

James A. Cook's Response to Guminski

Abstract: Arnold Guminski takes exception to a specific moral argument for the existence of God, which, for the sake of argument in his paper, is to be considered independently of any other argument for God's existence. The crux of his assertions seems to stress that in setting up their argument, certain Christian philosophers have 1) conflated all forms of metaphysical naturalism into a particular construal of metaphysical naturalism called physicalism and in so doing they have ignored his brand of metaphysical naturalism—to their apologetic advantage. He calls his sort of naturalism Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism. 2) Further, he explicitly claims his particular position on naturalism avoids the conclusions of the specific moral argument and that when this is taken into account, the proper stance toward that moral argument is to see that it fails. Finally, 3) he asserts the moral argument presented in the way it has been by these certain Christian philosophers, subverts natural morality and “tends to unnecessarily generate feelings of ill-will between theists and naturalists (and atheists).” I intend to show that Guminski, in large part, does not succeed in *showing* that any of these substantial assertions are fully justified, though I found some of his less consequential claims to be correct.

The Paper: Response to Guminski

In a 28 page, single spaced document, including endnotes, Arnold Guminski claims that a particular moral argument that is alleged to give support to theism fails. He asserts that certain Christian philosophers have, in constructing their moral argument 1) conflated all forms of metaphysical naturalism into a physicalist version which allows them to gain an apologetic advantage. He also seems to imply that they conflate *in order to* gain an apologetic advantage and that constructing it the way they do they have ignored his version of metaphysical naturalism, which he calls Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism (hereafter CMN)—a presumably coherent and plausible position. 2) His claim is that when his version of metaphysical naturalism is taken into account, it will be seen that their moral argument fails. (Guminski chooses to analyze the moral argument in his paper in a “stand alone” form, that is, without the context or alleged benefit of other non-moral arguments for God's existence.¹) 3) Finally, he asserts the moral argument presented in the way it has been by these certain Christian philosophers, subverts natural morality and “. . .tends to unnecessarily generate feelings of ill-will between theists and naturalists (and atheists).”² But these substantial claims, in large part, seem unwarranted or at least unwarranted based on the case he makes for them in

¹ Just for the record, I read Guminski to say he wants to look at this particular moral argument by itself, that is, not in the context of other non-moral arguments to see whether it is successful or not as a stand alone argument. Setting aside the question as to just what constitutes a successful argument, I do not intend to endorse by my acceptance of his conditions that this sort of “stand alone” way of analyzing the argument is the best or even a good way to think about moral arguments for God's existence or to think about natural theology in general. I assume that Guminski chose to narrow his focus in order to save space and not to gain an apologetic advantage.

² Guminski, Arnold T. “The Moral Argument for God's Existence, the Natural Moral Law, and Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism,” on University of Colorado, Philosophy Department *Theology Forum Website*, p. 16 of Guminski's text.

his paper—certainly they seem to be exaggerated claims relative to the quality of evidence he provides.

In this brief paper, I will try show why I think he does not succeed in showing that any of the important parts of his claims are fully justified—even though I will concede that some of the less important claims are correct. I will do so by discussing and examining the allegations made above, by analyzing the arguments that Guminiski gives for each, and by giving reasons why I think he has not done what he apparently claims or perhaps thinks he has done. For the sake of length considerations I will not take on the challenge of defending Moreland’s and Craig’s argument, even though some things I will have to say could be construed as lending support to it, nor will I take up every disagreement I might have with Guminiski in his essay.³

Section #1

Guminiski asserts that Craig, Moreland and Copan, do, by their presentation of a particular moral argument, “conflate the various forms of naturalism.”⁴ His case for showing that is a bit hard to follow. Apparently he feels he has shown this in the following way: he begins in his second paragraph by noting that there are some Christian philosophers “who do not accept any specifically moral arguments for God’s existence...”⁵ His point—mainly made in footnote #4 of his paper—seems to be that Swinburne, at least, thinks that moral properties are supervenient on non-moral properties and that these moral general truths are “*analytically* necessary and for that reason are objective.” Now Guminiski does not present arguments to support Swinburne’s conclusion; what he does say is that *another* Christian philosopher has *said* that Swinburne “has...provided a strategy for an atheist or agnostic to avoid moral arguments for God.” Next Guminiski proceeds to raise objections to that other Christian philosopher’s attempt to salvage the theist’s case by use of a fine tuning argument for God’s existence made from the applicability and the fittingness of the moral truths to the beings in the universe brought about by chance. But by addressing that rabbit trail Guminiski has not focused on the more fundamental question which I think he needs to address. He has not shown in his paper that Swinburne’s analysis is itself correct on its own grounds; why should we or anyone feel compelled to believe Swinburne’s account? Gannle’s endorsement of it doesn’t convey much by way of evidence without an argument. So, the call here is for Guminiski to give us more light—a more compelling explanation why we should accept Swinburne’s nominalistic account of moral properties.

