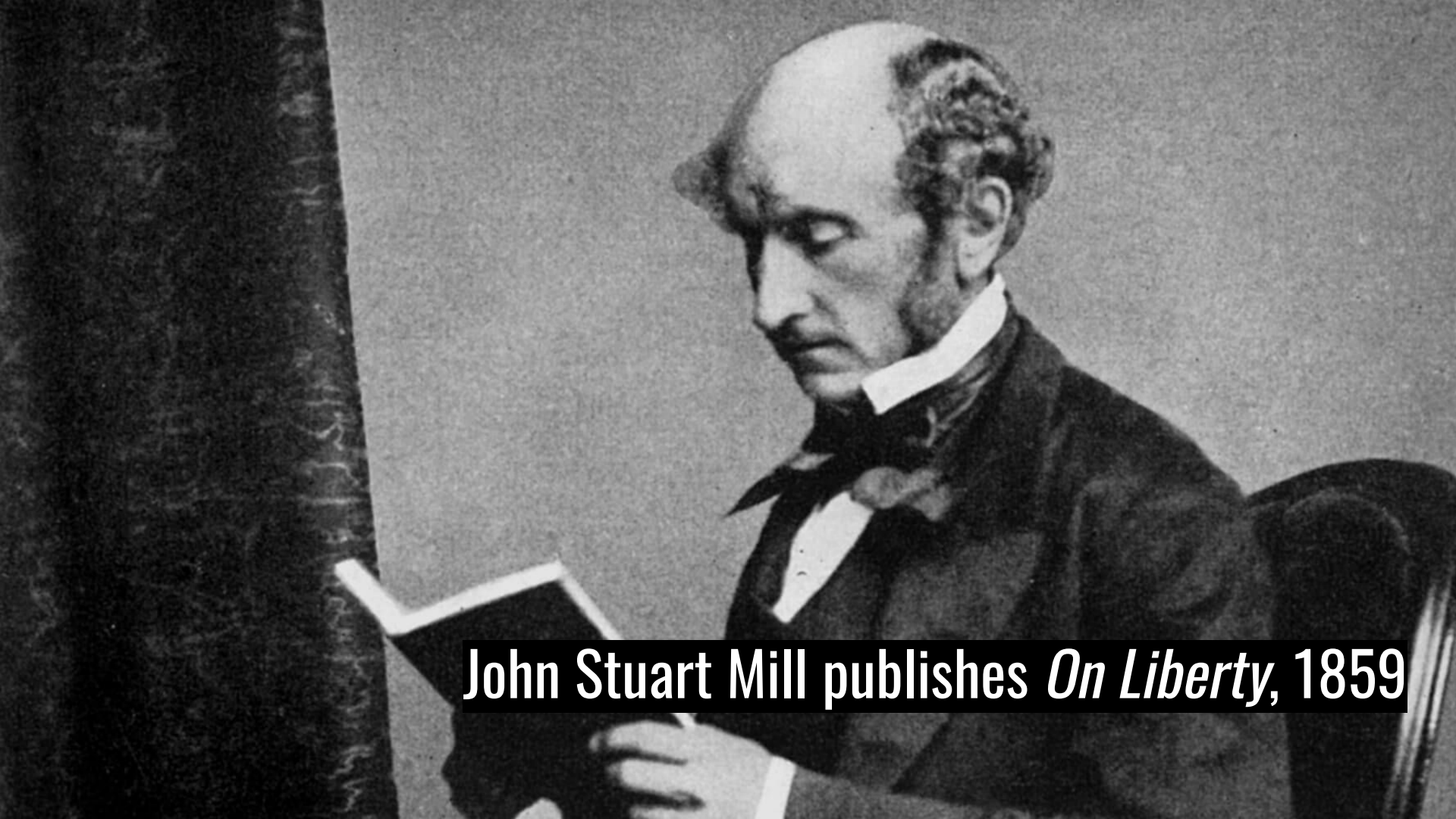




**Appendix B:**  
**The Mind Spreads Itself**  
**(or “The Technical Details of**  
**Moral Skepticism”)**



**John Stuart Mill publishes *On Liberty*, 1859**



**Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origins of Species*, 1859**

An  
extremely  
unwanted  
DIVERSION  
INTO  
metaethics!





