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Debunking A
Moral Landscape

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Introduction

When *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris came out a number of years ago, I purchased a copy and added it to a shelf of books that I wanted to read. As oftentimes is the case with me, I only got around to reading that book a number of years after I purchased it.

When I finished his first book, I decided to do a series of commentaries on certain portions of that book so that it could be aired on a podcast of mine – *Sufi Reflections* – that enjoyed (when it was active) a fairly decent subscribership in various parts of the world. When those commentaries and concomitant podcasts were completed, I turned the material into a short book – *Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim's Critical Response* -- that was published through Bilquees Press, my own publishing house.

There were many points in *The End of Faith* with which one could agree. However, the bottom line for me with respect to his first book was this: I found it difficult to distinguish between his form of irreligious fundamentalism and the religious fundamentalists against whom he railed in his book ... plus, not only was his ignorance about Islam fairly substantial, but, as well, he kept insisting that he should be the one who was the arbiter of what was, and what was not, Islamic.

The sorts of reasoning processes that Sam Harris employed in *The End of Faith* are in evidence throughout *The Moral Landscape*. Not surprisingly, therefore, the sorts of problems that I believe infested the modalities of reasoning utilized in his first book carry over into his latest book.

Whereas my response to *The End of Faith* was largely limited to a point-counterpoint with respect to various issues concerning Islam that formed a substantial part of *The End of Faith*, I decided that my response to *The Moral Landscape* should be conducted from a perspective involving just reason and science. In other words, I wanted to journey to Dr. Harris' alleged home court and play the game, so to speak, according to principles of rationality and scientific inquiry and, for the most part, put religious/spiritual issues aside.

Debunking A Moral Landscape deals almost entirely with matters of rationality, science, psychology, and moral philosophy ... although there are a few forays here and there into issues that seek to correct

Dr. Harris' mistaken conceptions about this or that religious idea or principle. To make a longer story (i.e., the present book) much shorter (this sentence), while, once again, there are any number of issues with which one might agree in relation to what Dr. Harris says in *The Moral Landscape*, nonetheless, when push comes to shove, I can't think of even one of the building blocks that Dr. Harris uses to construct his form of philosophical neurobiology – or neurobiological philosophy -- that is not seriously flawed.

One doesn't need to cite spiritual texts, revealed books, or mystical specialists in order point out the weaknesses in Dr. Harris' position in relation to his work: *The Moral Landscape*. One can accomplish the same thing by just thinking clearly and rigorously with respect to issues of rationality, philosophy, morality, psychology, and science.

Without wishing, in any way, to be dismissive of *The End of Faith*, Richard Dawkins once said that anyone could have written such a book, but, then, he continued on and proclaimed that only someone like Sam Harris could have written *The Moral Landscape*. The proclamation was meant to be a rousing endorsement of the latter book and an acknowledgement that the special talents that allegedly are on display in *The Moral Landscape* demonstrate Sam Harris to be someone who is at the forefront of expertise as an advocate for reason, science, and truth. Nonetheless, in a way that runs counter to what Richard Dawkins was trying to communicate through the foregoing comments, one can only hope that Richard Dawkins is correct in what he says because one can only tolerate so much in the way of a poorly reasoned and argued conceptual position.

Ian McEwan, a past Man Booker Prize winner, claims in relation to *The Moral Landscape* that: "Reason has never had a more passionate advocate." Steven Pinker, a professor of psychology at Harvard and author of such books as: *How The Mind Works* and *The Blank Slate* states that: "Harris makes a powerful case for a morality that is based on human flourishing and thoroughly enmeshed with science and rationality." Lawrence Krauss, a professor at Arizona State University and author of a number of books on physics writes: "Reading Sam Harris is like drinking water from a cool stream on a hot day ... As was the case with Harris's previous books, readers are bound to come

away with ... a vital new awareness about the nature and value of science and reason in our lives.”

There are many other quotes that could be given that are similar in laudatory character to the foregoing testimonials with respect to *The Moral Landscape*. However, having read the book in question, I really wonder how closely any of the foregoing individuals read – and, more importantly, critically reflected on -- *The Moral Landscape*.

Perhaps, the testimonials are an expression of the quid pro quo reciprocity that is common in the publishing industry in which different people write blurbs for one another’s books in order to help market their respective works – blurbs that often seem to be based on little more than a cursory examination of what is being lauded. Or, perhaps, all the foregoing, cited individuals have drunk from the same Kool-Aid, and, as a result, have become incapable of rigorous critical thought when it comes to the writings of Sam Harris.

If “reason has never had a more passionate advocate” than Sam Harris, then reason is in trouble. If *The Moral Landscape* “makes a powerful case for a morality that is ...thoroughly enmeshed with science and rationality”, then morality, science, and rationality are all in trouble. If “reading Sam Harris is like drinking water from a cool stream on a hot day”, then, perhaps, the individual who said such words is suffering from a heat stroke-generated hallucination because all that issues from *The Moral Landscape* is a barren landscape devoid of any signs of an oasis.

Near the end of the present book – namely, *Debunking A Moral Landscape*, the following words appear: “Not only does Dr. Harris fail to make a convincing case for why anyone else should jump on the bandwagon with respect to his ideas about the moral landscape, but, as well, his position is not even sufficiently strong or plausible for one to say something to the effect of: “While I do not feel he has put forth a sufficiently strong epistemological position to warrant me following him in his moral enterprise, I understand why he, as an individual, might wish to proceed in such a direction” because the fact of the matter is there is little rational or scientific clarity, coherency, or plausibility inherent in his position. If I were his teacher, the way I might put it is as follows – for effort, he gets a B or B-, but in terms of execution – that is, in terms of putting forth a well-argued, factually

strong, conceptually compelling case for either himself or others – his work in *The Moral Landscape* deserves a failing grade.” If one wanted to give a course about: how not to reason or how not to do science, *The Moral Landscape* would be an excellent textbook through which to assist students to learn how to avoid errors in reasoning by distancing themselves from how Dr. Harris goes about doing things in his book.

Debunking A Moral Landscape is not just about criticizing Sam Harris – although, to be sure, what Sam Harris has to say in *The Moral Landscape* serves as the focal point through which a wide variety of issues are explored. Nevertheless, if one is interested in: rationality, science, philosophy, morality, evolution, psychology, neurobiology, and critical thinking, then there is much of a constructive nature that is given expression through *Debunking A Moral Landscape* that transcends my criticisms of Dr. Harris’ position.

Although it is currently fashionable for some – and Dr. Harris is among them -- to argue that the relationship between science and spirituality is something of a zero-sum game, I believe the truth of the matter is that, when properly understood, there is very little – if anything -- in modern science that is capable of contradicting, or proving as false a great many spiritual possibilities, even as there might be particular forms of theology that foolishly seek to fly in the face of facts that are capable of knocking such theologies to the ground. I have coined the term “interstitial spirituality” to refer to the manner in which there are numerous conceptual convolutions in modern science, and such convolutions entail many spaces in which ignorance and the unknown prevail ... spaces of an interstitial sort that are capable of accommodating a great many spiritual possibilities that are quite intelligible and capable – up to a certain point – of being explored through the instrumentation of rationality in a context of whatever scientific facts have been established.

One person wrote a critical review of my book: *Sam Harris and the End of Faith*, warning people that there was nothing new in the book and people should not waste their time reading it. My first thought after hearing about this critical comment is that here was a person who was seeking to prevent other people from determining for themselves the truth of a matter and, therefore, the reviewer was someone who was seeking to control what other people read and

thought according to his own likes and dislikes ... something that seems contrary to the whole spirit of skepticism, rationality, and empirical inquiry.

Whether someone agrees or disagrees with the contents of *Debunking A Moral Landscape*, I hope the opinions that are formed by an individual with respect to the present book will be based on actually having taken a thoughtful and careful exploratory journey through the landscape of this book's contents rather than being based on the travel brochure written by someone else who very well might never even have bothered visiting the place that is being written up. Moreover, irrespective of whether a reader agrees or disagrees with the contents of the present book, I believe there is a great deal of food for thought contained herein that cannot but assist a person to better reflect on such food and decide whether, or not, it might be worthwhile working on digesting those contents more completely.

As is the case with many, but not all, of my twenty-four other books, the following material does not necessarily have to be read sequentially. The book is divided up into 32 sections, and each section gives expression to its own set of arguments that can be understood in the context of the quotations or ideas drawn from *The Moral Landscape* with which each section usually, but not always, begins.

Consequently, although the 32 sections do complement each other, they also are, to a certain extent, independent of one another. This means that, for the most part, one does not necessarily have to be familiar with a previous section in order to understand later sections even as all 32 sections, considered collectively, constitute – I hope – a fairly formidable set of arguments demonstrating the absence of credibility or tenability with respect to the perspective that is being set forth in *The Moral Landscape*.

In any event, if, upon first encounter, you find some of the numbered sections somewhat rough going, feel free to skip around to other sections that might be more user friendly. When you are ready, return to the section or sections that, initially, might have represented something of an obstacle and see whether, or not, the second time through the section(s) will lead to a more rewarding experience.

Chapter One

According to Sam Harris in his book: *The Moral Landscape*, values are reducible to issues that address questions about the “well-being of conscious creatures” (page 1). Moreover, since values “translate into facts that can be scientifically understood” (page 1), then science has the capacity to determine human values, and, as a result, the problem of how we ought to think about various issues involving meaning, purpose, and morality can be shown -- in Dr. Harris’ view -- to be functionally dependent on the processes of science.

Dr. Harris contends that just as science has established the universal criteria for diagnosing and treating physical maladies – e.g., typhus is typhus no matter where it occurs -- the criteria for determining what constitutes appropriate values also can be established through scientific research. More specifically, he maintains that neurobiology – which encompasses the organization, structure, and functional character of brain processes -- holds the key to coming to understand the principles and properties of well-being in relation to conscious creatures such as human beings.

The greater our knowledge about, and understanding of, brain processes, the more well-established will our vantage point be for grasping what Dr. Harris considers to be a central precept of existence. More specifically, there are right and wrong, better and worse, answers to questions about value, and such answers will be found through science and not through religion.

Dr. Harris states on page 2 of *The Moral Landscape*: “Human well-being depends on events in this world and on states of the human brain.” Furthermore, he wishes to argue that since one can determine the facts of such ‘events’ and ‘states’, then the nature of well-being becomes a matter of determining the relevant facts of ‘dependency’ with respect to those ‘events’ and ‘states.’

While Dr. Harris does not necessarily believe all moral issues will give rise to determinate answers about which everyone will agree – there are, after all, differences of opinion among scientists about a variety of issues – nonetheless, he does wish to maintain that all matters of value are necessarily constrained by facts and the degree to which this is so today will steadily increase into the future as more facts about the nature of reality are uncovered. In addition, Dr. Harris

feels that even though we might not be able to answer a given value issue at the present time, this does not mean there is not a determinate answer to such an issue since whatever the character of the circumstances might be -- and quite irrespective of whether, or not, we know or understand that character -- there is an ontological reality to those circumstances, and, according to Dr. Harris, this means there are ontological facts that constrain what can be correctly said about those circumstances.

Before continuing on to explore the topography of Dr. Harris' moral landscape more closely, there are a few points that are worth mentioning in relation to the foregoing overview of Dr. Harris' perspective. First, all facts are theory-laden, and among other things this means that one does not find "facts" lying about on the ground, ready to pick up and store away in some sort of scientific archive.

"Facts" are representations of certain facets of experience. Those representations might, or might not, reflect the actual character of that which is being represented.

"Facts" often have to be cobbled together to construct a theory, worldview, or framework concerning the nature of reality. The glue that holds those facts together tends to be interpretation -- which is a way of trying to make sense of how a set of facts might fit together in a coherent manner ... and there might be more than one modality of interpretation that is consistent with such a set of "facts."

Hypotheses arise as attempts to link facts with one another in particular ways. Hypotheses often arise as proposals for generating further experiences (in the form of research and/or experiments) that not only add to the data set of possible facts but, as well, hopefully provide a certain coherency among, and confirmation with respect to, such facts.

"Facts" are rooted in assumptions about the nature of experience. "Facts" also are a function of methodological strategies for generating "facts" ... strategies that tend to be theory-laden in their own right.

Do the foregoing comments mean that "facts" are arbitrary constructions? Not necessarily.

Can there be agreement among a group of people about what the 'facts' of a situation are? Yes, there can be.

Must one suppose that “facts” are cultural artifacts that are unrelated to realities independent of such cultural influences? Not necessarily.

Nevertheless, determining the “facts” of a given set of circumstances often is not a straightforward process. Among other things, this ‘not straightforward’ aspect of “facts” means there might be, and often are, arbitrary dimensions entangled with “facts,” and, as well, notwithstanding the ‘fact’ that a group of people have reached agreement upon what the facts of a given situation are, the agreement, in and of itself, does not mean that the facts that have been agreed upon correctly reflect the actual nature of the circumstances to which such “facts” allude. Furthermore, while “facts” might, on any given occasion, transcend specific cultures, being able to distinguish the ‘real’ from the ‘cultural’ tends to be a problematic undertaking.

Truth is not a function of facts. Rather, the best facts are well-conceived descriptions – and, sometimes, explanations -- concerning the character of the truth in relation to some given dimension of experience.

I agree with Dr. Harris that there is an objective reality. I also agree with him that despite the existence of such an objective reality, human beings might not always be in a position to determine what the nature of that objective reality is, and, consequently, human ignorance might prevail when it comes to trying to provide answers concerning what the nature of reality is on any given occasion.

Is Dr. Harris correct when he claims that: “human well-being depends on events in this world and on states in the human brain”? To answer this question, one must come to an understanding not only of the nature of the ‘dependency’ to which he refers, but one also must come to terms with the idea of “well-being.”

In what way does well-being depend on events in the world? In what way does well-being depend on states in the brain? What, if anything, do states in the brain have to do with events in the world? What does Dr. Harris mean by the idea of “well-being,” and how does one establish what the “facts” are concerning such a condition of well-being?

Is Dr. Harris right when he argues that values: “translate into facts that can be scientifically understood”? The answer to this question depends, in part, on the nature of the translation process that links values and facts, and, therefore, one needs to carefully examine the translation program being advocated by Dr. Harris with respect to values and facts.

Is Dr. Harris on a sound footing when he asserts that neurobiology holds the key to understanding how well-being is entirely a matter of properly understanding what goes on in the human brain and the manner in which some brain states are more conducive to well-being than are other brain states? The answer to this question depends, to a great extent, on whether, or not, neurobiology really provides any sort of essential insight into the nature of, on the one hand: consciousness, thinking, logic, language, understanding, and/or values and, on the other hand, the issue of well-being.

The following analysis will examine all of the foregoing issues concerning: science, facts, methodology, well-being, consciousness, brain states, and values. The general tenor of this analysis will be that Dr. Harris often treads on problematic ground in relation to many of the things that he says in his book, and the purpose of this extended essay is to demonstrate, in some detail, why and how Dr. Harris’ ideological position – and Dr. Harris is espousing an ideological position -- fails on a number of levels and in a number of essential ways.

Although I have been a Muslim for nearly 40 years and although I have been pursuing the mystical dimension of Islam – i.e., tasawwuf or the Sufi spiritual path -- for a little bit longer than four decades, I will not engage Dr. Harris in a discourse involving a set of spiritual versus rational/scientific arguments. Instead, I will venture into what Dr. Harris believes is his domain – that is, rationality and sound science – and do battle with him on his own turf, so to speak, and, in the process, attempt to reveal errors in his thinking, ideas, understanding, and conclusions through a critical examination of the ideational structure underlying, permeating, and being manifested through his perspective concerning morality, brain states, the world, and science.

Chapter Two

Dr. Harris believes that morality is an “undeveloped branch of science” (page 4). However, by using the term “undeveloped,” Dr. Harris seems to imply that currently morality is not a branch of science, but, in the future he believes that the emergence of certain kinds of “facts” will help to establish morality as a branch of science.

According to Dr. Harris, as we come to learn how “facts” concerning ideas, beliefs, or intentions arise in the brain, and, in addition, as we come to develop a better understanding in relation to the “facts” that are discovered about how such thoughts are translated into behaviors via various processes of the brain, and, finally, as we gradually develop an appreciation for the “facts” that will be established with respect to how such behaviors are received by and leave their imprint on other conscious beings, we should arrive at a point in which we will see that such “facts” about thoughts, behaviors, and their impact on other human beings will form a ‘fact-based’ science to which morality gives expression. What Dr. Harris is attempting to do in *The Moral Landscape* is to propose a theory about how “facts” – both present and future ones – will cohere and, thereby, demonstrate that moral issues not only belong under the purview of science, but, more specifically, are best understood as a function of neurobiological processes.

However, let’s backtrack a bit and reflect, for a moment, on certain aspects of the foregoing theory. For instance, let us ask the question: Do thoughts, ideas, and intentions arise in the brain? What are the facts here?

The facts are as follows: No one knows what consciousness is or how it arises; no one knows how ideas are generated; no one knows how reason or logic are possible; no one knows how purpose, meaning, or insight arise, and no one knows how or why language works in the way it does.

Collectively, we experience consciousness, thought, reason, logic, purpose, meaning, insight, and language. Collectively, most of us spend a considerable portion of our lives learning how to use these givens of experience, but when physical life comes to an end, few, if any, of us

are much the wiser about what is going on with respect to any of the aforementioned phenomena or how any of them are possible.

It is as if we have inherited, in a yet to be determined way, various “tools” – namely, consciousness, thought, reason, logic, insight and so on -- that we can learn (on our own, and/or be taught by others) how to use. However, such “tools” have proven to be relatively impenetrable when it comes to figuring out how such “tools” actually work or what makes them possible. Attempts at reverse engineering in relation to these “tools” or “instruments” have been fraught with a variety of problems.

Among other things, we have difficulty pointing to anything in particular as being the causal mechanisms through which such “tools” or “instruments” operate. In other words, we can examine, for example, the thoughts that are generated by such “tools” but not the means through which those “tools” generate specific thoughts.

When scientists look at neurons (certain kinds of specialized brain cells – there are a number of different kinds of neurons), dendrites (which are branch-like processes of a neuron that receive extra-neuronal information and deliver that information to the body of the neuron of which it is a part), axons (which are the portion of a neuron through which electrical impulses are generated that, among other things, activate the release of neurotransmitters that are stored in the tips of such axons), synapses (the space between a given axon and associated dendrites of other neurons), and the neurotransmitters (the chemical messengers that are linked in, as of yet, unknown ways to the electrical impulses that occur within neurons), one can determine that various kinds of circuits (or neuronal/synaptic networks) are established that link dendrites, axons, electrical signals, neurotransmitters and synapses together in certain ways, but there is absolutely no indication of how, or if, any of this complex brain activity generates consciousness, reason, logic, insight, understanding, interpretation, creativity, or language.

When I taught psychology, one of the concepts with which many of my students seemed to have a fair amount of difficulty understanding was the difference between correlation and causation. To say that two events or objects are correlated -- to some degree -- across a set of

experiences says nothing about the precise character of the linkage, if any, among such events or objects.

In general, there are four possibilities from which to choose. More specifically, if 'A' and 'B' are correlated -- or observed to occur together (or in relative close proximity either temporally, spatially or both) across a series of experiences -- it is possible that: (1) A causes B, or (2) B causes A, or (3) A and B are caused by some unknown factor 'C', or (4) a variety of "factors" are interacting in a complex dynamic such that A and B might occur in conjunction with one another but are not necessarily causally related to each other (that is: A does not cause B, and B does not cause A, and A and B are not necessarily caused by some third factor C).

The stronger the positive or negative correlation between two events or objects is, the more likely -- but this is not a certainty -- it is that one is encountering some sort of causal relationship in relation to those events or objects. However, even if causality of some kind links those events and/or objects, one cannot necessarily determine the direction of causality or the source of the causation on the basis of correlation alone. Further research is needed in order to try to determine the precise character of the relationship of such events or objects.

For instance, just because certain thoughts or intentions are correlated with certain kinds of brain events, one cannot automatically suppose that the thoughts and intentions are caused by such brain states. It is possible that in some unknown way thoughts and intentions are causing such brain states rather than being caused by those states. Furthermore, it also is possible that something else -- which might be neither a thought nor a brain state -- is causing both the thoughts and the brain states to occur together.

Perhaps an analogy, of sorts, might help to clarify some of the foregoing ideas. For example, let's think a little about how a television set works.

More specifically, the program images -- let's suppose there is a Star Trek episode running -- that appear on a television screen are not generated by the television set for which the screen serves as a medium through which programs are made visible to a viewer. To be sure, the various components and circuits that make up a television set

must be in working condition in order for the Star Trek program to be viewable, but if a television set is not connected in some manner with the towers and stations that transmit certain kinds of electromagnetic signals, then no program images will appear on the screen of my television set -- and for the purposes of the present discussion, I will set aside possibilities such as DVD, Blu-Ray, or TiVo that are capable of generating images in a different, but related, manner.

If my television set breaks down, I can call in a repairperson or take the set to a repair specialist. Often times when one turns the matter over to such a technician, one provides a brief description of the problem(s) – no picture, or no sound, or there seems to be something wrong with the color scheme, and so on.

The technician has a variety of diagnostic tools that will help identify that circuits and/or components might be dysfunctional. However, irrespective of what the problem might be, television stations and towers have continued to transmit program signals even as my television set has been unable to receive any of that electronic data.

There is a strong positive correlation between a properly functioning television set and Star Trek images appearing on the screen of my set, but, strictly speaking, the television set does not cause the content of the Star Trek images. Instead, the television helps make the occurrence of those images possible.

The structural character of the Star Trek images are primarily a function of the sort of signal that is being transmitted by a television station and/or tower quite independently of my television set. Once received, the television set's circuitry and components translate that signal into a set of sequential, viewable images – but images whose content character is largely dictated by the nature of the signal being sent by a given television station ... although, to be sure, the television set circuitry and components have the capacity to modulate that signal in certain, limited ways.

Moreover, if we take things one step further, strictly speaking, it is not a television station or tower, per se, that is the ultimate cause of the content character of the Star Trek images that appear on the screen of my television set. Whether a given program is live or recorded, there are scriptwriters, actors, producers, directors, lighting

and sound technicians, editors, special effects people, and camera personnel who combine together to construct the content of a given program that is intended to look a particular way when it appears on the screen of my television set.

When all is said and done, the television station might send out a signal, but the content, information, or data contained within that signal has been put together by a variety of people working in cooperation with one another. The station, on its own -- or the tower on its own -- cannot produce the content character of such programs.

Television stations, television towers, and television sets are all highly correlated with the images that appear on the screen of my television set. However, none of them, on their own, cause those images to have the structural content character that they have. Just as my television set enables the Star Trek program images to appear on my set without directly causing those images to have the content they do, so, too, television stations and towers – each in their own way – enable the Star Trek program content to be transmitted to my television set. Neither the television station nor the towers cause the Star Trek program content to have the character it has.

Television stations, towers, and sets do play causal roles, of a sort, in the generation of Star Trek program images. Nonetheless, the character of those causal roles is one of enabling Star Trek programming content to be manifested in my television set while the actual programming content of the Star Trek episode is created in a manner that, to varying degrees (depending on how things are done), is separate from, or independent of, those television stations, towers, and sets.

To what extent is the brain like a television set? In other words, could the nature of the brain be a collection of circuits and components that enable certain signals – sent from elsewhere – to be picked up and translated into lived experience ... the sort of lived experience that is viewable on the screen of consciousness?

Or, is it possible that the human brain is a sort of like a television tower? Perhaps the brain is a way station for transmitting signals sent from elsewhere and which then relays that signal to something else that might not be a function of brain processes – for example, consciousness – in order to make experiences ‘viewable’ ... in which

case consciousness becomes the television set and the brain is a complex receiving and relay tower.

Or, is it possible that the brain is more like a group of technicians at a television station? These technicians would generate an electromagnetic signal whose specific structure has been formed in accordance with the creative efforts of a group of writers, producers, directors, and actors who do their work outside the station and just bring in a finished product into the station that is modulated in various ways by technicians at the station to ready it for transmission to other destinations beyond the station.

Where do intelligence, reason, insight, consciousness, and ideas come from? We don't know, but any of the foregoing scenarios are possible analogies for the role that the brain plays in enabling us to view experience.

If someone were to try to claim that the television stations, relay towers, and receiving sets were – considered as objects – conscious, or were capable of: thought, reason, logic, insight, creativity and language, most people would treat such a possibility as absurd ... although who knows? Consequently, if someone insists that the brain – as an object – is the source of: consciousness, reason, insight, creativity, and so on, why should one suppose that such a claim is any less absurd than trying to claim that television stations, relay towers, and receiving sets are capable of such phenomena?

To be sure, there is a growing body of data indicating that when injury occurs to different parts of the brain, certain kinds of dysfunctional conditions are observed. Nevertheless, how is this any different than those situations in which the circuit boards of a television set are damaged and, as a result, certain kinds of dysfunctional states are observed in relation to the operation – or non-operational -- character of the television set?

The brain might be far more complex than any given television set. However, the underlying principle might be the same – namely, just as the television set is not the source or ultimate cause of the content of, say, a Star Trek program, so, too, the brain might not be the source or ultimate cause of the contents of consciousness or the 'programs' that are manifested there.

The foregoing is not meant to indicate that the brain is not the source of thoughts and all of the other phenomena of the mind. Rather, what is intended by the foregoing is to suggest that identification of the ultimate source(s) of the phenomena of mind is far from being a settled issue.

I believe that Dr. Harris understands the difference between correlation and causation, and none of the foregoing comments were intended to imply that Dr. Harris doesn't know the difference between correlation and causation. Nonetheless, he often writes in a way that assumes – without any proof – that the brain is alone responsible for the creation and production of everything that takes place on the viewing screen of consciousness. As a result, he does not make it sufficiently clear to his readers that his assumption concerning the nature and function of the brain is only one among a number of possibilities.

As noted earlier in this essay, Dr. Harris accepts the idea that there are questions about the nature of reality for which we might not currently know the answer. Despite this lack of knowledge and understanding, Dr. Harris is of the opinion – one with which I agree -- that reality does, nonetheless, operate in accordance with determinate principles – even if we don't know what the precise character of the “facts” are that accurately describe what those principles are and/or are unable to explain how they operate.

Our current position of knowledge/ignorance would entitle Dr. Harris to ask a legitimate question in relation to the foregoing considerations – namely: If the brain is not the cause and source of conscious experience -- along with all of consciousness' varied programs of reasoning, logic, creativity, insight, language, and so on, then what is the cause of such phenomena? At the same time, since Dr. Harris already has committed himself in principle to the possibility that we might never know the answer to such a question -- even though we might all agree that it has a determinate answer of some kind -- nonetheless, despite the ‘fact’ that the aforementioned question is not answerable at the present time (and perhaps never will be), one cannot presume that the ‘fact’ such an unanswerable question could be asked by someone like Dr. Harris, this fact, in and of itself, does not justifiably entitle a person – such as Dr. Harris – to make the further

claim that the only acceptable way of resolving the issue is to assume that there is no non-brain source for phenomena such as thoughts, and, as a result, by default, we are left with the idea that the brain must be the source of ideas, intentions, consciousness, thinking, creativity, language, and so on.

Furthermore, if one does not accept Dr. Harris' theoretical assumptions in relation to trying to understand the structural and functional nature of human experience, one need not automatically be forced to assume the burden of explanation in such matters. Dr. Harris is the one with the theories about such things, and, therefore, the burden of proof rests entirely with him.

He is the one who must provide plausible explanations for how the brain generates consciousness, thought, intention, creativity, language, understanding, and the like. At the present time, he (nor anyone else in neurobiology) has any plausible and fully defensible causal explanations (and this point will be further delineated throughout this essay) with respect to the possible connection between the brain and any of the aforementioned phenomena – i.e., consciousness, thought, intention, and so on.

All Dr. Harris has are correlations. He doesn't know what those correlations mean. He doesn't know whether, or not, there are any causal relationships entailed by such correlations ... or, if such causal relations are present, he doesn't know what they are or in which direction they go. In addition, he doesn't know whether, or not, those correlations are a function of the dynamics of further forces or factors that are currently unknown to us.

Chapter Three

On page 6 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris criticizes the journal *Nature* for generally accepting the late Stephen Gould's idea of "nonoverlapping magisteria". This term refers to the idea that the principles and facts of science and religion do not conflict with one another because the two disciplines encompass different domains of expertise.

I agree with the general tenor of Dr. Harris' rejection of the "nonoverlapping magisteria" concept. My reasons for doing so are somewhat different than his are.

More specifically, Dr. Harris wishes to take issue with Gould's/*Nature's* perspective concerning the idea that the reason why there is no conflict between science and religion is because science rules authoritatively over the processes of discovering and establishing the physical principles and "facts" of the universe, while religion rules authoritatively over the processes of discovering and establishing the moral and spiritual principles/"facts" of the universe. Dr. Harris rejects the foregoing distinction, because: "Meaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures – and in our case, must lawfully depend upon events in the world and upon states of the human brain." (page 6)

In addition, Dr. Harris believes that: "rational, open-ended, honest inquiry has always been the true source of insight into such processes. Faith, if it is ever right about anything, is right by accident." (page 6).

I agree with Dr. Harris that 'rational, open-ended, honest inquiry' is an important component in relation to any sort of investigatory activity, although I am less certain about whether, or not, such inquiry is the "source of insight" with respect to that process since rational, open-ended, honest inquiry might only be a necessary prelude to the emergence of insight into a given issue rather than the source of the insight into the nature or character of that situation. In other words, to say that a certain kind of inquiry is the cause or source of insight is to make a statement about the structural character of how understanding and intelligence operate, and, yet, Dr. Harris is entirely unclear as to how inquiry is the cause or source of insight.

Just as a television set enables images to manifest themselves on the screen of my set, so, too, the right sort of inquiry might enable insight to manifest itself on the screen of consciousness. Nonetheless, such inquiry might no more be the source or cause of insight than a television set is the cause of the content of the images that appear on its screen.

There are many individuals who might participate in a process of “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry.” However, not all of them necessarily come up with the correct insight concerning such inquiry.

Consequently, strictly speaking, one cannot argue that such inquiry is the source or cause of insight. The two might be correlated, but their relationship might not be causal in nature, and, as a result, some additional factor or factors might be responsible for the manifestation of insight.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, Dr. Harris seems to assume that the meaning of what constitutes a “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” is fairly straightforward. However, there are any number of instances in the history of science involving areas of inquiry such as: cosmology, astrophysics, geology, evolution, quantum mechanics, psychology, string theory, climate science, and so on, in which the participants of those exploratory processes are not necessarily guided by principles of rationality, open-endedness, and honesty but, unfortunately, are all too often guided, instead, by principles entailed by a felt need to defend one’s intellectual turf against the onslaught of new “facts” and ideas.

The status quo of science often tends to express a certain amount of inertial resistance to being moved or displaced in relation to the dynamics of ongoing revolutions in thinking in relation to the status quo of – to use Kuhn’s term – “normal science.” The idea that scientists are always “rational, open-ended and honest” with respect to their inquiry into the nature of things is a myth, and there is a considerable amount of junk science associated with, among others, the tobacco, chemical, pharmaceutical, agriculture, and environmental industries that underscores the nature of that mythology.

Dr. Harris never explains what he means by “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry”. Instead, what he does is to provide a variety of examples throughout *The Moral Landscape* and apparently feels that

the reader will grasp the meaning of the foregoing phraseology through a process of interpolation and extrapolation in relation to the individual exemplars he presents during the course of his book, but as will be delineated later on in this essay, I am not sure that Dr. Harris is, himself, always committed to “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” about a variety of issues ... assuming, of course, one could arrive at a characterization of such inquiry with which most people might agree.