Guminiski then moves on, and for the most part helpfully, to distinguish the way he is using such terms as: “special revelation”, “God”—distinguishing between what he calls the God of basic theism and the God of maximal theism—and to stake out his particular

³ The impression, no doubt, this paper will leave is that I have major disagreements with Guminiski’s position on CMN. Space limitations also limit the amount of space I could devote to areas where we agree—for instance we both share a moral realist view, though on different grounds—or areas where I appreciate his keen insight and erudition—for instance his openness to interactionism and emergent substance dualism.

⁴ Ibid. p. 6.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 2, 3.

form of metaphysical naturalism in contradistinction to certain non-reductive and reductive forms of metaphysical naturalism, each of which would hold a non-interactive view of the mind-body relationship.⁶

Guminski, then, presents a rough and ready description (likely due to space limitations) of his particular version of metaphysical naturalism which includes an interactive view of the mind-body relationship and upon having *explained* his version of metaphysical naturalism, he goes on to say in paragraph #10 that enough has been said about it by him for him to “report”⁷ that the presentations by Craig, Moreland and Copan of the moral argument conflate the various forms of naturalism. Despite the strong claim and the relevancy of a supporting argument to show the success of his thesis, he relegates the argument for the reliability of this “report” to a footnote.

In footnote #24, which is the relevant footnote, he quotes Moreland and Craig as saying that “The term Naturalism has many different meanings, but *a standard use of the term* defines it as the view that the universe alone exists. Since *most current forms* of naturalism are physicalist in flavor, naturalism has come to mean that reality is exhausted (sic) by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects accessible in some ways to the sense and embraced by our best scientific theories.” [Emphasis mine] Then Guminski adds, “This is the naturalism that they have in mind in the course of their exposition of the moral and moral-plus argument for God’s existence at....”⁸

Now the connection between this footnote and the claim that Craig, Moreland and Copan conflate naturalism seems dubious. Certainly Guminski has not drawn out his argument in such a way it is clear to my satisfaction. Note that Craig and Moreland acknowledge that Naturalism “**has many different meanings**,” but also claim they are “using a **standard use of the term**” since “most” of the current forms of naturalism are physicalist in flavor [emphasis mine].⁹ Does Guminski deny either of these two claims or provide evidence in his paper that these assertions were not true? I saw no refuting evidence (arguments or relevant citations) in his paper to counter Moreland and Craig’s claim that 1) there are different meanings to the term naturalism, or 2) that the way Moreland and Craig were using the term was a standard usage for the term or that most of the current forms of naturalism were physicalist in flavor. They are no more conflating

⁶ Guminski seems to want to distinguish his Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism from epiphenomenalism under Point 9 on page 4—rejecting it apparently because it embraces “causal closure in the physical domain” (and thus ruling out interactionism); but at the same time he paradoxically seems to embrace mind-brain reductionism as a possibility for CMN. That is, under the same Point 9, but on page 5, he describes one who embraces CMN as one who “might be an emergent substance-dualist” and in the same paragraph includes “Another possible scenario...” for CMN which is apparently a reductionist *and* interactive account. So it appears he wants CMN to play both sides of the substance or property dualist fence. He has not, however, spelled out how the property dualist view can avoid epiphenomenalism despite his recognition that Craig and Moreland raise this issue—see Guminski’s footnote #11 on page 18—other than Guminski’s reference to C.D. Broad’s account of event-event causation in footnote #17 on page 20. How Guminski gets intentionality and an agent causal view of libertarian freedom from within CMN needs to be spelled out in some detail and defended.

⁷ Ibid. p. 6.

⁸ Ibid. p. 22.

