thoughts" that they have causes, that it is built into our language and ways of talking that they have causes. After all, it makes perfect sense in ordinary conversation to speak of being caused to have beliefs (thoughts) because of one event or another. And if one accepts this, then one can in fact want to insist that "Thoughts are dependent on causes" must be a necessary truth.

Since my epistemology is pragmatic, I of course don't particularly care what anyone wants to do with step three—for a pragmatist, necessary truths are what they are only because we can't imagine wanting to stop believing in them; they exist on the extreme end of a continuum that includes beliefs we are less confident about. Pragmatist epistemology therefore doesn't place much importance on the distinction between empirical and necessary truth, though it certainly recognizes the occasional utility in the distinction.

Mariner's conclusion is just a logical blunder so obvious I can't believe it was actually made. It is, "2 and 3 are contradictory. Therefore, 1 is false." The elementary error here is the overlooked possibility that if 2 and 3 are contradictory, perhaps one of them is right and the other wrong. For instance, I'd drop 2.
By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't follow it. If I think God exists, then he doesn't exist, based on premise 3? Why? Premise 3: "Humans have access to truth". Perhaps you meant the third step in the argument. Please clarify that before we proceed, spam .

Premise (3) is that humans have access to truth. If we do not have access to truth, that does not imply that everything we think is true is actually false, but rather that we can not be certain that what we believe to be true actually is - a truism without regard to determinism.

BTW, premise (1) can not be proven false by definition. The flaw must reside in (2) or (3).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I agree that this is "the correct conclusion". But if we conclude that, we are stating apodictic truth. Else, it isn't "the correct conclusion". And we're back in the loop.

There's no escaping the loop. Our assumption of being correct does not imply we are not, but rather, there is uncertainty in the claim.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Point 2 means that all conclusions fall into this category iff all thoughts are the result of causes. It doesn't establish that all thoughts are the results of causes.

Actually, it's *iff* knowledge of truth is not the same as apodictic knowledge of truth. You can not claim apodictic knowledge of truth in any model other than by assumption, so this is not a weakness of determinism, but rather of epistemology in general.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, we move on "as if we could know absolute truth", and this means that we accept the ability (and not "the inability") to claim knowledge of absolute truth.

We always make that assumption, and we may be wrong. This is independent of determinism.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't know of any philosopher who denied all possibility of absolute truth. Do you know of any?

Descartes probably comes closest, although he did accept the certainty of knowledge of abstract concepts, such as mathematics. We all have our crutches .

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

What we do know is that if all thoughts are the results of material causes, then we can't trust any thought --

including the thought "we can't trust any thought". Why should we trust that thought, then?

How can you trust any thought if determinism is not correct either, other than "cogito ergo sum"? We trust our thoughts because we will die otherwise. I'm ok with that.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If we expose two people to very different environments/societies/genes/etc., and ask them what is 1+1 (for instance), we hear the same output. Apparently, apodictic truth is unrelated to materialistic causes of thoughts.

This is not proof of apodictic truth. Note that some people will answer "3". Is that somehow proof that determinism is correct?

You have not proven that you can have absolute certainty with a nonmaterialistic perspective. All you can do is assume it - a far cry from proving it.

By spamspamamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But if we do not have access to truth, then "we do not have access to truth" can't be true.

And neither can "'we do not have access to truth" can't be true'.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Would you agree if I said that determinism can't account for this weakness in epistemology? I think we're saying the same things in different ways.

Perhaps we are. It wasn't clear to me that you realized all world views suffer this same problem. It isn't unique to determinism.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

There are some possible escapes, though not deterministic, material ones. Plato's Ideas and their relationship with the soul is the first that comes to mind. If we have some ability to discover truth (and we must assume that we do, because we can't assume the opposite), then there must be a reason for this ability -- though not a material one.

But ultimately, you can not be sure that the 'real world' is what you think it is.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, if they mean "2" when they say "3" (i.e., if they are confusing signs), or if their brains are disturbed somehow, then they will say "3", but I don't think they will say "3" if they are functional human beings.

But that's the point. The dysfunction of some is actually evidence of determinism, as you indirectly insinuated. (let's not mix materialism up with determinism for now).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Similarly, if someone truly believes that 1+1=3, he can be taught and corrected. I don't see how this is possible if thoughts are caused by material causes...

Why not? Why would a deterministic world prevent people from being able to learn?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, it's not proven that absolute certainty is possible. What is proven is that "non-absolute certainty" is impossible -- that we can't "not assume" that absolute certainty is possible. Yet, this is what determinism demands.

That's what all epistemological perspectives demand. That's why we ignore them except in these types of discussions. They drive us mad. How does nondeterminism resolve this?

By spamspamspamandham

ignorance is the only certainty.

i'm very very late to the party so i'll jump right in without further ado:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Premise 1: Truth is apodictically true.

Premise 2: Material causation -- by definition -- is, itself, dependent on causes.

Premise 3: Humans have access to truth.

These are the premises. This is the argument:

1. If a thought is caused, it is dependent on other causes (premise 2).

2. A thought dependent on other causes can't be apodictically true (since it may be changed with a change in the causes, and apodictic truth doesn't change).

3. The thought "thoughts are dependent on other causes" claims to be apodictically true (as all absolute statements)

2 and 3 are contradictory. Therefore, 1 is false.

You both have attacked premise 1, which is probably the most unattackable (I don't know whether this is a real word) premise in the universe. You could perhaps focus your attack on premise 3, but any attack on premise 3 will claim to be true, and therefore will falsify itself. If I had to attack this argument (and I tried hard to do it when I first thought of it), I'd concentrate on premise 2. It seems quite impregnable, but compared to the other two, it's likely to be the weak link, if the argument is indeed wrong.

premise 1: nonsense. vacuous formalism. no information content.

premise 2: incoherent. "material causation ... dependent on causes" *begs the question* of what those prior causes are dependent upon. infinite regress. if what you mean is that material causation *entails* (material causes) ... well again, **mariner**, you're trafficking in vacuous tautologies ...

premise 3: incoherent. truth is not a material condition (spatial or temporal), therefore "access" does not obtain. human practices convey truth-value in terms of inferential validity & soundness or material utility or ineluctable significance.

1. if a thought is caused, then that thought is simply the effect of a cause which may or may not be the effect of other causes. there is evidence from quantum physics of acausal events which cause subsequent effects. as hume pointed out causality is how we interpret the regularities / succession of events in nature; we infer rather than 'observe' causality.

2. well ... this truism is almost laughable ... any given thought (or event) is apodictic or *necessarily itself*, though repeating it will probably not be. whatever has happened had to happen from the point of view of the present. the past is ineluctable. no implication is drawn from this that (some) future must resemble the

past; merely that the past, whatever the provenance of events which constitute it, IS necessary FOR the present.

3. absolute statements, being context-free, say nothing or bear no sense. (e.g. $A = A$)

Quote:

I don't know of any philosopher who denied all possibility of absolute truth. Do you know of any? off the top of my head:

[color=blue]pyrrho
sextus empiricus
lucretius
spinoza
montaigne
pascal
hume
kant
schopenhauer
nietzsche
peirce
wittgenstein
dewey
heidegger
levinas
adorno
quine
etc ...[/color]

Quote:

Blind Prophet, I believe you confuse evolution theory with materialism (what you call "philosophical naturalism). Don't be impressed by the likes of **probeman** and **Faustus** -- they talk a lot, but they really don't understand either evolution or materialism. They are not the same thing; evolution does not depend on materialism to be correct. Evolution, remember, deals only with the modification of living organisms through time. It doesn't deal with cosmology, or the origin of life, or the origins of morality, even if some of its defenders think it does.

It doesn't? well someone ought to tell the cosmologist lee smolin & quantum computation theorist david deutsch & all the practitioners of evolutionary psychology like steven pinker that the evolutionary paradigm is restricted to some immaterial telos / essence / form adequate only to biological phenomena.

"evolution" is a explanatory paradigm & "materialism" a methodological criterion. neither *entail* metaphysical commitments. they are simply efficacious scientific tools which have yet to be superceded by more efficacious alternatives.

By 180 Proof

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Both the opening sentence of your post and the list of philosophers put you squarely on the side of the sophists -- although only the combined effect can produce that, surely there are worthy names in your list.

an equivocating piece of sophistry if there ever was one ...

