

Evolutionary Moral Realism: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives in Biology

Evolutionary moral realism is a philosophical perspective that claims that moral values are objective and independent of human beliefs or desires. This view is based on the idea that moral values evolved over time through natural selection, just as other biological traits. As a result, evolutionary moral realists argue that moral values are just as real and objective as any other natural phenomenon.

Historical Origins of Evolutionary Moral Realism

The idea that morality has an evolutionary basis can be traced back to the writings of several 18th- and 19th-century philosophers, including David Hume, Adam Smith, and Herbert Spencer. However, it was not until the early 20th century that evolutionary moral realism became a fully developed philosophical theory.



Evolutionary Moral Realism (History and Philosophy of Biology) by Jessie Newton

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The first major proponent of evolutionary moral realism was the British philosopher G.E. Moore. In his book *Principia Ethica* (1903), Moore argued that moral values are objective and independent of human desires. He based this argument on the idea that moral values are natural properties, just like other physical properties such as mass or charge.

Moore's theory was later developed and refined by other philosophers, including C.S. Lewis, Richard Dawkins, and Michael Ruse. These philosophers have argued that evolutionary moral realism is the best explanation for the objective nature of moral values.

Philosophical Arguments for Evolutionary Moral Realism

There are a number of philosophical arguments in favor of evolutionary moral realism. One of the most common arguments is the argument from evolution by natural selection. This argument claims that moral values evolved because they helped our ancestors to survive and reproduce. For example, the value of cooperation may have evolved because it helped our ancestors to form alliances and defend themselves against predators.

Another argument in favor of evolutionary moral realism is the argument from cross-cultural universality. This argument claims that moral values are found in all human cultures, which suggests that they are not simply the product of human beliefs or desires. For example, the value of honesty is found in all human cultures, which suggests that it is an objective moral value.

Finally, some philosophers argue that evolutionary moral realism is the only theory that can account for the objective nature of moral values. They argue that other theories, such as subjectivism or relativism, cannot explain

why moral values are binding on all people, regardless of their beliefs or desires.

Criticisms of Evolutionary Moral Realism

Despite the strong arguments in favor of evolutionary moral realism, there are also some criticisms of this view. One of the most common criticisms is that it is based on a false analogy between morality and other biological traits. Critics argue that moral values are not like physical properties, such as mass or charge. Instead, they are more like social conventions, which are created and maintained by humans.

Another criticism of evolutionary moral realism is that it is too pessimistic. Critics argue that this view implies that moral values are simply the product of our evolutionary history. As a result, they claim that evolutionary moral realism cannot provide a foundation for moral progress.

Evolutionary Moral Realism and the Future of Ethics

Despite the criticisms, evolutionary moral realism remains a popular and influential philosophical perspective. This view has the potential to provide a new foundation for ethics, one that is based on our understanding of the natural world.

Evolutionary moral realism can help us to understand the origins of moral values and their function in human society. It can also help us to identify the moral values that are most likely to promote human well-being.

As our understanding of evolution continues to grow, so too will our understanding of the relationship between morality and nature.

Evolutionary moral realism is a promising philosophical perspective that can help us to make sense of this complex relationship.

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Additional Resources

* "Evolutionary Ethics" by Richard Dawkins * "The Moral Animal" by Robert Wright * "The Evolution of Morality" by Michael Ruse * "Moral Realism" by Simon Blackburn * "Naturalism and Normativity" by Philip Kitcher

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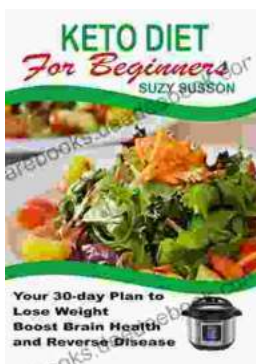


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