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## Natural Law, Biological Knowledge, and The Claims of Evolutionary Ethics

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JOHN LIPTAY

## NATURAL LAW, BIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND THE CLAIMS OF EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

**Abstract.** This paper investigates the claim that developments in biological sciences require us to abandon the account of moral norms advanced by natural law theory and to embrace some version of evolutionary ethics. A brief sketch of a contemporary statement of evolutionary ethics is followed by a consideration of the two fundamental ways in which it opposes the natural law account. Both of these objections are shown to misfire: first, positing a sceptical position fails to attend to what is implicitly affirmed in the critique of ethical objectivity, and, second, the criticism of natural law's account of marital sexual acts proceeds by way of misunderstanding. While the natural law account of moral norms is not undermined, evolutionary ethics itself is found to be untenable.

**Keywords:** natural law, evolutionary ethics, ethical naturalism, ethical objectivity, is-ought fallacy, ethical scepticism, moral absolutes, sexual ethics

1. Michael Ruse's Evolutionary Ethics. 2. Critical Examination of Ruse's Position. 3. Conclusion.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* addresses a "genuine crisis" in contemporary moral thinking and living, constituted by the rejection of the universal and permanently valid precepts of natural law and thus by the attempt to undermine moral theology's very foundations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*, Vatican translation, Éditions Paulines, QC, Sherbrooke 1993, 4–5.

As the principles and precepts of natural law are thought to be available to reason, philosophers working within the natural law tradition have done much recently to shore up the natural law account and to respond to various objections against it, particularly in respect to those *false solutions* referred to by the Holy Father as “consequentialism” and “proportionalism.”<sup>2</sup> But the dialectical task of responding to objections to natural law theory and its commitments to exceptionless moral norms is, in the nature of the case, ongoing and open-ended. In this paper, accordingly, I turn my attention to evolutionary ethics, not necessarily because it represents a plausible alternative to thinking about ethics, but (i) because its practitioners take great interest in the claims of natural law theory and seek to impugn them – directly or indirectly – in each of the two ways available to them, and (ii) because of the possibility that, in the minds of some, evolutionary ethics may come to be regarded as being worthy of acceptance through its association with the science of evolution. I hope to show that it is neither (ii) deserving of this regard, nor (i) a cause of concern to the natural law theorist. I proceed by first setting out briefly the normative and metaethical commitments of an important contemporary statement of evolutionary ethics, in order to highlight the precise nature of the challenge to the natural law account, and then identify a number of decisive deficiencies with it. I conclude that it is a mistake to think that recent developments in the biological sciences require a reformulation or new understanding of the propositions advanced by natural law theory.

## 1. MICHAEL RUSE’S EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

Ethics is ‘evolutionary’ when it seeks to derive normative propositions from and to ground them in the insights into human nature and behavior that the theory of evolution allegedly provides. So understood, evolutionary ethics has a long history in which one finds numerous versions advancing significantly different substantive ethical claims. But the evolutionary ethicist who has done perhaps more than any other to advance the cause of this approach – Michael Ruse – has recently argued

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 75. For criticism of these doctrines, see J. Finnis, *Fundamental of Ethics*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C. 1983, 80–135.

that all these ‘traditional’ approaches fail insofar as, metaethically, they rely on some conception of progress, which cannot be defended, or involve an illicit move from what *is* the case to what *ought* to be the case.<sup>3</sup> Ruse’s claim is that recent “advances in biological science” allow for the articulation of an evolutionary ethics that avoids the metaethical failings of all earlier statements.<sup>4</sup>

