

## **Darwinian Normative Skepticism**

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### **Abstract**

Sharon Street (2006) has argued that, given certain plausible evolutionary considerations, normative realism leads to normative skepticism. Street calls this ‘the Darwinian dilemma’. This paper considers the two most popular responses to the Darwinian dilemma and argues that both are problematic. According to the *naturalist* response, the evolutionary account of our normative dispositions reveals that there was selection *for* normative dispositions that were reliable with respect to normative truth. According to the *minimalist* response, the evolutionary account reveals that there was selection *of* normative dispositions that were reliable with respect to normative truth. This paper argues that the minimalist response is in principle unacceptable, and that the naturalist response faces a very serious difficulty.

**Keywords.** Normative Realism, Evolution, Normative Skepticism, Epistemic Defeat, Normative Naturalism

## 1. Introduction

Many philosophers hold that normative truth is independent of our normative attitudes. According to this view, even if we had thought that killing was not *pro tanto* wrong, it still would have been. Call this view ‘normative realism’.<sup>1</sup> Sharon Street (2006) has recently argued that, given certain evolutionary considerations, normative realism leads to normative skepticism—the thesis that our beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong, reasonable and unreasonable, and so on, are universally irrational.

As I understand it, Street’s argument has two stages. First, she argues for the following pair of claims:

- (1) Our normative dispositions—that is, our dispositions to form certain normative beliefs rather than others—are (largely) products of our evolutionary history.
- (2) Our normative dispositions were selected because they had natural property N (e.g., they contributed to reproductive success by promoting certain kinds of cooperation amongst our ancestors).

According to Street, there are good scientific grounds for accepting (1) and (2), and these grounds are independent of whether normative realism is true or false. If so, then even a normative realist has good reason to accept (1) and (2). But accepting (1) and (2), Street argues, gets a realist into trouble. In effect, Street claims that from the perspective of realism accepting (1) and (2) *defeats* one’s epistemic entitlement to one’s normative beliefs.<sup>2</sup> The upshot is that a proponent of normative realism can either reject (1) or (2)—both of which she has good

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this paper, I follow Street’s usage of the term ‘realism’. The above definition is rough, but precise enough for our purposes. See Street (2006: pp. 110 - 112) for more details.

<sup>2</sup> An agent is *entitled* to her belief that *p* if and only if it is epistemically appropriate, permissible, or okay for her to have that belief. I grant, on behalf of the minimalist view discussed in this paper, that there are cases in which an agent may be entitled to her belief—that is, it may be epistemically permissible for her to hold that belief—even when she does not have *evidence* or an *argument* in support of it. The entitlement in such cases shall be called ‘default entitlement’. Some philosophers use the term ‘entitlement’ to refer specifically to cases of *default* entitlement. I use it in the broader sense defined here. For more on the notion of entitlement see *inter alia* Dretske (2000) and Wright (2004).

reason to accept—or else she can accept (1) and (2)—in which case her normative judgments are, by her own lights, irrational. This is Street’s ‘Darwinian dilemma’ for the normative realist.

In this paper I consider the two most popular responses to the Darwinian dilemma and argues that both are problematic. The two responses that I consider are the *naturalist* response and what I call the *minimalist* response. There are of course other possible responses to the dilemma, but these will not be my topic here.

Richard Joyce (2006) and David Copp (2008) have argued that a realist can block Street’s argument by endorsing the right form of meta-ethical naturalism—the view that normative facts just are certain kinds of natural facts. As I understand them, Joyce and Copp claim that a realist can endorse (1) and (2) and yet maintain that our normative dispositions were selected for their ability to track normative truth. The idea here is that according to some forms of naturalism, normative truths *reduce to*, *consist in*, or can be *constructed out of* the natural truths that our normative dispositions were selected for their ability to track. This is the naturalist response.

David Enoch (2010), Karl Schafer (2010), Erik Weilenberg (2010), and to some extent Knut Olav Skarsaune (2011) have offered a different kind of response to the Darwinian dilemma. According to these authors, a normative realist can block Street’s argument by simply appealing to what I will call

**Common-sense Normativity.** Our fundamental, common-sense normative beliefs are, for the most part, true. For example, it is true that killing is (pro tanto)<sup>3</sup> wrong.

Roughly, these authors argue that although our normative dispositions were not selected *for* their reliability with respect to normative truth, it nonetheless appears, by the lights of common-sense normativity, that there was selection *of* normative dispositions that were reliable with respect to normative truth. This

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<sup>3</sup> I henceforth suppress this qualification.

response makes an exciting promise: if sound, it is potentially open to both naturalist and non-naturalists alike.<sup>4</sup> This is ‘the minimalist response’.

