

3 God and moral knowledge

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1. Introduction

Daniel Dennett has observed that “[t]here is a lot of goodness in this world, and more goodness every day.”¹ Surely we can all agree with at least the first part of his claim (and there is a good case for the second). Happiness and friendship are good. And advancement in medicine and the reduction of poverty continue to make the world better. We know that Dennett is correct because we know that many things are good. And we know that promoting these goods is often morally right. We also know of many bad things. We know suffering is bad. And we know that acts like racial discrimination and harming the innocent are morally wrong. This is *moral knowledge*.

In this chapter, we will investigate the ramifications of moral knowledge for naturalism (roughly, the view that all that exists is the natural world). Specifically, we will draw attention to a certain problem we face if the world is purely naturalistic. We will then show how theism provides resources for solving this problem. We’ll argue that the fact that we have lots of moral knowledge fits better with theism than with naturalism. Specifically, we’ll present reasons to think that (1) naturalists who think we have lots of moral knowledge will have trouble rationally maintaining both their naturalism and their belief that we have such knowledge and (2) theism better explains the fact that we have lots of moral knowledge than naturalism does. Similar arguments might show a conflict between the existence of lots of moral knowledge and some views besides naturalism, but we will focus on naturalism due to its popularity among many philosophers and among the New Atheists to whom this book is addressed.

To display the problem we have in mind for naturalism, we begin with an analogy. Suppose you have no idea what time it is, and you see a clock. If you think the clock is stopped, you shouldn’t believe what it says. Of course, the clock *might* be right; it will be, twice a day. But you shouldn’t trust it. If it’s correct, it will be because of luck, not because it is trustworthy. And if you did trust it and it turned out to be correct, then even though you were right, we wouldn’t say that you *knew* what time it was. You placed your trust in an untrustworthy source. You were correct only by accident.

But suppose you know that the clock really is accurate. You check your watch and the time matches. It's *possible* that the clock is stopped and just happens to be showing the right time, and if you obtained strong enough evidence that this was true (maybe you see it doesn't have a battery), you might have to conclude that the clock displays the right time by chance. But the hypothesis that the clock was set to the right time and is working properly seems like a much better explanation of the fact that the clock shows the right time. Accordingly, absent very strong evidence to the contrary, you should believe the clock is working properly.

The problem is that, with naturalism, the faculties we use to form moral beliefs are ultimately the result of natural processes that weren't aimed at giving us *true* moral beliefs, but were instead aimed at giving us beliefs which (say) maximize reproductive fitness. We'll argue that moral truth and reproductive fitness don't seem to be connected in the right way for such a process to be likely to produce knowledge: if we wound up with true moral beliefs, we would do so only in a problematically accidental way, just like the stopped clock occasionally provides the correct time only in a problematically accidental way. Meanwhile, with theism, God exists, knows the moral truths, and has the ability to bring it about that we have the capacity to know the moral truths (either through intervening in the world or by setting up natural processes in the right way). Further, it's easy to see why God might be motivated to bring it about that we have moral knowledge. Theism can provide a nonaccidental connection between our moral beliefs and the moral truths, just as there would be a nonaccidental connection between the time on the clock and the actual time if a knowledgeable and competent agent set the clock to display the correct time.

You might wonder how God could come to have moral knowledge. Are we just pushing the problem back a step if we appeal to God's knowledge in order to explain human moral knowledge? Some theists will account for God's moral knowledge by claiming that moral facts depend on God's will, desires, or character. For example, maybe keeping promises is right because God wants people to keep their promises. A worry for this proposal is that it seems to make morality depend on something arbitrary. Why does God want promises kept rather than broken? It can't be because keeping promises is right. That would be circular.

Here is a suggestion we like better. You might find it plausible that a human being could not become a tree. If you tried to turn Bob the human into a tree, you would kill him. (Even if you ended up with a tree at the end, it wouldn't be Bob.) The reason for this is that Bob is not the kind of thing that can be a tree. His nature or essence is incompatible with being a tree. Traditional theists construe God as essentially believing all truths. In this view, God is *not the kind of thing* that can fail to have all true beliefs about morality. So God's own nature or essence accounts for God's moral knowledge. If God exists, God must have moral knowledge.