According to the new scientific claims, human beings, like other species, cooperate with one another to attain a specific biological result, namely, that of maximizing the genetic material passed on to subsequent generations.<sup>5</sup> Such cooperation has led to success, survival, and the production of more offspring, and hence we should regard ‘altruism’ – the cooperation involved in achieving one’s biological ends – as something that has arisen within our species through evolution.<sup>6</sup> But human beings cooperate to achieve this biological result in a unique way: for the form that our cooperation takes is that of thinking and acting in ethical ways.<sup>7</sup> We cooperate to achieve our biological ends because we believe we *ought* to cooperate to achieve these ends.<sup>8</sup> While admitting that this last claim is somewhat “speculative” in nature, Ruse also thinks it can stand as an empirical fact.<sup>9</sup> Human beings are moral, then, for a simple reason: “[we] are moral because our genes, as fashioned by natural selection, fill us full of thoughts about being moral.”<sup>10</sup> Even so, the moral thoughts that our genes fill us with refer only to the most fundamental of our moral beliefs – something akin to a “deep universal moral grammar” –, whereas they are variously applied or expressed in function of the culture or particular society to which one belongs.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, 170–174. Also M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, in: *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. P. Singer, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1991, 501–502.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, op. cit., 502.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 504.

<sup>11</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 176.

Normative morality can, accordingly, be understood as a social contract established by evolution to serve the biological interest of the human species,<sup>12</sup> as coinciding with “common-sense morality,”<sup>13</sup> and as consisting of a “fairly conventional set of rules.”<sup>14</sup> Given the emphasis on being treated fairly and on reciprocity (so as to avoid free-riders), Ruse, like that other contractarian, Hobbes, finds a fundamental role for the Love Commandment.<sup>15</sup> We are not given any further detailed account of the specific norms that are to govern our social behavior, however, as Ruse maintains that concerning ordinary, everyday affairs there is much agreement between rival and alternative moral philosophies, and where there is disagreement he thinks it is explicable in terms of different understandings of the relevant facts.<sup>16</sup>

The metaethical upshot of conceiving morality as an adaptation is that, once we have affirmed that morality has been adopted as the uniquely human strategy for pursuing the biological ends of the species, nothing more can or need be said. Morality simply is a biological adaptation to serve reproductive ends, and otherwise has no foundations at all.<sup>17</sup> To this extent, the belief in a morality that is objectively true is nothing but a “collective illusion,”<sup>18</sup> and there is no way in which it can be rationally justified or vindicated – although from within one’s normative system, propositions can be judged true or false.<sup>19</sup> Morality is constituted, then, by a set of substantive claims that serve to foster human biological ends, but which in no sense can be considered ‘true’ or ‘objective’ in themselves. For this reason, human biology not only accounts for the moral beliefs that we happen to have, it serves to maintain these beliefs within us by deceiving us.<sup>20</sup> By thus ‘making’ us ascribe to moral beliefs, our biology lends these beliefs a sense of objectivity

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<sup>12</sup> M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, op. cit., 505.

<sup>13</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 176.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 180; M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, op. cit., 506.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 181.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

that they do not and cannot really have. So, while morality cannot be otherwise than it is or as it must be (given our biology), it nonetheless is radically subjective and non-realist,<sup>21</sup> and merely has “an aura of objectivity,” which keeps us in our place as we continue to believe that moral norms are binding on us.<sup>22</sup>

Ruse’s commitment to ethical scepticism does not undermine his belief that new scientific claims regarding homosexual orientation have a bearing on certain moral theories, singling out for examination and criticism natural law. In the ensuing discussion, he raises objections to the moral norms governing same-sex sexual relations in natural law theory, and advances a corrective from the standpoint of evolutionary biology. As Ruse understands it, the basic claim of natural law is that “what one should do is that which is natural, because that is how God has made things and intends them to be used.”<sup>23</sup> He finds this premise operative in Aquinas’ argument that same-sex sexual acts are immoral, inasmuch as Aquinas affirms that human acts have a proper end that they should attain and that, since semen is emitted for reproductive purposes, so the sexual act should be directed to reproduction as its proper, natural end.<sup>24</sup> As they cannot be so directed, homosexual acts are deemed “unnatural vices” – a position, Ruse notes, that is still maintained by natural law thinkers. Ruse proposes to criticize the natural law account on its own terms, and the way to do so, he thinks, is to show that the behavior – homosexual sexual acts – is natural. For if such behavior is natural, then, in view of the natural law premise that “what one should do is that which is natural”, it is permissible, and natural law theory is mistaken in proscribing it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>22</sup> M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, op. cit., 508.

