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# Responding to the Darwinian Dilemma: Navigating the Lure of Universal Normativity and the Threat of Evaluative Skepticism

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University of Vermont  
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## *Introduction*

It is widely accepted that evolution, to a large degree, has shaped much of what we are as humans. We often think about how evolution has affected our physical structure and our psychology, for example, why we have sharp teeth in the front and dull teeth in the back or why we desire food and sex. Evolutionary considerations have also had an effect on what we believe, for example, why we believe it is right to care for our children or wrong to murder a stranger. Several philosophers have constructed arguments that rely crucially on the thesis that evolution influences moral beliefs. These arguments are called evolutionary debunking arguments, and are meant to “debunk” our moral beliefs, i.e. show that they’re unjustified, by undermining the processes by which those beliefs came about.

This thesis will focus on evolutionary debunking arguments, and, more specifically, on an argument called the Darwinian Dilemma. I have chosen to specifically discuss the Darwinian Dilemma (which will be called the DD henceforth) because of all evolutionary debunking arguments, it poses the biggest threat to the metaethical view of realism. The aim of this thesis is to evaluate realism in light of the challenges exposed by the Darwinian Dilemma.

The overall structure of my thesis is this: I first identify the challenges the Darwinian Dilemma exposes for realism and I introduce the desideratum of universal normativity. I then evaluate realism in light of those challenges to determine whether realism can successfully respond to the Darwinian Dilemma.

I, following Katia Vavova, will begin in section 1 by identifying three criteria a successful evolutionary debunking argument should meet. The Darwinian Dilemma meets these criteria. I’ll also respond to an argument commonly used by realists to resist the consequences of the Darwinian Dilemma. By responding to this argument, which is Enoch’s “all things

considered” argument, I hope to reveal what makes the Darwinian Dilemma particularly challenging for realist metaethical views. I argue that we should care whether realist views can respond to the DD by identifying what they do particularly well. And the reason is the ability of realist views to explain how evaluative beliefs recommend, guide, or oblige *everyone* regardless of each person’s personal evaluative stance. A view that has this ability can provide universal normativity, which is something we would prefer all metaethical views to provide. So, the first section of the thesis gives an overview of the structure of evolutionary debunking arguments, characterizes the DD, and explains the problems the DD poses for a specific type of realist metaethical views. It then responds to the “all things considered” objection and identifies the desideratum of universal normativity for metaethical views.

In Section 2 of the thesis, I will discuss how realist metaethical views respond to the threat posed by the DD. I identify two major strands of realist responses which I call Take 1 and Take 2, each of which contain different realist arguments that have similar structures. I will discuss and respond to Take 1 response and identify the general problem with Take 1 responses. I will then discuss and respond to Take 2 and identify the general problem with Take 2 responses. I will conclude that realism fails to respond to the Darwinian Dilemma. So, in Section 2, I will characterize several realist responses to the DD and group them in Take 1 and Take 2, I will respond to each argument, and I will formulate more general objections to Take 1 and Take 2.

One takeaway from my thesis is the formulation of major objections to two types of realist response to the Darwinian Dilemma. The realist must respond to these objections or appeal to other arguments to resist the consequences of the DD. If the realist cannot do either, she must give up realism. A second takeaway is how I distinguish between what a metaethical

view *must* accomplish and what makes a metaethical view attractive. This is an important distinction that helps us determine what must be included in metaethical views and what we can give up, if necessary. A third takeaway is the revelation of an interesting tension for metaethical views. It appears that the pressure to give a plausible story about universal normativity is in tension with the pressure to give an account of how our beliefs are justified. The Darwinian Dilemma helps us see how this tension emerges. It's especially difficult to justify evaluative beliefs upon consideration of the evolutionary influence on our evaluative beliefs. Realism easily provides universal normativity, but struggles majorly with the justification of our evaluative beliefs. Thus, a very important result of my thesis will be the acceptance that oftentimes, the metaethical views that provide us with what we want most, i.e. universal normativity, don't always provide us with what we need, i.e. the justification of our evaluative beliefs.

### *1. Section 1: Understanding the Challenge Posed by the DD*

Evolutionary debunking arguments are a strand of debunking arguments in general. These arguments seek to undermine the epistemic status of our beliefs in a certain domain by appealing to the origins of these beliefs. They suggest the origins of certain domains of belief give good reason to think that those beliefs do not reliably track the truth. The basic structure of general debunking arguments is:

*“Causal premise:* S's beliefs about domain D are explained by X.

*Epistemic premise:* X is an off-track process (i.e., a process that doesn't reliably track the truth)

Therefore, S's belief about domain D are unjustified (Kahane 106)

Evolutionary debunking arguments are a species of debunking arguments that use evolution to show that something is an off-track process. Evolutionary debunking arguments

“aim to undermine the epistemic status of our moral beliefs by appeal to their evolutionary origins. The worry is that if evolution shaped our moral beliefs, but evolution aims for survival and fitness, not moral truth, then moral skepticism follows.” (Vavova 1). The basic structure of evolutionary debunking arguments looks like this:

*Causal premise:* S’s beliefs about domain D are explained by X

*Epistemic premise:* X is an evolutionarily influenced (and thus off-track) process

Therefore, S’s beliefs about domain D are unjustified

So, evolutionary debunking arguments operate by arguing that the process that led us to believe a certain domain of beliefs has been influenced by evolutionary influences such as natural selection. Evolutionary influences are not truth-tracking, which means that the process that led to the domain of beliefs not truth tracking. The justification of beliefs depends on the process by which we come to those beliefs. If beliefs have come from a process that does not track the truth, then the justification for those beliefs is compromised. Thus, beliefs about a domain that have non-truth-tracking origins are unjustified.

Katia Vavova identifies three features of evolutionary debunking arguments that distinguish them from other types of debunking arguments and make them particularly powerful. First, “the debunker’s argument rests on a claim about our beliefs’ origins. The alleged threat arises because these origins are suspect. The debunker needs some such empirical claim. Her argument can’t be evolutionary without it. The debunker’s argument must, therefore, be empirical” So, an evolutionary debunking argument (EDA) must rest on some sort of empirical claim because it’s appealing to evolution, which is an empirical phenomenon. An EDA that fails to make an empirical claim about a belief’s origins cannot appeal to evolution to show that those origins are suspect. An EDA that fails to make an empirical claim is not evolutionary at all. An

EDA should thus rest on empirical claims about evolution processes, our beliefs, and the relationship between the two. Second, “the debunker’s argument must also be targeted...this distinguishes debunkers from other, less modest, skeptics.” An important consideration when examining evolutionary debunking arguments is ensuring that they don’t debunk too much. An EDA shouldn’t attempt to debunk every belief anyone has. It would be a major problem, for example, if an EDA compromised not only moral beliefs, but also mathematical beliefs, scientific beliefs, and so on. It is much more difficult to defend the idea that certain scientific and mathematical beliefs are unjustified than it is to defend the idea that moral beliefs are unjustified. Also, an EDA rests on certain scientific beliefs about evolution being true. If it turns out those beliefs are unjustified according to an EDA, then that EDA is self-defeating. Thus, since I don’t want to bring in complication regarding the epistemology of every type of belief, the type of EDA I want to consider should only target moral beliefs. Third, “the argument must be epistemological. The conclusion isn’t that there aren’t moral truths, but that we cannot *know* them” (Vavova 105). An EDA is a type of argument that attempts to prove that beliefs are unjustified. If a belief is unjustified, we cannot reasonably hold on to that belief. If we cannot maintain beliefs about moral truths, then there’s no sense in which we can *know* those moral truths. An EDA is not meant to disprove the existence of moral truths, but rather, to show that those beliefs are unjustified and thus, unknowable. Throughout this thesis, I will be relying on the epistemological claim that if a belief is unjustified, it is also unknowable. An unjustified belief should not be held and thus cannot be known. So, when I claim that a belief is unjustified, it comes with the implication that the belief is also unknowable.

Let me now introduce the particular EDA on which I focus my attention in this thesis: an argument that has come to be known as the Darwinian Dilemma. The starting point of the

Darwinian Dilemma is that “one enormous factor in shaping the content of human values has been the forces of natural selection, such that our system of evaluative judgements is thoroughly saturated with evolutionary influence” (Street 114). Our evaluative beliefs are beliefs that X is good, Y is bad, A is a reason to B, etc. Street argues that the forces of natural selection that favor survival and reproduction have influenced our evaluative beliefs. Consider the widespread evaluative judgment that one should value the life of one’s child and protect that child even at the expense of one’s comfort. This sort of evaluative judgement seems to be a result of evolutionary forces. Evolution favors those who maintain the survival of their offspring. If one didn’t value the survival of one’s offspring, then those offspring likely wouldn’t survive, and the trait of not valuing one’s offspring wouldn’t be passed down. Consider, in contrast, if the evaluative judgment that one should seek out what is physically harmful was widespread among humans. Humans who have this judgment would very quickly get themselves hurt or killed to the degree that they couldn’t have offspring or they couldn’t take care of their offspring. It wouldn’t be evolutionarily adaptive to hold such an evaluative judgment. We can conclude that “different evaluative tendencies, then, can have extremely different effects on a creature’s chances of survival and reproduction. In light of this, it is only reasonable to expect there to have been, over the course of our evolutionary history, relentless selective pressure on the content of our evaluative judgements” (Street 114). So, some evaluative beliefs lead to reproductive success and other evaluative beliefs lead to reproductive failure. Thus, the mechanics of reproductive success and other aspects of evolution greatly influence the evaluative beliefs we have as humans.

Street has established that the origins of our evaluative beliefs are subject to evolutionary influences. The DD, like other EDAs, argues that evolutionary influence is an off-track process.

The DD starts with a conditional premise that assumes the metaethical view of realism. I will explain realism in more detail after I give the general structure of the DD. The basic tenet of realism is that the evaluative truth exists as mind-independent facts. The DD is meant to show that if one accepts realism, one's evaluative beliefs are unjustified. In order to do so, the DD must start with a conditional premise that assumes realism, i.e. a premise that posits the mind-independent evaluative truth. If we assume the mind-independent evaluative truth, we can show that evolution doesn't track that truth. Evolution doesn't track the truth that realists posit, and thus, the realist's beliefs are unjustified. Thus, the DD takes the following form: *if realism, then our evaluative beliefs are unjustified*. Evolution is primarily concerned with survival and reproduction. Any sort of evaluative belief endorsed by evolution *may* track the mind-independent evaluative truth, but, as long as the belief leads to reproductive success, it doesn't matter whether it actually *does* track that truth. Since evolution doesn't necessarily track the mind-independent evaluative truth, we can conclude that evolutionary influence is an off-track process. Since our evaluative beliefs have evolutionary origins, we can conclude that the origins of our evaluative beliefs are off-track. The basic structure of the Darwinian Dilemma is as follows:

*Conditional Premise:* There are mind-independent evaluative truths (i.e. assume realism)

*Causal Premise:* S's evaluative belief that p is explained by evolutionary influences

*Epistemic Premise:* Evolution is an off-track process (i.e., evolution does not track the mind-independent evaluative truth)

Therefore

S's evaluative belief that p is unjustified

Earlier I argued that the type of EDA I want to consider follows the general outline of evolutionary debunking arguments, is empirical in nature, does not debunk too much, and has some sort of epistemological fallout. The Darwinian Dilemma fulfills each of these requirements.

I will now characterize realism in more detail and explain how the DD targets realism. Realists claim that there exist mind-independent evaluative truths: evaluative truths are truths that X is good, Y is bad, A is a reason to B, etc that obtain independently of one's personal evaluative stance. One's personal evaluative stance includes one's desires, judgments about what one ought to do, what one thinks is a reason for what, etc. Mind-independent facts exist outside one's personal evaluative stance. Consider the fact that the chair in front of me is red. This is not true simply because I judge the chair to be red or because I believe the chair in front of me is red. Rather, it's true about the world that the chair is red. That the chair is red is a mind-independent fact.