**Metaethics:  
Important Concepts**

# Metaethics

**Meta-ethics** is a subdivision of ethics concerned with the philosophical study of the meaning of ethical terms; e.g., questions like “What is good?”, “What is moral responsibility?”, etc.

# Logical Background Concepts

A **monadic predicate** (a.k.a. a one-place predicate) is a predicate that says something about one thing;

e.g., “Joe is happy” has a monadic predicate, namely “\_\_\_\_\_ is happy.”

In symbols:  $Hj$

# Logical Background Concepts

A **relational predicate** (a.k.a., a dyadic predicate, a.k.a. a two-place predicate) is a predicate that asserts a relationship between two or more things;

e.g., the predicate in “Sabrina is taller than Katia” is “\_\_\_ is taller than \_\_\_.”



## Logical Background Concepts

This relational predicate would be symbolized using two constants (or variables):

Tsk

It is read as

“Sabrina is taller than Katia.”

# Moral Relativism

Moral relativism is the view that moral predicates (usually expressed as, for example, “\_\_\_ is morally wrong.”) are actually *relational predicates*.

Moral judgments are only true relative to some individual or group.

E.g., “\_\_\_ is wrong for \_\_\_.”

**Cultural relativism** is the view that:

- a. there is no objective way to establish that a particular morality is the correct morality;
- b. there is no reason to believe in a single true morality; even though
- c. there may be certain moral universals.



**arranged**



**marriage**

“Arranged marriages are morally permissible in (for example) India.”

# Moral Absolutism

Moral absolutism is the denial of moral relativism.

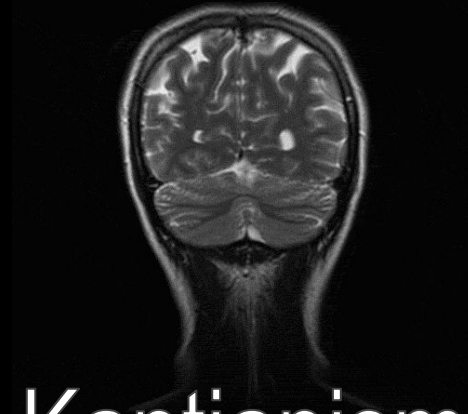
In other words, actions are permissible (or impermissible) regardless of context.

Put another way, moral predicates are *monadic predicates*.

# Utilitarianism



Divine Command Theory



Kantianism

# Moral Objectivism

**Moral objectivism** is the view that moral predicates (i.e., the predicates in moral judgments like “Capital punishment is **morally abhorrent**”) are mind-independent.

In other words, they are independent of human thoughts and actions.

# Moral Non-objectivism

Moral non-objectivism, a.k.a. moral anti-realism, is the view that moral predicates are mind-dependent.

In other words, moral properties are **human constructs**.



**The debate between relativism and absolutism is a debate about the truth (or falsity) of the entire sentence containing a moral predicate, i.e., is it a relational predicate or a monadic predicate.**

**The debate between objectivism and non-objectivism is only about the moral predicates. In other words, it's the question of whether or not moral properties are human constructs or not.**

# First-order Moral Positions

First-order moral positions refer to one's commitment to a particular ethical theory (e.g., Utilitarianism, Kantianism, etc.), as opposed to one's second-order metaethical positions (e.g., non-objectivist relativism, or objectivist absolutism).