For example -- and to offer something of an appetizer for the meal that is to come -- Dr. Harris wants to contrast “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” with ‘faith’. Dr. Harris appears to be of the opinion that his idea of inquiry is everything which faith is not and vice versa.

The foregoing distinction is being drawn by someone who, whether he wishes to acknowledge it or not, employs the principle of faith throughout his book, *The Moral Landscape*. More specifically, earlier I quoted Dr. Harris as asserting that: “Meaning, values, morality and the good life must relate to facts” that “must lawfully depend on events in the world and upon states in the human brain.”

The foregoing claim is a faith statement. Justifying the previous statement is not all that difficult to accomplish.

Dr. Harris does not currently know how: “meaning, values, morality, and the good life” relate to lawful facts that “depend on events in the world and upon states in the human brain.” Currently, Dr. Harris does not know what the “facts” are to which meaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate,” and he does not know what the precise character of that relation is. Furthermore, Dr. Harris does not know how such facts “must lawfully depend on the events in the world and upon states in the human brain.”

What Dr. Harris does know are certain “facts” about, among other things, neurobiology (and this concession is granted for purposes of argument and not because everything that Dr. Harris might like to claim as a ‘fact’ is necessarily so). The “facts” he does know have a relationship with the many things he does not know.

Such a relationship is one of faith. Dr. Harris believes – and I have quoted him arguing in this fashion on several occasions earlier in this essay – that there are “facts” that will be discovered in the future that will vindicate his current theory concerning the nature of morality as

a, presently, “undeveloped branch of science.” Moreover, Dr. Harris believes that science will engage the events of the world and the states of the brain through a process of “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” and, thereby, develop insights into the lawful nature of the dependencies that link “facts” concerning events in the world and “facts” concerning various brain states.

Dr. Harris has no proof with respect to any of the foregoing claims. Nonetheless, on the basis of what he now believes he knows, he is of the opinion that certain things – which are currently not known to be true -- will be shown in the future to be “facts” of a lawful nature that give expression to specific dependency relationships involving the world, brain states, and morality.

Dr. Harris might use terms such as: “opinion,” “theory,” “hypothesis,” “belief,” “prediction,” “reason,” and “science” to allude to the way in which what he knows is juxtaposed in relation to what he does not know, but the connection is nothing else but faith, and that faith is what sustains Dr. Harris as he attempts to construct a reliable bridge that will link his current knowledge with the unexplored territory of the future and, thereby, possibly prove himself to be correct with respect to his claims about morality and science.

Dr. Harris has faith that the process of science will lead to truth despite its many difficulties. Dr. Harris has faith that “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry” will generate insights concerning the nature of various kinds of “facts.” He has faith that lawful dependencies will be established and clarified in relation to such “facts.” He has faith that those lawful dependencies will demonstrate that morality is a branch of science. Dr. Harris has faith that one needs to look no further than the brain to be able to develop a fully complete science of morality. He has faith that science can determine human values.

The concept of faith is never really defined by Dr. Harris. One does gather from some of his statements that he doesn’t think much of the idea – after all, why else would he say that: “Faith, if it is ever right about anything, is right by accident”? (page 6)

According to Dr. Harris, faith is the antithesis of “rational, open-ended, honest inquiry.” However, what is his justification for saying this?

One finds any number of instances in *The Moral Landscape* in which Dr. Harris criticizes certain individuals for their religious views, and by implication, faith seems to be the culprit ... that is, apparently, faith is what led such people astray.

Although I might agree with Dr. Harris with respect to any number of issues that he seeks to criticize with respect to this or that religious belief or practice, nonetheless, one might argue that faith is not necessarily the problem child in relation to any of the mistakes or errors that are cited by Dr. Harris in conjunction with such religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps, the mistake or error is that the individuals that Dr. Harris takes to task were merely guilty of placing their faith in the wrong sort of practice or belief.

If it is okay for Dr. Harris to have faith in relation to the future with respect to his present neurobiological project of hoping to demonstrate that morality is an undeveloped branch of science, then how can he argue – and still be consistent – that it is not okay for any given individual to have faith concerning what that person believes will be the face of truth in the future? The issue of faith is not a matter of what is right or wrong, but, instead, it is a matter of having a commitment to a given understanding as a correct reflection of the way the universe operates despite an absence of certain kinds of knowledge concerning all of the facts of a matter.

If the theory being propounded by Dr. Harris is correct -- in other words, the idea that morality is a branch of science and that science can determine human values – then his current faith in his project will have been justified. If, on the other hand, it turns out that his theory about morality is incorrect, then his faith in his current project will have been misplaced.

Faith is one of the primary exchange currencies of existence. The exercise of faith is no more an error than is the act of spending some form of currency in exchange for the goods of life, although, certainly, one can be criticized for the ways in which faith is used during such exchanges, just as one can be criticized for the way in which money might be used in various economic transactions.

Dr. Harris might reject use of the term “faith” when he discusses his own ideas, beliefs, understanding, values, and behavior. However,

if he does so, then this merely provides evidence that he is neither: rational, open-ended, nor honest when it comes to such issues.

Faith is a measure of the confidence or commitment one has in relation to some particular idea, belief, value, theory, hypothesis, understanding and the like. If Dr. Harris is uncomfortable with the lexicon of faith, he certainly can choose other words to describe what he is doing, but he is fooling no one but himself and others who have an unreasoning, irrational, closed, and dishonest antipathy to the issue of faith.

Faith is not necessarily an inherently religious or spiritual concept. Rather, it is the glue that holds much of one's life together, and, as such, it helps get one through a day of transactions in which one is trusting that the world cooperates in a way that is consistent with, and reflective of, to some extent, one's understanding about how that world operates.

Getting in a car is rooted in a faith that the car will perform as expected and that other drivers will obey the rules of the road. Eating food is rooted in a faith that such products have been properly grown, raised, harvested, cultivated, slaughtered, preserved, stored, and/or cooked. Being married is rooted in a faith that the person to whom one is married will treat one with respect, honor, fidelity, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, friendship, cooperation, intimacy, and love. Getting an education is rooted in a faith that all the work, money, time, and sacrifices that are entailed by such a process will be worth it somewhere down the line.

Almost nothing we do is absent some dimension of faith. This fact is embedded in the very nature of human beings as creatures that generally exist in a condition that is far removed from omniscience.

As long as one's knowledge is constrained by ignorance, our relation with the universe will be an existential condition that involves faith. Faith is the manner in which our knowledge relates to the unknown ... faith is the character of the complex hermeneutical tensor dynamic that links all one knows -- or thinks that one knows -- to all that is unknown in phenomenological/experiential space.

In summary, Dr. Harris argues that both the journal *Nature* as well as Stephen Gould are wrong when they claim that the relationship of

science and religion is one that is characterized by “nonoverlapping magisteria”. Dr. Harris believes they are wrong because all of existence gives expression to “facts,” and, according to Dr. Harris, religion is incapable of discovering such “facts.” Only rational, open-ended, honest inquiry (i.e., science) is capable of establishing the lawful facts of dependency that relate events in the world to states of the brain and, thereby, demonstrate how human values can be determined by science.

Previously, I noted that while I agree with Dr. Harris that the concept of “nonoverlapping magisteria” should be rejected, my reasons for wishing to do so are different than his are. More specifically, I believe that neither physical sciences nor religion have any privileged access to the truth, and, therefore, it makes no sense to try to divvy up the universe into those aspects that religion can address authoritatively and those facets that physical science can address authoritatively.

Physical science and religion are methodologies for engaging existence. If there are physical “facts” that can be established through a rigorous and exacting process of inquiry, then religion cannot justify rejecting such “facts” ... although, of course, in saying this, I do not mean to suggest that everything and anything that might be said by someone who calls herself or himself a scientist necessarily gives expression to “facts” that accurately reflect the structural character of reality. On the other hand, if there is more to reality than physical science assumes, then physical science cannot justify its underlying premise that the ultimate nature of reality must consist of physical and/or material processes and entities ... although, once again, this does not mean that anything and everything that might be said with respect to the possibility of non-physical and non-material dimensions of reality are necessarily correct.

The truth constrains us all – irrespective of whether, or not, we understand the nature of such truth. The goal should be to understand the nature of truth in any given set of circumstances ... not physical truth and not religious truth, but truth.

Truth is nondenominational and nonsectarian. Our understanding must conform to the requirements of reality, and, therefore, correct understanding is dependent on discovering the nature of such truth.

Truth is not a function of “facts.” “Facts” are a representation of the truth concerning the way being, ontology, or the universe is alleged to be.

To try to argue that the universe should be divided up into two domains – one of which is to be addressed by physical science and one of which is to be addressed by religion – presupposes that the nature of the universe is such that it can be parsed in this manner. If the ultimate nature of the universe is not as physical science supposes it to be, and if the nature of ontology is not as religion supposes it to be, then we are left with an irresolvable problem since the two methodologies that are being used to claim authority with respect to such matters are inadequate to the tasks before them ... inadequacies born of biases and assumptions about the way the universe or reality or ontology is believed to be and, therefore, inadequacies that will seep into and distort, if not corrupt, everything one does in an attempt to seek to come to some viable understanding about the nature of reality.

Dr. Harris claims that: “It seems inevitable, however, that science will gradually encompass life’s deepest questions ... Only a rational understanding of human beings will allow billions of us to coexist peacefully, converging on the same social, political, economic, and environmental goals.” (page 7)

By making the foregoing statements, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith about the nature of life’s deepest questions – namely, that they are of a kind that are fully amenable to the methods and techniques of science. By claiming that only “rational understanding” will permit human beings to reach agreements about various goals, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith that “rational understanding” (whatever that might mean) is the sort of thing that is capable of not only providing a path through which to reach agreement about a variety of goals but also of providing a means through which to generate solutions for how such goals should be achieved. In addition, Dr. Harris is expressing his faith that rational understanding constitutes the deepest, richest, most creative and most constructive capacity human beings have to reach agreement on, and generate solutions in relation to, such goals.

I have my doubts about the assumptions and presumptions that are built into Dr. Harris’ faith-based approach to engaging life and

being – some of which have been noted already. I also have my doubts about the assumptions and presumptions that are built into Gould’s faith-based concept of “nonoverlapping magisteria” -- some of which have been noted already.

Chapter Four

The idea of the ‘moral landscape’ is a term fashioned by Dr. Harris (page 8) to refer to a hypothetical space in which the properties of well-being can be described through various peaks and valleys whose shape and characteristics are a function of whatever measures are used to chart the flow of well-being. The peaks of the moral landscape constitute heights of human flourishing while the valleys mark the depths of human suffering.

Dr. Harris believes that different modalities of ethics, governance, and cultural practice could be represented as so many kinds of chartable dynamics across the moral landscape. Moreover, he believes that while there might not be just one right answer to any given moral issue, nevertheless, one still would be able to represent moral decisions in a graph-like form of peaks and valleys (and all the possible stations in between those two extremes) and demonstrate how various responses to the same underlying moral question or issue compare to one another with respect to the manner in which such responses lead to human suffering or human flourishing as a function of well-being.

According to Dr. Harris, the dynamics of the moral landscape can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives – ranging from: biochemistry, to: political science, economics, education, emotional health, and so on. However, he maintains that while he adheres to the belief that all the different branches of science increasingly converge toward a fully coherent, consistent, and comprehensive account of the nature of the universe, nevertheless, when considering issues of well-being in relation to human beings, Dr. Harris not only maintains that all the sciences of the mind – especially neuroscience – have primacy when analyzing human experience, but, as well, he is so confident on this matter that he claims such primacy: “cannot be denied” (page 8). He goes on to state: “Human experience shows every sign of being determined by, and realized in, states of the human brain.” (page 8)

To make meaningful calculations in any given space – such as the hypothetical space that is termed the ‘moral landscape -- one must be able to settle on a metric – that is, the structure of the space being mapped. The nature of the metric one selects determines what can and

can't be measured within such space, and, as well, such a metric determines how everything occurring in that space can be measured.

For example, Euclidean points are not Riemannian points. Their respective metrics are different – the former are dimensionless entities that occupy position, whereas the latter have varying degrees of curvature inherent in the structure of such entities.

As a result, the sort of metric that gives expression to Euclidean space is different from the sort of metric that is given expression through Riemannian space. Among other things, this means that the nature of measurement will proceed differently in each sort of space, and, in addition, the foregoing means that: what can, and can't be, accurately measured will be affected by the sort of measurement process one uses in the respective spaces.

The foregoing does not necessarily mean there is no way to translate results from one metric to another. However, such a process of translation – if it exists – is often not straightforward and might involve many subtleties.

For example, the metric of Newtonian space is not the same as the metric for the space of general relativity. However, one can show that the dynamics of the space that is governed by the principles of Newtonian mechanics is a special, limiting case of the dynamics of a space that is governed by the principles of general relativity, and, therefore, there is a relationship of translatability between the two different kinds of metric space.

Each 'point' of the space in Dr. Harris' moral landscape is measured through the metric of well-being. In turn, well-being is a complex function of many properties involving – among other possibilities -- physical, emotional, intellectual, social, political, economic, environmental, and scientific factors.

Ultimately, however, Dr. Harris believes that all of the foregoing factors can be represented by brain states that establish higher or lower points on the moral landscape. For him, morality is the branch of science through which one can plot the differences between better or worse (that is, higher or lower) points on the graph of well-being or human flourishing (rather than suffering) that he refers to as the moral landscape.

Even if one were inclined to accept Dr. Harris' belief that "Human experience shows every sign of being determined by, and realized in, states of the human brain" (page 8) – which I am not inclined to do since, among other things, I am not convinced (at least at the present time) that human experience is determined by states of the brain (although the two are correlated) – nevertheless, Dr. Harris cannot show that the brain states of different individuals give expression to the same sort of metric through which one can compare them in any common, unified sort of way. Furthermore, if one does not possess a common metric, then the peaks and valleys of the individuals being considered constitute entirely different kinds of moral landscape, and, as a result, what one person, with a given metric of moral space means by well-being is not comparable to what someone else, with a different metric of moral space, means by the idea of well-being.

For example, consider the possible metrics for the experiential spaces of psychopaths and non-psychopaths. The metric through which a psychopath measures well-being is likely to be very different than the metric through which a non-psychopath measures well-being.

One might suppose that in the case of a psychopath, the more oppressive control he or she has over a situation and the greater the suffering that such an individual can inflict on others, then the greater will such an individual gauge the status of her or his well-being. On the other hand, for a non-psychopath, while this sort of individual might wish to have some degree of control over her or his personal life, this need not be oppressive. Furthermore, while any given non-psychopath is not likely to be a perfect human being and, therefore, at varying times is likely to inflict suffering on others, the infliction of such suffering is likely to be considered an anomaly that needs to be corrected rather than a *modus operandi*.

The points of well-being that give expression to the metric in the respective experiential spaces of the psychopath and the non-psychopath do not share much in common. One might wish to argue that each of the individuals is seeking to maximize pleasure and control of a certain kind – which we will, for the purposes of this example, equate with well-being – but it is clear that the metric through which one plots the respective notions of well-being are substantially different in the two cases.

Consequently, although the life of each individual can be represented by a moral landscape, the peaks and valleys of well-being that are plotted for the psychopath and nonpsychopath – really can't be compared. Is there a way of translating one form of metric into the other?

There is, but I am not sure that it will be very helpful. For example, if one uses the metric of the psychopath, then, the metric of the non-psychopath will have a sort of inverse relationship to the metric of the psychopath – that is, what will be a peak for the psychopath will -- hopefully -- be a valley for the non-psychopath, whereas, what constitutes a valley for the psychopath will be something of a peak for the non-psychopath.

From the perspective of the psychopath's metric for charting the space of the moral landscape, the nonpsychopath is "disturbed" in some way. Similarly, from the perspective of the nonpsychopath's metric for charting the space of the moral landscape, the psychopath is "disturbed" in some way.

Furthermore, if one accepts Dr. Harris' way of looking at things, the metrics of both the psychopath and the nonpsychopath are a function of – that is, determined by --brain states. Yet, having said this – and assuming that one agreed with such a perspective – it really doesn't advance one's understanding of the situation.

Brain State 1 leads to a given metric of one mode of moral landscape space. Brain State 2 leads to a different metric that defines a different sort of moral landscape space.

Why should one prefer one brain state to the other? Obviously, the metric for such preferential consideration needs to be rooted in some third brain state (or set of brain states) that explains why one ought to translate both of the other metrics into the metric for the landscape of some sort of space of preferentiality, and, as a result, the new metric becomes the standard through which the metrics of other spaces concerning well-being should be measured.

Dr. Harris might wish to argue that the reason why the third brain state (or set of brain sets) should be the metric of choice is because that metric is a function of points whose structure is compositionally complex and takes into consideration the curvature dynamics of such

things as: nutrition, economics, politics, relationships, education, psychological health, and so on. However, in and of itself, there is nothing in such a complex metric that indicates how it is better than the metric of a psychopath, and, therefore, even if one could reduce everything down to brain states, nothing has been established that demonstrates how, or why, one brain state (or set of such states) is preferable to another.

According to Dr. Harris, “If there are objective truths to be known about human well-being – if kindness, for instance, is generally more conducive to happiness than cruelty is – then science should one day be able to make very precise claims about which of our behaviors and uses of attention are morally good, which are neutral, and which are worth abandoning.” (page 8) The promise that Dr. Harris believes science holds for establishing objective, precise truths concerning human well-being is much easier to say than to accomplish.

Being able to associate a given meaning with a particular term is not sufficient in science. One also must know how what one means by such a term can be translated into something that not only can be empirically studied but, as well, how such a term can be translated into something that can be studied in a heuristically valuable way with respect to gaining a deeper understanding into how some facet of reality seems to operate.

This process of operationalizing a term – that is, translating meaning into a form that can be empirically studied – is not always straightforward. For example, let’s consider the terms “kindness” and “cruelty.”

How are the terms to be defined? What is to count as an instance of ‘kindness’ and what is to count as an instance of ‘cruelty’?

Should such terms be considered to be instrumental in nature? In other words, if someone is nice to another person because the first individual wants the second person to do something for him or her later on, will this be counted as an instance of kindness? Or, must kindness be considered as something that is done for its own sake without any consideration of what might be done for one as a result of these kinds of act at some later point in time?

What if a person does an act with a certain intention other than that of kindness and, then, such an act is interpreted by another individual as showing kindness? Does this count as an act of kindness? Is it possible to be accidentally kind?

If kindness has an instrumental dimension, then, conceivably, some of the acts of a psychopath might be 'scored' as constituting acts of "kindness" even though such acts are part of a process intended to gain someone's trust en route to doing damage to that same individual somewhere down the road. On the other hand, if kindness is something that must be done for its own sake, then one is faced with a problem of determining when, or if, people ever have the sort of purity of intentions that might lead to the performance of acts of 'true' kindness.

An oppressive dictator might sincerely believe that his or her acts of repression are, ultimately, acts of kindness and not acts of cruelty. Such an individual might believe that the ends (e.g., peace, prosperity, stability, order, etc.) justify the means (killing, censorship, and imprisonment) and, therefore, although the latter means might appear to be cruel, they are really motivated by a kindness that, in the end, seeks a better life for everyone in a given country ... or, so, someone might try to argue

Therefore, from a scientific point of view, how should one score the acts of a tyrant? Are they acts of kindness, or are they acts of cruelty, or are they a mixture of the two?

What a fiscally conservative Republican considers to be an act of kindness (e.g., cutting taxes to stimulate business growth) might not be what a socially active Democrat considers to be an act of kindness (e. g., raising taxes as a means of subsidizing certain kinds of social programs). How should one score such things on the kindness/cruelty scale?

In order for a given fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) – or some other imaging process -- to have meaning, one must be able to establish baselines against which subsequent imaging results can be compared, and on the basis of such an established baseline, an individual then would be able to intelligibly discuss what might be transpiring in any given case. However, if one discovers that there is a correlation between activity in a certain region of the brain and

alleged acts of kindness, one still might not be able to properly interpret the imaging data if the manner in which one operationalizes the idea of kindness (e.g., the tasks one asks a subject to perform, or the questions one asks a subject, or the challenges that one presents to a subject) is rooted in a problematic process of operationalizing the ideas of kindness and cruelty.

At the extreme end of the intentional/behavioral scale, we might be able to agree that certain acts seem to give expression to cruelty (although even here there are a variety of mitigating circumstances and intentions that could alter how one evaluates such situations), but when circumstances are less extreme, trying to differentiate between cruelty and kindness might be quite difficult. Yet, much of life – at least in some societies -- tends to be lived far from the extremes, and, therefore, coming up with a precise, objective scientific sense of kindness and cruelty in relation to the issue of well-being might be quite complex and not necessarily something that can be sorted out in any way with which people, in general, can agree upon.

Is well-being a short-term issue, or is it a long-term matter, or must it be both? If a mother or father denies a child treats in order to help the child develop qualities such as patience, as well as in order to assist the child to acquire discernment about issues of nutrition, how does one measure the actual current displeasure of the child against the potential for – and not necessarily the reality of – a developmentally mature grown-up?

What if the developmental strategy pursued by the parents leads to deep-rooted resentment on the part of the child when he or she grows up, and such resentment leads, in turn, to problems with authority or to problems involving keeping a job or doing well in school? Or, what if the strategy of nuanced privation leads to the development of an adult who overindulges his or her own children because that adult doesn't want her or his children to have to suffer through the privations that he or she perceived were the case when she or he was a child? How does one go about calculating kindness, cruelty, and well-being in such instances?

If a given parental strategy is intended to lead to long-term well-being in a child, how does one differentiate between, on the one hand, kind intentions that, for whatever reason, go astray and, on the other

hand, cruel intentions that are masked by the parental claim that they, the parents, are doing what they are doing for the long-term good of the child? Dr. Harris seems to believe that science will provide techniques that are capable of cutting through all of the problems that are associated with such issues. However, he might be either vastly overestimating the capacity of science to resolve such issues, or he might be vastly underestimating the complexity of such issues – especially when it comes to the problem of operationalizing terms and readying them for empirical investigation ... or he might be doing a bit of both.

What is clear, however, is that at the present time science can do almost none of what Dr. Harris believes science eventually might be capable of in the realm of neurobiology. Consequently, currently, the position of Dr. Harris is somewhat reminiscent of the character Wimpey in the Popeye cartoon series – that is, someone who would gladly pay someone on Tuesday for the granting of a hamburger today, since, in effect, Dr. Harris wants us all to accept a promissory note for payment in scientific coin at some later, unspecified date, if we will just grant him the reality of his philosophical (not scientific) meal today.

Possibly, science might prove to be fully capable of responding in the way Dr. Harris believes it can with respect to generating objective, precise “facts” concerning the determinate relationship between different brain states and corresponding conditions of well-being. Such is not the case today, however, and Dr. Harris has provided no evidence to indicate why anyone who is impartial in the matter should believe that things will turn out the way he envisions concerning the future scientific generation of factual knowledge that will determinately tie differential conditions of well-being to specific brain states.

Research requires money, time, personnel, equipment, and there is no guarantee that the resources consumed by a research project will result in constructive returns with respect to enhanced well-being for everyone. Money and time are – at least, in the short run – finite in nature, and there are other needs in which that money and time can be invested. So, how does one calculate the dynamics of kindness, cruelty, and well-being with respect to whether, or not, such research should be funded, knowing that this sort of decision is likely to result in

problems of well-being elsewhere in the social/political/economic universe?

On page 9 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris notes that there is general agreement in relation to the idea that emotional abuse and/or neglect are not conducive to the well-being of human beings. He further asserts that the effects of childhood experiences – whether good or bad – will leave their effects on the brain.

In this regard, he alludes to research that has been conducted in relation to rodents that has shown how the presence of hormones such as oxytocin and vasopressin – which play various roles in the reward system of many animals -- have been found to be correlated with the regulation of stress, social attachment and parental care. As a result, Dr. Harris feels it would appear reasonable to suppose that some similar sort of correlation should be present in human beings.

Consequently, he proceeds to outline research in which the levels of oxytocin and vasopressin were measured and compared with respect to two groups of children. One group consisted of children who had been raised by the State, while the other group of children had been raised by their parents.

Dr. Harris reports that results from the foregoing research are consistent with what already had been found with respect to rodents. In other words, there were lower levels of vasopressin and oxytocin produced when the children raised by the State were given physical contact by their adoptive mothers than was the case with respect to the amount of vasopressin and oxytocin that was released when children raised by their parents were given physical contact by their mothers.

Dr. Harris also indicates that many of the State-raised children tend to have various kinds of psychological and social difficulties later in life. However, during this facet of his discussion, Dr. Harris does not indicate whether, or not, children raised in “normal” circumstances also might encounter various kinds of psychological and social difficulties later in life.

Nonetheless, he does conclude that the reward systems in human beings that are regulated, to varying degrees, by the presence or absence of oxytocin and vasopressin play a crucial role in either

integrating or alienating children with respect to the social fabric of a society. Thus, not only do child-rearing practices serve as an essential medium through which moral, interpersonal, and psychological development take place and are shaped due to the vasopressin/oxytocin connection, but, as well, the research that has been done to date indicates that the human brain is at the heart of such dynamics.

The connections and linkages seem to be relatively straightforward. However, sometimes appearances are deceptive.

Do oxytocin and vasopressin cause a sense of well-being, or are they merely biochemical markers which indicate that when they are present in certain amounts, then one also is likely to find an organism with a sense of well being as operationalized through behaviors involving activities such as social attachment and stress management? If the latter should be the case, then what specifically is it that causes the levels of oxytocin and vasopressin to rise or be suppressed? What role does interpretation, perception, expectation, identity, purpose, and understanding play in the levels of vasopressin and oxytocin that will be observed at any given time, and what roles do such levels play in the subsequent development of identity, understanding, and interpretation of life events? On the other hand, if levels of oxytocin and vasopressin in some sense “cause” the phenomenological quality of a well-being experience to have the character it does, then how do those hormones accomplish this?

As pointed out earlier, Dr. Harris stipulates that State-raised children tend to encounter social and psychological problems later in life. The term “tend to” in his description of State-raised children is statistical-speak and is a way of tacitly acknowledging – without having to admit it -- that not all children raised by the State necessarily go on to experience the sort of psychological and social problems that are above and beyond the kinds of problems that might be experienced by anyone in life. But, if not all State-raised children go on to experience out-of-the-ordinary social and psychological problems later in life, then what does this say about the vasopressin-oxytocin circuit that exists in the brain in relation to earlier life experiences and the manner in which such circuits supposedly determine what can and can’t occur later in life?

Alternatively, although Dr. Harris does not mention the issue at this point in his discussion, one might suppose that the idea of “tend to” is also present in relation to children who are raised by their biological parents except this time it would indicate that while many children who are raised by their biological parents ‘tend to’ experience less social and psychological problems later in life, there are, nevertheless, some children raised by their biological parents who do, nonetheless, encounter problems that are beyond what one might “normally” expect in such circumstances. If this is so, then what does this say about the status of the vasopressin-oxytocin reward circuit in relation to the alleged connection between the establishing of such a circuit early in childhood and its apparently dysfunctional nature later in life?

One can add to the foregoing questions a number of other methodological problems that arise in conjunction with Dr. Harris’ description of the vasopressin/oxytocin neurological circuit in which experiences early in childhood are said to be rooted in the relative presence or relative absence of such circuitry that are alleged to be causally related to the character of experiences later in developmental life. For example, when Dr. Harris talks about State-raised children tending to experience greater numbers of psychological and social problems later in life, what is being counted as a psychological or a social problem, and perhaps more importantly, is it possible that such problems are more the result of societal attitudes toward State-raised children than such psychological and social difficulties are a reflection of the presence or absence of certain kinds of vasopressin-oxytocin circuitry that have, or have not, been established in conjunction with the reward centers of the brain due to relative neglect and/or abuse in a State institution?

Or, consider another issue. More specifically, in the study that Dr. Harris cites – the one which indicates that the hormones vasopressin and oxytocin do not surge as much when a State-raised child is touched by an adoptive mother as when a non-State-raised child is touched by his or her biological mother, what, precisely is it that the State-raised child is responding to: the past history of being raised in a State institution or the current relationship with the adoptive mother? How does one disentangle the two?

Furthermore, there are any number of psychological and medical studies that have been conducted indicating that there seems to be a critical period, of sorts, for the bond between a mother and child to be established within a certain frame of time following birth. Once that critical period has expired and bonding has not occurred, then the way in which the mother feels about her child and the way the child responds to the mother tend to be adversely affected.

Given the foregoing, isn't it possible that what the vasopressin/oxytocin levels reflect in the study mentioned by Dr. Harris might be more connected to the fact that an adoptive mother is not the biological mother and, as a result, the appropriate sort of bonding has never taken place? In other words, the vasopressin/oxytocin levels might have nothing to do with how a child might have been treated in State institutions and, instead, constitutes a remnant of an event that never took place – namely, bonding with the biological mother?

The fact of the matter is, one doesn't really know what the presence of certain kinds of levels of vasopressin/oxytocin means. What, precisely, are the hormone levels an index of? Are they a cause of behavior, or are they a product of something else, and if the latter should be the case, then what, exactly, are they a function of? Do vasopressin/oxytocin levels modulate phenomenology, or are they a function, in some yet to be determined way, of such phenomenology, or is it some combination of the two?

The issue here is not about attempting to dispute the idea that early childhood experiences have a shaping, coloring, and orienting influence with respect to subsequent development. Nor is the present issue a matter of debating whether, or not, abuse and neglect early in life might have an adverse effect on subsequent development.

The issue is whether, or not, all of the foregoing matters are a strict function of brain states. In other words, the issue is whether, or not, one can develop a complete account of the human mind that is rooted in nothing more than biological events as Dr. Harris suggests is the case when he makes statements like: "There is simply no doubt that the human brain is the nexus of " (page 9) the social, moral, and psychological development that arises in conjunction with cultural practices.

The fact of the matter is: there is a considerable amount of legitimate doubt that swirls all about the foregoing belief of Dr. Harris. The fact that he does not acknowledge such doubt is more of a reflection of his faith concerning the matter than it is an accurate reflection of the current scientific soundness of such a statement.

Chapter Five

According to David Hume, an 18th century philosopher, one cannot derive the moral force of “ought” from facts concerning the way the world “is.” Hume’s argument was primarily intended as a philosophical counter to those individuals who sought to claim that the existence of God justified the establishment of this or that moral system.

Even if for the purposes of argument one were to grant the existence of God, this concession, in and of itself, does not serve as a warrant that justifies any particular moral system. In other words, no form of morality (which is a system that gives expression to the force of ‘ought’) can be logically deduced from the mere fact of God’s existence.

I am inclined to agree with Hume. Unless one knows what kind of Being God is, then one really is in no position to make justifiable claims about whether, or not, this or that moral system actually reflects the nature of God’s Being or whether God is the sort of Being Who even prescribes some particular form of morality.

Some philosophers have sought to summarize Hume’s position by saying that one cannot derive ‘ought’ from ‘is.’ I’m not sure such a characterization is correct, or, if it is an accurate reflection of Hume’s position, then I believe that Hume has exceeded the parameters of what he is justified in saying concerning the relation of ‘ought’ and ‘is’ in precisely the same way that he sought to criticize certain religious perspectives for exceeding the parameters of rational permissibility in such circumstances.

More specifically, just as an individual is not justified in claiming that a particular form of morality can be derived from the fact that God exists, so, too, a person is not justified in automatically ruling out any given form of morality as being inconsistent with the bare fact of God’s existence. In other words, a person is not justified in making a general statement such as: ‘one cannot derive ought from is’ until one can demonstrate that there is no modality of ‘ought’ inherent in the nature of ‘is.’