Quote:

By the way, can you provide any quote to that effect (that those philosophers denied all possibility of absolute truth), and a quote that does not claim, itself, to be absolutely true?

if you're remotely familiar with any of the relevant works of any of the philosophers i've mentioned then i don't need to provide you with a quote. if, however, you are not then i suggest you study any 3-4 from that list -- for your own edification, of course. in any case, **mariner**, the *burden* of proof lies with the claimant: if you claim there is 'absolute truth' then by all means demonstrate it; failing *that we incredulous* sophists will carry on as we always have, as *cognitive fallibilists / epistemic probabilists*.

Quote:

Your treatment of the argument, itself, shows that you are not a great fan of logic either. "Vacuous tautologies", you call it.

on the contrary, i'm quite fond of logic, and respect it's proper application: to arguments (or itself) -- *and not* to the world. (*pace* wittgenstein) besides, i was referring to your 2nd premise and not to any formally valid & sound inference of consequence.

Quote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **180 Proof**

human practices convey truth-value in terms of inferential validity & soundness or material utility or ineluctable significance.

Is this sentence conveying truth value in terms of inferential validity & soundness? Or is it material utility? Or is it ineluctable significance?

The 'sentence' in question is not a "human practice" but an artifact resulting from one -- namely, *this* discussion. i posit an alternative because i find your 'essentialist' program *performatively inconsistent*: you locate 'truth' outside language and yet use language to express 'truth' about (this) 'truth' -- **which, of course, wholly begs the question**; rather, i *propose* a notion of truth that does not degenerate into the incoherence of your *petito principii*. your questions are addressed to a strawman, **mariner**.

Quote:

Just so I understand what you mean by "truth". Hard to know, when you say that "ignorance is the only certainty". what do YOU mean by 'absolute truth'? apodicticity? *petito principii*! logic does not justify itself, **mariner**; 'reason' is not founded upon 'reason'. **whatever we know is shot through with & encompassed by the unknown**. Can you (intelligibly) doubt the unknown? are you omniscient?! (isn't omniscience a self-refuting concept? -- like an eye without a blindspot!)

Quote:

"materialism" is not necessarily methodological, it may be metaphysical ...

where "materialism" amounts to a 'metaphysical commitment' it is incoherent and without utility (except as a reprieve from thinking.) the claim -- (that) the ONLY existence or knowledge is 'material' -- has no 'material content' (it's own requirement) which can be tested, measured or demonstrated. in the context of "evolution", **mariner**, "materialism" only refers to a methodology. it's pointlessly argumentative to confuse matters & insist otherwise.

By 180 Proof

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't think it is shared by "all worldviews", though I surely agree that it isn't unique to determinism... though if we define determinism broadly enough, then I think it would be unique to determinism. It is particularly exacerbated by "bottom-up relationships", which are the mark of determinism. If our relationship to apodictic truth is not "bottom-up", but "top-down", then the problem is minimized or even disappears. Plato's theory is very much "top-down". Christian theology, too.

But you have merely assumed your perspective solves the problem, which is not the same as proving it actually does. Unless proven, there is still uncertainty. The truth of the claim of apodictic knowledge is dependent on already having it - a classic tautology.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I can be sure that truth is true. And we have access to truths, or at least we can't assume (we can't even imagine)

that we don't have access to truths. This is an "existential" problem.

Agreed. We will render ourselves immobile unless we assume that what we believe to be true, actually is true.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If truths are part of "the real world", then I can be sure about that. If truths are not part of "the real world", then what are they? I think this is a position even more damning to materialism.

The most damning position is one in which, by definition, things are not what they seem, as it already admits that truth and the sense of reality we have are in conflict. Materialism does not suffer from this problem. What you see is what you get from a materialist perspective. The same can not be said for supernatural perspectives, as you have already admit that the absolute truth is different from what we perceive.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It would be, if there were such disfunction. But there is not. Brains, mixed signs, are not disfunctions of reason, they are disfunctions of physiology/language.

Again, you are admitting that by your perspective, what appears to be the truth, that the brain is the source of reason, is not the truth at all. Yet you seem to think that materialism has a weaker position regarding knowledge?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

A deterministic world would entail some people that could not learn.

I don't know how you jump to that conclusion. Although there are plenty of people with severe learning disabilities, psychological problems, as well as severe forms of memory loss, I'm not sure you could claim they "can not learn". Needless to say, these are all clear indicators that reason and the brain are somehow causally related - precisely what material determinism would predict.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If learning about $1+1=2$ is a universal ability, independent of material causes (environment/genes/society/etc.), then we should see what we actually see. If it is not this kind of ability, then we ought to see people that can't learn about that, or change the meaning of causality to allow for an effect that is produced by just about any cause.

$1+1=2$ follows from a determinist perspective, because the universe behaves predictably - that's what determinism is all about. I seriously doubt you deny determinism for anything but the seat of reason. If you did, you would be hard pressed to explain why $1+1=2$, as it is an axiom based on observation.

The claim that the brain is just some kind of spiritual transponder is an outrageous claim that needs some serious substantiation.

Quote:

I don't think "an effect that is produced by any cause" can fit into a deterministic world.

We observe noncontradiction. We observe that $1+1=2$. There are many other truths we accept based on nothing but observation. Determinism assumes there are underlying rules that can not be violated. I'm not sure these should be called 'effects' though.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

By assuming that our relationship with truth is "top-down". (I hope you understand what I mean here. I can clarify if you wish).

An assumption of apodictic knowledge is not the same as apodictic knowledge. Do you see the problem?

BTW, Wittgenstein is probably the most recent philosopher to address the issue of certainty. I managed to

locate an on-line copy of "On Certainty", but the server is really slow. Hopefully you can access it. [On Certainty](#)

By spamspamspamandham

180 and all: the underlying problem with **Mariner's** belief system is that somehow (miraculously) evolution applies to all species except (modern) humans. To reconcile his strange belief system, he is required to propose (with 100% certainty) supernatural explanations for his inability to comprehend how purposeless and impersonal forces can create not only the wealth and diversity of genetic life but also the foundations for social behavior in animals and humans. His uneconomical proposal of two separate behavioral explanations, one for social behavior in non-humans primates and another for social behavior in human primates clearly shows his chauvinism.

The fact that he admits that all the human behavioral attributes (morality, consciousness, reason, etc) that he wants to protect from materialistic explanation, are at least in part derived from or "influenced" by evolutionary processes makes one feel sympathy for his existential dilemma in deciding where the natural leaves off and the supernatural begins.

In fact, Mariner's refusal to accept the idea that materialistic processes could possibly lead to social or cognitive behavior in animals but not to social or cognitive behavior in humans, is quite analogous to the creationist that accepts that materialistic processes could lead to "microevolution" differentiation of varieties but not to "macroevolution" differentiation of species. Arbitrary lines can be drawn in many different places evidently, depending on the degree of one's religious fundamentalism.

It's been enjoyable to see you philosophers deal so effectively with his obtuse and circular reasonings. I especially enjoyed these points:

By Faustus: "Since necessary truths are true by virtue of the meanings of words, very little that we are accustomed to calling "true" will measure up to Mariner's bizarre standards. In fact, Mariner's premise will ONLY permit logical and mathematical propositions to be true. Forget science—science requires making falsifiable claims that need investigation and are often modified or rejected outright over time; you don't sit back and do biology by contemplating the meanings of words and doing logical calculus, which is exactly what you would expect if biological truths were in fact necessary truths. Similarly, you can forget ethics, aesthetics. . .forget pretty much anything to which you were accustomed to thinking had at least some truth to it: unless something is typically known to be true by logical analysis of the meanings of terms, Mariner won't let you call it "truth"."

By 180: "the 'sentence' in question is not a "human practice" but an artifact resulting from one -- namely, this discussion. i posit an alternative because i find your 'essentialist' program performatively inconsistent: you locate 'truth' outside language and yet use language to express 'truth' about (this) 'truth' -- which, of course, wholly begs the question; rather, i propose a notion of truth that does not degenerate into the incoherence of your *petito principii*. your questions are addressed to a strawman, mariner. "

By Spam: "The most damning position is one in which, by definition, things are not what they seem, as it already admits that truth and the sense of reality we have are in conflict. Materialism does not suffer from this problem. What you see is what you get from a materialist perspective. The same can not be said for supernatural perspectives, as you have already admit[ted] that the absolute truth is different from what we perceive."