I will consider in this thesis both non-naturalist and naturalist versions of realism. The DD argues that evolutionary influences do not track mind-independent truths. Because both the naturalist and non-naturalist realist see evaluative truths as things independent of one's personal evaluative stance, both realist views are targeted by the DD.<sup>1</sup>

It's important to note that both realists and anti-realists may claim that the truth of an evaluative judgement holds independently of one's making that particular evaluative judgement. As Street explains,

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<sup>1</sup> Non-naturalist views argue that that mind-independent evaluative truths "are not reducibly to any kind of natural fact, and are not the kinds of things that play a role in causal explanations; instead, they are irreducibly normative facts or truths" (Street 111-112). Naturalist views, on the other hand, argue that evaluative truths are identical with certain natural truths. There is a question regarding whether all naturalist views are legitimately realist and thus targeted by the DD. That discussion can be found in Street's paper "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realists of Value." According to Street's standards, the naturalist view I investigate later on in this thesis counts as a realist view.

“Consider, for example, a constructivist view according to which the truth of ‘‘X is a reason for agent A to Y’’ is a function of whether that judgement would be among A’s evaluative judgements in reflective equilibrium. This view is antirealist because it understands truths about what reasons a person has as depending on her evaluative attitudes (in particular, on what those attitudes would be in reflective equilibrium). Yet on this view, it is quite possible for someone to have a reason independently of whether she thinks she does, for whether she has a reason is not a function of whether she (presently) judges she has it, but rather a function of whether that judgement would be among her evaluative judgements in reflective equilibrium. Antirealists can therefore agree with realists that the truth of a given evaluative judgement holds independently of whether one makes that particular judgement’’ (Street 110-111).

So, the key difference between realism and antirealism is not that the evaluative truths realism posits are independent of the evaluative judgments we, in fact, make, but rather, that they are independent of the *whole set* of the evaluative judgments we would be inclined to make, including the judgments we would make in reflective equilibrium. So, for the realist, the whole set of evaluative stances I would have towards a certain action, even after careful rational reflection, has nothing to do with the goodness or badness of the action. For example, according to realism, it’s wrong to light cats on fire, even if, after achieving reflective equilibrium, I personally enjoy lighting cats on fire, desire to light cats on fire, or think we have reason to light cats on fire. The wrongness of lighting cats on fire is just something true about the world. When I see someone lighting a cat on fire, I apprehend the wrongness of the action and form the belief that lighting cats on fire is wrong. It’s the same thing that happens when I walk on a sidewalk, feel the firmness of the sidewalk, and form the belief that the sidewalk is firm. So, the realist

claims there exist mind-independent evaluative truths in the world and that our evaluative beliefs come from those truths. Antirealists deny the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths. The DD doesn't pose an obvious threat to antirealist views. Antirealists expect a correlation between the evaluative truth and our evolutionarily influenced beliefs. Antirealists take our evolutionary influenced beliefs, apply rational processes to them, and from there determine the evaluative truth. They expect that the evaluative truth has some connection to the process of evolution because that truth comes from evolutionarily influenced beliefs. Evolution thus determines the antirealist evaluative truth and we can be sure our evaluative beliefs are justified on an antirealist view. If we were to assume antirealism as the conditional premise of the DD, it would not lead to the consequence that our evaluative beliefs are unjustified. Realists, on the other hand, argue that the evaluative truth exists as mind-independent facts. Our evaluative beliefs come from evolutionary processes. Evolution aims at survival rather than the mind-independent evaluative truth. If evolutionary influences explain the content of our evaluative beliefs, and evolution aims at survival rather than the mind-independent truth, why think the content of our evaluative beliefs track the mind-independent evaluative truth? This is the basic problem the DD poses for realism.

So, the DD poses a problem for realism. The very same beliefs believed by realists to accurately represent the evaluative truth are also beliefs endorsed by evolution for promoting our survival. If the content of our evaluative beliefs is greatly influenced by evolution, then it doesn't seem those beliefs have anything to do with the evaluative truth. If our evaluative beliefs are the result of evolutionary processes, and evolutionary processes aim at survival rather than truth, then there's no reason to think that our evaluative beliefs latch on to the mind-independent evaluative truth. Realists offer a way to justify our beliefs that is incompatible with evolution.

Realists need to respond to the claim that our evaluative beliefs are largely influenced by evolution. Street states that realism “needs to take a position on what relation there is, if any, between the selective forces that have influenced the content of our evaluative judgements, on the one hand, and the mind-independent evaluative truths that realism posits, on the other” (Street 121). The dilemma for realists is generated from the two ways they can respond to the claim that our evaluative beliefs are influenced by evolution. One option is to claim that our evaluative beliefs track the mind-independent evaluative truth. This option asserts that there is a relation between the evolutionary influences on our evaluative beliefs and the mind-independent evaluative truth. This option is a rejection of the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process. The second option is to claim that despite the evolutionary influence on our evaluative beliefs, it is still the case that our evaluative beliefs are justified. This option denies a relation between evolutionary influences and the mind-independent evaluative truth. This option accepts the epistemic and causal claims of the DD but denies the conclusion that our evaluative beliefs are unjustified.

One option for realists is to affirm a relation between evolutionary influences and the mind-independent evaluative truth. In doing so, they accept the causal premise of the DD that our beliefs are explained by evolutionary influences, but they deny the epistemic premise that evolution is an off-track process. How might a realist make this denial that evolution is an off-track process?

“The answer is this: they may understand these evolutionary causes as having *tracked* the truth; they may understand the relation in question to be a *tracking* relation. The realist might elaborate on this as follows. Surely, he or she might say, it is advantageous to

recognize evaluative truths; surely it promotes one's survival (and that of one's offspring) to be able to grasp what one has reason to do, believe, and feel" (Street 125).

So, realists can explain the connection between mind-independent evaluative truths and evolutionary influence by claiming that it's evolutionarily advantageous for humans to grasp the mind-independent evaluative truth. The realist considers how evolutionarily valuable it is to grasp the truth in other, non-evaluative domains. The realist asks, "if it is evolutionary adaptive to grasp the truth in other, non-evaluative domains, why shouldn't it be evolutionarily advantageous to grasp the truth in the evaluative domain?" If it's evolutionarily advantageous to grasp the truth in the evaluative domain, then evolution would have favored those who had grasped the evaluative truth, and we can be sure that our evaluative beliefs align with the evaluative truth.

Street rejects the tracking account by offering an alternative theory for why we have the evaluative beliefs we do. Her theory does not pose the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths. Street argues that the tracking account puts itself forward as a scientific theory meant to explain why we have the beliefs we do. She says that

"in putting itself forward as a scientific explanation, the tracking account renders itself subject to all the usual standards of scientific evaluation, putting itself in direct competition with all other scientific hypotheses as to why human beings tend to make some evaluative judgements rather than others. The problem for realism is that the tracking account fares quite poorly in this competition" (Street 126).

So, Street plans to defeat the tracking account on scientific grounds by offering a scientifically superior account. The account Street offers is called the adaptive link account and it states that

“tendencies to make certain kinds of evaluative judgements rather than others contributed to our ancestors’ reproductive success not because they constituted perceptions of mind-independent evaluative truths, but rather because they forged adaptive links between our ancestors’ circumstances and their responses to those circumstances, getting them to act, feel, and believe in ways that turned out to be reproductively advantageous” (Street 127).

Evolution forms adaptive links between certain circumstances and a human’s evaluative stance. Evolution forms a link between the circumstance of someone helping me and the belief that I should help them in return. Every time someone helps me, evolution encourages me to help them in return, and this is evolutionarily advantageous.

Street claims, I think rightly, that there are two respects in which the adaptive link account is superior to the tracking account – it is more parsimonious and much clearer. The adaptive link is more parsimonious because it operates without having to posit the existence of an extra sort of thing – mind-independent evaluative truths. The adaptive link account is much clearer because it’s not clear why knowing the mind-independent evaluative truth should be relevant for one to be evolutionarily successful. It’s obvious how knowing some truths would make one more evolutionarily successful. For example, it’s clear that knowing t which mushrooms are poisonous and which are not increases my evolutionary success. It is far less clear why knowing the mind-independent evaluative truth should have anything to do with our ability to survive and reproduce.<sup>2</sup> I submit that we should accept the adaptive link account over the tracking account because its parsimony and clarity in comparison to the tracking account make it a scientifically superior account. Thus, the realist cannot explain the connection between

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<sup>2</sup> Street has a third reason for thinking that the adaptive link is superior to the tracking account. She argues that the adaptive link account better captures why human beings tend to make some evaluative judgments rather than others. I don’t find this argument very clear or compelling, and I don’t think it adds much to Street’s reasons for thinking the tracking account is superior, so I won’t discuss it further in this thesis.

evolutionary influences on our evaluative beliefs and the mind-independent evaluative truth by appeal to the tracking account.

The realist might argue in response to Street that the tracking account and adaptive linking account don't contradict each other. That the adaptive link account is true doesn't mean that the tracking account must be given up. The adaptive link account says that humans form evaluative beliefs in response to certain circumstances, forging a link between the circumstance and the appropriate belief. The links serve the purpose of getting "the organism to respond to its circumstances in a way that is adaptive" (Street 128). As long as the link forged gets an organism to act in a way that is adaptive, it doesn't matter how exactly that link is forged, whether through apprehending the evaluative truth or from a process in which certain circumstances call for certain responses. Realists formulate their tracking account from the observation that having access to the truth is often evolutionary adaptive. Being able to apprehend the truth that there's a bear in front of me is obviously evolutionarily adaptive. So, realists make the following generalization: a cognitive system that tracks the truth leads to reproductive success. The realist then applies this generalization to the specific case of evaluative beliefs. So, realists have reason to believe that truth-tracking occurs in the realm of evaluative beliefs. The realist next asks whether the adaptive link account and truth-tracking can occur simultaneously. Something like the adaptive link account seems to be at work when we respond to certain non-evaluative truths in adaptive ways. A link is forged between the truth of the bear being in front of me and the appropriate response (running away from the bear, for example). So, it seems that the adaptive link account can accommodate truth tracking. Why shouldn't it also be the case that adaptive links are forged between the evaluative truth and the relevant response, i.e. forming certain evaluative beliefs? We can imagine a link being formed between the evaluative truth that one

ought to take care of one's children, and the corresponding evaluative belief that I should take care of my child. Street's account appears to rest on the assumption that the tracking account and the adaptive link account contradict one another. In fact, the realist argues, they can coexist, and the generalization that a cognitive system that tracks the truth leads to reproductive success gives us reason to think that tracking the evaluative truth would be evolutionary adaptive. If the adaptive link account is true, and we have reason to think the tracking account is true, and they don't contradict each other, then we should have no problem theorizing that evaluative truth-tracking is part of the adaptive link account as it pertains to evaluative beliefs. Thus, the realist doesn't have to give up the tracking account and she has an adequate explanation for the striking correlation between our evaluative beliefs and the mind-independent evaluative truth.

The problem with the realist's defense of the tracking account is the generalization that a cognitive system that tracks the truth leads to reproductive success. I agree that very often, in many domains, tracking the truth leads to reproductive success. It's clear that having access to truths how much food I have left for the winter, about which mushrooms are poisonous, and about where to find hunting prey all lead to reproductive success. It doesn't seem to be the case, however, that in *all* domains having true beliefs lead to evolutionary success. Consider the following theory taken from biological research. The theory states that in many cases, being oversensitive to the possible presence of predators is evolutionary useful. According to this theory, it is evolutionarily adaptive for me to form the belief that there's a bear approaching my tent whenever I hear a strange noise. My belief that there's a bear is rarely true, but it's useful in the case that there actually is a bear. According to this theory, then, false beliefs can be useful. Evaluative beliefs might similarly be useful despite the fact that they're not true. For example, it might not be *true* that killing people is wrong, but it's useful for me to believe that killing people

is wrong. The realist's generalization implies that the truth or falsity of evaluative beliefs has an effect on their evolutionary usefulness. According to the realist, if evaluative beliefs are true, they lead to reproductive success. If they're false, they do not lead to reproductive success. Let's consider with a few examples whether the truth of an evaluative belief is significant for the usefulness of that belief. If it is *not* significant, we can conclude that the generalization that true evaluative beliefs lead to reproductive success is false. So, the question to consider is whether the truth of evaluative beliefs affects their usefulness.

