Universal Morality Reconsidered

Universal Morality Reconsidered: The Concept of God

By

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INTRODUCTION

The Enlightenment represented, among other things, a strong movement away from religious worldviews toward more humanistic ones. Gone was the Christian notion of human depravity with its rejection of human goodness, replaced instead by the optimistic notion that humans could and should begin to solve their own problems. No longer did one need to pray in order to be healed because medicine—created and controlled by humans—was capable of doing the healing. No longer was it necessary to rely on God to produce a good crop because advances in science and agriculture made it possible to take back some of the control that was previously held by nature. This new-found optimism was the result of great human achievement and began a pronounced shift away from religious ways of thinking and acting and toward secular ways of thinking and acting.

It wasn't long before this secular movement began to ask similar questions regarding morality. Before the Enlightenment, it was widely believed that morality had a divine foundation. The "ought" compelling moral behavior must come from somewhere, but surely not from humanity, because of humanity's sinful nature; therefore, it must come from God. The Enlightenment continually called these religious conclusions into question. If human reason can initiate great advances in medicine, technology, and agriculture without divine assistance, then morality may be no different. Thus, the Enlightenment began to suggest that human beings may hold the key to a moral compass that exists outside the mind and will of God. If reason, or some other human faculty, can ground one's moral claims in a universal way, then this provides one with a strong argument in favor of a purely secular universal morality.[1] This moral position will be referred to as *Universal Naturalism*. More specifically, universal naturalism refers to the various attempts to justify universal morality using a form of metaphysical naturalism.[2]

Before we continue, the term "universal morality" must be defined more clearly. In this work, the term universal morality refers to the basic principles of any moral system that apply equally and comprehensively to all acts as well as to every group, sub-group, and individual on the planet. This notion of universal morality represents the meta-ethical conviction that some moral principles are binding on all people regardless of culture,

race, sex, political convictions, or religion. One of the primary goals of the current work is to explore the possibility that a form of universal morality may be justified in a purely secular way.

The pursuit of an adequate form of universal naturalism is crucial because it plays a major role in two very important and very relevant discussions. The first discussion takes place between the defenders of universal naturalism and those who argue for a universal morality grounded in the divine. In Basil Mitchell's book *Morality: Religious and Secular*, he argues that a theistic worldview is able to make absolute moral claims that a purely secular worldview cannot. For example, a Christian is able to ground moral imperatives in God, giving them both a metaphysical and an epistemic foundation. Secular worldviews, on the other hand, can neither ground moral imperatives nor provide an adequate epistemological framework. Furthermore, Mitchell argues that secular moral theories cannot provide adequate moral motivation. According to Mitchell, apart from God there is no adequate answer to the question, "Why should I be moral?" For these reasons Mitchell writes,

> It is sufficient for the purposes of my argument to claim that such principles, to which the man of traditional conscience is characteristically committed, are more congruous with a religious view of the world than with a modern secular one.[3]

Many existential and postmodern thinkers make a similar argument against universal naturalism. Both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky argue that once God has been removed from the moral framework, there can be nothing universally binding. As Richard Rorty writes in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "To say, with Nietzsche, that God is dead, is to say that we serve no higher purposes."[4] Thus, once God is removed from the moral framework, it no longer makes sense to talk about universal moral truths. Jeffrie Murphy, in an article titled "Constitutionalism, Moral Skepticism, and Religious Belief" writes,

> We at present live in a time when it is widely believed—under the impact of work by such writers in the 'analytic' tradition as Gilbert Harman and John Mackie and such writers in the 'pluralist' tradition as Richard Rorty and Alasdair Macintyre—that all attempts rationally to demonstrate the objective correctness of certain moral claims are doomed to failure. Thus moral skepticism and moral relativism are the order of the day; and in the inherent dignity or sacredness of persons… Whatever rights that exist are simply grounded in conventions—conventions based on either general utility or enlightened self-interest.[5]

These criticisms seem to suggest that morality either has a divine component, making it universal, or morality is a purely natural phenomenon relative to particular communities and individuals. However, if an adequate form of universal naturalism is developed, a third option emerges. In this way, universal naturalism may provide one with an alternative to the moral dogmatism found in most religious traditions and the moral relativism of postmodernity.

The second discussion takes place between universal naturalism and the idea that a universal morality is not only unnecessary, but harmful. The Enlightenment project, with regard to morality, attempted to universalize reason and rational morality. Now, two hundred years removed from the Enlightenment, we are in a position to inquire about the effectiveness of such a project. With postmodernity upon us, many philosophers criticize the Enlightenment because it did not take seriously the undeniable plurality, diversity, and difference found in today's world, especially with regard to morality. One of the many goals of the Enlightenment was to achieve unity and objectivity; yet in our postmodern world this leads to words with negative connotations such as conformity and control. If we are going to take individuality seriously, then the differences we find must be seen as something good rather than something to overcome. The question presented to universal naturalism by many postmodern thinkers is, "Why is universal morality necessary at all?"

In her book *Moral Contexts*, Margaret Walker argues that the universalism of Bentham, Kant, and Sidgwick is not only outdated, but also harmful to certain groups, most notably, women. These moral frameworks emphasize objectivity, separation, and uniformity. Unfortunately, the moral contexts we find ourselves in do not allow for such characteristics. Morality demands that one act as a subject attached to the situation with all of its particularity and concreteness. Unfortunately, the moral tradition often ignores or refuses to acknowledge the particular concrete situations where genuine morality is experienced. According to Walker, morality should not be separated from a particular context, and as a result, any successful moral theory must deal with the specifics of a given situation. No longer should objectivity and uniformity be the primary virtues of morality. Rather, each situation should be evaluated and understood in its uniqueness. This requires virtues such as empathy, attentiveness and compassion.

