

A Revised Darwinian Dilemma (20180123)

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Introduction

In her paper, “Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” Sharon Street raises a serious problem for what she calls “realist theories of value.”¹ However, in attempting to apply her argument, I have found it necessary to make some amendments and revisions to its details. In this paper, I wish to provide a substantially revised Darwinian Dilemma.²

On “Realism”

The first proposed revision is a matter of semantics.

As somebody who writes for non-philosophers, I find that Street’s claim that describing this as an argument against “realist theories of value” risks generating real and potentially harmful confusion. Her use suggests that value is not real unless it is independent of psychological states. I fear that, outside of philosophy lecture halls (and even within some lecture halls) this translates into a Darwinian argument that morality (and immorality) cannot exist. This fits comfortably into the public narrative that, “Without God, all things are permissible.”

While philosophers tend to be aware of the fact that Street’s claims have no such implication, I think it would be better to use terms not likely to confuse non-philosophers. Consequently, I will call this a “Darwinian dilemma against theories of intrinsic value.” I believe – or, at least, will stipulate – that my use of the term “intrinsic value” applies to what Street wants to call “realism.” She defined “realism” as the view, “that there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes.” (DD p. 110).

I will be using the idea that psychological states – and, in particular, beliefs and desires – are real. The properties of psychological states are real. And relationships between psychological states and other things are real. More specifically, I will be leaning heavily on the idea that beliefs and desires are propositional attitudes.

Desires and “Evaluative Attitudes”

The first premise of Street’s argument states that our evaluative attitudes have been subject to evolutionary forces.

In its first approximation, the opening premise of the Darwinian Dilemma argument is this: the forces of natural selection have had a tremendous influence on the content of human evaluative judgements. (DD p. 113)

She will later refine this first approximation to limit the Darwinian effects to primitive proto-judgments. However, like Street herself, we can put that off for a while.

¹ Street, Sharon (2005). “A Darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value”. *Philosophical Studies* 127 (1):109-166.

² In the next chapter, I wish to examine this version in the light of objections to Street’s original version.

Evolution, to the degree that it had a say in the matter, would favor ancestors who were disposed to judge favorably that which, in judging it favorable, would contribute to evolutionary success. Evolutionary forces would select against attitudes that went against evolutionary fitness.

For example, if one group of creatures adopted a favorable attitude towards actions that resulted in their own deaths or the death of their offspring, and another set adopted a favorable attitude towards its own survival and that of its offspring, only the second group is going to have viable offspring. In evolutionary terms, the “correctness” of the attitude in identifying something that had intrinsic value would not be relevant. Evolution would make its selection based, not on the correctness of attitudes, but on their effects.

Street considered whether there was a connection between that which had real value and that which we evolved a disposition to like or dislike.

If there is no connection, then there being a match between true value to that which we evolved a disposition to like or dislike would require an unlikely coincidence. Plus, it would raise questions of how we could discover this coincidence – whether we could discover a value that went against fitness.

If, on the other hand, there is a connection, the realist must deal with the fact that we do not need to complicate our view of how we came to approve of these things by including these independent truths. They are unnecessary.

In light of this, my second proposed revision to Street’s Darwinian Dilemma concerns the “human evaluative judgments” or “evaluative attitudes” that evolution has worked on. Street uses two phrases apparently interchangeably: “evaluative judgments” and “evaluative attitudes.”

Street described “evaluative attitudes” as follows:

Evaluative attitudes I understand to include states such as desires, attitudes of approval and disapproval, unreflective evaluative tendencies such as the tendency to experience X as counting in favor of or demanding Y, and consciously or unconsciously held evaluative judgements, such as judgements about what is a reason for what, about what one should or ought to do, about what is good, valuable, or worthwhile, about what is morally right or wrong, and so on.

I want to pluck “desires” out of this list and set the others aside. I will deal with them later.

The thesis that I want to look at states that desires have been subjected to evolutionary pressure and, as a result, it is unreasonable to believe that what we want and do not want has some sort of intrinsic value.

The term “desire” itself is ambiguous. We use it to refer to both (1) that which we value as an end or for its own sake, and (2) that which we value as a means to some end or as a part of some end (the way a segment of the Mona Lisa has value in virtue of being a part of the whole).