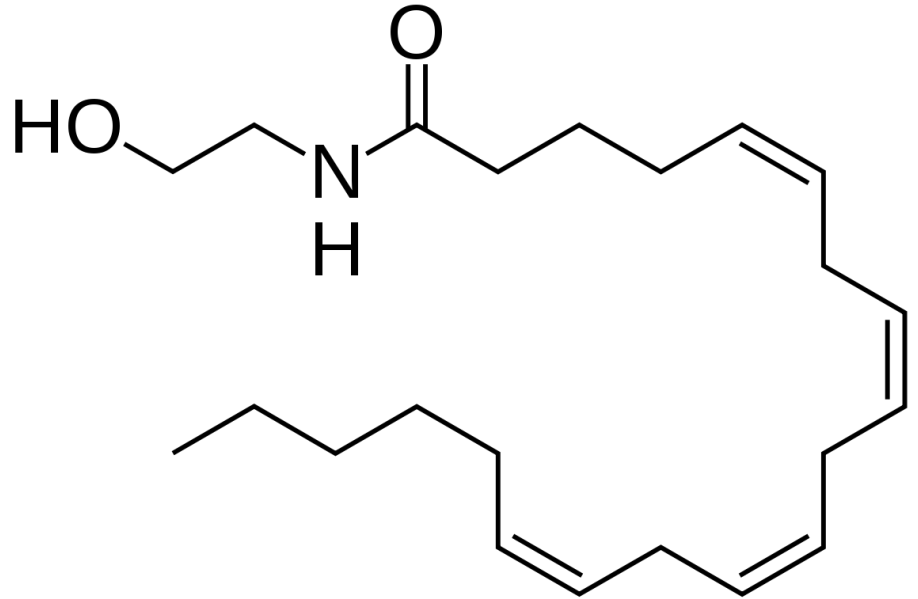
*Food for thought...*

# **POSSIBLE POSITIONS**

## MORAL NATURALISM

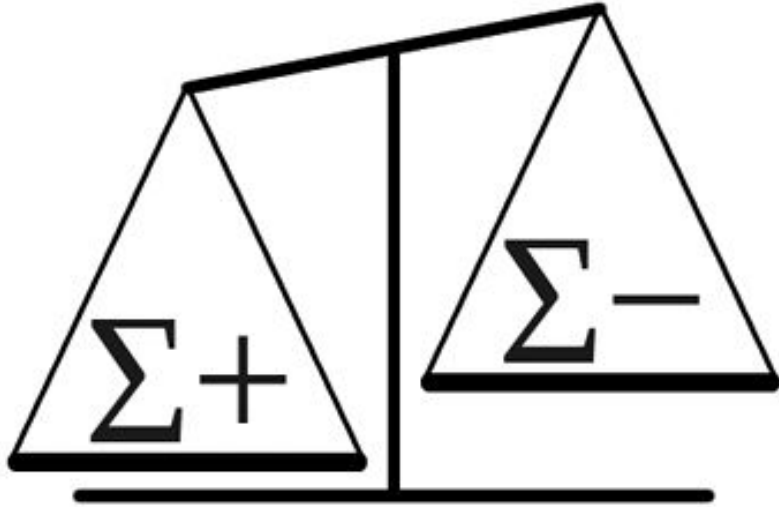
...is the view that moral properties are some type of physical (or natural) object.

E.g., GOOD just is



ANANDAMIDE

# NOTABLE PROPONENTS:

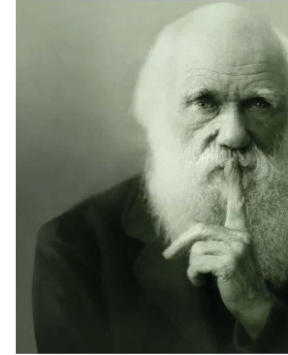


Utilitarians might say that moral rights just are some biological feature, namely the capacity to feel pain and pleasure.

# MORAL NON-NATURALISM

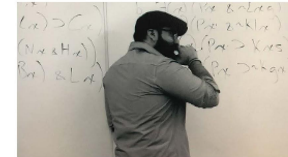
...is the view that the study of moral properties is autonomous from the natural sciences.

Moral properties are non-physical, mind-independent properties that cannot be perceived by the five senses, but can be perceived (perhaps) by reason or divine revelation.



**THE  
GREAT  
DEBATE  
SERIES**  
A  
CONVERSATION  
ON GOD,  
MORALITY, AND  
EVOLUTION

*Dr. Tomás Bogardus, Pepperdine  
University (pictured right)*  
*Roberto García, El Camino College  
(pictured below)*



**Wednesday, May 2nd 2018**

**1-3pm**

**Marsee Auditorium**

Moderated by: **Dr. Felipe Leon,**  
Philosophy Professor (ECC)

This event is free and open to the public.