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Mariner, your writing style is extremely unclear, in that it's difficult to see what in the world you are really trying to say. I don't like arguing against straw men, but your vagueness and lack of precision invites the invention of straw men at every turn.

For instance, I was under the impression that your argument was directed against the plausibility of reason-in-general having an evolutionary origin, and that premise one was supposed to be a definition of truth-in-general. Now it seems as if the scope has been narrowed, and you are only talking about logic.

Nevertheless, your responses to me continue to send mixed messages on this point. First you state that "no one claims that science is apodictically true". Then, once I point out that premise one is an eccentric way of understanding truth, you claim that your definition is merely the dictionary one. That's simply false if we're talking about truth-in-general, but plausible if the focus is merely on the evolutionary origins of logic. Which is it?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If the dog doesn't have a language, it doesn't have a belief. Try to define "belief" without a kind of language.

No, I'll play burden tennis on that one: find a dictionary anywhere that defines the English word "belief" in such a way as to make it apply only to the mental states of language using animals. Good luck. Oh, and by the way, if we can't say "The vervet monkey on the left believes a lion is nearby?" then what changes to the English language do you recommend in its place?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Of course thoughts are caused by something. My argument shows that this something is not material.

Thoughts are caused by something non-material? Really? Then what does the brain do? And why is it that the scientific world seems not to know of your genius conclusions? I mean, my god, you have a revolutionary argument here, something no one has ever heard of. Please, send a copy to the editors of **Nature** or **Behavioral and Brain Sciences** so that they are no longer in the dark. You owe it to the world, Mariner. Why restrict the morsels of your sparkling new insights to scum like us?

By the way, thanks for admitting your dualism. So much for your commitment to and understanding of science. And yes, I am going to continue to conflate "material causes" with all causes until you can find scientific support for the existence of souls.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Unfortunately, "2" follows from the premises and can't quite be "dropped" without dropping logic in the process.

For someone arguing about the origins of logic you know precious little about it. Step two does not follow from the premises—it IS a premise. And unfortunately for you, it is a question begging premise. Why? Because, as I pointed out, it is the very statement your argument is supposed to conclude upon. Therefore, it cannot appear as a premise. This is Logic 101, Mariner, and that's why you have failed to convince anyone here that you are making sense.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faustus**

Thoughts are caused by something non-material? Really? Then what does the brain do?

In Mariner's case, apparently attempt to find "rationalizations" to justify one's deepest intuitions and emotional beliefs.

"Not to be absolutely certain is, I think, one of the essential things in rationality."
Bertrand Russell, "Am I An Atheist Or An Agnostic?", 1947

"When one admits that nothing is certain one must, I think, also admit that some things are much more nearly certain than others."
Bertrand Russell, "Am I An Atheist Or An Agnostic?", 1947

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faustus**

Mariner, your writing style is extremely unclear, in that it's difficult to see what in the world you are really trying to say. I don't like arguing against straw men, but your vagueness and lack of precision invites the invention of straw men at every turn.

Faustus, "vagueness and lack of precision" are tactics typical of creationists and ID'ers the world 'round. He's admitted already that he has no alternative scientific theory of the evolution of human behavior and now apparently he doesn't have even a philosophical argument. When one has no theory or rational argument, it pays to be vague.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Hey, I finished the book on the evolution of logic. Pretty interesting stuff, but it was heavy on mathematics that I could just barely "get," and by the author's own admission, more empirical work needs to be done. But he makes a good case.

It turns out that classic logic is only selected for—provides an evolutionarily stable strategy—in the most simple and abstract models of population dynamics. The more complications you add (the more like real life the model is), the more it turns out that non-classical logics provide the best "fitness" to the environment.

This might explain why it is that human beings do so "poorly" in cognitive science studies of their reasoning behavior when the benchmark of success is taken to be classical logic. That benchmark, as it turns out, might be inappropriate. That is, creatures that reason according to logic and decision theory as taught classically may turn out to be less fit than creatures that reason in a non-classical manner. So in effect, calling the behaviors tracked in these experiments "mistakes" could itself be question begging. Apparently, natural selection doesn't reward the "perfection" of classic logic in every choice we make. Interesting, and very counter-intuitive.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **BlindProphet**

So the demand, made by many evolutionists, that a "scientific theory" must conform to one religious/philosophical belief system (e.g., humanistic naturalism) to the exclusion of another (e.g., biblical Christianity), is an arbitrarily contrived requirement—and a double standard.

Any attempt to "explain" anything using supernatural processes does not explain anything at all. Saying "god did it" is only another way humans have for millennia said "we don't understand". The history of science is replete with supernatural explanations that have been replaced by robust, useful and informative natural and scientific explanations. This is not a double standard- science actually explains, religion

pretends to explain.

Do you believe that lightning the wrath of god? If not, why not? It's no different for evolution (or for example, controversies involving contraception or gay sex) except that human reproduction is a much more emotional issue to ourselves than the weather. Why is that? It's because if our reproductive behavior wasn't overwhelmingly emotionally involved in our existence, we probably wouldn't have survived as a species.

Saying god created the world 15 billion years ago, 4 billion years ago, 4,000 years ago or even 5 seconds ago are equally vacuous, empty and useless "explanations" (except of course they may relieve your existential anxieties- which is exactly why religious belief could have been adaptively selected for).

Attributing to the supernatural only what science has not yet fully explained to your intuitive satisfaction is uneducated emotionalism and ultimately a self-defeating basis for belief. It's an amazing and beautiful universe out there- learn about it and explore it. Science is makes much more interesting reading than bible stories.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faustus**

This might explain why it is that human beings do so "poorly" in cognitive science studies of their reasoning behavior when the benchmark of success is taken to be classical logic. That benchmark, as it turns out, might be inappropriate. That is, creatures that reason according to logic and decision theory as taught classically may turn out to be less fit than creatures that reason in a non-classical manner. So in effect, calling the behaviors tracked in these experiments "mistakes" could itself be question begging. Apparently, natural selection doesn't reward the "perfection" of classic logic in every choice we make. Interesting, and very counter-intuitive.

This fits in well with the book I'm reading now "Influence" which examines how much of our "reasoning" is based upon "shortcuts" (click-whirr mechanisms) that provide (in most situations) an adaptive response to common situations.

For example: Why did the tourists buy all the cheap turquoise that was accidently **marked up**? Because "you get what you pay for" **most** of the time- so "expensive" generally means "quality", and not all of us can afford the "survival resources" to become experts in appraising turquoise jewelry.

The point being that we don't need 100% certainty to interact with the real world for a selective survival advantage. Those creatures that waited around for 100% certainty- didn't survive to reproduce.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **probeman**

The point being that we don't need 100% certainty to interact with the real world for a selective survival advantage. Those creatures that waited around for 100% certainty- didn't survive to reproduce.

Yep, in a lot of the models the author used, there was a selection advantage to creatures who basically "flipped a coin" when choosing a strategy. His comment was that natural selection may have "dumbed us down" in some circumstances because sometimes it was beneficial. Weird.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faustus**

Yep, in a lot of the models the author used, there was a selection advantage to creatures who basically "flipped a coin" when choosing a strategy. His comment was that natural selection may have "dumbed us down" in some circumstances because sometimes it was beneficial. Weird.

This reminds me of behavioral studies in which participants are asked to anticipate a response of what turned out to be random blinking lights. Most participants scored lower than chance because they tried to find a pattern in the lights even though there wasn't one. Just picking at random would have been a better strategy in these cases.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

... It's better to leave those who are used to logic to deal with it . I don't argue with belief either, so you'll understand if I don't address the rest of your post -- since you deny logic, all you have is belief, so there.

I agree (and so do a few philosophers here) that logic should probably be left to those that know how to "deal with it".

It seems that the consensus among the philosophers is that no one here "denies" logic, but rather that applications of logic to the real world and conclusions of 100% certainty are at least problematic. That is why we have science as a test for our tentative conclusions about nature. Because if "premises" and "forms of argument" can be mistaken (as you seem to admit), then so can the results of such "logic", that is based on them.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, I haven't assumed that my perspective solves the problem, because since the beginning of this discussion (which you probably missed) my only claim is that materialism does NOT solve the problem. I don't know how to account for reason, and I never said I knew. I have guesses, but that's all. What I do know, however, is that materialism doesn't solve it.