For some beliefs, it's obvious that their truth bears on their usefulness. Many of these beliefs act like maps. They allow us to structure our environment in a way that allows us to move successfully through it. Consider the non-evaluative belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous. This belief is either true or false. Imagine that I hold this belief in the scenario where it's true. I hold the belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous and it's actually *true* that blue mushrooms are poisonous. The belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous along with the truth of that belief allows me to avoid the consequences of eating poisonous food. The truth of the belief makes holding the belief useful. Now imagine I hold the belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous in the scenario where it's false. I hold the belief that blue mushroom are poisonous, but blue mushrooms are *not* poisonous. The belief is not useful in this scenario. There's no reason to avoid eating blue mushrooms. Holding the belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous when it's not true might even be less than useful because I lose a good food source by avoiding blue mushrooms. The falsity of the belief makes holding the belief non-useful or even less than useful. The truth or falsity of the non-evaluative belief that blue mushrooms are poisonous clearly influences the usefulness of holding that belief.

Now consider the evaluative belief that I shouldn't murder people. There is either a mind-independent evaluative truth corresponding to this belief or there isn't. Imagine the situation where I hold this belief but it's false – there's no mind-independent evaluative truth that murder is wrong. Although the belief is false, it has a certain level of usefulness – it allows me to avoid jail, to avoid killing people who might be useful to my survival, etc. The falsity of the belief doesn't bear on its usefulness. It doesn't matter whether the belief is false. It only matters that I hold the belief. Now imagine the situation where I hold the belief but it *is* true –there's a mind-independent evaluative truth that murder is wrong. The usefulness of the belief is the exact same as when it was false. It's still the case that when I hold this belief, I avoid jail, I avoid killing useful people, etc. The truth or falsity of the evaluative belief that murder is wrong has no bearing on the usefulness of holding that belief. It appears that the truth or falsity of evaluative beliefs does not influence their evolutionary usefulness. The realist's generalization that tracking the truth in all domains leads to reproductive success in all domains is false – it does not matter whether a belief tracks the truth in the evaluative domain. If the truth of evaluative beliefs does not affect their evolutionary usefulness, then there's no reason for evolution to track true evaluative beliefs. The realist's claim that it would make sense for evolution to track the truth is false. It wouldn't make sense for evolution to track the evaluative truth because tracking the evaluative truth would not lead to reproductive success. We should thus reject the tracking account.

The tracking account might work in conjunction with the adaptive link account, but there's no reason to accept the tracking account. We should thus rely only on the adaptive link account.

The second available option for realists is a denial of the existence of any relation between evolutionary influences and the evaluative truth. Realists taking this option accept the causal premise of the DD that the truth of our evaluative beliefs is explained by evolutionary influences. They also accept the epistemic premise that evolution is an off-track process. However, they deny the conclusion of the DD that our evaluative beliefs are unjustified. They argue that the two premises of the DD do not lead to the conclusion that our evaluative beliefs are unjustified. In this way, they deny the validity of the DD. Most realists do not take option two. If one does take option two, then as I will show, it seems that our evaluative beliefs cannot possibly be justified. Those who take option two claim that despite the fact that evolution doesn't track the truth, evolution still has happened to pick out the truth in the evaluative domain it's certainly *possible* that evolution has favored the beliefs that happen to align with the evaluative truth. However, evolution happening to choose such beliefs over the variety of other beliefs that could have been chosen would be a major stroke of luck. Our beliefs are not justified if the only reason for their truth is a massive stroke of luck. Imagine picking a gumball from a container containing hundreds of different colors of gumballs without looking at it. You then form the belief that you have a blue gumball in your hand. Your belief might be true – you might have actually grabbed a blue gumball. Even if your belief was true, however, you wouldn't have any way to justify your belief. All you could say is that you might have grabbed a blue gumball and that your belief might be true. Your belief being true rests entirely on the luckiness of grabbing the right gumball. Your belief, though it may be true, relies on luck and thus is not justified and so does not count as knowledge. In the same way, one who accepts that evolution happened to choose the correct moral system, even though it is not the case the evolutionary pressures systematically track the evaluative truths, is committed to a massive stroke of luck and cannot

justify her evaluative beliefs. Thus, a realist could attempt to deny the validity of the DD, but in doing so, she commits herself to a massive stroke of luck and has a result cannot claim her evaluative beliefs are justified.

To make the problem realists face clearer, imagine that Joe has a variety of beliefs about Jupiter. He then finds out that he has those beliefs because a hypnotist implanted them into his head when he was a child. The hypnotist chose those beliefs out of a random pile of beliefs about Jupiter, some of which were true and some of which were false. Joe's beliefs were formed by an untrustworthy process, and he is no longer justified in holding those beliefs. This is the force of the Darwinian Dilemma: If we believe that the truth of our evaluative beliefs is determined by the mind-independent evaluative truth, but we find out that there's been a non-truth-oriented (evolutionary) influence on those beliefs, then we are no longer justified in holding our evaluative beliefs.

Thus, denying an explanation between mind-independent evaluative truths and evolutionary influence and continuing to endorse the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths, as the realist does, appears to have skeptical consequences. The DD posits that all of our evaluative beliefs have been greatly influenced by evolutionary pressures. It appears that there is no way to explain why or how those evolutionary pressures would guide our evaluative beliefs to the independent truth posited by realists. If we don't know whether our beliefs align with the truth, we are not justified in holding any of our evaluative beliefs. Thus, it seems the realist is forced to embrace evaluative skepticism, which I define as follows:

*Evaluative skepticism:* knowledge regarding evaluative truths is impossible. We cannot have knowledge regarding evaluative truths because we cannot have justified beliefs about those truths.

Evaluative skepticism is an unattractive view that would have major repercussions on our lives. If we can no longer have justification for our evaluative beliefs, then those beliefs no longer count as knowledge, and we should no longer hold those beliefs. We would have to give up all of our beliefs regarding right, wrong, what is a reason for what, etc. The evaluative beliefs from which we base our societies and our lives would all have a negative epistemic status. We would lose justification for basic evaluative beliefs such as “killing people for no good reason is wrong,” or “everyone having enough food is good,” or “It’s wrong to take other people’s things just because you want them.” One could not have any justified beliefs about what one should do on a daily basis. My belief that I should get up for classes in the morning ultimately stems from an evaluative belief about the intrinsic value of education, or the value of eventually supporting myself, or the wrongness of wasting the money provided to me for college. These sorts of beliefs are unjustified, meaning the accompanying belief that I should get up for classes is also unjustified. Thus, evaluative skepticism has the extremely negative consequence of forcing us to give up the beliefs that structure our day-to-day decisions, our societies, and our lives in general.

It seems that the realist is in no position to deny the causal or epistemic premises of the DD. She cannot provide an adequate account to explain how evolution tracks the truth. She also cannot deny the causal premise that evolution is connected to the evaluative truth and maintain that our beliefs align with the evaluative truth without committing herself to a massive fluke. Either way she is committed to the unattractive view of evaluative skepticism.

The Darwinian Dilemma exposes two problems that plague realist views. First, it appears that the only epistemic story available to the realist according to which our evaluative beliefs can be and often are justified is incompatible with the well-supported thesis that our evaluative beliefs are strongly influenced by evolution. The realist claims that there exists an evaluative

truth but cannot explain how we have reliable access to that truth without denying that our evaluative beliefs are shaped by evolutionary pressures. Second, if the realist accepts that our evaluative beliefs are shaped by evolutionary pressures, then it seems she can only account for the truth of our evaluative beliefs by committing to a stroke of luck. As a result, she seems to face evaluative skepticism. We have no good reason to think that our beliefs approach the evaluative truth that realism posits. And recognizing this makes our beliefs unjustified evaluative skepticism.

At this point, it looks as if the realist is faced with a difficult choice. She can continue to insist on being a realist, even if it commits her to evaluative skepticism. Or, she can give up realism.

A realist who chooses the first option might attempt to lessen its negative impact by showing that even if the DD seems to commit one to an extremely negative consequences, one should continue to be a realist because it is the all-things-considered superior view. Being unable to avoid the DD is a serious blow for realism, one might argue, but it doesn't completely undermine realism. Realism can't deal with the Darwinian Dilemma, but it has serious advantages over antirealist views in other areas. In particular, realism can more easily capture our basic moral intuitions. Realism has the resources to validate the intuition that that murder is wrong regardless of what anyone thinks. Even if an individual thinks it's okay to murder, or a society thinks it can justify its apparent need to kill many people, or anyone thinks it's not wrong for any other reason, murder is still wrong. The independent fact that murder is wrong can justify this sort of intuition. Views that do not posit the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths cannot validate that intuition and have a more difficult time explaining why we naturally have intuitions

that there is intrinsic rightness and wrongness. A realist might claim that in this way, and other ways, realism is a better view than the alternative and we should accept realism.

I don't think the claim that realism is all-things-considered better is a successful response to the DD. There are three reasons why all-things-considered arguments don't work. The first reason is that if one wants to show that one view is overall superior to another, it's not enough just to say it. One has a rather large burden to show *why and how* their view is overall superior to another view. The second reason is that the bias implicit in metaethical arguments between realists and anti-realists compromises anyone's ability to determine which view is overall better. The final reason is that all-things-considered arguments seem to ignore the reality of view-defeating objections. I'll discuss these three in turn below.

One reason why arguments to the effect that that realism is all-things-considered superior are often ineffective is that if one wants to support such a claim, one has a large explanatory burden to meet. The realist must explicate the number of ways realism is superior to anti-realism. The realist must identify the major advantages of realism over anti-realism, then she must give arguments supporting those advantages, and she must address any objections from anti-realists. All of this amounts to a rather hefty workload in order to make the all-things-considered argument work. I've already raised doubts about whether an all-things-considered argument *can* work when there are conflicting interests. A realist who thinks he can save the all-things-considered approach should think very carefully about whether it's even possible before endeavoring to produce the massive explanation to make it work.

Another reason why both realists and antirealists will have a difficult time advancing all-things-considered-superior arguments is because each philosophical camp has different biases and values. Let's consider the various ways either realists or anti-realists might be biased in their

all-things-considered assessments. A realist or antirealist might be biased simply because he believes he's right. One is biased because one only chooses the view that coincides best with one's reasoning. This is a plausible instance of bias, but I think bias in metaethical arguments often goes deeper. A stronger source of bias pertaining to the debate between realists and anti-realists is what each camp personally values and looks for in a view. Imagine someone who really wants a metaethical view that captures our commonsense feelings about morality. Often, when we see someone killing someone else, we think, feel, and believe that act is wrong. We don't just think that we *take* it to be wrong. Rather, our first intuition is often the belief that it just *is* wrong, that the wrongness of the action is some property about the world. Moral realism provides the means in the form of mind-independent evaluative truth to vindicate these sorts of commonsense moral feelings. A person who highly values a view's ability to explain and vindicate commonsense moral feelings will find realism highly attractive. Now, imagine someone else who really wants a metaethical view to explain moral motivation. Realists have difficulty explaining how mind-independent evaluative truths have a grip on us so that we still have reason to act morally. This is easy to explain for anti-realism because antirealism points to our evaluative states as the thing that gives us motivation to act morally. If my evaluative state under reflective equilibrium includes a desire to help those who help me, then my motivation for helping those who help me is obvious. I do it because I want to do it. This person would likely find anti-realist views highly attractive.

It's a major problem for all-things-considered superior arguments if different people choose different views not because they're "superior" but because different people value differently what a view can offer. Enoch likely finds the phenomena realism captures and the intuitions realism vindicates highly attractive. That his view can capture this phenomena is likely

far less important for anti-realists. There doesn't seem to be any way to arbitrate debates regarding what a view should capture and accomplish. Some philosophers would prefer a view to capture certain phenomena, and other philosophers would prefer it to capture other phenomena. There are, of course some phenomena most philosophers believe a view *must* capture. For example, most realists and antirealists would agree that a metaethical view *must* tell a story about the justification of our evaluative beliefs. Certainly, proponents of views like expressivism might not think justifying evaluative beliefs is important, but as I have argued, not justifying evaluative beliefs comes at the significant cost of evaluative skepticism. For most philosophical debates, attempting to determine which phenomena are more important or necessary for a particular view to capture is like trying to determine which features of a house are more important or necessary for people who have different preferences. Certainly, some features of a house would be regarded as necessary by everyone. Everyone would agree that a house in Vermont should have heating. Less important, though, is whether the house includes a large backyard. For some, it's extremely important the house has a large backyard. For others, it's more important that the house lets in plenty of sunlight. There is no objective fact for whether plenty of sunlight or a big backyard is more important. Both are certainly desirable, but one cannot be proven to be more important than the other. Part of Enoch's argument that his view is all-things-considered superior rests on the assumption that his view captures more of the most important phenomena than does antirealism. This argument fails upon the consideration that there is no good way to determine which phenomena are more important to capture than others. The only arguments one could give to explain why some phenomena are more important than others will be theory-driven, i.e. motivated by the views one already accepts. Consider the antirealist who wants to argue that moral motivation is the most important phenomena a view should capture. The antirealist's view

already has an easy time providing moral motivation, and it's probably the reason why she chose antirealism in the first place. Thus, any arguments she gives for thinking that capturing moral motivation is more important will likely be motivated by her acceptance of antirealism. A realist won't find those sorts of arguments compelling because they appear to assume the superiority of antirealism. So, when someone claims a view is all-things-considered superior because of the phenomena it captures, one should consider whether different philosophers value differently the phenomena that view might capture. If they do, there's no good way to determine which phenomena are better, and an all-things-considered view should not be utilized. This is the case with Enoch's assessment that realism is all-things-considered superior.