> This image (impartiality), then, gives little help. Worse still, though, it does damage. The image powerfully projects the idea that a morally ideal grasp of things is essentially a view (sight, observation) from a place apart, perhaps timeless as well. The suggestion of placelessness and timelessness,

> however, is no innocent idealization. In morality we think to live and act and be able to give an account of ourselves, not just to have a "view". … In actual morality there are real stakes and real costs, of value, self-esteem, relationship, future, options, coherence in one's own eyes, etc.[6]

Given the feminist and postmodern critiques of universalism, the burden of proof lies with the universalist to explain why a moral theory of this scope is necessary. Why are local or communitarian moralities inadequate? What makes universal morality necessary?

In order to answer the various questions and criticisms surrounding universal naturalism, I turn to three contemporary thinkers who remain defenders of the Enlightenment project: Jürgen Habermas, Ronald Dworkin and Marc Hauser. I chose these three figures because collectively they provide clear, plausible, yet varied, examples of universal naturalism. That is, all three thinkers attempt to defend a secular version of universal morality using a form of metaphysical naturalism—a strategy that I earlier defined using the technical term "universal naturalism."[7] Traditionally, universal naturalism has implemented one of three justification strategies: rational consensus, intrinsic human value, or humanity's shared biological nature. Each of the figures chosen represents one of these major justification strategies. Jürgen Habermas provides a procedural model for morality that relies on rational discourse and consensus. Dworkin argues that human beings are sacred and, therefore, possess certain inalienable rights that should never be violated. Dworkin's position is interesting because he does not use the term sacred in a religious way. Rather, he provides a secular definition for the sacred. Finally, Marc Hauser uses scientific evidence found in both biology and neuropsychology to support the existence of a universal moral grammar. According to Hauser, humanity has been equipped with an innate moral faculty that developed as a result of the evolutionary process. Collectively, these arguments represent the three strongest branches currently available to universal naturalism.

The purpose of this project is threefold. First, it will analyze the three distinct responses mentioned above in an attempt to discern the viability of universal naturalism. Can a form of universal morality be adequately defended using a form of metaphysical naturalism? Second, I will introduce a set of coherence-based criteria to help determine the relative strength of each moral theory. The four criteria used are empirical fruitfulness, internal consistency, comprehensiveness, and rationality. Based on this analysis, some general conclusions will be made regarding the various strengths and weaknesses of universal naturalism. Third, I will introduce theism as a viable alternative to metaphysical naturalism. The

overall goal is to show the compatibility that exists among metaphysical theism and the three moral research programs highlighted by Habermas, Dworkin, and Hauser**.**

Certainly, the term theism demands further explanation because of the many potential forms one could use in this context. The form of theism advocated in this dissertation is very general. First, theism requires that one believe in the existence of a God or Gods. The only other stipulations are that this God(s) be relational, compatible with the natural sciences, i.e., evolutionary theory, and allow for a meaningful amount of freewill. A more detailed description of this form of theism will be given in Chapter 5.[8]

Using the same four coherence-based criteria, I intend to show not only that theism is compatible with these three secular moral theories, but also that implementing a theistic metaphysic provides certain advantages as well. It should be noted that the goal of this project is not to downplay the importance of universal naturalism. On the contrary, each of the arguments evaluated in this work represents a very strong moral theory. However, it is my contention that adding a theistic metaphysic to these naturalistic research programs will help provide a more adequate justification for universal morality, making it a necessary dialogue partner in the current moral landscape. Therefore, it is the thesis of this project that the strongest justification for universal morality comes when all four of these moral theories are synthesized to provide a more comprehensive moral research program. This means that none of the competing moral research programs is adequate by itself; not even theism. Rather, the strongest defense of universal morality arises when the natural and social sciences are synthesized with a theistic metaphysic in order to create a more comprehensive moral framework.[9]

For instance, evolutionary ethics uses empirical data to provide strong explanations related to the development of our moral faculty. This includes information regarding our shared biological nature, our moral instincts, and the like. Hauser uses this information to effectively argue for certain universal moral instincts that we inherit from our biological past.

Similarly, Dworkin's rights thesis and Habermas' discourse ethic can use this hard data to help strengthen their moral theories. For instance, if humans are motivated by enlightened self-interest, as sociobiology suggests, then it makes sense for Habermas to develop a pragmatic moral theory that allows competing interests to cancel each other out during open and critical discourse. Such an environment enables the various perspectives represented to hone in on those issues of justice that are most fundamental. If I can recognize those things that matter most to me (self-interest), then I can begin to recognize that these same things may matter to others as well.

If biology had revealed a fundamentally different kind of human nature, then Habermas' moral theory may be in need of revision. However, given what motivates humans to act, Habermas has created an effective research program for reaching consensus.

Finally, each form of universal naturalism gives rise to certain metaphysical questions. Adding theism to the research program allows one to answer the various metaphysical questions that inevitably emerge during universal moral discourse. Are natural processes, such as natural selection, random or goal directed? Why is there an inherent connection between certain forms of language and morality? From where do humans derive their intrinsic value?

Theism, unlike most forms of universal naturalism, is able to provide an objective foundation for things such as human worth, teleology, and the like. In this way, a theistic metaphysic can provide evolutionary theory with an ultimate teleology, Habermas' preconditions for argumentation with a non-circular justification, and Dworkin's rights thesis with a solid foundation for humanity's intrinsic value. Thus, synthesizing these four moral theories into one large research program provides the strongest justification for universal morality.