We want a hammer so that we can use it to pound nails. We wish to pound nails because we wish to build a shelter. We wish to build a shelter so that we can stay warm in the winter. We wish to stay warm in the winter because . . . well, we just do.

The first three desires (wants, wishes) – for the hammer, to pound nails, and the shelter – are desires-as-means. In these cases, we want these things for the sake of something else. These are “desires-as-means.” Ultimately, the objects of desire have their value in virtue of their ability to realizing a state in which we are comfortably warm when we would not otherwise be.

The last item on the list – the desire for a comfortable temperature – is a “desire-as-end”. We want it for its own sake, and not for the sake of something else. The desire-as-end (comfort) provides the motivation for all of the other actions. Take away the desire for comfort in winter, and you take away the reason to buy a hammer and use it to pound nails so as to build a shelter.

When I claim that desires are subject to evolutionary forces, I am interested only in desires-as-ends for the time being. I would like to separate these from desires-as-means and leave the latter type of desire in the same bin with the other "evaluative attitudes" mentioned above. Later, I will argue that they belong together.

In the meantime, I want to revise Street’s Darwinian Dilemma by applying it only to desires-as-ends. The types of desires-as-ends that I have in mind includes hunger, thirst, the aversion to pain, desire for sex, our preferences for particular foods (e.g., high-fat, high-calorie), comfort (in terms of not being too hot or too cold), friendships and companionship, and the well-being of one’s offspring.

It seems reasonable to believe that these “evaluative attitudes,” at least, have been subjected to evolutionary pressure and are unlikely to be evaluative attitudes that pick out something of intrinsic worth for the reasons Street gives. This may be true of other evaluative judgments as well – though I will argue that they are not. At the very least, evolutionary forces are certainly applicable here.

This is not to say that all of our desires-as-ends are of this type. In a later section I will discuss learned desires-as-ends. However, even with them, evolution is going to also have an influence on the mechanisms for learning new desire-as-ends, disposing us to acquire ends that promote genetic replication over ends that pick out some evolution-independent value fact.

I will address those concerns later. For the moment, I wish merely to establish that I am applying Street’s Darwinian Dilemma only to desires-as-ends such as the aversion to pain, desire for sex, and food preferences, as well as desires-as-ends that we acquire through activation of a reward system that evolution has also fine-tuned.

Given this limited application, I now want to say a bit more about these desires-as-ends.

Beliefs, Desires, and Propositional Attitudes

I have stated that I am going to limit the application of Street’s Darwinian dilemma to desires-as-ends.

Before I continue, I want to say some things about these desires-as-ends.

Desires – and beliefs – are propositional attitudes. They are mental states that we can express in the form:

[Agent] [attitude] that [proposition]

So, we have examples like:

Jim believes that Joan went to the movies.

Mira hopes that the weather remains good through the weekend.

Tully thinks that it is going to rain.

Zach loves that they will all be together for the holidays.

We can divide propositional attitudes into two main camps – beliefs and desires.

The primary difference between the two is the “direction of fit”. If Agent believes that P, and P is false, then Agent should change her belief to fit the world. However, if Agent desires that P, and P is false, then Agent has a motivating reason to change the world.

By way of example, if Alice believes that she owns a red car, and her car is blue, then she should change her belief so that she believes that she owns a blue car. However, if Alice owns a red car and wants to own a blue car she has a motivating reason to buy a blue car, or get her car painted.

A “desire that P” is fulfilled if and only if the proposition “P” is made or kept true. In other words, a “desire that P” provides the agent with a motivating reason to realize any state of affairs in which “P” is true. Alice’s desire to own a blue car is fulfilled in any state of affairs where the proposition, “Alice owns a blue car” is made true – by buying a blue car, getting her car painted, or obtaining one as a gift.

Robert Nozick’s Experience Machine

The account of desire that I gave above has applications for Robert Nozick’s “Experience Machine” thought experiment.

Nozick asks us to imagine that there is a machine that will provide us with whatever experience we want. Do you want to be a successful parent raising happy and healthy children? The experience machine will provide you with input that will make you think that you are a successful parent raising happy and healthy children. Do you think you would enjoy going to a poor country and fighting poverty or disease? Step into the experience machine and it will make you think that you are in a poor country fighting poverty and disease.³

The issue with the experience machine is that some people find it unappealing.

