

Evolutionary Psychology

www.epjournal.net – 2011. 9(3): 438-448

Book Review

Darwinian Philosophy Unleashed

A review of Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God, and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew*. Cambridge University Press: New York, 2010, 352 pp., US\$28.00, ISBN #978-0-521-76278-6 (hardcover).

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Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection revolutionized biology and our understanding of the origin and diversity of life. In *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life: How Evolutionary Theory Undermines Everything You Thought You Knew*, Steve Stewart-Williams unleashes the theory and addresses its implications for theology, ethics, philosophy, and the purpose and place of humans among animals and the cosmos at large.

Part 1 – Darwin Gets Religion

The book is organized into three main parts, with the second and third parts building straightforwardly on arguments outlined in previous parts. Part 1 summarizes for the audience several classic arguments against the existence of God. While these arguments are not groundbreaking, Stewart-Williams does a good job of bringing the reader new to these arguments up to speed, as a foundation for later sections. Complicating the issue of the existence of God is the fact that the definition of God varies widely between religions as well as among individuals of the same religion. Stewart-Williams takes time in part 1 to address the various flavors of these beliefs across a full spectrum, from the literal “Big Guy in the Sky” to the more abstract conceptions of God as the non-intervening nature of being and existence. His refutations are thorough, and the mainstay arguments from an atheistic perspective are summarized.

Evolution vs. creationism

Since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the volume of accumulated scientific evidence has slowly transitioned what was once a theory into scientific fact. Stewart-Williams cites several fascinating points from the evolutionary record, which make

little sense through the lens of creationism, including the stages of embryo development and the differences in wing structure between bats and birds. Creationism and evolution cannot both be true, and Stewart-Williams shows that the scientific evidence clearly favors evolution—indeed, the creationist arguments lack any supportive scientific evidence.

Stewart-Williams goes on the attack against the “Intelligent Design” movement, strongly refuting the argument from “irreducible complexity.” Stewart-Williams notes that although it may be the case that evolution has not yet been able to explain all natural phenomena, it is a logical fallacy to conclude that evolution is false, and that only a supernatural being could be responsible for the development of life on earth. While the Intelligent Design argument has historically appealed to our intuitions, it does not hold up to logical or empirical scrutiny. This sound refutation of the Bible’s claims about creation calls the authority of the Bible into question.

Stewart-Williams further demonstrates the weakness of the Intelligent Design position by dissecting the “argument from design.” In regard to man-made items, the argument from design can be valid, in that we can infer a human designer based on the complexity of a man-made object. But in applying this argument to the realm of nature or metaphysics, this is a false analogy. Additionally, should we accept the argument from design with respect to the natural world, this offers us no information about who or what did the creating—or who or what created the designer.

Evolution vs. God

Not content with merely refuting creationism, Stewart-Williams argues convincingly that belief in evolution and belief in God are incompatible, despite numerous attempts by others to reconcile the two. Darwin himself put forth an argument that evolution and religion can be compatible. But such an argument forces the (Judeo-Christian) faithful to reinterpret the book of Genesis as metaphorical, weakening the argument for the truth of religion. In an effort to soothe the dissonance between evolution and religion, religious thinkers have mashed up the ideas into what has been called “theistic evolution.” One school of thought posits that an all-knowing God created the universe and its laws, including evolution by natural selection, with foreknowledge of how things would work out, without further intervention. In another version, God intervened throughout the process of evolution as the guiding hand. In both scenarios, God preordained the path of natural history.

Once it is shown that Genesis is not the literal truth, we must scrutinize and question the whole of Judeo-Christian religious dogma. Evolution requires that the entire Bible be read as metaphorical, and the religious position is weakened when the scripture is open to individual interpretation. Would an omnipotent God allow his message to become so muddled? Stewart-Williams argues that if any story in the Bible can be taken as a symbolic interpretation of reality, then it becomes so flexible that it can be coopted to support many conflicting interpretations, and no longer holds water. In addition, adding any metaphysics to the theory of evolution begins to pry it away from scientific truth. As Stewart-Williams argues, “...every attempt to effect this reconciliation does grievous damage either to the religion, or to evolutionary theory, or both” (p. 61).