A final reason why all-things-considered arguments are ineffective in this case is that they ignore the possibility of view-defeating arguments. All-things-considered-superior arguments can allow proponents of a view to illegitimately avoid objections that dismantle that view. I've already shown that evaluative skepticism is an extremely negative consequence for anyone who commits to it. Realism has a particularly difficult time avoiding evaluative skepticism compared to other views. As I will show later on in this thesis, non-realist views have a much easier time explaining the striking correlation between our evolutionarily influenced beliefs and the evaluative truth. Realism, because it justifies our evaluative beliefs through mind-independent evaluative truths, has a much more difficult time explaining that correlation. Unless the realist can explain that correlation, she must commit to evaluative skepticism. So, one very good reason to avoid committing to realism is the consequence of having to commit to evaluative skepticism. This reason, however, might not be enough for truly committed realists. They might believe that the virtues of realism far outweigh the negative consequences it might commit us to. I want to argue, however, that evaluative skepticism is especially bad for the realist because it

compromises the very virtues that make realism attractive. One of the most attractive aspects of realism is its ability to ensure that moral truths have a grip on us. Realism provides universal normativity. I will explain universal normativity in more detail later in this section. For now, accept this quick overview of the concept and note how evaluative skepticism destroys the ability to provide universal normativity. The fact that murder is objectively wrong independent of any personal preferences gives a very good reason not to murder. Such a reason applies to everyone because the objective fact that it's wrong to murder is true for everyone. So, the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths ensures that moral truths are binding in a robust way – they have a guaranteed force on everyone. This is universal normativity. A commitment to evaluative skepticism compromises this aspect of realism. Evaluative skepticism means all our evaluative beliefs are unjustified, and thus, unknowable. This means that we cannot hold justified evaluative beliefs. If we cannot hold true, justified evaluative beliefs, we seem to not have access to the mind-independent evaluative truth. The mind-independent evaluative truth might exist but we cannot *know* the mind-independent evaluative truth. We cannot hold beliefs about the mind-independent evaluative truth. If we cannot hold beliefs about the mind-independent evaluative truth, then that truth has no way to grip us. To make this thought clearer, consider the following example. In order for the mind-independent evaluative truth that murder is wrong to grip me, i.e. to give me a reason not to murder, I would have to be able to hold that belief. Otherwise, how could I know murder is wrong? If I cannot know murder is wrong, how can the fact that murder is wrong give me reason not to murder? I must know the mind-independent evaluative truth that murder is wrong in order for that truth to give me reasons. Evaluative skepticism makes it so I cannot know murder is wrong. In this way, evaluative skepticism destroys realism's ability to provide universal normativity. Evaluative skepticism also defeats realism's ability to vindicate

moral intuitions. We might have the intuition that it is a property of the world that murder is wrong and we might want realism to prove that that intuition is true – that there’s a mind-independent evaluative fact that says murder is wrong. The problem is, however, that even if there is a mind-independent evaluative truth that murder is wrong, we can never know that truth. If we can never know that truth, then we cannot be sure such a truth exists. If such a truth does not exist, then our intuitions regarding that truth are not vindicated by that truth. For example, I might have the intuition that it is a property of the world that giving to charity is good. It might actually be a mind-independent evaluative truth that giving to charity is good. I cannot, however, know the mind-independent evaluative truth that giving to charity is good. My intuition is never proven to be correct. So, under evaluative skepticism, realism cannot vindicate our intuitions that there are properties of right and wrong about the world because we can never know about those properties. Thus, Enoch’s all-things-considered argument attempts to protect the realist from the consequence of the DD by showing that those consequences are not so bad, but it ignores the reality that evaluative skepticism defeats the realist position. One cannot call a position-defeating objection “not so bad.” The result of a position-defeating objection should just be a loss of “plausibility points”. Rather, if an argument defeats one’s view, one should give up that view. So, since the DD defeats the realist’s view, she should give up realism.

Thus, all-things-considered arguments should not be used due to the need to provide a huge explanatory burden, the inability to arbitrate which phenomena it is more important for a view to capture, and their use in maintaining views that should be given up in the face of view-defeating objections.

I now want to take a moment to distinguish between the phenomena a view *must* capture and the phenomena that makes a view more attractive, but aren’t necessary. A major goal of this

thesis is to evaluate whether metaethical views can respond to the challenges for metaethical views exposed by evolutionary debunking arguments and whether they provide certain desiderata we would like a metaethical view to have. Consider again the example between buyers choosing different houses. For a house in Vermont to be at all adequate, it *must* have heating. For metaethical views to be at all adequate, they too *must* meet certain criteria. Buyers would prefer their house to have a large backyard or plenty of sunlight. Each of these isn't necessary for houses in general, but they make an individual house more attractive. Likewise, for metaethical views, there are certain desiderata we would prefer a view to capture that make the view more attractive.

The Darwinian Dilemma brings to light certain criteria that should be considered when evaluating how metaethical views respond to evolutionary debunking arguments. The Darwinian Dilemma operates on the thesis that evolution has influenced our evaluative beliefs. This is the causal premise of the DD. Metaethical views cannot deny this premise without sufficient scientific evidence to show it is false. So, a metaethical view should account for the existence of evolutionary influence on our beliefs of the DD in their views unless they can prove the causal premise is false. The second thing a view should do is explain how it is possible that our evaluative beliefs are justified. In other words, a metaethical view must avoid evaluative skepticism. A metaethical view that wishes to avoid evaluative skepticism must account for the fact that evolutionary influences have had a major impact on the content of our evaluative beliefs. If a view does not account for the existence of evolutionary influence but still attempts to assert realism, it has no way to account for the improbability that our moral beliefs are true despite being influenced by evolution. The result is evaluative beliefs that could only be true due to a massive stroke of luck, and are thus unjustified. This leads to evaluative skepticism. Some

views, like error theory, don't care about avoiding evaluative skepticism. For the purpose of this thesis, I am working under the assumption that we want to avoid evaluative skepticism. As I argued previously, accepting evaluative skepticism would be radically revisionary for the way we operate on a day to day basis, and that gives us reason to avoid evaluative skepticism.

Realists might accept the causal premise of the DD but reject the epistemic premise through the tracking account to avoid evaluative skepticism. Realists used the tracking account to show that evolution was an on-track process and that because of that, our evaluative beliefs are justified.

The tracking account failed however, and thus, those realists still face evaluative skepticism. Any other metaethical view must be able to explain how our evaluative beliefs are justified. If they can't, they face the consequence of unjustified beliefs, and thus the consequence of evaluative skepticism.

I've shown how the Darwinian Dilemma targets realism and I've explained the issues realism faces as a result of the Darwinian Dilemma. One might wonder at this point whether realism can possibly respond to the DD and if it can, whether it is worth saving. I take up the question of whether the realist can respond to the DD in the next section. Before moving on, however, I want to call attention to what realism does well that antirealist metaethical views struggle with. That realism can easily achieve something that antirealist views cannot gives reason to care about whether the realist can respond to the challenge of the DD.

It might seem at this point that anti-realist views, because they can respond to the DD, are obviously and undeniably preferable to realism. But realism has an important advantage that anti-realist views do not. Realism gives evaluative beliefs a way to recommend, guide, or oblige everyone universally, and to the same degree, and regardless of their preferences. Most metaethical views can provide *some* sort of normativity by capitalizing on personal evaluative

stances. If I have the personal evaluative stance that helping others is good, then it's clear that I have reason to help the biker who has been hit by I car on the street. My evaluative stance or belief that helping others is good is what obliges me to help the biker. Realism, however, can provide a special kind of universal normativity that other views struggle to vindicate. Realism has the tools to provide normativity for someone like Caligula.<sup>3</sup> Caligula is a perfectly rational agent who has a strong desire to torture others. The desire to hurt others gives Caligula reason to torture others. This reason is not trumped by the consequences of his torturing others. Caligula would be unmoved if we explained to him the legal repercussions if he were to be caught torturing others or if we explained to him any other negative consequence that comes from torturing others. Now, we might want the normativity of our reasons to be such that we can convince Caligula not to torture others. We might ask Caligula to think of the pain that others are feeling, to consider our disgust at his torturing of others, and so on. If Caligula truly has a strong desire to torture others that overrides all his other desires and consideration, however, it seems we have nothing to say to him. The ability to provide a reason that would appeal to Caligula regardless of his personal preferences is the sort of normativity that non-realist views struggle with. Those views do not provide the tools for moral reasons to weigh in any way on someone like Caligula. Realism, on the other hand, seems to have access to those tools. If Caligula has access to the evaluative truth that torturing others is wrong, then he has strong reason not to torture others. It does not matter what Caligula personally feels about torturing others because the truth that torturing others is wrong is completely independent of his personal evaluative stance. So, realism can provide us with a special sort of universal normativity that other views struggle with. The desire for a view to provide this sort of normativity gives good reason to hope realism can answer the DD.

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<sup>3</sup> The example of Caligula is from Gibbard 1993.

I want to note here a distinction between universal and categorical moral norms. Universal moral norms apply to everyone. Categorical moral norms apply in so far as people are subject to them regardless of any feature(s) of their psychology. So, universal normativity simply establishes that moral norms apply to everyone. Categorical normativity establishes that they apply to everyone but can also show that they ignore the idiosyncrasies one might have, for example, one having a psychology such that they have no reason not to torture. Some would prefer that our moral norms be categorical. Categorical normativity might be better than universal normativity, but it is difficult enough to provide universal normativity already. In this paper, I am not going to worry about categorical normativity. It will be enough to show that everyone, even people like Caligula, are subject to moral norms. Also, it's not clear that there would be any difference for our evaluative practice if we could establish categorical normativity over universal normativity.

I argued earlier that not having to commit to evaluative skepticism was necessary for a view. One might argue that the same should apply to normative skepticism. I disagree with that assessment. We would prefer to have something to say to the ideally coherent Caligula that would show him he's wrong, but it doesn't discredit anti-realism if we don't. It might simply be the case that we can't tell Caligula he's wrong. Realism, in contrast, claims that there exists a mind-independent evaluative truth, and then commits itself to a massive fluke to explain that truth. An essential part of realism should be a reasonable explanation of how we have access to the evaluative truth. Anti-realism doesn't face this sort of problem. It merely fails to provide something we want to be true of the world – that we have something to say to someone like Caligula. In this way, evaluative skepticism is more like a lack of a backyard than a lack of a heating.

## 2. Section 2: Evaluating Realist Responses

So far I've explained the DD, explained the problem it poses for realism, and shown how an anti-realist view might fare better in response to the DD. I explained earlier that responding to the Darwinian Dilemma is a criterion of adequacy for realists, meaning that they *must* respond to the DD or else forgo their view. I examined one of the ways realists have tried to neutralize the DD, i.e. by claiming it's not so bad. I now want to consider some of the other ways realists have responded to the Darwinian Dilemma. I have not considered *all* the ways of responding to the Darwinian Dilemma, but rather, I've focused on some of the strongest and most relevant responses. Examining these responses will allow me to determine whether there's any possibility of responding to the Darwinian Dilemma for realists.