One might be tempted to think that the minimalist response is obviously question-begging. How can we avoid normative skepticism by simply *assuming* that our common-sense normative beliefs are true? This is a good question, but it has what appears to be a good answer. The Darwinian dilemma does not argue that unless the normative realist can show that her normative beliefs are true, those normative beliefs are unjustified. Rather, the Darwinian dilemma grants the normative realist a default entitlement to her normative beliefs,<sup>5</sup> but argues that that entitlement is *defeated* by evolutionary considerations. In response, the minimalist aims to exploit her default entitlement to her normative beliefs—that is, her default entitlement to common-sense normativity—to show that she does not have the defeater the Darwinian dilemma claims she has.

Nevertheless, I argue that the minimalist response *is* ultimately unacceptable: the minimalist is not entitled to common-sense normativity. Street (2006, 2008) has argued that the *naturalist* response is unacceptable for roughly the same reason. According to Street, any naturalist view will ultimately rest on common-sense normativity, and it is common-sense normativity that the Darwinian dilemma throws into doubt. I argue that Street is wrong about this: while the naturalist response does face other challenges, that the naturalist *is* entitled to common-sense normativity. This might seem like a double standard, but as we will see, there is a good reason why the naturalist is entitled to common-sense normativity while the minimalist is not.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate upshot is that while the minimalist response is in principle unacceptable, the naturalist response merely faces a serious difficulty.

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<sup>4</sup> Certain proponents of the minimalist response are more explicit about this promise than others. Enoch (2010) and Weilenberg (2010) are examples of the former; Schafer (2010) is an example of the latter.

<sup>5</sup> See fn 2 a above.

<sup>6</sup> There are several interesting and important questions surrounding the Darwinian dilemma that space constraints force me to set aside here. For example, to what extent do the issues discussed here carry over to the case of our mathematical/logical/scientific beliefs? See, respectively, Joshua Schechter (2010), Justin Clarke-Doane (2012) and James Beilby, ed., (2002). Is Street’s normative *anti-realism* really immune to the Darwinian dilemma, as she claims it is? See Street (2006: pp. 152 – 154). Is the Darwinian dilemma *self-defeating*? See Richard Fumerton (1995: pp. 50 – 51). Finally, can a *quasi-realist* escape the Darwinian dilemma? See Gibbard (2011) and Street (2011).

## 2. Idealizations

If it is true at all that our normative beliefs are the products of our evolutionary history, the complete story is surely quite complex. Perhaps some of our most basic tendencies towards certain normative beliefs will have more or less direct Darwinian explanations, while most of our normative beliefs will be the products of a complex process involving both evolutionary and cultural forces, as well as complex chains of reasoning. For purposes of this paper, however, we will want to work with a highly *idealized* version of the thesis that our normative beliefs have Darwinian explanations. This will enable us to screen-off potentially confounding factors, so that we may see more clearly whether evolutionary considerations *per se* have any skeptical implications.

Here I will be making three idealizing assumptions in particular. First, I will assume that all of our normative beliefs are directly based on what I will call ‘normative dispositions’. By ‘normative dispositions’ I mean dispositions to believe that certain kinds of things are good/bad, right/wrong, reasonable/unreasonable, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Another term for normative dispositions is ‘normative intuitions’. By assuming that each of our normative judgments is directly based on a normative disposition/intuition, I mean to be idealizing away from the fact that many of our normative judgments are the products of chains of *reasoning* from other beliefs. My second idealizing assumption is that each of our normative dispositions has a direct Darwinian explanation. By this I mean that in the environment of evolutionary adaptation (EEA), possessing such a disposition conferred a comparative reproductive advantage, and that this is why we now have these dispositions. Finally, my third idealizing assumption is that there is no epistemically relevant difference between our *current* environment and the EEA. For example, I will be assuming that if our normative dispositions

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<sup>7</sup> For example, I may have a normative disposition to believe that (instances of) killing is (are) wrong. Call this my ‘killing-to-wrong’ disposition. This disposition can directly manifest itself in two ways: first, it can manifest itself in the general belief that *killing is wrong*. Second, it can manifest itself when I believe, of some particular act of killing, that *that act is wrong*. When the disposition manifests itself in this second way, I need not be making an inference from a belief that *that is an act of killing* and a belief that *killing is wrong* to a belief that *that act is wrong*—it may simply be that I have a tendency to believe *that’s wrong* in reaction to instances of killing.

reliably produced true beliefs in the EEA, then they *still* reliably produce true beliefs.

These idealizing assumptions are just that: idealizations. As such, they are quite obviously false. But just as a physicist might want to know about the behavior of an object on a frictionless plane so that she might ultimately learn something about the behavior of objects under more realistic circumstances, we want to know about the epistemic status of normative beliefs with purely Darwinian explanations so that we might ultimately learn something about the epistemic status of normative beliefs under more realistic circumstances. Once we get clear on the idealized case, we can then consider whether any of the differences between our actual situation and the idealized situation are epistemically important differences.