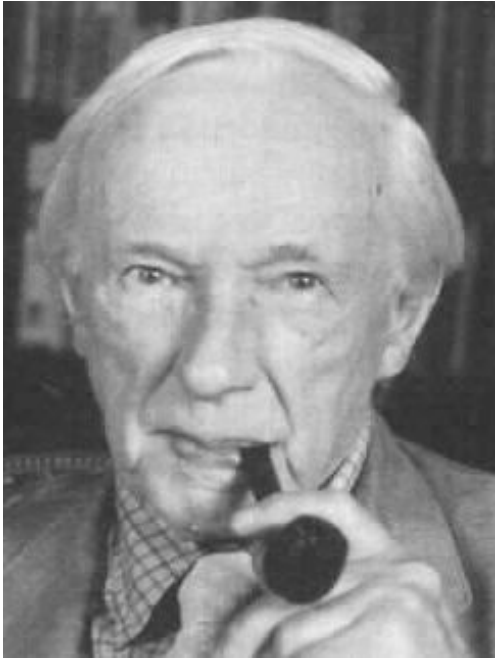
\$3 parking permit required to park on campus.

**Sponsored by the ECC Philosophy Department**



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# MORAL NON-NATURALISM

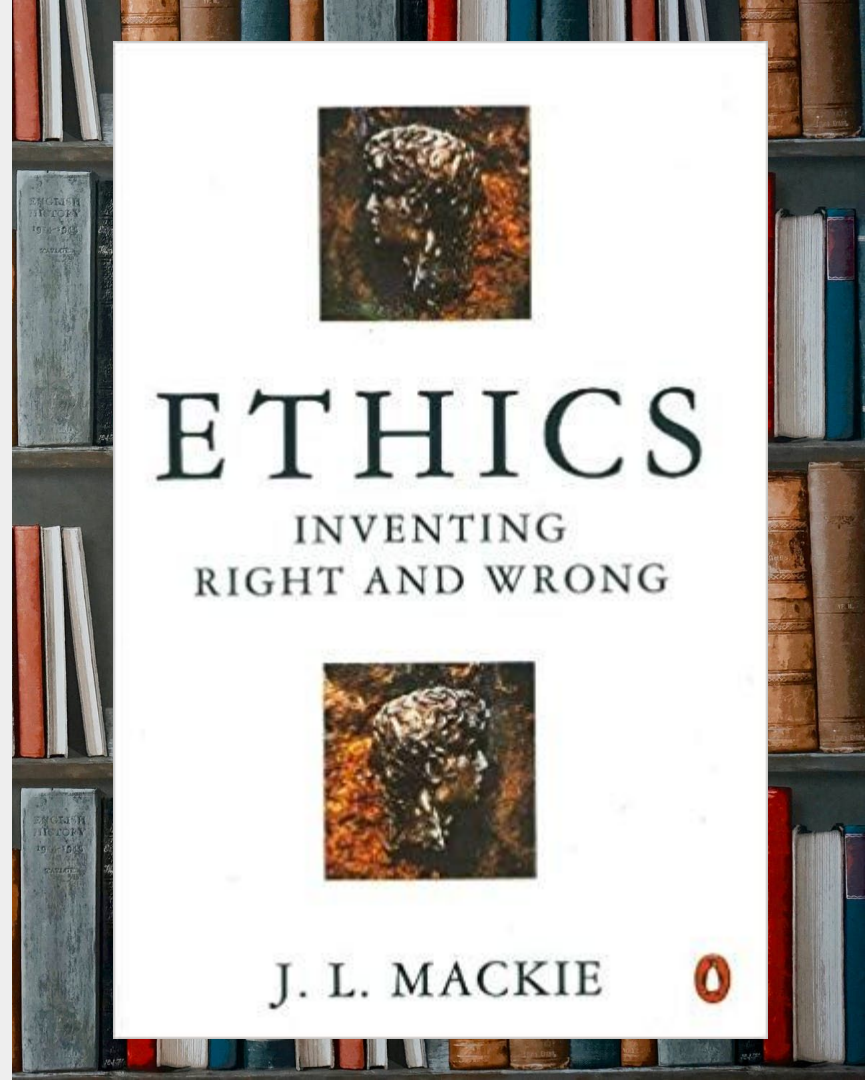


“If I am asked 'What is good?' my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it.”