Chapter One

The first form of universal naturalism comes from Jürgen Habermas. Although Habermas writes for a postmodern world, his procedural morality attempts to recover parts of the enlightenment project. Habermas believes that a middle ground can be found between morality as mere preference and morality as a set of universal truths independent of human discourse. Moral truths amount to more then cultural or individual preferences because reason and argumentation can lead to moral consensus, and thus, to moral obligation. In this way, Habermas' discourse ethic represents an attempt to recover the spirit of objectivity found in Kant's *Prolegomena*. According to Kant, universal intersubjective agreement is equivalent to objectivity.[10] If Kant is right, then Habermas can use consensus to justify universal moral claims without corresponding these claims to some outside realm of moral facts. Because of this, Habermas commits to a form of procedural justice that provides consensual justification for moral norms. [11]

For Habermas to make the transition from moral correspondence to moral consensus, a distinction must be made between statements of fact about nature and normative statements concerning value and virtue. Natural events exist independent of our statements, giving them

independent and objective criteria for verification. Normative truths, however, are necessarily linked to our statements about them, making their validity dependent upon social recognition and approval. With no criteria independent of human thought and action to validate our normative statements, how can subjectivity be avoided?

According to Habermas, relativism can be overcome because moral agreement is not the result of matching our normative claims to an outside reality. Rather, it is made possible by free, equal, and open argumentation within a given moral community.[12] This method of validation is not purely cultural or subjective; it is universal.[13] When one makes the statement, "You ought to feed the hungry," or "Society ought to give people what they deserve," the "ought" is intended to signify that these moral norms are not valid solely for the individual who happens to accept them. Rather, our reasons for holding these moral points of view should be valid for all involved.

Habermas' universal morality rests on the assumption that no matter how diverse cultures and individuals may be from one another in terms of religious convictions, political traditions, and the like, rational dialogue has the potential to unify our moral consciences. According to Habermas, moral consensus is possible through a process of open dialogue in the context of communicative action. This encourages fair debate and argumentation regarding moral norms, allowing discursive reason to guide the collective moral conscience rather than personal or group bias. Ultimately, this can lead to moral norms that are universal in scope.[14]

One of the key questions posed by critics of the enlightenment centers around the need for a universal morality. In a world as diverse as ours, what possible good can come from universal naturalism? Habermas wishes to salvage the enlightenment project, in part, because he fears the political and moral consequences of postmodernity. Stripping the enlightenment project of its universalism also strips its emancipator power. If reason, or more accurately, rational discourse cannot lead to consensus on issues regarding human value, mutual respect, and freedom, then the ability to criticize policies or moral norms that contradict this conception of human worth is severely limited. If there are no objective means for resolving serious moral disputes, then basic human rights as well as fundamental principles of justice are in jeopardy. Thus, Habermas argues that the loss of universalism opens the door to tyranny in all its forms.

Some of the motivation prompting Habermas to endorse a form of universal morality comes from his past. As a teenager growing up in Germany, Habermas experienced the atrocities of the Second World War. Undoubtedly, these experiences left a lasting impression. Due to

Habermas' past, he criticizes communitarian morality for its failure to recognize that tradition and culture, when left alone, can devolve into something horrible.

> Tradition means we carry something forward as unproblematic which others began before us. The older generation places a trust in their forerunners that they will be true to the values, traditions, etc. This basis of trust was destroyed at the threshold of the gas chambers… The execution (calm and calculated) of a group of people was done with a sense of normality. It was dependent upon the normality of a highly civilized social intercourse. The monstrous occurred without interrupting the smooth breathing of everyday life.[15]

In order to keep gross injustices such as the holocaust from reoccurring, Habermas argues for a form of moral universalism. According to Habermas, all moral action should have a rational justification because rationality provides the necessary means for the development of universal standards of behavior. These universals transcend particular contexts and cultures, but according to Habermas, they do not necessarily destroy plurality. For Habermas, it is possible to have transcendent guidelines related to justice while at the same time preserving difference. The universal guidelines for justice are needed because our world has experienced, and is still experiencing, terrible violations of human rights, human freedoms, and standards of fair treatment. The world needs a form of universal morality that has binding force on all communities, cultures, governments and religious traditions. While this transcendent morality will condemn the gross injustices found in places such as the Sudan or the Congo, it will not deny the legitimacy of diversity of thought or a plurality of life styles. In this way, Habermas attempts to provide a moral framework that embraces both the concrete and the universal.

Chapter Two

The second defense of universal naturalism comes from Ronald Dworkin.[16] Dworkin argues that every human being has intrinsic value, which endows him or her with certain inalienable rights that should never be violated. Dworkin's strong view of human rights is, in part, a response to what he calls "the ruling theory of law." The historical figure associated with this theory of law is Jeremy Bentham; however, the version that Dworkin attacks in his book *Taking Rights Seriously* comes from H.L.A. Hart. As part of the "ruling theory of law," Hart rejects the notion that human rights pre-exist any form of legislation. According to Hart, human

rights are the result of legal processes that determine what protections and provisions are to be given to the people of a particular community. Individuals have rights only insofar as explicit political decisions or social practices create these rights. Thus, the rights that are given are not based on the intrinsic value of humanity or a notion of human dignity, but are determined by their social utility. For Hart, those rights that serve the general welfare of a particular community are legitimate, but those that do not should be rejected.

The substantive view of human rights endorsed by Dworkin differs from Hart's procedural model, arguing instead that human beings are born with certain inalienable rights that should never be violated. These rights should be respected regardless of the social utility they may or may not provide. Jeremy Bentham referred to this notion as "nonsense on stilts," because such a view had no place in his empirical metaphysic. In response to both Hart and Bentham, Dworkin argues that human rights should give individuals a "trump card" against the public good. Some actions may serve the public good by providing a benefit to the majority of citizens living in a particular area, but if this public good requires that individual human rights be sacrificed, then these actions must be avoided. A society should never abandon human rights in favor of the common good. Dworkin supports his conviction by arguing that human beings are sacred. The sacred status of each and every human being gives him or her certain "inviolable rights." The term "sacred" usually conjures up images of a spiritual or religious nature, but Dworkin argues that this is not necessarily the case. For Dworkin, the term "sacred" has a legitimate secular definition as well. Dworkin writes,

> We almost all accept that human life in all its forms is sacred… For some of us, this is a matter of religious faith; for others, of secular but deep philosophical belief.[17]

Dworkin supports this claim by arguing that humanity has both intrinsic and objective value. Dworkin argues that this kind of intrinsic value need not be religious because it holds a central place in our "shared scheme of values and opinions."[18] This shared worldview gives humanity its intrinsic worth and designates it as sacred apart from any religious conviction.