However, some atheists will claim that it's extremely implausible to think that anything has an essence like that—in other words, that it's extremely implausible to think that God exists—and will claim that this rules theistic explanations of moral knowledge out of bounds. Suppose an important document disappears from a locked safe and all the usual explanations for how it could have happened seem insufficient (security camera footage shows that no one accessed the safe, etc.). One possibility is that the flying spaghetti monster, whose noodly appendages can supernaturally pass through safes unimpeded, stole the document in an undetectable way. But although this theory can account for the disappearance of the document, it isn't a satisfying explanation, because it seems extremely implausible on other grounds. If theism is similarly implausible, theistic explanations of moral knowledge might fail for the same reason.

We deny that theism is relevantly like the flying spaghetti monster. Theism possesses certain intrinsic features that make it appealing. For instance, it is comparatively very *simple*: from just one property (perfection, or maximal value, or something like that), all of God's essential attributes (being all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good) can be derived, and any inessential properties that God has can be explained in terms of God's possession of these.² Further, as Joshua Rasmussen notes in his chapter in this book, God is free of arbitrary, unexplained properties.³ On the other hand, the flying spaghetti monster would be incredibly complicated and incredibly arbitrary. (We can naturally ask questions like: why on earth is he made out of spaghetti?) The flying spaghetti monster was invented to be a silly hypothesis, and it succeeds. But the features that make it silly aren't possessed by theism, so that, as a parody of theism, it fails. Further still, there are serious independent reasons to accept theism, some of which are surveyed in other chapters. In light of all this, while a naturalist will, of course, think theism is *unlikely*, they shouldn't think it's totally ridiculous in the way that the flying spaghetti monster is. We should think they should be *open-minded* about theism, if it can be shown that theism fits better with certain facts than naturalism does. Of course, we are claiming here that the extent of our moral knowledge may be such a fact.

With that said, we don't claim to be *absolutely certain* that the arguments we will present are sound. As is true of nearly all philosophical arguments, intelligent people have presented sophisticated objections to them. But although we don't expect to convince everyone, we think there is something to these arguments. And while we will not be able to recap the literature on them down to every last detail, we hope to give a sense of why we think these arguments are promising. We should further note that we are *not* claiming that naturalists don't *have* moral knowledge. Obviously they do. Our claim is instead about whether any of us would have moral knowledge were naturalism true.

In the next section, we defend the claim that we have moral knowledge. In the third section, we discuss the conflict between naturalism and the claim

that we have moral knowledge. In the fourth section, we discuss three ways one might attempt to reconcile naturalism and moral knowledge. One of these ways involves adopting moral subjectivism, the idea that moral truths somehow depend on human attitudes. Another involves claiming that the way in which moral terms get their meanings ensures that we are likely to be correct about what they are. The third involves claiming that our moral beliefs are accurate because natural processes, while not aimed directly at moral accuracy, are aimed at something that is roughly correlated with moral accuracy. We give some reasons for being skeptical of each of these views. In the final section, we say a bit more about theistic explanations of our moral knowledge.

2. Moral knowledge

Our argument requires that human beings have lots of moral knowledge. We certainly grant that humans are fallible about morality. But almost everyone thinks they know a fair amount about it. For example, you probably think you know facts like “hurting people just for fun is morally bad” and “slavery is morally wrong.” There are some holdouts. Moral skeptics deny that we have any moral knowledge. But this is a rare and extreme view, and the endorsement of moral knowledge is part of common sense. If something seems obvious to you and nearly every other reasonable person, then that’s a powerful reason to believe it. Otherwise, it’s hard to see how we could ever be justified in believing anything about the world at all: believing anything about the world at all seems to require, ultimately, trusting that how things seem is at least a somewhat reliable guide to how they are. Of course, it *sometimes* turns out that how things seem is *not* how they are, and we should sometimes abandon beliefs about things that seemed obvious when we have sufficiently good reasons for doing so. But the point is that we shouldn’t abandon such beliefs *without* sufficiently good reasons for doing so.

