

What If Morality Is Innate?

A Reply to Joyce's Moral Skepticism

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Abstract

Since advocated by Darwin, the theory of evolution has greatly changed the intellectual landscapes of numerous academic disciplines, including moral philosophy. While both philosophers and scientists are trying to account for morality in evolutionary terms, the exact explanandum differs from one another. Joyce (2006), one of those who want to bridge between the achievements of evolutionary biology and the discussion of moral philosophy, aims at illustrating that our moral sense is innate, in that natural selection had devised our ancestors with the capacity for making moral judgments (hereafter I will use “the thesis of innateness” to denote this). The interesting question directly follows from this is: What if morality is innate? Does it provide any prescriptive guidance or have any implication for metaethics? With regard to this issue, Joyce holds that morality is “debunked” once we have a complete non-moral genealogy of which. Though not thereby claiming that morality be abandoned, Joyce endorses the notion of moral skepticism: No moral judgments are epistemically justified. In this paper, I will argue that (1) Joyce’s argument that moral skepticism has no negative practical effects is wrong, and that (2) the thesis of innateness does not imply moral skepticism.