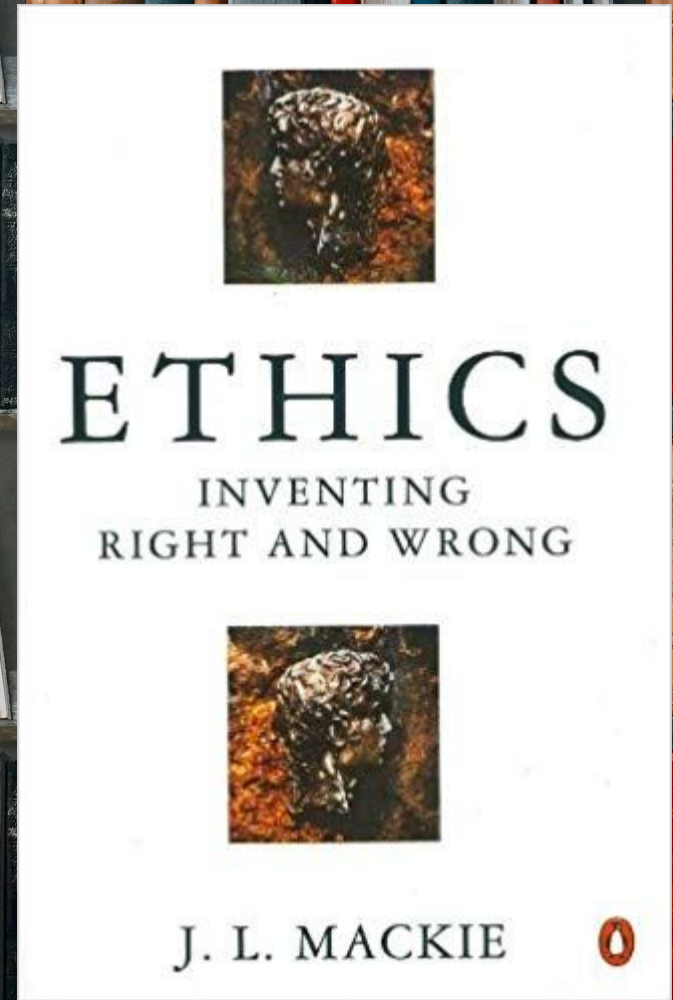
G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*



“As a historical fact, metaethical positions have been combined with a variety of first-order moral positions, and vice versa: [George Berkeley](#), [John Stuart Mill](#), [G.E. Moore](#), and R.M. Hare, for instance, were all committed to some form of [Utilitarianism](#) as a first-order moral framework, despite advocating radically different metaethical positions...



“Likewise, in his influential book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, J.L. Mackie (1977) defends a form of (second-order) **metaethical skepticism** or relativism in the first chapter, only to devote the rest of the book to the articulation of a substantive theory of (first-order) Utilitarianism” ([DeLapp §2](#)).







**Moral Skepticism:  
Important Concepts**

# Moral Skepticism

The strongest form of moral skepticism is the conjunction of three views:

- Non-cognitivism
- Moral error theory
- Justification skepticism

Briefly, it is the view that moral knowledge is impossible.

# Non-cognitivism

**Non-cognitivism** takes many forms.

The version that Joyce (2017) develops is the view that moral judgments express beliefs, but they also express emotional states and/or express desires/commands.

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing sunglasses and a denim jacket over a green top with a white daisy, holds a large white sign. The sign has the text 'STOP KILLING ANIMALS GO VEGAN TODAY' in red and green block letters. In the background, a white police car with 'POLITI' written on it is visible. To the left, another woman holds a yellow sign with Danish text.

**STOP  
KILLING  
ANIMALS  
GO VEGAN  
TODAY**

MÆLK  
KOMMER  
FRA  
SØRGENS  
MØDRE

FOR  
ALLE  
DYRS  
FRIHED

**E.g., “Eating meat is wrong!”**

# Moral Error Theory

Moral Error theory is the view that moral judgments express beliefs but that they are always false.

