

THEISM, EVOLUTIONARY EPISTEMOLOGY, AND TWO THEORIES OF TRUTH

by John Lemos

Abstract. In Michael Ruse's recent publications, such as *Taking Darwin Seriously* (1998) and *Evolutionary Naturalism* (1995), he has advocated a certain sort of evolutionary epistemology and has argued that it implies a rejection of metaphysical realism (MR) in favor of a position that he calls "internal realism" (IR). Additionally, he has maintained that, insofar as his evolutionary epistemology implies a rejection of MR in favor of IR, it escapes the kind of argument against naturalism that Alvin Plantinga makes in his *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993). In this article I explain the relevant views and arguments of Ruse and Plantinga, and I critically engage with Ruse's views, arguing that (1) his case for rejecting MR has no essential connection to evolutionary considerations; (2) his case for rejecting MR depends upon internalist assumptions about the nature of knowledge that are in need of some kind of defense; and (3) given his implicit internalism and his commitment to IR, his argument for rejecting MR can be used against his IR.

Keywords: epistemically ideal conditions; epistemology; evolution; internal realism (IR); metaphysical realism (MR); naturalism; Alvin Plantinga; Michael Ruse; theism; truth.

Naturalism is the view that there exists nothing other than spatiotemporal beings embedded within a space-time framework. This view denies the existence of abstract entities such as propositions and numbers, it rejects Platonic universals, and it does not countenance disembodied minds, gods, and similar abstractions. In contrast to this, theists believe among other things that there is an infinite spiritual being who is an infinitely wise and good creator of the universe. These two metaphysical perspectives stand in clear opposition to each another.

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The Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection is one of the most important and fundamental working assumptions of contemporary biological science. In the recent philosophical literature Alvin Plantinga (1993) has argued that, given a correct understanding of the nature of knowledge—his reliabilist theory of knowledge—it can be shown that, were human beings and their cognitive faculties the products of Darwinian evolution alone without the guiding influence of a wise and benevolent creator, there would be no way to account for human knowledge, including the knowledge of the truth of the Darwinian theory of natural selection. In effect, Plantinga uses a scientific theory, the theory of evolution by natural selection, to argue against naturalism in support of theism.

Various critical replies to Plantinga's argument have been published. One of the leading critics of Plantinga's argument is Michael Ruse. In his recent publications, such as *Taking Darwin Seriously* (1998) and *Evolutionary Naturalism* (1995), he has advocated a certain sort of evolutionary epistemology and has argued that it implies a rejection of metaphysical realism (MR) in favor of a position that he calls "internal realism" (IR). In addition, he has maintained that, insofar as his evolutionary epistemology implies a rejection of MR in favor of IR, it escapes Plantinga's argument against naturalism.

In what follows I begin by explaining Plantinga's critique of naturalism, noting what Plantinga thinks this implies about the rationality of theism. Then I explain what kind of evolutionary epistemology Ruse advocates, briefly contrasting his evolutionary epistemology with that of David Hull (1982; 1988a; 1988b). I also show that Ruse does indeed reject MR, replacing it with IR, and I try to explain the difference between these views. I go on to examine the reasons Ruse gives for favoring IR over MR. I argue that (1) Ruse's case for rejecting MR has no essential connection to evolutionary considerations; (2) his case for rejecting MR depends upon internalist assumptions about the nature of knowledge that are in need of some kind of defense; and (3) given his implicit internalism and his commitment to IR, his argument for rejecting MR can be used against his argument for IR.

PLANTINGA'S CRITIQUE OF NATURALISM

In Plantinga's *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993) he provides the following argument against naturalism:

1. According to naturalism, our reasoning and cognitive powers are the product of evolution.
2. Evolution, especially Darwinian evolution, cares nothing for truth, only for survival and reproductive success.

3. Therefore, there really is no reason that our reasoning and cognitive powers should tell us the truth about the world—they tell us just what we need to believe to survive and reproduce, which information could as easily be quite false.
4. If there is no reason to think that our reasoning and cognitive powers should tell us the truth, then there is no reason to think that we can know anything.
5. Therefore, naturalism ends up in skepticism.