### 3. The Darwinian Dilemma

As I understand it, the Darwinian dilemma consists in a *series of defeaters*. Abstractly put, the first step argues that the realist has all-things-considered reason to believe a certain claim X. The second step argues that believing X makes it irrational to believe Y. The third step argues that withholding belief from Y makes it irrational to believe Z.<sup>8</sup> And finally the fourth step argues that withholding belief from Z makes it irrational to have normative beliefs. Let's instantiate these variables.

According to the first step, realists have all-things-considered reason to believe the conjunction of (1) and (2)—call this '(1-2)'—which says that our normative dispositions are the products of natural selection and that they were selected because they had some purely natural property N. Now (1-2) seems to imply that *normative facts* were nowhere involved in the explanatory history of our normative dispositions. If so, then believing (1-2) makes it irrational to believe that normative facts *were* involved in the explanatory history of one's normative dispositions. This is the second step.

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<sup>8</sup> Withholding belief that *p* is obviously not equivalent to believing not-*p*. Neither is it equivalent to *not* believing *p*. If you have simply never considered *p*, then you do not believe *p* (although you might be disposed to believe it), but neither do you withhold belief that *p*. Withholding belief that *p* is an (active) attitude that one takes towards *p*, and it thus requires having at least considered *p*, whereas simply not believing *p* does not. See Michael Bergmann (2005). Thanks to Michael Bergmann for discussion on this point.

According to the third step, withholding belief that normative facts were involved in the explanatory history of one's normative dispositions makes it irrational to believe that one's normative dispositions are reliable. The implicit principle here is analogous to the implicit principle in Harman's (1977) classic (and qualified) argument for normative skepticism. According to Harman—at least on one reading of his argument—it is irrational to hold some normative belief and yet simultaneously *withhold* belief that the explanatory history of that normative belief involves normative facts. The principle in play here is similar: it is irrational to believe that one's normative disposition is reliable and yet simultaneously *withhold* belief that the explanatory history of that disposition involves normative facts.

According to the fourth step of the Darwinian dilemma, withholding belief that one's normative dispositions are reliable makes it irrational to form beliefs exclusively on the basis of those dispositions. The principle in play here is a common defeater principle: if you withhold belief that the process by which you formed a given belief was reliable, then it is not rational to have that belief.<sup>9</sup> Given the idealizations of section two, it follows that if we withhold belief that our normative dispositions are reliable, then all of our normative beliefs are irrational.

Let's put all of this into the form of a numbered argument. For convenience, we'll define the following propositions.

**Reliable.** Our normative dispositions are reliable.

**History.** The explanatory history of our normative dispositions involves normative facts.

Now here's the argument.

### **The Darwinian Dilemma**

- (i) The realist has all-things-considered reason to believe (1-2).
- (ii) If one believes (1-2), then one is not entitled to believe H.

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<sup>9</sup> See Bergmann (2005).

- (iii) If the realist withholds belief in H, then she is not entitled to believe R.
- (iv) If one withholds belief in R, then one is not entitled to one's normative beliefs.
- (v) Thus, either
  - (a) the realist does not believe (1-2), in which case she does not believe what she has all-things-considered reason to believe, or
  - (b) the realist believes (1-2) and also H, in which case her belief in H is irrational, or
  - (c) the realist withholds belief in H but believes R, in which case her belief in R is irrational, or
  - (d) the realist withholds belief in R and yet retains her normative beliefs, in which case her normative beliefs are irrational, or
  - (e) the realist gives up all of her normative beliefs, in which case it's a sad day to be a realist.<sup>10</sup>

On this interpretation of the argument, it is a bit misleading to characterize the acceptance of (1-2) as defeating the realist's entitlement to her normative beliefs. It is rather that accepting (1-2) commits the realist to withholding belief in H, which in turn commits the realist to withholding belief in R, which in turn commits the realist to abandoning her normative beliefs. Accordingly, it is also a bit misleading to describe the Darwinian dilemma as a *dilemma* for the realist—it is, rather, a quintilemma, the unappealing options being (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e). But let us keep Street's more pleasing title.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Here I am ignoring the possibility that the realist simply not take any attitude at all towards R or H—that is, neither believe nor withhold belief from R or H. I take it that unless she has some good excuse—e.g., she has never had cause to consider whether R or whether H, or she simply hasn't had the time to form a considered attitude towards these propositions—then the realist is rationally required to either believe these propositions or else withhold belief from them. See fn. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Although there is quite a bit to be said in favor of this interpretation of the Darwinian dilemma, I suspect that there are alternative ways to interpret—or perhaps, refine—Street's argument. Street herself (personal communication) has expressed reservations about this formulation of the Darwinian dilemma. For our purposes, however, the important question is whether the realist has the resources to block the strongest form the Darwinian dilemma might take. As a proponent of the minimalist response once put it, "we realists should not kid ourselves: without a solution to this strongest version of the epistemological dilemma we are not off the epistemological hook" (Enoch, 2010: p. 425).