<sup>23</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 210.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. The relevant text in Aquinas is *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 122.

<sup>25</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 211. Ruse develops a parallel case against the natural law opposition to the use of artificial contraception in *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 210–212. As he adopts the same strategy on both these issues, it will be sufficient to evaluate it as deployed in the case of same-sex sexual acts.

## 2. CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF RUSE'S POSITION

According to Ruse's evolutionary ethics, then, our biology allegedly does two things: (1) it informs us as to the nature of certain moral dictates at the level of normative ethics, and (2) it deceives us into thinking that moral dictates are objective, whereas in reality morality has no foundation. Developments in evolutionary biology, moreover, (3) require a more permissive sexual ethic than what the natural law tradition allows for. Thus, Ruse argues explicitly against the natural law account insofar as it considers same-sex sexual relations immoral, and implicitly against it, but more generally against all forms of ethical realism, that there is no such thing as an objective moral order. He contends, on the one hand, that natural law theory should allow that same-sex sexual acts are moral, but, on the other hand, that there is no objective truth at stake here, so that this judgment can be considered true only within the natural law framework.

It must simply be said, however, that Ruse has not made good on his claims against the natural law account. Turning first to (1) Ruse's characterization of normative ethics, the natural thinker will obviously agree that the Love Commandment has a fundamental role in our moral thinking, as fairness in one's dealings with others is plainly essential to upright moral living. But on the natural law account, the Love Commandment does not stand on its own and must be augmented and complemented by additional practical and moral principles. That the Love Commandment cannot stand on its own is clear from the fact that one can harm, or act immorally with respect to, another without treating them unfairly, when one is willing to harm oneself in the same way that one harms the other (e.g., in cases of drug or alcohol abuse).<sup>26</sup> The Love Commandment's concern for fairness is also not what is primarily at stake when one is reflecting on moral goodness as it bears upon oneself and upon acts involving oneself alone, for one can clearly harm oneself,

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<sup>26</sup> See G. Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life*, Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL 1993, 322–323.

and so act immorally, in ways that involve no unfairness to others.<sup>27</sup> Hence, in order to take better account of the range and complexity of moral issues, one finds a natural law thinker like Aquinas articulating both first practical principles specifying goods to be pursued and first moral principles directing the manner in which these goods are to be pursued, from which moral principles are derived more specific moral norms – as in the Decalogue – which identify certain human acts as intrinsically evil.<sup>28</sup> By bringing these principles and precepts to bear upon one's choices and actions, they are made to accord with reason. In relying solely on the Love Commandment, however, evolutionary ethics simply cannot provide the requisite guidance for moral reflection and living.

Ruse also suggests that the evolutionary ethics approach to normative morality will coincide with common-sense morality and issue in a fairly conventional set of moral rules. One might quibble with the assumption that there is such a thing as common-sense morality and a fairly conventional set of rules upon which most moral philosophies and plain persons agree, as the opposite assumption, of interminable moral disagreement, is perhaps a better characterization of what we find in the contemporary context.<sup>29</sup> Leaving this issue to the side, however, there is the deeper problem of accepting uncritically the deliverances of one's culture, community, or society. Natural law thinkers point out that this procedure involves an illicit inference from propositions about what is the case to propositions about what ought to be the case.<sup>30</sup> Inasmuch as Ruse acknowledges that this line of criticism is valid and even deploys it himself against his fellow evolutionary ethicists, one

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<sup>27</sup> For a particularly striking example of how one may do so, see J. Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, op. cit., 8.

<sup>28</sup> For a helpful overview of the first principles and normative truths of natural law and how we come to know them, see W.E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Life*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Huntington, IN 2000, 47–64.