> Our concern for future generations is not a matter of justice at all but of our instinctive sense that human flourishing as well as human survival is of sacred importance.[19]

Dworkin's secular view of the sacred is based on two basic facts about human beings. First, human beings are the "highest product of natural creation." This gives way to the idea that human beings are special and should be protected. Second, the sacredness of humanity is also the result of human creation giving it value similar to that of art. Dworkin writes,

> The combination of nature and art—two traditions of the sacred—supports the further and more dramatic claim that each individual human life, on its own, is also inviolable because each individual life, on its own, can be understood as the product of both creative traditions.[20]

The sacred status of humanity provides it with certain inviolable rights before any such rights are recognized by public or community policy. These rights do not receive their authority from laws or legal procedures, but are inherent in the very nature of humanity itself. Thus, these rights are universal in scope and inviolable in nature.

The blatant violations of human rights that have occurred and continue to occur reveal the importance of Dworkin's argument. The current atrocities taking place around the world make it clear that the conversation needs to continue because the posture of assumption is the posture of passivity. However, the events unfolding around the world call for a much more active disposition. The beginning of this action should be to justify or ground human rights using sound arguments. It is not enough to rely on local or in-group criticisms with regard to human rights. The issue demands that we make external criticisms as well. But in order to have such a voice, one needs a universal justification. If some rights are given strictly based on one's being a member of the human race, then these rights should apply equally to all humans. If Dworkin succeeds, then he will have provided a strong secular justification for universal human rights.

Chapter Three

The third argument for universal naturalism comes from Marc Hauser. In his book *Moral Minds*, Hauser attempts to show that morality is not merely learned through one's environment. Rather, many moral instincts are inherited through our evolutionary past. Hauser admits that human behavior is extremely complex. However, at the core of our moral dispositions is a grammar for action that we inherit. Thus, morality is, in a very profound sense, biological. In order to make this argument, Hauser focuses on the similarities between the acquisition of morality and that of language. Hauser argues that humans do not simply learn a language;

humans are designed to learn languages. This argument suggests that one is born with the tools one needs to speak and write. Similarly, humans don't simply learn moral behavior. Rather, humans are biologically *designed* to acquire morality.

> Why does everyone take for granted that we don't learn to grow arms, but rather, are designed to grow arms? Similarly, we should conclude that in the case of the development of moral systems, there's a biological endowment which in effect requires us to develop a system of moral judgment and a theory of justice, if you like, that if fact has detailed applicability over an enormous range.[21]

The thrust of Hauser's argument is that an unconscious set of moral instincts has evolved in humans creating a universal moral grammar. This moral grammar is not rigid in nature. Rather, it provides a set of general moral principles that allow for a significant amount of flexibility and variation. Hauser makes an important distinction between the innate principles that form our moral grammar and the innate morality found in a thinker such as Plato. Unlike Plato and other rationalists, Hauser's moral grammar does not provide the individual with specific moral content. Instead, Hauser argues that humans are born with abstract rules and principles that function as parameters on our moral systems. This view of innate morality suggests that humans are born with the necessary equipment to develop moral systems, but the specific moral content that develops is the result of one's environment. Thus, one's innate moral grammar provides the universal parameters and principles for our moral systems, but these parameters allow for a wide variation with regard to content.[22] For example, not all people will come to the same conclusions regarding intentional verses unintentional killing, but all peoples will make a distinction between intentional and unintentional killing. Not only will this distinction be made, but it will be seen as morally relevant as well. This constitutes part of our universal moral grammar.

If Hauser can make a convincing argument for a universal moral grammar that is inherited as part of our biological makeup, then he will have provided a strong evolutionary argument supporting universal naturalism. An evolutionary argument may succeed where other secular theories have failed because the empirical nature of scientific theories can provide general *moral content* that *corresponds* to tangible data. Corresponding moral norms to biological facts may provide a stronger argument supporting universal naturalism in that this kind of analysis is less susceptible to the criticisms brought on by relativism. Thus, if Hauser's argument is successful, and morality does in fact correspond to

something real, then he will have provided a very strong case for universal naturalism.

Chapter Four

In Chapter 3, evolutionary theory will be brought to the forefront in the work of Marc Hauser. This represents an important step for universal naturalism because it is an attempt to combine the research being done in biology and neuropsychology with moral theory. If morality has a clear biological foundation, then this would provide a very promising foundation for universal naturalism.

It is my contention that the evidence supporting an evolutionary based morality is too strong to ignore. Therefore, if I wish to support a theistic version of universal morality, it must be compatible with the evidence being gathered in the natural sciences.[23] Any theory that turns its back on the facts is doomed to fail. Because of this, the current chapter will look at three important issues concerning the relationship between morality and evolutionary theory.

First, I will show that while most neo-Darwinians assume a form of scientific or metaphysical naturalism[24], such core assumptions go beyond the scope of empirical verification. This raises a very important question. If there is more than one metaphysical system that is compatible with evolutionary theory, and the meta-ethical issues at hand tend to go beyond the scope of empirical science, then how is one supposed to make a responsible decision with regard to moral systems? I suggest that these are the very questions that make a third level (metaphysical) of moral discourse necessary. Therefore, this section of the chapter will attempt to flesh out the details surrounding the various levels of moral discourse. What defines them? What distinguishes each from the others? This discussion will be quite important for revealing the ways in which the four moral theories covered in the present volume may be compatible, namely, how Hauser's research at the first level of moral discourse and Habermas' and Dworkin's moral theories at the second level, are compatible with a theistic metaphysic at level three.[25]

Second, I will argue that neo-Darwinian explanations regarding the origin(s) of morality are compatible with certain teleological explanations. That is to say, there is no logical incompatibility between methodological naturalism at Levels 1 and 2 (L1 and L2), and metaphysical theism at level 3 (L3). If this can be shown, then Darwinian explanations, such as Hauser's, wouldn't necessarily exclude teleological explanations for the same moral phenomena. This frees Darwin from the clutches of metaphysical naturalism

by showing the possible compatibility between evolutionary theory and certain forms of theism.