In this section, I will evaluate prominent responses to the Darwinian Dilemma from realists. There have been a variety of realist responses to the DD and I will not cover all of them in this paper. Rather, I have identified two major strands of response in the literature that seem to be particularly powerful arguments against the DD. These strands of response are related as they both take up the first option of the dilemma, meaning that they both attempt to deny the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process. I call them Take 1 and Take 2 because I see them as two attempts to resist the DD in the same way. Take 1 is the first of such attempts. Take 2 is the second, improved, and more promising attempt. Take 1 attempts to explain the connection between evolutionary influences and the mind-independent evaluative truth by showing that there is *some* sort of connection between the evolutionary phenomena and goodness or badness. Thus, Take 1 takes up and aims to defend the first option by establishing *some* way by which evolution tracks the evaluative truth. Take 2 arguments use concepts such as "pain" or "morality" and their associated conceptual truths. The first version of Take 2 uses

concepts to explain a connection between evolutionary influences and the evaluative truth. The second version of Take 2 uses concepts to refute one of the premises of the DD. In doing so, it defeats the DD's ability to show that evolution is an off-track process. So, Take 2, like Take 1, takes up and aims to defend the first option of the dilemma. Rather than simply claim that there is *some* connection between evolutionary phenomena and the evaluative truth, Take 2 aims to explain and back up that sort of connection with conceptual truths. I will characterize Take 1 and Take 2, explain why they fail as strategies to avoid the Darwinian Dilemma, and come up with lessons for future views that want to avoid the failures of Take 1 and Take 2.

Before I discuss Take 1 and Take 2, I want to note that there are major similarities between them. Some of the arguments presented under one of the Takes can be recast as the type of argument championed by the other Take. For this reason, the objections I will deploy against Take 1 and Take 2 have a similar flavor. I will flag these similarities as I go. In what follows, I will formulate arguments that could be formulated under either Take, under the Take that provides the strongest version of the argument.

### 2.1 *Take 1*

Take 1 attempts to prove that evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth by showing that evolution tracks *some* evaluative truth and from there establishing that evolution tracks the rest of the evaluative truth. In doing so, it denies the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is off-track. If evolution does track the truth, then our evaluative beliefs align with the mind-independent evaluative truth, and we avoid the conclusion that our evaluative beliefs are unjustified.

Take 1 capitalizes on the following claim: Our evaluative beliefs, despite their being influenced by evolutionary influences, are close enough to the evaluative truth so that through

reasoning mechanisms and rational reflection, we can align our beliefs with the evaluative truth.

This claim states that if there is *any sort* of connection between evolution and the evaluative truth, reasoning mechanisms can guide our evaluative beliefs towards the evaluative truth.

Enoch says,

“given a starting point of normative beliefs that are not too far-off, presumably some reasoning mechanisms (and perhaps some other mechanisms as well) can get us increasingly closer to the truth by eliminating inconsistencies, increasing overall coherence, eliminating arbitrary distinctions, drawing analogies, ruling out initially justified beliefs whose justificatory status has been defeated later on, etc.” (Enoch 26).

Imagine an early human tribe that has a slew of evaluative attitudes that have been influenced by evolutionary processes. These humans have the following beliefs:

1. It is wrong to kill any member of the tribe
2. It's okay to kill strangers outside the tribe

It's clear how each of these beliefs is valuable from an evolutionary perspective. It's not clear, however, how they have any connection to the mind-independent evaluative truth. Imagine, then, that this tribe has some access to the moral truths about fairness, perhaps just that fairness is good. As time goes on, the tribe members reflect on their beliefs and use reasoning mechanisms to refine their beliefs. These mechanisms might bring them to the conclusion that humans outside their tribe aren't so different from humans inside their tribe. They then apply their notion of fairness to revise belief 2. *It's okay to kill strangers outside the tribe* to belief 2a. *It's wrong to kill any human*. The first belief was merely a result of evolutionary forces, but the second aligns with evaluative truths regarding fairness. The small correlation between evolution and evaluative truths about fairness allows humans to revise certain beliefs to align with the evaluative truth.

The process could continue so that the tribe develops beliefs that align with the whole evaluative truth. The tribe will eventually reach beliefs that align with the most fundamental moral truths. They might start to believe that everyone should be treated equally, that you should treat everyone how you would want yourself to be treated, and so on. The tribe will have beliefs that align with specific evaluative truths as well. For example, their notions of fairness will make them realize that people of different races should have the same rights under the law and should be treated equally by society. Thus, having access to a specific foundational moral truth, such as the truth that fairness is good, can conceivably allow a group of people to reach beliefs that mostly align with the evaluative truth. Having access to a single foundational moral truth seems to provide a reliable way to access the whole set of evaluative truths. If humans have a reliable way to access the evaluative truth and align their beliefs with the evaluative truth, then we no longer need to worry that all of our beliefs regarding the evaluative truth are unjustified because they're not – they were reached by a reliable process, i.e., one that tracks the truth.

So, it seems that realists who can prove that evolution leads us to have at least one true belief about fundamental mind-independent evaluative facts have a means to justify all of our evaluative beliefs and thus avoid the consequence of evaluative skepticism. I will now consider two specific versions of Take 1. First is developed by David Enoch. Enoch asks us to

“assume that survival or reproductive success (or whatever else evolution “aims” at) is at least somewhat good. Not, of course, that it is always good, or that its positive value is never outweighed by other considerations, or even that it is of ultimate or of intrinsic value, or anything of the sort. Furthermore, I am not asking you to assume that the evolutionary “aim” is of value because it is the

evolutionary aim. All I will be relying on is the assumption that survival (or whatever) is actually by-and-large better than the alternative” (Enoch 431).

So, Enoch claims that “survival is good.” The aim of evolution is survival. So, if evolution shapes our beliefs to promote survival, and survival is good, then evolution shapes our beliefs to promote goodness. Thus, there is a connection between the mind-independent evaluative truth survival is good and evolution. Enoch further suggests that our evaluative beliefs are built on the truth “survival is good”, in the same way the tribe built on “fairness is good” in the previous example. Evolution shapes our beliefs to instill beliefs that promote survival, such as the belief that one should take care of one’s children. We have the belief that taking care of our children is good, and we can be sure this belief is true because we know that it promotes survival, and survival is good. And if survival is good, then the things that promote survival are also good, so taking care of our children is good. Similarly, evolution causes us to reach a variety of other beliefs that promote survival, such as the beliefs that we shouldn’t harm others for no good reason, that we should help the people around us, that we should treat everyone fairly, and so on. Those beliefs align with the evaluative truth because they are built on the belief that survival is good which, itself, is aligned with the evaluative truth. So, because evolution promotes survival and survival is good, there is at least one connection between evolution and the mind-independent truth. From the belief “survival is good,” we can reach the rest of the evaluative truth.

One may be doubtful that attributing goodness to survival could provide a strong enough connection between evolution and our evaluative beliefs to ensure our evaluative beliefs completely align with the evaluative truth. Enoch has a response to this doubt. Even if our evaluative beliefs do not exactly align with the evaluative truth, we can presumably use

reasoning mechanisms to refine our beliefs from a loose alignment with the evaluative truth to a very close alignment with the evaluative truth. For example, we might revise the belief we received from evolution that our own children are valuable to the closer-to-the evaluative-truth belief that *all* children are valuable. Thus, as a result of the truth that survival is good, we now have beliefs that align with the mind-independent evaluative truth. By building our evaluative beliefs off the single evaluative truth that survival is good, we have a reliable way to match the rest of our beliefs with the evaluative truth. This amounts to a denial of the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process. Evolution is not an off-track process because it promotes beliefs that aid in survival, and survival is good, so evolution promotes beliefs that align with goodness and thus align with the evaluative truth.

We might wonder whether Enoch can really base his explanation on the assumption “survival is good,” a claim he leaves largely unjustified. His one effort to justify the assumption is that accepting the assumption is better than accepting the alternative of the assumption (that survival is *not* good). Enoch does admit that the claim is unjustified, as he calls the fact that “survival is good” happens to be true a “small miracle.” This doesn’t justify the claim, but he seems to feel that the claim’s unjustified status is unproblematic. Enoch writes that the miracle is “small” because if [“survival is good”] were not true then “the evolutionary ‘aim’ would not have been of any value. And how could that be?” (Enoch 433).<sup>4</sup> That survival is good explains at least one connection between evolutionary influences and the mind-independent evaluative truth. From this single connection humans can use reasoning mechanism to reach the entire mind-independent evaluative truth. Thus, our evaluative beliefs are justified, and we don’t have to

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<sup>4</sup> Enoch also appeals to the all-things-considered-better argument to justify the claim “survival is good”. He argues that realism overall does a better job at explaining than the alternative (anti-realism), so it’s okay that in this one case, realism has a difficult time explaining. So, we should accept the claim “survival is good” because it’s better than the alternative and we don’t want to give up the explanatory power of realism. As I argued earlier, we should not accept all-things-considered-better arguments.

accept evaluative skepticism. So, Enoch's version of Take 1 rejects the epistemic premise of the DD and resists the dilemma's conclusion of evaluative skepticism.

My primary objection to Enoch's account is that it doesn't adequately explain what it needs to explain. The charge of the DD is to *explain* how the process of evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth and then gives rise to evaluative beliefs that align with that truth. Enoch has not provided an adequate explanation. All Enoch has done is claim that evolutionary influences track one mind-independent evaluative truth (survival is good), but he doesn't offer an explanation for why it's true that survival is good. He expects us to accept that survival is good is true as a "small miracle," or, in other words, on faith. The acceptance of a small miracle does not provide an explanation for *how* evolution tracks the truth that survival is good. "Survival is good" is an unacceptable unexplained explainer for this reason. It's something that on the surface seems to explain what needs explaining. If we were to accept this small miracle, then "survival is good" would *seem* to establish an explanation of how our evolutionarily influenced beliefs track the truth. The problem, however, is that we need an explanation for why we're supposed to accept that the claim "survival is good" is true. We shouldn't accept this "small miracle" because it doesn't do the explaining the realist needs to do. Further, we cannot accept the small miracle "survival is good" because we've been influenced to believe that survival is good by evolutionary forces. Evolution influences us to think that survival and whatever promotes survival is good. Thinking survival is good causes us to seek out whatever promotes survival and thus increases our chances to survive. Since we've been influenced to believe "survival is good" by evolutionary processes, and evolution is an off-track process, we can conclude that our belief that "survival is good" is off-track. We can deploy the DD all over again on the belief that "survival is good." Doing so proves that we cannot simply

assume that survival is good to respond to the DD because we are evolutionarily influenced to assume survival is good and the DD shows that evolutionarily influenced evaluative beliefs are unjustified. If we had an explanation for why the claim “survival is good” is true, independent of our propensity to assume it, then we could establish a connection between evolutionary influences and the mind-independent evaluative truth. We need an explanation that explains how survival is good is true. This explanation is not provided by Enoch and we cannot accept his argument without it. Our reason for accepting evolution is an on-track process cannot rest on an unjustified claim we are supposed to accept as a small miracle. It also cannot be accepted because we are evolutionarily influenced to believe survival is good, and evolution is an off-track process. The realist needs to provide good explanation for why we should reject the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process. Enoch’s small miracle does not provide that explanation. Thus, Enoch’s version of Take 1 fails.

Some might agree with Enoch that in some cases, we can accept unjustified claims, such as “survival is good.” I’ve already attempted to show that “small miracles” should not be accepted because they don’t do the explaining needed to respond to the DD. One might argue that we can accept certain unjustified claims such as “survival is good” because those claims are explanatorily basic. There are certain fundamental truths about mathematics, for example, that we accept without justification. One might argue that the claim “survival is good” is similarly an explanatorily basic truth that needs no justification and that its explanatorily basic status grounds the explanation needed for why evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. That “survival is good” is true might be a small miracle, but it’s one of many small miracles we accept because of their explanatory basicness. In the same way we require no explanation for the claim *if A=B, then B=A*, we also do not require more explanation for the claim survival is good. I

argued earlier that we need an explanation that grounds the truth “survival is good” independently of the fact that evolution has influenced us to believe survival is good. Explanatory basicness can provide this explanation. It’s true that evolution influences us to believe “survival is good,” one might say, but we can show that the claim is true independent of evolutionary influences by appealing to its explanatorily basic nature. So, Enoch could use the explanatorily basicness of “survival is good” to explain how it’s true that survival is good. He can then claim that evolution tracks the truth “survival is good” because evolution promotes survival. He thus has the means to deny the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process. He can prove that our evaluative beliefs are justified and avoid evaluative skepticism.