Well, without going into a "he said, he said", I'll just accept that you have not claimed the superiority of any particular position. That being the case, do you agree that it is epistemology in general that suffers from the problem of certainty, and that the problem is not specific to determinism?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, this addresses premises 1 and 3, and we agree on them. The problem, to you, is premise 2, right? I also think it is the most vulnerable.

Hold up. I just stated that it is epistemology in general that suffers from the problem of certainty. An assumption of truth is still not the same as apodictic knowledge of it. (3) is still the fundamental problem, unless you can demonstrate that there is some other epistemology that does not suffer from the problem of certainty. We assume that what we think to be true actually is, because otherwise we are immobile, even if we acknowledge that it might not be, we are compelled to assume it or die. Neither you, nor I can not prove to me that I am not insane. It is possible that I live in my own world created by my mind that has no bearing whatsoever on apodictic truth. The same holds true for you (unless of course I am actually insane).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't think we may say that "materialism does not suffer from this problem".

I recant. You are correct. The proper position would be that materialism is not founded on the premise that the true reality differs from the perception of reality, but rather that the perception of reality is a close approximation of actual reality.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In other words, that "things are not what they seem" is pretty much accepted in some circumstances, whether one is a materialist or not.

I think I'd rephrase that as "things might not be what they seem". We do not know they are not what they seem any more than we know they are.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think there's meat for thought in this point, though. The process of conceptualization, itself, is active -- we do not simply register the sense perceptions, we interpret them -- and we use logic in that process. So I think the point about perception can be reduced to the point about logic... what do you think?

I think perception is much more than logic, and possible perpendicular to it. It is possible to believe in contradictory premises, and I suspect everyone does at times, as long as the contradiction is not obvious.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

That "the brain is the source of reason" appears to be the truth from a materialist point of view, only.

There is strong evidence for it, that must be explained by unverifiable premises if it is denied. The dependence on hidden parameters for competing theories is evidence in favor of materialism - if you have a healthy respect for Occam.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think materialism can't account for itself (as a theory). Any formulation of materialism is "a formulation", and if it is contradictory with the general truth of formulations, it can't be right. Is it contradictory? As I understand it, you believe that materialism does not establish the general truth of formulations, but not that it is contradictory with the general truth of formulations. Is that it?

That's close, but the fundamental problem is not specific to materialism or determinism (you seem to use these interchangeably, but they are not the same)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I'd say that this is an indicator that reason and brains are "related", but I wouldn't add the "causal".

When correlation is consistently 1, it is assumed there is a causal relationship, although that is not enough to establish *what* the cause is.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

We also assume that reason is independent of brains (since we assume that causality and logic were working before there were brains around). In effect, we assume that reason is not something caused.

Your basically correct here. The foundations of reason are axioms which are based on observation alone. They are assumed to be true independent of our minds. The observation that reason is effective, is evidence that things are predictable, i.e. deterministic.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Hm, I think it is an axiom based on the definitions of mathematics... even if one never observed a material addition of two different units, he would be forced to accept that $1+1=2$ if he understood the concepts and their

definition.

The axioms of mathematics were not founded in a vacuum. They are accepted because we observe them. Otherwise, mathematics would be a powerless toy for brainiacs.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Anyway, the argument does not say "If determinism is true, then $1+1$ could be 3". It says "If determinism is true, then someone could honestly believe that $1+1$ could be 3".

First, I don't see how that follows. Regardless, there might be people who think $1+1=3$ independent of determinism. Why would other epistemologies not suffer from this problem?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't know what a transponder is.

A walkie talkie is a transponder - a device capable of transforming information into a different form and transmitting it, or the inverse, or both.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But I'm claiming that the brain can't be the sole cause of reason, that's all.

You are claiming it. The question is, can you prove it? I find your argument against determinism flawed from premise 3, as I have previously stated.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I differentiate my guesses about what else is involved from the argument, itself. If I think that "a spirit" solves the problem neatly (by postulating the pre-existence of truth, and a faculty of recognizing that in "the spirit"), it is quite likely just the result of my faith. But that material causation can't be the sole agent involved is the result of the argument. Among the possible alternatives, "the spirit" is just one. I can't prove it. I never said I could

Of course I disagree. The concept of spirit involves at least two problems. First, it is not verifiable. Second, it assumes that reality is not what it appears to be - an admission that the epistemology necessarily suffers from uncertainty, rather than merely acknowledging that it might (as in materialism). As far as claiming apodictic truth, dualism is weaker than materialism because of the second point.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I wouldn't say that "we observe" any of those things, because observation itself is dependent on the axioms of logic.

I'll just disagree on this point. Observation is that which is observed. I think it possible to observe a paradox, and it is even quite common to do so. But we can not understand a paradox once it is made clear.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Where do these axioms "come from" in a materialistic worldview? Could they be different?

We don't know why they are what they are, and Godel may have shown that we never will. We merely assert they are not different (not that they couldn't be though).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If yes, then why aren't they different if we change the causes; if no, then we have an effect caused by all causes, which is hard to explain (in a materialistic worldview).

All of nature seems to adhere to underlying repeatable laws. That is the premise of materialistic determinism. From this perspective, it is not surprising that things behave predictably even when the causes are modified. Non-deterministic world views tend to implicitly make the same assumption, but with an

exception thrown in for the mind. After all, how far would you get if you could not even rely on noncontradiction (a material observation).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, that's the existential problem. But the point is not that "we have apodictic knowledge", it's more like "we can't assume that we don't have apodictic knowledge". This makes all theories based on that assumption, contradictory.

Ok, I agree. It is not practical (possible?) to assume our knowledge is unrelated to absolute truth. It is merely something that nags us from time to time between debates.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Thanks . I'll check it now. Though from the opening pages I can say that 180Proof should scrap this name from his list...

i don't want to get involved in a 'philosophy triangle'. You and 180 can hash it out independently.

(You'll get no argument from me opposing the premise that Wittgenstein was a brilliant man. It's sad that he was forced to leave his work on uncertainty incomplete.)

By spampampamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But if we do not have access to truth, then "we do not have access to truth" can't be true.

Huh???

Just what do you mean by "have access to truth"? Do you mean "believe true statements"? Do you mean "have justifiably certain belief in true statements"? If it's the former, your whole argument is trivially stupid. But if it's the latter, I don't understand the argument for the proposition quoted above.

By Curt Monash

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Agreed. But though it is possible that we live in a world created by our minds that has no bearing on apodictic truth, we can't assume that we do. And this "can't" is quite strong. It's not a "won't". No matter how much we try, we can't assume that apodictic truth is false, without resurrecting it on the spot.

Agreed. We *must* assume that what we perceive as truth actually is. At the same time, we can also recognize the possibility that it might not be.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I do. I'd be the first to say that the brain is the source of reason if that hypothesis didn't have problems of its own. In fact, it is because I have a healthy respect for Occam that I insist that something else is involved .

I feel somewhat like a lazy lurker on this as I'm sure it's been covered earlier in the thread. If you wouldn't

mind, please present a brief summary of the problems you think are associated with the premise that the brain is the seat of reason.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, I don't think that this is a general principle. I can think of lots of nutty correlations that are consistently 1.

No doubt. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. So does the moon. Is there a causal relationship? It turns out the answer is yes, although the relationship is not between the sun and moon, but rather between the earth and sun and the earth and moon. This nutty correlation does in fact tell us about causal relationships, but you can not assume the causal relationship is between the two correlated actions.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I agree, though, that this is a reasonable principle (though not a general one). I think that all cases must be checked, though.

If all cases must be checked, then nothing can be inferred from observed principles. Your position appears to be a case of special pleading, as you are more than willing to utilize inference for other cases.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Agreed. That reason predicts the workings of the world is evidence that the world works along deterministic lines. But each case must be studied separately, and any single instance to the contrary allows us to claim that determinism is false.