Third, after revealing the genuine moral discourse taking place between competing metaphysical systems, a set of coherence-based criteria used by Imre Lakatos, Willard Quine, and others, will be established to help determine the relative strength of each participant. The ultimate goal of each moral system is to provide a set of core assumptions that best supports universal morality. This will be determined using the criteria of empirical fruitfulness, internal consistency, comprehensiveness, and rationality.

First, progressive research programs must be empirically fruitful. That is, they should be able to account for the empirical data of the past as well as predict future events with some accuracy. Past scientific discoveries[26] form the foundation for current research, and progressive research programs should incorporate and help interpret this core data. A research program that completely abandons the scientific labor of the past will have a very difficult time justifying its research. Thus, there should be coherence with statements commonly accepted by the scientific community. More importantly, progressive research programs should also have the ability to predict novel or unexpected facts. If certain previously unknown phenomena can be incorporated into as well as anticipated by a given research program, then it is a good sign of progress. According to Lakatos, the epistemological merit of a research program should not be based on verification or falsification, but on fruitfulness. If the research program leads to intellectual progress, then one is rationally justified in pursuing it further.

Second, a progressive research program should establish a sense of internal consistency, or what Lakatos calls "heuristic progress," among the three levels. Simply put, scientific theories should eliminate internal contradictions whether they are logical contradictions or factual contradictions. Furthermore, the scientific justifications that arise in a given research program should be derived from the internal logic of the research program itself.

For example, suppose a scientist structures her negative heuristic around the belief that the movement of all matter is governed by deterministic natural laws, and as a result, cannot find a way to explain the behavior of subatomic particles. If, because of this difficulty, the scientist began arguing that large pieces of matter were governed by natural laws, while tiny bits of matter were directed by the hand of God, then the research program being developed would not be internally coherent because using God as an auxiliary hypothesis to help explain the random

movement of subatomic particles represents an artificial shift within the research program. Rather than being exceptions to the negative heuristic, the auxiliary hypotheses used by a particular research program should derive their logic directly from the negative heuristic.

The third prong used to establish the coherence of a given research program is comprehensiveness. If Lakatos is right, i.e., that meaning and truth are contextual, then we should search for the most comprehensive context possible. To stop at any particular context would be arbitrary because there is always the possibility for a broader context that will provide a more comprehensive interpretive framework. Thus, all contexts must be seen as provisional with the hope of finding contexts that help make sense of the past as well as provide new insights for the future.

Progressive research programs represent frameworks that give rise to ever widening contexts because as the context widens, explanations with more comprehensive explanatory power are developed. Research programs that are better equipped to take new empirical data and novel facts and turn them into examples that support the overall project show themselves to be more comprehensive. Typically, these deeper and more encompassing explanations derive from research programs with ever broadening contexts.

The final criterion for deciphering progressive from degenerative research programs is rationality. Throughout this work, rationality will be defined as the elimination of non-rational factors through a process of intersubjective assessment. One should expect to find non-rational elements in every research program. In order to root out such unjustified biases and dogmatic assertions, each and every research program must be subjected to open and critical dialogue. The more objections a research program can answer, the more coherent it becomes. Simply put, rationality demands that one remain willing to take the conversation further. The goal is for these non-rational elements to be weeded out over time.

It should be noted that the four criteria for determining coherence do not provide an objective method for determining the truth or falsity of a research program. They were never intended to do so. Instead, the criteria should be used holistically to help determine which research programs are progressive and which are not. This helps to avoid dead end roads. And while this method for establishing coherence does not provide a correspondence between theory and fact, it does establish criteria that are at the very least "truth indicative."[27] Thus, using such an epistemology will be helpful in determining the relative strength of various moral research programs.

Chapter Five

As noted above, I will argue in Chapter 4 that several competing metaphysical systems are compatible with the evidence being gathered in the natural sciences. Once this is established, the question that must be answered is which of these metaphysical systems provides the strongest justification for universal morality? The goal of this chapter is to apply the established criteria to both theism and scientific naturalism in an attempt to answer this question. The term scientific naturalism refers to those research programs committed to a metaphysic defined by sensationism, atheism, and materialism.[28] The current discussion will be limited to these two research programs for three reasons. First, there is not enough time to discuss all of the competing theories fully, making some kind of limitation necessary. Second, given the many competitors, scientific naturalism and theism represent two of the more fertile moral research programs available. Finally, this chapter will focus on these two moral theories because the three thinkers that were highlighted in this work—Jürgen Habermas, Ronald Dworkin, and Marc Hauser—either openly endorse a form of scientific naturalism or assume a strong compatibility between scientific naturalism and universal morality.

It is clear that the metaphysical commitments of scientific naturalism are incompatible with theism. However, in Chapter 5 it will be demonstrated that both of these metaphysical systems are compatible with evolutionary theory. Thus, the four criteria established in Chapter 5 must be used to help determine the relative strength of the two competing moral research programs. It is my contention that these criteria will show that theism provides a much stronger foundation for justifying universal morality. I will further argue that synthesizing metaphysical theism with *methodological* naturalism[29] creates a much stronger moral research program than either theory in isolation.