This is because there is nothing that exists that would ever make a moral proposition true.



**Question:**

**What sort of thing are moral properties anyway?**

# The Argument from Queerness

The **Argument from Queerness** is an argument against moral objectivism stating that moral properties (which would make moral judgments true) are just too strange to actually exist.

Moreover, even if they did exist, they would be non-natural entities and we would have no contact with them. So, they might as well not exist.



“Plato’s Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be.

The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something’s being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it.

An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, ...because the end has **to-be-pursuedness** somehow built into it” (Mackie 1977: 28; emphasis added).



These very things that **they** model and draw, which also have their

own **shadows** and *images in water*,

they are now using as *images* in their turn,

in an attempt to see

**THOSE THINGS THEMSELVES** that one could not see

in any other way than by the **power** of **THINKING**.

(510e-511a).

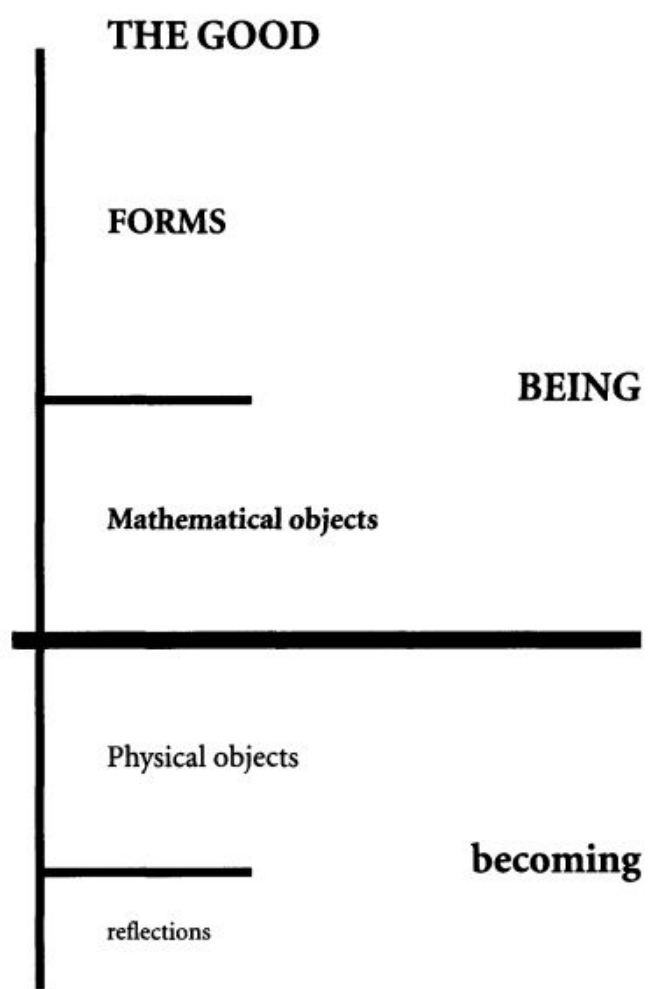
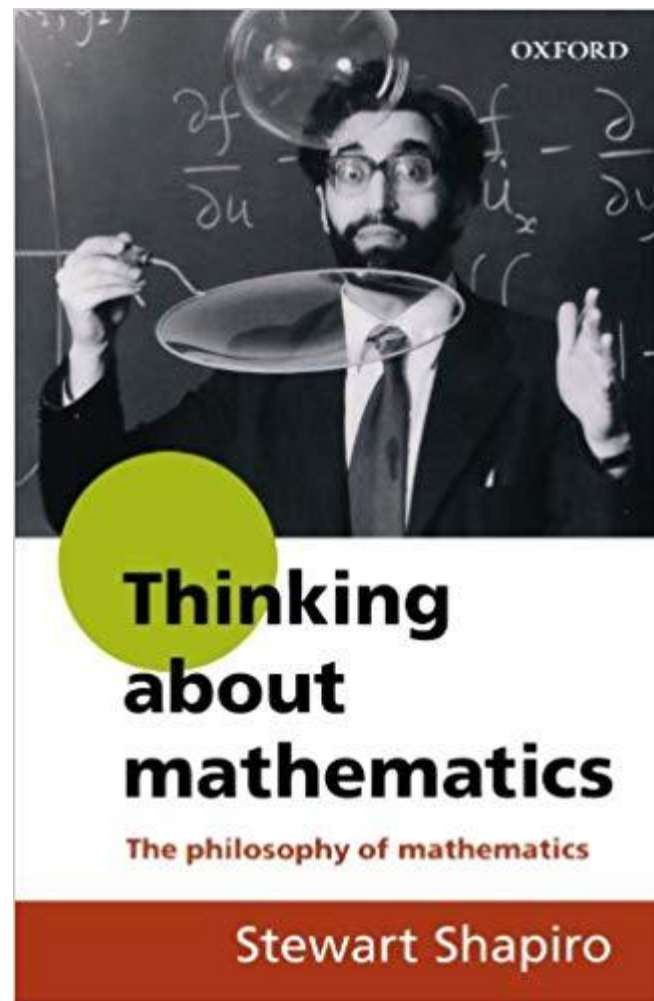