Our argument will make the case that naturalists may be forced to abandon either their naturalism or their belief that we have moral knowledge. The idea now is just that, given how clear the existence of a substantial amount of moral knowledge is to most sane people, abandoning belief in it should be done only as a last resort. (Note that we are not currently assuming that morality is objective. We are just claiming that there is moral knowledge. If some form of moral relativism or subjectivism is true, people still know something about morality. It’s just that what they know about is a subjective domain. We address subjectivism in Section 4.)

Furthermore, many prominent atheists are committed to the claim that we have, or at least are in a position to get, lots of moral knowledge. Sam Harris famously endorses moral knowledge in his book *The Moral Landscape* (2010). And atheistic critics of religion argue that various religious teachings or practices are immoral. Richard Dawkins, for example, criticizes the God of the Old Testament as unjust.⁴ Clearly, one can’t justifiably

condemn teachings or practices as immoral if one doesn't have a good idea of what sorts of things are immoral. Those who think that some such critiques succeed—at least who think they *could* succeed, assuming that the sorts of claims these atheists make about the morality of various religions are correct—should grant that they know some moral facts.

3. The conflict

Our moral beliefs ultimately depend, in some way, on what philosophers call “moral intuitions.” When we consider certain moral claims, we can just “see” whether they're true: we can see that (at least absent extenuating circumstances) hatred is bad, virtue is good, killing innocent people is wrong, etc. With these intuitions in place, we can reason and make our moral judgments more accurate. For instance, initially we might not think that factory farming is wrong. However, once we realize that causing suffering without a good enough reason is wrong, that producing cheaper meat is not a good enough reason for producing tremendous suffering, and that factory farming causes tremendous suffering in order to produce cheaper meat, we might change our minds. But this requires that we trust our intuitions: we wouldn't be able to reason our way to the wrongness of factory farming without intuitively grasping the wrongness of causing suffering and the insufficiency of producing cheap meat as a justification for it.

The problem for the naturalist here is that, if naturalism is true, it seems that the faculties responsible for our intuitions were formed through purely natural processes that didn't aim at producing true beliefs. For instance, it seems plausible that our intuition that you shouldn't cause pain without a good reason was instilled in us by evolution, since communities of our ancestors who flippantly inflicted harm on each other wouldn't have lasted. But this might unnerve the naturalist who believes in moral knowledge. After all, it seems that we might have easily had very different moral intuitions. For instance, Charles Darwin suggested that:

If . . . men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees . . . our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering.

(1902, 137)

Similarly, the philosopher Mark Linville (2009, 397) suggests that

Wolves in a pack know their place in the social hierarchy. A lower-ranked wolf feels compelled to give way to the alpha male. Were he endowed with [moral thoughts], then, presumably, his “moral sense” would tell him that obeisance is his moral duty. He would regard it as a moral fact that alpha interests trump beta or omega interests.

In light of this, the philosopher Sharon Street, who has done as much as anyone to draw attention to this issue, suggests that trusting moral faculties that have been formed by such natural processes might seem to be

analogous to setting out for Bermuda and letting the course of your boat be determined by the wind and tides: just as the push of the wind and tides on your boat has nothing to do with where you want to go, so the historical push of natural selection on the content of our evaluative judgements has nothing to do with evaluative truth.

While this historical push might sometimes give us correct beliefs, this would be “purely a matter of chance” (2006, 121–122).

Further, with naturalism, how the moral domain is doesn’t seem to explain why we hold the beliefs we do; even if these beliefs are true, we don’t hold them *because* of how anything in the moral domain is, but instead because beliefs like that helped our ancestors survive. As we discuss in Section 4.3, even if we *couldn’t* have easily had very different, and therefore largely incorrect, moral intuitions, this fact might be enough to make it the case that, if our beliefs are true, they are true only by accident in a way that rules out knowledge.