I will agree that if there are cases where it is observed that determinism is violated, then determinism is not a general principle. Failure to understand how determinism might account for something (consciousness for example) is not the same as proving that it does not. I am not convinced that the universe is fundamentally deterministic, although it does appear to be so at the macroscopic level.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Well, I'm not a mathematician, perhaps Curt Monash may help here; couldn't we say that there are many possible mathematics, and we chose the one that is useful for us, because it is the one that corresponds to the world? But the truth of the axioms of mathematics is not related to its utility to us.

The truths of the axioms of mathematics are based solely on observation. There are no limits to the possible mathematics from an intellectual perspective, but only those capable of modelling the real world are of interest.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Taking the second question first: there "might be" people who think $1+1=3$, but there aren't.

How can you know that? Have you actually interviewed everyone?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And determinism entails the conclusion that there "should be" people who thought that. Since there aren't, then determinism is false.

It seems that your entire argument is resting on this. But you have not shown why the truth of determinism would compel some people to think $1+1=3$. You have not quantified what percentage would think this way, or why they would, nor have you proven that there are not people who think this. You have also not shown that other epistemologies would not suffer the same 'problem'. This is an extremely tenuous position you have taken.

But for the sake of argument, suppose it is true that there are no people who think $1+1=3$. I could just as easily claim this as evidence that determinism is true, as only an indeterminate process could result in a conclusion that contradicts deterministic processes. (for the record, I recognize this as a nonsequitur as well).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Of course that "entails the conclusion" is the answer to the first question. And the reasoning is as follows -- if "1+1=2" is the result of deterministic causes, akin to how a molecule is a product of a gland, then any disfunction in the causal chain involved production of the effect should result in a disfunction in the effect. This analogy is crude, but it is meaningful. If we "produce truths" as opposed to "discovering" them, then different truths ought to be observed if we changed the productive chain.

It isn't enough that there is *any* dysfunction to cause a change in the observed behavior, there must be *sufficient* dysfunction. We do in fact observe irrational behavior in people with severe brain impairment. By the standard you have set, this is proof that determinism is the correct position.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But what is the flaw? You didn't show a flaw, you said that all epistemologies suffer from the same problem. And I agreed. But since we can't dispose of premise 3 (because of the way we think -- and we can't change the way we think, for better or for worse), then what is wrong with the argument?

The flaw is that uncertainty does not imply that what we think is correct is actually false. You already agreed to this. Argument point (2) (which is actually a premise) is false, so your conclusion is flawed.

Additionally, all epistemologies suffer from the problem of uncertainty, so this is not a weakness specific to determinism. Any conclusion you can draw from that is then also not specific to determinism. If this argument disproves determinism, it also disproves all other epistemologies, and thus determinism is no weaker than any other.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

What do you mean by "observing a paradox"?

A set of observations that result in a contradictory conclusion when put together, but that independently do not seem to. An example is the guy who has a system for picking lottery numbers, even though he knows the numbers are chosen completely at random.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

"Not that they couldn't be though" is assuming that the axioms of logic could be false; but had we not agreed that we can't assume that?

We can not assume they are false, but we must accept uncertainty.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I agree with everything but the last part. Noncontradiction is a material observation? Why? It is in-built in us, and we can't assume that it is wrong, and we use it in conceptualization... just as all axioms of logic, it comes prior to observation.

It can not be proven, but must simply be accepted since that's the way we observe the world (us included) works. We can not even imagine something contradictory, because our thoughts are part of the system that does not allow contradiction. If you think about it, isn't this evidence of the truth of determinism? Why would even our thoughts be subject to noncontradiction if they originate outside nature? Dualism is forced to assume that the axioms of logic are transcendental to get around this - a further complication of a needlessly complex epistemology.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have no doubts that Wittgenstein was brilliant, from what I knew, and from what I'm reading. And I never said otherwise. Brilliancy, however, does not save us from error .

Did you find a flaw in his notes on certainty?

By spamspamsamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

On the other hand, luckily for mankind, the kind of ignorance that refuses to read what the poster is saying but prefers to fight ghosts is quite rare .

I and the philosophers here have read all too much of your confused philosophical attempts at justifying your religious beliefs and I suspect that they, like myself, grow weary of debating your 100% certainty which is lacking in both scientific evidence (according to yourself) and logical argument (according to the philosophers).

Why don't you help Radrook and Dantes with their confusions regarding the evolution of life? At least you mostly get that part right. Or are their beliefs too close to your own for comfort?

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't have a problem with the premise that the brain is the seat of reason. I think there is a problem with the premise that the brain is the cause of reason.

Ok then, what are the problems you see with the premise that the brain is the cause of reason?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

... And when we apply this particular (reasonable) principle, all cases must be checked, and the "checking apparatus" is composed of the general principles (e.g. logic).

But you just dodged the issue. Determinism is accepted as true even by you except in the case of reason. You reject it not because it has been proven false, but merely because you do not see how to prove it true. Yet, this same standard is not applied across the board with respect to determinism. It is assumed to apply in all other cases, including other cases where it is not immediately obvious that it does. This is the inference which you reject for the special case of reason. Am I wrong on this point or do you really insist on observing repeatable behavior in all cases before you conclude that something is deterministic?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, but the argument, rightly or wrongly, proves that determinism can't account for reason. If it is "wrongly", then we must find the flaw.

Which argument? You already agreed that argument point (2) is false. The rest of your proof falls apart. You have not proven that determinism can't account for reason, and you indirectly admitted as much already.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I think we have a correlation of 1, here . I have never met, heard of, or read about anyone who espoused a different system of mathematics. To say that "I must interview everybody before I can claim that all humans share the same system of mathematics (and more importantly, the same axioms of logic)" is to condemn inferential

reasoning.

But you are positing a case for which such inference is invalid by construction. You can not then use an inference to prove your point on the matter for which inference should not be expected to apply.

The point is moot anyway, since you have not demonstrated why determinism would result in people who hold to systems of mathematics or logic that in no way resemble the actual world, nor have you shown that such a phenomenon would be unique to determinism.

It's mind boggling to me why you refuse to concede even when you have admitted your own argument is flawed, and have not justified these peripheral points that you seem to find important.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

... why do we function as we do; why are the two (reason and world) so closely linked?

Isn't the obvious answer that reason is an aspect of the world itself and is thus subject to the same laws we observe acting on everything else?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

...and we must explain what is the causal chain that produces "truth" in our knowledge; and we must explain what is the causal (historical) chain that produced that neurological causal chain.

Here is the fundamental difference in our perspectives. I do not insist on understanding every causal chain before I accept that it is in fact causal. Neither do you I suspect, except in the case of reason. But this is special pleading. Since causality is such a good predictor of everything else, the default position should be that it also applies to us, even if there exist cases where we do not yet understand how.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't think that some people would be compelled to think $1+1=3$; I think some people might be compelled. But none ever is.

You keep using this example without any justification whatsoever that;

1. There are none, nor have there ever been, nor will there ever be anyone who thinks $1+1=3$
2. That the odds of someone thinking this way 'should be' nontrivial
3. That you can arrive at a valid conclusion that there never have been, are not, and never will be any based on your personal sampling of at most a few thousand people
4. That somehow determinism 'should' be producing such people
5. That some competing epistemologies would not also produce such people
6. That other forms of irrational behavior in people with impaired brains does not count for some reason, only $1+1=3$ will do

In other words, there is not the slightest bit of validity to this argument. Until you address these points, I will ignore any further discussion of this example.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In other words, people in such a deterministic world could never be mistaken; they could never, from good premises, reach a bad conclusion. All failures of reasoning would be the fault of bad premises; never of bad reasoning (since reasoning would be a deterministic process).

Now you're trying to have the other side of the argument too! You claimed that determinism would create people with faulty reasoning, but we never see faulty reasoning and so determinism isn't true. Now you are saying that determinism should never result in faulty reasoning, but we see faulty reasoning and so determinism isn't true. I'll use this as evidence that faulty reasoning does in fact exist, and so by your original standard, determinism must be true.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

In the deterministic world, people would -- very reasonably -- reach different conclusions. We would have rational people arguing about whether $1+1=2$ or $1+1=3$. And in such a world, perhaps, it would make sense to do "experiments" to prove reason. Since our world is nothing like that, determinism can't quite account for it.