In order to see whether one can make the above argument, we must consider when it is acceptable for explanations to bottom out. Every argument has explanatorily basic propositions on which other claims rest. Consider the use of the proposition “triangles have three sides” in a geometry proof. This sort of claim would be readily accepted as a premise with no further explanation. Offering an explanation for this proposition seems superfluous. A host of claims (e.g. “that squares have four sides,” “that bachelors are unmarried men,” that “2 is less than 20,” “that water is H<sub>2</sub>O”, and so on) similarly seem to be an acceptable place for explanations to bottom out. If we compare these explanatorily basic propositions to the claim “survival is good,” we see that “survival is good” should not be considered explanatorily basic. In the context of a geometry proof, we can accept “triangles have three sides” with no further explanation. In the context of a metaethical argument, however, we cannot accept claims like “survival is good” without further explanation because the epistemic status of claims like “survival is good” is what we’re debating. You cannot assume the conclusion you’re trying to prove in a debate. Doing so

is like accepting the claim “chocolate is the best flavor of ice cream” as explanatorily basic in a debate about which ice cream flavors are better. So, one reason why we should not accept “survival is good” as explanatorily basic is because doing so would assume the conclusion the realist is trying to prove. This would amount to question-begging. Additionally, accepting “survival is good” as explanatorily basic would make it seem that which claims we accept as explanatorily basic is entirely arbitrary. If “survival is good” is explanatorily basic, then a host of other claims we might not want to accept without further justification should also be considered explanatorily basic. If a certain claim doesn’t require justification, then similar claims should not require justification. For example, if “2 is less than 20” doesn’t require justification, then “1057 is less than 2600” also should not require explanation. Strange claims like “the color green is bad” or “it’s good to pet dogs on Tuesdays” are unjustified claims similar to “survival is good.” These claims should be accepted as explanatorily basic if “survival is good” is accepted as explanatorily basic. We do not want to accept these claims as explanatorily basic, so we should not accept claims like “survival is good” as explanatorily basic.

Enoch’s argument from the thesis that “survival is good” is true to the conclusion that evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth is not the only way of pursuing Take 1 on offer. David Copp develops an alternative argument that also makes use of Take 1. Copp argues that moral facts are determined by the moral codes that would best advance the needs of a particular society. Whatever advances the needs of a society is given positive enforcement through the moral code and is morally correct, and whatever detracts the needs of a society is discouraged through the code and is morally incorrect.

“The theory says that a basic moral proposition, such as the proposition that torture is wrong, would be true only if the moral code that would best serve the function of

enabling society to meet its needs included or entailed a relevantly corresponding norm, such as a prohibition on torture” (Copp 199).

The claim “torture is wrong” is true because a society can better meet its needs when it puts a prohibition on torture. Copp then argues that

“That is, beliefs that correspond to the social moral code that emerged in this way from a process of cultural evolution would increasingly tend to approximate to the truth. For the theory implies that moral beliefs that correspond to a moral code, the currency of which in a society would tend to promote the society’s ability to meet its needs, are by and large approximately true” (Copp 202).

According to the society-centered account of morality, there is a connection between the codes that help a society best meet its needs (and be evolutionarily successful) and the mind-independent evaluative truth. This connection between evolution and the mind-independent evaluative truth allows Copp to show that evolution is on-track and thus deny the epistemic premise of the DD. The codes that help a society best meet its needs cause the humans who live in that society to form beliefs that align with those codes. Consider again the example of a society that prohibits torture. Torture causes discontent, doesn’t lead to accurate information, and creates enemies for the society that uses it. A prohibition on torture helps avoid these negative consequences. By avoiding these consequences, a society can meet its needs of peace, justice, punishment, and accurate information. Thus, prohibiting torture helps a society meet its needs and be evolutionarily successful. A society that prohibits torture likely causes its citizens to believe that torturing is wrong. They see social and legal disapproval of torture and from there form the belief that torture is wrong. The most successful moral codes stand the test of time. A society that prohibits torture flourishes while other societies fail. Evolutionary forces weed out

societies whose moral codes don't prohibit torture and maintain societies whose moral codes do prohibit torture. There is a connection between the moral codes of a society and evolutionary success. There is thus a connection between the moral codes of a society and evolutionary influences. So, humans in the society that prohibits torture have the belief that torture is wrong, and this belief aligns with the mind-independent evaluative truth because it's part of the moral code that helps a society best meet its needs. That moral code is shaped by evolutionary influences. There is thus a reliable, evolutionarily influenced process from which humans in societies establish beliefs that align with the evaluative truth. The society-centered account denies the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is off-track. Evolution shapes the moral codes that our societies have to at least approximate those moral codes that would best benefit a society and those codes are connected to the evaluative truth, so evolution is connected to the evaluative truth. If Copp's argument is successful, then the epistemic premise of the DD is false, and so the realist can avoid the conclusion of evaluative skepticism.

I will now respond to Copp's version of Take 1. Copp, through his society-centered account, has given an interesting account of morality, but he hasn't actually explained what he needs to explain, i.e. the connection between what is best for our societies and the mind-independent evaluative truth that goodness equals what is best for a society. Street, in her paper "Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About," responds to Copp's account nicely when she says,

"It is no answer to this challenge simply to assume a large swath of substantive views on how we have reason to live, as the society-centered theory does, and then note that these are the very views evolutionary forces pushed us toward. Such an account merely trivially reasserts the coincidence between the mind-independent normative truth and

what the evolutionary causes pushed us to think; it does nothing to explain that coincidence” (Street 214).

How come it happens to be that the very law codes we expect successful societies to create due to Darwinian and cultural evolution are the same ones identified as the evaluative facts? In other words, why is it the case that the codes that help society to advance also happen to be true? This is what Copp fails to explain.

Copp might argue that the claim “moral facts correspond to the codes that best advance the needs of the society” is explanatorily basic, and that its basic nature provides the explanation for the correlation between evolutionarily influenced beliefs and the mind-independent evaluative truth. I’ve already shown why claims like Enoch’s claim “survival is good” should not be considered to be explanatorily basic. The same goes, I think, for Copp’s claim.

I’ll now provide a more general objection to all versions of Take 1 and formulate a general rule for accounts that want to avoid the pitfalls that Take 1 accounts fall into. Both Enoch and Copp’s accounts are best understood as versions of Take 1 because they both attempt to explain how it is that our evolutionarily influenced evaluative beliefs manage to track the evaluative truth. However, both ultimately fail to do so. They each tell a story that appears to explain the how our evolutionarily influenced beliefs track the truth, but, upon closer inspection, merely reassert that the relevant truth-tracking holds as a matter of coincidence. We are asked to accept unjustified claims that certainly would explain how our evolutionarily influenced beliefs track the mind-independent evaluative truth, if only they, themselves, were explained. But the explanation that these claims purport to ground would be adequate only if these claims were justified. For example, if Enoch could justify why we should accept “survival is good,” and thus

that our belief that survival is good tracks the truth, then he would have explained why it is true that an evolutionary phenomena is identical to mind-independent evaluative fact.

To make the objection against Take 1 clearer, consider the following example: Imagine you have certain facts about the life of your philosophy professor, Professor Nolfi, including that she enjoys horseback riding, that she just moved into a new house, and so on. You find out that you've received these views from a hypnotist who has randomly selected Professor Nolfi-related facts out of a hat. Take 1 then ask us to accept one of these facts as true and from there revise the rest of our beliefs to align with truths about Professor Nolfi. We're asked to accept the true claim that "Professor Nolfi enjoys horseback riding" and from that align our other beliefs about Professor Nolfi with the truth. From the belief "Professor Nolfi enjoys horseback riding" we might form the related belief "Professor Nolfi would like it if she were given a saddle as a birthday present." We assume this belief is aligned with the truth because we were told that the belief from which it was built, "Professor Nolfi enjoys horseback riding," is aligned with truths about Professor Nolfi. What we needed to do, however, was explain how one can reach *any* justifiably true facts about Professor Nolfi. Simply asking us to accept that one of our beliefs about Professor Nolfi is true should not satisfy us when we've been shown that the process that begot this belief was unreliable (it came randomly from a hypnotist). The justification of the assumptions provided by Copp and Enoch (that survival is good or that the codes that advance a society are good) would provide the necessary explanation for realists to avoid the consequences of the Darwinian Dilemma. They fail, however, to provide those justifications.

There is a lesson to be learned from the failure of Take 1. If a view wishes to discharge a certain explanatory burden it must tell a story that answers the burden. The pieces of that story must themselves be justified OR must be shown to be explanatorily basic. So, it is not

satisfactory to answer an explanatory burden with unjustified claims. It is also not satisfactory to justify claims with explanatorily basicness unless we're given an independent reason for how a claim is explanatorily basic.

## *2.2 Take 2*

Arguments that fall under Take 2 use concepts and conceptual truths to attempt to undermine the DD. I will consider two versions of Take 2, one by Skarsaune, and another by Cuneo & Shafer-Landau. I will summarize each version of Take 2, respond to each individually, explain the problem with Take 2 as a whole, and come up with lessons for views to follow if they want to avoid the failures of Take 2. I will start with Skarsaune's version of Take 2.

Skarsaune makes use of the concepts of pain and pleasure to avoid the DD. Skarsaune's account rests on the following claim: P: Pleasure is usually good and pain is usually bad.

Skarsaune argues that

“if pleasure is usually good (for the subject), then to the extent that evolution has influenced our evaluative beliefs through the mechanism just described, that influence has been truth-conducive. For if pleasure is usually good, then the activities and states of affairs evolution has caused us to value through this mechanism tend to be good—because they are pleasurable. Hence, if P is true, there is a relation between reproductive enhancement and goodness after all” (Skarsaune 234).

So, Skarsaune argues that if pleasure is usually good, and evolution causes us to believe things that are pleasurable are good, then there is a connection between the goodness of pleasure and our evolutionarily influenced beliefs. Skarsaune has thus provided the connection between mind-independent evaluative truths and our evaluative beliefs.

On the face of it, Skarsaune's argument doesn't seem to appeal to conceptual truths. In fact, we can easily recast Skarsaune's argument in the form of Take 1. P seems very similar to Enoch's claim that "survival is good," and can be defeated in the same way. We can simply deploy the Darwinian Dilemma again. Evolution has influenced our evaluative beliefs such that we believe pain is bad and we believe pleasure is good. Skarsaune needs to explain the striking correlation between the evolutionarily influenced belief that pain is bad and the mind-independent evaluative truth that pain is bad, and he hasn't.

There is, however, another way of reconstructing Skarsaune's argument that merits attention. In particular, Skarsaune's argument can be reconstructed to appeal to conceptual truths. When describing pain-related realist responses to the Darwinian Dilemma, Street writes "evolutionary pressures led us to feel pain under such-and-such kinds of circumstances, and that experience is, of its very nature, bad independently of all our evaluative attitudes, its badness therefore demanding a realist construal" (Street 145). The crucial idea here is that an experience of pain *of its very nature* calls for believing it is bad independent of all our evaluative attitudes. This comes with the following conceptual truth: in order for X to count as pain, X must be bad (independently of our evaluative attitudes). Thus, it is a conceptual truth that ( $P_a$ ): pain is bad. Similarly, it is a conceptual truth that ( $P_e$ ): pleasure is good (i.e. in order for Y to count as pleasure, Y must be good). That pain is bad and pleasure is good provides the means to deny the epistemic premise of the DD that our evaluative beliefs are off-track. There is a relationship between evolution and the mind-independent evaluative truths that pain is bad and pleasure is good. Evolution causes us to seek out pleasurable experiences and avoid painful experiences. Seeking out pleasurable experiences, like sex, is evolutionarily adaptive. It increases one's chances at reproducing. Avoiding painful experiences, like touching sharp objects, is also

evolutionarily adaptive. It causes one to avoid harm that would decrease the chance of survival and reproduction. One way evolution causes us to seek out pleasurable experiences and avoid painful experiences is by promoting the attitude that pleasurable experiences are good and painful experiences are bad. If we believe pleasure is good, we are more likely to seek out pleasurable experiences like sex. Likewise, if we believe pain is bad, we are less likely to seek out painful experiences such as touching sharp objects. Evolution thus tracks the mind-independent evaluative truths that pain is bad and pleasure is good by promoting the belief that pain is bad and that pleasure is good. Furthermore, the single true belief that pain is bad or that pleasure is good allows us to align the rest of our beliefs with the evaluative truth through reasoning processes. If we believe that the experience of pain is bad, then we also believe that whatever caused that experience is bad. For example, we feel psychological pain when someone steals our food. From the belief that the psychological pain is bad, we can form that believe that what caused that pain is bad, i.e. someone stealing from us is bad. We can then use reasoning mechanisms to revise the belief “someone stealing from me is bad” to the belief “stealing in general is bad.” Thus, we form the belief that stealing is bad and this belief is true because it aligns with the mind-independent evaluative truth that stealing is bad. In this way reasoning mechanisms allow us to use the true beliefs that pain is bad and pleasure is good to revise the rest of our beliefs to approximate the mind-independent evaluative truth.