Once we realize this, our moral judgments might seem, with naturalism, to look like the stopped clock: just as it’s a happy accident if the clock happens to be stopped on the right time, what a happy accident that we wound up with a roughly correct set of intuitions! There are various ways naturalists might respond to this worry. Sharon Street suggests that we must give up on the “realist’s independent evaluative truths” and endorses a sophisticated form of subjectivism. We explain why we reject this in Section 4.1. Alexander Rosenberg (2009) claims that we should accept moral *nihilism*, the view that our moral judgments are false and that morality is an illusion. We explained why we reject this in Section 4.2. Still others attempt to reconcile naturalism with moral *realism*, the view that there are moral facts independent of human attitudes that we have some knowledge of. We argue against two such attempts in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

4. Three possible responses

4.1. Subjectivism

One possible response to the problem laid out earlier involves accepting *moral subjectivism*. One famous form of subjectivism is *moral relativism*, which claims that moral truths vary according to human standards. One type is *cultural relativism*, which, in its simplest form, claims that actions are right just in case the standards of the society in which they’re performed says that they’re right, wrong if those standards say they’re wrong, etc. Morality would then be kind of like etiquette. Actions that are rude here can

be polite elsewhere, because politeness and rudeness are relative to which etiquette standards a culture accepts. For instance, burping loudly after eating is rude in the United States, but might be acceptable someplace where it's viewed as a sign that you enjoyed the meal. Cultural relativists think that morality works in a similar way. They aren't just making the obvious claim that which actions people *think* are right or wrong can vary from culture to culture. What they claim is that which actions *really are* right or wrong vary depending on cultural standards, even when the actions are performed in otherwise equivalent situations. Whether people *think* the earth is flat has varied between times and places, but this has had no impact on whether the earth really was flat; some people were just wrong. This is different from etiquette, where changing standards really do change which actions are polite. Relativists think morality is like etiquette rather than like the earth's shape.

If this view is true, our argument fails. There would be no mystery about how we wound up with the right moral beliefs, just as there is no mystery about how we wound up with the right beliefs about etiquette: in both cases, what's right is just whatever we say is right. It would be true that, like the stopped clock, that the beliefs are true wouldn't explain why we have them. But this would be because the fact that we have them explains why they're true.

But relativism of this sort is extremely implausible, and almost everyone rejects it once they understand its implications. It entails that if a society says that slavery is okay and fighting to end slavery is wrong, then slavery there really is okay, and people who fight to abolish slavery are acting wrongly. Clearly, this contradicts how things seem. Someone who fights to end slavery in a society that views it as a good thing is a moral visionary, not a wrongdoer. Because cultural relativism has false implications, it must be false.

Other forms of relativism say that morality is relative to something besides cultural standards, but they run into similar problems. For instance, *individual* moral relativism, in its simplest form, says that which actions are right or wrong is relative to individuals: the morality of my actions is determined by my own moral standards, and the morality of yours by yours. But this is clearly false, too. It implies that the actions of a racist are right, as long as the racist is living up to their own standards. In response to this, philosophers have developed other, more sophisticated forms of subjectivism. For instance, we might claim that what matters is not what people *actually* think is right, but what they *would* think was right if they were fully informed about all the other facts of the situation and if their beliefs were perfectly consistent. Since most racists are misinformed about many facts and have many inconsistent beliefs, maybe they would abandon their racism if they were more informed and rational. This represents an improvement. But although we cannot discuss every view like this in all its detail, we suspect that these more sophisticated views will ultimately fail for reasons similar to those that undermined the cruder forms of subjectivism we discussed

earlier. In principle, if someone's conscience was messed up enough, it seems that they might approve of racism even if they met the conditions mentioned earlier.⁵ But clearly racism would still be wrong, even if everyone thought this way.

In light of problems like this, we accept moral realism. In this view, instead of the moral facts conforming to whatever our moral standards are, in developing moral standards, we should try to develop ones that conform to the objective moral facts. If this is right, the relativist response to our argument fails, because it reintroduces the possibility that our moral beliefs could have seriously failed to conform.