Every time you observe anything behaving in a predictable way, another experiment that proves determinism has been performed. It is so commonplace, happening thousands of times a day for each of us, that we simply take it for granted and are baffled when we observe something that doesn't appear deterministic. It would be a waste of time to set up experiments to confirm what we already observe continuously.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Only "bottom-up" epistemologies. And uncertainty does imply that what we think is correct is uncertain; but we can't assume that.

No, ALL epistemologies suffer from uncertainty. Uncertainty does not disappear through the assumption that your epistemology doesn't suffer from it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Also, why would "assuming that the axioms of logic are transcendental" complicate the problem?

Because it is a baseless assumption to claim that logic exists external to the physical world in which it operates. If you are willing to accept that, then I have a concise disproof of the necessity of god based on that assumption here [Simplest Possible World](#). You can't have it both ways.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It seems that it would solve it. The problem that one finds when he assumes that the axioms of logic are not transcendental is that he is forced to accept a "bottom-up" epistemology, as if he built knowledge instead of discovering it -- and this is circular. But the "transcendentalization" of logic solves it quite neatly.

If you assume that the natural is all there is, then nothing transcends it. There is no paradox from this perspective.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

This is basically why I think Occam's razor results in accepting such "transcendentalization". It's the simplest way to solve the problem.

The simplest is not to add yet another baseless assumption to a series of other baseless assumptions, but rather to re-examine the whole set. You have not disproven determinism, so it may still be assumed to be correct, in which case we have an even simpler set that is in principle verifiable, even if we have not yet figured out how to do it.

By spamspamspamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamspamspamandham**

Which argument? You already agreed that argument point (2) is false. The rest of your proof falls apart. You have not proven that determinism can't account for reason, and you indirectly admitted as much already.

Spam, Thanks for the support. Mariner was earlier suggesting that you agreed with "lots" of his argument. Unfortunately even someone as ignorant as myself knows that when one aspect of a logical "proof" is invalid- the conclusion is also invalid.

I must say though, it's sad to see someone as smart as Mariner abuse philosophy, solely in the attempt to justify (rationalize?) his religious beliefs. It really all comes down to the need for 100% certainty by some of us humans. However, I shouldn't be surprised since I suspect that this need for 100% certainty is evolutionary adaptive in many cases. After all, if one is wandering in the desert for 40 years, it might enhance one's survival to believe that there is a "greater" purpose and meaning for it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It may "seem", but I don't think you'll find any blooper like that one in my recent posts.

You mean like when you claimed Aristotle didn't hold the geocentric theory and asked me to prove it?

There were both religious and non-religious "universities" being started all through the period. Some were Church based and some Guild based. Read Cromer's "Uncommon Sense" for a nice summary of the development of science through that time. I think you would enjoy it. Seriously.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamspamspamandham**

Here is the fundamental difference in our perspectives. I do not insist on understanding every causal chain before I accept that it is in fact causal. Neither do you I suspect, except in the case of reason. But this is special pleading. Since causality is such a good predictor of everything else, the default position should be that it also applies to us, even if there exist cases where we do not yet understand how.

Spam, Sorry to keep quoting you but I think you've hit the nail on the head here. Special pleading is indeed the proper phrase for Mariner's position since he wants to apply evolution to all life except recent humans.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Are you writing too fast? Why do you call me "a creationist"? Are you redefining the words now?

Because you invoke the supernatural to explain the natural, without necessity.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

As for ignoring the scientific data... well, I can't really discuss scientific data with a man that denies the concept of truth. Sorry about that. All you have is beliefs, probeman -- but you don't like the word "belief". That's what happens when one abandons truth -- he becomes unattached to reality.

Strawman. I only deny the concept of Truth with 100% certainty and I believe that's the brand that you smoke.

Watch this folks- he'll say: "Are you 100% certain of this?"

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Mariner, you are truly living in an interesting fantasy world entirely of your own creation. The history of the Enlightenment—when Western science was born—is the history of original thinkers struggling AGAINST the oppression of narrow Christian ideology. That's why so many scientific and philosophical tracts had to be kept secret or got published after the deaths of their writers. That's why some of them were under house arrest or were burned at the stake.

I've been reading a highly regarded book about these events (*Radical Enlightenment*)—there's your documentation. Even I was shocked at how tough it was for these heroes to get decent science and philosophy done in an environment dominated by Christianity. A Europe dominated by Christianity during the Enlightenment was scarcely different from a Middle East dominated by mullahs today. In page after page of exhaustive detail, this book describes over and over again how original thinkers and their supporters had to hide their books, recant their beliefs, write without putting their names on their work. . .and without exception, always because some Christian authority or other accused them of heresy.

The irony is that for the most part, these oppressed thinkers really were Christians and Jews themselves

who engaged in whatever mental gymnastics they could to retain their faiths despite what they were finding out about the world. But religious conservatives are rarely fooled by such tactics, and recognized that thinkers such as Descartes or Spinoza really were eating away at the foundations of the Judeo-Christian traditions, whatever rationalizations they offered to the contrary.

Of course, these days a dualist like Descartes is considered old fashioned, stodgy, and out of touch. . .but that only shows how far things have gone away from faith based thinking, at least in the sciences. It is no coincidence that scientific organizations have a much higher than normal percentage of non-believers than other groups. If your little fantasies were true, we should see the opposite trend.

But at least you can take perverse comfort in that you are carrying on a tradition: denying science to preserve religious beliefs. That's exactly what enemies of science in the West have always done.

And by the way, your writing continues to be confused, obviously a sign of confusion at the source. In an earlier post you protested to me that scientific truth was not apodictically true. Now, suddenly, science depends on it. Do you even really know what you believe?

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yep. And you see the difference clearly -- I admitted the mistake, said what is the sentence that might give you this impression, and the discussion went on.

Are you 100% certain? Actually at the time (and I'm not 100% certain) you claimed that you always knew that Aristotle was a geocentric. When I then asked why you asked me for a source, you never answered. So I'm not so sure if you really admitted your mistake, except for just now. In any case, just because you made a mistake on that bit of philosophical history doesn't mean anything for our discussion now. I just brought it up because you claimed you never made a "blooper". So I refuted you- that's all.

Oh, and yes, I am totally enjoying seeing how a philosopher like **Spam** deals with your logical confusions.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And you would do well to read Jacques Le Goff's "Intellectuals at the Middle Ages". (I suppose that's the name in English). You're speaking of a later period.

Right now yes. But Cromer starts with the Greeks- though his take on the origin of science relates to the successful integration of their toleration of other ideas and it's value for economic trade. Not God.

Thanks for the reading suggestion. It's on my list.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The circularity already discussed in a bottom-up account of truth.

The circularity is in your argument, whereby you first assume you have access to absolute truth, and thus conclude you have absolute certainty of that access.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Now, in the case of reason, we see the "effect produced by all causes", which is an attack on determinism from "the other side of it", so to speak. Determinism entails both repeatable behavior and changeable behavior. If we maintain the causes, the effects must be maintained; if we change the causes, the effect must be changed.

You have not demonstrated that all causes lead to the same effect, you are merely repeating it over and over. You have also not shown that it is impossible for similar sets of causes to result in the same effect.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**
I did? When?

Here

Quote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, I haven't assumed that my perspective solves the problem, because since the beginning of this discussion (which you probably missed) my only claim is that materialism does NOT solve the problem...

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spam**

That being the case, do you agree that it is epistemology in general that suffers from the problem of certainty, and that the problem is not specific to determinism?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Yes, that problem (of certainty) is a problem of epistemology.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spam**

An assumption of truth is still not the same as apodictic knowledge of it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Agreed.

I thought we had come to consensus that uncertainty is an aspect of all epistemologies, which then makes your argument point number (2) irrelevant.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't think that the denial of determinism in the case of reason falsifies all kinds of inductive reasoning -- is that what you're claiming?

No. You claimed that if determinism is true, there must be people who believe $1+1=3$. Then without quantifying the percentage of people who should believe this under the premise of determinism, you concluded that a sampling of a few thousand at most is sufficient to infer the actual number is 0. This is an invalid inference unless you first quantify the fraction of people who should think $1+1=3$ under a determinist model. You may be right that some people should, but it may also be the case that the probability of it is immeasurably small. Further, you arbitrarily decided $1+1=3$ is a proper litmus test, but really, any sign of faulty reasoning should be sufficient. Although the entire argument is a nonsequitur anyway.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have shown that a determinism world would undermine our belief in truth.