<sup>29</sup> See A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 1984, 6.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, J. Finnis, *Natural Law*, in: *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig, Routledge, London 1998, 66–86.



is left puzzled as to why he does not apply it against his own general normative proposal.

Perhaps Ruse does not apply the is-ought fallacy to his own position because of his claim that “normative morality is as it is because of our biology,” so that no inference is involved as our biology simply outfits us with the moral beliefs we have.<sup>31</sup> But on Ruse’s own telling, we are determined by our biology only at the level of deep universal moral grammar, and this is specified and applied in different ways in different societies and cultures. Moral disagreement arises, it seems, not only because we disagree about facts, but also because our biology, in view of the influence of culture, does not deterministically prescribe specific moral norms. We thus have from Ruse himself clear testimony as to the limited role played by biology. Normative morality, then, is not as it is because of our biology, and hence our biology does not unflinchingly and of itself recommend any particular moral code or identify the correct normative position. When we recall, for Ruse, that there is no correct normative position and that all normative positions are foundationless, it follows that he should be committed to cultural relativism and should not be endeavouring to eliminate ethical pluralism regarding concrete moral dictates or to offer moral guidance. For the contending norms would be both false in themselves, but ‘objective’ from within their own system. All of which brings us back to the questions why should one accept common-sense morality and which, of those on offer, should one accept? While Ruse’s evolutionary ethics cannot answer these questions, they do not amount to an insurmountable difficulty for the natural law theorist who, in recognition of the multiplicity of possible moral positions, claims that practical reason can provide insight into the standards which, as true, should guide one’s moral reflection and enable one to set aside as false or deficient the claims of rival and alternative moral philosophies.

As for (2) Ruse’s claim that our biology deceives us into thinking that the moral norms we hold are objective,<sup>32</sup> the natural law theorist argues that he is deceived in maintaining this. For Ruse rejects the

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<sup>31</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 182.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

metaethical justification offered by traditional evolutionary ethicists, insisting that these accounts do not work in the sense that they are not rationally defensible.<sup>33</sup> Ruse's position that there is no foundation to ethics at all, no objective truth at stake in choices and actions, makes an appeal to our reason and is intended as an advance on the traditional account: whereas that account is mistaken, Ruse's conception is true and we are better off for knowing it. Hence, in the very performance of asserting and arguing that there is no objective truth in ethics, Ruse himself is inescapably committed to the proposition "that knowledge of truth . . . is a good worth pursuing and instantiating in that argument and assertion."<sup>34</sup> Ruse cannot, then, "coherently deny that truth is a good,"<sup>35</sup> for the very performance of articulating such a sceptical claim involves him in a self-contradiction, in that the explicit content of his utterance is at odds with the implicit commitments required to assert it.<sup>36</sup> By showing that the sceptic's position is self-defeating, natural law thinkers open up a space in which to investigate and identify the basic goods that are choiceworthy in themselves, and that, properly pursued, lead to human fulfillment.<sup>37</sup>

Ruse also faces a problem in that, since he has helped us to attain insight into the illusory nature of ethics, we may likely feel less inclined or not inclined at all to respect such norms.<sup>38</sup> But inasmuch as he has helped us to make this recognition and realization, he now needs to supply us with a reason why we should cooperate in view of humanity's reproductive ends; lacking such a reason, one could not otherwise be blamed by the evolutionary ethicist for refusing to act 'morally.' Ruse's suggestion that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 174, 180.

<sup>34</sup> J. Finnis, *Natural Law*, op. cit..

<sup>35</sup> J. Finnis, *Scepticism, Self-Refutation, and the Good of Truth*, in: *Law, Morality, and Society: Essays in Honour of H.L.A. Hart*, ed. P.M.S. Hacker, J. Raz, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977, 259.

<sup>36</sup> See J. Finnis, *Self-referential (or Performative) Inconsistency: Its Significance for Truth*, in: *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 78(2004), 13–22.