For Plantinga the most controversial premise of this argument is the second one. In his book he defends it by showing how there are at least five ways in which Darwinian evolution could lead to our having cognitive faculties that are not reliable producers of true beliefs. According to Plantinga, because these five scenarios are equiprobable alongside the possibility that evolution has led us to possess cognitive powers that are reliable producers of truth, it follows that, if naturalism is true, we have little reason to think that our cognitive powers should tell us the truth about the world.

This epistemological argument plays a central role in Plantinga's critique of naturalism and in his defense of supernaturalism. For the reasons given in the preceding paragraph he is led to conclude that "Naturalistic epistemology conjoined with naturalistic metaphysics leads via evolution to skepticism or to violations of canons of rationality; enjoined with theism it does not. The naturalistic epistemologist should therefore prefer theism to metaphysical naturalism" (Plantinga 1993, 237). According to Plantinga, we can more readily make sense of our knowledge of the world if we assume that we are the products of God's intelligent design than if we reject God's existence and understand ourselves as a product of the blind forces of natural selection.

As already noted, Ruse has responded to this argument in some of his recent publications. In the postscript to the second edition of his *Taking Darwin Seriously* Ruse argues that Plantinga mistakenly assumes that the naturalist, or more specifically the Darwinian, is committed to a metaphysical realist conception of truth (1998, 295–97). However, in *Taking Darwin Seriously* and in *Evolutionary Naturalism* Ruse argues that Darwinians should reject such a theory of truth and instead adopt what he and Hilary Putnam call an "internal realist" theory of truth. Ultimately, I argue that Ruse's conclusion that the Darwinian should reject MR is flawed, but first I clarify Ruse's version of evolutionary epistemology and explain the difference between MR and IR.

RUSEAN EVOLUTIONARY EPISTEMOLOGY

In *Evolutionary Naturalism* Ruse distinguishes between two kinds of evolutionary epistemology and specifies which type he practices.

. . . there are two main approaches that people have taken in trying to bring evolutionary thinking to bear on philosophical problems of knowledge and epistemology. The first is to argue by analogy from the main evolutionary mechanism of natural selection to the supposed way in which knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, arises and develops. The second is to argue literally, from the way in which natural selection has shaped us humans as thinking beings to the kind of knowledge claims that we would make. Here, as elsewhere, I express a pretty strong preference for the second kind of approach, feeling that there are some major points of disanalogy between the growth of organisms and the growth of science. (Ruse 1995, 109)

Rusean evolutionary epistemology sees human cognitive capacities as an adaptation that has aided us in the struggle to survive and reproduce, and it examines the implications this has for traditional epistemological problems. In *Evolutionary Naturalism* this Rusean evolutionary epistemology is contrasted with the alternative version, which has been advocated by Hull. The alternative version tries to understand changes in our knowledge or scientific understanding as a result of something like Darwinian natural selective forces. So, for instance, on this view those scientific theories that have been prevalent for long periods of time are to be understood as more fit for survival in the minds of human beings than are other theories. Thus, traditional theories tend to be reproduced more in the minds of humans through communication. Ruse explains the difference between these two types of evolutionary epistemology and why he prefers his theory to Hull's (Ruse 1995, 174–82).

According to Ruse's evolutionary epistemology, the basic rules of mathematics, deductive logic, and scientific reasoning are things that we are innately disposed to accept into our thinking. He thinks that this is a result of the principles of natural selection. In his writings he gives several examples that illustrate how an innate tendency to think in accordance with some of the basic principles of mathematics and deductive logic, for example, would be adaptive and how failure to think in these ways would be maladaptive. For instance:

Consider two would-be human ancestors, one with elementary logical and mathematical skills, and the other without much in that direction. One can think of countless situations, many of which must have happened in real life, where the former proto-human would have been at great selective advantage over the other. A tiger is seen entering a cave that you and your family usually use for sleeping. No one has seen the tiger emerge. Should you seek alternative accommodation for this night at least? How else does one achieve a happy end to this story, other than by an application of those laws of logic that we try to uncover for our students in elementary logic classes? (Ruse 1998, 162)

Ruse's evolutionary epistemology is primarily an attempt to (1) support the view that such principles are innate within us and that they are the products of evolution by natural selection and (2) explain the philosophical significance of these facts.