⁹ Ibid. p. 22.

metaphysical naturalism than Guminski is conflating all forms of natural theology. That is, Guminski made it clear in his essay he was narrowing his discussion of the moral argument to a stand alone form, rather than in the context of other non-moral arguments—which typically is a cue to the informed reader that Guminski hasn't covered all the bases—but it wouldn't occur to me to think he did this to get a substantial apologetic advantage. If he could make his case in the stand alone form, which I don't think he has, I would merely point out he has some additional hills to climb.

I see no reason to charge Moreland and Craig with conflation—at least not yet. But Guminski goes on to say that Moreland's and Craig's later presentation of the moral argument in their book treats metaphysical naturalism just in its most current physicalist form and not in all forms. Implicit in this observation is that when Moreland and Craig do this they purposefully avoid *his* non-physicalist version of metaphysical naturalism, which he further thinks could better withstand their attack. I agree that in addressing metaphysical naturalism in the way they do—in the physicalist form—they leave out his non-physicalist version, and that Moreland and Craig *do gain* an apologetic advantage by doing so. But the question is what kind of apologetic advantage do they gain?

While it does seem fair to say that Moreland and Craig's presentation of the moral argument **does not** specifically discuss non-physicalist forms of naturalism, it does seem a stretch to assert that they did it the way they did *to gain* an apologetic advantage—other than to save some space. More plausibly, I think, they did not discuss non-physicalist versions for other more obvious reasons. For instance, they likely hold that non-physicalist forms of naturalism are not widely held among metaphysical naturalists or by prominent or leading advocates; in this scenario they would be facing their toughest and most numerous critics.¹⁰ If this alleged *descriptive* fact about the situation were true, and I think it is a very plausible scenario, Moreland and Craig could be felicitously thought of as facing the most widely and prominently held forms of metaphysical naturalism. I don't think you can easily go from that picture to concluding that they **purposely** left off addressing a non-physicalist version of naturalism—for instance CMN—in order to gain an apologetic advantage. Just the possibility of this scenario seems to make Guminski's charge a bit hyperbolic and a non-felicitous interpretation of their project.

The fact is that Moreland and Craig conceded that their use of the term was NOT comprehensive; by doing so they did in fact avoid, in my judgment, culpability to any conflation charge. I don't think Guminski has given us good reason to say they conflated anything. The best, it seems to me, Guminski could have done is point out that **even though** Moreland and Craig did not necessarily conflate naturalism, they did not consider his version of it as he thought they should—even though it is not at present widely or

¹⁰ Guminski does not quote any contemporary naturalistic philosophers as holding it and the closest he comes to referencing anyone near his position on this is quoting some of C.D. Broad's work and a paper by Hasker on naturalism. I have already alluded to Guminski's need to spell out CMN's account of event-event causation consistent with human agency in my footnote #6. I also don't think that CMN can take much succor from Hasker's account; one problem that Hasker concedes is that the definition of "naturalism" gets stretched past its breaking point in order to accommodate our common sense notions of rational thought. See Hasker's article, "What About a Sensible Naturalism? A Response to Victor Reppert" in *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 53-61. See especially pp. 58ff.

prominently held among professional naturalistic philosophers—and that, possibly, the *uninformed reader might conflate* physicalist and non-physicalist forms of metaphysical naturalism when they evaluate Moreland’s and Craig’s moral argument.

Presuming I have it right about that, I think what Guminski should have done is just point out the potential mistake that Craig and Moreland might be making *if they think they have all the bases covered* or maybe warned the uninformed reader that Moreland and Craig hadn’t fully covered *all* the options at the naturalist’s disposal. Then his job would be to show that his position was coherent and plausible (or at least more plausible than the physicalist construal of metaphysical naturalism) and show just how it avoids the conclusion of the specific moral argument.

Section #2

Moving on from the question of conflation, we should wonder if Guminski has shown us good reason to think his version of Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism is coherent and plausible **and** avoids the conclusion of Moreland’s and Craig’s moral argument. Wondering whether CMN is coherent and plausible is a prior question to the question of whether it avoids the conclusions of Moreland and Craig’s moral argument. The reason for that is fairly obvious: what good would it be to avoid the conclusion of the specific moral argument if one’s construal of CMN was incoherent or implausible? So before addressing whether CMN avoids the moral argument, let me say some things about Guminski’s thoughts on CMN’s coherency and plausibility.