<sup>37</sup> J. Finnis, *Introduction*, in: *Natural Law*, ed. J. Finnis, Aldershot, Publishing Company Limited, Dartmouth 1991, 1: xiv.

<sup>38</sup> M. Ruse, *The Significance of Evolution*, op. cit., 507–508.

we remain committed to morality “because we are not psychopaths” is unconvincing,<sup>39</sup> since, if we are not psychopaths and do not wish to become psychopaths, this is due to our recognition of and allegiance to objective moral values. If we were convinced of morality’s illusory nature and believed we inhabited a world without objective moral values, we would lack any standard by appeal to which the psychopath’s acts could be considered wrongful or disordered in themselves. Any psychological discomfort we might feel in acting against these illusory values would be based on the residue of our former commitment to objective moral values, would therefore be an unreasonable response, and presumably would wane and disappear over time. Once again, natural law theory provides the evolutionary ethicist with some much needed assistance by pointing out that evolutionary ethics implies and presupposes real goods that are accounted for by natural law, e.g., life (the main goal of the evolutionary process), fellowship, and truth. Without this assistance, evolutionary ethics is not able to explain why someone would wish to remain committed to the moral life at all.

Finally, (3) Ruse’s case against the natural law account of the morality of same-sex sexual acts – which involves him criticizing the natural law account on its own terms, through a clarification of a factual dispute as to what is natural – fails. For the case he makes against the natural law position involves a very obvious equivocation, coupled with the adoption of a dubious premise that his source – Aquinas – need and ought not be understood as appealing to, and that is not accepted by or relied on in an important contemporary statement of natural law theory. The equivocation is plain enough: Ruse thinks that the way to show the natural law sexual ethic mistaken is to show that same-sex sexual *behaviour* is natural.<sup>40</sup> He then proceeds to offer some suggestions as to how the homosexual *orientation* can be considered natural on evolutionary grounds – thereby equivocating between behavior and orientation.<sup>41</sup> Even if we grant that same-sex sexual *acts* are natural in the sense intended by Ruse – namely, that they appear in the natural

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<sup>39</sup> M. Ruse, *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, op. cit., 182.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

world and can be explained as natural phenomena by natural selection – it does not follow that such acts should be understood as moral. Ruse’s discussion of the is-ought fallacy should have alerted him to the difficulty that this line of reasoning could expose the natural law thinker to the charge of attempting to derive an ought from an is. If the fallacy is avoided, it is through the adoption of the premise “one should do (...) that which is natural,” where what is natural is grasped by means of scientific (or speculative) reasoning. The trouble is that we are not given any reason as to why we should do what is natural, and that, in addition, some things that can be understood as ‘natural’ are plainly things that one should not do.

Ruse, however, is mistaken to think that Aquinas, properly understood, argues in this way. Aquinas makes it very clear that the first principle of practical reason is “good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided,” where what is good is grasped by means of the exercise of practical reason.<sup>42</sup> For Aquinas, the good is what is fulfilling or perfective of persons, and so – in marked contrast to the premise adopted by Ruse – this first principle directs and prescribes the pursuit of intelligible ends or purposes.<sup>43</sup> By means of a practical insight into the ends that are given in our experience, we come to know the goods that specify this principle. These goods, accordingly, make us better off and contribute to our well-being, and, by thus providing a point or purpose to our choices and actions, are thought to play the role of starting points in our practical thinking. Aquinas’ brief, but not exhaustive, list of such goods includes human life, the union of male and female (marriage), knowledge of the truth, and fellowship with others. Such principles, once again, do not comprise the entirety of natural law, as additional moral principles are recognized, such as the Love Commandment, from which further moral precepts are derived. What is crucially important, for present purposes, is to emphasize the intrinsic relation between the love of neighbor principle and the principles enjoining the pursuit of various human goods, for: “it is obvious that we can love our neighbours

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<sup>42</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1–2. 94. 2.