In making the case for the view that our having such innate tendencies is a result of natural selection, Ruse makes three main points. First, he notes how different cultures, both Eastern and Western, have similar systems of logic, mathematics, and causal reasoning. He says that this suggests the likelihood of innate tendencies to think in these ways. Second, he says studies of children show that a number of mathematical and other reasoning skills develop in them without either formal or informal teaching. This again suggests the innateness hypothesis. Third, he states that “non-human and human animals show the kinds of overlap of formal reasoning ability which one would expect were natural selection at work, leaving its mark” (Ruse 1998, 166). He goes on to discuss experiments done with chimpanzees that demonstrate their capacities for rudimentary mathematical and deductive thinking.

Having briefly considered Ruse’s reasons for believing that we have evolved innate dispositions to reason in certain ways, let us look at his thoughts on the philosophical implications. We examine in particular what Ruse thinks the Darwinian views imply about MR.

METAPHYSICAL REALISM AND RUSE’S REJECTION OF IT

Although Ruse acknowledges that Putnam (1982) has criticized evolutionary epistemology, in rejecting MR in favor of IR he does to some extent align himself with him. Ruse is explicit about this in his writings (see Ruse 1995, 63–68, 193, 289; 1998, 196, 202). In *Evolutionary Naturalism* he appeals to the writings of Putnam in order to define MR and IR. He quotes the following passages from Putnam:

[According to MR], the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of “the way the world is.” Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things. I shall call this perspective the *externalist* perspective, because its favourite point of view is a God’s Eye point of view.

The perspective I shall defend has no unambiguous name. It is a late arrival in the history of philosophy, and even today it keeps being confused with other points of view of a quite different sort. I shall refer to it as the *internalist* perspective, because it is characteristic of this view to hold that *what objects does the world consist of?* is a question that it only makes sense to ask *within* a theory or description. Many “internalist” philosophers, though not all, hold further that there is more than one “true” theory or description of the world. “Truth,” in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability—some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system*—and not correspondence with mind-independent “states of affairs.” There is no God’s Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve. (Putnam 1981, 49–50, quoted in Ruse 1995, 64–65)

Ruse also quotes the following passage:

In an internalist view also, signs do not intrinsically correspond to objects, independently of how those signs are employed and by whom. But a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects *within the conceptual scheme of those users*. “Objects” do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what. (Putnam 1981, 52, quoted in Ruse 1995, 65)

When Ruse rejects MR, he is rejecting the view that “There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’” and the correspondence theory of truth. Instead, he embraces the idea that “‘Truth’ . . . is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability—some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences . . .” (Ruse 1995, 64–65).

In his own writings Ruse has said the following: “Thus, with Hume and Clark, I am led to reject the notion of a reality beyond our experience” (Ruse 1995, 192); “. . . as an internal realist I think that everything is in the mind in some sense” (1995, 289); and “This kind of reality—something outside the sensing interpreting subject—is meaningless” (1998, 194).

While these passages may make him look as though he holds to some sort of metaphysical idealism à la Berkeley, he actually does not. Along with his adoption of IR, Ruse also embraces what he calls a common-sense realism. He writes, “. . . at one (everyday) level we believe in the reality of chairs and tables and trees. They are not chimeras like Macbeth’s dagger. This is common-sense realism, which the propensities inform and support. Chairs and tables and trees have a solid, ongoing existence. Today, we can include electrons, genes, and dinosaurs” (1998, 192).