The process of evolution by natural selection makes more sense without the

involvement of a supernatural being. Those who believe in theistic evolution have some very problematic questions to address. Life is riddled with imperfections – why would an omnipotent, perfect creator allow this? Examples of what Stewart-Williams calls “unintelligent design” include the roundabout way that the human eye is wired, creating a blind spot. Our wisdom teeth are a problem, our appendix is apparently useless and our spine is not optimally designed for walking upright. Natural selection can explain these anomalies as consequences of the evolutionary process, and places the current human form within the larger context of life evolving over time. The only explanation put forth by the theist is that “God works in mysterious ways,” also known as a plea from ignorance. If you accept this argument, you may as well say that we cannot know the purpose of anything.

The theistic evolutionist can retreat in the face of these arguments to a position Stewart-Williams labels “deistic evolutionism.” In this school of thought, God created the laws of natural selection, and provided the spark of life to set the wheels in motion, but did not intervene further. This idea holds up better to scrutiny, but is incompatible with most popular religious beliefs. If God is unwilling or unable to intervene with the development of life on earth, then it follows that God will not intervene in the lives of humans, nor answer prayers, nor command them to write laws. This belief system proposes a God that may answer the challenging question about the source of our existence, but is otherwise not present.

God as gap filler

Many people are not comfortable with unanswered questions. Stewart-Williams outlines the ways in which God springs up to fill holes in our current knowledge about our origins, purpose, and place in the universe, as well as the origin and purpose of the universe itself. Stewart-Williams sets out not to answer the big questions, as they are beyond the scope of the book, but instead undermines the reasons why God is necessary to answer them, summarizing the current thinking from the scientific community.

With evolution by natural selection as a fact, creationists aim to exploit the current lack of certainty regarding the generation of life from non-life, speculating that if we do not have the answer now, there must be a God that started life. But with the advance of science, the pieces of the puzzle are beginning to come in to focus. Contrary to intuitions and to historical thought, life emerged gradually from non-life, as organic molecules chemically combined into polymers, and polymers into self-replicating structures. There are still gaps in our understanding between these steps, but scientific progress in these areas is encouraging, without the need to invoke supernatural explanation.

Stepping back from life to the existence of the universe itself, Stewart-Williams argues that God is unnecessary. He attacks the “First Cause Argument”: every event must have a cause, this chain of cause/effect cannot move infinitely backward, therefore there must be a first cause. Using this argument in defense of God begs the question, “Who made God?,” and the argument falls on its face. Looking at it a different way, if you accept the First Cause Argument, you are only accepting the concept of a First Cause. Nothing in the argument suggests that there must be a God, especially a specific concept of the traditional monotheistic God. Could not the universe itself be the First Cause? Does that make any less sense than a God the Creator? Stewart-Williams further attacks the First Cause Argument

with recent scientific findings about subatomic particles, which demonstrate behavior without cause.

The existence of God has been supported by the idea that the conditions needed for life, and especially for human consciousness, are so rare and special that only a supernatural force could be behind these phenomena. This includes the specifics of earth's chemistry, atmosphere, and distance from the sun, as well as the specific laws of physics which determine the clockwork of the universe. If any of these values were tweaked even slightly, life as we know it would be at least different, but more likely nonexistent. Stewart-Williams notes that the probability of life elsewhere in the universe is not necessarily low, given that there are billions of planets in each of the hundreds of billions of galaxies in the universe.

On the apparent fine-tuning of the universe, Stewart-Williams offers that this is the best argument for God that he knows, though he does not find it persuasive in the face of all the other arguments clearly refuting the existence of God. If God fine-tuned the physical laws of the universe to be ideal for the creation of life, He could have done a much better job. If the purpose of the universe is to create conscious minds, why did it take 10 billion years? And although we are amazed by our own minds, perhaps in a more ideally fine-tuned universe something vastly superior could have evolved. If the universe was fine-tuned, we do not know what exactly it was fine-tuned for. In these muddy waters, Stewart-Williams suggests that the introduction of a God complicates rather than simplifies things.

