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# Seeking Common Ground: A Response To Dunfee

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Readers of this "He said, I said"—"Aristotle, Yes, Darwin, No" exchange can be forgiven for feeling as if they and the protagonists are on a merry-go-round that goes nowhere. It's fun for a while but dizzying after a few spins. I'm jumping off after this one last turn.

Dunfee's solo ride deserves applause. He finds ways to link a naturalist approach with some of the core concepts of *Ties That Bind.* Those linkages are forged mainly by acknowledging the pragmatic base from which norms (of all kinds), human values, and business behavior are derived. All are rooted firmly in natural processes and are conditioned by diverse sociocultural traditions. The gradations of moral significance accorded to these normative phenomena are clearly signaled by labeling them as "micro," "macro," "hyper," and by acknowledging the free play, i.e., the experimenting of diverse societies (called "moral free space" in ISCT), as they arrive at satisfying moral understandings suitable for their own particular environmental (and experiential) circumstances. So far, so good.

Remaining as contested territory is the question of nature's meaning and place in moral analysis. "How one determines what is 'natural'" should not be a problem for anyone a century and a half after Darwin, or following the flood of scientific achievements during the 20th century, all of which have greatly clarified "what is natural" and how nature affects our lives. Science has never been without controversy, for that is inherent in its method. One can always expect a diversity of scientific opinions as new areas are opened up for exploration and new tools are applied, one current example being the question of whether the cosmos is expanding at an increasing rate, another the possible existence of parallel universes

and travel between them, yet another whether far-distant planetary systems can sustain life. But as Dunfee observes, we approach and try to resolve these puzzles by applying "whatever logics are persuasive" and "these logics . . . can be seen as natural in and of themselves." Indeed they are, because (to continue quoting Dunfee) "Humans are actors within the natural order" even though "What is persuasive may vary from culture to culture and over time." Scientific understanding of nature has always been a function of environmental (i.e., sociocultural) variability, as well as of the tools and methods employed by scientists. So, too, has moral analysis been conditioned by the variability of human social systems, but that does not separate it from the realm of nature, which must remain the primary analytic category. Sociocultural "man" is an integral, inseparable part of nature. Moral analysis aimed at improving the human condition can be nothing less than an examination of the natural forces at play in human societies.

I want to tweak the authors on two other points. They are mistaken to equate "thought experiments" in science with social contract philosophizing. The latter may be "fiction," as they say, but the former are not. Whether devised by Albert Einstein or Erwin Schrodinger, scientific thought experiments are extensions of already well-known and empirically verified features of nature, reinforced by complex mathematical analysis, and they ideally motivate other investigators to verify the posited hypothetical relationships or to disprove them. Not so with "social contracts," which typically lack empirical grounding and represent abstract idealized states not known to human experience. They are more like wishful thinking than empirically-inspired scientific speculation.

A more serious problem arises when both authors speak of "nature *or* reason," as if a choice must be made between the two or, worse, that human reasoning, displaying an imputed extra-natural dimension, somehow brings qualities not otherwise present in the natural world. Such bifurcations of nature and human reasoning are easily recognized as just another form of anthropocentrism wherein nature is to be improved by supranatural human actions.

Ethologists demonstrated long ago that animal reasoning is widespread and common, a product of genetic and neurological process, of imprinting, and of natural selection. Our nearest primate relatives reason with remarkable facility and flexibility. Thanks to our more complex brain, we outdo them. But that more advanced brain

that supports human reasoning is set apart only in degree from the neurological equipment possessed by other animals. Reason rests securely *within* natural processes that are responsible for the ways reason is brought to bear on moral problems.

Dunfee's emphasis on the pragmatic, experiential features of ISCT is a welcome demonstration of the feasibility of finding common ground for pursuing the normative puzzles generated by business practices. When placed securely within a naturalist realm, ISCT can help generate the normative clarity sought by all business ethicists. To proceed without that natural component would leave all of us on a perpetually whirling analytic merry-go-round that goes only in circles.