Ruse believes that tables and chairs and trees and cows and genes and electrons have an existence independent of consciousness. It is just that what ultimately makes our beliefs about the existence and nature of these things true is not the fact that our beliefs correspond with or accurately represent them. Rather, our beliefs in and about these things are true simply because of their coherence with our other beliefs and perceptions. The following passage reflects this Rusean position and his affiliation with Putnam:

. . . the Darwinian rejects a correspondence theory of truth. That is to say, he/she rejects the idea that his/her thought corresponds to true reality, where “reality” in this context is some sort of absolute entity, like the thing-in-itself. Obviously, working within the common-sense level, the Darwinian is just as much of a correspondence thinker as anyone else. But at the final level, defending common-sense reality, as we have had to accept, the Darwinian subscribes to a coherence theory of truth, believing that the best you can do is to get everything to hang together. (Ruse 1998, 202) [Ruse adds: “(See Putnam, 1981, for a similar point and Rorty, 1980, for a powerful attack on the correspondence theory.)”]

In *Taking Darwin Seriously* and *Evolutionary Naturalism* Ruse argues that when you take seriously the fact that human cognitive capacities are

adaptations that exist in humans because they aid us in the struggle to survive and reproduce, and when you think through the implications of this, you will come to see, as Hume did, that we simply posit the existence of objects existing external to consciousness in order to make sense of the coherence of our experience. For instance, to explain the continuous appearance of the desk in front of me, and to explain that when I leave and come back I still see a desk, I posit the existence of a desk external to my consciousness. According to Ruse, evolutionary considerations lead us to recognize that humans are naturally led to posit or believe in the existence of such mind-independent objects, because doing so is adaptive. But, says Ruse, even though we are naturally led to believe in the existence of objects external to consciousness, at the philosophical level there is a “justificatory void” (1998, 192).

Ruse’s view is that as long as we think that the truth of our claims about what things exist is governed by the correspondence of those claims with mind-independent facts, we will never be able to make sense of our knowledge of the world. Thus, Ruse is led to reject such a metaphysical realist theory of truth for the coherence theory. As a reflection of this point of view, consider the following passage:

Like the Darwinian, Hume emphasized that our knowledge of the world is based on propensities of the mind. This means that, with Hume, the Darwinian has to wrestle with the problem of scepticism. There is no guarantee that a philosophically satisfying answer will emerge. Fortunately, in real life this does not matter, for we have the world of common-sense reality. Moreover, natural selection has seen to it that we are psychologically inured against the torments of metaphysical doubt. In any case, the Darwinian epistemologist need not really fear even the deepest barbs of scepticism. Total deception of the kind that the metaphysical sceptic threatens is a far-from-plausible notion. So long as one recognizes that, ultimately, truth rests in coherence, not correspondence, all is well. (Ruse 1998, 206)

This quotation shows quite clearly that Ruse views the coherence theory of truth as the way out of the sceptical difficulties that arise when MR is combined with evolutionary epistemology. According to Ruse, what in the end governs the truth of our claims about what things exist is simply the coherence of those claims with our other beliefs and experiences.

Having shown what Ruse takes MR and IR to amount to and having shown that he rejects MR in favor of IR, I next consider in more detail just why he thinks an evolutionary epistemology should reject MR.

RUSE’S DARWINIAN CASE FOR REJECTING METAPHYSICAL REALISM

The clearest statement of why Ruse believes evolutionary epistemology implies a rejection of MR occurs in chapter 6 of *Evolutionary Naturalism*:

It is all very well to talk about reality, but it is clear—it is especially clear to the evolutionary epistemologist—that this reality is mediated as it were through our own perception and thought. Moreover, if you accept—as again the evolutionary epistemologist must accept—that there is something contingent about this perception and thinking, then even if the real world does exist it is at least one step removed from us. (1995, 190–91)

The “reality” referred to in this passage is mind-independent reality, existing external to consciousness. Ruse wants to say that for an evolutionary epistemologist this sort of reality, if known at all, would have to be known “through our own perception and thought.” Also, according to Ruse, our perceptions and thoughts about reality could have been radically different from what they are had evolution led our minds to operate in ways different from the ways they do operate. Hence the point about the “contingency” of our perception of reality.