The model of desire presented above suggests that whether an agent will find the experience machine appealing will depend on the propositions that are the objects of the agent’s desires-as-ends, and whether the Experience Machine can make those propositions true. If one desires to be in a poor country fighting poverty and disease, then one has a desire that the Experience Machine cannot fulfill. It can only be fulfilled by realizing a state in which the proposition, “I am in a poor country fighting poverty and disease” is made or kept true, and the machine cannot make it true.

On the other hand, if the agent desires the pleasure of thinking of himself as being in a poor country fighting poverty and disease, then this is something that the Experience Machine can provide. The

³ Nozick, Robert (1974). *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books. pp. 42–45

Experience Machine can make the proposition, “I think that I am in a poor country fighting poverty and disease” true, so this agent has a reason to enter the Experience Machine.

I believe that Nozick’s experience machine thought experiment gives reason to believe that at least some agents have at least some desires that the Experience Machine cannot fulfill. Consequently, the thesis that we only desire our own happiness, or our own pleasure and freedom from pain, are probably false for at least some people. Some people desire other things – things that they cannot get from the Experience Machine.

Reason the Slave of the Passions

The account of belief and desire that I gave above is fundamentally a Humean theory of motivation. It supports, for example, Hume’s thesis that:

*Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.*⁴

I take this to be true in the sense that desires pick out the ends or goals of intentional actions, and it is reason’s job to play the part of the dutiful servant in discovering how to realize those ends and carrying out that plan.

Reason is not to be envied. It serves multiple masters with competing agendas. Sometimes it’s masters actively aim to thwart other desires as the desire for health conspires with the desire to look good to thwart the desire to have more chocolate cake by making sure there is no chocolate cake in the house. Yet, reason has to constantly be looking for ways to keep all of its masters happy.

On this Humean model, while beliefs can be true or false, desires cannot be. There are no “correct” or “incorrect” desires – or, more precisely, there are no correct desires-as-ends per se.

The value of Street’s argument, properly revised, is that it provides support for this part of Hume’s thesis. Her “Darwinian dilemma” provides a reason to accept the claim that there are no “correct” or “incorrect” desires-as-ends. She shows that what we know about evolution supports the hypothesis that there is no external evaluative “truth” for desires to correspond to in the way that beliefs correspond to an external reality. The “ends” of our desires-as-ends do not have intrinsic value. They are simply those things, the desiring of which, caused our ancestors to have offspring who eventually had us.

Sharon Street’s Proto-Evaluative Judgments

Above, I said that I was going to pull “desires-as-ends” out of Street’s list of evaluative attitudes and apply her Darwinian dilemma only to them. Street herself argued that her Darwinian dilemma did not apply to all evaluative attitudes, only to the basic and most fundamental attitudes. However, all other attitudes are “contaminated” by this basic evolution-influenced set.

My point here is instead the simple and plausible one that had the general content of our basic evaluative tendencies been very different, then the general content of our

⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1896 ed.) [1739], Online at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hume-a-treatise-of-human-nature>, Last accessed, January 19, 2018.

full-fledged evaluative judgements would also have been very different, and in loosely corresponding ways. (DD p. 120)

Recall that Street expressed a first approximation of her first premise as:

The forces of natural selection have had a tremendous influence on the content of human evaluative judgements.

She then noted that this initial formulation had a couple of problems. Specifically, it is not reasonable to believe that “reflective, linguistically-infused capacity to judge that one thing counts in favor of another” (1) have a genetic basis (DD p. 118), or (2) emerged early enough for evolutionary forces to choose winners and losers. (DD p. 118-9)

Instead, she suggested that evolution acted upon "more basic evaluative tendencies" that:

...may be understood very roughly as an unreflective, non-linguistic, motivational tendency to experience something as 'called for' or 'demanded' in itself, or to experience one thing as 'calling for' or 'counting in favor of' something else. (DD p. 119)

Please note that Street is describing two different types of evaluative judgments here.

There is:

- (1) an unreflective, non-linguistic, motivational tendency to experience something as 'called for' or 'demanded' in itself, and
- (2) to experience one thing as 'calling for' or 'counting in favor of' something else.

These are the two types of judgments that Street argues that evolution could have acted on – or, at least, the primitive proto-version of each.

In limiting the target of Street’s Darwinian dilemma to desires-as-ends, I am limiting them to Type (1) judgments. Desires-as-ends make it the case that realizing the object of a “desire that P” – that is, making or keeping the proposition “P” true – is done for its own sake, and not the sake of something else. These include avoiding pain, eating, drinking, seeing to the welfare of one’s offspring, sharing the company of friends, and the like.