Coherency and Plausibility

Now the direct defense of CMN’s coherency and plausibility in Guminski’s paper seems quite thin to me. Beginning in paragraph #9 of his paper on page 4 to page 6, Guminski *explains* in a rough and ready way his metaphysical position. He rejects “the principle of causal closure in the physical domain and its twin-sibling—epiphenomenalism”¹¹—and affirms mind-body interactionism. He asserts that humans are unique among all sentient animals in having “the power of propositional speech and reasoning.”¹² But he holds that given mind-body interaction one who holds CMN might 1) be an emergent substance-dualist, 2) hold that the mind is just the brain when “appropriately configured....”¹³; 3) that in any case minds must “necessarily be embodied.”¹⁴

He goes further to *define* his view of the nature of human rationality in terms of second-order dispositions (or properties) of “members of the species homo sapiens who have, or presumptively have, at birth the potentiality to eventually develop (nature and nurture permitting) into theoretically and practically rational persons of good will, who will be generally disposed and able to ordinarily follow the Golden Rule.”¹⁵ Finally, he seems

¹¹ Ibid. p. 4.

¹² Ibid. p. 4.

¹³ Ibid. p. 4. see also his footnote #17 on p. 20. It appears that C.D. Broad’s view is a property dualism.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 5, 6.

to identify CMN as consistent with some form of a “properly basic” belief view of warranted belief.

Now I can find no general argument in the body of his paper or in his footnotes to show that this is likely a coherent view or that it is plausible or more plausible than physicalism—and for that matter more plausible than any other naturalistic metaphysical view. What I do see are references to further elucidations or possible elucidations of his rough and ready position. Naturally I cannot fault him for this lack of detail and rigor because of length considerations, but it is not a matter of indifference that he show that whatever his position is that it be coherent and plausible in order to be taken as a serious alternative to physicalist accounts of metaphysical naturalism. So it seems to me that he has more work to do before he could claim victory on that front.

Escaping the Moral Argument

It appears to me that Guminski is trying to rough out a picture of metaphysical naturalism—his CMN—that allows or is consistent with the view that persons are agents (that is, capable of being responsible for actions) and are naturally aware of objective moral principles. Evidently he holds that mind-body interactionism is necessary for the former. The existence of objective natural moral laws which is “somehow rooted in the facts about human nature—conceived as being that set of radical (that is basic or second order) potentialities or dispositions of what are commonly thought to be uniquely human with respect to animals and which constitute what persons consider to be the constituents of an ideal human nature”¹⁶ is necessary for the latter.

Would such a view, if it was shown to be coherent and plausible, “escape” the conclusions of Moreland’s and Craig’s moral argument?¹⁷ It would seem that it would; so far so good. But Guminski also realizes that Moreland’s and Craig’s argument concedes that the moral law obtains or, said another way, is known (or is a warranted belief) by both theists and non-theists. What they seem to disagree about is whether human nature alone is a sufficient ontological foundation for natural moral law.

I will try to capture and summarize what I take to be Guminski’s three basic arguments for the sufficiency of human nature to ground the natural moral law in the following ways:

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 8. I would add a couple of comments: 1) I resonate with Guminski’s moral realist intuitions and I do not want to be construed as arguing for moral nihilism in this paper; 2) Rooting objective natural moral law in human nature, as does Guminski, implies that human nature is both objective and that it is to be objectively valued. But why think that human nature is to be objectively valued if you’re a metaphysical naturalist—how is it that *that* value is imbedded in nature “from eternity”? I’m inclined to think that Guminski’s metaphysical account of that will be in Aristotelian and not Platonic terms, but I would like further explanation from him to be clear.

¹⁷ An important question to ask Guminski is where in his paper is the specific moral argument that he is arguing against laid out to see if he got their argument right? It seems you have to sort of piece together what the theists have to say by looking through his footnotes and finding and reading their originals; I think it would have been helpful to see his explicit interpretation of their argument so I could compare it with my reading in a fairly direct way.

Argument A

(1) Theists hold that the ontological foundation of the natural moral law lies in that man has been created in the image of God. (Humans are endowed with the radical potentiality to become rational and to govern oneself and to become a person of good will.)

(2) The natural moral law pertains to humans as having a natural end; “divine [positive] law principally looks to the ordering of man toward God, especially as it pertains to humans as having a supernatural end.”