Is this argument any good? Given that one's belief that  $p$  is rational if and only if one is entitled to one's belief that  $p$ , the sole inference of the argument appears to be valid (but see fn 10). What about the premises? As (i) and (iv) are targeted neither by the naturalist nor by the minimalist, I will simply take them as given for purposes of this paper. This leaves (ii) and (iii), which are targeted by the naturalist and minimalist respectively. Let us consider their arguments in turn.

#### 4. The naturalist response<sup>12</sup>

Here is Joyce (2006) outlining the general strategy of a naturalist response to the Darwinian dilemma.

Can we make sense of its having been useful for our ancestors to form beliefs concerning *rightness* and *wrongness* independently of the existence of rightness and wrongness? Here I think the answer is a resounding “Quite possibly.” Cast your mind back to the whole complex story that was presented in previous chapters concerning why it might have been systematically useful for our ancestors to form beliefs about moral rightness and wrongness (among other things). It was no background assumption of that explanation that any actual moral rightness or wrongness existed in the ancestral environment.

... But [this] doesn't *suffice* for establishing... a debunking genealogy, for the possibility remains that an identity or supervenience relation may hold between the items denoted in the [evolutionary] genealogy and the moral properties represented in the [content of our moral beliefs]... (2006: pp. 183 – 184)

Joyce goes on to explain this idea by comparison with the famous Harman/Sturgeon debate. Ultimately, Joyce argues against naturalism on more general grounds—namely, naturalism's alleged inability to account for what Joyce calls the ‘inescapability’ and ‘authority’ of morality.

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<sup>12</sup> Above I noted that the principle behind (ii) of the Darwinian challenge is analogous to the principle implicitly at play in Harman's (1977: Ch 1) argument. Accordingly, the naturalist response presented here is analogous to the naturalist response considered in Harman (1977: Ch 2) and revisited in Sturgeon (1995).

What Joyce does not discuss in detail, however, is a more particular problem faced by any attempt to use naturalism as a response to the Darwinian dilemma. As Joyce notes, not just *any* form of naturalism will do: the proposed form of naturalism must posit an identity or supervenience relation between moral properties and—not just any natural properties—but natural properties that played a role in the actual evolutionary history of our normative dispositions. Only if she adopts such a view can a naturalist reject premise (ii).<sup>13</sup>

This last point is what separates the Darwinian dilemma from the more familiar epistemic challenge to normative realism. The familiar epistemic challenge argues that since normative facts (allegedly) do not stand in explanatory relations to natural processes, we could not possibly have “access” to normative truths.<sup>14</sup> How does the Darwinian dilemma differ from this traditional challenge? It is tempting to think that it does not. Even Street ultimately concludes that the Darwinian dilemma is ‘not distinctly Darwinian’ (2006: p. 155).

To treat the Darwinian dilemma as a mere instance of the familiar epistemic challenge is to understate the power of the Darwinian dilemma. The familiar epistemic challenge to normative realism rests on the strong, general claim that normative facts never enter into explanatory relationships with natural processes. Hence, the familiar challenge is blocked by any view according to which normative facts *do* enter into explanatory relationships with natural processes.<sup>15</sup> Any form of naturalism, for example, will have it that normative properties reduce to or consist in natural properties, and thus there is no more of

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<sup>13</sup> This claim needs an important qualification. If the realist believes (1-2) and does not believe that normative facts are natural facts, then she will not believe that normative facts were involved in the evolutionary history *per se* of our normative dispositions. She might, however, believe that such facts are part of the explanatory history of the *initial conditions* of the evolutionary process. A theist, for example, might insist that God set up the initial conditions of the universe in the way that he did *because* the normative facts are what they are, and he knew that setting things up in that way would lead us to believe those facts. Such a theist can coherently accept (1-2) and also H, even if she does not believe that normative facts are natural facts. In what follows, I set aside such responses to the Darwinian dilemma, but it is important to note that they are available to those who think that normative facts may have played some role antecedent to the evolutionary process.

<sup>14</sup> Mackie (1977: pp. 38 – 42).

<sup>15</sup> Assuming that, contra Street, such an appeal can be made without begging the question. See section 7 below.

an epistemic problem (on this front) for our normative beliefs than there is for any of our beliefs.

The Darwinian dilemma, however, makes no *general* claim about whether normative facts can enter into explanatory relations with natural processes—it merely asserts that normative facts didn't enter into the *specific* natural processes that generated our normative dispositions. Hence, not just any form of naturalism will block the Darwinian dilemma. To reject (ii), we cannot simply argue that it is *possible* to get our normative dispositions in the right kind of explanatory relationship with normative facts—we must argue that our normative dispositions *actually are* in the right kind of explanatory relationship—via our evolutionary history—with normative facts. Thus, to block the Darwinian dilemma by an appeal to naturalism, one must offer a specific brand of naturalism such that a plausible evolutionary history in which normative facts, according to *that brand* of naturalism, were involved.