Type (1) Evaluative Judgments

We can easily see the impact of evolution on these Type (1) values. Since the invention of sex, not one of your ancestors died a virgin. None absolutely refused to eat or to remain hydrated. The awfulness of pain became more reliably associated with that which threatened their evolutionary success. From the point that your ancestors produced offspring incapable of surviving alone at birth, every one of them found somebody willing to care for them until they could take care of themselves.

Consequently, Street's Darwinian dilemma is applicable here. Biologists can explain our acquisition of these desires-as-ends, such as the evolution of the aversion to pain, without ever once mentioning intrinsic value properties. We have no reason to postulate their existence. Whether we say that they do not exist, or that they might exist but we cannot know about them, the practical effect is the same. We can dismiss them as being of no practical importance.

However, it is not fully accurate to characterize desires-as-ends as a “tendency to experience something as ‘called for’ or ‘demanded’ in itself.

I do not actually experience my desire for another slice of that chocolate cake sitting in the kitchen as a case of the slice of cake “calling for” me or “demanding” that I eat it. That would be quite odd. If I try to explain to my wife that I took the last piece that she had been saving for her lunch (and had asked me not to eat) because the cake demanded this of me, she would be neither amused nor understanding. I took the cake because I wanted it. It was my want that caused the cake to be eaten, not something in the cake – or the eating of the cake – doing something called “calling” or “demanding”.

If there is a “perception” that the object of evaluation “calls for” or “demands” something of the agent, it is the same type of perception as the perception that the earth is the center of the universe. We are making assumptions that are not entirely accurate.

Perceiving these ends as something “calling” to us or making demands of us potentially leads to a further mistake that can be serious. If somebody perceives the value in the object “calling for” or “demanding” some action, this suggests that, if others do not feel the same pull, then there is something wrong with them. They are defective in some way. However, if the cause of the motivation is correctly identified as something in the agent, there is no such mistake. The fact that somebody else has a different set of motivations is no more a “mistake” than the fact that somebody else has a different blood type, age, or gender.

Although many of our desires-as-ends likely are built on a genetic foundation, some of them are learned. They come about through our interactions with our environment. I will have more to say about learned Type (1) evaluative judgments a little later. For now, I would like to look at Type (2) evaluative judgments.

Type (2) Evaluative Judgments

I have looked at desires-as-ends and shown how evolution may have influenced their development.

So far in this discussion, I have set aside Street’s second type of evaluative judgment, which I have called Type (2) evaluative judgments:

Type (2): to experience one thing as 'calling for' or 'counting in favor of' something else

This phrase contains some ambiguity.

Option 1: On this interpretation, this type of evaluative judgment states what is, in fact, a simple implication of the first type of judgment. A Type (1) judgment says that a state is valued “in itself”. Under this first option, a Type (2) judgment recognizes those things that help to bring about or are a part of that which is valued “in itself”. Where avoiding pain is judged to have value in itself, then avoiding pain “calls for” or “demands” any other action that will help to prevent it being the case that one is in pain. It “demands” that one not put their hand in a bed of hot coals, that this will cause some painful burns.

Option 2: On this interpretation, experiencing something as having value “in itself” is one type of judgment, and experiencing it as a reason for doing something else that will help bring it about is a different judgment. For example, experiencing pain as something to be avoided in itself represents one

type of evaluative judgment. Experiencing pain as something to be avoided by not sticking one's hand in a bed of hot coals is a different type of evaluative judgment.

I wish to reject Option 2. If we accept that interpretation, then we are going to need a great many Type (2) judgments. For example, we would need a new Type (2) judgment for each and everything that the end of avoiding pain gives an agent a reason to do or to avoid doing. Option 1 says it is sufficient to have an aversion to pain combined with learning the fact that a bee's sting is painful to adopt the attitude that avoiding pain counts as a reason to avoid bothering bees. Option 2 on the other hand says that, in addition to this, we need a new and distinct that avoiding pain calls for or demands leaving bees alone.

There is simply no reason to make the situation this complicated. We should go with the simpler option. No additional evaluative judgment is needed to understand that avoiding pain provides one with a reason to leave bees alone. One only needs the Type (1) judgment and beliefs relating the state of bothering bees to the state of being in pain.