4.2. *Moral language*

A subtly different potential response to our argument accepts realism but suggests that how words get their meanings accounts for the accuracy of our moral beliefs. It claims that, because the words we use in talking about morality derive their meaning from our linguistic practices, it is no surprise that we have accurate moral beliefs: if our moral beliefs had been very different, our moral words would have referred to different properties, so that our beliefs would have been fairly accurate no matter what. Consider:

Boat Case: Suppose you crash-landed on an alien planet where people spoke a language very similar to English. You notice an odd behavior. The aliens are regularly pointing to vehicles floating on the water and saying, "That's a nice car." They also ask you if you want to "go for a car ride on the lake."

You might think the aliens are woefully uninformed about the nature of cars, but that would be a mistake. Rather, you should realize that their word "cars" refers to what we call "boats." The way they use the term "car" has resulted in "car" having a meaning in their language that makes most of what they say about "cars" true.⁶ There is no mystery about how either we or the aliens wound up using the words correctly: the meaning of "car" in their language is determined by how they use the word, and the same is true for us.

These claims don't entail relativism about cars and boats. There are perfectly objective facts about what's a car or a boat, and a car wouldn't change into a boat, or vice versa, if one was flown back and forth between our planets. It's just that we have different words for referring to the same objectively existing things, and, confusingly, we use words that sound the same to refer to different things.

Someone could claim that something similar is true for talk about morality. We apply the word "right" to certain actions, say, actions that promote happiness, and this, the objector claims, is enough for the word "right" to refer to those actions. In a way, "right" is just another name for promoting happiness, just as, say, "water" is just another name for H₂O. If we had

used the word differently, it would have referred to whatever we applied it to instead, and we would have been correct then, too. (For instance, if murder was the only thing we ever called “right,” then we could have truly said “murder is right,” because the word “right” would then refer to murder.)

This claim about moral language is not a form of moral relativism, just as our judgment about the Boat Case doesn’t lead to relativism about boats. In this view, it’s correct to say that slavery is wrong even in societies where it’s accepted (since rightness involves, say, promoting happiness, and slavery doesn’t promote happiness overall). It thereby seems to avoid some of relativism’s false implications. At the same time, the objector claims, this view is still enough to solve the problem of moral knowledge. Whatever we had called right would have been the referent of our word “right.” So there is again no mystery about our accuracy.

The problem is that this view doesn’t seem to reflect the way moral terms actually work. Consider the following:

Bad Aliens Case: You crash-land on an alien planet where people speak a language very similar to English. You notice that the aliens do not seem to care at all about left-handed people. They say enslaving left-handed people is right if it produces even a tiny benefit for the non-left-handed. Otherwise, their moral talk and practice are very similar to Earth’s (e.g., they agree that if an action is “wrong,” it’s very important not to do it).⁷

This scenario seems importantly different from the Boat Case. When we say “enslaving left-handed people is wrong” and they say “enslaving left-handed people is right,” it seems clear that we *disagree*. This isn’t true when we say “cars don’t go on water” and they say “cars do go on water”: there, we are just talking past one another, because our word “car” means something different from theirs. We can both be right, and in fact we both are. (It’s as if I said “banks”—meaning a financial institution—“are meant for storing money” and you said that banks—meaning a riverbank—aren’t.) But we and the aliens can’t both be right about morality. In fact, they are very seriously mistaken.

This verdict suggests that our moral language doesn’t work in the way the objector suggests and that it is not true that “right” would have picked out whatever we happened to call right. Rather, we (like the aliens) could have been completely in the dark about which things really are right without our word “right” having a different meaning. Exactly how our word “right” does work is a complicated question in the philosophy of language, but we don’t need to pursue that here. Agreeing with our verdict about the Bad Aliens Case is enough to show that whether claims of the form “X is good” are true is not determined just by which things we say are good, and that’s enough to defeat this objection. The aliens are wrong about morality. Their use of moral terms does not make them accurate. Are we doing better?