The parameters of Hume’s point does not extend beyond the very circumscribed issue that given the existence of God, then such a

premise, in and of itself, does not logically justify deducing anything concerning the nature of morality. Consequently, given God's existence, such a premise does not justify saying, as a general truth, that 'ought cannot be derived from is' since the ought which Hume was talking about concerns only the existence of God taken as a very general, diffuse statement of being such that there is no sense of 'ought' inherent in admitting the existence of this sort of general, diffuse sense of being.

G.E. Moore committed the foregoing mistake of exceeding the boundaries of the point being made by Hume when Moore introduced the idea of a 'naturalistic fallacy.' Moore argued that whenever an individual sought to derive moral truths from nature, then that person was guilty of committing the 'naturalistic fallacy.'

To be sure, if the structural character of nature were such that one could demonstrate that there is no element of morality inherent in the ontological character of being, then, yes, anyone who sought to claim that certain moral principles followed from the facticity of being would be guilty of committing the naturalistic fallacy. However, until one knows what the character of reality or being is, then one is not in any position to justifiably argue whether, or not, morality is an inherent part of nature.

The correctness of the 'naturalistic fallacy' is a function of the nature of reality ... or the reality of nature. As long as one remains ignorant about the actual character of nature or reality, then one does not know whether, or not, in any given instance someone is committing the naturalistic fallacy.

For his own reasons, Dr. Harris also wishes to reject the perspective of Hume and Moore vis-à-vis the relation between 'is' and 'ought.' Dr. Harris believes that it is possible to derive "ought" from "is" and wishes to take issue with those scientists who believe that it is: "intellectually disreputable, even vaguely authoritarian, for a scientist to suggest that his or her work offers some guidance about how people should live." (page 11)

Dr. Harris maintains that facts translate into values. More specifically, facts concerning the nature of the dynamics between brain states and the world naturally lend themselves to being translated into assertions concerning the nature of well-being.

Dr. Harris contends that one of the prototypic expressions concerning the relation between values and facts is entailed by the process of science, itself, when considered as a search for “objective knowledge.” Activities involving honest observation and the reasoned evaluation of such observations are values that are at the very heart of any attempt to establish objective facts about the universe of being.

Consequently, there is a relationship of reciprocity between facts and values. Values such as exercising honesty during the process of observation, in addition to compliance with impartial forms of reasoning, help shape the methodology through which one searches for knowledge. In turn, the facts that are derived through the exercise of this sort of methodology help one to refine and develop the system of values that guide research.

In fact, Dr. Harris is willing to extend the foregoing sort of reciprocity to the relationship between beliefs about facts and values. This is because he feels that both sets of beliefs exhibit similarities at the level of brain functioning, and, as a result, this suggests to him that our brains go about evaluating the truth or falsity of beliefs about facts and values in very similar ways.

Although I will have more to say about this issue at a later time, how one goes about evaluating the truth or falsity of one’s beliefs about facts and values might have little to do with what the actual truth of a situation might be. We all have beliefs about how to go about determining facts and values, and not all of those beliefs are necessarily well-founded or accurately reflective of the character of reality.

Even if one were justified in suggesting that there seem to be neurological systems that are held in common by the brain states through which human beings supposedly evaluate beliefs about facts and values, this carries no necessary implications with respect to establishing the truth of anything beyond the horizons of such beliefs and neurological processes. In a sense, this is a variation on the Hume perspective outlined earlier.

In other words, the existence of common or similar neurological systems in relation to human evaluation of beliefs about facts and values does not necessarily carry any more ramifications for the truth of things beyond that fact than granting the existence of God carries

any ramifications for the truth about morality beyond the granting of such existence. One could grant Dr. Harris his point about the existence of such similarities in neurological processing in relation to the processing of beliefs about facts and values, but granting this point does not thereby entitle Dr. Harris to go on to make claims concerning how human beings ought to behave merely based on the ontological existence of such neurological systems.

Unless one can demonstrate that human modes of evaluating beliefs about facts and values are capable of reflecting the actual nature of reality with respect to the issue of moral behavior -- and its concomitant dimension of 'ought' -- then whether, or not, the processes through which human beings evaluate beliefs about facts and beliefs about values share a common set or similar set of neurological circuitry (networks) is actually irrelevant as far as determining what 'ought' to be done such that people in general might feel themselves to be under some sort of obligation to follow along with Dr. Harris' approach to the idea of establishing a moral landscape concerning well-being.

Dr. Harris claims that: "whatever can be known about maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures – which is, I will argue, the only thing we can reasonably value – must at some point translate into facts about brains and their interaction with the world." (page 11) What kinds of "facts about brains and their interaction with the world" will "whatever can be known about maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures" translate into?

It is difficult to answer the foregoing question. Part of this difficulty is, by Dr. Harris' own admission, because there are many facts about the relation of brain states to the world that are not currently known – although Dr. Harris has faith that an increasing number of such facts will be established in the near future.

However, in addition, part of the difficulty surrounding the foregoing question concerning the relationship between brain states and issues of well-being are also a function of some of the problems that are entailed by that which Dr. Harris believes eventually will translate into facts about the brain. When Dr. Harris argues that "maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures" is the only thing human beings can reasonably value, what exactly does he mean?

More specifically, what does he mean by the idea of well-being, and what does he mean by the idea of “maximizing” such well-being? Moreover, what counts as a conscious creature?

Putting aside, for the moment, the issue of well-being, let’s start with the idea of “conscious creatures.” What does Dr. Harris mean by the idea of a conscious creature?

Presumably, Dr. Harris would like to subsume all of humanity under this category of ‘conscious creature.’ However, the quality of consciousness exhibited by the population of living human beings (assuming, of course, that dead human beings do not possess consciousness) varies greatly – from the awareness of a genius to the awareness of a severely retarded individual.

Can one necessarily say that whatever constitutes well-being across this range of human consciousness will necessarily be a function of the same set of qualities? Even without a clear sense of the notion of ‘well-being,’ one has difficulty understanding how such a generalized, diffuse notion of well-being will manifest itself the same way in each case of consciousness. As a result, there is the possibility that one might come up with as many forms of well-being as there are qualitative and quantitative differences in human consciousness.

In addition, one might raise questions about Dr. Harris’ insistence that “maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures” is “the only thing we can reasonably value.” For example, how will we establish what creatures are conscious? What do we even mean by the idea of consciousness?

What about the well-being of nonconscious creatures or entities? Why can’t one reasonably value their well-being and be concerned about maximizing it? What does it mean to reasonably value anything? What are the criteria of ‘reasonableness’?

What are the criteria for maximizing well-being, and what if we don’t have the resources for such maximization? Under such conditions of limited resources, would maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures still be the only thing that one can reasonably value, and if so, then how would one set about doing this and in accordance with what criteria?

Dr. Harris believes that the idea of well-being might be similar in nature to the somewhat open-ended, flexible concept we have of physical health. Just as our ideas about the latter notion change with new discoveries in science and medicine, so, too, our ideas about well-being might change in conjunction with new scientific findings.

However, at any given time, there are likely to be differences of opinion about what constitutes physical health. How does one relate facts to values in some maximal manner under those circumstances?

There are a variety of approaches to issues of physical health. For instance, there are different ideas about nutrition. In addition, there are different ideas about what programs of exercise and/or flexibility training are most conducive to physical health. Furthermore, there are Western allopathic approaches to physical health (such as modern institutionalized practices and herbal remedies), and there are Eastern allopathic approaches (such as traditional Chinese medicine or ayurvedic systems of thought), as well as homeopathic modes of engaging physical health.

Whose ideas about physical health should one accept? How does one go about deciding such issues when the practitioners of different disciplines disagree with one another and oftentimes disagree with practitioners within their own discipline concerning the nature of physical health?

Presumably, Dr. Harris might want to argue – and he sometimes does this -- that the matters should be settled by whoever has the superior facts. However, the issue of such superiority is, itself, often rooted in differences of opinion.

Alternatively, Dr Harris might wish to argue – and he sometimes does this – that alternative approaches to the issue of physical health might merely represent different sets of peaks and valleys on the moral landscape. As a result, according to Dr. Harris, all that the existence of such different moral topography might mean is that one has: alternative but equivalent ways of engaging the issue of physical-health.

The foregoing possibility leads to the following kind of question: namely, how does one establish the equivalency of such different ways of engaging the issue of physical health. After all, those approaches are

often rooted in competing theories about the nature of physical health and how it relates to the principles of existence. Consequently, the methods through which one evaluates the quality of physical health are likely to be divergent in a variety of respects as well.

While it might be true that the distinction between being alive and being dead is about as clear-cut as one can get when it comes to evaluating the differential outcomes of various approaches to the issues of physical health, the fact of the matter is that the evaluation of such alternatives to physical health does not always occur in relation to such an extreme. This often means that one is forced to deal with the shades of gray and complexities of evaluating the status of physical health in day-to-day life.

If one permits such alternatives to exist, how does one maximize the well-being of conscious creatures – assuming, of course, that physical health, in some sense, is one of the qualities of what is meant by well-being? Even in the case of physical health, it is not at all clear what is meant by the idea of maximizing the well-being of conscious creatures. Therefore, when one adds political, educational, social, environmental, economic, and aesthetic themes into the mix, one begins to understand that, quite possibly, the way in which well-being is like physical health is that the process of trying to evaluate what it means to maximize one or the other is more than just open-ended and flexible but is inherently problematic.

Science might have valuable contributions to make with respect to such debates. Nonetheless, I am not at all clear as to how science will determine the values that are to govern such matters.

Dr. Harris maintains that while: “it is reasonable to wonder whether maximizing pleasure in any given instance is ‘good,’ it makes no sense at all to ask whether maximizing well-being is ‘good’.” Maybe not, but, nevertheless, it does make sense to ask whether trying to maximize any particular conception of well-being is necessarily a good thing.

Politicians are very adept at using words that elicit agreement even as they are empty of details concerning exactly what is meant by those words. To say that maximizing well-being is good is like saying that ‘maximizing justice is good’ or ‘maximizing truth is good,’ or ‘maximizing beauty is good.’ In each case one is advocating the

maximization of something that, as it stands, is fairly empty and devoid of any sort of meaning with which one could take exception even as one has been conditioned to believe that such things as ‘truth,’ ‘justice,’ ‘beauty,’ and ‘well-being’ are “good” things.

However, unless one begins to supply some of the details of what constitutes one’s understanding of well-being (or truth, justice, and beauty) and why that to which such an understanding alludes is good and what it means for something to be considered as good, then it is relatively meaningless to claim that it is reasonable to try to argue that ‘maximizing well-being is a good thing.’ Consequently, if “it is reasonable to wonder whether maximizing pleasure in any given instance is good,” then surely it is reasonable to wonder whether maximizing any particular instance of well-being is good, and just as surely it is just as reasonable to maintain that the idea of: ‘maximizing well-being is good’, is a relatively empty statement considered in and of itself.

Throughout *The End of Faith* and in many places within *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris is quite clear that he does not consider all theories of “well-being” to be well-considered, reasonable, or factually based. In this respect, he is especially skeptical toward, and critical of, almost anything that has to do with religion. Shouldn’t the same skeptical, critical attitude be applied to whatever notions of well-being are being proffered by Dr. Harris, especially when he is not always very clear what he means by the idea of well-being, or precisely how such ideas are tied to specific states of the brain, or why one ought to pursue certain modalities of well-being that are correlated with certain kinds of brain states?

Chapter Six

Dr. Harris is quite adamant in pointing out that his perspective -- in which brain states can be tied to conditions in the world in a manner that is intended to maximize the well-being of conscious creatures -- should not be confused with an evolutionary account of things. For instance, at one point, he says: "Evolution could never have foreseen the wisdom or necessity of creating stable democracies, mitigating climate change, saving other species from extinction, containing the spread of nuclear weapons, or of doing much else that is now crucial to our happiness in this century." (page 13)

While I will be returning to the concept of evolution again later on in this essay in a much more critically reflective manner -- both in relation to Dr. Harris' position as well as with respect to the more general idea of evolutionary theory -- let it suffice for now to note a few points with respect to Dr. Harris' aforementioned quote. More specifically, Dr. Harris argues that the process of evolution could not have foreseen the value of developing certain kinds of understanding (e.g., the establishment of stable democracies) in relation to enhancing our sense of well-being.

Dr. Harris likely would wish to argue that by creating a science -- for example, neurobiology -- that permits one to show how certain brain states are conducive to the enhancement (and, therefore, the maximizing process) of well-being in relation to a variety of events in the world, such a science offers humankind a way to begin to control its own evolution, and, therefore, evolution would no longer be a random process. That is, if one can control the impact that mutations have on the human species, and if one can control the conditions of our environment, then such control can be used to deliver the development of humankind from the clutches of the vagaries of mutations and uncontrollable events that are at the heart of the process of natural selection that are believed by many to be at the heart of the evolutionary process.

Nonetheless, by stating things in the way he has, Dr. Harris has mischaracterized the nature of evolution -- at least in the sense in which that concept is generally understood. In one sense, it is true, of course, that the evolutionary process doesn't foresee the value of anything -- biologically or otherwise -- but, instead, selects in an ex

post facto manner (i.e., after the fact as a function of natural selection) whatever works, and by selecting what works, this offers an organism the opportunity to continue on and help generate progeny that also are viable in a given set of conditions.

In other words, as traditionally conceived, the process of evolution is blind. Random mutations bring about certain kinds of changes, and some of these mutations give rise to organisms that are capable of surviving in certain environments, while other mutations give rise to organisms that are not so capable of surviving in those same conditions.

Natural selection gives expression to a process in which organisms with certain kinds of properties have a better fit with existing environmental conditions than do organisms with other kinds of properties that do not match up as well with those conditions. Natural selection refers to the pruning process that tends to eliminate, or place existential obstacles in the way of whatever does not fit in well with existing environmental conditions and, as a result, has difficulty adapting to such conditions.

What cannot adapt tends not to survive. What cannot survive tends not to propagate progeny. What does not propagate progeny tends to become extinct.

Anything that helps to subsidize the continued existence of a given species of organism is likely to enhance the prospects of producing future generations of such a species. What subsidizes adaptation does not have to be conscious or have a capacity to foresee the results of any strategy of adaptation. All that matters is that whatever has come to be, however it has come to be, has the capacity to be able to adapt to -- and therefore enhance the likelihood of survival of a particular species in -- a given set of conditions.

Consequently, if a specific species were, by chance, able to somehow develop a capacity to foresee the results of various adaptive strategies – such as establishing stable democratic practices – this is perfectly consistent with the process of evolution. In other words, somehow, random mutations have brought about the existence of an adaptive capacity that enhances the likelihood of such a species surviving by enabling progeny of that species to foresee how creating

certain kinds of adaptive strategies might permit that species to continue on with life.

However, the essential mechanism of evolution still works in very much the same way. If adaptive strategies work, then the likelihood of continued existence is enhanced. If, on the other hand, such adaptive strategies do not work, then the likelihood of continued existence is diminished.

Natural selection is still natural selection irrespective of whether, or not, a given adaptive strategy permits one to foresee the possible results of employing such a strategy. In fact, being able to foresee – or not -- the value that certain kinds of adaptive strategies might have for enhanced well-being could, under certain circumstances, be irrelevant to the evolutionary process.

In other words, one could argue that there are occasions in which an enhanced sense of well-being or the ability to generate adaptive strategies that are directed toward maximizing such well-being might not necessarily win the natural selection sweepstakes. For example, if an asteroid hit Earth and caused an extinction level event, then organisms capable of surviving in extreme conditions might fare better than organisms capable of foreseeing the value of trying to maximize their sense of well-being if for no other reason than the calculus of trying to figure out what constituted a maximization of well-being under such circumstances might not be able to compete with simple organisms that were already prepared to live in the sort of harsh environment that is likely to be left in the wake of such an extinction level event.

From an evolutionary point of view, continued existence depends on two things. These are: (1) Random mutations that generate qualitative and/or quantitative changes in a given species that enhance the likelihood of survival; (2) the extent to which the conditions of the surrounding environment are, or are not, conducive to what a given organism brings to the ex post facto process of natural selection that is expressed through those conditions.

Human beings – irrespective of their views about well-being – cannot control “random” events. In addition, irrespective of one’s views about well-being, there are many facets of the surrounding environment that, currently, are often beyond our capacity to control

(e.g., earthquakes, tsunamis, famines, super novae, asteroids, shifts in the magnetic poles, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, blizzards, and so on).

‘Random’ mutations and ‘random’ events both have the capacity to undermine one’s attempts to maximize one’s sense of well-being ... however that idea might be construed. If ‘random mutations’ and ‘random events’ conspire against humankind, then attempting to maximize well-being might not take human beings very far when it comes to the force of natural selection and the likelihood of human survival.

Moreover, one might also argue that differences of opinion about what constitutes the maximization of well-being could, themselves, undermine the likelihood of human beings being able to withstand the forces of natural selection. After all, wars, depleted uranium, financial debt (both individual and collective), failed systems of governance – irrespective of whether, or not, they are called democratic -- problematic programs of scientific research, dysfunctional modalities of education, nuclear and biological/chemical weapons, the contamination of reusable resources such as air and water, and the depletion of nonrenewable natural resources on which one’s notion of well-being might depend, all give expression to forces of natural selection. Therefore, our theories of what it means to maximize well-being might actually be carriers of different kinds of ideological, psychological, and theological diseases that are capable of destroying humankind even as – and, perhaps, precisely because -- we seek to maximize such notions of well-being in competition with other such ‘diseases’ of the mind.

Dr. Harris maintains that: “Our minds do not merely conform to the logic of natural selection. In fact, anyone who wears eyeglasses or uses sunscreen has confessed his disinclination to live the life that his genes have made for him.” (page 13) As it stands, Dr. Harris’ statement is incorrect on several levels.

From an evolutionary point of view, the development of eyeglasses and sunscreen are inventions that have been made possible by the potentials inherent in the human genome. Consequently, inventing sunscreen and eyeglasses in order to be able to better adapt to the environment is merely a matter of the strengths of one

dimension of the genome (the capacity for invention and science) overcoming the shortcomings of other dimensions of that same genome (such as poor eyesight). Therefore, one would be perfectly justified in arguing that eyeglasses and sunscreen are as much a function of the logic of natural selection as are 20/20 eyesight and the absence of oncogenes (genes that, when activated, tend to be correlated with the onset of certain kinds of cancer).

The logic of natural selection is that anything – consciously or accidentally -- which works in a given set of environmental circumstances and, thereby, enhances the likelihood of an organism surviving – which, in turn, enhances the likelihood of a species surviving under those same conditions -- is an expression of the logic of natural selection. It is rather surprising that Dr. Harris would seek to argue otherwise.

In fact, the logic of natural selection would tend to favor any organism or species that was capable of exploiting the strengths of its genetic potential while mitigating or eliminating the weaknesses of that same genetic potential. Much of modern science and medicine are dedicated to realizing just such a maximum/minimum research project.

When Dr. Harris claims that: “our minds do not merely conform to the logic of natural selection,” he states the issue in a problematic way. Oftentimes, we do not know what will and will not serve as a strategy that is capable of surviving the forces of natural selection.

Therefore, one might have to go through a process of trial and error, or a process of research, to be able to determine what works and what doesn't work under a given set of circumstances. This means that one will not necessarily know ahead of time what kinds of adaptive strategy will be supported by the forces of natural selection, and if one cannot know ahead of time what will, and will not, work, then one cannot really say that the mind is conforming to the logic of natural selection if by “logic” one means that one completely understands what will be necessary to be able to survive amidst a complex dynamic of environmental and internal forces that are impinging on one's yet-to-be-devised adaptive strategy.

The logic of natural selection can be extremely complex. There are many physical, chemical, biological, climatological, hydrological,

meteorological, and environmental forces that shape the logic of natural selection. Moreover, in the case of humankind, one must add psychological, emotional, political, social, economic, and philosophical forces to the dynamic cauldron brewed by natural selection.

One of the purposes of research and science is to explore what the structural character of the logic of natural selection might be in any given set of circumstances. Presumably, an effective research program will generate a solution that conforms to one, or another, dimension of the forces of natural selection.

This is why solutions are solutions. They work amidst the varied forces of natural selection in a given set of circumstances, and if a proposed solution does not work, this is because some aspect of its structural design runs contrary to various dimensions of the forces of natural selection that are active in such a set of circumstances.

A little later on in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “The temptation to start each day with several glazed donuts and to end it with an extramarital affair might be difficult for some people to resist, for reasons that are easily understood in evolutionary terms, but there are surely better ways to maximize one’s long-term well-being.” (page 13) Again, Dr. Harris describes things in a problematic manner.

While eating glazed donuts and having extramarital affairs might appeal to certain neurological circuits that have been fashioned into a feedback loop through experiences that a given individual might find to be rewarding in some way, neither of the foregoing activities necessarily makes sense in evolutionary terms. Evolutionary sense is a function of what enhances the likelihood of survival in either individual or, more importantly, collective terms.

If the person who likes glazed donuts and extramarital affairs is a genius, but the foregoing sorts of inclination cut short his or her life prior to the point of producing progeny, then those activities don’t make any evolutionary sense whatsoever. This is so both individually and collectively.

Furthermore, the whole idea of seeking “to maximize one’s long term well-being” is also something that makes sense in evolutionary terms. Presumably, maximizing long-term well-being is something that might correlate fairly highly with evolutionary success – which entails

the capacity to be able to survive on both an individual and collective level in a given set of circumstances.

Dr. Harris seems to be of the opinion that the only things that qualify as products of evolution are “instinctual drives and evolutionary imperatives” (pages 13-14). This kind of understanding is expressed through statements like: “As with mathematics, science, art and almost everything else that interests us, our modern concerns about meaning and morality have flown the perch built by evolution.” (page 14)

Although I have my own reservations concerning the nature of evolutionary theory – and these will be stated later on – nonetheless, at this point, I don’t believe that Dr. Harris has a very tenable position when it comes to the manner in which he wishes to distance his neurological point of view from evolutionary theory in general. Proponents of evolutionary theory tend to argue that not only is the process of evolution responsible for the generation of instincts and various biological imperatives, but, as well, they maintain that the process of evolution is also responsible for the generation of such capabilities as consciousness, logic, reason, science, language, and art.

Consequently, from the perspective of evolutionary theory, both the perch and the bird are the products of evolutionary vectors – namely, random mutations and the forces of natural selection. If Dr. Harris wishes to argue that the bird of morality and meaning that has flown from the perch that allegedly was constructed through evolutionary forces is somehow different in nature from the instinctual perch from which it has taken flight, then he is going to have to come up with a theory that explains such a difference and how that functional divergence came about. Thus far in *The Moral Landscape*, however, Dr. Harris has not shown how any of this facet of his perspective constitutes a viable conceptual position.

He has asserted that such is the case, or, he has faith that such is the case. Nonetheless, he has not yet backed up his assertions with actual proof.

Chapter Seven

According to Dr. Harris: “The human brain is an engine of belief.” (page 14) While it might be true that there is a correlation between various kinds of beliefs and various states of the brain (and Dr. Harris has conducted such research), nonetheless, he has not demonstrated how – or if -- beliefs are generated by the brain. This is merely his working hypothesis.

Dr. Harris’ discussion of beliefs at this stage of his book is of only a preliminary nature – and he will return to the issue of beliefs in a more concentrated and formal way in the third chapter of *The Moral Landscape*. However, he is attempting to lay down the conceptual scaffolding for the position that he is intending to construct in more detail later in his book.

More specifically, Dr. Harris wants to show that the neurological and logical qualities of belief are of such a nature that any perspective seeking to claim that there is an unbridgeable gap between facts and values is illusory in nature (bottom of page 14). In addition, he wishes to argue that when one does the right kind of research concerning the relationship between differential brain states and various events in the world, one will discover that those brain states will point the way toward how one ought to engage various issues of valuation and morality.

Notwithstanding the preliminary character of Dr. Harris’ treatment of “beliefs” at this point, let’s explore a few issues. For instance, Dr. Harris argues that: “We form beliefs about facts, and belief in this sense constitutes most of what we know about the world.” (page 14) Once again, Dr. Harris has a problematic way of stating things.

For instance, if one does not understand how a given belief is true, then, at best, one does not have any knowledge beyond the fact that one knows that one has such a belief about the nature of things. Even here, however, one’s ‘knowledge’ about one’s beliefs could be subject to the sort of self-questioning that a confused or stressed person might experience when unsure about who one is and what one truly believes.

We have many beliefs about the world. Nonetheless, very few of these beliefs actually constitute knowledge.

Beliefs are theories about the way different aspects of reality operate. In order to demonstrate the truth of those beliefs, one would have to undergo some sort of program of research through which one confirms – if one can -- the truth of this or that belief.

When I taught college and university classes in various subjects, I gave quizzes and tests as part of a more extensive verification process to determine what, if anything, had been learned. The examinations were usually multiple-choice in form – although I often added a number of wrinkles that would prevent a student from just guessing his or her way to a passing grade.

If someone did well on those tests, this did not necessarily mean that such an individual understood the material. In other words, doing well on my tests did not necessarily mean a student knew how or why certain statements were correct or incorrect.

Instead, for the most part, the students in my course picked up information – either from lectures, class discussions, the textbook, or their own research – that permitted them to identify certain ‘facts’ concerning course material. This knowledge might enable them to differentiate between statements that were, or were not, factual, but such knowledge didn’t necessarily enable them to understand how such facts came to be ‘facts’ ... that is, they hadn’t necessarily gone back to the original research papers through which experimental data or other kinds of research had been transformed into verifiable facts about some aspect of the world.

While beliefs about what constitutes correct and incorrect statements might constitute a kind of knowledge – assuming, of course, that such beliefs accurately reflect the character of such ‘facts’ – this is not knowledge about the world. Rather, it is a sort of meta-knowledge ... it is a certain, limited knowledge about information that might, or might not, accurately reflect the structural character of the world.

Until one understands the relationship between such information and the nature of the world, then one doesn’t have any knowledge about the world. Without understanding, then one’s knowledge – to whatever extent one has it -- is at least once removed from the real world.

A belief might be true, but it is only a correct understanding that transforms belief into knowledge. Without such understanding, then whatever beliefs one has are, at best, knowledge about facts that have not been verified. Consequently, one lacks the requisite insight to grasp why something is a fact and not mere information.

Dr. Harris contends that: “Factual beliefs like ‘water is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen’ and ethical beliefs like ‘cruelty is wrong’ are not expressions of mere preference. To really believe either proposition is also to believe that you have accepted it for legitimate reasons.” (page 14)

In order to understand why water is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, one has to understand something about the atomic structure of hydrogen and oxygen. In addition, one also must understand something about the nature of molecular bonds and why it is that the three components in a molecule of water come together in the way they do. One might also have to have a bit of knowledge about thermodynamics and, perhaps, even some passing knowledge about the quantum dynamics of chemical interactions.

If someone claimed to know that water is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, how would she or he respond if asked to explain why water isn’t H_2O_2 or H_3O ? I know a seven-year old who can give the correct chemical formula for water, but that youngster really doesn’t understand why what he says is true.

The aforementioned seven-year old child might “really believe” that water consists of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen because he has heard many people say this or because he heard it on television or because he saw it in a book or because his mother and father have told him that this is so. However, none of these possible sources for the child’s belief are necessarily legitimate reasons to hold on to such a belief and treat it as knowledge ... although early on in life, children tend to develop preferences for the kinds of sources that will constitute what they consider to be sources of legitimate reasons for believing any given proposition.

What we consider to be legitimate reasons for believing anything to be true is often the result of an array of preferences that develop in conjunction with the exigencies of life. Such a system of preferences develops as a function of a variety of beliefs that arise in relation to life

experiences – e.g., which sources of information are: most likely to be reliable; most likely to be wrong about certain issues; most likely to give one the answer one wants to hear; most likely to give one the answer that one finds to be most comforting, and so on.

Consequently, Dr. Harris is not necessarily correct when he claims that beliefs – including things that we “really believe” -- are not mere preferences. Moreover, the fact that one considers something to be a ‘legitimate reason’ for believing something does not, thereby, automatically legitimize such beliefs ... much depends on the nature of the reason one is using to “legitimize” a belief and whether, or not, such reasoning can withstand the rigors of critical reflection.

Dr. Harris continues on with: “When we believe that something is actually true or morally good, we also believe that another person, similarly placed, should share our belief.” What does it mean to say that someone is “similarly placed”?

Does it mean that if someone else had had all of the experiences I have had, then such a person ‘should’ or ‘would’ accept as true whatever I believe to be true? Wouldn’t it be possible for two people to have had the same sort of experience and, yet, interpret such experiences differently? Would different intellectual capabilities have any bearing on the issue? Would temperamental and personality differences affect what two individuals come to believe about a given situation or what preferential inclinations arose as a result of such individual differences? Would personal interests or motivational orientations affect the situation at all?

Early on in life most of us tend to be egocentric. In other words, this is our tendency to assume that other people see the world from, or through, exactly the same sort of perspective as we do.

With maturity, there is a tendency to gravitate away from such an egocentric orientation. However, this doesn’t always occur, or, if it does take place to some extent, then the transition might not be stable, and, as a result, a person might revert back to the egocentric orientation under various stressful conditions.

When one is operating out of a mode of non-egocentric functioning, one is aware that different people presented with the same information might not arrive at the same conclusions.

Consequently, such an individual would not necessarily suppose that if someone else seems to be operating out of a similar experiential place as we are, then that person necessarily will share our beliefs concerning such a “place.”

Dr. Harris claims that beliefs bridge “the gap between facts and values.” (page 14) While it is true that people use beliefs to construct frameworks of facts and values, and while it is true that people often conflate, if not confuse, issues of facts with matters of values, it is not really clear how Dr. Harris will be able to justify saying that beliefs bridge “the gap between facts and values.”

There often is a certain element of wish fulfillment that is present in many of our beliefs. We often wish that our beliefs were true, or we hope that our beliefs accurately reflect the character of this or that aspect of reality, or we develop expectations concerning the relationship between beliefs and reality.

Wishes, hopes, and expectations do not serve to link facts and values in any but the most tenuous of ways. The only thing that might bridge the divide between facts and values is if one could demonstrate that values are a particular kind of fact concerning the nature of reality.

If there are no aspects of value that are inherent in the nature of reality, then there is nothing in the way of facts about reality’s nature that will be capable of justifying the use of certain values in the light of those facts. For beliefs to be able to bridge the gap between facts and values, one must be able to demonstrate that one’s beliefs about the nature of such a bridge are such that the composition of the bridge being constructed consists of both facts and values that reflect different dimensions of reality in a manner that enables one to reliably travel between facts and values across such a bridge.

Beliefs, in and of themselves, cannot bridge the gap between facts and values. Only truth and an understanding of that truth concerning the nature of the relationships among any given set of facts and values can establish that sort of bridge.

Chapter Eight

On page 15 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris begins a general discussion that seeks to explore the differences between the 'Bad Life' and the 'Good Life'. The 'Bad Life' is described, more or less, as consisting of everything that could happen to an individual that was painful, degrading, humiliating, problematic and that gave expression to various intense degrees of suffering. The only opportunities and choices available in the 'Bad Life' are in relation to greater suffering and only marginally lesser suffering.

The 'Good Life', on the other hand, consists of all manner of choices and opportunities for enhancing the quality of one's life. Genes, health, wealth, family, education, and the political environment have all come together in a perfect storm of good times that lead to nothing but constructive experiences and, as a result, keep any form of suffering far from one's experiential horizons.

