

Naturalizing Normativity

Exploring the Relationship between Evolutionary Naturalism and Moral Realism

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MA Research Report

Abstract:

What is the relationship between evolutionary naturalism and moral realism? More specifically, is moral realism compatible with evolutionary naturalism? Moral realism depends on the view that our 'moral intuitions' are epistemically reliable. Considerations from evolutionary science allegedly suggest otherwise. Certain evolutionary naturalists employ these considerations in so-called 'Evolutionary Debunking' arguments which show, if sound, that moral realism is unjustified or implausible. Evolutionary naturalism, therefore, appears to be incompatible with moral realism. I consider this to be a forceful challenge for moral realism. In this dissertation I investigate whether or not, or in which sense, the challenge is successful. I argue that (what I call) 'moral realism (traditionally construed)', a version of moral realism which depends on the epistemic reliability of our 'moral intuitions', is, given evolutionary naturalism and evolutionary science, probably implausible. I outline a version of moral realism ('moral realism' (non-traditionally construed)) which does not depend on the epistemic reliability of our 'moral intuitions'. I argue that given evolutionary naturalism, evolutionary science, and nativist evolutionary psychology, 'moral realism' (non-traditionally construed) is a naturalized version of moral realism, and is probably compatible with evolutionary naturalism. If the outline of 'moral realism' (non-traditionally construed) is plausible, then there is a form of moral realism which is compatible with evolutionary naturalism. If it is not then 'moral realism' (traditionally construed) is probably implausible given evolutionary naturalism.