Ruse goes on to argue that the idea of such a reality existing external to consciousness in this way is incomprehensible:

What sense can we give to the idea of a reality that lies beyond our ken, and that necessarily must remain so? The answer seems to be that no sense at all can be given: to speak of a reality, we must in some way specify what it would be like to meet with this reality and, on the evolutionary epistemological position, this is precisely what we cannot do. (Ruse 1995, 192)

In short, Ruse wants to argue that if we know mind-independent reality at all, we must know it through our own perception and thought. However, there is no way to make sense of such a reality existing outside of the ways in which it is perceived and understood. Therefore, the concept of mind-independent reality makes “no sense at all” and should be rejected. Notice that in the preceding passage he says that “no sense at all” can be given to “the idea of a reality that lies beyond our ken.”

Now I can easily agree with and make sense of the view that we can know of a mind-independent reality only through our own perception and thought. However, what is not clear is why Ruse finds all of this so problematic. How else can we know of reality except through our own perception and thought?

The next to last passage cited above suggests an argument. Ruse states, “Moreover, if you accept—as again the evolutionary epistemologist must accept—that there is something contingent about this perception and thinking, then even if the real world does exist it is at least one step removed from us.” I suppose that at one level Ruse might want to say that inasmuch as our ways of perceiving and thinking are contingent—they could have been different had we evolved differently—our perception of reality does not necessarily reflect the true nature of that reality. Hence, no matter how we perceive reality to be, the truth about it will always be “one step removed from us.” According to Ruse, the problem is that as long as you think truth involves having your beliefs correspond with mind-indepen-

dent facts, and given that our perception and thought do not necessarily reflect those facts, there is not going to be a way for us to know the truth. In other words, MR conjoined with an evolutionary epistemology results in scepticism.

To overcome this scepticism Ruse rejects MR, replacing it with IR and its coherence theory of truth. If the truth of our beliefs is ultimately governed by nothing more than the coherence among them and with our experience (things we can witness because they are internal to our consciousness or conceptual scheme), knowing the truth about reality will no longer require doing the impossible—transcending our own perception and thoughts to get an unbiased vision of reality.

A CRITICAL REPLY TO RUSE: THREE POINTS OF CONTENTION

What are we to make of this Darwinian argument for rejecting MR? First, let me say that Darwinian or evolutionary thinking is really not essential to the argument. Ruse makes much of the fact that because we could have evolved to perceive the world in radically different ways, reality (of the mind-independent sort) is “one step removed from us,” that is, our perceptions don’t necessarily reflect the true nature of reality. This seems, however, to be a fairly obvious point, and evolutionary considerations are hardly needed to see that our perceptions don’t *necessarily* reflect the truth about reality. Reading Descartes’ First Meditation drives this point home quite clearly, for he gives some rather good reasons to think that our perceptions do not necessarily reflect the true nature of reality, although he provides no evolutionary reasons in support of this view.

Second, is it true that just because our perceptions do not necessarily reflect the truth about mind-independent reality, we cannot be said to *know* that reality? Perhaps I must concede that it means I cannot be certain or possess indubitable knowledge of that reality; but few people, besides Descartes, expect this from their criteria of knowledge. When I say, I know that’s a cow in the meadow, what I mean is that I have a justified true belief to this effect and my belief about this can be (1) justified and (2) true even though I might be mistaken. In addition, I can myself concede that I *might* be mistaken while justifiably and truthfully believing that a cow is in the meadow. For instance, I might look toward the meadow, and because I see a cow I believe there is a cow in the meadow, and my justification is that I see one there. If there is, as a matter of mind-independent fact, a cow there, then I know the cow is there. But I might also concede that I could be wrong, because I know that my senses sometimes mislead me.