The first criterion is empirical fruitfulness. It is my contention that while scientific naturalism does provide a progressive framework in some respects, it is inferior to theism with respect to empirical fruitfulness for two reasons. First, there is no empirical data accounted for by scientific naturalism that cannot also be accounted for by theism. However, the same does not hold true when working in the other direction. We will look at two specific examples — biological convergence and the fine tuned nature of the universe — that demonstrate empirical data that can be adequately explained using a theistic metaphysic, but pose significant problems for scientific naturalism. Second, while scientific naturalism is able to make some important and accurate predictions related to moral discovery, such

as the connection between biology and moral judgments, these same predictions can also be made using theism. However, the anticipation of evolutionary convergence and the fine tuned nature of the universe cannot be fully predicted by scientific naturalism. This suggests that while a theistic metaphysic can incorporate the data being gathered in the natural sciences, the metaphysic-associated naturalism-sam (sensationism, atheism, and materialism) cannot adequately explain the evidence pointing toward design. Thus, with respect to empirical fruitfulness, theism shows itself to be more progressive than its naturalistic counterparts.

Furthermore, I argue that the concept of a moral telos raises serious questions related to the internal consistency and comprehensiveness of the moral research programs offered by scientific naturalism. It is unclear whether the universe actually contains a moral telos, but regardless of its ontological status, a progressive moral research program must give an account of the clear and undeniable sense of purpose that each of us experiences. One may not be completely clear about the content of one's purpose, but there will undoubtedly be some general notion that one's life should go in a particular direction. How should such experiences be explained?

Questions such as these raise serious issues associated with the internal consistency of scientific naturalism. If we start with the metaphysical assumptions of atheism and materialism, then the nearly universal feeling of purpose that we experience will typically be explained as an illusion perpetuated by our biology or as the product of various environmental influences. Furthermore, scientific naturalism suggests that phenomena such as morality, free-will, and complex intelligence are the result of contingent forces such as the big bang, natural selection, and the like. These natural processes are not, nor can they be, intentional or goal-directed. Thus, humanity does not represent the aim or pinnacle of the evolutionary process. How can a universal telos be defended using such a framework? It may be possible by pointing to our shared biology, as Hauser and others do, but this simply begs the question, "How can a universal sense of purpose arise from processes that are fundamentally without purpose?"

Furthermore, scientific naturalism seems to lack a sufficient level of comprehensiveness due to the inherent reductionism found in such research programs. By definition, scientific naturalism is logically obligated to reject certain explanations as existing "outside the realm of possibility" given the metaphysical parameters it places on its moral research programs. These tight parameters limit the scope of the research program's explanations regarding moral phenomena. For example, because

of its commitment to sensationism, atheism, and materialism, scientific naturalism must argue that moral intuitions such as obligation and guilt are *nothing more than* experiences arising from some lower-level phenomena such as biological instinct or social conditioning. This is the result of a research program that allows only for bottom-up explanations in order to garner any kind of credibility. This kind of reductionism eliminates the possibility that such moral phenomena are actually the result of a sense of purpose or telos that originates outside of human consciousness. The fact that such top-down explanations are eliminated without first providing an adequate philosophical critique at the metaphysical level shows the limited scope of such research programs.

One option for improving the comprehensiveness of naturalistic moral research programs is to include a theistic component. Theism represents a more comprehensive, and thus a more progressive, research program for two reasons. First, theism is able to incorporate all of the scientific data used by scientific naturalism. We have already shown that certain forms of theism are perfectly compatible with evolutionary theory, making it possible for such a theistic framework to take seriously the claims that biology makes on human nature and morality. Such a research program is also compatible with the social sciences, allowing theism to take into consideration the ways in which environmental and cultural factors impact human behavior and morality. However, adding a theistic metaphysic to the core of a given research program allows it to consider explanations that include, but also go beyond, biological and cultural influences. The freedom to look for top-down explanations that are not bound to sensationism, atheism, and materialism grants theism the opportunity to look for greater levels of integration and synthesis that are simply not possible using the reductionistic metaphysic of scientific naturalism. The fact that theism can incorporate the information for both the natural and social sciences, while at the same time not limiting itself to such explanations, reveals the comprehensive nature of theistic metaphysics.

Chapter Six

In Chapter 4, a set of criteria based on coherence will be established to help determine the relative strength of moral research programs. In Chapter 5 these criteria will be applied to both theism and a form of metaphysical naturalism derived from a particular view of the natural sciences**.** I suggest that this analysis will reveal the relative strength of incorporating a theistic metaphysic to the moral research program. In this final chapter, the same four criteria will be applied briefly to Habermas'

discourse ethics as well as Dworkin's theory of universal human rights in an attempt to determine the relative strength of each moral research program. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will argue that theism is not only compatible with both Habermas and Dworkin, but adding a theistic metaphysic provides a stronger overall justification for universal morality as well. Again, the strongest justification for universal morality occurs when the three forms of universal naturalism are synthesized using a theistic metaphysic.

In the first section, I will analyze Habermas' discourse ethics in terms of empirical fruitfulness, internal consistency, comprehensiveness, and rationality. While discourse ethics are strong in most of these areas, there are several important elements lacking in Habermas' theory. After some of these problems are highlighted, namely, Habermas' inability adequately to ground the preconditions for argumentation, I will show how the addition of a theistic metaphysic helps to overcome these shortcomings.

The second section will analyze Dworkin's natural rights thesis using the same four criteria. Like Habermas, Dworkin's theory is strong in certain respects, but weak in others. The major shortcoming related to Dworkin's rights thesis is its inability to provide a non-conventionalist foundation for human value. If humanity is not intrinsically valuable but, rather, derives its value from various modes of human construction, then it becomes increasingly difficult to use this as the foundation for universal human rights. Because of this, I argue that theism should be implemented to provide a strong view of intrinsic human value that will enable a theory of human rights to be justified independently of more conventionalist approaches. If humanity is the product of divine creation, then its value would derive from a transcendent source. Such intrinsic value would inevitably grant humanity certain fundamental rights.