Fig. 3.1. The divided line

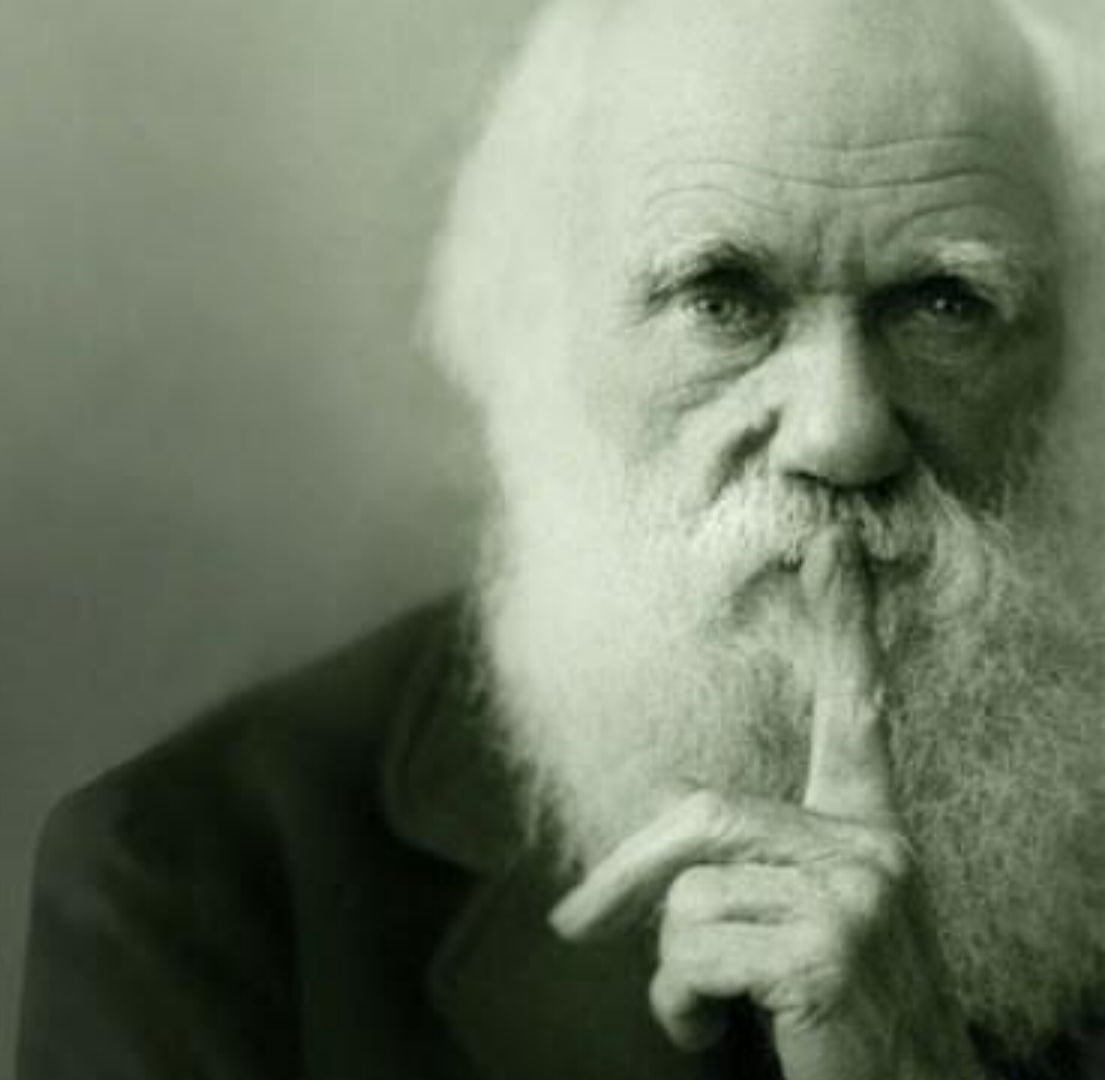




**“How much simpler and more comprehensible the situation would be if we could replace the [non-natural] moral quality with some sort of subjective response which could be causally related to the detection of the natural features on which the supposed quality is said to be consequential” (Mackie 1977: 29; interpolation is mine).**



*Food for thought...*







## Here are some things we know:

1. Many rule-oriented moral judgments (like “Don’t kill!”) are made by emotional mechanisms that played an adaptive role in our evolution ([Greene 2008](#)).
2. Norms and values play a central role in regulating group behavior ([Fukuyama 2001](#)).
3. Cross-cultural evidence suggests an association between the cultural presence of morally concerned deities and large group size in humans ([Norenzayan and Shariff 2008](#)).
4. Larger, cohesive groups outcompete smaller groups (LeBlanc and Katherine 2003).





## Maybe...

Our capacity to make moral judgments (or to have moral drives) evolved.

Tribes with a shared moral faculty were more cooperative, and thus they beat non-moral tribes.

This makes tribes with a moral faculty more adaptive (i.e., evolutionarily fit), making the moral faculty a feature of humans.

Cultural evolution did the rest!

**Even if we accept the view that morality evolved, why can't we call our moral judgments "knowledge", i.e., why skepticism?**



# Justification Skepticism

**Justification skepticism** is the view that moral judgments express beliefs but they are never justified.

In other words, the truth of moral judgments can never be shown to be completely grounded.