Have naturalists attempted to offer such a brand of naturalism? At least one has. Simplifying his story quite a bit, David Copp (2008) has suggested, first, that our normative dispositions were selected for their ability to track facts about the degree to which norms that prohibited (allowed) given acts contributed to the flourishing of society, and second, that the degree to which an act is morally wrong (right) *just is* the degree to which systems of norms that prohibit (permit) that act contribute to the flourishing of society. If Copp is right about this, then facts about *moral rightness* and *moral wrongness* did play a role in the explanatory history of our normative dispositions: our normative dispositions were selected for their ability to track those very facts.

The trouble, of course, is that it is hard for many of us to believe Copp's story about what moral rightness and wrongness are, and, before lots of further research anyway, it also hard to believe Copp's particular account of the evolutionary history of our normative dispositions. Moreover, it is difficult to see how we might generalize Copp's account from a defense of our *moral* dispositions to a defense of all of our normative dispositions. The Darwinian dilemma, recall, is not focused specifically on our moral beliefs, but concerns *all* of our normative beliefs. Hence, what we need is a story like Copp's, but one that accounts for all normative properties and one that appears by our lights plausible. No realist has yet offered such an account.

Facing such difficulties for carrying out a naturalist response, the realist might hope for something better—a response that doesn't require commitment to naturalism or any other specific meta-ethical view. This is precisely what the minimalist response promises.

## 5. The minimalist response

As I said at the end of section three, the minimalist rejects premise (iii) of the Darwinian challenge. Here again is that premise:

(iii) If the realist withholds belief in H, then she is not entitled to believe R.

H, recall, is the proposition that the explanatory history of our normative dispositions involves normative facts, and R is the proposition that our normative dispositions are reliable. Where X is a concept, let 'X-facts' refer to facts involving the object/property/relation/kind/etc denoted by X. Here then is the general principle that lies behind (iii).

**Cognition Defeat.** Where D is one of S's cognitive disposition to form beliefs involving the concept X, if S withholds belief that the explanatory history of D involves X-facts, then S is not entitled to believe that D is reliable.

It is this principle that the minimalist in effect rejects. Here is Schafer (2010).

[In] evaluating the reliability of our normative dispositions, it doesn't matter whether or not they developed so as to track the nonnormative properties that have normative significance *because* these properties have normative significance, so long as the development of our normative faculties was sensitive to the distinction between properties that do have normative significance and those that do not *for some reason*. (2010: pp. 480, emphasis in original)

According to CD, your entitlement to believe R is defeated by your withholding belief that the explanatory history of your normative dispositions involves

normative facts. Minimalists reject this. According to Schafer, it does not matter whether you believe that the explanatory history of your normative dispositions involves normative facts—what matters is that you believe that there was *some explanation* of why you came to have reliable dispositions. On the minimalist’s view, the challenge presented to the realist by the Darwinian dilemma is simply to give a plausible account of what this reason is—that is, the challenge is to provide a plausible *explanation* of why we would develop reliable normative dispositions, despite the fact that normative facts are no part of that explanation.

David Enoch (2010), another minimalist, puts this view of the challenge quite clearly.

Realists, Street argues, are committed to the response-independence of some normative truths. And if they are to avoid large-scale skepticism about our normative judgments, realists must think that often enough we get things right, that our normative judgments are at least often enough in line with the independent normative truths. But our normative judgments have been shaped to a large extent by evolutionary pressures. So realists are committed to a rather strong correlation between the independent normative truths and the normative judgments you can expect evolutionarily successful creatures to make, the normative judgments that were (roughly speaking) selected for. But how can the realist explain such a correlation?... The general challenge... is that of coming up with an explanation of a correlation between our relevant beliefs and the relevant truths. (2010: p. 425 – 426)

There seems to be something right about this—something right about the idea that it doesn’t matter whether you believe that normative facts were involved in the explanatory history of your normative dispositions, provided that you believe that there is *some* explanation of why you would come to have reliable normative dispositions.<sup>16</sup> Here is a toy case that seems to support this contention.

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<sup>16</sup> On one precisification of what the minimalists are up to, they are offering what epistemologists call a ‘defeater-defeater’: a belief that *defeats* the defeating force of some other belief. On this interpretation, the idea would be that (typically) believing that the explanatory history of your X-to-Y disposition did not involve Y-facts defeats your belief that that disposition is reliable. However, when you *also* believe (for good reason) that

Cammie has lots of beliefs about sports. However, she did not arrive at those beliefs in any of the usual ways (watching television, reading books, browsing the internet, etc). Rather, a mad scientist programmed her with various sports dispositions—that is, dispositions to believe various things about sports. Moreover, when the scientist was programming her with these dispositions, he *randomly chose* the propositions she would be disposed to believe from a list of some true and some false propositions about sports. Cammie has come to justifiably believe all of this about herself. However, by reading a sports almanac, Cammie has also discovered that all of the sports propositions that the scientist randomly chose for her to believe happen to be true, and so her sports dispositions are after all reliable.