(3) “For the naturalist, natural moral law only embodies duties to himself and to other humans....”

(4) Could not God have created a world which in the ordinary course of nature, the human race appears and with it the proximate ontological foundation for the natural moral law?

(5) If it is possible for such a world to have been created and exist, then it follows that one **could have** actually obtained in the ordinary course of nature without God.
[Emphasis mine]

(6) Therefore it is not necessary that God exist for there to be a natural moral law.

Now presumably the language that Guminski uses in the development of his argument, words like “could have” and “not necessarily” implies to me that he is trying to show that the moral law argument of Moreland’s and Craig’s fails if it is intended that the force of it be a **logical demonstration**. This conclusion about what Guminski intended to show about the nature of their argument is further reinforced by his continuing in paragraph # 32 to deal with another possible form of the argument: inference to the best explanation.

While I believe I could reasonably disagree with Guminski’s spin on the propositions contained in (1) – (4) in various ways, I will largely waive that because of length considerations and because, most directly, I do not believe that what Moreland and Craig were trying for is a logical demonstration in their argumentation.¹⁸ I do not think it is realistic to think they did.

Argument B

In this latter form, to which I refer, Guminski wants to compare the hypotheses of theism and CMN to see which better **explains** the foundation of our sense of morality. But the

¹⁸ For instance, it may be, contra Guminski, **impossible** for God to create a world in which the natural law obtains in the natural course of events in the same way it is impossible for God to create a square circle or create a stone so great he cannot lift it. While *I do think it is possible for God to create such a world*, how has Guminski shown that his proposition # 4 in Argument B is possible and not like creating a square circle?

theists, he insists, cannot rely on any non-moral arguments because they have agreed for the sake of argument not to do so. He seems to reason that since God could have created a world where the moral law obtained in the natural course of nature that it is metaphysically possible that such a world *could exist*. That being the case the key thing to decide between the metaphysical options is the application of Ockham's razor (entities are not to be unnecessarily multiplied) and, apparently, the antecedent improbability of God's existence for the one committed to CMN (and likely any form of metaphysical naturalism). These considerations apparently tip the scale in favor of the CMN hypothesis.

Now there is not much of an argument spelled out here—a lot is left to the imagination. Granting for the sake of argument that God could have created a world where the moral law obtained in the natural course of nature it would, as Guminski claims, have shown that it is possible that such a world could exist, but there are important problems yet to be resolved.¹⁹ Guminski has not shown in his paper that Ockham's razor really applies until he has shown that his CMN is coherent and plausible itself.²⁰ Even if it was, and I have serious doubts about whether this can be pulled off, there is some other unfinished business. He would also need to show that Ockham's razor applies to metaphysical theories as well as scientific ones.

His claim that there is an antecedent improbability of God's existence for a metaphysical naturalist (here I take Guminski to mean antecedently improbable for naturalists generally) is diminished until he shows that metaphysical naturalism is in a different epistemic boat than metaphysical theism—and that he has not done. How does one arrive at metaphysical naturalism in the first place? Is it on the basis of evidence or appearances? There is little doubt that Guminski's description of his position declares that he takes metaphysical naturalism as a properly basic belief—but why cannot metaphysical theism be taken as one, too. And he has not shown that theism cannot be taken as such.²¹

¹⁹ It should be noted that while it might be possible for God to create a world in which the natural law obtained or came about in the natural course of nature, it may not have been within his power to do so without designing our faculties in certain ways to be able to be aware of it. That is, it is hard to see that God can be completely left out of the explanation of why we are **aware** of the natural law. Strictly speaking lack of contradiction does not imply possibility. There are some things and states of affairs that are self-referentially incoherent and therefore not possible—for instance, it is possible to imagine I cannot type a word in English, but it is not possible for me to affirm that **while** I am typing in English.

²⁰ There is a little irony here because I think that physicalists would claim a superior position to CMN based on Ockham's razor.

²¹ This is where a discussion of what makes an argument successful or not would have been helpful in Guminski's article. In argument B we can more clearly see that Guminski is evaluating the efficacy of the moral argument in terms of its ability to convince or persuade *those who are committed to CMN*, or something close to CMN. But this scenario raises the burden of proof on the theist. To level this playing field a bit for both antagonists I would suggest that both the theist and those who hold to some form of CMN must explain how they got committed to theism or naturalism in the first place and from that carry on the discussion. This would also help me understand just why Guminski takes belief in God as antecedently improbable—there are differing accounts as to why this might hold.