Stewart-Williams next briefly discusses the multiverse hypothesis. As an alternative to the fine-tuned universe concept, this hypothesis states that many different universes exist that are fine-tuned differently. If this were the case, then eventually a universe would exist with the properties that give rise to life. We happen to find ourselves in one due to the anthropic principle: We can only ask the question because we find ourselves in a universe that has allowed us to evolve the type of mind to ask the question. Stewart-Williams relays the work of physicist Lee Smolin, who proposes that universes can reproduce, pass on their "traits" or constants, and have differential fitness. Therefore natural selection is at work on the grandest scale. While Stewart-Williams admits that this theory is controversial, his point is that there are plausible alternative theories to the idea that God created a universe fit for life.

Getting back to planet Earth, Stewart-Williams addresses the notion that the human mind was created by an act of divinity, in a process separate from evolution. The argument states that the higher functions of the human mind, including language, creativity, and abstract reasoning, offer no reproductive advantage, and therefore could not have been naturally selected. On the contrary, evidence for evolved modules of the human mind has amassed in the past couple decades, showing that these functions could have provided for our ancestors advantages in survival and reproduction. Stewart-Williams points out that although, for example, complex mathematics abilities may not have been selected directly, higher-level cognition may have had evolutionary advantages, and in modern times we can apply these mechanisms to learn math. Additionally, not everyone is endowed with the ability to engage in the most complex thought and theory, such as quantum mechanics, as our minds evolved to deal with problems on a human scale. But what about human consciousness?

On the question of consciousness, Stewart-Williams reviews several mainstay atheist arguments. Suggesting that God created human consciousness raises a new problem: If God made humans conscious, who made God? Here Stewart-Williams might have discussed current scientific theories of how human consciousness evolved. A case can be made to support the hypothesis that consciousness is a byproduct of human sociality. In the ancestral human environment, reproductive success may have become intertwined with tribal sociality. As human ancestors learned to compete and cooperate within this social playing field, understanding the intentions and emotions of other group members may have been favorably selected. Modern humans can now understand a complex social web of intention and emotion, by effortlessly mapping internally the minds of others. This, in addition to monitoring how others perceive you, could be the origin of self-reflection or consciousness (Geary, 2005).

On the problem of evil

The problem of evil is a powerful argument against the existence of God, and Stewart-Williams points out that evolutionary theory strengthens this argument. If there is an infinitely good, omnipotent God, why does He allow so much suffering and evil? Why would this God create evil and suffering at all? Consider how much death and suffering is involved in the process of natural selection, and the wasteful inefficiency of the process. At the very least, this challenges the ideas that God is all-powerful and all-loving. Some may argue that the brutality of the natural world is not equivalent to human suffering, that animals cannot experience pain on the level of conscious humans. Although non-human animals may not experience consciousness on the same level as humans, science provides evidence that animals experience pain and fear.

Stewart-Williams addresses several counterarguments that attempt to reconcile God and evil. The free will defense suggests that God gave us free will, and while God is infinitely good, we use this free will to create suffering. One problem here is that if God created the free will that allows us to do evil, than He is still indirectly responsible for creating and allowing evil acts to transpire. The free will defense also fails to account for the suffering of non-human animals. Another counterargument is that the ends justify the means, and God permitted suffering in the world to allow us to grow spiritually, thereby creating good through experiencing evil. This fails to account for the vast differences between individual hardships, such that some experience an inordinate amount of suffering while others suffer very little. And why would God create imperfect souls that must experience a boot camp of suffering to become pure souls? Research indicates that instead of leading us to a path of goodness and happiness, extreme suffering often leads to more suffering. For example, individuals that experience extreme suffering may experience the ongoing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including nightmares, anxiety, and maladjustment to normal society, leading to years of further suffering (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This line of reasoning again paints a picture of a God willing to introduce suffering and evil into His creation.