Of course, beliefs can be mistaken. A parent can falsely believe that avoiding autism in a child provides a reason to avoid childhood vaccinations. This judgment depends on a false assumption that there is a link between childhood vaccinations and autism. But there is a fact of the matter – a truth value to be discovered. The parent does not have an actual reason to avoid vaccinating her child, she falsely believes she has a reason.

Furthermore, these reasons to perform or forego some option are not always sufficient reasons. The pain that will follow surgery is a reason to avoid surgery, but it is a reason that may be outweighed by other reasons to have the surgery – such as surviving to have the future experiences that one wants to have, or to contribute to the realization of other ends that one wants to realize.

All things considered, after separating desires-as-ends from everything else in Street's bin of evaluative attitudes and showing that it makes sense to say that they have been subject to evolutionary modification, the next revision that I wish to propose is that all other types of evaluative judgments have a truth value. They relate objects of evaluations to the "ends" of Type (1) judgments, and there is a fact of the matter concerning the existence (or not) of these relationships.

Whether something Y counts as a means to some end X or counts as a part of that some end X is a matter of fact.

If a creature actually does have ends that promote its evolutionary fitness – such as the aversion to pain (where pains are associated with states that tend to threaten or destroy fitness), hunger, thirst, comfort, concern for one's offspring, and the like – then it would be a good idea to develop a faculty that can reliably discover these true relationships between things that the agent can bring about and those ends. Failure to discover the truth of these relationship can be costly, resulting in painful states that also threaten fitness, hunger, dehydration, and the like.

If an agent is generally mistaken in what realizes these desires-as-ends (i.e., fails to realize that severe burns are going to be painful, or that a particular plant can be safely eaten, or that a predator is a threat to the safety of her offspring), then that agent will fail to realize (make real) the relevant end. If evolution has selected that end in virtue of its capacity to contribute to evolutionary fitness, then failure to realize that a particular course of action will help to realize that end is a threat to evolutionary fitness. Under these conditions, we may expect evolution to develop some faculty that accurately determines

and tracks the truth of these relationships between that which is in the agent's control and the fulfillment or thwarting those ends.

Note that this is not a refutation of Street's thesis. The truth of Type (2) judgments is still a truth about the relationship between objects of evaluation and ends that nature has selected through hundreds of millions of years of evolution. Change the ends, and the truth of the relationships between the objects of evaluations and those ends will also change. If we evolved differently, then that which has value given our current evolved dispositions need not have value under our new dispositions.

If we look at many moral claims, they appear to be Type (1) claims. A moral claim may be understood as a judgment that the fact that something is taking the property of another without her consent is a reason not to take it, or that the fact that a statement is untrue is a reason not to profess it, or the fact that somebody needs help is a reason to help him. The best understanding of these types of judgments is that they identify ends. Theft and dishonesty are to be disvalued in themselves, as helping others is to be valued for itself.

However, moral evaluations do not appear to be judgments like the aversion to pain or a preference for more salt on one's mashed potatoes. In fact, there appears to be something nonsensical about such an assertion. It is not generally considered valid reasoning to say, for example, "I have evolved to feel justified in killing people like you; therefore, you deserve to die." Or, similarly, "I have evolved to feel justified in harming people like you – punishing people like you; therefore, you deserve to be harmed or punished." If moral judgments are Type (1) judgments, they are a different sort of Type (1) judgment than the type already discussed.

Learned Type (1) Values

Among humans and among, at least, complex mammals, natural evolved ends are not the only ends we have. We have the capacity to acquire new ends - new desires and aversions - as well as experience some modification to our natural ends (e.g., food preferences). These modifications to our ends come about through our interactions with our environment.

For example, eating a particular type of plant makes a creature sick. After eating such a plant, the creature associates the smell of that plant with the nausea and comes to dislike the smell itself. The animal does not avoid the smell as a means to avoiding the plant and the nausea that comes from eating it.

The animal cannot even comprehend such complex relationships. Rather, evolution has built the creature in such a way that, when the plant causes nausea, the creature acquires a simple aversion to the smell that it associates with the feeling of nausea. This new learned end – the end of avoiding that particular smell – becomes yet another end to add to the ends the creature has such as the aversion to pain, hunger, thirst, and concern for the well-being of its offspring. It becomes another reason for action.