In such a case, Cammie can see that the facts that explain her sports dispositions were such that they shaped her sports dispositions so as to be reliable. Cammie will admit that her sports dispositions are not explained by sports facts. But she will note that once the scientists happened to select true propositions, it was all but inevitable that she would come to have reliable sports dispositions. It thus seems that Cammie is justified in relying on her sports dispositions, despite the fact that she believes that the explanatory history of those dispositions involves no sports facts.

Can the minimalist tell a similar story in the normative case—that is, a story about why we came to have reliable normative dispositions *despite* the fact that normative facts are not involved in their explanatory history? Minimalists have offered several such stories,<sup>17</sup> but perhaps the clearest is given by David Enoch (2010).

Assume that survival or reproductive success (or whatever else evolution “aims” at) is at least somewhat good. Not, of course, that it is always

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there is a reason why you would have a reliable disposition nonetheless, this *defeats the defeating force* of the previous belief. For more on defeater-defeaters, see *inter alia* Pollock (1986).

<sup>17</sup> See Weilenberg (2010: pp. 447 - 452), Skarsaune (2011: pp. 233 - 236), and Schafer (2010: p. 482).

good, or that its positive value is never outweighed by other considerations, or even that it is of ultimate or of intrinsic value, or anything of the sort. Furthermore, I am not asking you to assume that the evolutionary “aim” is of value because it is the evolutionary aim. All I will be relying on is the assumption that survival (or whatever) is actually by-and-large better than the alternative.

Selective forces have shaped our normative judgments and beliefs, with the “aim” of survival or reproductive success in mind (so to speak). But given that these are by-and-large good aims—aims that normative truths recommend—our normative beliefs have developed to be at least somewhat in line with the normative truths... **This is so, then... [not] because our normative beliefs causally track the normative truths, but because our normative beliefs have been shaped by selective pressures towards ends that are in fact—and quite independently—of value...**

The causal influence of selective forces only directly “pushes” us in the direction of having evolutionarily beneficial beliefs, not necessarily true ones. But here as elsewhere, the two may be systematically related... Survival (or whatever) is good; so behaving in ways that promote it is (*pro tanto*) good; but one efficient way of pushing us in the direction of acting in those ways is by pushing us to believe that it is good to act in those ways. And in fact, as we have just seen, it is good so to act. So the normative beliefs this mechanism pushes us to have will tend to be true. (Enoch 2008: pp. 430 – 31, **emphasis added**)

The minimalist thus has a story according to which there is an explanation of why our normative dispositions developed so as to be reliable, despite the fact that their explanatory histories involve no normative facts: given the way evolution works (and given that certain conditions came to be in place), it was all but inevitable that, if we came to have normative dispositions at all, we would come to have ones that were for the most part reliable.

It is tempting to object to the minimalist by accusing him of *obviously* begging the question. Consider Enoch’s argument: it simply *begins* with the

assumption that survival is good. Isn't our belief that survival is good one of the very beliefs in question? That is, isn't our belief that survival is good based on our normative dispositions, and isn't the Darwinian dilemma meant to cast doubt on those dispositions?

In a moment I will argue that the minimalist response is ultimately unacceptable. But it is not unacceptable for the simple reason just given. Note an important aspect of what I said in the previous paragraph: the disposition to believe that survival is good a disposition upon which the Darwinian dilemma is meant to *cast* doubt. In the context of the Darwinian dilemma, we are not assuming that our common-sense normative beliefs are *already* in doubt. In other words, the Darwinian dilemma is not what we might call a 'Cartesian skeptical argument'. A Cartesian skeptical argument begins with the assumption that all of the relevant beliefs are in doubt, and then argues that there is no way to *justify* those beliefs. The Darwinian dilemma, on the other hand, is meant to provide the realist with *reason to stop* believing what we should grant she has a *default entitlement* to believe. Schafer (2010: p. 475) is particularly clear on this point.

Why should a proponent of the Darwinian challenge grant the realist a default entitlement to rely on her normative dispositions? Several reasons. First, it just seems highly plausible that we *do* have such a default entitlement. Second, if she *didn't* grant the realist a default entitlement to her normative beliefs, then it is not clear why she is going to all this trouble concerning the evolutionary origins of our normative dispositions. Rather, a proponent of the Darwinian challenge could simply argue as follows.

- (i\*) The realist has no default entitlement to her rely on her normative dispositions.
- (ii\*) The realist has no source of justification for her normative beliefs that is independent of her normative dispositions.
- (iii\*) Thus, the realist is not entitled to her normative beliefs.

(i\*) is simply the supposition now under consideration, (ii\*) follows from the idealizations of section two, and the inference appears to be valid. Finally, third, notice that if we substitute 'anti-realist' for 'realist', the argument appears no less



plausible. But surely Street does not want the argument to show that *her own* normative view leads to normative skepticism.