If we step away from the traditional concept of an all-loving, all-knowing God and instead consider the non-intervening deist “god” of natural law, it can be argued that this conception of God cannot be responsible for evil and is instead only responsible for writing

the laws of the universe. All this does is render God's responsibility for evil indirect instead of direct, having set in motion a world in which evil takes place. And the argument that God works in mysterious, incomprehensible ways is a fallacious plea from ignorance; if we cannot know the intentions of God, we cannot know if God is good or evil.

For some, science has pushed God into concepts more abstract even than the God of the deist, or First Cause, such as "God is being," or "God is nature." These vague definitions are more difficult to argue against, but they have little meaning and weak implications. They are unfalsifiable hypotheses and render the question of a God of this type's existence a moot point. For example, if God, to you, is nothing but nature, why not simply have reverence for nature instead of introducing the concept of God, which in this definition is no different from nature? Stewart-Williams perceives these types of believers as simply fooling themselves; he writes, "There comes a point, though, when you should stop trying to redefine the word, and simply concede that you're an atheist" (p. 136). These types of believers may want to retain their beliefs in the face of the evidence, based on childhood upbringing and/or social pressures.

Part 2 – Life after Darwin

In the second part of the book, Stewart-Williams moves into new territory. Having established a strong case against the existence of God, he turns to the implications of humans' place in a world without deities, and Stewart-Williams's ideas diverge somewhat from mainstream atheistic schools of thought. But he is correct in comparing the revolutionary impact of evolution to that of the discovery that the earth orbits the sun, and the ripple effect caused in the sciences. Humans are animals.

The Darwinian worldview, sans God, does away with the metaphysical separation of mind and body, and instead shows the mind to be an evolved phenomenon, built into the brain. Similarly, notions of a soul or a mystical life force are dealt a lethal blow. Instead, evolutionary psychology argues that the mind is a collection of evolved tools which accumulated via natural selection over hundreds of thousands of years. For example, modern humans are more likely to develop fears toward things that were threatening in ancestral environments, such as snakes and spiders, than they are to develop fears toward more dangerous threats in the modern world, such as guns or automobiles. Today's neuroscience allows us to view the activity in the brain that coincides with various thoughts and states of mind, and supports the idea that when the brain dies, the mind ceases to be.

Stewart-Williams goes a step further, suggesting that if the mind and consciousness evolved, then the line between mind and non-mind are naturally blurred, since these phenomena evolved gradually over time. Further, according to Stewart-Williams, we should not make the mistake of assuming that the modern human mind represents "full-mindedness," since we may be somewhere in the middle between full-mindedness and non-mindedness. Stewart-Williams concludes that mind and matter are indistinguishable, since mind is generated by matter. Continuing down this rabbit hole, the argument goes like this: Humans are conscious beings made solely of matter. That matter is part of the universe. Therefore, the universe now possesses consciousness. This perspective is certainly interesting, but felt a bit out of place in the context of Stewart-Williams' other arguments in

this section.

Humans among animals

Back from our trip around the cosmos, we now consider our place in nature among the animals, informed by our evolutionary origins. Stewart-Williams aims to knock humans down from the pedestal established by centuries of believing that we were crafted in God's image, and provided with animals by that God to suit our purposes. Instead, we should consider other species as our relatives. Species are not immutable, and Stewart-Williams notes that our definitions of distinct species are therefore arbitrary. Modern taxonomy is a snapshot of animals at this point in time, and according to Stewart-Williams, species represent "convenient fictions" (p.158). In broad form Stewart-Williams presents a strong argument; however, this line of reasoning fails to consider the benefits of modern taxonomy to the study of biology, including the theory of evolution by natural selection.

The attack on conventional thought in biology does not end there. Stewart-Williams argues that Darwinism blurs the line between life and non-life, citing viruses as an example. We are machines that exhibit life through the complex organization of non-living matter. This concept should not depress us, if we consider how amazing it is that matter can be arranged in such a way that we think and feel.

