

Jonathan Fuqua's Research Statement (2018)

Research Questions

My research, present and projected, is and will be focused on three specific questions:

1. From moral epistemology – Do we have good reasons to worry about moral skepticism?
2. From philosophy of religion – Is there a viable answer to the problem of evil?
3. From political theory – How should a public reason norm be understood and justified?

A thread running through all of my work on these questions is the attempt to do and make use of careful epistemological thinking to help answer questions outside of pure epistemology proper.

Question 1: Do we have good reasons to worry about moral skepticism?

Answering this question will occupy the bulk of my research agenda for the next several years and will build on work started in my dissertation. My dissertation, “Metaethical Mooreanism,” is a first attempt to give a negative answer to this question. In my dissertation I carefully expound Mooreanism itself¹ and then argue for metaethical Mooreanism, the view that some of the Moorean facts are moral facts (e.g. that recreational genocide is wrong) and thus are epistemically superior to skeptical arguments to the contrary. I then take this view and apply it to three skeptical challenges: evolutionary debunking, moral disagreement, and empirical moral psychology.

My most substantive research project in the foreseeable future is to use materials in the dissertation to launch an investigation into the question of whether there is a conflict between science and morality. There are well-known scientific challenges to religious belief, challenges which lead many to the conclusion that there is a conflict between science and religion. We now have on our hands a number of scientific (science-inspired) challenges to commonsense morality, leading to a new conflict, one that we are facing but that hasn't yet been conceived in these terms exactly: a conflict between science and morality. I propose to write a series of papers, some of which will flow directly from the dissertation, on this conflict, arguing that in fact there is no good reason to think that there is any real conflict between science and commonsense morality. The tentative plan is that this series of papers will then eventually be used as materials for a monograph on the conflict between science and morality.

Here are the scientific challenges. Evolutionary biology appears to provide us with reasons for moral skepticism, or perhaps moral anti-realism; this is the evolutionary debunking argument. Cultural anthropology appears to provide us with evidence of irreconcilable moral disagreement, which threatens moral knowledge; this is the argument from moral disagreement. Empirical moral psychology appears to tell us that our moral cognition isn't reliable; this is the argument from empirical moral psychology. Neuroscience and psychology seem to show that we don't have free will, which threatens moral responsibility, which in turn threatens retributive punishment; this is the argument from neuroscience. Finally, situationist psychology seems to show that we don't have stable character traits after all, and thus that we don't have virtues; this is the argument from situationist psychology. My basic response to these challenges is twofold: (i) the challenges can be met on their own terms in that none of the arguments actually succeeds; (ii) the reason why the challenges fail is that they ultimately rely on controversial philosophical ideas, and those are epistemically inferior to commonsense morality.

¹ I have already published some work on Mooreanism itself, in “Dogmatism Without Mooreanism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2017): 169-181.

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Here is an outline of the project, which is already partly underway. *First*, I am currently writing a paper, "Science vs. Morality: The Scientific Threat to Morality and How to Deal with It," presenting the idea of a conflict between science and morality; this paper outlines the conflicts canvassed above and attempts to show that philosophical principles do the real work in these arguments, and that these philosophical principles are too epistemically weak to overturn commonsense morality. *Second*, I will take materials from my dissertation that are related to this project and develop them into published papers. A version of my first chapter, entitled "Moore for (Almost) Everyone," has already been conferenced and is currently under review. I will begin conferencing an already conference-ready version of my second chapter, "Metaethical Mooreanism and Evolutionary Debunking," this fall. I will also prepare conference-ready and then publish-ready versions of my chapters on moral disagreement and empirical moral psychology. *Third*, I will write a paper on the neuroscientific challenge to free will, moral responsibility, and retributive punishment and then another on the challenge from situationist psychology to the virtues. *Finally*, I will round the project out with a paper on the role played by philosophy in scientific challenges to morality, arguing that commonsense morality is epistemically superior to the controversial philosophy needed by those challenges.

A related project that I am currently working on is a paper entitled "Moral Epistemological Disjunctivism." This paper, which applies epistemological disjunctivism to moral knowledge, is my attempt to provide a robustly anti-skeptical moral epistemology to accompany my work defending commonsense morality from scientific challenges. A second related project is a paper (in preparation) entitled "Moorean Constraints in Normative Ethics," which is an attempt to argue that Moorean considerations should play a significant role in normative ethical theory.

Question 2: Is there a viable answer to the problem of evil?

My primary focus here is on investigating the prospects for a holistic response to the problem of evil, or one that combines natural theology, theodicy, skeptical theism, and Reformed epistemology. I have presented my paper on this, "A Holistic Response to the Problem Evil," at a Central Division APA meeting. My secondary focus is on skeptical theism and specifically on the question of whether the Humean argument from evil is immune to skeptical theism. To that end I have presented "Skeptical Theism and the Humean Argument from Evil" at a number of conferences. Both papers are now set to be developed into journal-ready papers.

Question 3: What is the best way to understand and justify a norm of public reason?

There are numerous versions of the doctrine of public reason; it is not entirely clear what the norm amounts to and whether or to what extent it allows for the use of comprehensive doctrines, such as religious beliefs, in the public square.² Some have argued that a public reason requirement places too many strictures on religious believers, but I argue that religious believers have good reasons for embracing a version of the doctrine of public reason. My paper on this, "Why Religious Citizens Should Support Public Reason," is currently under review.

² I have investigated the epistemic suitability of religious belief for use in the public square in my "Courting Epistemology: Legal Scholarship, the Courts, and the Rationality of Religious Belief," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 3 (2014): 195-211.