Argument C

- (1) He knows that the external world and other minds exist.
- (2) This knowledge does not presuppose knowledge that God exists.
- (3) His belief in the external world and that other minds exist has the requisite proximate ontological foundation without the need to ascertain what is the ultimate foundation of his knowledge.
- (4) Implied: since he can know that the external world and other minds exist, without the knowledge of God, he could know moral truths without the knowledge of God.

Guminski concludes that he does not need to know God exists to know that the external world or that other minds exist—they are properly basic or inferred from propositions that are properly basic for him. Therefore he reasons that he does not need to know God to know these things or to know the natural moral law.

But this seems to be based on confusion and does not seem to get at the heart of the issue. Again, Moreland and Craig agree many theists believe that non-theists and theists alike know (or at least believe that it is rational or warranted to believe) that there is an external world and that other minds exist and that there are objective moral truths. Where theists and naturalists differ is in their account of the *metaphysical resources* their positions have to account for this basic intuition.²² It appears to me that Guminski may not appreciate that difference because Argument C does not provide any evidence that theism does not have the resources or that CMN does.

Let me say something parenthetically about how we might get at that difference. I think that warranted beliefs are integrally related to whether or not we have reliable means of acquiring these beliefs; what kind of coherent naturalistic account can Guminski give of acquiring these beliefs? I think that one of the main challenges that CMN (and other accounts of metaphysical naturalism) has is explaining how the resources of their metaphysical position can account for the basic beliefs that they hold. That is, if one's cognitive and sensory faculties are **not** designed to produce reliable beliefs in widely realized conditions there is little reason for trusting their deliverances. But does any naturalistic metaphysical account of our cognitive and sensory faculties include a Designer, who in his design of mind (or brain), was aiming at the production of true or warranted beliefs by those faculties? The answer seems to be a resounding no. Since knowledge and warranted beliefs have to *have something more than just being a true belief*, where do the resources of metaphysical naturalism come in to solve the problem?

²² Craig and Moreland obviously hold this for in the section Guminski cites they say, “The theist will typically maintain that a person need not believe in God in order to recognize, say, that we should love our children”, (see p. 492 of their *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*) and they quote Paul Kurt’s, *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, N.Y. Prometheus, 1988, p. 65) to further express their agreement about this, “The central question about moral and ethical principles concern their ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?”

So it seems to me that Guminski, to make this last argument work, needs a full accounting for the reliability ones cognitive and sensory faculties consistent with his metaphysics. And that metaphysic would hold **necessarily** that those faculties are not designed by anyone (there being no designers in his metaphysical view) to deliver true beliefs. This seems to me a most challenging task that should be taken up by Guminski and others before we are to take his CMN as plausible.

Section #3

Guminski is concerned that Craig, Moreland and Copan argue that *if* their moral argument is correct, then the foundation for natural moral values is gone, as is the basis for valuing human beings. Indeed, they are quoted in footnote # 58 of Guminski's paper as saying, "...Moreover, why think we have any moral obligations to do anything?" and, "Life is too short to jeopardize it by acting out of anything but pure self-interest." And, "[A]s much as we laud self-sacrifice, naturalism renders irrational the laying down of one's life for a family member or friend. How does the obligation of self-sacrifice make any sense at all in this scenario?"²³

Guminski's charge, roughed out in paragraph #36 on page 16, is that this is a sort of "slash and burn apologetic enterprise...." And, "... it operates as an unintended to be sure but nevertheless pernicious-in-effect subverter of natural morality." And, "...moreover tends to unnecessarily generate feelings of ill-will between theists and naturalists (and atheists)." He further seems to think that Craig, Moreland, and Copan (assuming for the sake of argument that their theology is correct about a Final Judgment by God), by means of their statements above, will be found to be inconsistent with the Gospel where they (we) are "all enjoined as a matter of moral principle to treat ourselves and others as human beings—both by the natural moral law and the positive divine law."

First of all, it appears to me that Guminski has assumed too quickly that he has shown their moral argument fails. I do not see where he has shown that to be the case; he still has much work to do to fairly say he has pulled that off. If their argument goes through then would it not follow that without the metaphysical resources for the natural moral law, what we call the natural moral law is an illusion?