For Dr. Harris, the purpose of the foregoing exercise is, first of all, to induce readers to admit that there are differences between the two general forms of life – i.e., the 'Good Life' and the 'Bad Life' -- that he has outlined. Secondly, Dr. Harris believes that readers also should be willing to admit that one of the two forms of life he is describing is better than the other form of life – and, presumably, this means that he believes most readers will consider the 'Good Life' to be eminently better than the 'Bad Life'.

Finally, Dr. Harris believes that the differences in suffering and well-being between those ways of 'life and the reason why one life can be considered to be better than the other is tied to the existence of lawful relationships that bind together states of the brain and events in the world in ways that are clearly distinguishable from one another with respect to issues of well-being. Moreover, he believes that if a reader does not accept the idea that such differences in suffering and enhanced living are rooted in the manner in which various brain states are related to the events of the world in a law-like manner, then the reader will miss a central point in Dr. Harris' argument concerning the relationship of facts and values.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, there are a number of questions that one can raise about the 'Bad Life/Good Life' scenario that Dr. Harris has devised. For example, one might wonder if the

people with the 'Good Life' are connected to the people with the 'Bad Life' in a zero-sum game such that the reason why someone experiences a 'Bad Life' is because the lifestyle of the person with a 'Good Life' not only is subsidized in various ways by the suffering of the people with the 'Bad Life' (for example, working for slave wages in unsafe and unhealthy working environments under the control of an oppressive military regime that serves the interests of the people with the 'Good Life') but, in some sense, the latter might also be dependent on the fact that people somewhere must suffer in order for the person with the 'Good Life' to have what she or he wants – that is, many resources might be both finite and non-renewable, so if the 'Good Life' is dependent on having control over such resources so that only 'x' number of people can have access to them, then such a Good Life/Bad Life scenario is predicated to a large degree on enforced suffering by a certain number of other people.

If the 'Good Life' is dependent on the suffering of others, then in what sense is it the 'Good Life'? If the 'Good Life' presupposes that only the well-being of certain individuals can be maximized, then in what sense can such maximization be considered to be an expression of what is 'good'?

What are the facts about brain states concerning the zero-sum status of world events that might induce people ensconced in the 'Good Life' being described by Dr. Harris to change what is considered to be the 'Good Life' for something else ... something that necessarily will entail a certain amount of suffering since one must deprive oneself of certain elements of what had been defined as a maximized 'Good Life' so that others might (at a minimum) suffer less? If -- as Dr. Harris has argued and as has been noted earlier -- the only value worthy of reasonable consideration is to maximize human well-being, then what does one do when maximization is not possible? How does one compare the quality of maximized well-being among people when the goal of maximizing well-being must be jettisoned due to the recognition that the 'Good Life'/'Bad Life' scenario might be inherently impossible when considered in the context of finite resources?

Politics has sometimes been described as the 'art of the possible.' What does such possibility entail with respect to the issue of attempting to maximize well-being given finite resources?

To be sure, there are clear differences between the experiences of well-being in relation to those who are embedded in the 'Good Life' relative to the experiences of those who are rooted in the 'Bad Life.' However, can one really say that under such circumstances the 'Good Life' is better than the 'Bad Life' if the former is, in various ways, responsible for the suffering that is experienced by those enduring the 'Bad Life'?

Let's approach the foregoing issue from a slightly different direction. What if suffering led to the development of qualities such as patience, courage, honesty, sincerity, fairness, generosity, compassion, strength, perseverance, humility, tolerance, and forgiveness, whereas, although the 'Good Life' involved a condition that was permeated with a sense of physical, social, political, educational, economic, and environmental well-being, nevertheless, this notion of the 'Good Life' also was a condition in which the aforementioned qualities of patience, courage, and so on were absent or might not be able to arise in relation to such optimum circumstances? Under such circumstances could one really say that the 'Good Life' was better than the 'Bad Life'?

A variation on the foregoing question is the following one. Is it really possible to develop qualities of character amidst conditions of maximal well-being marked by optimal indices of: health, wealth, power, position, education, and career? If not, how does one compare a 'Bad Life' marked by the presence of character to a 'Good Life' that is marked by an absence of character?

Is the development of character an essential element of well-being? Is it more important, less important, or equally important to other more material dimensions of well-being? How does one go about determining any of this? If character is, in some way, considered to be more important than other components of well-being, and if we live in a finite world, then how does one go about constructing a program of well-being given that well-being cannot be maximized? How does science determine what one should value under such circumstances?

Although one might be inclined to agree with Dr. Harris that there are differences between the 'Good Life' and the 'Bad Life' as he describes them, such differences lack an existential context, and the absence of that context makes it difficult to know what, ultimately, constitutes a "better" way of life. In addition to what already has been

said in this respect, part of the context that is missing concerns the issue of purpose.

How can one entertain the question of whether one way of life is better than another unless there is some underlying agreement about what constitutes the purpose of life or unless there is some underlying agreement about whether, or not, life has any purpose at all? If the purpose of life were to develop character, and if character were not possible to acquire without suffering of some kind, then talking about the maximization of well-being in the absence of the requisite suffering and hoped-for character formation is to introduce a problematic, if not false, metric into the nature of the moral landscape. On the other hand, if life has no purpose, then aren't all notions of well-being rather arbitrary in the sense that how one goes about defining well-being would likely be entirely an artifact of one's likes, dislikes, and beliefs?

One might even be able to establish law-like relationships between certain brain states and the events of the world, but those relationships – in themselves -- cannot establish what is better or worse with respect to the issue of well-being. Until one knows how to interpret or understand the events of the world and how they are connected to the ultimate nature of reality – that is, until one establishes a reliable metric for mapping out moral space -- then the law-like relationships between brain states and those events is relatively useless with respect to determining what one ought to do given facts about brain states and facts about world events.

Dr. Harris argues that: "... the moment one grants there is a difference between the Bad Life and the Good Life that lawfully relates to states of the human brain, to human behavior, and to states of the world, one has admitted that there are right and wrong answers to questions of morality." (pages 18-19) The foregoing assertion sounds impressive, but it actually is relatively meaningless.

If the law-like connections between, on the one hand, the 'Bad Life' or the 'Good Life and, on the other hand, brain states, together with the events of the world are a function of principles of imperialism, colonialism, corporate exploitation, enslavement, stealing lands and resources from indigenous peoples, class-warfare, oppression of the poor, environmental degradation, corrupt governments, and the like,

then just what “right and wrong answers to the questions of morality” has one committed oneself to? If certain ends – for example, the ‘Good Life’ – are deemed to be desirable, but one must employ methods that will adversely affect certain people in the process, is the ‘Good Life’ really the good life?

Under what conditions is suffering a necessary part of the ‘Good Life’? What kinds of suffering are appropriate and why?

If the end goal is to enhance well-being, but the means being used to accomplish that goal tend to simultaneously undermine well-being - - permanently for some and temporarily for others -- how does one evaluate the relation between the two conditions? Or, maybe what matters is the journey and not the end result, and, if so, how does one justify generating long-term problems with respect to the condition of well-being by seeking to establish certain kinds of short-term, intermediate enhancements of well-being?

Even if one could establish law-like connections among well-being, brain states, and events in the world, none of this necessarily indicates how one should go about bringing such connections to fruition amidst the many forces – both within and without – that tend to run contrary to, and are not conducive to, the establishment of well-being for everyone. Does having an understanding of the structural character of well-being entitle one to oppress people in order to implement and realize such an understanding? Does understanding the law-like connections among the ‘Good Life,’ brain states, and events in the world justify the use of force to be able to give expression to those connections in social, political, educational, judicial, and economic institutions or arrangements? And, if force were deemed acceptable, then what forms and what degree of force would be acceptable and why?

Moreover, throughout the foregoing discussion, one has been working on the assumption that Dr. Harris’ program of science will be able to establish what the lawful connections are that tie together the ‘Good Life,’ brain states, and the events of the world. What if such lawful connections cannot be established, or what if they can be established but only in a limited manner?

All Dr. Harris has at the moment – and this is all that neurobiology considered as a whole has at the moment – are a variety of

correlations concerning, on the one hand, certain kinds of brain states and, on the other hand, certain very circumscribed and, frequently, very artificially constructed events in the world (i.e., experimental/lab work). What such brain states have to do with the generation of consciousness, intelligence, reason, language, insight, and creativity is unknown. Which brain states are most conducive to well-being is unknown. Which lawful connections between brain states and events in the world constitute the 'Good Life' is unknown. What constitutes emotional or psychological well-being is not well-understood, even as certain kinds of dysfunctional behavior might have been identified that should, if possible, be avoided. How best to assist people to develop enhanced well-being is fraught with disagreements – one of which concerns the nature of well-being itself.

In effect, Dr. Harris is arguing that if one knew the truth of things, then one would be forced to admit the nature of the lawful connections among the 'Good Life', brain states, and events in the world. Our current problem is that we don't know the truth of things. Therefore, one is not required to admit much of anything when it comes to issues of: the 'Good Life,' brain states, and the events of the world. Moreover, even if one knew such truths, one might not be any further ahead with respect to the problem of how to go about realizing such truths in people's lives, or the problems surrounding the possible role that suffering might play in such a program of realization, or the problems that surround the issue of force and oppression concerning the implementation of such truths.

Consequently, contrary to what Dr. Harris claims, one has not necessarily admitted to the existence of any right or wrong answers when it comes to the issues of morality even if one were to admit that there might be lawful connections among brain states and various events in the world. Furthermore, even if one were to acknowledge the existence of certain lawful connections between brain states and events in the world, none of this would necessarily commit one to some particular conception of the 'Good Life'. A lot would depend on the nature of such connections ... connections that are not yet well understood by neurobiologists and connections that, conceivably, might never be sorted out.

Dr. Harris has faith in the capacity of reason to penetrate to the truth concerning reality and our relationship to it. Are there limits to the capacity of reason? If there are, reason is often ignorant of them ... although reason is sometimes sufficiently astute to recognize the existence of difficulties surrounding the use of reason.

As a result, one must always be concerned about what exists beyond the horizons of reason's capacity to shed light upon any given matter. When ignorance is present, we tend to get blind-sided by that about which we are unaware. Furthermore, since reason is largely unaware of the degree of its own ignorance, there could be many lacunae through which such ignorance might come back to haunt us with respect to the problem of determining what constitutes the 'Good Life' and how this relates to brain states and events in the world.

Dr. Harris claims that if someone wanted to argue that, in reality, what he described as the 'Bad Life' were really the 'Good Life,' the basic character of his argument concerning the relationship between facts and values would not change. Under such circumstances, one would be "morally obligated to engineer an appropriately pious Bad Life for as many people as possible." (page 18)

Use of the phrase "morally obligated to engineer" is troublesome. By using such a phrase, Dr. Harris seems to believe that if one knew what the truth is, then one would be morally obligated to impose that way of life on people.

While there are many ways to engineer a situation, all such ways entail the use of an array of forces, methods, techniques, and principles that tend to ensure a certain kind of outcome. When one engineers a situation, it doesn't matter what the beliefs, feelings, or aspirations of the entities being engineered might be.

More importantly, what is the character of the argument that connects knowing the truth and being morally obligated to engineer such a truth in relation to other people? One can understand the nature of the logic that might require an individual to engineer his or her own internal environment and life circumstances in a way that reflects what she or he understands (or knows) the truth to be, but trying to impose this logic on others seems more problematic.

Dr. Harris is frequently critical of religion, as well as those who are influenced by religion, because of the manner in which such proponents sometimes seek to force people to live in accordance with their conception of the truth. Why would it be any more acceptable for people who are influenced by science to try to “engineer” people to live in accordance with that which science allegedly had established as truth?

Presumably, Dr. Harris might argue somewhat along the following lines: Well, if science has established the truth of something, and if this truth demonstrates, among other things, that the vast majority of the teachings of all religion are utterly false, then what possible objection could one raise that would justify preventing the truth from regulating the lives of people with respect to issues of well-being? The problem with the foregoing is that science hasn’t demonstrated the truth of much of anything when it comes to the nature of human potential, brain states, the events of the world, the ‘Good Life’, or how the universe came to be – or whether it ever came to be at all and, therefore, has always been. Moreover, even if science could establish such truths, this does not, in and of itself, entitle the proponents of science to force their understanding of things – even if true -- onto other people.

Justification under such circumstances would seem to require that the entire truth about existence had been grasped and, in addition, justification would appear to require that one of the dimensions of such truth would have to be a clear indication – on which everyone could agree -- that it was okay to use methods of engineering or other modalities of force and oppression to bring all human beings not only to the same understanding of the truth but, as well, to help them realize the truths about well-being in their individual lives. I have no idea what such ontological permission would look like, and I have no idea how one would go about proving the existence of such permission ... and neither does Dr. Harris.

Dr. Harris introduces the example of Jeffrey Dahmer whose “idea of a life well-lived was to kill young men, have sex with their corpses, dismember them, and keep their body parts as souvenirs.” (pages 18-19) Dr. Harris goes on to indicate that: “... in any domain of knowledge, we are free to say that certain opinions do not count. In fact, we must

say this for knowledge or expertise to count at all. Why should it be any different on the subject of human well-being?"

First of all, we really don't know what was on in the mind of Jeffrey Dahmer when he did the things he did. Was he happy? Was he compulsively driven? Were there dimensions of his phenomenology that were horrified by what was going on but felt powerless to stop the behavior? Did Dahmer ever wish that his life were not the way it was? Did Jeffrey Dahmer really consider his existence prior to being caught and prosecuted to be "a life well-lived"?

One could acknowledge Dr. Harris' general point that what Jeffrey Dahmer believes about the nature of well-being might have little merit when it comes to trying to determine what constitutes 'legitimate' forms of well-being. Nonetheless, at the same time, the nature of Jeffrey Dahmer's experiences might have considerable relevance with respect to our attempts to try to understand important truths about the nature of well-being.

Was Jeffrey Dahmer a sociopath? Did he suffer from some sort of narcissistic personality disorder? Was there some underlying neurological damage that induced him to do what he did? Was he evil? Can such conditions be prevented? Can such conditions be treated? Is imprisonment the correct way to engage such conditions?

Whatever the answer to the foregoing questions might be, I know that Dr. Harris doesn't know the truth of the matter in relation to any of those questions – although he might have a variety of opinions about such matters. He is – to a large extent -- as ignorant about these issues as is Jeffrey Dahmer.

Therefore, when Dr. Harris begins to talk about how "in any domain of knowledge, we are free to say that certain opinions do not count," I wonder what domain of knowledge he is talking about and who the "we" is that is free to pass judgments on this or that opinion as things that do not count."

Presumably, the mysterious "we" to whom Dr. Harris alludes are 'people in the know.' But who exactly, are these people in the know, and what, precisely, is it that they know? Moreover, how does one establish that such individuals know what they claim to know?

Dr. Harris seems to believe that he is one of the individuals who knows certain things about the issue of well-being. I am sure that he does know a thing or two about the issues in question, but I am also sure that he knows far less than he supposes he knows about such issues (and one of the purposes of the present book is to demonstrate as much), and, therefore, I am wondering if some of Dr. Harris' opinions should be included among those that do not count in the domain of knowledge concerning the nature of life and how well-being fits into such a nature.

At one point in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: "If we were to discover a new tribe in the Amazon tomorrow, there is not a scientist alive who would assume a priori that these people must enjoy optimal physical health and material prosperity. Rather, we would ask questions about the tribe's average lifespan, daily calorie intake, the percentage of women dying in childbirth, the prevalence of infectious disease" and so on. Dr. Harris claims that such questions have determinate answers.

While one might be able to point to differences between the degree of physical health and material prosperity 'enjoyed' by such a tribe relative to the degree of physical health and material prosperity experienced by people in, say, most Western societies, I'm not sure that noting such differences is relevant to the issue of maximizing well-being. For instance, what if one were to ask about the extent to which the degree of physical and material prosperity experienced by such a tribe was compatible with a sustainable condition of well-being?

The fact of the matter is, the ontological jury is still out on whether, or not, the level at which most Westerners experience physical and material well-being will be sustainable into the future and, as well, what the cost will be to other possible dimensions of well-being that might have to be forsaken in order to sustain such a lifestyle. The hypothetical Amazon tribe to which Dr. Harris alludes might match up quite poorly with current Western physical and material standards of living, but such a tribe might be better suited to long-term survival relative to the high degree of physical and material subsidies that are required by a Western style of life ... assuming, of course, that the Western standard of living doesn't destroy the

Amazon rain forests in the former people's pursuit of maintaining a certain conception of well-being that is antithetical to the continued existence of a tribe living amidst the coveted resources of such a rain forest.

In addition, one doesn't know what trade-offs might be operating in such a hypothetical tribe with respect to, on the one hand, a certain level of physical or material well-being and, on the other hand, certain levels of emotional and psychological qualities of well-being. Maybe the stress associated with a higher level of physical and material well-being is not a cost that the members of such a tribe are willing to incur. Maybe members of the tribe prefer having free time to do whatever they like rather than being tied to the mechanisms that are necessary to live a certain kind of material and physical life.

I'm not trying to idealize primitive ways of life. Rather, the point is that the hypothetical example of the Amazon tribe that was introduced by Dr. Harris naturally leads to considering the possibility that, in general, well-being might involve a variety of trade-offs involving different possibilities concerning the sort of assets and liabilities that are to shape what one considers to be a maximal package of sustainable well-being under a given set of conditions.

Dr. Harris often approaches such questions as if their answers either already had been established or were fairly determinate in nature. He often seems to proceed as if it is an undeniable truth that the current, modern Western style of material and physical living gives expression to an enhanced form of well-being and, therefore, such a perspective must be part of any solution to the problem of maximizing well-being.

Unfortunately, the answers (if there are any) to such problems have not, yet, been established in a way that leads to ready agreement on the part of most people. The hypothetical Amazon tribe has its ideas about such matters, and the modern Western world has its ideas about such matters, but no one knows where the truth lies ... although we all have beliefs about how and where such truths might be found.

According to Dr. Harris: "The disparity between how we think about physical health and mental/societal health reveals a bizarre double standard: one that is predicated on our not knowing – or, rather, on our pretending not to know – anything at all about human

well-being.” (page 19) The foregoing quote follows a brief discussion in which Dr. Harris notes how if, in relation to his hypothetical tribe, one were suddenly to discover that such a people advocated sacrificing their first born to imaginary gods, most social scientists would not proceed to document the disparities of social/mental health that existed between the tribal way of life and, say, Western standards of social and mental health as those scientists had done in relation to the physical/material disparities that could be observed between the tribal way of life and, say, the Western way of life. Instead, according to Dr. Harris, social scientists would try to argue that such social arrangements are every bit as valid as are our own social arrangements ... neither better nor worse, but instead, merely different from how we go about things.

Dr. Harris is often guilty of framing his arguments so that they support his point of view -- using examples that are consistent with what he wishes to argue, while ignoring other possibilities that might present difficulties for his perspective. For example, with respect to his hypothetical Amazon tribe, he speaks about practices involving the sacrifice of one’s first-born son in relation to imaginary gods.

However, what if the practices of such a tribe were not so extreme? What if, instead, such practices involved learning techniques for living in harmony with the environment in such a way that one’s existential footprint was as minimal as it could be while still maintaining a certain sustainable way of life? Would -- or should -- scientists be ready to denounce such practices as not being expressions of a defensible position concerning the nature of maximizing well-being?

As far as the issue of the “imaginary gods” that are mentioned by Dr. Harris (page 19) are concerned, one should note that Dr. Harris is entirely a negative campaigner when it comes to the issue of whether, or not, God exists. In other words, Dr. Harris does not put forth any arguments apart from his criticisms of this or that individual or theological position that are capable of demonstrating or proving that God does not exist.

The mode of argument that Dr. Harris tends to use in relation to such issues is one in which he points out all the problems with this or that religious framework and, then, concludes that, therefore, there is

no God. The fact that particular arguments concerning the existence of God might not be persuasive, or they might not be inconsistent, or such arguments might be error-ridden has absolutely nothing to do with whether, or not, God exists. Such existence – to whatever extent it is the case – is independent of, and ontologically prior to, whatever arguments might be assembled in an attempt to prove such existence.

Thus, Dr. Harris is like those politicians who have nothing of value of their own to contribute with respect to the existence issue and, as a result, they just engage in negative campaigning against the other ‘politicians’ who are putting forth arguments of one sort or another, and, in the process, Dr. Harris tries to claim that because he is right – assuming that he is -- about the weakness of such arguments, then one should accept his perspective as the only viable position concerning the existence issue, when, in reality, Dr. Harris has absolutely no proof of any kind – independent of the problematic arguments of those he considers his adversaries -- concerning the existence issue.

The foregoing considerations have not been offered because I believe that truth is relative when it comes to issues of well-being. I agree with Dr. Harris when he argues that the nature of reality gives expression to certain kinds of truths, but I disagree with Dr. Harris when he seeks to induce readers of his works to suppose that Dr. Harris knows what those truths are.

The problem facing humankind is not the fact that an insufficient number of people are open to the sorts of things that Dr. Harris considers to be knowledge, Rather, the problem is human beings – including people such as Dr. Harris -- are, for the most part, all too ignorant about the actual nature of reality. Almost all of us are uncertain about where the truth lies with respect to many things ... however forcefully we might voice our opinions about such matters.

In the face of ignorance and uncertainty, one is not in a position to claim that any given approach to well-being is superior or inferior to some other sort of way of engaging the issue of well-being. This does not mean that all such ideas concerning well-being are entitled to be considered to be correct. Instead, our condition of uncertainty means one is not justified in imposing one’s ideas concerning well-being on others in the absence of proofs and demonstrations that could be

acknowledged by the vast majority of human beings as being reflective of the character of some facet of reality.

I wouldn't want the hypothetical Amazon tribe described by Dr. Harris to tell me how to maximize my well-being or the well-being of society in general. Nevertheless, at the same time, I wouldn't want Dr. Harris' ideas concerning his hypothetical account (of how the 'Good Life', brain states, and events of the world are tied together by lawful connections) governing how I try to go about maximizing my well-being or that of society in general.

The so-called domain of knowledge concerning well-being is problematic. This is so because humanity, in general, is having difficulty distinguishing between beliefs about well-being and actual knowledge concerning such well-being.

I agree with Dr. Harris when he states that most people deal with the world through beliefs concerning that which they take to be knowledge (but which might not be) with respect to alleged nature of things. However, I haven't seen anything in *The End of Faith* or *The Moral Landscape* which would lead me to believe that Dr. Harris is, somehow, all that different from the generality of human beings – that is, like most other people, Dr. Harris tends to engage a great deal of experience out of a perspective of belief rather than one that is clearly rooted in knowledge.

Does Dr. Harris have more epistemological facility with certain kinds of data and information – for example, having to do with neurobiology -- than many other people do? Yes, he does!

Does such facility give him an inside track with respect to understanding the nature of the 'Good Life' or what world events – or events in the lives of individuals for that matter -- actually mean in relation to the 'Good Life'? No, not necessarily!

Consequently, do Dr. Harris' ideas about maximizing well-being entitle him to pass judgments on the perspective of others with respect to the same set of issues? Or, do his ideas about maximizing well-being entitle him to discount the ideas of others whom he does not consider to enjoy the same level of expertise in relation to the issue of well-being – notwithstanding his mentioning of Jeffrey

Dahmer ... which, as Sheryl Crow might say, is apropos of nothing? In both instances , the answer is: Not necessarily!

Dr. Harris received his doctorate in neurobiology ... not well-being. He might be an expert, of sorts, in the former discipline, but it doesn't necessarily follow that he is an expert in the area of well-being or that his status of having earned a doctorate in neurobiology permits him to participate in a domain of knowledge concerning the issue of well-being that, somehow, automatically makes his judgments about those issues more defensible than the opinions of other individuals.

Dr. Harris is, of course, seeking to leverage his expertise in neurobiology with respect to his start-up intellectual enterprise concerning the issue of well-being that he wishes to trade publically. However, I am of the opinion that the IPO for his would-be moral enterprise is highly overvalued and, perhaps, not worth the paper on which it is written.

As with everything else in matters of knowledge, the pudding is in the proof. Thus far in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris has produced very little, if any, in the way of pudding.

Chapter Nine

On page 20 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris points out that contrary to the opinion of many individuals who are influenced by evolutionary theory, not all practices among human beings that have endured across many centuries -- if not millennia -- are necessarily adaptive. Dr. Harris proceeds to list a number of human practices (including: slavery, ceremonial rape, infanticide, cannibalism, female genital excision, human sacrifice, and the torture of animals) that seem to lack adaptive value and, yet, persist through much of history in many localities in order to back up his claim.

I am inclined to agree with Dr. Harris on this point. On the other hand -- and Dr. Harris has indicated as much earlier in his book -- human beings often tend to be a superstitious lot, and, sometimes, practices that have no adaptive value (and, therefore, do not actually enhance the likelihood of group/population survival) come to be associated with beliefs that -- rightly or wrongly, and usually wrongly -- attempt to justify such practices ... much as someone with compulsive behavior attempts to justify her or his repetitive behaviors by claiming that the universe will remain "off" in some intolerable manner if such and such does not occur (i.e., a given behavior, usually of a repetitive nature).

Dr. Harris uses the term: "meme" to refer to the manner in which some people link certain kinds of belief with various nonadaptive practices. Such memes or understandings/orientations are culturally transmitted rather than genetically passed on, and, therefore, according to Dr. Harris, memes can persist alongside of adaptive biological mechanisms even though such memes might not be adaptive on their own ... in fact, some of these memes might be counter-productive to both short-term and long-term survival or well-being

Oftentimes, the beliefs or memes that hold many nonadaptive practices in place are rooted in ideas about who is a 'worthy' recipient with respect to such practices. 'Worthiness' in this case is a function of beliefs that determine which parts of the universe do not need to be consulted in order for them to be acted upon.

Women, children, minorities, the poor, animals, and adversaries of one kind or another have all tended to qualify as 'worthy' candidates who are part of the pool from which designated individuals might be

selected for being on the receiving end of practices that are nonadaptive (especially for the people so selected) and, instead, are designed to impose suffering, if not destruction, to one degree or another in relation to the recipient. The foregoing disenfranchised creatures all are entailed by the very flexible category of 'other' whom – from someone's perspective -- constitute entities that are claimed by the holders of power to be disposable in some manner.

Unfortunately, Dr. Harris, himself, is in danger of becoming one of the 'power holders' which are being alluded to in the foregoing – that is, a person of influence – who might be seeking to populate the category of the 'other' with individuals who are deemed to be among those who have opinions that “do not count” (page 19) and, therefore, subject to whatever treatment the power wielders consider to be appropriate. Furthermore, in certain ways, Dr. Harris might be just as superstitious in his own way as many of the very people he wishes to remove from discussions concerning morality – people whom he considers as being too superstitious and unreasonable in the religious way they go about things.

Without wishing to justify, in any way, the destructive cruelty of all too many people who profess to be religious – and, conceivably, there might be very few religious groups that are largely, if not entirely free of such cruelty -- I'm not so sure that scientists and rationalists are immune from the same underlying disease. In many ways, Dr. Harris' carte blanche rejection of religion – as opposed to individual failings with respect to the truth of things – is rooted in a compulsive and sometimes irrational attachment to his own religion of “reason” ... and, indeed, like most proponents of religion, Dr. Harris is entirely incapable of saying what reason is or what makes it possible or how it arose or why anyone should be influenced by Dr. Harris particular species of 'reason' independently of his beliefs about the matter.

What is irrational, compulsive, and somewhat superstitious about the way in which Dr. Harris “reasons” about religion and, therefore, wishes to jettison such ideas from polite or serious discussion? There are a variety of things that might be mentioned at this point, but let's just consider one possibility.

There are billions of people in the world who, to one degree or another, subscribe to some form of religious belief. What is the size of

the sample set that Dr. Harris is using and from which he is seeking to extrapolate certain conclusions in relation to the larger population of religious believers and practitioners? What methodological steps did he take to ensure that his sample constitutes an appropriate cross section of the larger population? To what extent did he randomize the manner through which he selected the members of his sample? What steps, if any, did Dr. Harris take to ensure that his own biases concerning religion did not corrupt or distort either his data or his interpretation of such data?

Much of what Dr. Harris has to say about religion and those who subscribe to some form of religious belief and practice tends to be anecdotal in nature. More specifically, he tends to take specific cases about which he has read or heard – cases that involve some particularly egregious expressions of stupidity, cruelty, irrationality, abusiveness, or closed-mindedness in relation to religious beliefs and practices – and, uses these cases to construct his argument against religion and those who are inclined toward religion.

One could accept pretty much everything Dr. Harris has to say about such examples of religious beliefs and practices that seem to manifest more pathology than religion. Yet, none of this ‘acceptance’ necessarily carries any ramifications for the millions of people who do not necessarily behave or act in such problematic ways.

For every bizarre facet of religious practice and belief, one could point to more than one example of religious practice and belief that are constructive, loving, kind, honest, inspiring, selfless, courageous, humble, tolerant, forgiving, and so on. Although I have met people of the kind whom Dr. Harris likes to criticize, I also have met many religious people who appear to be of a far more constructive, decent, and sane orientation as well.

The people whom I have met represent a variety of different religious traditions – Native Americans, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and mystics of all different stripes. I have met these people during my several journeys overseas, as well as via my various travels in North America.

Many, if not most, of the foregoing individuals whom I have met would be as horrified and troubled as Dr. Harris is by those people who are caught up in cruel, intolerant, hateful, dogmatic, and

destructive forms of religious beliefs and practices. Yet, Dr. Harris doesn't want to talk in any reasonable way about the many exemplars that serve as counter instances to his own ideas about things. Instead, he would rather dwell on the sorts of individuals who serve the purposes of his crusade against religion.

Throughout *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris extols the values and virtues of science, and, yet, when it comes to his antipathy to religion and people of religion, such values and virtues are pretty much absent. Instead, he would rather compulsively hang on to his superstitions against the religious "other" and thoroughly ensconce his thinking in a rather irrational approach to such issues. When he does this, he manifests a sort of compulsive, superstitious, irrational thinking that is difficult to distinguish from the sorts of behavior and thinking that he claims to oppose.

Clearly, there is a sense of the sacred that Dr. Harris associates with science and reason. The way he talks and believes with respect to such topics is reminiscent of the way religious believers talk and believe in conjunction with whatever gives expression to their sense of the sacred.

Unfortunately, there is a streak of dogmatism and intolerance that tends to seep into his discourse concerning religious issues. When this occurs, distinguishing what Dr. Harris believes from other forms of religious extremism becomes difficult.

Dr. Harris argues: "From a factual point of view, is it possible for a person to believe the wrong things? Yes. Is it possible for a person to value the wrong things (that is, to believe the wrong things about human well-being)? I am arguing that the answer to this question is an equally emphatic "yes" and, therefore, that science should increasingly inform our values." (page 21) One could agree with Dr. Harris in relation to both of the foregoing premises and still disagree with him on the conclusion – namely, "therefore, that science should increasingly inform our values."

Is it possible for scientists and rationalists to believe the wrong things? If not, then why isn't this possible?

The foregoing question is actually a rhetorical one ... except, of course, for those who are insufferably in love with their own limited

understanding of things. After all, the history of science is as much about people getting things wrong as it is about people getting things right.

Generally speaking, scientific revolutions often mean that the majority of scientists who live and practice at the time of the revolution have, to varying degrees, an incorrect understanding concerning certain issues of fact. Moreover, if science continues to progress, then there are many scientists today who have understandings concerning this or that factual matter who, at some point in the future, will be proven to be incorrect.

In saying the foregoing, I am not attempting to indicate that science has no capacity to establish certain kinds of truth because science clearly does have such a capacity. Nevertheless, not everything that issues forth from the bowels of science is necessarily an embodiment of the truth or even a manifestation of good scientific practice.