4.3. *Third-factor explanations*

Suppose a naturalist agrees that nothing in the moral domain explains why we have the moral beliefs we do. Suppose they also agree that our moral beliefs don't explain the moral facts. They might still attempt to reconcile moral knowledge and naturalism by claiming that natural processes, although not aimed directly at moral accuracy, are aimed at some third thing that is roughly correlated with moral accuracy. In this case, even though these processes did not aim at accuracy, they could not easily have been wildly inaccurate.

One version of this response has been defended by, among others, the philosopher David Enoch (2010). Evolutionary processes give us moral beliefs that promote survival: they tend toward making us think that the things that promote survival are good. Fortunately, promoting survival actually does tend to be good, so we wind up with beliefs about what's good that are fairly accurate. Accordingly, the story goes, we could not have easily wound up with largely false moral beliefs, and this is enough to make them nonaccidental in the way needed for knowledge. Of course, Enoch must trust his moral intuitions—whose reliability is what's in question—in order to believe that survival is good. This might seem circular, but perhaps it isn't so bad: ultimately, we have no way to verify the reliability of our faculties without using our faculties, so (as we mentioned in Section 2) it may be that if we're justified in believing anything, we're allowed to start by trusting how things seem to us. Our criticism of naturalism was not that naturalists have no way to prove that their faculties produce knowledge without using them, but rather that, given what they believe, they have good reason to think their faculties *don't* produce knowledge. But Enoch claims that a third-factor explanation allows us to see how, even if naturalism is true, our faculties can produce moral knowledge after all.

One worry with Enoch's approach is that it does not appear to be sufficient to account for the full extent of our moral knowledge. Couldn't it have easily turned out that most of the acts that were required to promote survival were bad overall, even though survival is good? Recall the discussion from Section 3 about the sorts of beliefs that intelligent bees or wolves might hold: plausibly, fratricide and inegalitarianism would be wrong for them even though it promoted survival among their ancestors. If these evolutionary influences would distort their moral intuitions enough that they would have much less moral knowledge than we do, it seems very lucky that we happen to have the evolutionary history we do.

There is also a deeper worry for third-factor explanations. They assume that showing that we don't hold our moral beliefs *because* of anything in the moral domain is a threat to moral knowledge, because this seems to show that we easily could have been mistaken, and then they attempt to show that we couldn't easily have been mistaken. This assumption is called into question by an important recent paper by Daniel Korman and Dustin

Locke (forthcoming). Korman and Locke suggest that the lack of an explanatory connection between the moral domain and our beliefs doesn't pose a threat to knowledge because it shows that we could have easily been wrong. Instead, the lack of an explanatory connection between the moral domain and our beliefs is itself enough to defeat knowledge and, once we recognize it, to make us unjustified in holding our belief. To argue for this, they present cases like the following:

On the basis of clear and distinct intuitions, Neora believes in an all-powerful deity. Later, Agent Smith convinces her that she is part of a computer simulation. He tells her that the designers had a terrible time building a simulation inhabited by conscious cognizers but that—through a great deal of trial and error—they found that they could achieve this result only by rendering the inhabitants strongly disposed to believe in an all-powerful deity. Without such beliefs, the simulations would break down before they even got going. Neora believes everything he tells her. And she believes that the deity (if it does exist) had nothing to do with her religious intuitions and associated beliefs. Despite believing all this, she doesn't abandon her belief in an all-powerful deity.

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It seems clear that Neora can't justifiably maintain both her belief in the deity and her belief that she ultimately holds it only because the programmers instilled it in her for reasons having nothing to do with anything in the theological domain. (Of course, things might be different if she thought that perhaps the deity had arranged it so that the programmers instilled the belief in her; then the existence of the deity might ultimately explain why she holds the belief after all. But suppose she thinks this isn't true.)