Second, he seems to think that the intention of Craig, Moreland, and Copan is to subvert natural morality in order to motivate theists to persist in their faith who might be apprehensive that the "loss of religious commitment will be followed by immoral behavior..." and he implies that there is "also likely to be unintended counter-productive consequences with respect to such naturalists as are less sure that the natural moral law (or objective moral values) obtain than they are that it is unreasonable to believe that God exists." But why think that this is the aim of their argument for theists and that this is the most likely unintended consequence for naturalists?

²³ Ibid. p.

Is it not more likely that what Craig, Moreland and Copan are intending to do is show that though there *is* an objective moral law that theists and naturalists *know* (or perhaps have sufficient warrant to believe) alike, the naturalists do not have a *sufficient metaphysical foundation for it*? I think their encouragement is to embrace theism which holds that the moral law obtains (is objective— independent of human minds) *and* that Christian theism, at least, has a sufficient metaphysical foundation for the intuitions we have about it. That sufficient metaphysical foundation is God and His moral nature²⁴ and *his design* of our cognitive and moral faculties—aimed as they are in helping us to grasp truth and not just grasp beliefs that are conducive to survival or are accidentally true. In short, I do not think their intention was to persuade naturalists to become nihilists; I think their intention was to convert naturalists into theists.

If that was their intention then I think that Craig, Moreland, and Copan will have little to concern themselves with God’s Judgment about the way they have framed their moral argument. To be sure, some might misunderstand their argument or draw the wrong inference and become inclined towards nihilism, but Guminski hasn’t shown compelling reasons that they would be culpable for that. In short, I don’t think any of the three are intending to keep Christians in the faith out of fear or greatly run the risk that an unintended consequence of their argumentation is that naturalists will find intellectual resources to disobey the natural law. *Ceteris paribus*, wouldn’t it be more rational to think that for the naturalist who becomes convinced she does not have the metaphysical resources for trusting her moral intuitions, that instead of becoming a nihilist, she would consider or re-consider a world view or metaphysical system that more plausibly did have those resources?

Summary and Conclusion

I have argued that Guminski has not shown that Craig and Moreland have by their presentation of the moral argument conflated the various forms of naturalism and he especially has not shown that they have constructed it the way they have to gain a substantial apologetic advantage. I have shown that Craig and Moreland clearly indicated they were not treating all forms of naturalism in their arguments, and that a felicitous interpretation of their project would see their construction as facing the most numerous and prominent objections.

Regarding whether Guminski has shown that their specific moral argument failed there are several things to say. I concede that their argument does not work if it is construed as logical demonstration—but Guminski has not shown that it was their goal to do so and it seems highly probable they never intended that. Regarding the “inference to the best explanation” argument I still think there is much work for Guminski to complete before that should be viewed as credible. He has not shown CMN is coherent and more plausible than physicalism and he needs to show why Ockham’s razor applies to metaphysical theories and not just scientific ones. I have not shown that Guminski cannot do that, I just do not think so far he has.

²⁴ Moreland and Craig identify God’s moral nature with “what Plato called the Good”. See p. 491 of *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian World View*.

Finally, it appears to me that Guminiski has misunderstood both the intent and nature of Craig's, Moreland's, and Copan's moral argument and because of that misunderstanding I think he (and perhaps others) takes offense. I do not think it is most reasonable to infer Craig and Moreland are constructing their arguments or drawing inferences from it to keep theists persisting in their faith who otherwise might think their loss of religious commitment will be followed by immoral behavior, and I see no good reason to think naturalists of good will are likely to ignore the natural moral law because of their argument. What I think Craig and Moreland intended to show is that theism—Christian theism—has a solid metaphysical foundation for the objective natural moral law whereas metaphysical naturalism does not. If one rejects a credible foundation for it, then the explanation of our sense of right and wrong and our obligation to follow it must be explained in other terms—and there are practical implications from that that need to be understood. Seen in this way, their intention could reasonably be seen to encourage a re-examination of the foundations for our moral intuitions and an acceptance of a (or conversion to a) metaphysical position that better supports those intuitions and not a rejection of natural moral law.

James A. Cook
Louisville, CO
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
<jcook@intervarsity.org>