This construal of Skarsaune’s argument provides a satisfying justification for the claim P. This isn’t a claim we accept as a “small miracle” nor is it a claim we arbitrarily call explanatorily basic. Rather, the claim “pain is bad” is a necessary truth built into the meanings of the relevant concepts. From believing that “pain is bad” and “pleasure is good,” we can use reasoning mechanisms to reach a host of other evaluative true beliefs. Skarsaune can appeal to conceptual

truths to show that evolutionarily influenced beliefs like “pain is bad” align with the mind-independent evaluative truth. He thus denies the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process and avoids the conclusion of evaluative skepticism. Skarsaune’s argument is less objectionable when it uses conceptual truths, and that is why I formulated it as a Take 2 argument.

I will now respond to Skarsaune’s version of Take 2. Skarsaune utilizes what seems to be a fairly obvious conceptual truth – that pain is bad – as one of the premises in his argument. I want to question whether we should accept this premise. In order to do so, I must determine under what conditions we are obliged to accept one analysis of a concept over a different analysis of the same concept. Note that there are two ways to frame this discussion. It can be framed as endorsing an analysis of a concept over another analysis of a concept or as endorsing one concept over another concept. The analyses of a concept refer to the different ways we could specify the conceptual truths of the same concept. For example, one analysis of the concept of sharks might contain the truth that sharks are dangerous. A different analysis of the concept of sharks might *not* contain that truth. In both cases, the concept being analyzed is the concept of sharks. The debate is over the conceptual truths that constitute that concept. Compare this to the endorsement of a concept over another concept. This involves the choice of an entire concept with its own set of conceptual truths over another entire concept with *its* own set of conceptual truth.. For example, we might endorse the use of the concept poltergeist, which has its own set of conceptual truths, over the concept ghost, which also has its own set of conceptual truths. There are two different concepts in question, not just different analyses of the same concept. In this discussion, I will frame my discussion in terms of the analysis of a concept. Later on in the thesis, I will more often talk about endorsing a concept over a different, but related concept. The

remarks I make about the analyses of concepts can also be applied to concepts themselves. In both cases, it's a matter of which conceptual truths we choose to use.

So, how should we determine which analysis of a concept we should use? We should accept the analysis of a concept only if adequately captures the essential aspects of the phenomena that concept refers to. It should appeal to our pre-theoretical commonsense grip of the phenomena. For example, our analysis of the concept of water should not include absolutely everything we know about water. It should not include the truth that water is a polar molecule, that I'm currently drinking water, that water won't put out a grease fire, and so on. Our analysis of the concept of water should, however capture the most basic and essential aspects of the phenomena. The analysis of the concept should be able to distinguish water from other phenomena, should give me the resources to point out a particular instance of water, and should not conflict with our ordinary usage of water in obvious and straightforward ways. My analysis of the concept of water, for example, should allow me to distinguish water from air, should allow me to identify the cup of stuff in front of me as water, and should not contain truths that clearly contradict with the concept of water like "water is dry." If an analysis of the concept of water does *not* do everything I set out above, then I should reject that analysis of the concept. I might determine that an analysis of a concept is inadequate is by seeing whether I can use an alternate concept that adequately captures the relevant phenomena but doesn't use the same conceptual truths. For example, I might formulate two different analyses of the concept of the game shuffleboard. Shuffleboard\* is the ordinary analysis of the concept of shuffleboard. It contains truths like "shuffleboard is a game", "shuffleboard is played with discs", "shuffleboard is played on a court", etc. Shuffleboard\*\* contains all the conceptual truths as shuffleboard\*, but also contains the conceptual truth that "shuffleboard is fun". If shuffleboard\* seems to adequately

capture the phenomena of shuffle board, then the additional conceptual truth of shuffleboard\*\* that “shuffle board is fun” is either false or superfluous to the concept of shuffleboard (and thus cannot be appealed to as a conceptual truth). Thus, if I can use shuffleboard\* adequately to refer to the phenomenon of shuffleboard, then there’s no reason to use shuffleboard\*\*.

I will use an alternative concept to show that the concept of pain need not contain the conceptual truth that pain is mind-independently bad. First, though, I want to note that there is some merit to thinking that the proposition “pain is (mind-independently) bad” is conceptually true. When we think about pain, we often think about it as a sensation that we dislike or one that hurts us or one that makes us want to get rid of that sensation. It seems to follow from considering pain in this way that there’s something independently bad about pain. Pain is just so obviously bad that it must be bad independently of what anyone thinks or believes about pain. It doesn’t seem, however, that the concept of pain *must* include or is partially constituted by the mind-independent evaluative truth that pain is bad. And the reason is that we can capture everything that caused us to want to call pain bad without positing a mind-independent evaluative truth. What we might say about pain is that we prefer not to have it, that it’s something that harms us, that we take it to be bad (note: taking it to be bad does not mean that it is mind-independently bad). And this suggests that we can provide an adequate account of the concept of pain without endorsing the thesis that the evaluative truth that pain is bad is built into this concept.

Here’s another way to put the point: If we accept that pain must conceptually imply that pain is bad, we can formulate a new concept, “shpain,” according to which something is shpain if we take it to be bad and it causes discomfort. We can use shpain for all the instances we might want to use “pain” and avoid positing the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths. Thus,

we can adequately come up with what's conceptually necessary to the concept of pain without posing the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths. We have no reason to use the concept of pain that includes the mind-independent evaluative truth that pain is bad. That pain is bad cannot be appealed to as a conceptual truth. If we can't say that pain's independent badness is conceptually true, then Skarsaune can't adequately justify  $P_a$  and  $P_e$ . He can assume  $P_a$  and  $P_e$ , but as I argued earlier, deploying the DD again will show that his argument is inadequate to defend a realist who claims  $P_a$  and  $P_e$  from committing to a massive fluke, the kind of fluke which undermines the epistemic status of our evaluative beliefs. One might use the unjustified claims  $P_a$  and  $P_e$  to explain how our evolutionarily influenced evaluative beliefs track the independent evaluative truth. This would make this response a version of Take 1 that can be defeated in the same way I defeated the other versions of Take 1. Skarsaune cannot appeal to the conceptual truths  $P_a$  and  $P_e$  to show that evolution is an on-track process and thus cannot deny the epistemic premise of the DD. He cannot avoid evaluative skepticism.

A second argument that makes use of conceptual truths in response to the DD is championed by Cuneo & Shafer-Landau. Cuneo & Shafer-Landau, unlike Skarsaune, don't use conceptual truths to directly assert a connection between mind-independent evaluative truths and evolutionary forces. Instead, they use conceptual truths to dismantle one of the major presuppositions in the DD, thus defeating the DD and protecting realism from the consequence of a massive fluke or evaluative skepticism. They do end up, however, arguing that evolution must track a system of evaluative beliefs that in turn tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. This amounts to arguing that evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. Thus, they do end up taking option one by refuting the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is off-track in the same way Skarsaune's version of Take 2 does.

The Darwinian Dilemma presupposes that there are multiple of systems of evaluative beliefs evolution could have influenced us to believe. Cuneo & Shafer-Landau refer to these systems of evaluative beliefs as “moral systems.” I will also refer to them as “moral systems” in the context of Cuneo & Shafer-Landau’s argument. Evolutionary influences have led to a moral system in which a person helping you is reason to help them in return, in which you have reason to take care of your children, in which you have reason not to torture for fun, etc. But evolution could have picked out a moral system in which a person helping you is reason to harm them in return, in which you have no reason to take care of your children, in which you have reason to wear purple on Tuesdays, and so on. Realists don’t explain why evolution picked out the moral system that tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. Realists are committed to a stroke of luck if they believe that evolution just happened to select the moral system that tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth from so many others. We have little reason to believe that evolutionary influences encourage a moral system that tracks that mind-independent evaluative truth. We thus have little reason to believe that our evolutionarily-influenced evaluative beliefs are justified.

Cuneo & Shafer-Landau in response use conceptual truths to dismantle this argument. They claim that to call a system a “moral” system is to be committed to certain conceptual truths. They say “something counts as a moral system only if it incorporates a sufficiently wide range of the moral fixed points” (Cuneo & Shafer-Landau 404). Thus, when one uses “moral system” in the claim that “evolution could have picked out a variety of moral systems,” one is committed to the claim that in order for something to be a moral system, it must incorporate moral fixed points. Evolution could only have picked out moral systems that incorporate these moral fixed points. The presupposition that there are a variety of moral systems evolution could have picked

out is false, and for this reason, the Darwinian Dilemma fails. Given that evolutionary pressures caused us to endorse a *moral system*, it's no surprise that our evaluative beliefs grasp, at least by-and-large, the moral truths. Moral systems by their very nature must contain moral truths. Street's claim that evolution could have picked out a moral system that doesn't include moral truths cannot possibly be true. If evolution picked out a *moral system*, then it must have picked out a system that contains moral truths. And if evolution picked out a system that contains moral truths, then it would have directed our beliefs towards those truths. Because evolution chose a moral system, we can be sure that our evaluative beliefs have been guided to the evaluative truth by evolution. Cuneo & Shafer-Landau have argued that evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. This amounts to denying the epistemic premise of the DD and thus avoiding evaluative skepticism.

I will note here that a line of reasoning in the ballpark of Cuneo & Shafer-Landau's argument can be developed in the style of Take 1. This style of argument is definitely not what Cuneo & Shafer-Landau have in mind – it's just a fairly plausible alternative way of developing their basic idea. We might think, as many do, that the moral fixed points Cuneo & Shafer-Landau appeal to should be assumed in the same way Enoch suggests “survival is good” is assumed. That is, it might be assumed that our evaluative beliefs that correspond to the moral fixed points are true, i.e. that our beliefs that correspond to moral fixed points accurately reflect the mind-independent reality. It seems intuitively obvious, for example, that killing babies for fun is wrong. If we assume these mind-independent evaluative truths, then it's obvious that morality must include these truths, and it appears that the DD is once again defeated because it cannot claim that evolution could have chosen among a variety of moral systems – it could only have chosen the moral system that contains moral fixed points. We could deploy the Darwinian

Dilemma the same way I deploy it against Take 1 arguments to defeat this alternative way of framing Cuneo & Shafer Landau's argument.

I will use a similar argument to the one deployed against Skarsaune to challenge the way Cuneo & Shafer-Landau use conceptual truths in their Take 2 argument. When Street used the term "moral systems" in the DD, I doubt she wanted to use a concept where certain moral truths were a necessary part of the concept "moral systems." We might come up for an alternative concept for Street to use, perhaps "shmoral systems." Shmoral systems include the sorts of propositions we might see in a moral system, but they don't have to incorporate moral fixed points. Each shmoral system might incorporate its own moral fixed points such as "it's wrong to wear purple on Tuesdays," "if someone helps you, you should kill their grandson," and so on. The DD argument can be run again, now. Instead of saying that evolution could have picked out any moral system, Street can say evolution could have picked out any of the various shmoral systems. The question is now why evolution chose the shmoral system that contains the moral fixed points—i.e. why evolutionary pressures caused us to adopt a system that constitutes a genuine *moral* system by virtue of including these fixed points--over all of the shmoral systems that contain different fixed points. If the realist cannot give an explanation for why the particular correct shmoral system was adopted, then she cannot show that evolution has tracked the evaluative truth. If this is the case, she cannot deny the epistemic premise of the DD that evolution is an off-track process, and she is committed to evaluative skepticism. Thus, an appeal to the concept of moral systems cannot be used to resist the DD unless the realist provides further argument. .

So, the first strategy of responding to Cuneo & Shafer-Landau's version of Take 2 is to argue that the DD can use the concept "shmoral systems" instead of the concept moral systems

and can thus avoid committing to the claim that evolution must have picked out the system of evaluative beliefs that track the truth. This is the same strategy used to respond to Skarsaune's use of the concept pain. There is a second strategy one might adopt in order to expose the shortcomings of appealing to conceptual truths to defend realism from the DD. That is to consider whether evolution has influenced how we arrive at certain concepts. This argument does not target the proposition "pain, by its very nature, is independently bad." Rather, it targets the process by which we get our concepts and argues that that process is prone to evolutionary influences.