When the creature acquires this new end, a number of propositions relating other potential objects of evaluation to this new end become true (or false). The end of avoiding the smell of this plant becomes a reason to avoid that area by the stream where the plant grows, and a reason to stay upwind of that collection of plants.

Where some of the ends that a creature acquires are acquired through interaction with the environment, creatures in that environment can use this to alter the behavior of that creature – causing

it to act in ways that suit its own purposes. Consider, again, the poisonous plant in the example above. The consuming creature's property of acquiring an aversion to that which causes it to feel ill means that, if the plant should evolve the capacity to make the creature feel ill, then the plant has evolved a way of preventing itself from being eaten. It does not need to kill the consuming creature – just give it an upset stomach, and the potential predator will learn from that.

We can see examples of creatures acquiring traits to take advantage of the capacity for learned ends in others in creatures that mimic the features of those entities that “teach” other creatures in the environment to behave in particular ways. For example, some species of beetles look like bees.⁵ Predators that have acquired an aversion to bees leave the look-alike beetles alone as well.

More sophisticated animals that find themselves in an environment filled with creatures capable of developing learned ends can exploit this fact in more sophisticated ways. A creature can cause other creatures in its environment to acquire certain ends useful to that creature by giving the other rewards such as food, sex, or grooming to those whose behavior it finds useful. Similarly, it can respond to behavior that threatens its ends with a swipe of the paw, snarling, threatening displays, and similar actions that may create in others an aversion to performing that type of behavior.

Creatures with a human level of sophistication can ask, “Which ends do we have reason to promote?”

When a creature asks this question, it combines facts about Type (1) and Type (2) evaluative judgments. It is evaluating ends – Type (1) values. However, it is asking about their usefulness – the Type (2) value of a Type (1) judgment. In asking Type (2) questions about various ends, it is asking questions that have a truth value, though it is a truth about the relationships between the end being evaluated and the other ends the agent may have or have reason to acquire.

Earlier, I said that Type (1) values cannot be “correct” or “incorrect”, I must now make a qualification to that statement. Type (2) questions asked about a learned end, concerning the reasons that exist (or not), can be correct or incorrect. When we are talking about learned ends, we have reason to ask Type (2) questions about the effects of teaching others to acquire these ends. We can make correct or incorrect claims about the reasons that exist for promoting or inhibiting learned ends in others.

An example that I use to illustrate this relationship imagines a community of individuals each with an aversion to their own pain. These individuals also have the ability to promote in others an aversion to causing pain by praising those who refrain from actions that cause pain and condemning those who cause pain. Their own aversion to pain gives them a reason to use these tools to promote universally – in all others, or at least as many others as they can effectively teach – an aversion to causing pain.

Those who acquire this aversion to causing pain come to acquire this as a second end – alongside their end of avoiding personal pain. They become reluctant to consider options that will result in causing pain to others, not because they seek to avoid punishment or obtain a reward, but because they simply do not like causing pain to others.

⁵ Bee Mimic Beetle – *Trichiotinas Assimilis*, BugGuide, <https://bugguide.net/node/view/21492>, Last accessed January 20, 2018.

In the discussion of Type (2) values, I stated that I wanted to set aside for the moment the fact that moral values seem to be concerned with ends, and yet they seem to be significantly different from preferences such as wanting more salt on one's mashed potatoes.

Here, we can see some of that difference. There are certain ends that are not evolved preference but, instead, are learned ends. More to the point, they are taught ends – ends that people generally have reason to promote using the tools made available by the fact that our ends are determined, in part, by our interactions with our environment. A person with an aversion to pain has a reason to cause others to acquire, as an end, an aversion to causing pain. A person seeking to be secure in his property has reason to promote, universally, an aversion to taking property without consent. These are ends – and, as such, they cannot be correct or incorrect in themselves. However, people can make true or false statements about whether people generally have reasons to promote such desires and aversions universally. There is a fact of the matter.

Once again, I want to make it clear that this does not refute Street's thesis. It is still the case that the value of the aversion to causing pain to others is found in its relationship to the evolutionarily acquired aversion to pain. Without the aversion to pain, there would be no reason to promote an aversion to causing pain in others. Consequently, the value of the aversion to causing pain is not independent of all of our other values.

This sense in which statements about learned ends can be correct or incorrect allows us one way to make sense of statements that Street makes concerning the practice of “reflective equilibrium”.