In response to the preceding point, Ruse might argue that I cannot know that my beliefs correspond with a mind-independent reality unless I have good reason to think that the method of justification for these beliefs is reliable. For instance, assuming MR for a moment, I cannot know that a

cow is in the meadow unless I have good reason to think my seeing a cow gives me a reliable basis upon which to believe that there is a cow. Ruse might add that as long as there is no necessity for our thoughts and perceptions to represent reality accurately, there is no way to know whether they are reliable guides or not.

But this sort of response moves us into the realm of the debates in epistemology between internalists and externalists. While there is no easy way to characterize the difference between internalists and externalists about knowledge, at the risk of oversimplification we might say that internalists believe that to know that *P* one must know that one knows that *P*, and the externalists deny this. Having mentioned the debates between internalists and externalists, let me make a couple of points. First, it is difficult to characterize the internalist and externalist positions in this debate, because there are many types of internalism discussed in the literature. Some internalists believe that to know that *P* one must simply believe that one knows that *P*, whereas others believe that one must know that one knows that *P* (as I have defined the view above), whereas others believe that to know that *P* one must justifiably believe that one knows that *P*. (For an introduction to the different ways of expressing the internalist position see Dancy 1985, 130–35.) Second, the internalism and externalism referred to here are not to be confused with the external and internal perspectives discussed in the passages quoted from Putnam earlier in this paper. When Putnam says that the correspondence theory of truth found in MR reflects the externalist perspective, he means that it makes the truth of a belief dependent upon its relating to something external to consciousness. The coherence theory of truth that is associated with IR makes the truth of beliefs dependent on their relationship to things internal to consciousness, namely, other beliefs and perception. Hence, the internalism and externalism referred to by Putnam are not the same as the internalism and externalism referred to above.

It strikes me that Ruse's concerns with the fact that evolution could have led us to perceive the world differently and that, consequently, if we are metaphysical realists we can never know whether our beliefs accurately reflect reality, belie an underlying commitment to the internalist perspective, the view that to know that *P* one must know that one knows that *P*. Only by appeal to the sort of internalist considerations mentioned can Ruse defend his argument against my critique.

For the record, let me note that I agree that perception must be a reliable guide to the truth in order for the fact that I see a cow to justify my belief that I see a cow. It is not at all obvious to me, however, nor should it be to anyone familiar with the debates in contemporary epistemology, that one must also be justified in believing in the reliability of perception for perception to justify beliefs. A number of counterintuitive consequences of this view suggest that it is problematic.

On an intuitive level we would like to say that a boy who doubts his mathematical ability but who consistently or reliably gives the right answers to a wide array of math problems after correctly working them out knows mathematics. He does not know that he knows math, but he knows it nonetheless. We also want to say that two-year-olds know many things, but if they can only know things when they are justified in their beliefs about the reliability of their faculties, then they know nothing at all, for two-year-olds have no beliefs whatsoever about the reliability of their faculties. These examples should suffice for now.

Before taking up another point of contention with Ruse, let me note that the preceding considerations are not necessarily damning criticisms of Ruse's position. There could be some way for the internalist to escape the alleged counterintuitive consequences. Or perhaps the internalist and/or Ruse would just "bite the bullet" of intuition and accept these counterintuitive consequences while arguing that the internalist perspective is superior on other grounds. Who knows? Maybe externalism suffers from just as many if not more problems. Having noted this, however, I do think that (1) before accepting Ruse's argument for rejecting MR one really should think critically about the internalism that underlies it, and (2) for Ruse to make a more convincing case against MR, some defense of his underlying internalist assumptions is called for.