One of the strengths of science is its capacity to change to better reflect new data. At the same time, such a capacity for change does not, in and of itself, guarantee that science has any facility for determining the nature of any sort of value system other than in conjunction with the ethical considerations that have to do with the observance of science as a methodological process.

In fact, one could argue that in certain ways science didn't become science in the modern sense of the term until various ethical dimensions were introduced into scientific practice. These ethical standards concerned such issues as the importance of being as free from as many biases as possible when observing nature, as well as during the processes of collecting and interpreting such data.

Freedom from bias doesn't just refer to the importance of distancing oneself from various theological ideas that could distort observation, data collection, and interpretation. Freedom from bias also refers to the importance of distancing oneself from various scientific ideas that could distort observation, data collection, and interpretation.

The process of science often encounters as much resistance from vested interests within scientific institutions, organizations, and

educational settings as it does from vested interests within theological circles. Furthermore, in some ways, the former sorts of resistances are more pernicious because they are camouflaged in scientific garb.

As a result, there is a great deal of 'junk' science that claims to be scientific even when such science exhibits more interest in obfuscating the truth than in uncovering it in certain cases. In addition, there is a great deal of environmental, climatological, chemical, pharmaceutical, psychological, as well as medical 'science' that gives expression to such junk values in the alleged pursuit of "facts."

In what way should science inform our values? If one means, by the term 'science' that we all should pay heed to the need for rigorous methodology and ethical standards of research in our search for truth, then one could agree that such a point of view should help inform (but not necessarily determine) any discussion of values. On the other hand, if what one means by the term 'science' is that we all must accept whatever scientists – or some elite, specialized group of such scientists -- say about values based on their interpretations of, or best-efforts concerning, some given set of facts, then I am not so sure this is necessarily a defensible position. Furthermore, there is a sense in which such a position is not all that different in character from those who sought to argue that because a group of theologians are considered to be experts, then this fact in and of itself indicates that we should cede our moral and intellectual authority to such individuals.

I can't think of one fact -- or set of facts -- involving quantum theory, general relativity, special relativity, cosmology, astrophysics, mathematics, molecular biology, and/or neurobiology (and I have a certain degree of familiarity with -- as well as have written about -- all of these areas ... although I certainly would not consider myself an expert) -- that has a single thing of value to say about values other than the rather obvious fact of how all of the foregoing achievements strongly demonstrate the importance of employing a rigorous methodological process in order for one to be in a position to be able to generate heuristically valuable outcomes. None of those perspectives definitively proves what reality is, or how consciousness, intelligence, reason, creativity, language, curiosity, or insight is possible. None of those theories definitively indicates whether, or not, certain kinds of values are inherent in the structure of reality or

whether, or not, some sense of purpose is inherent in the character of ontology. More importantly, as far as Dr. Harris' arguments in *The Moral Landscape* are concerned, none of the foregoing scientific frameworks provide any indication of how one should go about deciding issues of well-being ... including the most fundamental of such issues – namely, what might be the most appropriate way to characterize the meaning of well-being and what justifies using such a characterization.

So, on just what basis does Dr. Harris believe that “science should increasingly inform our values”? Other than in relation to the aforementioned matter of methodological issues – and even here such issues tend to be limited to understandings that are rooted in materialistic and physical assumptions concerning the nature of reality – the connection between science and values seems rather vague, problematic, and not at all well-established.

Like all other ideas, ‘science’ is a meme. Will the transmission of Dr. Harris’ version of such a meme enhance or diminish well-being?

According to Dr. Harris, he believes that “the difference between the Good Life and the Bad Life could not be clearer: the question, for both individuals and groups, is how can we most reliably move in one direction and avoid moving in the other.” (page 22) The problem is that there is considerable ambiguity and amorphousness at the heart of his manner of distinguishing the ‘Good Life’ and the ‘Bad Life,’ and, therefore, one is uncertain of the precise direction in which one should travel, and one is not entirely certain of what should be avoided.

For example, on pages 21 and 22, Dr. Harris runs through an all-too-brief discussion concerning the issue of suffering. He tends to liken suffering to the sort of thing that someone experiences when she or he takes certain sorts of medicine or undergoes surgery that, despite the curative properties that might ensue from such treatments, might entail some degree of pain or discomfort.

While the general idea to which Dr. Harris is alluding is understandable – namely, that one might have to experience some degree of short-term suffering in order for one’s overall or long-term well-being to be enhanced – nonetheless, the physical/medical analogy put forth by Dr. Harris leaves a lot of questions unanswered, if not unasked. Among other things, one would like to know what will play

the social, economic, educational, psychological, and/or political counterpart to the appropriate sort of medicine that needs to be given with respect to some sort of individual or collective value-malady such that whatever short-term unpleasantness, pain, or suffering which might accompany the treatment will be forgotten as a necessary step in establishing a long-term remedy or cure?

Moreover, how does one distinguish between, on the one hand, valid treatments that entail suffering but have a genuine chance to lead to wellness in some sense and, on the other hand, abusive treatments that entail suffering without much, if any, prospect of resolving the underlying problem of well-being? The foregoing question becomes more relevant when one remembers that those who pursue the practice of medicine sometimes forget that they are ‘practicing’ on human beings when such practitioners proceed to operate on the basis of a combination of knowledge and ignorance that doesn’t always lead to enhanced conditions of well-being ... and, indeed, there are thousands of people every year who suffer needlessly due to iatrogenically caused medical difficulties that diminish rather than enhance well-being.

While Dr. Harris might be quite eager to ‘practice’ his version of some sort of science-based values-medicine -- despite the fact that, all too frequently, considerable ignorance surrounds whatever we know, or think we know, about how to resolve this or that problem of well-being -- I am not sure that very many people would be prepared to accept Dr. Harris’ claims of expertise when it comes to his readiness to ‘practice’ his science-based values-medicine on anyone but himself. This is especially the case when there is a fair degree of likelihood that there might be considerably more iatrogenically caused difficulties which arise through the practice of such science-based value-treatments than exists even in the case of medical practice ... which, by comparison, is far, far less complex than anything that Dr. Harris is alluding to.

More importantly, am I prepared to let Dr. Harris practice his version of a science-based values-medicine on me or on anyone that I love? The answer – at least for me – is clearly no.

Other than some broad considerations concerning certain kinds of physical, sexual, intellectual, emotional, political, economic,

educational, and spiritual abuse – with which I probably would agree with Dr. Harris in many, if not most, instances – I don't feel that Dr. Harris has any special insight into what truly constitutes the Good Life or the nature of well-being. Furthermore, I don't think one needs to be a scientist or have been trained in science in order to be opposed to any of the sorts of abuses that, from time to time, Dr. Harris criticizes throughout the pages of *The Moral Landscape*.

Indeed, the abuses that appall Dr. Harris (and rightfully so) were recognized as abuses – at least by some people of moral integrity both within and outside of religious circles – long before modern science ever entered the picture, and, yet, I don't believe that Dr. Harris has the foggiest idea how such a capacity for moral integrity was, or is, possible. In fact, I will go so far as to say that while I believe Dr. Harris is, in many ways, a person of moral integrity with good intentions – however much I might disagree with him on certain issues -- I don't believe he can explain what gives him the capacity for such moral integrity.

I am not claiming to have superior knowledge relative to Dr. Harris with respect to understanding the nature and origins of such a moral capacity. However, I do find it strange that someone like Dr. Harris -- who believes in the importance of maintaining an open mind when probing experience – seems to be so willing to quickly foreclose on the exploration of certain possibilities concerning the nature of morality despite not really seeming to have any idea what makes such a capacity possible ... even in relation to himself.

Toward the beginning of the present section, I indicated how Dr. Harris believes there are behaviors that are not adaptive – in fact, they tend to be destructive in nature -- and, yet, such behaviors persist. Rejecting a common refrain that has arisen in various evolutionary accounts of behavior, Dr. Harris does not believe the reason why such nonadaptive behaviors persist is necessarily connected to some sort of adaptive evolutionary strategy.

Instead, Dr. Harris speaks about memes that are transmitted culturally rather than being disseminated genetically. Some of these memes give expression to nonadaptive and destructive practices or behaviors that are rooted in an idea or a belief which gets passed on

like a sort of parasite or virus that inhabits an environment and attaches itself to this or that organism.

Dr. Harris doesn't provide an account of what makes it possible for memes of a destructive character to arise in the first place. Moreover, he doesn't provide an account of why such memes are able to attach themselves to some human beings and, thereby, persist over time despite the nonadaptive character of such memes

Why do some human beings seem to be vulnerable to such memes? Why do some people appear to have the moral and/or intellectual wherewithal to resist the onslaught of such memes?

The origins and nature of memes is not self-explanatory. The origins and nature of a capacity to be able to engage such memes in either an adaptive or nonadaptive manner is not self-explanatory.

There seems to be a dynamic involving memes and human beings that is not straightforward. This dynamic consists of a complex set of forces involving ideas, beliefs, facts, understandings, interpretations, arguments, purposes, values, identities, motivations, desires, judgments, and commitments that extend far beyond the ability of the meme concept/belief/orientation to plausibly explain.

Behaviors that turn out to be of an adaptive nature often are a function of a struggle between not only various kinds of memes but, as well, involve a set of processes that evaluate such memes according to a variety of considerations. In addition, the foregoing sort of struggle and evaluation process might also be present in conjunction with the kinds of behaviors that turn out to be of a nonadaptive nature.

Memes, in themselves, don't necessarily determine which memes will be selected in any given set of circumstances. The memes go through a hermeneutical process through which people come to commit themselves – for good reasons and/or bad reasons – to certain kinds of behaviors, some of which turn out to have adaptive value and some of which turn out to have nonadaptive value, but as long as the latter modes of nonadaptive behavior are not totally self-destructive, then there will be an opportunity for such modes of behavior to continue to persist despite their nonadaptive character.

Chapter Ten

Dr. Harris states on page 24 of *The Moral Landscape* that: “I have made it clear that religion and science are in a zero-sum conflict with respect to the facts. Here, I have begun to argue that the division between facts and values is intellectually unsustainable, especially from the perspective of neuroscience. Consequently, it will come as no surprise that I see very little room for compromise between faith and reason on questions of morality.”

While Dr. Harris has made it very clear that he believes that ‘religion and science are in a zero-sum conflict with respect to the facts,’ what he has not made clear is why anyone should accept such a statement as being an accurate reflection of what reality demands of human beings. The ‘fact’ of the matter is, reality is in a zero-sum game with respect to all human attempts to determine the nature of reality.

Science does not determine the truth, and religion does not determine the truth. Rather, truth already is whatever it is, and science and religion are but two attempts to figure out what is the case with respect to the nature of what is.

The extent to which any given scientific or religious perspective is correct will be a function of the ability of such a perspective to be able to reflect the truth of some given dimension of ontology. Being able to demonstrate that such perspectives accurately reflect the nature of reality is not always easy to establish in a way that will be able to enjoy a consensus of agreement among human beings in general. In addition, sometimes, of course, we might come up empty with respect to such demonstrations.

The absence of ultimate vindication is not necessarily a death knell for a given scientific or religious perspective. Such perspectives might have heuristic value – that is, they might serve to help us learn, discover, or operate – even if clear-cut proofs have not been developed that show such perspectives to be accurate reflections of some facet of the way things are.

Previously, I have indicated that, to a degree, I agree with Dr. Harris when he states that: “the division between facts and values is intellectually unsustainable.” In other words -- and one might wish to take issue with the following conditional – if the nature of “ought” is

inherent in the nature of reality, then, obviously, any perspective that sought to separate facts from values would be artificial in as much as values would be -- given the nature of the underlying conditional -- a special sort of fact.

If, on the other hand, there is no force of “ought” that is inherent in the nature of reality, then values give expression to entirely artificial constructs – although, nonetheless, possibly still possessing heuristic value. Under such circumstances, facts and values are different from one another in the sense that “facts” have to do with the nature of, say, physical or psychological reality, whereas values have to do with frameworks for interacting with those facts in one way rather than another without one being able to demonstrate that the nature of physical reality justifies, in some sense, the use of one set of values rather than another such set.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, I tend to disagree with Dr. Harris’ way of going about characterizing what the facts are with respect to any given situation. For instance, Dr. Harris is inclined to treat reason and faith as being polar opposites of one another.

For Dr. Harris, faith seems to be a matter of blind belief. While this might be the case for some individuals, this is not how I – and, I believe, quite a few other individuals -- actually approach the dynamic of faith.

Suppose I have several friends. Let us also suppose that whenever I have problems I approach one or the other friend and ask for their assistance.

Over time, I discover that one friend is much more likely to help me with my difficulties than the other friend is. My faith in the individual who is inclined to help me out is enhanced with each new experience of assistance, while my faith in the individual who is not inclined to help me might diminish – at least as far as asking for assistance is concerned.

Such faith is not blind but is clearly rooted in experience. Such faith is subject to change, and it is sensitive to what does, and does not, occur. Consequently, such faith is not just a blind, static form of belief.

At the same time, the faith that I have in the individual who is willing to help me out is not exactly knowledge since I am aware that

on any given occasion the friend who usually helps me might not be able to do so for any number of reasons. Perhaps he is busy or has a previous commitment or is not feeling well or is broke himself.

I could use terms such as: 'confidence level,' 'probability,' 'chance' or 'likelihood' to describe the situation with my friend. However, the idea of faith works just as well, and use of such a term doesn't distort the nature or character of the relationship I have with my friend when it comes to issues of assistance.

There does tend to be an element of emotional commitment present when the term "faith" is used that might not be present when the terminology of probability models is employed. On the other hand, someone who is a gambler and plays the odds might have an emotional commitment with respect to the possibility of certain outcomes occurring rather than others, and the decision to play such odds in a certain way might be rooted in some sort of faith that has arisen as a result of past experiences in similar circumstances.

I am confident that the sun will appear tomorrow. I have faith that the sun will appear tomorrow.

The probability that the stock market will continue to rise is 'x'. I have little, moderate, or a lot of faith that the stock market will continue to go up.

I am convinced that this experiment will prove me to be right. I have faith that this experiment will prove me to be correct.

We use the lexicon of faith to give expression to an understanding that contains a mixture of things that are known and things that are not known with respect to our relationship with this or that situation. We use the lexicon of probability to do the same thing.

Dr. Harris has no faith in the idea of faith. Yet, faith is the glue that holds most of his world together, and he could not operate without it even if he chooses to use other words to mask what is actually going on.

For Dr. Harris, science and reason are like friends of his to whom he can go and seek assistance for different kinds of problems. As such, he has faith in them even though there might be times when reason and science might not be able to solve certain kinds of problems that Dr. Harris places before them.

For instance, currently, neither science nor reason has much of value to say about the origins of consciousness, intelligence, reason, logic, language, or creativity. Moreover, neither science nor reason can say what the essential nature of such phenomena is (e.g., are they material, physical, or something else), and, yet, both science and reason rely on such phenomena in countless ways, and, therefore, people who use science and reason have a faith-based relationship with such processes because there are elements of both the known and the unknown that are entangled in inextricable ways with respect to the exercise of science and reason.

We all parse the experiences of our lives into bundles of “facts” that might, or might not, accurately represent the character of such experiences. We all develop belief systems concerning such bundles that often tend to entail certain kinds of faith relationships involving the past, the present, and the future.

If Dr. Harris wishes to argue that faith plays no role in the way he interacts with science, reason, and the experiences of his life, then I believe he will have a very difficult time proving that his life is faith free. Consequently, the beef that Dr. Harris really seems to have with faith and reason is that certain people bring these two phenomena together in ways with which he does not agree.

Faith and reason are not necessarily inherently opposed to one another. Rather, the trick is to find the modes of their interaction that might provide one with the best opportunity to be able to grasp the character of reality.

In other words, religious and scientific perspectives aren't necessarily locked in some sort of zero-sum contest in which only one perspective can be correct – and, certainly, Dr. Harris has not demonstrated this is, or must be, the case. Instead, religious and scientific experiences generate data on which to reflect and with respect to which one develops various kinds of faith relationships through which an array of problems are addressed and resolved (or not) in ways that also can be critically reflected upon.

If a given set of religious beliefs is not working for me, and I lose faith in the capacity of such a system of beliefs to be able to adequately address a variety of on-going existential problems in a heuristically valuable way, then I am free to go looking for something that seems to

do a better job of addressing such needs. Is this not also the case in relation to scientific beliefs, and has not such a search for something better gone on repeatedly throughout the history of science?

Stripped down to its essential features, religion is a search for the truth concerning the nature of being and the nature of one's relationship with such being. Stripped down to its essential features, science is also a search for truths concerning the same issues.

Does this mean that science and religion are in competition to determine whether reality is scientific or religious in nature? Not necessarily.

To date, there really is no reason of which I am aware that has been incontrovertibly established and demonstrates why the nature of reality couldn't give simultaneous expression to both scientific and religious truths. However, by saying the foregoing, one need not thereby be committed to a position in which science and religion must go about engaging or discovering the nature of reality in precisely the same way.

In other words, the relationship between science and religion could be complementary in nature with respect to generating understandings concerning reality. Although both science and religion are attempts to probe reality and establish the nature of truth, the truth might be sufficiently complex to accommodate a variety of different ways of engaging it and understanding it without such understandings necessarily contradicting one another.

If the truths of science and religion were complementary, this would mean that the "nonoverlapping magisteria" notion introduced by Stephen Jay Gould (discussed earlier) might not be correct, or it might have to be modified somewhat. More specifically, it is entirely possible that one and the same set of facts concerning the physical world might support more than one level of interpretation/understanding, or it is possible that what we know of the physical world is but one level of reality.

Physical facts are what they are. If someone is devoted to the truth, then this means acknowledging the character of physical/material reality. If one can demonstrate that a certain dimension of the universe operates in a certain way, then there is no

need to treat such truths as constituting threats to religious truths since it is the truth that matters and not some particular understanding of things in which one might have a vested interest.

I am of the opinion that if there are religious and physical truths about being – and I believe there are such truths – then, ultimately, such truths will not be contradictory in any way. However, we might have to abandon this or that pet idea along the way in order to reach such a unified position ... which is just another way of saying that it is the truth that matters and not our beliefs, ideas, opinions, worldviews, and theories.

The place where religion and science often end up stepping on one another's toes often concerns the interpretation of "facts." As a result, it might be of some value to remind oneself at this point that there is a fundamental difference between talking about science as a methodology and talking about science as a process of interpreting the "facts" that are generated through such a methodology.

Science-as-methodology has produced all manner of "facts" that have been arranged in a multiplicity of ways in an attempt to make sense of such "facts." The modes of arrangement are often referred to as "science," but not all such arrangements are able to stand the test of time since science-as-methodology has a tendency to generate further "facts" that reveal problems – whether peripheral or essential – which undermine whatever claims are being made about the capacity of such arrangements to accurately reflect the character of reality.

Dr. Harris appears to want to argue that all religious modes of searching for the truth are unacceptable because some people have failed miserably with respect to such an undertaking and, in the process, have inflicted considerable suffering on other human beings, not to mention other life forms. If failure is the criteria for determining what modalities of searching should be pursued, then science should have been abandoned a long time ago since for every success in science, there have been many more failures and, as well, considerable suffering associated with the uses and abuses of science.

Every failed experiment in science provides important information if one knows how to make use of such data. Every failed experiment in religion provides important information if one knows how to make use of such data.

Someone once said that the only thing worse than making mistakes is not learning from those mistakes. Sometimes, the religious search for truth is a little bit – and sometimes considerably – slower on the uptake with respect to making use of the data that ensues from failed experiments than is the case with science, but, then, science, for the most part, doesn't deal with issues concerning human: meaning, purpose, identity, and potential. Therefore, the complexity of the problems engaged through religion tend to be many magnitudes of difficulty greater than are the sorts of problems addressed by science.

According to Dr. Harris, the situation vis-à-vis science and religion is as follows: “If the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous; if the basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the nature of reality, confounded by irrational hopes and fears ... often with tragic results.” (page 25) Once again, Dr. Harris is wrong about the facts of the situation.

In the foregoing excerpt from his book, Dr. Harris talks about something that he refers to as “the basic claims of religion.” What are these claims?

Religion is not a monolithic process in which everyone is making the same sort of claims. In fact, religious discourse is marked by a wealth of ongoing controversies surrounding a vast array of different claims concerning the nature of reality.

Perhaps the only claim held in common by all religious modes of engaging reality is that there is something more to existence than can be exhausted by our senses (including those modes of instrumentation that augment and enhance our biological, sensory capabilities). Different religious understandings give different names to this extrasensory dimension of reality, and different religious understandings go about parsing such a dimension in ways that often tend to conflict with one another.

Unfortunately, many religious people make the same kind of mistake that Dr. Harris does when he tries to claim that science and religion are caught in a zero-sum game concerning the nature of reality. That is, people from different religious backgrounds often assume that they are caught up in a zero-sum game with other

religious perspectives concerning the nature of reality such that only one of the explanations can be correct.

People who consider religion, like science, to be a zero-sum game - with reality and truth at stake -- often overlook the possibility that none of their interpretations of reality are necessarily correct. Alternatively, it could be the case that all such perspectives are correct in some ways and incorrect in other ways, and sorting out which is which is very problematic ... to whatever extent such a sorting out process actually can be successfully accomplished.

Just as there is a difference between science-as-methodology and science-as-interpretation, there also is a difference between religion-as-methodology and religion-as-interpretation. Dr. Harris actually touches on this issue toward the latter part of his book: *The End of Faith* when he discusses his ideas about Buddhist spirituality and proceeds to emphasize the methodological aspects of such spirituality as opposed to theological interpretations that arise in conjunction with the data packages that are generated through the use of such spiritual methodology.

Processes such as fasting, meditation, and contemplation are expressions of methodology that one can undertake as experimental exercises in which one remains uncommitted to any particular outcome but attempts to reflect on the data generated through such an exercise in as objective and unbiased a way as possible. Issues of replication and consensus come into play with respect to such methodological considerations even as one seeks to remain open to possibility and not foreclose on any particular interpretation of such methodological events prematurely.

However one wishes to conceive of consciousness, intelligence, reason, insight, understanding, curiosity, creativity, attention, motivation, and intentionality, it seems clear that such phenomena are forms of instrumentality that are used during the process of critically reflecting on the data that arises from one's experimental forays into this or that spiritual methodology. Such phenomena are the means through which one seeks to evaluate the nature of experience.

Thus, empirical observation, critical reflection, experimental methods, instrumentation, objectivity, replication, and consensus all play similar roles in spiritual methodology – when properly pursued --

as they do in scientific methodology. The zero-sum issue does not usually arise in conjunction with such methodology but, instead, tends to arise in relation to interpretations concerning the significance or meaning of the results that issue forth from the use of methodology – and this is as true in science as it is in spirituality and religion.

Spiritual methodology does not constitute a threat to science – although theological interpretations concerning the results of such methodology might constitute such a threat. Scientific methodology does not constitute a threat to spirituality – although various sorts of dogmatic scientific interpretations of the results issuing forth from the application of such methodology might constitute such a threat.

I know of no fact issuing forth from any branch of science that proves there is no transcendental dimension to being. I know of no fact issuing forth from any branch of science that shows that the universe is random in nature ... and here, one needs to distinguish between, on the one hand, the value of using the concept of randomness as a methodological means of establishing certain kinds of baselines against which experimental results can be compared in the search for data that do not conform to the properties that would be predicted on the basis of assuming that a given phenomenon operates in accordance with random processes, and, on the other hand, using the results of experiments as a basis for claiming that the nature of the universe is intrinsically random in character.

At the same time, I know of no dimension of spiritual methodology that is capable of demonstrating that using scientific methodology is untenable and incapable of revealing important truths about certain facets of reality. Indeed, spiritual and scientific methodologies overlap in many respects even though such methodologies might be directed at, and interested in, different aspects of reality and experience.

To be sure, there are ethical considerations that might arise in conjunction with the way and extent to which scientific methodology might be applied in some given set of circumstances. However, such ethical issues might be as much about the importance of observing the cautionary principle when venturing into areas of uncertainty and, therefore, recognizing the need to have humility with respect to our considerable ignorance about where the truth of things lies, as it is the case that such ethical issues might be about the manner in which

theological interpretations have a tendency to impinge on the application of scientific methodology.

Neither science nor religion is complete unto itself. Each is a process that takes place in the midst of other people who might not share one's way of interpreting the world.

Under such circumstances, the problem becomes one of trying to decide whose perspective, if any, has priority in a given set of circumstances. More to the point, while I am not willing to automatically cede my moral and intellectual authority to some given theological interpretation of reality, I also am not willing to automatically cede my moral and intellectual authority to some given scientific interpretation of reality.

Methodology – whether spiritual or scientific -- yes! Interpretation – whether spiritual or scientific -- not necessarily!

Advocates of religion engage in problematic and unconstructive forms of caricature concerning science when they try to reduce science-as-methodology to nothing more than a case of Herr Doktor Frankenstein and his monster. Advocates of science engage in problematic and unconstructive forms of caricature concerning religion and spirituality when the former individuals try to reduce spirituality down to being nothing more than irrationality and superstition as exemplified by the case of the Inquisition and its victims.

At times, the application of results from scientific methodology has occurred in all manner of ways that have led to “tragic results” -- and war is just one example of this. At times, the application of results from spiritual methodology has occurred in ways that have led to “tragic results” – and war, as well, is just one example of this.

Religion-as-interpretation has had its share of extremists and fundamentalists – and race hatred is just one example of this. However, science-as-interpretation also has had its share of extremists and fundamentalists – and eugenics is just one example of this.

Unfortunately, because Dr. Harris seems intent on force-fitting things into a mould of zero-sum games, he often falls victim to a problematic and unconstructive ways of stating problems. This is true not only with respect to the way he often talks about science and

religion, per se, but this also often is true in relation to the way he talks about the nature of the relationship that might exist between science and religion.

Things are not either black and white, or right or wrong, or correct and incorrect when it comes to science versus religion. The two processes need not be locked in a struggle to the death in which there can only be one winner and one loser.

Dr. Harris states that: "If the basic claims of religion are true, the scientific worldview is so blinkered and susceptible to modification as to be rendered nearly ridiculous." (page 25) Dr. Harris seems to overlook the obvious in the foregoing assertion – namely, that "If the basic claims of religion are true" (and this is his conditional not mine), then, perhaps, the scientific worldview should be susceptible to appropriate modifications to enable it to be less ridiculous than it would be if it were permitted to continue on with a false worldview.

However, the fact of the matter is that Dr. Harris is entirely vague about which religious claims he is talking about. Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, to carry on much of a discussion with respect to what would be necessary to do in relation to modifying some given scientific worldview if certain religious claims were true.

Conceivably, if certain religious claims were true, one might not have to modify the scientific worldview. Much depends on the claim in question.

On the other hand, Dr. Harris argues that: "If the basic claims of religion are false, most people are profoundly confused about the nature of reality [and] confounded by irrational hopes and fears." (page 25) Even if one knew which "basic claims of religion" Dr. Harris had in mind – which one doesn't (although one might be able to guess what is weighing on his mind) – one still could ask Dr. Harris about the nature of the process through which such claims supposedly were proven to be false.

Dr. Harris is dealing entirely in the realm of the hypothetical. 'If this, then that', and, in the meantime, Dr. Harris has not shown why one should go along with, or accept as plausible, the 'if' aspect of any of his conditionals.

Moreover, Dr. Harris is entirely too restricted in his way of conceptualizing issues. If someone has faith that something – whether scientific, religious or philosophical -- is the truth and is then provided with evidence indicating that such faith is unwarranted, then, under such circumstances, anyone is likely to become “profoundly confused” and “confounded by irrational hopes and fears.”

Such a condition is known as dissociation. People whose worldview or faith-orientation is brought into question become stressed, anxious, depressed, uncertain, and tend to lose their sense of identity (depersonalization) and reality (de-realization).

The worldview or faith-orientation that could come crashing down might be political, economic, cultural, philosophical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, spiritual, or scientific. People of science are as vulnerable to becoming “profoundly confused” and “confounded by irrational hopes and fears” when their worldview is brought into question as anyone else who suffers a crisis of faith concerning their worldviews.

On page 24 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: “... there is no mystery why most scientists feel that they must pretend that religion and science are compatible. ... While few scientists living in the West now fear torture or death at the hands of religious fanatics, many will voice concerns about losing their funding if they give offense to religion.”

Imagine that! People worried about losing their funding if they offend the people with the money.

The foregoing has a certain resonance with the whining of a petulant child who is not permitted to do whatever he or she wishes to do, when she or he wishes to do so, and irrespective of how such behaviors might affect those around the child. The condition is called dependency, and if one doesn't care for the conditions that are placed on one in order to obtain someone else's money, then perhaps, one should begin thinking about how to support oneself outside the distastefulness of such dependency.

Neither science nor religion has an absolute, unquestionable right to people's money. At least, I don't recall coming across any proof that would justify such a 'right'.

Neither science nor religion has an absolute, incontrovertible right to dictate the way things should be irrespective of how people might feel about the matter. At least, I don't recall coming across anything that would justify such a 'right'

Even when universal truths are particular expressions of such universals, there tend to be many contingencies that need to be considered when seeking to understand the nature of the relationship between universal principles and particularized expressions of such principles. This is especially true when more than one universal principle is involved in the dynamic that is shaping the character of some given particular.

Chapter Eleven

Toward the beginning of Chapter 1 in *The Moral Landscape* – the chapter is entitled: ‘Moral Truth’ – Dr. Harris notes: “I don’t think one has fully enjoyed the life of the mind until one has seen a celebrated scholar defend the ‘contextual’ legitimacy of the burqa or female genital mutilation, a mere thirty seconds after announcing that moral relativism does nothing to diminish a person’s commitment to making the world a better place.” (page 27) A page later, Dr. Harris indicates: “... I am arguing that science can, in principle, help us understand what we should do and should want – and, therefore, what other people should do and should want in order to have the best lives possible.”

If by “‘contextual’ legitimacy” one is referring to the forced imposition of certain practices -- in this case, wearing the burqa and female genital mutilation -- (and force could mean anything from the use of physical violence to tactics of social pressure and undue influence), there is no legitimacy in relation to such practices, contextual or otherwise. One can agree with Dr. Harris on this point.

Yet, when, just a few paragraphs later, he begins to wax rhapsodic about how science can help us to not only understand what one should want and should do but, as well, help determine what other people should want and should do, I begin to wonder if, perhaps, Dr. Harris might be missing out on enjoying the capacity of his own mind to juxtapose problematic ideas in a way that is similar to the “celebrated scholar” to whom he alludes in the foregoing quote. How does one go from rejecting or condemning practices – namely, wearing the burqa and female genital mutilation because of, among other things, the element of force/pressure/imposition that is present – to talking about the idea that science can help to determine why people should want and do certain things given the element of force and imposition that appears to be implicit in Dr. Harris’ statements ... i.e., if we “know” what others should want and do than we must find ways of inducing them to believe that what science says they should want and do is what they must learn to want and do?

The individuals who force women to wear the burqa or who force them to become participants in genital mutilation believe that truth is on their side, and, therefore, it is okay to employ force to get other people to submit to such ‘truth.’ Now, Dr. Harris is arguing that science

is – in principle – capable of establishing the truth of things, and, therefore, it is apparently okay to induce people to come to believe that they should want and that they should do certain kinds of things as long as science is the authority for doing so.

When religious advocates adopt such a perspective, it is wrong. When advocates of science pursue such an agenda, apparently what was previously odious – that is, forcing (broadly construed) people to believe and behave in certain ways -- becomes okay.