I will henceforth thus take it as given that the realist has a default entitlement to rely on her normative dispositions, and thus a default entitlement to her normative beliefs. If so, then isn't the minimalist entitled to rely on those beliefs when she gives her explanation—as Enoch did above—as to why we evolved to have reliable normative dispositions?

She is, but *only if* she accepts H. Consider the following case.

*Martian.* Jack has not received the training of an ordinary physics student. Rather, Martians brainwashed Jack to believe that certain kinds of streaks are caused by protons. Moreover, they brainwashed Jack to have this disposition, rather than a disposition to believe that something else causes such streaks, not because they themselves had done any physics, but simply because they liked the sound of the word 'proton'. You can even suppose, if you like, that there is some deep law of Martian psychology that makes them like the sound of the word 'proton', and so in what is a certain sense inevitable (given the initial conditions) that Jack would come to have this disposition. Now Jack sees a streak and believes *there goes a proton*. However, just after coming to believe this, Jack learns that he was brainwashed in just the manner described above, and that he has not received the training of an ordinary physics student.

I take as given that by the end of *Martian*, Jack is not entitled to believe that his disposition to believe that certain kinds of streaks are caused by protons—call this his streak-to-proton disposition—is reliable.<sup>18</sup> Why not? Because Jack will have stopped believing that facts about protons are part of the explanatory history of his streak-to-proton disposition.

Notice, however, that if the minimalist response were sound, the analogous response would be sound here. All Jack needs to do is reason as follows.

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<sup>18</sup> Note that Jack's entitlement is defeated even if the relevant kind of streaks are in fact caused by protons.

*OK, sure, no facts about protons were involved (in the right kind of way) in the explanatory history of my streak-to-proton disposition. But still, I can see that there was a reason that I would come to have a reliable disposition regarding streaks. The reason is that there is a law of Martian psychology that makes them enjoy the sound of the word 'proton' and this is why the Martians chose the proton theory. Since, as it happens, the proton theory is true [here Jack relies on his streak-to-proton disposition] it was thus all but inevitable that I would come to have a reliable disposition regarding streaks.*

I take it as intuitively obvious that Jack's ability to reason in this way does not preserve his default entitlement to believe that his streak-to-proton disposition is reliable.

But what's going on here? Why *doesn't* this kind of reasoning preserve Jack's entitlement to believe that his disposition is reliable? After all, doesn't Jack have a default entitlement to form beliefs on the basis of his streak-to-proton disposition? And if Jack has a default entitlement to rely on that disposition, why can't he rely on it as he does in the above reasoning? Similarly, why shouldn't this kind of reasoning work in response to the Darwinian dilemma? Doesn't the proponent of the Darwinian dilemma grant the realist a default entitlement to rely on her normative dispositions? And if so, why can't she exploit this default entitlement to show that her normative dispositions have after all been shaped in such a way as to be reliable?

The answer in both cases is that the default entitlement has been lost. Indeed, the same thing happens in the case of Cammie's sports dispositions. The crucial difference between Cammie's case, on the one hand, and Jack's case and the normative case, on the other, is that Cammie is able to find *independent means* (the sports almanac) to confirm that her sports dispositions are reliable. By doing so she gains *new* justification for believing that her sports dispositions are reliable—she does not *preserve* her default entitlement. Jack and the minimalist, however, have done no such thing. They have attempted to rely on the very dispositions in question. But Jack's default entitlement to rely on his streak-to-proton disposition, and the minimalist's default entitlement to rely on

her normative dispositions, and indeed Cammie's default entitlement to rely on her sports dispositions, were all defeated the moment they stopped believing that those dispositions had explanatory histories that involved the relevant kind of facts.

Here's another way to put this point. First, we must grant the minimalist that Cammie's case does show that CD needs a tweak. What it ought to say is

**Cognition Defeat.** Where D is one of S's cognitive disposition to form beliefs involving the concept X, if S withholds belief that the explanatory history of D involves X-facts, then S is not **default** entitled to believe that D is reliable.

But despite this tweak, CD is nonetheless strong enough to support premise (ii) of the Darwinian dilemma. Given CD, someone who withholds belief that his disposition D has an explanatory history that involves X-facts is entitled to believe that D is reliable, *only if* he has a source of justification for the belief that D is reliable that is itself independent of D. But given the idealizations of section two, all of the realist's beliefs about normative matters are based on his normative dispositions. Hence, he will have no source of justification for his belief in R that is independent of his normative dispositions.

## 7. Some hope for the realist

I want to end by offering the realist a bit of hope. Above I argued that the naturalist response faces a certain *difficulty*. I did not, however, argue that the naturalist response is in-principle doomed. Street (2006, 2008) has. In effect, Street accuses the naturalist response of the same sort of illegitimate move that I am here attributing to the minimalist response—a certain kind of question-begging.<sup>19</sup> In this last section I will argue that this is simply not the case: whatever other problems the naturalist response may have, naturalists do not face the same (decisive) problem faced by minimalists.