“The (moral) realist must hold that an astonishing coincidence took place—claiming that as a matter of sheer luck, evolutionary pressures affected our evaluative attitudes in such a way that they just happened to land on or near *the true normative view* among all the conceptually possible ones” ([Street 2008, 208-9](#)).



**What's more likely?**

**We evolved our moral faculty in a way such that it “tracks the truth” and gives us access to real objective moral properties.**

**—or—**

**We developed a moral faculty because it was adaptive but it doesn't really provide moral knowledge.**

# Moral Skepticism

The strongest form of moral skepticism is the conjunction of three views:

- Non-cognitivism
- Moral error theory
- Justification skepticism

Briefly, it is the view that moral knowledge is impossible.



Although moral skepticism is not very popular in Philosophy (only about 28% of philosophers hold the view per a recent survey), it is popular in other fields...

“Sapiens rule the world because only they can weave an intersubjective web of meaning: a web of laws, forces, entities and places that exist purely in their common imagination. This web allows humans alone to organise crusades, socialist revolutions and human rights movements...

The humanities, in contrast, emphasize the crucial importance of intersubjective entities, which cannot be reduced to hormones and neurons. To think historically means to ascribe real power to the contents of our imaginary stories. Of course, historians don't ignore objective factors such as climate changes and genetic mutations, but they give much greater importance to the stories people invent and believe” (Harari 2017: 150-2).

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Yuval Noah Harari

New York Times Bestselling  
Author of *Sapiens*



# Homo Deus

A Brief History  
of Tomorrow

“Provocative. . . . The handiwork of a gifted thinker.”

—NEW YORK TIMES