Dr. Harris, of course, could object at this point and indicate that there is a clear difference between the religious contexts and the scientific contexts being outlined above. Science is about truth, whereas religion is about falsehood, superstition, and irrationality.

To be sure, falsehood should never be the basis of what a person should want or what a person should do. Truth, on the other hand, should always be the basis of what one should want or what one should do.

However, what one should want and what one should do as an individual – even if true – does not necessarily translate into giving the right to determine what other people should want or what others should do. The problem here revolves about the issue of force, and, as noted earlier, I am using the term “force” in a broad manner that encompasses any set of practices (political, economic, educational, social, emotional, or physical) that are designed to induce people to believe or behave in a certain way when, if the matter were left to themselves, they might not choose to believe or behave in such ways.

Naturally, every social setting is going to require parameters of behavior that do not undermine the stability and functionality of the public space – that is, the space defined by the dynamics of interpersonal behavior. Nonetheless, as much as is practically feasible, the precise character of such parameters of behavior should be an expression of general acceptance and voluntary agreement rather than arrangements of force and imposition.

Nevertheless, I’m really not convinced that science – despite the claims of such advocates as Dr. Harris – is in any better a position than religion is with respect to the issue of determining what people should want or what they should do. Furthermore, when Dr. Harris makes

claims that science – in principle – is positioned to determine what we should want and what we should do, and this remains so even if we never arrive at the truth of matters (and whether, or not, he realizes it, this is what he means by the notion of “in principle”), then I have difficulty distinguishing Dr. Harris from advocates of religion who might also wish to claim that religion – in principle – is in a position to determine what we should want and what we should do, and this remains so even if we never arrive at the truth of matters.

Dr. Harris argues: “My claim is that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, just as there are right and wrong answers to questions of physics.” (page 28) One might agree with such a claim, but such agreement does nothing to establish what the right and wrong answers are to either moral questions or questions of physics.

Unless one wishes to claim that there are no truths – and I am certain that Dr. Harris does not wish to make such a claim – then, yes, the universe, whatever it is, has a determinate character irrespective of whether, or not, we ever come to understand that character in any complete sense. Such a determinate character carries ramifications for both moral and physical questions. Consequently, there will be right and wrong answers concerning those sorts of questions.

However, such a concession says nothing about what the character of such right and wrong answers must be. Conceivably, neither science nor religion is capable of revealing the full nature of reality. If this were the case, then in certain ways, rightness and wrongness could give expression to something other than the sorts of understandings that science or religion -- whether considered as methodologies or interpretive systems – might be capable.

Toward the bottom of page 28 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “As we come to understand how beings can best collaborate and thrive in this world, science can help us find a path leading away from the lowest depths of misery and toward the heights of happiness, for the greatest number of people.” How should one: “come to understand how beings can best collaborate and thrive in this world” when the criteria for determining what constitutes the best forms of collaboration or what it means to “thrive in this world” are so problematic? Even if one were to settle on science as the means through which such issues should be determined, on what basis will

science seek to justify 'x' or 'y' as being the best forms of collaboration, and on what basis will science seek to justify that 'q' and 'z' give expression to what it means to "thrive in this world"?

Dr. Harris emphasizes the point that the ideas of 'thriving' and 'best forms of collaboration' must be understood in terms of 'this world'. This is the case because Dr. Harris doesn't believe that anything more than 'this world' – whatever that means – exists.

Aside from the possibility that 'this world' might include dimensions of being that are as far beyond the capacity of current science to understand as the current practice of science is beyond the capacity of a single-celled organism to grasp, one wonders what justifies Dr. Harris' emphasis concerning 'this world' when it comes to issues of establishing what the best forms of collaboration and thriving are. After all, if there is more to reality than 'this world,' then Dr. Harris is seeking solutions that address only part of the ontological situation in which human beings find themselves. Therefore, if there is more to reality than 'this world,' then Dr. Harris' way of approaching things – scientific though it might be -- will be distorted, skewed, and terribly incomplete to precisely the extent that the rest of reality – about which we are unaware -- affects the way one should go about things in this world.

Presumably, Dr. Harris might respond to the foregoing point by saying something along the lines of: 'What is your proof that there is more to reality than 'this world'? Actually, the burden of proof here is on Dr. Harris since he is the one who is making the claims about how one should proceed. Consequently, the foregoing question needs to be turned back on him – namely, what is his proof that 'this world' is all there is ... and, again, we will leave aside, for the moment, questions that might allude to the possibility that 'this world' has a complexity, richness, and depth that extends beyond the capacity of modern science to understand.

Someone might respond to the above question with something like: 'one can't prove a negative' – meaning that if there is no 'other' world beyond 'this world,' then one will not be able to prove that such a non-existing realm does not exist. However, the fact of the matter is that mathematicians go about proving such negatives quite a bit, and one wonders why science would not be capable of a similar feat.

One of the problems with trying to scientifically prove such an ontological negative, of course, is that one would have difficulty getting any methodological traction if one has no idea about what it is, exactly, that one is trying to show is not, or cannot, be the case. If, for instance, the 'world' beyond 'this world' is of a non-material and non-physical nature, then modern physical, material science will have no way of gathering data about such a world because the nature of the latter world is beyond the horizons of everything that physical, material science believes about the nature of reality. Where, and how, and with what instruments would physical, material science search for the non-physical and the non-material?

In the excerpt from page 28 of *The Moral Landscape* cited earlier, Dr. Harris claims that the issue before us is a matter of how science can "help us find a path leading away from the lowest depths of misery and toward the heights of happiness, for the greatest number of people." What justifies his contention that issues of well-being must be a matter of "the greatest number of people"?

Many people misunderstand the notion of democracy – and Dr. Harris might be one of them – when they seek to argue that democracy is simply a matter of determining whatever the majority wants and then implementing programs to serve such wants. However, unless one is capable of establishing a notion of rights that is capable of withstanding the demands, pressures, and interests of the majority, then democracy becomes a very uninteresting, and potentially oppressive, idea.

In a true democracy, if the well-being of 'the greatest number of people' is dependent on denying what has been described as the 'inalienable rights' of not only the majority of people but various minorities, as well, then one might want to re-think the way in which one's idea of well-being relates to the whole population and not just some "greatest number of people." If one is prepared to jettison the rights of a given sub-population for the sake of 'the greatest number of people,' then one likely will end up with a situation that is neither democratic nor one that is likely to be able to sustain the sort of stable conditions that might be necessary for the generation of whatever one considers well-being to be.

In addition, there is a certain ambiguity that surrounds the idea of “the greatest number.” Some might interpret this idea to mean, say, 50.00001% of a given population, but other individuals might interpret the idea of “the greatest number” to mean the largest of all of the sub-groups of a given population.

For instance, in many elections, the person who wins is not the individual who captures the vote of more than 50% of the population or even the person who captures more than 50% of the electorate. In other words, in any given election, not everyone in the population is eligible to vote (for example, because of age or other kinds of restrictions), and of those who are eligible to vote, quite frequently only a percentage of those who can vote do vote. Moreover, if there are more than two candidates, then the votes that are cast could be distributed across the candidates in a manner that provides for the possibility of an array of percentages of the total vote but all of them less than 50%.

Therefore, potentially, one is confronted with the possibility that what someone might mean by “the greatest number” is merely the largest of a number of sub-groups in such a population. Under such circumstances, as long as the sub-group that is the largest of any of the other sub-groups enjoys maximized well-being, then all is right with ‘this world’ ... or so someone might try to argue.

Even if one were to insist that “the greatest number” must consist of a group that contained more than 50% of a population – and leaving aside the issue of rights – one still encounters problems. More specifically, what is the nature of the moral calculus that one might use which requires that the well-being of such a majority is to be predicated on the suffering of others? How does one even compare the quality of suffering to the quality of well-being in a way that permits one to justifiably claim that the well-being of “the greatest number” has a value greater than the quality of the suffering among the minority?

Alternatively, is it merely a quantitative issue? If so, how does one justify the choice of quantitative measures as the basis of one’s moral calculus rather than some form of qualitative ‘metric’?

Finally, in the foregoing excerpt from *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris speaks about maximizing “happiness” rather than maximizing

well-being. Obviously, Dr. Harris presumes that the ideas of happiness and well-being are relatively interchangeable, but one might legitimately question the tenability of such a presumption.

To illustrate what I have in mind, consider the following example. Let us assume that I have a job that pays good money and that affords me the opportunity to purchase all that I need to maximize my economic, social, physical, mental, educational, interpersonal and emotional well-being. Let's also assume that although I don't mind the job, it has facets that I find to be frustrating, problematic, or worrisome in a number of ways.

As a result, my job involves a certain amount of suffering. However, since the job is the means through which I am able to obtain what is necessary for my sense of well-being, and since I am required to work at the job for 40, or more, hours a week, then, there will be at least a quarter of the week – and, probably more since it might take me time to deal with the stresses of the job in off-work hours – which is not likely to generate a great deal of happiness.

In addition, it might be that the idea of well-being is not necessarily about happiness, per se, but about being well – physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, economically, and so on. I might have moments or periods of happiness that are part of my overall condition of well-being, but most of my life might be a matter of being relatively content, healthy, and committed to the way things in my life are aligned -- despite whatever problems might exist in my life -- rather than being on a high of happiness all the time.

Is it even reasonable to suppose that one must be happy all the time in order for one's well-being to be maximized? Is it practical to expect that one should feel happy all the time as long as the rest of one's life is quite good with respect to an array of indices concerning well-being? Is life the sort of thing about which one can maintain some maximized condition of happiness, or would such a sustained condition of happiness be the sort of symptom about which a mental healthcare provider might become concerned? Don't most of us begin to wonder about people who are smiling all the time ... that, perhaps, not everything is as good as the acts of smiling attempt to suggest is the case?

Moreover, given the likelihood that different people will be happy about different things, how does one go about maximizing happiness for the largest number of people when the idea of happiness is capable of being manifested in so many different ways across a population or group? In addition, isn't it possible that what makes different people happy might be at cross-purposes with one another such that, sooner or later under such circumstances, someone's happiness is going to suffer when different modalities of seeking happiness clash with one another?

Alternatively, how does one distinguish between actual happiness and illusory happiness? Just because someone says that she or he is happy doesn't necessarily mean that such an individual is happy, and, indeed, there has been a long-standing uneasiness concerning the issue of the reliability and significance of self-reports in therapeutic literature.

All of the foregoing considerations tend to point in the direction of the following question: What does it mean to maximize well-being? Is maximization a function of some sustained, optimum state of happiness irrespective of conditions, or is the maximization of well-being a function of what is practically achievable in a given set of conditions? If maximization is a function of some sustained, optimum state of happiness, then one might wonder whether such a condition is capable of being realized, and if, on the other hand, maximization is a matter of what is practically possible in a given set of circumstances, then one might be inclined to wonder what such a notion of practical maximization might mean and in accordance with what criteria and what principles of justification.

On page 29 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: "Science simply represents our best effort to understand what is going on in the universe, and the boundary between it and the rest of rational thought cannot always be drawn." I know that Dr. Harris believes such things – one might even say that he has faith that such is the case – but where is his proof that science constitutes "our best effort to understand what is going on in the universe"?

To entertain the possibility that what Dr. Harris says in the foregoing quote might be true, one must presume that the nature of the universe is something that physical, material science is – at least in

principle -- fully capable of probing and comprehending. After all, if the nature of the universe were of such a nature that science could not fully probe and comprehend that nature, then, obviously, science – in its modern form – would not necessarily represent “our best effort to understand what is going on in the universe.”

Dr. Harris can't assume his conclusions. He must show that science constitutes our “best effort to understand what is going on in the universe,” and as long as he can't demonstrate what the nature of the universe is in any ultimate or essential sense, then what Dr. Harris claims in the foregoing quote is not necessarily tenable.

By saying the foregoing, I am not trying to say that the matter being considered is an ‘either/or’ situation such that if science is not up to the job of probing and understanding the universe, then one is left with religion, and, therefore, by default, religion must be the means through which one engages the universe or existence. The fact of the matter is that I'm not necessarily convinced that religion – and by the term “religion” I am referring to the tendency of some individuals who seem to be inclined toward trying to reduce spirituality down to a purely rationalistic, ritualistic, and institutional form of seeking answers to certain kinds of questions -- constitutes our best effort to determine what the nature of the universe is any more than science gives expression to our “best effort” in this regard. Consequently, one encounters the possibility that the methods of religion are as much behind the eight ball when it comes to understanding the full nature of the universe as science is.

Dr. Harris goes on in the foregoing quote to indicate that: “The boundary between it [science] and the rest of rational thought cannot always be drawn.” The reason for such difficulty might have more to do with the fact that Dr. Harris – as is true for all of us – can't say, exactly, what rational thought is. Indeed, what we call ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’ is often more a matter of vested interests than it is necessarily due to our possessing any objective, definitive sense of what constitutes the nature of rationality.

One should not construe any of the foregoing comments as meaning that I believe that logic or reason is, in some sense, relativistic. However, oftentimes we do have to struggle to find our way to the rational, and, more often than not, this involves clearing

away various kinds of empirical, conceptual, and/or logical problems, or it involves pointing out the difficulties with certain kinds of failed attempts at reasoning more than it involves being able to define what reason is or must be.

The process of reasoning does not always produce rational results – that is, results that are defensible and can be shown to have certain degrees of consistency, coherency, and intelligibility, while simultaneously being able to avoid various kinds of problems. We often can recognize viable ways of reasoning when we encounter them more than we are able to indicate, before the fact, what criteria such ways of reasoning must observe in order to be viable.

Reasoning and rationality are often contextual. That is, rationality often involves a process of discerning or tracing out the form of logic that is present in the structural character of an event, set of circumstances, dynamic, or the like.

All of this makes the relationship between science and rational thought somewhat problematic since the process of science tends to be permeated with what we consider to be rationality even as we are unable to determine what the nature of such rationality actually entails. ‘Consistency,’ ‘coherency,’ ‘implication,’ ‘inference,’ ‘extrapolation,’ ‘interpolation,’ ‘deduction,’ ‘induction,’ ‘abduction,’ and the rest of the lexicon of rational discourse can be very elusive and illusory terms.

What is understood from a certain perspective to constitute the ‘rational’ often proves – in the light of further experience and critical reflection -- to be rather unreliable with respect to its capacity to discern truth. Any science that is infused with such an understanding concerning the alleged nature of rationality is likely to encounter difficulties and uncertainties as a result of such a relationship.

Part of Dr. Harris’ problem in *The Moral Landscape* is that he seems to assume that he knows what the relationship is between science and the rest of the universe, and he doesn’t. None of us do ... although we all tend to have some working ideas concerning the matter.

Part of Dr. Harris’ problem in *The Moral Landscape* is that he appears to assume that he knows what the nature of rationality is, and

he doesn't. None of us do. Yet, despite this, we each can, from time to time, manage to struggle our way to instances of thinking that other people recognize as, in some way, possessing a certain degree of 'rationality'.

Part of the Dr. Harris' problem in *The Moral Landscape* is that while he believes the boundary between science and the rest of rational thought is not always well-defined, he appears to be certain that everything which goes on in science is of a rational nature. Unfortunately, the history of science tends to prove otherwise, and while it is all well and fine to say that, eventually, scientific methods will bring us back from the precipice and, in time, put us back on the road to rational recovery, one doesn't always know which of the roads before us is the road to rational salvation and which is the road to rational perdition.

Some aspects of scientific activity are rational. Some facets of scientific activity are not so rational, and it is not always easy to differentiate which is which before the fact. The same also can be said in relation to religious activity.

Chapter Twelve

At one point Dr. Harris says: “I am certainly not claiming that moral truths exist independently of the experience of conscious beings – like the Platonic Form of the Good – or that certain actions are intrinsically wrong. I am simply saying that, given that there are facts – real facts – to be known about how conscious creatures can experience the worst possible misery and the greatest possible well-being, it is objectively true to say that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, whether or not we can always answer these questions in practice.” (page 30)

For Dr. Harris, the rightness or wrongness of any given moral question is an expression of the way reality is in some objective sense ... that is, the sense in which “real facts” have descriptive sway. Consequently, from such a perspective, moral answers are not a relativistic function of the likes and dislikes of people but must be a reflection of the way the universe is both with respect to events in ‘this world’ but, as well, in relation to what constitutes those brain states that maximize well-being in an individual or group of individuals vis-à-vis such world events.

The form of Dr. Harris’ argument is as follows: (1) The world has a determinate character irrespective of whether, or not, we can grasp that character; (2) Human beings – including their brain states – have a determinate character irrespective of whether, or not, we can grasp that character; (3) The possible relationships between the determinate character of the world and the determinate character of human brain states are capable of running from maximized misery to maximized well-being, and, therefore, in principle, there are relationships between the world and brain states that constitute conditions of well-being irrespective of whether, or not, we are able to determine or understand such relationships. Since Dr. Harris believes that morality only makes sense in a context “of the experience of conscious beings,” he believes he is justified in claiming that moral truths cannot exist independently of human beings. At the same time, if the existence of moral truths is not dependent on human beings being conscious of the precise character of such truths (rather, one is somehow, at least in principle, aware of their existence), then there is a sense in which moral truths fall beyond “the experience of conscious beings.”

In other words, if moral truths do not “exist independently of the experience of conscious beings,” then what does it mean to say “there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, whether or not we can always answer these questions in practice”? If right and wrong answers to moral questions exist, but, in practice, we are not able to grasp the character of such answers, then the truth and falsity of such answers is, to an extent, independent “of the experience of conscious beings.”

Everything depends on the nature of the “real facts” concerning: events in the world, brain states, the relation between such events and brain states, as well as some sort of correct understanding concerning which of those relationships give expression to maximized conditions of well-being rather than maximized conditions of misery. Thus, everything is pretty simple and straightforward. If we know the facts and understand them, we will have the answer to all of our moral questions -- well, in principle, we will have such answers.

Of course, there is the little problem that we don’t necessarily know what the “real facts” are concerning the events of the world. We also don’t necessarily know what the “real facts” are concerning the nature of brain states. Moreover, we don’t necessarily know what the “real facts” are with respect to the relationships between the events of the world and brain states that will maximize misery or well-being.

Nonetheless, according to Dr. Harris, in principle, we know there are right and wrong answers to our moral questions. All we have to do is to discover the “real facts” of the matter.

According to Dr. Harris: “Clearly, we can make true or false claims about human (and animal) subjectivity, and we can often evaluate those claims without having access to the facts in question. This is a perfectly reasonable, scientific, and often necessary thing to do.” (page 30) Apparently, one doesn’t necessarily require access to the “real facts” after all in order to be able to make evaluations about various claims.

Presumably, part of what Dr. Harris might be trying to communicate in the foregoing quote could be an allusion to the use of various kinds techniques in reasoning to evaluate certain facets of such claims – and philosophy often concerns itself with these sorts of techniques. However, even when such techniques work in a reliable

way, they are very limited in their capacity to evaluate claims of truth and falsehood.

If truth is independent of our capacity to know and understand it – and, I concur with Dr. Harris that this is the case -- then, one might agree that: “we can make true or false claims about human (and animal) subjectivity.” The only problem is that we won’t necessarily know which of those claims are true or false ... only that, in principle, such claims either reflect, or do not reflect, the way things are.

Nonetheless, I am disinclined to agree with the rest of what Dr. Harris says in the foregoing statement. For instance, how would one go about evaluating such claims “without having access to the facts in question”? What would be the basis for justifying such an evaluation? How is a process -- in which facts are in relatively short supply -- a ‘reasonable, scientific, and necessary thing to do’? What are the conditions that establish such a process as being reasonable, scientific and necessary?

In defending his claim that “morality and values relate to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures,” (page 32) Dr. Harris argues: “I think we can know through reason alone, that consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value. What is the alternative? I invite you to think of a source of value that has nothing to do with the factual or potential experience of conscious beings.”

Irrespective of whether one can “think of a source of value that has nothing to do with the factual or potential experience of conscious beings,” ignorance and/or the limitations of imagination might not be the best grounds for trying to justify a claim that “consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value.” Furthermore, even if one were to agree with Dr. Harris that “consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value,” this concession really doesn’t get one very far if one doesn’t know what the nature of consciousness is or how or why the domain of consciousness should be valued.

Dr. Harris believes that his exercise of challenging readers to try to “think of a source of value that has nothing to do with the factual or potential experience of conscious beings” constitutes a sort of rhetorical cul-de-sac. Consequently, he proceeds to raise the question: “So how much time should we spend worrying about such a transcendental source of value?” (page 32)

While I am unable to give a precise answer to the foregoing question, I do think one might want to spend some amount of time reflecting on the possibility of a “transcendental source of value.” After all, if such a transcendental source of value were conscious then such a conscious, transcendent source of value would have something to do with Dr. Harris’s claim that “consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value”.

If a “transcendent source of value” existed, then one might have to figure out what, if anything, the “factual and potential experience of conscious beings” -- like humankind -- has to do with the factual and potential experience of such a conscious, transcendent source of value. Presumably, this would be both a reasonable and necessary thing to do, but one would need some “real facts” to get very far with this kind of issue.

Some people -- known as theologians -- have attempted to know through reason alone what the nature of such a relationship might look like. They have sought to evaluate claims concerning such a relationship “without having access to the facts in question,” and, in my opinion, I don’t believe they have done very well in that kind of enterprise... in fact, people like Dr. Harris have criticized them for doing so (and quite correctly in many, if not most, cases).

So, I’m a little confused. If theologians are at fault -- and I believe they are -- for trying to use reason alone to know and evaluate the relationship of a possible, conscious, transcendent source of value with the factual and potential experience of conscious beings like humans, and if such theologians are at fault -- and I believe they are -- for undertaking such explorations “without having access to the facts in question,” then on what basis does Dr. Harris believe that it is ‘reasonable, scientific and necessary’ to pursue similar sorts of exploration in conjunction with either the “factual and potential experience of conscious beings” and/or some possible “transcendent source of value”?

Dr. Harris states: “... my claim that consciousness is the basis of human values and morality is not an arbitrary starting point.” (page 32) This claim is not entirely accurate.

To be sure, without consciousness, one would be hard-pressed to know how to proceed with respect to questions concerning morality

and values. In other words, how could one explore, differentiate, understand, evaluate, or act in relation to experience without the presence of consciousness?

Nevertheless, until Dr. Harris can demonstrate factually that “the basis of human values and morality” is nothing more than human consciousness, then his starting point is an arbitrary one. Moreover, as long as Dr. Harris summarily rejects the possibility – or doesn’t wish to spend any time worrying about such ideas -- that a “transcendent source of value’ could be conscious and, therefore, might have something to do with values and morality -- and as long as Dr. Harris does so without necessarily having access to the “real facts” of the matter and does so based on nothing more than ignorance and a impoverished imagination with respect to how things might be different than he (or his readers) can conceive -- then his starting point is an arbitrary one.

Furthermore, while one might agree that consciousness plays an important, if not central role, in matters of morality and values, one also needs to determine whether, or not, there are other vector forces that affect morality and values beyond the domain of consciousness. Being aware of something is not necessarily the same thing as being aware why something is right or wrong. Consequently, one must explore the factors that might render something right or wrong independently of our awareness of such things ... factors that might have more to do with the “right facts” for why something is right or wrong than consciousness does.

In other words, while consciousness might be what is called a ‘necessary condition,’ it is not necessarily a ‘sufficient condition’. If so, then there might be other factors that are more fundamental – or equally fundamental – with respect to the shaping of a condition of well-being than consciousness, by itself, is.

For instance, if economic stability is a component of well-being, then even when one is asleep and unaware of one’s economic condition, something beside consciousness can be shown to be a factor that serves as a basis of well-being. Moreover, if a person wished to argue that we, in some way, were aware of such a condition while asleep, nonetheless, it is not consciousness, per se, that is the cause of such economic well-being ... although having awareness of one’s

economic condition might be a more maximized form of well-being than merely being in such an economic condition without such an awareness.

According to Dr. Harris: "... the concept of well-being captures all that we can intelligibly value. And, 'morality' – whatever people's associations with this term happen to be – really relates to the intentions and behaviors that affect the well-being of conscious creatures. (pages 32-33) Let's reflect on this perspective for a moment or two.

If one values the truth, but the truth is inimical to one's sense of well-being, is it necessarily the case that well-being is "all that we can intelligibly value"? Of course, someone might wish to argue that truth will always enhance one's sense of well-being, but one would need to see the evidence which demonstrates that such an argument is both empirically and rationally viable.

What is the relationship between truth and well-being? The fact of the matter is, we don't know, and one might add that this is what books like *The Moral Landscape* are trying to figure out.

Let's assume – with Dr. Harris – that 'this world' (in some material and/or physical sense) is all there is. Let's further assume that if I seek the truth about some matter, then I will be executed or imprisoned. Finally, let's assume that by seeking the truth, I will not necessarily be helping anyone to have an enhanced condition of well-being – that is, I am not necessarily seeking the truth as a means of sacrificing myself for the well-being of others or even for the enhancement of my own well-being.

Under such circumstances, truth seeking doesn't seem to have much to do with well-being given that not only (1) does one not necessarily know what the truth of a matter is or what ramifications that truth might have for my well-being or the well-being of others, but (2) the very search for truth is not conducive to my well-being. Nonetheless, valuing truth-seeking more than well-being might make perfect sense because I might be committed to establishing the nature of truth even if I discover that the truth is inimical to my well-being or the well-being of others and even if I find that just the search for such truth is inimical to my well-being.

Someone might wish to argue that valuing truth more than well-being would not be a rational thing to do. This sort of a criticism is working on the assumption that only the search for enhanced well-being is rational in nature. Nonetheless, this approach is in need of an account concerning what the criteria of rationality are and why one is required to accept and apply such criteria when evaluating life.

Presumably, seeking the truth would play an important role in working toward understanding the nature of well-being. So, such an individual would have difficulty claiming that seeking the truth is irrational when it comes to issues of well-being and, yet, simultaneously claiming that seeking the truth in its own right is somehow irrational.

Moreover, seeking the truth also could play an important role in working toward understanding why such a search might be more important than considerations of well-being. This is especially so when one is uncertain where such a search will take one ... as is the case with human beings.

Until one knows the truth of things, one is not in a position to move forward with any degree of confidence. Consequently, irrespective of whether, or not, seeking the truth will, in any given set of circumstances, enhance one's well-being, truth-seeking has a value beyond, and independent of, the idea of well-being.

Of course, the foregoing example has been structured in a contrived way in order to force the sort of conclusion I wanted. However, contrived or not, the example points to the possibility that it might be entirely reasonable to value truth more than well-being.

One could argue, I suppose, that in searching for the truth I have maximized my condition of well-being right up to the point I died. Arguing in this manner seems as contrived as my previous example since it is structured in such a way that no matter what we do, the intention is always assumed to be something that has the aim of enhancing one's well-being ... and, under such circumstances, truth-seeking would, by definition, just be part of the recipe for well-being.

Nonetheless, searching for the truth is not necessarily some sort of means to a condition of well-being, nor is such a search, in and of itself, necessarily a condition of well-being since one's search might be

misguided in some sense. The life of Socrates (and one could add many other exemplars) might be a good example to consider here since he was someone who believed that just the process of seeking truth was more important than the opportunity to stay alive by being willing to submit to the wishes of the powers that be in Athens and, thereby, curtail his truth-seeking activities.

Someone who says – as Socrates is reported to have done – that: ‘The unexamined life is not worth living’ is not a person who is necessarily concerned about well-being. There are no guarantees – and Socrates came to understand this as well as anyone -- with respect to where such a process of examination will take one, and there are not necessarily any expectations concerning what outcomes will ensue from this sort of undertaking.

Socrates is like George Mallory, the mountaineer, for whom the reason for exploring life or climbing Mt. Everest was: “Because it’s there.” Moreover, to borrow from the Andy Dufresne character in the movie, ‘The Shawshank Redemption’: ‘one gets busy living, or one gets busy dying’ ... but neither the living nor the dying that is being alluded to in the line from the movie is necessarily about seeking well-being.

Is truth-seeking a part of what it means to have well-being, or is it possible to have well-being apart from truth-seeking? Alternatively, is truth-seeking a necessary precursor to the issue of well-being – namely, until one knows the truth of a matter, then one is not in any position to proceed with discussions about the nature of well-being?

Can one – in contrast to what Dr. Harris claims (and quoted earlier) -- value things that are not part of what constitutes well-being? The idea of searching for the truth might be one candidate that serves as a counter-example to Dr. Harris’ claims in this respect. Are there other such possibilities?

For example, what about the issue of freedom? How one exercises freedom might have a considerable impact on one’s condition of well-being, and, yet, when push comes to shove, one might value freedom above any condition of well-being.

When one values freedom above well-being, one does so not necessarily because such a struggle will end in a condition for oneself and/or others that constitutes a higher level of well-being. One might

have no idea where such a struggle will go, but win or lose struggling for freedom becomes an end in itself and not just a means to some sort of end involving well-being. As such, freedom would constitute a principle that might have value in its own right quite aside from issues of well-being.

Love is another dimension of life that is not necessarily pursued because it gives expression to well-being or because it will lead to a condition of well-being ... although one might hope that it does so. Nevertheless, the search for love and the dilemmas of love have been with human beings for thousands of years, and, oftentimes the accounts seem to encompass a lot of possibilities quite apart from the issue of well-being.

Like the search for truth and the heights of Mt. Everest, love is a challenge that, even under the best of conditions, often sweeps across our lives like a tsunami. One might not win at love, and, even if one wins, the condition is not likely to be devoid of struggles, difficulties, turmoil, or danger ... although some would say that these sorts of risks are all part of the allure of going on such a life-long 'safari.'

For the sake of love, people often are willing to undermine whatever their condition of well-being might be. For many, love is, as Leonard Cohen writes, a "broken Hallelujah" and "not a victory march," and, yet, all human beings seek it out even as they have read about, heard, seen, or experienced its will-o'-the-wisp nature.

Love is not necessarily a matter of seeking out, or being in a condition of, well-being ... although there might be those who have brought into a certain kind of mythology concerning the nature of love and, as a result, do equate love with a condition of well-being. Love is its own phenomenon, and it is sought and lived for its own sake and not necessarily due to some expectation or hope that love constitutes something like a pot of gold that lies waiting at the end of the rainbow which marks the end of the storm that precedes the discovery of love ... for love, itself, might be a life-long storm which has no rainbows and no pot of gold.

Creativity is another facet of life that need not have any relationship with well-being. Indeed, the creative impulse might be so insistent in seeking to become manifest in the life of an individual that everything else seems unimportant ... including well-being.

Some people live to create no matter what the costs might be and no matter what one might have to suffer and endure in the process. Is such a condition pathological?

Like those who are, or have been, in love, people who are immersed in the process of trying to surf the ocean of creativity would not exchange their condition with anyone ... despite its problems, frustrations, pains, sacrifices, and uncertainties. People who view the phenomenology of creativity from the outside might consider such a condition to be pathological, but it also is possible to argue that people whose lives are devoid of creativity might be the ones who actually are suffering from some sort of pathology.

What about the issue of justice? Is justice necessarily about, or a function of, well-being?

There is a double problem in the foregoing question. If one doesn't know what justice is and one doesn't know what well-being is – which is the condition of most of us -- then it becomes rather difficult to determine whether, or not, justice is a function of well-being or a means for realizing well-being or an intrinsic component of well-being.

Despite the foregoing problems, it might be worthwhile to ask a few questions. For example, could a person be said to be in a condition of well-being without justice – however this term might be construed – being a part of everyone's life? Or, stated in an alternative fashion, as long as there is injustice in the world, could there be such a thing as well-being for anyone?

If one's condition of well-being is predicated on injustice being done to others, then how would one justify referring to such a condition as giving expression to well-being? On the other hand, if everyone in the world is treated justly, does this automatically mean that everyone will be in a condition of well-being?