In the final section, I will review the current work as a whole, highlighting areas of compatibility between theism and each of the three disciplines represented by Hauser, Habermas, and Dworkin, i.e. the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the law respectively. I argue that not only is theism compatible with each of these individually, but collectively as well. It is my contention that the strongest defense of universal morality comes when all four of these research programs are synthesized to provide explanations at the various levels.

CHAPTER ONE

MORAL DISCOURSE AS A MEANS TO UNIVERSAL JUSTIFICATION

> Either we would have to accept something like moral facts and understand 'moral truth' in the sense of a correspondence theory of truth, as the conformity of proposition with an antecedent realm of value objects that is ultimately independent of the self-understanding and the needs of agents, or we would have to deny that normative propositions can be true or false at all and hold that behind the apparent validity claim to moral truth there is concealed something purely subjective… Rawls rightly regards this alternative as unacceptable because, while moral commands, unlike constative utterances, do not relate to anything in the objective world, yet like them they have something objective in view.[1]

The first argument supporting universal naturalism comes from Jürgen Habermas. In part because of his commitment to metaphysical naturalism, Habermas attempts to argue for a form of universal morality that does not require moral facts or epistemic foundations. To do this, Habermas uses a neo-Kantian approach focused on rational consensus. In Kant's *Prolegomena*, he argues that universal intersubjective agreement is equivalent to objectivity.[2] If Kant is right, then Habermas can use consensus to justify universal moral claims without corresponding these claims to some outside realm of moral facts. In the absence of moral facts, objectivity should be defined by intersubjective agreement. However, overcoming relativism is a difficult task because Habermas finds himself firmly entrenched in a postmodern world where philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty, and others are arguing against objective truth and universal knowledge. Furthermore, neo-Aristotelians such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre are critiquing various versions of rational morality, replacing them instead with contextual views of morality emphasizing the good.[3] In the midst of this philosophical shift toward particularity and contextuality, Habermas still is able to make a strong argument supporting universal morality.

Habermas wishes to salvage the enlightenment project, in part because he fears the political and moral consequences of postmodernity. Stripping the enlightenment project of its universalism also strips its emancipatory power. If reason, or more accurately, rational discourse cannot lead to consensus on issues regarding human value, mutual respect, and freedom, then the ability to criticize policies or moral norms that contradict this conception of human worth is severely limited. If there are no objective means for resolving serious moral disputes, then basic human rights as well as fundamental principles of justice are in jeopardy. Thus, Habermas argues that the loss of universalism opens the door to tyranny in all its forms.

Some of the motivation prompting Habermas to endorse a form of universal naturalism comes from his past. As a teenager growing up in Germany, Habermas experienced the atrocities of the Second World War. Undoubtedly, these experiences left a lasting impression. Due to Habermas' past, he criticizes communitarian morality for its failure to recognize that tradition and culture, when left alone, can devolve into something horrible.

> Tradition means we carry something forward as unproblematic which others began before us. The older generation places a trust in their forerunners that they will be true to the values, traditions, etc.. This basis of trust was destroyed at the threshold of the gas chambers… The execution (calm and calculated) of a group of people was done with a sense of normality. It was dependent upon the normality of a highly civilized social intercourse. The monstrous occurred without interrupting the smooth breathing of everyday life.[4]

In order to keep gross injustices such as the holocaust from reoccurring, Habermas argues for a form of moral universalism. According to Habermas, all moral action should have a rational justification because rationality provides the necessary means for the development of universal standards of behavior. These universals transcend particular contexts and cultures, but according to Habermas, they do not necessarily destroy plurality. For Habermas, it is possible to have transcendent guidelines related to justice while at the same time preserving difference. The universal guidelines for justice are needed because our world has experienced, and is still experiencing, terrible violations of human rights, freedoms, and standards of fair treatment. Thus, the world needs a form of universal morality that has binding force on all communities, cultures, governments and religious traditions. While this transcendent morality will condemn the gross injustices found in places such as the Sudan or the Congo, it will not deny the legitimacy of diversity of thought or a plurality of life styles. In this

way, Habermas attempts to provide a moral framework that embraces both the concrete and the universal.

The Need for Discourse

For Habermas, there are two primary alternatives available to those trying to make a case for universal morality. The first relies on theoretical rationality exemplified by the kind of objective reasoning most often associated with various forms of foundationalism. Using such a framework requires that moral truth correspond to something objective in order to be universal in scope. In the case of moral discourse, however, no clear empirical foundation is readily available. Therefore, some other moral authority must be substituted in its place. Most often, the foundation used in theoretical moral arguments relies heavily on metaphysical, religious, or rational justifications.

The second alternative justifies moral norms using a form of practical rationality characterized by discursive reason and consensus building. It is argued that moral truth cannot be determined using objective criteria because none of the moral authorities listed above (metaphysics, religion, reason) is adequate. With no readily available moral foundation, Habermas makes a transition away from substantive morality and theoretical rationality, replacing it instead with a pragmatic procedure geared toward rational dialogue and intersubjective agreement.[5]

According to Habermas, there are two "world-historical" shifts facilitating such a transition. The first is the shattering of religious and metaphysical authority. Plurality and multiculturalism show that there is a separation between justice and any one particular conception of the good. With multiple conceptions of the good and no objective way to determine the ultimate good, one must turn from substantive notions of morality toward procedural ones**.** Second, Habermas argues that the demise of the metaphysical conception of essence moves "epistemic authority" away from a foundational model, toward the social sciences. This makes significant changes to morality. Without a moral foundation or a "transcendental good", morality must be preserved by appealing to a just procedure to determine whether or not our actions can be justified.

> Modern worldviews must accept the conditions of postmetaphysical thought to the extent that they recognize that they are competing with other interpretations of the world within the same universe of validity claims. This reflective knowledge concerning the competition between equally valid warring "gods and demons" creates an awareness of their fallibility

> and shatters the naiveté of dogmatic modes of belief founded on absolute truth claims.[6]

While Habermas rejects metaphysical foundationalism, he still wants to endorse a form of universal morality. To do this, Habermas turns to Kant for help. Like Kant, Habermas wants to derive a universal morality through the use of reason. Discourse ethics, like deontological ethics, is cognitivist**,** formalist, and universalist. However, Habermas wants to avoid some of the major criticisms brought on by Kant's deontological ethic.