The third point I want to make in response to Ruse's argument is that the IR he is replacing MR with is subject to the same sorts of charges he levels against MR. To see why this is so, it will help to reconsider the conception of truth that IR embraces. According to IR, truth is "some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability—some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system" (Ruse 1995, 64–65). Having noted this, one might still wonder what exactly this means. To better understand the IR conception of truth, consider the following:

Truth cannot *be* rational acceptability for one fundamental reason; truth is supposed to be a property of a statement that cannot be lost, whereas justification can be lost. The statement "The earth is flat" was, very likely, rationally acceptable 3,000 years ago; but it is not rationally acceptable today. Yet it would be wrong to say that "the earth is flat" was *true* 3,000 years ago; for that would mean that the earth has changed its shape. In fact, rational acceptability is a matter of degree; truth is sometimes spoken of as a matter of degree (e.g., we sometimes say, "*the earth is a sphere*" is *approximately true*); but the "degree" here is the *accuracy* of the statement, and not its degree of acceptability or justification.

What this shows, in my opinion, is not that the externalist view is right after all, but that truth is an *idealization* of rational acceptability. We speak as if there were such things as epistemically ideal conditions, and we call a statement "true" if it would be justified under such conditions. "Epistemically ideal conditions," of course, are like "frictionless planes": we cannot really attain epistemically ideal conditions, or even be absolutely certain that we have come sufficiently close to

them. But frictionless planes cannot really be attained either, and yet talk of frictionless planes has “cash value” because we can approximate them to a very high degree of approximation. (Putnam 1981, 55)

To preserve the intuition that truth cannot be lost but that justification can be, Putnam is driven to reject the idea that truth just *is* rational acceptability. Instead, he maintains that a belief is true if it would be rational to accept it under epistemically ideal conditions. This is the notion of truth that Ruse weds himself to in his own writings, but doing so is problematic, given the nature of the argument he has made against MR.

It is important to recognize that none of us is in the situation of an ideal observer, and because of this the truth is once again “one step removed from us,” just as Ruse has said of the metaphysical realists’ conception of truth. Thus, even working under an IR conception of truth, it could be that, despite the coherence of my beliefs and experiences, they could be radically different from the beliefs and experiences that the ideal observer would have. My beliefs, no matter how coherent and no matter how well justified, could still be mistaken in significant and numerous ways. So, the very scepticism that drove Ruse away from MR is not answered by his IR. In that he proposes IR instead of MR to escape those sceptical worries, he really gives us little reason to prefer IR.

In reply to this, Ruse might argue that with respect to scepticism IR really is in a better position than MR. After all, as noted in the last passage cited from Putnam, we can approximate epistemically ideal conditions (EIC). Because of this we can have good reason to think our beliefs are true when we see that a rational observer in the approximately ideal conditions would accept them.

But how are we to know whether we have approximated the EIC? Whatever the EIC are, we are not in them. Hence, they are external to us in some sense. This raises the same specter of scepticism that, according to Ruse, haunts MR.

Ruse is likely to contend that indeed the EIC will be external in some sense but will not be external to our conceptual scheme. Thus, we can make sense of what better and better epistemic situations would be like, and so we can approximate these ideal conditions, meaning that we can have good reason to think that many of our beliefs are true.

But this reply will not do, for we might wonder whether the conceptual framework we are working in even permits us to approach EIC. I might wonder whether looking at and interpreting and analyzing the world as I do, using the conceptual scheme I do, somehow bars me from ever even approaching EIC. And as long as this question can be meaningfully raised, and I think it can be, we will never really be able to know whether we have approximated EIC. Thus, IR faces the problem of scepticism just as MR does, and because of this Ruse gives us little reason to prefer IR over MR.

CONCLUSION

For reasons given in the preceding section, I conclude that Ruse has not shown just why evolutionary epistemology calls for a rejection of MR in favor of IR. I do not intend to suggest that he could not make the case. Perhaps it could be done. Perhaps there are good replies to the arguments that I have made. Perhaps some altogether different arguments could show why evolutionary epistemology demands a rejection of MR. Regardless, I contend that the case Ruse has made is inadequate.

One consequence of my arguments is that Ruse's reply to the critique of naturalism by Plantinga (1993) is weakened. As noted at the beginning of this article, Ruse believes that he can answer this critique by showing how evolutionary epistemology implies a rejection of MR. As I have argued, however, he needs to do more to show that evolutionary epistemology implies a rejection of MR.

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