If the answer to the latter question is “no,” then justice might be a necessary condition for, or dimension of, the notion of well-being, but it is not a sufficient condition or dimension of well-being. If justice is a necessary but not sufficient condition, then the existence of justice in the world will not fully resolve the issue of well-being.

However, quite apart from whatever the answers to the foregoing questions might be, it still could be possible for someone to undertake

an exploration into the uncharted land of justice and, in the process, be willing to sacrifice his or her own well-being and, perhaps as well, what others consider to be their well-being for the sake of such a search. Under these circumstances, the idea of justice becomes -- in the short run, and possibly in the long run, as well -- an activity that might be unrelated to actual conditions of well-being.

The seeking of truth, love, freedom, creativity, and justice can be considered quite independently of the issue of well-being. Consequently, contrary to the earlier claim of Dr. Harris, each of those journeys might have value in their own right without necessarily advancing anyone's condition of well-being -- whether currently or prospectively.

At the same time, it does not seem unreasonable to say that truth, love, freedom, creativity, and justice might all constitute important elements in the structural character of well-being. In fact, it is possible that merely the process of searching for the principles that govern such phenomena might have relevance to establishing a condition of well-being quite apart from whether, or not, one is ever successful in discovering the nature of any of the aforementioned principles.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, the internal structure of well-being might be very complex -- both with respect to the nature of the events of the world, as well as in conjunction with brain states concerning those events. Well-being might give expression not just to the realities of truth, freedom, love, justice, and creativity -- whatever these may be -- but, as well, well-being might involve being able to search for such principles ... or, perhaps, searching for such principles might be a precursor for the possibility of well-being.

One might find the searching process enjoyable, pleasurable, or rewarding in some ways. However, the presence of these sorts of qualities or properties does not necessarily mean that the process of searching constitutes a condition of well-being since there are many things that are enjoyable, pleasurable, or rewarding that are not necessarily conducive to well-being.

If the search for truth, freedom, love, creativity, and/or justice is inimical to either establishing a condition of well-being or maximizing well-being, then would it necessarily be wrong to engage in such a process of searching even though the establishing or maximizing of

well-being might suffer in the process? And, if it were not necessarily wrong to pursue truth seeking and freedom in such an unconditional manner, then can one really maintain – as Dr. Harris wishes to – that: “the concept of well-being captures all that we can intelligibly value”?

Dr. Harris believes that – in principle -- such questions have determinate answers even if we do not, and might never, have access to such answers. The problem is, what does one do in the meantime when one is – or we are – uncertain about what the correct nature of the answers are to the questions that are being asked?

If the search for: truth, freedom, love, creativity, and justice are part of what one means by the idea of well-being, how does one balance things? In other words, how does one prevent such searches – which can have value in their own right – from undermining the condition of well-being given that, under various circumstances, such searches might become antithetical to either establishing or maintaining well-being?

More importantly, it is far from clear to me how Dr. Harris proposes to go about determining what the “real facts” of any of the foregoing principles (e.g., truth seeking, love, freedom, justice and creativity) are with respect to either the ‘events’ of the world, or one’s brain states, or the relation between the two. It is one thing to propose a research project, and it is quite another to realize such a project and bring it to fruition in a way that commands the attention, if not agreement, of people from a wide range of perspectives.

On page 33 of *The Moral Landscape* Dr. Harris introduces an argument in which he maintains that even “religious people are as eager to find happiness and to avoid misery as anyone else.” After noting that some religious people claim that following the religious law is important “for its own sake” and not, necessarily, for the sake of any possible rewards or punishments that might arise in conjunction with the observance or lack of observance concerning such laws, Dr. Harris poses a question: What if there were a more powerful God than the One Who one believed one was serving or worshipping Who would punish anyone who obeyed the former Deity for nothing more than the sake of serving or worshipping that Deity ... “Would it make sense to follow” that Deity’s law “for its own sake?”

Dr. Harris seems to assume that the foregoing question is rather rhetorical in nature since he proceeds to conclude that even religious people are motivated by considerations of happiness and misery. Moreover, he seems to assume that happiness and misery are the primary indices for what constitutes well-being or a lack thereof.

Without wishing to become involved in any sort of theological debate, the fact of the matter is that Dr. Harris's way raising the question he asks and, then, answers, is an exercise in framing a discussion. He is encouraging the reader to go along with the idea that spiritual belief is only about rewards and punishment as well as being a matter of going along with whatever deity turns out to be more powerful and, as a result, the one who is capable of doling out the rewards and punishments.

Ironically, the situation of doing things for their own sake versus doing things out of a concern about reward and punishment is capable of being turned back on Dr. Harris' position. In fact, one can raise the question that he raises in conjunction with his own perspective in relation to such matters.

More specifically, I believe that Dr. Harris would consider himself to be someone who does things for the sake of whatever the truth is (or whatever he considers the truth to be) in a given set of circumstances. He has heard stories from religious people about some greater God than 'truth' who will punish people who do things for their own sake, and, yet, such stories haven't deterred him from continuing to pursue matters in the way that he deems to be appropriate – that is, for their own sake.

Consequently, why should Dr. Harris assume that all religious people are motivated only by considerations of reward and punishment? Isn't it possible that there could be individuals who are spiritually or religiously inclined whose orientation is not a function of reward and punishment – that they would be prepared to do things for their own sake even if the ramifications for doing so involved misery, suffering and difficulty?

There is a story that has circulated among Sufi mystics for more than a thousand years that might be apropos to the current discussion. The story goes as follows.

The spirits were with God prior to Creation and loving their relationship with Divinity. Then, God created the world, and 9/10^{ths} of the people abandoned God for the sake of the world. Then, God created heaven, and 9/10^{ths} of the people who had been remaining with God abandoned God for the sake of heaven. Then, God brought misery into the lives of those who still remained devoted to God, and 9/10^{ths} of those who had been remaining with God left God because of such misery. Then, God threatened those who still were devoted to Divinity with such dire misery as had never been witnessed before, and the answer they gave was: 'As long as it is comes from You, O God'.

The relevant point here is not about whether, or not, God exists or, whether, or not, the foregoing story describes actual events. The point is that the story gives expression to a perspective in which the motivation for doing things is not about rewards and punishments, heaven and hell, nor well-being and misery. Just as importantly, the foregoing story gives expression to a point of view that, to a degree, Dr. Harris should recognize as having a certain amount of resonance with his way of going about things since he believes in the importance of proceeding as he does despite the existence of threats of misery and unhappiness that might be in store for those who do things they believe in for their own sake.

There is one difference between the Sufi story and Dr. Harris' position. Dr. Harris doesn't believe there is any truth to the talk about Divine sanctions, and, therefore, his decision to pursue certain things – say, truth – for their own sake does not seem to entail any sort of risk, whereas, the people who recite the aforementioned Sufi story do believe in the possibility of misery, suffering, and difficulty if they persist in pursuing Divinity for the sake of that pursuit, but it doesn't matter to them.

Again, the issue here is not about whether, or not, Dr. Harris' beliefs are correct. Moreover, the issue in the foregoing is not about whether, or not, God exists.

Although I am sure there are many religious people who do believe as Dr. Harris has described the situation in the foregoing part of his book, nonetheless, what Dr. Harris has to say about the motivations of people who are religiously or spiritually inclined is not necessarily correct. In other words, not every religious individual does

things out of a perspective in which misery and happiness is the primary consideration that motivates her or him to do whatever such individuals might do in any given situation.

In fact, the above notion of doing things for the sake of one's love for Divinity is a common theme among mystics from across a wide array of spiritual traditions. Furthermore, it doesn't matter whether such individuals are right or wrong about their beliefs in this regard since doing things for the sake of such love is at the heart of all that they do ... quite independently of whether there is any element of felt well-being in such a pursuit and quite independently of whether anyone else will benefit from such a commitment.

Toward the bottom of page 33 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: "I think there is little doubt that most of what matters to the average person – like fairness, justice, compassion – will be integral to our creating a thriving global civilization and, therefore, to the greater well-being of humanity." Whether or not what Dr. Harris claims matters to the average person – namely, fairness, justice and compassion – is what actually matters to such a statistical individual is an empirical issue, and I am not aware of any data that proves (and surveys do not necessarily prove anything since there might be a gap between what people say and what they actually do) that what matters to the average person are issues such as fairness, justice, and compassion. In fact, there is much evidence from day-to-day life that might be cited to prove otherwise.

Alternatively, one might state the issue slightly differently. While many of us might be concerned about fairness, justice, and compassion, the way in which we often tend to be interested in such things is a matter of feeling that we should be treated fairly, justly, and compassionately and not necessarily that we owe a duty of care to others to treat them fairly, justly, and compassionately or that we should understand how such principles are reciprocal in nature and, therefore, simultaneously point in a multiplicity of directions involving other people and not just oneself.

What matters to the mythical "average" person is often a matter of whether or not s/he has money to pay the rent/mortgage and money to pay for the other things they need or want in life. If what one has to do in order to obtain such money should involve treating other people

unfairly, unjustly, or without compassion, then, this is unfortunate, but what can one do?

Many individuals – if they are asked to sacrifice or suffer or encounter difficulties for other individuals so that the latter might enjoy some semblance of fairness, justice, or compassion – do not seem to have much interest in matters such as fairness, justice, or compassion. We might all have our exceptional moments. However, by and large, for many of us, what matters to us is not a function of fairness, justice, or compassion unless we are on the receiving end of such activity.

Consequently, I am a little uncertain how -- as Dr. Harris is claiming: “most of what matters to the average person” will “be integral to our creating a thriving global civilization and, therefore, to the greater well-being of humanity.” In fact, one could argue that Dr. Harris spent a great deal of time in his book, *The End of Faith*, as well as in various parts of *The Moral Landscape*, trying to indicate that the “average” religious person is really not all that interested in matters of fairness, justice, or compassion, and, since, people who have an inclination toward some sort of religious perspective constitute a considerable portion of the world’s population, I’m not exactly sure how Dr. Harris comes to the conclusions he does concerning the nature of what supposedly matters to the “average” person.

According to Dr. Harris: “The concept of ‘well-being,’ like the concept of ‘health’ is truly open for revision and discovery. Just how fulfilled is it possible for us to be personally and collectively? What are the conditions – ranging from changes in the genome to changes in economic systems – that will produce such happiness? We simply do not know.” (page 34)

The reason that “we simply don’t know” the answer to the foregoing questions being asked by Dr. Harris is not necessarily because the concept of well-being is open but because currently we are just too ignorant with respect to the issue of truth in relation to the nature of being human to understand what well-being actually means in a human context. Is well-being a function of changes in the genome or changes in economic system, or is well-being a function of something else that has nothing to do with changes in our genomes and economic systems?

This is not an open-ended question. It is an unanswered question.

We are not free to respond to the question in whatever way we please. Instead, we are constrained by the truth of things concerning human nature and human potential.

A little further down on page 34 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: “It is, perhaps, worth remembering that there are trained ‘scientists’ who are Biblical Creationists, and their ‘scientific’ thinking is purposed toward interpreting the data of science to fit the Book of Genesis. Such people claim to be doing ‘science,’ of course, but real scientists are free, and indeed obligated to point out that they are misusing the term.”

To a certain extent, I agree with Dr. Harris that: “real scientists are free.” But, from what are they free or in what way are they free?

They are not free from the truth, and, indeed, the whole point of science is to try to discover as much as possible about the nature of the universe and how it appears to operate in different contexts so that our understanding of the universe will reflect such natural principles. No, what scientists should be free from are various presuppositions about the world, as well as various biases and prejudices that have the capacity to distort, undermine and corrupt the process of conducting scientific exploration in as objective a manner as is possible.

Therefore, I do agree with Dr. Harris that one should never try to get the methodology of science to serve the interests of any interpretation of empirical data, whether such interests have to do with certain kinds of interpretations of the Book of Genesis or such interests are a function of certain kinds of scientific interpretations of empirical data. In my opinion, however (and I have written about this elsewhere – e.g., *Evolution and the Origin of Life*), scientists who claim science has proven that the origins of life on Earth are due to entirely natural, random processes are every bit as guilty of misusing the term of “science” as are those scientists who claim that science has proven the Book of Genesis’ account of such origins.

Modern evolutionary science contains absolutely no plausible explanation for how functional systems of DNA/RNA originally came into existence, nor do such accounts possess any sort of plausible explanations for how molecules such as DNA and RNA (or their

component molecules such as nucleic acids and ribose sugars) came to be originally synthesized in the pre-biotic world – that is, prior to the existence of biological systems and during the time when inorganic and organic chemical systems are alleged to have made the transition to the first primitive life forms. Similarly, there are no plausible explanations in modern evolutionary theory for how lipids were synthesized under pre-biotic conditions, or how energy-producing gradients of phosphorylation were established under pre-biotic conditions in a way that could be coupled with processes involving the synthesis of such things as DNA, RNA, proteins, and lipids.

In addition, the proteinoids (these are inorganically generated polymers of amino acids that have been produced in the laboratories of such scientists as Sidney Fox) are a long way from the sort of functional proteins that are observed in actual biological cells. In fact, to my knowledge, I know of no scientific experiment or series of experiments that has shown how one could produce systems of proteins via the proteinoid route that were capable of replicating themselves and, as well, carrying out any sort of complex set of specialized functions as is the case with cellular proteins.

One might also point out that the tri-laminate structure of cellular membranes is far more complex than some evolutionary scientists might try to induce one to believe is the case. Biological membranes do not spontaneously come together in the manner in which micelles aggregate into bi-layered structures in certain liquid environments, and modern evolutionary theory has no plausible explanation for how one would go from such simple, spontaneously formed bi-layered pre-biotic structures to the complex tri-laminate character of biological membranes in a working cell ... even the simplest of cells.

Furthermore, although there have been laboratory demonstrations that show how it is possible to create microspheres out of a certain concentration of proteinoids when the latter are placed within an appropriate liquid solution such that the microspheres that arise out of this sort of concentrated solution exhibit many properties that are characteristic of living cells (e.g., osmotic shrinking and swelling, division into daughter microspheres, an outer wall, an internal dynamic of streaming substances), these microspheres exhibit none of the complexity of actual biological cells. This is especially true

with respect to the way in which DNA/RNA retains information that is involved in feedback systems supported by internally created sources of energy involving a collection of specialized molecules (e.g., proteins, lipids, carbohydrates. etc) capable of maintaining the integrity of the cell and enabling the cell to engage in complex transactions with the environment across a membrane structure that is governed by active transport systems and not just passive systems that are operate in accordance with the considerable limitations of osmotic pressure.

I have only summarized a limited portion of the data in the foregoing few paragraphs that could be brought to bear on the substantial problems that are characteristic of all modern evolutionary attempts to explain the origins of life on Earth. Currently, there is nothing that has been produced by modern science that gives even the faintest hope that any of the foregoing problems can be resolved in a plausible, reliable, fully demonstrable manner ... although, who knows, some enterprising scientist or group of scientists might bring forth evidence indicating otherwise.

In any event, if it is scientifically illegitimate for so-called Creationist scientists to interpret the empirical data to fit in with their preconceived ideas about the nature of the universe, then it is equally scientifically illegitimate for so-called evolutionary scientists to interpret the empirical data to fit in with their preconceived ideas about the nature of the universe. In both cases, the idea of science-as-methodology is being misused.

Moreover, evolution is not the best scientific theory available to interpret the empirical data concerning the origins of life, because there is no evolutionary theory concerning the origins of life on Earth that gives expression to a scientific explanation that permits one to make the transition from pre-biotic conditions to biological realities in any sort of reasonable, reliable, and plausible manner. Evolutionary theories concerning the origins of life on Earth are nothing more than a system of assumptions dressed up in unverified -- and possibly unverifiable -- interpretations of available data.

The origin of life on Earth is as much as mystery to scientists as it is to religious people. Science-as-methodology has little to say about either Creationist theories concerning the origins of life on Earth or evolutionary theories concerning the origin of life on Earth ... except

that neither side of this rancorous discussion understands how life came to be.

In fact, there is a real sense in which one cannot speak of evolutionary theories concerning the origin of life on Earth, because, strictly speaking, evolution (at least in the Darwinian or neo-Darwinian sense of the term) is only about the formation of species due to natural selection within an existing population of biological systems. Therefore, if there were no biological systems in existence in the pre-biotic world, then there were no populations of such systems in the pre-biotic world on which natural selection might operate, and, as a result, there could not be any form of evolution that is occurring.

Of course, the idea of evolution has been broadened to refer to any set of natural processes that might generate structures with differential capabilities for continuing on within a given set of conditions. The structures possessing characteristics that are compatible with such a set of conditions are more likely to survive than are those structures that possess characteristics that are not as compatible with such a set of conditions, and such a set of characteristics are said to be what natural selection (i.e., the way things are at a given time and in a particular environment) operates upon.

However, the idea that there is a naturally occurring path that can be shaped by only random or chance events, together with the forces of natural selection, such that a process of evolution will take us from a pre-biotic set of conditions in which there are no self-replicating primitive cells to a biological set of conditions in which there are self-replicating primitive cells is not so much a theory as it is a hypothesis in need of demonstration. To date, there is nothing remotely resembling a proof concerning the likelihood that such a hypothesis is true.

One should not suppose that implicit in any of the foregoing is some sort of Intelligent Design argument that is intended to become the default position as soon as one acknowledges – as the evidence demands that one must – that, currently, there is no tenable, reliable, demonstrable scientific account of an evolutionary process that takes one from pre-biotic systems to biological systems. I am content with treating the origins of life as a mystery – both scientifically and

religiously – since this is what the available evidence tells us is our current epistemological situation.

On page 36 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris claims: “Despite 150 years of working at it, we still can’t convince a majority of Americans that evolution is a fact.” In what sense is evolution a fact?

If by ‘evolution’ one is referring to something like population genetics in which the gene pool for a given population contains degrees of freedom that can be expressed under the right set of environmental conditions and forms of genetic recombination and that, as a result, over time such degrees of freedom and potential for genetic recombination can push the set of manifested and non-manifested properties of a population in one direction or another, then, yes, such evolution is a fact. If by ‘evolution’ one means that one possesses an understanding that can explain, in detail, how such things as consciousness, intelligence, creativity, talent, reason, and language arose, then, no, evolution is not a fact, and there is very little, if any, evidence currently available to us that is able to prove otherwise ... although people might wish to subject such data to various kinds of extrapolative or interpolative manipulations to suggest that we understand more than we actually do.

Chapter Thirteen

According to Dr. Harris: “It would be impossible to prove that our definition of science is correct, because our standards of proof will be built into any proof we would offer.” (page 37) The foregoing is problematic in a number of ways.

While one might be prepared to acknowledge that: “because our standards of proof will be built into any proof we would offer,” and, therefore, to an extent, science has boundaries or limitations that are a reflection of such standards, nevertheless, by admitting the existence of these sorts of limitations, one is in a position to begin to pose questions concerning those limitations and the manner in which they might affect – and, perhaps, distort, if not undermine – how scientists go about trying to understand the full nature of reality. For example, if science is about the exploration of physical and material systems – and, therefore, some of the limitations of science are set by such an approach to exploration -- then at least one can raise the following questions: What if there are dimensions of reality that are not an expression of physical or material principles? What if physical/material phenomena are, themselves, a function of non-material and non-physical processes?

Scientists, of course, might claim that such questions are nonsensical or are irrelevant to the activities of science. Scientists might also claim that such questions are not subject to any sort of scientific proof.

To be sure, from the perspective of science, such questions are nonsensical, irrelevant, and incapable of satisfying the standards of scientific proof. On the other hand, the claims of scientists in this regard also are little more than tautological musings in which what science acknowledges as real is an expression of its own internal rules of operation.

The foregoing is an example of how the standards of proof that are built into science might render it incapable of seeing beyond the horizons set by such standards. This also could be an example of why one should not necessarily consider science to be the only point of view that ought to be considered when trying to figure out what might constitute the best ways of trying to understand different facets of reality.

We can define science in any way we like. And, while the “standards of proof” such a form of science uses might “be built into any proof” that is utilized by scientists operating out of such a perspective, there is more to intellectual activity than science.

Indeed, any form of science is subject to the extra-scientific probing of rational criticisms concerning the legitimacy of such a form of activity. Presumably, based on what I have read in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris would agree with such a perspective.

Scientific logic might give expression to its own unique set of properties. However, logic is not, thereby, immune to various, logical considerations seeking to point out problems, limitations, or lacunae that might be inherent in such logic even as those criticisms arise from beyond the horizons of scientific activity.

Science does not occur in isolation. It occurs in the context of people, most of who are not scientists. Therefore, there are pertinent questions that can be raised about what rights, if any, science has to affect the lives of those people who, to a degree, live beyond the horizons of scientific interests, priorities, activities, and logic.

One can concede the value and importance of scientific understandings concerning issues such as quantum mechanics, special and general relativity, astrophysics, and molecular biology. One also can concede the fact that science tends to produce better ‘facts’ about this sort of subject matter than other forms of intellectual activity seem to be able to accomplish. However, none of these kinds of concessions requires one to concede that scientific ways of going about generating or acquiring such facts must assume priority in all matters – especially with respect to issues that fall beyond the purview of science.

Even if one could come up with some sort of a science-based form of morality, one could still question the standards and modes of proof utilized in such a form of morality and ask: Isn’t it possible that these sorts of standards and modes of proof are inadequate to the task of discovering the full nature of reality? After all, if Dr. Harris is correct that the “standards of proof will be built into any proof” which are offered with respect to the pursuit of science, then one must always be concerned about the possible blind spots that might be present in such

a pursuit ... blind spots that some scientists might be unwilling to acknowledge or concede.

Dr. Harris goes on to argue: "What evidence could prove that we should value evidence? What logic could demonstrate the importance of logic?" (page 37) The foregoing questions are asked in a rhetorical manner ... as if their answers were obvious and unavoidable.

If someone wishes to get from point A to point B but is given incorrect information and, consequently, ends up at some distance from one's desired destination, then this sort of experience tends to prove that we should only value evidence of a certain kind - namely, reliable evidence. To an important degree, one distinguishes 'good' evidence from 'bad' evidence as a function of the way experience provides feedback to substantiate some forms of evidence while disconfirming other kinds of evidence. In other words, life experience - - which encompasses a multiplicity of forms of evidence - tends to prove that evidence has value.

The idea of having value, of course, is not necessarily the same thing as being true. For instance, one could be in possession of a certain set of evidential data that might be able to assist one to continue exploring the nature of truth by giving rise to various kinds of questions (e.g., concerning problems that such a data set could not adequately answer) that, eventually, led to the formation of a better set of evidential data concerning whatever issue is under consideration.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Dr. Harris, I believe that it is possible to provide intelligible, meaningful responses to the question: "What evidence could prove that we should value evidence." In fact, I believe it is possible to offer an array of evidential packages that might not only prove the value of evidence but, as well, demonstrate the differential values among an array of such evidential packages.

What has been said above also applies to Dr. Harris' question: "What logic could demonstrate the importance of logic?" Being able to discern the error in a particular mode of thinking, reasoning, or logical analysis is an undertaking that gives expression to a form of logic that "demonstrates the importance of logic."

The capacity to recognize that something is a perceptual illusion is a form of logical reasoning that demonstrates the importance of logic. If it were not for the existence of such logic, one would be trapped forever in the 'reality' to which a given form of illusion gives expression.

A more important question to ask with respect to the issue of logic, however, might be: What form of logic could demonstrate the limitations of logic? Such a question has a certain resonance with a Gödel-like exploration into the nature of logic and whether any system of logic can be shown to be complete.

Reason and logic operate in accordance with whatever the nature of reason and logic are. We often can recognize when reason and logic are present in some given instance, but we cannot say what makes such reason and logic possible.

Being unable to say what the source of logic and reason are or what makes them possible, there is a certain element of uncertainty inherent in our use of logic and reason. We employ logic and reason, but we don't know necessarily what the limits of logic and reason might be or whether any given issue is capable of being fully and adequately understood through the use of reason and logic alone.

Science-as-methodology indicates that reason and logic are not sufficient by themselves to understand the nature of reality. Empirical data or experience is also needed.

Indeed, the distinction between, on the one hand, reason/logic and, on the other hand, empirical experience goes to the heart of the beginning of the rise of modern science. If one is open to empirical data, then the nature of experience can induce one to reformulate one's way of reasoning about a given issue by pointing out problems with one's current mode of logic or reasoning.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence on its own is insufficient to arrive at the truth of a matter. One must subject such evidence to the rigors of reasoning and logic in order to try to struggle toward an understanding of the evidence that might, to a degree, encompass and reflect the collective experiences of a variety of individuals.

The dynamic between experience and reason/logic is quite powerful and heuristically valuable. The process of science has demonstrated this again and again.

Such a dynamic, however, cannot answer the question of: What are the limits of science? The best that science might be able to do in this respect is to show that there might be certain kinds of problems and questions that cannot be adequately addressed by science because such matters fall outside the way in which science generally operates.

Consequently, one might be able to answer Dr. Harris' question of: "What logic could demonstrate the importance of logic?" but one might not be able to answer the question of: what logic demonstrates the limitations of logic – if by the idea of "logic" one is referring to some form of rational process that should not only be able to recognize its own limitations but would be able to chart those limitations in some precise manner, as well. In other words, if there is some form of intelligence or understanding that is transcendent to reason, reason might be unable or unwilling to acknowledge that such is the case.

We engage the world and understand that world through the filters of the 'logical' processes to which that understanding gives expression. Such 'logical' processes are not always rational – that is, they are not always capable of demonstrating themselves to be consistent, coherent, or tenable in the face of challenges to the manner through which one understands experience. Nonetheless, such 'logical' processes often do have a structural order to them or a way of ordering and arranging one's understanding of the world.

Dr. Harris often claims – usually indirectly – that his way of parsing experience is rational. This is not always so, and one of the purposes of writing a critique of *The Moral Landscape* is to point out, in a variety of ways, how and why this is so.

He does have a way of ordering his experience, and this process of ordering gives expression to the logical structure of his manner of doing and understanding things. However, this logic often is incapable of withstanding rational scrutiny and, therefore, tends to break down under careful examination and in the process tends to prove itself to be something other than completely rational.

Chapter Fourteen

On page 38 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris argues: “The person who insists that he is committed to treating children with kindness for reasons that have nothing to do with anyone’s well-being, is ... not making sense.” While treating children with kindness for purposes of enhancing the well-being of the child and/or for purposes for enhancing the well-being of the one performing the acts of kindness toward the child, and/or a combination of the two does constitute one set of possibilities, this is not the only set of possibilities that -- in contrast to what Dr. Harris claims -- make sense.

Before getting to the main issue, one might ask the question: What does Dr. Harris mean by the idea of kindness? What are the criteria of kindness?

If one interacts with a child on the premise that: ‘if one spares the rod, one spoils the child,’ would this necessarily constitute a commitment to kindness? Alternatively, if one were to operate out of an orientation in which one sought to indulge a child as often as possible, would this necessarily constitute a commitment to kindness.? Or, considered from, yet, another perspective, if one treated a child in a certain way in order to induce the child to do what one wanted, is this necessarily an act of kindness?

If being kind to another human being – whether a child, teenager, or an adult – involves a struggle, how does one calculate the degree of well-being that is present ... especially, if one’s efforts in this regard are less than perfect? If our intentions go astray, is it enough to have ‘good’ intentions with respect to enhancing the well-being of another human being through kindness? What happens if one’s intentions are misinterpreted and, as a result, what one supposes to be an act of kindness is understood to be something else, and, as a result, well-being is not enhanced?

What are the parameters of kindness, and what are they based on? What justifies calling a given act an instance of kindness?

Let’s return to the initial issue of whether, or not, it makes sense to claim that one is committed to treating a child with kindness which has nothing to do with considerations of well-being. What if a person were committed to treating a person with respect, integrity, fairness,

compassion, honesty, and a certain soupçon of moderation but had no idea what impact any of this would have on the well-being of the child and/or one's own well-being?

Isn't it possible that the motivation for acting in such a way is not necessarily based on any calculus involving well-being but is, instead, a matter of trying to do justice to the situation and nothing more than that situation? In fact, isn't it possible that calculations concerning how some act is going to impact on the well-being of oneself, a child, one's family, a community, or existence in general are far too problematic to try to figure out with any certainty, and, therefore, it might make more sense to try to do justice to another person because the person deserves it, in and of itself, and not because it will enhance anyone's well-being?

Of course, if one seeks to do justice or to do the right thing, someone might wish to raise questions about why one was seeking to do justice or seeking to do the right thing. The implication here is that the reason why one seeks to do justice and the right thing is because this is the best means for enhancing well-being.

Without wishing to deny such a possibility, this sort of reasoning is not necessarily what could be transpiring in such cases. Irrespective of what some act might do for one's own well-being or what such an act might do for the well-being of others, one's conception of human beings might be that they deserve a certain duty of care – perhaps exemplified in terms of kindness (however this might be defined) – because they are fellow human beings and for no other reason.

Under such circumstances, kindness is a principle in its own right. Its purpose is not necessarily to serve anything else or to be a means to bring about something else.

One might have little understanding or control over how one's acts will spread out into the world to touch people and events in this or that way. One might have little understanding or control over how other people will interpret or respond to one's acts.

The only thing over which one might have some degree of control and understanding is the way in which one seeks to act in the moment with, or without, character. If one has no way of evaluating whether, or not, such an orientation to life will enhance one's own well-being or

the well-being of anyone else, it is difficult to see why one should suppose that what is motivating an individual under such circumstances is a function of considerations concerning well-being ... unless one wished to argue that one's reason for acting was governed by some vague, ill-defined, all-inclusive notion of always seeking to enhance well-being no matter what else one might try to claim is the reason why one is acting as one is – which really becomes nothing more than argument by definition and fiat.

It is not necessarily enhanced well-being that makes something right or just, but rather what is right or just could be a function of how human beings deserve to be treated because they are human. One could extend this sort of argument to life, in general, but in such a case the principle still would be one in which the rightness and justness of an act is whether, or not, a certain quality of care was present even if due to a variety of complex circumstances no one's, or no thing's, well-being was enhanced.

One might ask: Why do human beings or other life forms deserve justice? One could respond to such a question with: What form of argument would justify not treating human beings and/or other life forms with such justice? – assuming, of course, that what one considered to be just actually gave expression to justice in some sense of the word that could be agreed upon by others.

Under such circumstances one might wish to critique someone's notion of justice. However, it is not immediately obvious, if at all, that such a critique must be expressed in terms of considerations about well-being.

In other words, such criticisms might just revolve around the definition of justice and/or revolve around pointing out various sorts of shortcomings in a given definition that seemed to be entailed by a particular idea of justice. The term “well-meaning” might never arise in such discussions.

Dr. Harris might believe that to the extent the notion of “well-being” is left out of such discussions, then, to that extent are such discussions problematic or in error. However, this is a different matter than trying to claim that it makes no sense to talk about the issue of kindness independently of considerations of the issue of well-being.

Perhaps human beings or life forms in general deserve to be treated in a certain way even if such treatment does not enhance their well-being. Perhaps, human beings and life forms in general deserve to be treated in a certain way even if such treatment does not enhance one's own well-being.

One seeks truth because one wishes to understand the way things are. Maybe, one seeks to do justice for the same reasons – that is, because one believes or understands that this might give expression to the truth about the way of the universe – and, if this is the case, then Dr. Harris is not necessarily correct when he claims that it does not make any sense for someone to claim that the reason why he or she is committed to kindness has nothing to do with issues of well-being.