Uhg. You seemed to have agreed that all epistemologies suffered from uncertainty, but for some reason you want to pick on determinism as if this were a flaw specific to it.

If you disagree that your epistemology suffers from uncertainty, then it's probably best we just cut this off, as I find your argument based on that premise fundamentally unsound. Uncertainty is simply not the same as the negation.

By spamspamsamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

*I don't come to "philosophyforums" to avoid **examining** my ideas.*

What 'ideas'? (you're clearly avoiding *my* examination of your *cough* idols *cough*!)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Science is not apodictically true, **but it depends on** apodictic truth (as all knowledge does).

Is it just me or is anyone here persuaded at all by this fatuous nonsense?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You, on the other hand, as usual, have not answered to my questions, not provided quotes to establish your assertion about that long list of philosophers, etc.

A point of order, **friend**: you've made claims which you've not deigned to substantiate or express coherently & consistently. the burden of proof, as they say, lies with you: "apodictic truth"? show me, don't tell me! *how*? Make an apodictic argument that is not merely tautologous.

By 180 Proof

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Science was born on the Enlightenment? Wow. Well, this is too far from reality to merit discussion.

Western science did not significantly differ from that of other cultures, did not take off the way it did, until the "scientific revolution," which was the offspring of the Enlightenment. In fact, before the Enlightenment, there was no separate discipline called "science" that was clearly assigned a different division of labor from, for instance, philosophy, alchemy, and idle scholasticism (Newton and his contemporaries were called "natural philosophers").

So, it was the Enlightenment that led to that unique triumph of scientific method that is now identified as modern Western science. And clearly, the evidence is that the core changes in Western thinking during that period were violently opposed by Christian authorities.

I think it should be said that I know of several intellectually sophisticated Christian thinkers on other forums who have adapted their faith remarkably well to modern scientific findings and don't have any problems with evolution being responsible for the development of **all** animal cognition, not just the factors dualism assigns to the immaterial soul. In fact, one of the guys I interact with is a priest who spends time patiently and kindly explaining scientific principles to various deaf creationists. So, there is no need for non-believers like myself to insist you can't do good science and still have strong belief in religion—that would be silly, and is certainly contradicted by the good works of many believing scientists.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **180 Proof**

Is it just me or is anyone here persuaded at all by this fatuous nonsense?

Doesn't appear to be. One thinks of energizer bunnies. Or guys doggedly trying to build perpetual motion machines in their basements, convinced they have stumbled upon insights too brilliant for ordinary mortals to understand.

By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Also, I didn't make "claims that I've not deigned to substantiate", etc. etc. Whenever one asked me to substantiate a claim, I did so.

A thousand apologies, **sir!** I must have missed this spectacular display of "absolute truth". would you be so kind as to point me (and the rest of these cranky folks) towards the post # where you brought 2500+ years of western philosophy to a screeching halt?

By 180 Proof

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I conclude that we can't assume that we don't have such access -- and you agreed with that, didn't you?

We must assume it, not because it is necessarily true, but because we would be immobilized if we do not. While assuming it, we can still recognize the assumption might not be true. You have cast aside that recognition by mere assumptive fiat.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I never said it is "impossible", but I have said that it would make a mockery of determinism if we could find an effect produced by all known causes. Wouldn't it? We see something; we tinker with the cause -- the effect is the same; we tinker still more -- the effect is the same...

Not if the tinkering is small with respect to other forces, and the ability to measure the effects is limited. Throwing an ice cube into a tornado will have no measurable effect.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I don't see how determinism can co-exist with the notion of an effect produced by all causes.

What is this effect produced by all causes you refer to? Consciousness? The belief that $1+1=2$? These are not produced by all causes, but only by a very small fraction of causes.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But I repeatedly said that this is a problem of bottom-up epistemologies, and said that top-down epistemologies are not subjected to it.

Then our discussion is complete. Uncertainty is a fundamental premise of philosophy.

By spamspamamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I have stated several times, with examples, that some epistemologies should be exempt from the problem.

It seems that Spam has logically shown that your philosophical argument boils down to a belief in the absence of uncertainty in your own beliefs (much like Radrook's special pleading to remove his own religious beliefs from evolutionary explanations). In my uneducated and simple mind I'd say you and Radrook are both guilty of "circular" reasoning.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But I repeatedly said that this is a problem of bottom-up epistemologies, and said that top-down epistemologies are not subjected to it. The circularity in explaining truth from matter does not arise if truth predates matter and is actively involved in epistemology.

This quote from you reminds me very much of John Locke's hierarchy of ideas on matter and mind. That is :

1. That nothing can only produce nothing.
2. That matter can only produce matter.
3. That life can only produce life.
4. That mind can only produce mind.

Therefore mind (God) must come first.

Unfortunately Darwinian evolution to begin with and subsequently many other fields of science has dealt a severe blow to this quaint notion and other related human intuitions with the development of quantum mechanics, nanotechnology, biochemistry, cognitive science and evolutionary psychology.

There will always be those that yearn for 100% certainty in their beliefs of God, but that is not science, nor is it even philosophy apparently.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Radrook**

Evolutionists once claimed tha neck-stretching was what caused the giraffes to develop long necks.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamspamspamandham**

Yet it's still has more explanatory power than goddidit.

Good response.

Spam, I'd say put a fork in Mariner- he's done.

You know, it's sad, but not surprising, that after first retreating from a scientific argument to a philosophical argument, he's now retreated to what? Apparently a religious argument. What else can he mean by "...top-down epistemologies are not subjected to it [uncertainty]."? By "top-down" I can only assume he means "from god". He is simply an "intelligent design creationist" after all, pretending to be a philosopher, pretending to be a scientist.

Quote:

Originally Posted by Faustus

I've been reading a highly regarded book about these events (Radical Enlightenment)—there's your documentation. Even I was shocked at how tough it was for these heroes to get decent science and philosophy done in an environment dominated by Christianity.

Faustus,

Do you mean this book?- (there's two with similar titles):

Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750

by Jonathan I. Israel

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **probeman**

Originally Posted by Faustus

I've been reading a highly regarded book about these events (Radical Enlightenment)—there's your documentation. Even I was shocked at how tough it was for these heroes to get decent science and philosophy done in an environment dominated by Christianity.

Faustus,

Do you mean this book?- (there's two with similar titles):

Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750

by Jonathan I. Israel

Yep, that's the one. I haven't finished it yet, for reasons relevant to this thread: it is so darn repetitious. Book introduces us to minor scholar in Europe trying to spread/debate the ideas of Spinoza/Descartes, or introduce new scientific concept that goes against old school scholasticism. Minor Scholar starts getting pummeled by Christian authorities. Minor Scholar starts to have to worry about being run out of town or having his (often secret) library raided for heresy. Minor Scholar a) barely survives b) is forced to recant (or pretend to recant) c) ends up in jail and/or dies poor and miserable. On and on it goes, from one figure and country to another.

From a general history, one always hears of the names of the giants, like Descartes, Spinoza, Newton, etc. What I'm learning from this book is that we wouldn't know about these giants were it not for the heroic determination of lesser known figures, often far more vulnerable, to spread and modify new and heretical ideas. Quite an eye opener, at least for me.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faustus**

Minor Scholar starts getting pummeled by Christian authorities. Minor Scholar starts to have to worry about being run out of town or having his (often secret) library raided for heresy. Minor Scholar a) barely survives b) is forced to recant (or pretend to recant) c) ends up in jail and/or dies poor and miserable. On and on it goes, from one figure and country to another.

Of course revisionists like Mariner will argue that those Christians, like those burning witches then or books today, aren't "true" Christians. But when I read in the newspaper that Bishops and Popes threaten that women shall reproduce against their free will- it seems to be that same "ol' time religion" to me!

Strange how religion and reproduction always get entwined- until one realizes it's merely evolutionary

adaptive behavior to claim that limiting reproductive capacity (through contraception and gay marriage as well) is immoral.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Interestingly enough, I finished the first part of Wittgenstein's book last night, and he does the same thing. In fact, everybody does the same thing. That it is not possible for us to do otherwise surely is a strong enough argument for us to accept it -- a better argument than "mere assumptive fiat". If something is not possible, why should we assume its possibility?