According to Habermas, discourse ethics makes three important improvements to Kant's ethical theory. First, Habermas criticizes Kant's use of monological reason as a moral authority, moving instead toward a more discursive model. Instead of each individual testing the legitimacy of his or her maxims in the "loneliness of the soul," maxims should be presented for public discourse and argumentation. This process of public debate will determine whether the maxim in question is something that *all* can accept. Habermas writes,

> Every justified truth claim advocated by someone must be capable of being defended with reasons against the objections of possible opponents and must ultimately be able to command the rationally motivated agreement of the community of interpreters as a whole. Here an appeal to some particular community of interpreters will not suffice.[7]

The major shortcoming of deontological ethics is Kant's transcendental view of reason that simply cannot be supported. The categorical imperative assumes that an individual, through rational thought and impartiality, can discern the validity of a given maxim by reflecting on his or her own motives. For Habermas, this is inadequate because no individual is able to discern his or her own motives accurately, impartially, and without bias. Reason, like morality, is embedded in various contexts, making it less than objective. This necessitates a move from theoretical rationality to practical rationality. It is only when competing interests are in open dialogue with one another that justice can be achieved. To avoid using autonomous reason as a moral foundation, a given maxim should be discussed openly before it is considered justified.

Second, Kant seems to handle problems with justification by pointing to "pure reason." Thus, for Kant, there are no rational disagreements, but only various misuses of reason. If reason is used properly, then consensus or intersubjective agreement would be the result. Discourse ethics makes no such claim. In fact, our use of reason is often clouded by our historical location, personal biases, and the like. As a result, all reason must be

accountable to public discourse and rational argumentation. Only those conclusions that withstand public scrutiny can be called rational. In this way, Habermas reformulates Kant's version of the principle of universalization in terms of intersubjectivity.[8]

> From this viewpoint, the categorical imperative needs to be reformulated as follows: "Rather than ascribing as valid to all others any maxim that I can will to be a universal law, I must submit my maxim to all others for purposes of discursively testing its claims to universality." The emphasis shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm. This version of the universality principle does in fact entail the ideal of a cooperative process of argumentation.[9]

Third, unlike Kant, Habermas denies the existence of moral facts, and as a result, makes a shift from *moral knowledge* to *moral justification*. For Habermas, empirical propositions are quite different from normative propositions because the truth or falsity of empirical claims can be decided using tangible evidence. Moral propositions, on the other hand, cannot be deemed true or false using the same criteria. Thus, there is an obvious difference between the statement "You shouldn't steal that candy bar," and "Your jacket is brown." One is objective; the other is not. This makes the term "moral knowledge" a very difficult one to explain. If postmodernity's arguments regarding plurality and contextuality are taken seriously, then it becomes increasingly difficult to defend universal morality using metaphysical foundations and theoretical rationality. This leads Habermas to replace foundationalism with a procedural view of ethics built around discursive reason and justification. All moral statements are justified inside of a given community of interpreters who seek to find some common ground so that certain moral claims can be validated and others invalidated. Unfortunately, there are no uninterpreted conditions for validity, and no impartial 'facts' to help justify our moral norms. Because of this, moral justification must rely on practical rationality related to open and critical discourse. Those claims that provide sound reasons and withstand criticism are valid, while those that do not are turned away. Thus, Habermas' universal morality does not provide theoretical foundations or moral knowledge, but instead articulates a rational process for moral justification.

The distinction between moral knowledge and moral justification is important for another reason. Unlike moral knowledge, moral justification does not require one to have hard evidence proving one's moral norms to be 'true' in an epistemic sense. Justification only requires one to give good

reasons for one's moral propositions and then allow others to raise questions, provide criticisms, and suggest other alternatives. If one is open to this kind of critical dialogue and one's maxim stands up to such criticisms, then it is morally justified. This model of justification does not provide truth in a scientific sense, but when applied correctly it is "truth indicative." In this way, the burden of proof is very different when one moves from moral knowledge to moral justification.

Another important aspect related to moral justification is the movement from private to public reason. Moral knowledge is often a private endeavor, but Habermas argues that we must submit our moral claims to public discourse in order to justify them. This transition from private to public reason helps Habermas avoid many of the major criticisms brought on by Kant's deontological ethics. Habermas is trying to renew the enlightenment project with regard to morality, but he is attempting to do this in a postmodern world. Can a middle ground be found between a postmodern view of morality as mere preference and Kant's deontology which views morality as a set of universal truths corresponding to an objective metaphysical reality?

Habermas is committed to metaphysical naturalism, and as such, accepts postmodernity's rejection of transcendent epistemic foundations. However, Habermas also wants to affirm the possibility of a universal morality. To do this, Habermas turns to discourse ethics. Rational discourse can lead to consensus, and thus, to universal validity, but this consensus need not represent a correspondence between moral claims and an outside metaphysical reality. Thus, moral claims are justified, not because they correspond to some objective reality, but because they are validated using a just and rational procedure. If this procedure can be applied to a variety of contexts without providing specific moral content, then it seems possible for discourse ethics to support a universal morality that is also sensitive to context. In this way, discourse ethics may provide an effective normative standard for pluralistic societies which no longer have a single, overarching moral authority.

As Rick Roderick argues,

> Habermas wants a "foundation" which avoids both the relativism that seems to be a consequence of the recognition of the social and historical contextuality of norms and the absolutism of the traditional philosophical approach to ethics (as in Kant, for example). Such a "foundation" can, in Habermas's view, only be developed in conjunction with a more comprehensive theory of rationality that does not exclude practical questions of values, interests, and commitments.[10]