The conceptual truth "pain is bad" seems to have evolutionary origins. It is beneficial for humans to see pain as something bad because they will then make efforts to avoid pain. Pain often acts as a motivator to keep humans from doing things that are detrimental to survival and reproduction. If humans have evolutionary attitudes that pain is bad, they will avoid those things that bring about pain, and they will thus avoid what is detrimental to survival and reproduction. We can conclude that the conceptual truth "pain is bad" has evolutionary origins that explain why we have formulated the concept to include the conceptual truth that pain is independently bad.

If this is the case, we can deploy a version of the Darwinian Dilemma all over again. In this case, it takes the following form:

*Causal Premise:* The evaluative content of S's concepts and accompanying conceptual truths is explained by evolution ("evaluative content" refers to the content of concepts that contains claims such as X is good, Y is bad, A is a reason to B, and so on).

*Epistemic Premise:* Evolution is an off-track process

Therefore, The evaluative content of S's concepts and accompanying conceptual truths is unjustified

The conclusion of this dilemma, i.e. that the evaluative content of our concepts and conceptual truths are unjustified, is a major problem for anyone who uses conceptual truths to respond to the DD. If the conceptual truth "pain is bad" is unjustified, then it cannot be used to justify the mind-independent evaluative truth that pain is bad. As I argued earlier concerning the claim "survival is good," in order for claims like "survival is good" or "pain is bad" to meet the explanatory burden required to explain how evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth, those claims must be justified themselves. The relevant evaluative content of concepts and conceptual truths themselves are not justified and thus cannot be used to show the evolution is truth-tracking. If evolution is not truth-tracking, then the epistemic dilemma of the DD cannot be denied, and the realist faces evaluative skepticism. One could assert that, despite evolutionary influence on our concept-choosing processes, the evaluative content of our concepts is true. There are many different conceptual truths evolutionary influences could have influenced us to pick out. It would be extremely lucky if evolution influenced us to choose the conceptual truth that happens to align with the mind-independent evaluative truth. If one accepts "pain is bad" as a conceptual truth, one is committing oneself to a stroke of luck that this conceptual truth happens to match the same belief that was favored by evolution. Thus, one's belief that "pain is bad" is a conceptual truth is unjustified and cannot be used as a claim to rescue realism from the DD.

The same kind of dilemma can be generated for the conceptual truth of moral fixed points. It seems fairly obvious that the content of moral fixed points is explained by evolutionary influences. Consider the moral fixed point offered by Cuneo & Shafer-Landau that "There is

some moral reason to offer aid to those in distress, if such aid is very easily given and comes at very little expense.” (Cuneo & Shafer-Landau 405). Believing that there is reason to offer aid to those in distress is evolutionarily adaptive. The rewards for offering such aid will increase one’s chances of survival and reproduction. It thus seems that we are evolutionarily influenced to endorse this moral fixed point, and the same goes for the other moral fixed points. Each moral fixed point is presented as a conceptual truth. If we are evolutionarily influenced to endorse moral fixed points as conceptual truths, then we can apply the DD to the conceptual truth of moral fixed points to create a new dilemma. It looks like this:

*Causal Premise:* The evaluative content of S’s conceptual of moral fixed points and their accompanying conceptual truths is explained by evolution (i.e., the moral fixed point with the content that “killing babies is wrong” is explained by evolution )

*Epistemic Premise:* Evolution is an off-track process

Therefore, the evaluative content of S’s concept of moral fixed points and the accompanying conceptual truths is unjustified

This conclusion, i.e. the conclusion that the evaluative content of moral fixed points is unjustified, poses a major problem for Cuneo & Shafer-Landau’s argument. They want to tell a story explaining why evolution must pick out a moral system that incorporates certain moral fixed points. The content of moral fixed points that track the mind-independent evaluative truth are conceptually truths. If evolution *must* pick out a moral system, then evolution tracks the content of moral fixed points, which align with the truth, and thus, evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. If, as I argue above, the evaluative content of the moral fixed points is unjustified, then moral fixed points do not track the mind-independent evaluative truth. The moral fixed point “killing babies is wrong” is unjustified. Any belief that corresponds to that

moral fixed point cannot be shown to be justified. Moral fixed points thus do not track the mind-independent evaluative truth. Thus, evolution might track moral fixed points, but the content of moral fixed points cannot be shown to track the truth (barring a massive stroke of luck). Thus, evolution does not track the mind-independent evaluative truth, and the realist faces evaluative skepticism.

Cuneo & Shafer-Landau respond by arguing that moral fixed points are not the result of evolutionary influence because the process of arriving at conceptual truths is far removed from evolution. In doing so they attempt to show that the process by which we've received our conceptual truths about moral fixed points is on-track. They contend that the process of choosing conceptual truths is influenced by evolution is like arguing the scientific process of nuclear physics is influenced by evolution. They each seem to be several steps removed from what evolution cares about influencing in humans. I agree that that the process of arriving at conceptual truths seems to be several steps removed from evolution. However, the actual *choice* of which sorts of truths we take to be "moral fixed points" seems highly susceptible to evolutionary influence. Why don't Cuneo & Shafer-Landau choose the normative truth "it is pro tanto right to kill someone because they ran into you on the street?" as an example of a moral fixed point? Cuneo & Shafer-Landau do not choose this normative force as an example of a moral fixed point because they've been evolutionarily influenced to choose certain truths as moral fixed points over other truths. Thus, the actual *process* of arriving at conceptual truths has little to do with which moral fixed points are chosen. We choose whichever moral fixed points best correspond to our evolutionarily influenced evaluative beliefs. Thus, the choice of certain moral fixed points over others seems to be the result of evolutionary influence. Cuneo & Shafer-

Landau need to explain why the beliefs they chose as moral-fixed points happen to be the same beliefs favored by evolution.

What exactly is wrong with using the conceptual truths in Take 2? I've explained how we might respond to these individual uses of conceptual truths, but I haven't yet said anything about using conceptual truths in general.

The problem with the use of conceptual truths in both versions of Account 2 is that they aren't necessary for capturing the phenomena their concepts are supposed to capture. We can certainly talk about the phenomena of pain without saying "pain is bad." It's also possible to talk about "moral systems" without saying that "moral systems incorporate certain moral fixed points such that torturing babies is wrong, etc."

I don't want to claim that one can *never* use conceptual truths in an argument. Rather, I simply want to argue that if a conceptual truth is necessary for the advancement of an argument, one must justify that conceptual truth. This justification should include why we should use *this* concept and its conceptual truth rather than another concept that seems to capture all the relevant phenomena but doesn't pose additional and unnecessary conceptual truths. If the additional truths are not essential to the concept, then why should we consider them conceptually true? The realist needs to show why Street must use "moral systems" rather than "shmoral systems." And she needs to show that the concept successfully latches onto the reality of what we're talking about. If the author of an argument cannot justify the conceptual truth of a proposition and cannot explain why we should a particular concept over others, then we are free to reject claims that the relevant propositions are necessary to the concepts in question and/or we are free to use alternative concepts.

One might be concerned that my arguments regarding concepts and conceptual truths are question-begging. It might seem that I haven't done any real work with my discussion on concepts. Realists and antirealists use different concepts because they believe there are different phenomena to capture. For example, just because one *can* use a concept of pain that does not posit the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths doesn't mean one *must*. It would be inconsistent of realists to use a concept of pain that did not contain the conceptual truth that pain is independently bad. The purpose of my argument, however, was *not* to argue that one *must* use the concept of pain over pain or that one must use moral systems over immoral systems. The point was to show that there is an alternative to the concepts offered by Skarsaune and Cuneo & Shafer-Landau. The success of Cuneo & Shafer-Landau's arguments rests on the case that we must use the concept of morality offered by them. If there's another option, anyone can use that option and avoid committing to moral fixed points. For Skarsaune, there's the option of choosing a concept of pain that does not pose the existence of mind-independent evaluative truths. Skarsaune's argument rests on the fact that we must use the one concept of pain that supposes mind-independent evaluative truth. If Skarsaune wants us to use his concept of pain, he must give an argument in defense of that concept. Skarsaune has not done this. Similarly, Cuneo & Shafer-Landau have not adequately defended the use of their concept of moral systems. Moreover, there's reason to think Cuneo & Shafer-Landau and Skarsaune won't be able to provide a satisfying argument for why we should choose their conceptual truths. It seems they would have to show that something is lacking in the alternative concepts I provided that necessitates the use of their concepts. They could perhaps give an independent reason for choosing their concepts, but if an alternative concept can do everything required of our everyday practice, what possible reason could we have for adding more to that concept? We can reject any

superfluous and unnecessary conceptual truths on grounds of parsimony. The concept “shpain” I introduced earlier does everything a concept that corresponds to the phenomenon of pain needs to do. The additional conceptual truth “pain is bad” would be unnecessary, and should be rejected on grounds of parsimony. Thus, there’s reason to think that Skarsaune and Cuneo & Shafer-Landau won’t be able to provide a reason for accepting their concepts over the alternate concepts I provided.

Thus, Take 1 and Take 2 responses to the Darwinian Dilemma fail. Although realism is an attractive view that provides universal normativity, it fails in response to the Darwinian Dilemma.

### *Conclusion*

This thesis as a whole has made several contributions to the metaethical debate surrounding the Darwinian Dilemma. First, it has shown that the extant realist responses to the DD fail. Versions of the Take 1 strand of response, including Copp and Enoch’s responses, failed to adequately discharge the explanatory burden to explain how our evolutionarily influenced beliefs track the mind-independent evaluative truth. They told a story explaining the justification of our evaluative beliefs that was itself not made up of justified claims. Moreover, they failed to provide an independent reason for thinking those claims might be explanatorily basic. Versions of the Take 2 strand of response, including Skarsaune and Cuneo & Shafer-Landau’s responses, failed to provide an adequate explanation of how our evaluative beliefs track the mind-independent evaluative truth because they failed to provide a good independent reason to accept their asserted conceptual truths as conceptual truths. So, one major takeaway from my thesis is that none of the responses to the DD in the literature on behalf of the DD are successful. No

realist has managed to discharge the threat of evaluative skepticism. Realism is not an acceptable metaethical view to hold in light of the problems exposed by the DD.

The second contribution of my thesis is the explanation of criteria and desideratum for a metaethical view. I have made it clear that universal normativity is a *desideratum* of a metaethical view. That is to say, we *want* a metaethical view a view to provide universal normativity, but we *can* accept a view that does not. I have also made it clear that justifying our evaluative beliefs, and thus avoiding evaluative skepticism, is a *criterion* for metaethical views. That is to say, we *need* a view to avoid evaluative skepticism, and we *cannot* accept a view that does not. This is a very important distinction. Some realists have attempted to claim that the DD isn't so bad because realism is all-things-considered better than any other metaethical view and should thus be accepted even if accepting realism means committing to evaluative skepticism. I have shown that this is not the case. Thus, a major takeaway from my thesis is first the labeling of universal normativity as a desideratum and avoiding evaluative skepticism as a criterion of adequacy.

The third, and final, major contribution of my thesis is the revelation of a tension that emerges as we evaluate metaethical views in light of the problems exposed by the DD and our desire that metaethical views provide universal normativity. This is the tension between providing universal normativity and justifying our evaluative beliefs. In Section 1 I remarked that realism does something very well – the assertion of a mind-independent evaluative truth easily explains how our evaluative beliefs guide, recommend, and oblige everyone, regardless of individual personal stance. In other words, realism very easily provides universal normativity. I discovered from the problems exposed by the DD and from the refutation of realist responses to the DD that there is something that realism majorly struggles with, i.e. the justification our

evaluative beliefs. Realists have the explanatory burden of explaining how evolution tracks the mind-independent evaluative truth. As I have shown, no realist has managed to successfully meet that burden. So, realism struggles to explain the justification of our evaluative beliefs and thus fails to avoid evaluative skepticism, but can easily provide universal normativity. Thus, the final major takeaway of my thesis the acceptance of the fact that the metaethical views that provide us with what want most, i.e. universal normativity, don't tend to provide us with what we need, i.e. the justification of our evaluative beliefs.

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