It isn't impossible from a logical perspective, only from a practical perspective. From a logical perspective, it is not necessary to make any claims at all, thereby sidestepping the issue altogether.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

And you still don't consider alternative epistemologies. A pity. You realize that the argument is correct, and damning of "all epistemologies" as you say, and yet when I mention that some epistemology could solve it, you never even consider the possibility.

I have not rejected the possibility of other epistemologies, that's part of the uncertainty. Even if there is a top-down epistemology that you espouse, you can not be certain that you have it right, except merely to assume so. But an assumption is not proof, it's not even evidence. Your epistemology suffers the same problem as all. I'm done discussing this point, as I do not believe consensus is possible. Your assumption of certainty has revealed that. Although I'm confused what you are doing on a philosophy forum when you already know your position is irrefutable.

By spamspamspamandham

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It's sad, but not surprising, that you would say such a thing. My argument was never scientific, and it remains philosophical.

Revisionism strikes again. Well I remember all too well that it took me several pages of debate before you finally admitted that evolution could have "influences" on morality and reason. After that admission you retreated to your "philosophical" defense that morality and reason can only have a "supernatural" explanation, which is of course merely a thinly disguised religious belief.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

It may come as news to you, but that an argument mentions the possibility of God does not make it "religious".

Really. Well then what is the difference between theology and philosophy? One other minor point: how can your "philosophy" be 100% certain if the existence of God is only a "possibility"? But, according to you, I don't know how to think, so I'm sure you'll be able to show me the error of my ways and reveal the "Truth" to me.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

By "top-down" I mean, well, "top-down" (funny, isn't it? And yet Faustus complains of confusing writing). I gave two examples of top-down epistemologies, Platonic Idealism and Christian Theology.

But you really mean Christian Theology (or perhaps we should start calling it Christian Philosophy since you insist there's no difference. In any case I don't have to be a philosopher to know that Platonic Idealism is essentially religious.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

No, I'll just argue that you don't know anything about what you're saying . Those who want to bash the Church should at least know something about it. Of course, they never do – and they call orthodoxy and history "revisionism" because it goes against the fables they like to repeat to themselves.

Yeah, I'm just an idiot (probably because I was raised Catholic) that just makes up fables about how the Church demands limits to women's reproductive rights and threatens politicians that attempt to defend those rights.

Why is the Church so obsessed with sex and reproduction do you think? You always avoid the question.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Spam**

Your [Mariner's] assumption of certainty has revealed that. Although I'm confused what you are doing on a philosophy forum when you already know your position is irrefutable.

Well this debate is appropriately enough in the Religion and Mysticism section at least.

By Probeman (John Donovan)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But we are making claims at every moment in which we think. It is not possible to "stop making claims",

Again, this is a practical consideration, not a logical impossibility. This entire discussion seems irrelevant. Regardless of the truth of determinism, we must assume our truths to be true, even if they are not.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

That this impossibility is "not logical", as you say, does not mean that it is "less certain" than what you call a logical impossibility -- it is more.

Anything is more certain than a logical impossibility. It is not impossible to think you are correct, while simultaneously not being correct. We both do it all the time.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

Ouch. A very probeman-like comment . If you feel like that we'd better stop. I provided several avenues in which I might be proven wrong. Your assumption of certainty, coupled with the wish to stop the discussion, is quite odd, considering what we already agreed upon.

It is pointless to have a discussion when both parties are dead set in their position. Nothing you say will convince me that there is any more certainty in your epistemology than any other, whether top-down, bottom-up, left-right, or forward-back, because I see your position as founded on mere assumption. It has not been revealed to you in an irrefutable way, *and can not be*. As the entire argument rests on that point, we're done.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

If we have concluded anything here, is that deterministic epistemologies are self-contradictory, and therefore false, if we assume that the principle of non-contradiction is true -- since we can't assume that it isn't, we must

assume that it is.

This was a fallacious conclusion as I already pointed out. That there is known uncertainty in a position, does not imply the position is false. This is pretty basic stuff.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

But no matter how hard anyone tries, he can't assume that truth is not true.

You do not understand the concept of uncertainty. I'm unsubscribing from this thread now.
By spamspamspamandham

I read an interesting post on a science blog that made me think about this thread. The author is writing about why she avoids arguing scientific issues with religious zealots:

"Because they tend to be futile, and time and energy are so very finite, and I have so very many other things to do. And yet - strange to say, I still have correspondents who try to convince me that such discussions are not futile. That discussion, any discussion, is always and invariably healthy and useful and productive, and the source, ultimately, of truth. I don't believe a word of it.

The reason I don't believe a word of it is that not everyone knows how to argue and discuss, and that trying to discuss things with people who don't know how and refuse to learn does not produce truth, it only distorts. . . the whole thing is at best futile and at worst a train-wreck. Because the two parties do not play by the same rules. To put it bluntly, one side feels some obligation to the truth and the other feels none, but just yells out any old thing that pops into its head, no matter how dishonest. Then it wonders what on earth you mean when you talk about asymmetry. That's when it's time to remember how finite time is and how many other things there are to do."

I say that those of us committed to rationality and serious inquiry can be satisfied that we have successfully refuted Mariner. Certainly, Mariner hasn't convinced anyone that his proposed revolution in philosophy and science has merit. Now, I think it's time to move on. This is not a serious discussion any more, if it ever was. We all know that nothing like Mariner's views has any currency in mainstream philosophical or scientific circles, for reasons we've given, and countless others we haven't thought of. Mariner can live in his own fantasy universe and probably won't cause harm to anyone.

Meanwhile, I know I could have applied myself to much more enlightening discussions elsewhere on this forum with people who have a sound grasp of scientific and philosophical principles. . .but instead, I got distracted by this "fly paper". To my detriment. No more.

(For the curious, my quotes came from Ophelia at Butterflies and Wheels, a site I check out daily.)
By Faustus (Brian Petersen)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

You don't have to be a philosopher, it suffices to be a reader of dictionaries to know what a religion is. That Platonic Idealism is theistic does not mean it is religious.

The problem with dictionaries is that they are written by people and the meanings of words change because people's ideas change. You have redefined enough words yourself- so please don't hide behind dictionaries. If Theism isn't a religion then either I know nothing (your premise) or that you change meanings to suit your (lack of an) argument.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

I avoid the question for two reasons: because it is irrelevant for this thread, and because you never asked it.

Actually I've raised the question several times in our discussion of the origins of morality. Deny it again and I'll show you the posts. Besides, this issue is entirely relevant since so much of human morality is concerned with reproductive issues. That a biologist can't see that is surprising to say the least.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

The answer, of course, is "why is modern society so obsessed with sex?". The teaching of the Church about sex can only seem "obsessed" to one who is obsessed, himself. Define "obsessed", study the teachings of the Church, and check whether they are "obsessed" with sex.

I notice you carefully avoided the fact that I said "sex and reproduction". Why is that? In fact all animals are obsessed with reproduction- not just humans, though we may be more obsessed than average based on our reproductive success. The real answer, of course, is that one (primitive but tried and true) way for humans to spread faith (or any idea) is to out-reproduce the competitors. Human morality is evolved from mammalian social behaviors that are themselves selected for to ensure reproductive success. That the Church (and most other religions) uses these same behaviors and mechanisms for group selection of social behavior is explained in Wilson's book "Darwin's Cathedral".

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mariner**

As for being an idiot, I never said that. You're just stubbornly determined to avoid thinking.

Well what is "ignoramus invincibilis" if not "idiot"? You've called me that. Saying insults in Latin doesn't excuse you. In fact I'd say that someone that assumes 100% certainty in their ideas is actually the one that has ceased thinking. Since you like dictionaries so much, I'll point out that refusal to admit to uncertainty or change one's ideas is the definition of "dogma".

But if the argument has come down to dogmatic religious belief- which apparently according to Spam, and the other philosophers here, it has, then I withdraw from the argument until you have more science or even philosophy to show for it. Unsubscribing now and may this thread rest in peace.

By the way, biology (and evolutionary psychology) doesn't disprove the existence of the "soul"- it only makes it a scientifically unnecessary concept for explaining human behavior.

By Probeman (John Donovan)