The problem for Enoch is that Neora apparently takes herself to be in a position quite similar to the one that proponents of third-factor explanations take themselves to be in. Suppose that (like Enoch) she starts out by giving the benefit of the doubt to the sense in question and assuming that the deity exists. She's then in a position to argue (like Enoch) that she couldn't easily have been wrong: it wouldn't be easy for an all-powerful being not to exist, and it wouldn't have been easy for her not to believe in it (given that the programmers couldn't get simulations where people don't have such beliefs to work). So, we might imagine, she (like Enoch) concludes that she can hold her belief despite there being no explanatory connection between it and the theological domain, because, by her lights, she couldn't have easily been wrong. But we just agreed that she can't justifiably maintain her belief in the deity while also maintaining her belief in what Smith told her. It seems clear that there is a serious problem here, whether or not we agree with the specific diagnosis given by Korman and Locke.

Of course, there are various ways that proponents of third-factor views might respond (and Korman and Locke anticipate and respond in turn to

some of them); this issue is complicated. But we are inclined to think that, even if we quibble with particular details of Korman and Locke's account, there is something fishy about third-factor explanations in this context, that they posit something that looks too close to a convenient accident. Note that although Korman and Locke attack third-factor explanations, they do not conclude that we should therefore reject moral realism. Instead, they think their argument shows that "realists must . . . embrace some account on which the moral facts explain our moral beliefs" (2). As we discuss in the next section, theism can provide such an account.

5. God and moral knowledge

We are now in a position to give two arguments for preferring theism over naturalism. First, it looks like accepting naturalism rationally leads to moral skepticism. With naturalism, moral knowledge would be a happy accident of the sort we shouldn't accept. So, naturalists appear to have two options: either (1) reject naturalism in favor of a competitor (such as theism) or (2) give up on moral knowledge. Insofar as you agree that we have good reason to resist moral skepticism and trust the commonsense view that there is moral knowledge, you have reason to go with option (1).

Someone might respond by claiming that because it seems obvious that we have moral knowledge, it's rational for naturalists to believe that natural processes did give us many true moral beliefs, even if this requires accepting a happy accident. It is crazier to deny moral knowledge than it is to conclude that we just got really lucky. This response is a version of the G. E. Moore Shift. The G. E. Moore Shift responds to skeptical arguments by asserting that the claim denied by the skeptic is more obvious than the assumptions of the skeptical argument. Here the naturalist is claiming that (1) *we have moral knowledge* is more obvious than (2) *we should not accept that a happy accident occurred*. Thus, they should reject (2).

Perhaps this argument shows that naturalists can be rational in believing we have moral knowledge (although the G. E. Moore Shift doesn't seem like a good move in Neora's case). But we think there is a further problem for the naturalist here. Theism can secure moral knowledge without having to posit a happy accident. Rather, God ensured that there would be some degree of alignment between our intuitions and moral truth. Thus, theism can provide an explanation of why our moral beliefs are often true. If the best naturalism can do is posit a happy accident, theism provides a better explanation of the existence of moral knowledge.

Of course, we have not shown that theism is true. There may be plausible rivals to both theism and naturalism that can explain why we have moral knowledge. And naturalism may have other advantages over theism that outweigh the advantage moral knowledge provides to theism. But we do think that the existence of moral knowledge favors theism over naturalism.

And we hope this chapter helps you see where we are coming from, even if you are not fully persuaded.

Notes

- 1 Dennett 2006.
- 2 For instance, one of God's features is that God believes that Dustin Crummett, one of the authors of this chapter, owns two adorable cats, Artemis and Apollo. This is not an essential property of God, since God could have existed without having this property. But this belief can ultimately be explained in terms of God's essential attributes: God's knowledge, power, and goodness explain why God created this world, whose features include Dustin Crummett owning Artemis and Apollo, and Dustin Crummett does own them—God's being all-knowing explains why God knows that.
- 3 See also Miller 2018 (for an academic discussion) and Crummett 2018 (for a popular one).
- 4 E.g., Dawkins 2006, 31.
- 5 We can't derive a *logical contradiction* from the claim that one race is superior to another, and someone could claim that one race being superior to another is just a basic, unexplained moral fact, without holding any false beliefs about what members of one race or another are like.
- 6 This case is inspired by Hilary Putnam's "Twin Earth" example. See Putnam 1973.
- 7 This case is inspired by Horgan and Timmons's "Moral Twin Earth" example. See Horgan and Timmons 1991.

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