Reflective Equilibrium

In creating her Darwinian Dilemma, Street wrote:

Any full explanation of why human beings accept the evaluative judgements we do would need to make reference to the large influence of rational reflection. (DD p. 123)

The discussion of learned ends in the previous section provides a basis for this rational reflection in a universe where there are no intrinsic values. The possibility of acquired ends, accompanied by our capacity to determine which ends are acquired, gives us reason to ask, “Which ends do we have the most and strongest reasons to promote universally?” This becomes an important question.

However, the answer to this question does not depend on looking for ends that identify something of intrinsic worth. The answer to this question depends on learning the relationships between a potentially acquired end, other acquired ends, and natural ends that evolution has given us.

The example I provided above, in which a community of individuals with an aversion to pain each has reason to promote a universal aversion to causing pain, is an example that works at the foundation of reflective equilibrium. The value of the aversion to causing pain to others is grounded on the aversion to pain, which gives people reason to identify a community of individuals reluctant to or eager to cause pain to others “good” or “bad”.

Extra work needs to be done because learned ends need not only be evaluated in terms of their relationship to basic, evolved ends, but their relationship to other learned ends. Acquiring an aversion to harming others may leave an individual incapable of acting when he or some other innocent person is

under attack. It gives violent oppressors a free hand, which gives us reason to qualify the aversion we cause in others to doing harm with an exception for acts that protect the innocent.

As Street says:

[W]hat rational reflection about evaluative matters involves, inescapably, is assessing some evaluative judgements in terms of others. Rational reflection must always proceed from some evaluative standpoint; it must work from some evaluative premises; it must treat some evaluative judgements as fixed, if only for the time being, as the assessment of other evaluative judgements is undertaken. (DD p. 124).

Conclusion

My objective here has been to offer a revised version of Sharon Street's Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value.

First, I do not want to describe it as a dilemma for realist theories of value, since I fear that this will confuse a great many people. It is an argument against intrinsic values – values that exist in the world independent of the desires of agents. Intrinsic values do not exist or, at best, we have no reason to believe we can learn what they are if they do exist. However, values can be real without being independent of our likes and dislikes. After all, our likes and dislikes are real.

Second, I sought to distinguish different types of evaluative judgments. Specifically, I sought to distinguish “desires-as-ends” from “desires-as-means” and other forms of value that can be expressed in the form, “X counts as a reason in favor of Y.”

Third, I wished to replace the idea that the object of a desire-as-ends “call for” or “demand” a response on our part with the idea that the desire pushes us to realize (or to avoid the realization of) a state that realizes (makes real) what we desire or prevent the realization of that to which we have an aversion.

Fourth, I wish to endorse Street's claim that there is a set of desires-as-ends that have been subjected to evolutionary pressure and are unlikely to take, as their object, states having an intrinsic desire-independent merit. They are simply things that we have evolved a disposition to like or dislike grounded on the fact that in liking (or disliking) them our more distant ancestors produced our less distant ancestors, eventually resulting in us.

Fifth, the rest of Street's evaluative judgments relate objects of evaluation to these ends (and each other). These relationships have a truth value, and – if the ends we acquire truly do promote evolutionary fitness – it is not unreasonable to speculate that we evolved the capacity to acquire a relatively accurate understanding of these relationships between objects of evaluation and natural ends.

Sixth, there is a category of “acquired ends” which are like natural ends in that they cannot be “correct” or “incorrect”. However, like Street's other evaluative judgments, we can ask whether and to what degree it makes sense to acquire these ends or to cause others to acquire them. In some cases, there may be acquired ends (e.g., the aversion to causing pain to others) that people generally have reasons to promote as universal ends.

Seventh, the practice of determining the truth value of these relationships between acquired ends and other ends, and thus determining the reasons to encourage or discourage their adoption, is captured in the practice of “reflective equilibrium”.

In total, this does not refute Street's thesis. If the facts of Darwinian evolution are roughly correct, they give us reason to doubt that there are desire-independent values or, if there are, that we can know what they are. However, we can learn the facts of the matter regarding acquired ends and other ends, and use these facts to determine which acquirable ends to encourage people to acquire and which acquirable ends to discourage. These questions have true and false answers, though the answers still depend ineliminably on their relationships between evolved and other acquired ends.