<sup>43</sup> The following summary of Aquinas’ account of natural law draws on W.E. May, *op. cit.*, 55–59.

*only* if we are willing to respect fully the goods perfective of them, only by willing that these goods flourish in them, and by being *unwilling* intentionally to damage, destroy, or impede these goods, to ignore them or slight them or put them aside, substituting pseudo-goods for them.”<sup>44</sup> In contrast to Ruse’s account of natural law, which proceeds by way of one practical premise linked to an allegedly factual claim, Aquinas’ position is that choices and actions should be regulated and evaluated by appeal to all the principles of natural law,<sup>45</sup> so as to ensure that no human good is damaged, destroyed, or impeded. On this account, the good of marriage – the two-fold good involving both the exclusive, multi-dimensional, open-ended union of male and female and the procreating and raising of offspring – is what is to be instantiated in the sexual acts of those who are married; as this good can be harmed through the performance of a range of non-marital sexual acts – including same-sex sexual acts – the natural law account deems such acts not fully in accord with reason, and so immoral and ‘unnatural,’<sup>46</sup> where the latter term has a normative rather than a factual sense, as in Ruse’s account.

Ruse evidently understands Aquinas to hold a naturalist account of moral norms, on the strength of the passage he quotes in which Aquinas identifies the natural end of the sexual act; unfortunately for Ruse, he does not consider or even take notice of an alternative interpretation of Aquinas as a non-naturalist in morals, according to which passages like the one he relies on are at odds with Aquinas’ explicit statement of the manner in which basic principles of natural law are grasped.<sup>47</sup> Even if such interpreters are deemed mistaken regarding the correct way of understanding Aquinas, in their own work they advance natural law arguments to establish the immorality of same-sex and other non-marital sexual acts by appeal to “the requirement to respect the

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<sup>44</sup> W.E. May, *op. cit.*, 57.

<sup>45</sup> See P. Lee, *Is Thomas’ Natural Law Theory Naturalist?*, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71(1997), 577.

<sup>46</sup> J. Finnis, *Law, Morality, and “Sexual Orientation”*, in: *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality*, ed. J. Corvino, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD 1997, 38–39.

<sup>47</sup> See P. Lee, *Is Thomas’ Natural Law Theory Naturalist?*, *op. cit.*, 567–587.

basic human goods.<sup>748</sup> Ruse's own case against the natural law account cannot proceed by ignoring this significant body of work, nor can it be considered successful until it has responded to it. But in view of his stated metaethical position, Ruse has no reason to undertake this sort of dialectical engagement and has no way of vindicating one position over another. The task would be both misguided and pointless.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In summary, Ruse's work can be understood as directly and indirectly criticizing natural theory in the two ways in which it can be opposed. But while natural law theory is indirectly targeted in his attempt to show that moral norms cannot be objective and true, the attempt fails, as his ethical scepticism is fundamentally incoherent. Moreover, not only is Ruse's own account of normative ethics importantly deficient, his effort to directly target natural theory by arguing that it should be committed to a different moral norm as regards same-sex sexual acts also fails, in that it proceeds by way of equivocation and mistakenly foists upon the account a doubtful premise for the evaluation of human acts, while disregarding an alternative account that employs an entirely different methodology. Given that Ruse's objections to traditional accounts of evolutionary ethics are sound and that his own new improved version faces insurmountable difficulties, the evolutionary approach on the whole must be regarded as untenable and its challenge to natural theory nothing short of groundless. It follows that the objectivity and truth of natural law precepts and of moral theology's foundations are in no way undermined by the advances in biological knowledge made possible by evolutionary theory. This result is worth underscoring in the contemporary context, given the concerns that *Veritatis Splendor* seeks to address, as is the corroboration it provides to the encyclical letter's general diagnosis of the grounds of contemporary opposition to natural law, since Ruse's evolutionary ethics is indeed based on an

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 586, n.57.

anthropological presupposition that severs the relationship between human freedom and truth.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*, op. cit., 4.

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