Recall the outlines of the naturalist response to the Darwinian dilemma. The naturalist argues that normative facts consist in certain natural facts that were

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<sup>19</sup> Street (2006: pp. 139 – 141) and (2008: pp. 214 – 217).

involved in the evolutionary history of our normative dispositions. What, if anything, entitles a naturalist to his account of what normative facts consist in? Street insists that any argument that the naturalist could give for his naturalist view will ultimately rest, at least in part, on his normative beliefs. Street then protests that in relying on his normative beliefs, the naturalist is illicitly relying on the very beliefs in question—that is, the very beliefs that the Darwinian dilemma is meant to throw into doubt.<sup>20</sup> In defense of his naturalist response, Copp (2008: p. 203) argues that his form of naturalism finds support independent of his normative beliefs. But let us simply grant Street her claim to the contrary. Isn't the naturalist's reliance on his normative beliefs then a genuine problem for the naturalist response, as Street says it is? And isn't this the very same problem that I am attributing to the minimalist?

Contra Street, this is not a problem for the naturalist response. The crucial difference between the naturalist and the minimalist response is as follows. The naturalist response is, so to speak, a 'pushed-by' response: according to the naturalist, our normative beliefs have been *pushed by* normative facts. In contrast, the minimalist response is a 'pushed-towards' response: according to the minimalist, we can see that evolutionary forces have pushed our normative beliefs towards the normative truth. An analogy will help us to see the crucial difference between pushed-by responses and pushed-towards responses.

Recall Cammie and her sports dispositions. First, Cammie discovers that her sports dispositions were produced by a scientist who randomly chose what he would program her to believe. When Cammie learns this, her default entitlement to believe that her sports dispositions are reliable is *defeated*. Now, if she goes on to consult an almanac, what she is attempting to do is to find *new justification* for her belief that her sports dispositions are reliable.

But suppose that instead of trying to gain *new justification* for her belief that her sports dispositions are reliable, Cammie argues that, contrary to the way things at first appeared, she has the sports dispositions she has in part *because* the facts about sports are what they are. Perhaps she does a bit more investigation and finds that the scientist wasn't choosing sports propositions randomly after all. Rather, he was sneaking peeks into the hat from which he was drawing slips of paper and making sure that all of the propositions he chose matched the

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<sup>20</sup> Street (2006: p. 139) and (2008: p. 215).

propositions written in the sports almanac, which in turn has an explanatory history that involves sports facts. If this is how Cammie is reasoning, she is not (just) trying to find *new justification* for her belief that her sports dispositions are reliable. Rather, she is trying to show that she does not have the defeater for her sports beliefs that she once thought she had—she is trying to show that the explanatory history of her sports dispositions do after all involve sports facts.<sup>21</sup> If she can do so, she will retain her *default entitlement* to her belief that her sports dispositions are reliable.

The minimalist response to the Darwinian dilemma is in one respect analogous to the first strategy that Cammie might take in response to learning of a possible defeater for her sports beliefs. In effect, this response grants the defeater—which defeats one’s default entitlement to believe that one’s normative dispositions are reliable—and then tries to find *new justification* for that belief. But, as we’ve seen, the minimalist response is in another respect crucially different from the first strategy Cammie might take: the minimalist strategy relies on the very dispositions for which the minimalist’s default entitlement has been defeated. This is what makes the minimalist response unacceptable.

The naturalist response, on the other hand, is analogous to the second strategy that Cammie might take in response to learning of the possible defeater for her default entitlement to believe that her sports dispositions are reliable. The naturalist response never grants the defeater—it never grants that the explanatory histories of our normative dispositions do not involve normative facts. Instead, naturalists attempt to show the contrary: our normative dispositions *are* explained by normative facts. In their attempts to do so, naturalists must rely, we’ll grant, on their normative dispositions. But because they never abandoned the claim that the explanatory history of those normative dispositions involves normative facts, they retain their default entitlement to rely on those dispositions.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, in the process, Cammie might also learn lots of new things that justify her sports beliefs, such as facts about what the sports almanac says. But the crucial point for my purposes is that she does not need that new justification in order to be justified in her beliefs.

<sup>22</sup> For a more general discussion of when it is appropriate to rely on a belief forming process in the defense of that very belief forming process, see Bergmann (2006: pp. 197 - 200), whose views are largely in-line with those presented here.

## 8. Conclusion

While the naturalist and minimalist responses are perhaps the most common responses offered to the Darwinian dilemma, there are of course other options one might pursue. One such option—an option we simply set aside at the beginning of this paper—is to argue that the *actual* explanatory history of our normative dispositions is in some epistemically important sense different from the idealized Darwinian history under discussion here. While perhaps someday there will be good reason to think this is so, at this point we simply don't yet know enough about the actual explanatory history of our normative dispositions. For purposes of this paper, we have been preparing for what might be considered the worst-case scenario: that of no epistemically important difference between our actual situation and the idealized situation. I have argued that in that scenario things don't look *impossible* for the realist, but they do look pretty bad.

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