Stewart-Williams notes that humans are not superior to other animals, and that our thinking about species differences has been deeply biased and self-serving. Humans are evolutionarily new, having been on the scene for a mere blink of an eye relative to life on earth. Evolution does not have an overarching goal of creating complex or superior forms of life. That humans are evolutionarily new does not mean we are superior to the animals that preceded us in our evolutionary history. The path of evolution is based on the replication of genes, without any implication of progress. Perhaps we can evaluate species based on their ability to thrive. With this criterion, we might consider beetles, rats, or bacteria to be more prolific and therefore superior to humans. Another issue is that the playing field is ever-changing. The traits that contributed to relatively greater survival and reproduction in this age may prove worthless when changes in the environment occur and species are forced to adapt. Dinosaurs might be seen as the record holders for "ruling" the earth, having spent 160 million years surviving and reproducing. Stewart-Williams notes that all organisms currently living on the earth, including humans, have been evolving for the same duration, so no species is more or less evolved than any other. While we have unique traits such as language and abstract reasoning which enable our survival and reproduction, other animals have evolved different traits which enable their survival and reproduction. Therefore, no trait is superior to any other, broadly construed. According to Stewart-Williams, any attempt to rank species from low to high on an evolutionary scale is just an expression of our anthropocentric bias. The notion that evolution is taking life towards higher levels of intelligence begs the question that, if that is the case, why did it take four billion years? While Stewart-Williams concedes that there are observable historical patterns in evolution, he argues that this process does not imply progress.

But what about human reasoning? The process of natural selection is such that our current abilities evolved slowly, so it is reasonable to suggest that animals share some of our cognitive abilities, even if they are not developed to the same degree as in humans.

From the perspective of a vastly more intelligent alien species, Stewart-Williams suggests that the difference in intellect between us and the other animals would seem insignificant. Additionally, although language is one of the significant evolved traits that distinguishes us from other animals, it is merely an evolved trait (or suite of traits), no different than the unique traits of other animals that enable survival and reproduction, such as an anteater's specialized mouth. Intellectual superiority is no greater than superiority in other areas, such as a dolphin's ability to swim.

To drive the point home, Stewart-Williams asks if it can be argued that humans are *inferior* to other animals. It is possible that our technology and reasoning will inadvertently lead us to destroy our own species, through environmental destruction or nuclear war. No other animal has the capacity to be so self-destructive. From a moral perspective, we find ourselves in our current position as a species in part because we can more effectively murder other species, and we are unique in the violence and cruelty we can, and have historically, unleashed on each other. We are unique in twisting the gift of empathy into the ability to inflict tortuous pain on humans and other animals. At the very least, the pervasive assumption of human superiority deserves to be questioned.

The meaning of life

With God out of the way, and our place among the animals firmly established, Stewart-Williams next considers the implications of Darwinism for the meaning and purpose of life. While he previously argued that human consciousness gives weight to the idea that the universe is conscious, Stewart-Williams in this section offers that, in view of the universe, we are but insignificant specks of dust. Turning back to evolution, is it the case that our mission in life is to propagate our genes, or is life inherently meaningless? Considering the first option, the theory of evolution is descriptive, not prescriptive. There is no goal to evolution. Instead it is a process by which certain traits become more widespread when they lead to relatively greater survival and reproduction. Stewart-Williams therefore concludes that life has no objective meaning. To be clear, this is not to say that life is not worth living, it just leaves the meaning and purpose of life up to the individual.

Part 3 – Morality Stripped of Superstition

In part 3, Stewart-Williams explores the implications of evolution for morality. As with the preceding sections, his first task is to consider and dismiss conventional thought that stands in conflict with evolution. Stewart-Williams argues that while natural selection has played a key part in building our morality, morality is not solely the direct product of natural selection. Our emotional experience, intrinsically tied to our morality, has been mapped to areas of our brain, mainly the hypothalamus and limbic system. This provides the first link between our evolved biology and ethics, and the first argument against supernaturally-grounded, eternal moral truths. Moral behavior is observable in animals, though to different degrees and in different ways than in humans. On the other hand, learning and culture enter the interaction to explain moral diversity within humans, though we must be careful to avoid overemphasizing differences in moral codes in light of the substantial commonalities. Morality can change within a culture at speeds faster than the

slow pace of gene-based evolution by natural selection.

Given that morality has roots in evolution, altruistic behavior is a problem that vexed Darwin himself. If the struggle for existence is one between individuals for survival and reproduction, what could have possibly brought about selfless behavior? Part of the answer can be found in genetics: Kin selection theory demonstrates that the degree of selfless behavior is modified by the relatedness of the individual to the recipient of altruism. The greater the probability that genes are shared with the recipient, the more likely the individual is to act selflessly. This makes sense among relatives, but what about altruism observed between non-relatives? This can be explained by reciprocal altruism theory: Two individuals will experience increased fitness overall when they help each other when in need, assuming that the altruism is reciprocated and balanced. Organisms that engage in this type of altruism have evolved methods of detecting cheaters, and rule sets to avoid non-beneficial relationships. Among humans, we experience our potentially reciprocal relationships emotionally and the emotions of anger, guilt, and gratitude motivate our behavior. Altruism can secure social and reputational benefits for the altruist, because helping others may be seen as a display of worth, enhancing the individual's reputation as a valued group member.

There are, however, situations in which humans engage in selfless behavior that are not yet clearly explained by current evolutionary theories, and here the theist jumps in arguing that such noble behavior could only be endowed by God. Again, the introduction of a deity complicates the issue instead of simplifying it, and these types of acts are few and far between. Stewart-Williams's argument is that altruistic acts that show no benefit to the individual may be considered evolutionary "accidents." If these behaviors evolved in the ancestral environment of small communities with many kin relationships, then these selfless behaviors could be a consequence of mismatch with the modern world.

The naturalistic fallacy is the idea that we can extrapolate objective morality from the laws of nature and evolution and, according to Stewart-Williams, we cannot. In deriving ethics from nature, we risk creating a system which is brutal and ignores the more noble tendencies of human nature. In exploring how evolution influenced our morality, we are attempting to describe our evolved urges, but this should not be confused with arguing that our evolved urges should be followed simply because they come from nature. In other words, describing what *is* does not imply what *ought to be*. For example, evolutionary psychologists and others have conducted research that reveals differences in psychology based on sex (male or female), such as stronger parental motivation in women. This does not logically justify differential treatment of men and women. Nor does evolutionary theory legitimately provide excuses for socially negative behavior that may have biological origins, such as sexual infidelity. Although we might understand the internal forces that influence us, this does not logically remove individual responsibility. This same line of thinking discredits Social Darwinism, the idea that the laws of society should emulate nature, because evolution is descriptive and not prescriptive. Additionally, where Social Darwinism emphasizes competition and "survival of the fittest," it ignores our equally Darwinian tendencies toward altruism and cooperation.

Natural does not mean good, but even if we attempt to derive moral laws from nature, we quickly find that there are no clear answers provided. We have natural urges to

be monogamous as well as to pursue extramarital affairs. We have urges to be altruistic as well as aggressive. These natural urges are often in conflict, with some urges benefiting the individual and some benefiting the group. Nature provides no clear moral compass.

Remaking morality

Having examined what is not implied by evolution, let us review what Stewart-Williams considers to be the moral implications of evolution. Stewart-Williams comments sensibly that we should not take the argument that deriving morality from nature is a naturalistic fallacy to the point where we throw out our moral systems altogether. Our current moral systems represent thousands of years of trial-and-error development. While not a direct product of evolution, modern conventions of morality represent a collective record of cultural experience. This does not mean they are safe from criticism. We must consider whether our current moral systems are obsolete relics of history. In addition, we must examine the impact of our moral codes on society as a whole. Moral systems may benefit different members of society unfairly. Moral systems should be not regarded as sacred, and should be adjusted as necessary.

Stewart-Williams applies this line of thinking to the doctrine of human dignity: the idea that human life is of supreme worth, and animals exist solely for human benefit. Evolution undermines the foundation of this doctrine, having already contradicted the theistic beliefs from which the doctrine is derived. God did not create us in His image, or supply animals as our fodder. Evolution shows us that we are one species of animal, without any special status that necessitates unequal rights or value.

In throwing out the doctrine of human dignity, we can reexamine some of today's contentious moral debates. Most arguments against euthanasia are based on the idea that human life is infinitely valuable. Without that key presumption, we are left to consider the suffering of the individual and their freedom of choice. Evolution does not resolve this challenging issue, but does inform our perspective on it.

Viewing humans as animals, we find rational objections to our cruel treatment of non-human animals. Stewart-Williams notes that in assigning moral status to humans but not animals we are making an arbitrary choice. While some argue that humans only have moral obligations to other humans, Stewart-Williams points out that this speciesist thinking can be used to justify racism as well, and is therefore unjustified. Without the doctrine of human dignity, the line between which species deserve moral consideration and which species do not is blurred, if not removed altogether. In light of this, we should consider suffering among non-human animals as something to be avoided. Evolution does not provide black and white clarity on these issues, but it does support the argument that we throw out our historical assumptions and reevaluate our morality in consideration of modern science.

The death of right and wrong

Lastly, we widen our lens and consider ethics as a whole, and whether it can be derived objectively. On the contrary, Stewart-Williams argues for *ethical nihilism* – that there are no universal truths to inform our morality. We already ruled out that moral laws are eternal truths imposed on us from God. This is not to say that good and bad do not

exist, but Stewart-Williams suggests that they do not come from universal truths. Instead, we must treat subjective truths as a given, upon which a moral framework may be built. For example, if we assume that suffering is bad, we can use science and logic to build a rich moral system, using suffering to identify good or bad actions.

Stewart-Williams' ethical nihilism conflicts with Sam Harris' (2010) arguments on morality presented in his recent book, *The Moral Landscape*. Like Stewart-Williams, Harris argues that we should turn the lens of science on traditional moral values, and rid ourselves of the traditional ideas which have no empirical support. As a foundation, Harris believes we should start with suffering, since neuroscience now has insight into how suffering physically and objectively impacts the brain, and targets the admittedly loose definition of "well-being" as our moral objective. Harris presents support for this argument from different angles. He implies that looking for objective "moral truth" in the philosophical sense should not be our main focus, and questions the traditional dichotomy of objective truth and subjective truth. In Stewart-Williams terms, we can draw no objective moral imperatives from nature or the universe; therefore, there are no moral imperatives. Harris' approach is to scientifically draw conclusions about objective moral imperatives based on observation of the world, examining how action and belief impact suffering and happiness in oneself and others.

However, these two approaches may not be as different as they seem. After all, Stewart-Williams concludes that although he sees no objective reasons for morality, living a life without any morality whatsoever is sociopathic. While Stewart-Williams does not believe that "moral truth" exists, he does state that evolutionary psychology provides a strong foundation for utilitarianism – but as a hypothetical imperative instead of a categorical imperative. Harris believes that this type of thinking is what is responsible for taking the wind out of the sails of science's charge on morality, regrettably leaving the door open for theistic thinkers to take the stage. Stewart-Williams believes that there is no objective way to prove that suffering is bad and happiness is good. Harris would ask, "If you don't care about happiness and suffering, what could you possibly care about?"

Conclusion

Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life is a trailblazing advancement of the application of scientific values to traditionally metaphysical questions. Stewart-Williams presents his arguments clearly and concisely, making the book accessible, informative, and enjoyable. While certain to spark debate, this book is a valuable step in opening up the grand questions of life to the realm of scientific inquiry and reason.

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