This is not to say that one shouldn't do things that will improve the well-being of oneself and others – assuming people could agree on what constitutes well-being and how to go about securing it. Rather, the point is that Dr. Harris is simply wrong in what he claims with respect to the idea that enhanced well-being constitutes the bottom line for why anyone would exhibit kindness.

Another argument against Dr. Harris' current position is much easier to make. People do all kinds of things not because such activities will enhance their well-being but because they enjoy such activities or find them pleasurable and would continue to do them even if they knew that such activities were undermining their physical, emotional, psychological or economic well-being.

A pedophile shows 'kindness' to a child not because such kindness has anything to do with well-being – whether that of the pedophile or the child – but because such kindness is part of the grooming process that enables the pedophile to gain control over the 'object' of the exercise on the way toward abusing that child. Even after being incarcerated and, then, set free, some pedophiles will continue on with their activities despite knowing the ramifications of such actions for well-being.

Addicts of one kind or another might show 'kindness' to all manner of people as part of a strategy for manipulating those people in order to arrange life in a way that serves the addiction. An addict might understand that the addiction is not enhancing her or his welfare, and an addict certainly understands that whatever 'kindness'

is displayed is often not meant to enhance the well-being of the ones being manipulated through such kindness, and, yet, the addiction persists.

A parent who gives money to a daughter or son so that the latter individual will leave the house and spend the newfound money at the mall while the parent indulges in infidelity in the interim might appear to be treating the child with kindness, but the reality is otherwise. Moreover, no one's well-being is necessarily enhanced in the process ... although pleasure, of one kind or another, might abound for both the parent and the child.

The foregoing several paragraphs bring us full circle since this section started out with asking questions about the nature of kindness. Nonetheless, even if one could agree on a definition of what it meant to be kind, appearances can be deceiving, and, therefore, acts of 'kindness' don't necessarily serve the interests of well-being in relation to children or anyone else.

Chapter Fifteen

There is another possible example that doesn't exactly run directly counter to Dr. Harris' ideas concerning issues of kindness and well-being, but the example I have in mind does raise a variety of problematic questions concerning such ideas. This is especially the case given that Dr. Harris has, on a number of occasions, stated in *The Moral Landscape* that the notion of well-being is open and subject to change as new understandings in science emerge.

Let us suppose there is a scientist – maybe a neuro-scientist – who has just made a discovery that he or she believes will enhance the well-being of children. Perhaps, the discovery involves some sort of synthetic neurotransmitter that will boost intelligence.

Boosting someone's intelligence would seem to be a kind act. Moreover, such an act would seem to be rooted in an intention to enhance the well-being of, among others, children.

Let us assume that various computer and/or animal trials have been done, and all the empirical evidence from those trials seems to indicate that the neurotransmitter that has been synthesized will work. Let us further assume that certain adults have also been administered the drug, and not only have these clinical trials shown that the neurotransmitter appears to function quite well, but, in addition, no contraindications emerged during such trials, and, as a result, it seems that the neurotransmitter has no adverse side-effects.

Applications are made to the FDA. The FDA approves the neurotransmitter for sale – either as an over-the-counter purchase or as something requiring a prescription from a medical doctor ... and, we will leave aside, for the moment, the way in which the FDA (as is true for many governmental regulatory agencies) often consists of people who have a financially incestuous relationship with some, if not many, of the people, products, and processes it is supposed to regulate.

After a time, some anecdotal reports begin to emerge that everything might not be as rosy with respect to the synthetic neurotransmitter as first seemed to be the case. Consequently, an independent researcher is, somehow, able to secure some funds that will enable that individual to try to lend rigor to the anecdotal

evidence by gathering some hard data with respect to what is, or is not, happening in conjunction with the drug.

The researcher finds that although the synthetic neurotransmitter seems to work well enough in men, nevertheless, women, and especially children, sometimes have problematic responses that are correlated with such usage. These findings might be a reflection of the fact that the clinical trials only involved men, or that, for whatever reason, few women participated in the trials, and, for ethical reasons, no children were involved in the trials. Since the biochemistry of women is somewhat different than that of men and because the biochemistry of children – whether male or female -- might be much more sensitive to the presence of certain kinds of neurotransmitters than is the biochemistry of men, the clinical trials that were run would not have registered any contraindications concerning the use of such a neurotransmitter with respect to women and children.

On the other hand, perhaps, the problem is that we might not know as much about neurochemistry and development as we think we do, and, as a result, something unforeseen occurred. Such things happen.

The pharmaceutical company that has patented the synthetic neurotransmitter is disturbed by the findings of the aforementioned researcher. Consequently, that company induces some professors at a university – professors with whom it has had a long relationship since the company donates millions to the university where the scientists are employed -- to critically examine the findings and determine whether, or not, such independent research can stand up to critical scrutiny.

Not surprisingly, the professors ‘discover’ that there are problems with the research that has been done. The phrase “not surprisingly” is used in the foregoing sentence because a considerable amount of research shows that scientists who are funded by pharmaceutical and chemical companies are far more likely to arrive at results that are favorable to the products of such companies than are scientists who have no connection with those same companies.

In any event, there are industry-funded periodicals that publish the results of the professors. Their conclusion is that the synthetic neurotransmitter is perfectly safe and the researcher who published

results indicating otherwise was guilty of making a number of mistakes in his or her statistical analysis of the data.

Unfortunately, there is a growing literature concerning the ‘merchants of doubt’ whose job is to muddy the waters of science and induce the public to believe that a given product is safer than it actually is or that a given product has benefits that it doesn’t actually have or that a given product has little, or no, toxicity, with respect to the environment. When one reads books such as: *Doubt is Their Product* by David Michaels, *Bending Science* by Thomas O. McGarity and Wendy Wagner, *The Myth of the Chemical Cure* by Joanna Moncrieff, or *Side Effects* by Alison Bass, one comes to realize that there is more to ‘science’ than truth and well-being ... indeed, there is a very dark-side of science that is capable of being corrupted by money, power, and ego because after all is said and done, science is a very human enterprise.

Some scientists do not always have either truth or the best interests and well-being of people at heart in relation to what such individuals do. However, these sorts of scientists always can use the vocabulary of truth, good intentions, and concerns about the well-being of society to camouflage their actual intentions.

Consequently, when some scientist (or group of scientists) comes up with a discovery that is couched in the language of kindness and well-being, should one accept what they have to say at face value? Even if the scientist or scientists making such claims are sincere and well-intentioned, this doesn’t necessarily make what they say correct.

For example, following the initial synthesis of chlorpromazine (marketed as ‘Thorazine’ in the United States) in the early 1950s, the drug was introduced as a neuroleptic – that is, a chemical compound that was intended to alleviate some of the symptoms of certain psychological disorders. Unfortunately, there is a potential side-effect of the drug that seems to lower levels of dopamine in the brain, and since dopamine plays a role in motor functioning, the lowering of dopamine levels that sometimes accompanies consumption of chlorpromazine led to a condition known as tardive dyskinesia -- or involuntary, often repetitive, motor movements – in some individuals.

The condition tends to be permanent. Moreover, one does not necessarily have to have been on chlorpromazine for very long in order for the condition to show up.

What was put on the market with – we will assume – the best of intentions to enhance the well-being of those suffering from schizophrenia turns out to have problematic ramifications. Chlorpromazine is not an isolated case of drugs with a Janus-like nature. In fact most drugs on the market are characterized by such a two-faced quality as the list of contraindications in the packaging of drugs demonstrates.

Successive generations of neuroleptics have attempted to eliminate problems associated with earlier generations of such drugs. These newer drugs often have shortcomings of their own even as they – sometimes -- eliminate previously occurring problems associated with such neuroleptic usage.

Scientists and medical doctors might, at one point in time, claim that product or treatment ‘x’ enhances well-being. At some later point, some other group of scientists and medical doctors might claim that product or treatment ‘x’ entails certain kinds of problems and risks.

The foregoing scenario is not a product of wild imagination. It is a scenario that is repeated in history again and again.

Even when one leaves aside issues of corrupt or junk ‘science,’ there is a very real question that permeates Dr. Harris’ claim that science can and should determine values. This question remains even if one assumes that the intentions of scientists to advance truth and enhance well-being are sincere and not motivated by any other desire other than to establish the truth of things and to enhance well-being.

More specifically, the question that haunts science is this: Even if the underlying science appears to be sound and the associated intentions are sincere, why should one accept what scientists say concerning issues of well-being? The very essence of science is not just a matter of demonstrating what the truth is, but as well, the essence of science is to show what is not true, and, quite frequently, this means demonstrating that previous understandings concerning the nature of reality can be proven to be either completely wrong or shown to be in need of some kind of modification.

Some scientists are every bit as much the ‘true believers’ in their god – science -- as some religious believers are ‘true believers’ in their methods of engaging reality through their own god-constructs. Some scientists are just as fanatical about their belief system as some religious believers are fanatical about their own set of beliefs.

Is science really the best arbiter of what constitutes well-being? Furthermore, even if one were to agree that science provides the best-effort source of “facts” concerning the nature of physical reality, this doesn’t automatically make science the best-effort source of “facts” concerning either the nature of reality or the nature of well-being – especially if well-being should turn out to be a function of certain non-material and non-physical dimensions of reality.

Science’s capacity to be open to change in the light of new ‘facts’ is one of its greatest strengths. At the same time, science’s capacity to be open to change in the light of new ‘facts’ might be one of its greatest weaknesses as far as issues of well-being are concerned.

Like communism, the party line of science today in relation to issues of well-being might not be the party line of science tomorrow in relation to such issues. Is tomorrow’s party line necessarily better than today’s party line, or is it just different?

Some might take exception with the foregoing parallel between politics and science, but anyone who doesn’t understand that there are considerable politics at play in the process of science doesn’t understand how ‘science’ is often conducted. There are quite a few accounts of individuals whose careers in science were placed at risk -- not necessarily because there was something defective in their competency or understanding but, rather, because they operated out of a perspective that was in opposition to the one being promulgated by those in various scientific circles who were in power and had vested interests concerning certain ideas and positions of influence that needed to be protected.

Individuals have not gotten tenure because they did not tow the party line in some facet of science. The articles of various scientists have not been published because such materials ran against the current of ‘accepted’ science. Graduate students have been drummed out of degree programs because their interests ran contrary to what tenured faculty members considered appropriate.

For example, Peter Woit, a physicist, talks a great deal in his book, *Not Even GNORW*, about the way in which the purveyors and advocates of string theory have assumed ascendancy in many publishing, academic, and research circles, and, as a result, any physics that is not in line with some version, or other, of string theory has been pushed to the margins, if not eliminated altogether, within such circles. The issue is not about whether string theory gives expression to the truth or enhances well-being – since, in point of fact, there is not one piece of empirical data so far that substantiates string theory, and there is also the very real possibility that there will never be a way of proving the truth of string theory – but the issue at the heart of things here is all about the politics of science and who enjoys power at any given point in time and, as a result, is in a position to determine what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ science.

One should not construe the foregoing discussion to mean that I am trying to say that one cannot find truth through the process of science or that scientists aren’t interested in enhancing the well-being of us all ... if in no other way than through increased understanding of the nature of things. Rather, one of the primary themes running through the last several pages is that as long as human beings are involved in the process of science, then science is not necessarily a simple, straightforward endeavor in which all that is generated through science is truth and considerations of well-being.

Human beings have the capacity to corrupt the process of science. The result is often referred to as ‘junk science.’

Similarly, human beings have the capacity to corrupt the process of religion and spirituality. The result might be referred to as ‘junk religion’ or ‘junk spirituality.’

Science-as-methodology has the capacity to overcome the toxicity of junk science. However, this doesn’t always occur.

Spirituality/religion-as-methodology also has the capacity to overcome the toxicity of junk religion/spirituality. However, this doesn’t always occur.

Whenever vested interests begin to dominate and influence the manner in which methodological considerations are pursued, there will always be a tendency for conceptual toxicity to seep into the way

we engage and understand reality. This is as true for the process of science as it is for the processes of spirituality, philosophy, education, law, politics, and economics.

Chapter Sixteen

On pages 43-45 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris probes the issue of burqas – that is, the loose garment which covers a woman’s body when she goes out in public in various Muslim societies. He describes how at one talk he gave he mentioned the burqa issue, along with a number of related topics involving some other problematic practices in certain Muslim societies.

Dr. Harris further indicates that after the talk he became involved in a discussion about this portion of his lecture with a woman who had been appointed to the President’s Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. The woman asked Dr. Harris why he believed science would ever be able to provide determinate evidence that the wearing of the burqa was wrong.

Dr. Harris responded in the following manner: “Because I think that right and wrong are a matter of increasing or decreasing well-being – and it is obvious that forcing half the population to live in cloth bags, and beating or killing them if they refuse, is not a good strategy for maximizing human well-being.” (page 43) The woman responded with words to the effect that such a position was just his opinion.

While I agree with Dr. Harris that forcing anyone to do anything and, then, threatening to kill or beat that person if she or he refused to conform to such compulsory and forced expectations is not likely to be conducive to well-being, the fact of the matter is that Dr. Harris didn’t really answer the woman’s question – namely, what makes Dr. Harris believe that science will ever be able to prove that such behavior (i.e., forcing women to wear the burqa) is wrong. To be sure, implicit in Dr. Harris’s previous response is his belief that issues of well-being are best left to science, but such a belief does not constitute scientific evidence any more than the opening and closing statements of lawyers gives expression to anything of probative value in a court case.

If a woman freely chooses to wear a burqa, then this is her choice. However, if a woman is forced to wear a burqa and risks retaliation of some kind if she does not, this is an entirely different matter.

Nevertheless, one doesn’t need science to demonstrate that forcing people to do most things is often a counterproductive exercise, and this sort of understanding need not have anything to do with

issues of well-being. The idea of a person's inalienable right to freely choose how to proceed in life is a principle that is capable of existing quite independently of any notion of well-being.

The idea of a right to freely choose need not exist merely as a means for serving some notion of well-being. People might make poor choices via such an inalienable right that adversely affect their well-being, and other individuals might shake their head in disagreement or perplexity with respect to such decisions but, nonetheless, continue to support the idea that people have a right to exercise such a freedom independently of issues of well-being.

Of course, there is a vaguely defined and elusive boundary between, on the one hand, the right of a person to make choices that adversely affect his or her own well-being and, on the other hand, the idea that such a freedom or right is not absolute. This is especially the case when the exercise of freedom by one individual problematically impinges on someone else's right to exercise the latter's right to exercise the same sort of freedom.

Eventually, one might be able to prove that forcing women to wear a burqa adversely affects their well-being. Nevertheless, Dr. Harris' perspective notwithstanding, science might have considerable difficulty proving that, considerations of well-being aside, people do not have the right to freely choose how to proceed in life (I will have more to say on this issue when, later on, I critically explore Dr. Harris' belief that human beings don't really have or exercise free will).

People can arrive at rational, defensible, coherent, and heuristically valuable assessments of things quite apart from science and quite apart from issues of well-being. The depth, creativity, and nuanced character of intelligence is such that one does not have to be tethered to reality only by ropes of science and well-being in order to be able to proceed through life in a perfectly coherent and rational manner.

This is not to say that considerations of science or well-being are unimportant. Rather, the point here is a matter of indicating that one need not adopt a reductionist position in which everything must be a function of science and well-being in order to be considered reasonable or effective.

For example, one doesn't have to be a scientist or a proponent of a philosophy of well-being to be able to understand that the way in which the Taliban treat women, in particular, and people, in general, is indefensible. If nothing else, the Taliban's behavior in these respects is wrong because of the element of force that is present in such behavior and the manner in which that element of compulsion is like a thief with respect to one's right to choose.

Even if one were to consider Islam as nothing more than a dangerous, delusional philosophy – which is Dr. Harris' take on things – there are clear principles within that 'delusional philosophy' which prohibit the Taliban from doing what they do. Not only does such a 'delusional philosophy' indicate that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen or spiritual methodology, but, as well, there is nothing in the Qur'an that says one has the right to force women to wear the burqa or that one has the right to beat or kill them if they do not comply with such an edict.

The Taliban – as has been true of so many others, including Dr. Harris – impose their own interpretations on what they read in the Qur'an. Nowhere in the Qur'an are people denied the right to choose as they like, and, in fact, the right to choose goes to the very heart of the struggle between good and evil or right and wrong

The Qur'an might explore the consequences of choosing in one way rather than another. Nevertheless, no matter what one's choices might be in this respect, the right to choose remains sacrosanct.

So, delusional or not, the Qur'an has an intelligible coherency. Among other things, such a perspective prohibits and condemns any manner of oppression irrespective of whether a person believes in such a 'delusional philosophy' (as I do) or rejects it (as Dr. Harris does).

In fact, there is a dimension of Islam that is amendable to treating religion as a exploration into a multiplicity of issues concerning well-being. In some ways, this notion of well-being would be quite alien to someone who has a perspective like that of Dr. Harris (e.g., when considering the ideas of heaven, hell, souls, angels and the like), but in other ways, the notion of well-being that is given expression through such an approach to Islam would be quite consonant with many of Dr.

Harris' concerns about human rights, tolerance, compassion, concern for all life forms, and developing harmonious, productive societies.

On the other hand, there also is another dimension of Islam – a mystical one -- that lends itself to engaging spirituality as a methodology for discovering the truth about all aspects of reality, including one's own nature and potential. This approach to things doesn't necessarily give priority to the issue of well-being as the primary motivation for acting but, instead, often gives emphasis to doing things for their own sake – that is, this dimension of Islam attempts to adopt an orientation in which the reason why one does something is not for the sake of reward or in order to enhance well-being (one's own or that of others) but because such behavior is in harmony with, and gives expression to, the truth of things.

This is a case in which the maxim is not only: To thy own self be true, but, as well, it is operates in accordance with a principle of: 'Engaging everything in accordance with the truth of such things.' Well-being might ensue from this mode of pursuing life, but well-being is not necessarily the primary reason why one proceeds as one does.

The orientation is more one of: 'Establish the truth, and, then, let the existential cards fall where they might.' Or, stated in another way: 'Until one has established the truth, then one is no position to talk about issues of well-being since such a discussion is predicated on knowing the truth of things.'

The next best thing to having the truth is to be sincerely seeking the truth. Moreover, until one is certain (not just convinced) that what one understands is the truth, then, it is best to proceed with caution when it comes to trying to control the lives of others since such control almost always involves oppression of one kind or another, and if, on the other hand, one is certain of the truth, one might also realize that, within certain practical limits, interfering with the right of human beings to find their own way in life is a tricky, problematic, and frequently counterproductive process.

Consequently, seeking the truth has priority in all matters. In the absence of such truth, one must proceed with caution and learn to live life within the limits of what one 'knows' to be true – and not just what one 'believes' to be true.

Stripped down to essentials, we are all in need of a methodology for seeking truth. Oftentimes, all we have to rely on is the heuristic value of such a methodology ... its capacity to provide ways of engaging experience that have useful, practical, reliable, and constructive consequences that, sometimes, serve as bridges to developing a fuller sense of the truth.

On page 45 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris stipulates that: "I am arguing that the most basic facts about human flourishing must transcend culture." One could agree with Dr. Harris' foregoing assertion without necessarily feeling compelled to believe that the only thing capable of transcending culture is science or a science of well-being – at least, not as long as his notion of science is restricted to a perspective that is rooted in presuppositions concerning the physical and material nature of reality ... and, perhaps, not even then.

The only thing that is capable of transcending culture is the truth. Many, if not most, scientists are immersed in cultural practices that are shaped by a variety of historical, educational, political, economic, and philosophical forces, just as many, if not most, practitioners of religion are immersed in a similar sort of culture.

Truth is the only force that is capable of permitting an individual to break free of the gravitational field that is generated by such cultural practices. However, there might be an array of ways of coming to realize the nature of such truth and, in time, beginning to apply those truths to the manner through which one conducts one's life.

What permits human beings to flourish is truth. Consequently, all considerations of well-being are predicated on the existence of -- and, as a result, are a function of -- truth.

Truth is not a means to, or in the service of, well-being. Rather, at best, well-being is one of the possible side-effects that might arise from the presence of truth.

At one point during his critical meditation on what he considers to be the problems of multiculturalism and some forms of secular liberalism, Dr. Harris indicates he believes such perspectives lead to a form of moral relativism that entails a strange kind of self-contradiction. More specifically, Dr. Harris argues: "In practice, relativism almost always amounts to the claim that we should be

tolerant of moral differences because no moral truth can supersede any other. And, yet, this commitment to tolerance is not put forward as simply one relative preference among others deemed equally valid. Rather, tolerance is held to be more in line with the (universal) truth about morality than intolerance is.” (page 45)

Just as skepticism is often skeptical about everything but itself, so, too, moral relativism speaks about a relativity that should be applied everywhere but to itself, and, in the process, becomes an absolute. This is the sort of contradiction – minus the comment about skepticism that is my contribution to the form of the contradiction at issue -- that is being outlined by Dr. Harris.

In order to be able to claim that no moral truth can supersede any other, one must be able to show that, indeed, the nature of the universal character of morality is one in which no moral truth has priority over any other moral truth. Since no one has proved that this is true, then the claim that moral relativism should be preferred to all other forms of morality is suspect.

The foregoing perspective is not so much a matter of contradiction as it gives expression to an untenable – that is, to date unproven – argument concerning the nature of universal morality. However, having said this, such a position does not entitle one to suppose either that: (1) the primary rival to moral relativism is intolerance toward certain kinds of allegedly moral practices; or, (2) that a morality of intolerance toward certain kinds of allegedly moral practices has, thereby, been established.

Dr. Harris believes that one should be intolerant toward all practices that are inimical to enhancing well-being. However, such a notion of intolerance seems to carry within it an odor of force and compulsion that is every bit as objectionable as the smell of absoluteness that emanates from the rotting body of moral relativism.

The element of compulsion and force enter into the discussion through the unresolved issues that surround the issue of well-being. If Dr. Harris believes that science has established – to his satisfaction and, perhaps, some of his colleagues – that certain things are more conducive to the enhancement of well-being than are other things, then Dr. Harris believes that such a position warrants some degree of intolerance toward whatever falls beyond the pale of that perspective

– unless, of course, one can show that some other finding of science demonstrates something that is capable of enhancing well-being in some equivalent sense ... and what constitutes the criteria of equivalence here, or justifies the use of such criteria, is anybody's guess.

Perhaps, the truth lies somewhere between moral relativism and intolerance. Perhaps, morality is, in part, the process of discovering the nature of this interstitial topography.

Dr. Harris wishes to argue that: "The categorical distinction between facts and values has opened a sinkhole beneath secular liberalism – leading to moral relativism and masochistic depths of political correctness. (page 46)" He then goes on to refer to individuals such as Salman Rushdie and the Danish cartoonists as examples of people who were injuriously – and, innocently, Dr. Harris believes – entangled in such moral relativism and political correctness.

In relation to the many issues surrounding the Salman Rushdie and Danish cartoonists, I am inclined to gravitate toward the line from the song, 'For What's It's Worth', by the Buffalo Springfield that states: "Nobody's right, if everybody's wrong." However ill advised the response of some Muslims to Rushdie and the Danish cartoonists might have been (and the people who became violent during such responses are a miniscule portion of the world Muslim population), neither Rushdie nor the Danish cartoonists are innocents in the respective affairs.

For Rushdie to try to claim that he was entirely unprepared for, and shocked by, the extent of the Muslim negative reaction to his book: *The Satanic Verses*, border on, if not penetrates deeply into, the ludicrous. Even if neither he nor his family were observant Muslims or even if they did not consider themselves to be Muslim in any sense of the term, they lived amongst Muslims for years, and unless they were entirely self-absorbed individuals – and this might well be the case – they should have been well aware of Muslim sensibilities concerning such matters.

Rushdie was not interested in challenging the non-Muslim community. He was intentionally challenging and confronting Muslims, and he wrote his book in a deliberately provocative way,

having a clear sense of how his book would be received by the general Muslim community.

Indeed, *The Satanic Verses* is based on a degree of research – lacking rigor – conducted by Salman Rushdie concerning a theory (which did not begin with Rushdie and which is a perspective that, actually, is not rooted in any reliable or verifiable evidence) that certain verses of the Qur’an were the product of Satanic influence rather than Divine Revelation, and these verses allegedly were introduced into the Qur’an through some sort of confusion that allegedly came over the mind and heart of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Salman Rushdie took the angle he did in his book precisely because he was aware of Muslim beliefs and how fundamental a role the Qur’an and the Prophet play in the Muslim perspective. Whatever the rights of Rushdie might be with respect to being able to write and say that which he believes might be worthwhile for people to reflect upon – even if the underlying premise is not based in fact but pure speculation -- such a concession doesn’t bestow on him a right to publically posture and seek to mislead people about his understanding concerning the likelihood that many Muslims would be very upset by what he had to say.

The fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie and the offering of a reward to anyone who would kill him was a travesty of Islamic principles. At the same time, the disingenuousness with which Rushdie handled the whole situation was a travesty of an alleged artistic integrity that was largely devoid of any credibility with respect to his claims to be an innocent, shocked, and unprepared victim in the whole matter or as an individual whose only concern was to search for the truth by exploring an idea – namely, the alleged Satanic verses -- that had a factually challenged pedigree.

One might be free to jab a stick into a nest of hornets, but one shouldn’t be surprised if the hornets try to sting one as a result. Salman Rushdie might not have been able to predict the precise form that negative reaction to his book would take in the Muslim community, but, nonetheless, he demonstrated considerable indifference to, and neglect of, a number of duties of care that he had as an artist when he failed to properly assess a variety of very real possibilities that might arise in conjunction with his work.

Some artists might believe that their only duty is to serve their creative vision and that they are not responsible for whatever tumult and conflagration might ensue. I believe such a perspective is a very self-serving position. If artists understand that their work is controversial – and most artists do have insight concerning the times and circumstances in which they live and, therefore, have some appreciation of how their work will be received – then, they bear some of the responsibility for whatever happens to them.

Does this mean that however an offended person chooses to respond is justified? No, not necessarily, but, then neither is an artist necessarily justified in what he or she does in the way of art – whether written, painted, or otherwise.

Duties of care run in both directions with respect to society and the individual. The imposition of an artistic vision upon society can be just as oppressive as is the attempt of society to censor such a vision.

On page 41, Dr. Harris stated: “...while there are ways for their personal interests to be in conflict, most solutions to the problem of how two people can thrive on earth will not be zero-sum. Surely, the best solutions will not be zero-sum.” What is true – and I believe it is – with respect to conflict resolution between two people is also true (although in a much more complicated way) between any given individual and the collective.

The case of the Danish cartoonists is even more abject than the Salman Rushdie affair. After all, they had a clear view of the Rushdie affair in the rearview mirror of history.

Those cartoonists had an excellent idea of what might transpire subsequent to the publishing of such editorial portraits. The intended point of publishing such cartoons might have been to demonstrate, among other things, that there are freedoms in the West which do not exist in certain parts of the Muslim world, but the unintended point of such cartoons is to demonstrate that there is a perverse, self-absorbed penchant for arrogance and cruelty in the West that often will try to harm people for no other reason than to prop up its own existential insecurities and ignorance concerning the just exercise of those same freedoms.

Chapter Seventeen

On page 49 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris indicates there are at least three projects that might be undertaken in relation to the issue of morality. The first kind of project to which he refers involves processes that purportedly provide a descriptive account of why people behave in the way they do, and Dr. Harris maintains that most scientists – whether psychologists, evolutionists, or neurobiologists – are engaged in this kind of activity.

A second project involving issues of morality is directed toward trying to become clearer in the way one thinks about morality. In addition, this second sort of project attempts to establish which frameworks of thought and behavior might constitute the way people ought to behave and think. Dr. Harris considers *The Moral Landscape* to give expression to this second kind of moral project.

The third project mentioned by Dr. Harris encompasses processes that focus on trying to induce people to wean themselves from practices that might be considered by some to constitute moral behavior but are referred to by Dr. Harris as being foolish and harmful. The point of this project of morality is to assist people to live better lives, and Dr. Harris believes that this sort of project is one of the most important challenges and undertakings of the twenty-first century.

While one could agree with Dr. Harris that assisting people to live better lives is, indeed, a very important project, one might also suppose that such a project has been an important project for thousands of years. The problem then, as now, is what constitutes a better life.

Implicit in Dr. Harris' outline of the three aforementioned projects is the idea that only now are we beginning to appreciate the true nature of what constitutes a better life. I think that, at best, such a perspective is argumentative, if not untenable.

Qualities of love, compassion, humility, courage, honesty, sincerity, fairness, perseverance, tolerance, forgiveness, patience, self-sacrifice, charitableness, and the like have been a part of moral discussions for thousands of years. There is no evidence that the people of today understand these qualities better or are better able to apply them than our ancient counterparts did.

There were people who believed in the foregoing qualities thousands of years ago and sought, as best they could, to live in accordance with those qualities. There are people today who believe in such qualities and attempt to mould their lives to give expression to such qualities. There also were people thousands of years ago who – as is true today – seemed to have little interest in such qualities.

I know of no scientific study that has demonstrated how qualities such as love, compassion, humility, and so on, are immoral, foolish, or harmful. I know of no scientific study that has demonstrated there are better moral qualities than the ones listed above.

Moreover, there are assumptions present in each of the three projects outlined by Dr. Harris that are problematic. For example, the first project involves processes of describing why people do what they do.

Nothing is said about whether, or not, any of these modes of description are necessarily accurate or correct. In addition, nothing is said about what the criteria are for determining how one might go about demonstrating such correctness, or what would justify the use of such criteria -- rather than some other set of possibilities – with respect to the process of determining the nature of “correctness”.

Dr. Harris mentions three groups of scientists who are engaged in such a project. These are: neurobiologists, evolutionists, and psychologists.

Without wishing to imply that nothing of value or nothing that is true has emerged through the work of such groups of scientists, I don't believe it would be inappropriate to ask the following question: What is the evidence that any of their descriptions concerning why people behave in the way they do with respect to issues of morality are correct? To be sure, all of the foregoing disciplines are rife with all manner of theories about why people do what they do, but I am not aware of any work which definitively shows that some of those theories are, in fact, consistently true.

Having taught a variety of courses in psychology (General/Introductory, Social, Developmental, Abnormal, and Transpersonal) – courses that included a fair amount of material involving neurobiology and evolutionary psychology – and having

written several books on evolution and psychology, and having studied all of these areas for a number of decades, I think I can safely fairly say that while there is a great deal of empirical evidence that is consistent with any number of theories, there is no one theory in any of the foregoing areas that has proven itself to be the undisputed and indisputable champion concerning the truth about why people behave as they do.

Dr. Harris considers the first morality project to be, more or less, irrelevant to the second and third morality projects for which he provides an overview. Dr. Harris doesn't elaborate a great deal about why he believes the first project is irrelevant to the second two projects other than to allude to the fact that, oftentimes, he has found himself at odds with proponents of the first group.

Even if Dr. Harris believes that the first project is irrelevant to the other two morality projects, one might suppose that the second project – that is, the one which focuses on clarifying our thinking about moral issues – might have relevancy to the first project. In fact, one gets the impression from *The Moral Landscape* that one of the points of difference between his approach to things and the manner in which representatives of the first morality project engage issues concerns the “facts” and “values” issue. In other words, Dr. Harris believes that values are a function of facts, whereas people in the first group tend to separate facts and values and believe that the latter cannot be, and should not be, derived from the former.

In a sense, Dr. Harris' second morality project – the one to which *The Moral Landscape* gives expression and that, allegedly, involves clarifying our thinking about moral thinking and behavior – is really just another version of the first morality project. What appears to induce Dr. Harris to believe the second project is different from the first one is that he believes he really does understand how facts and values are related, and, therefore, his position constitutes an advancement with respect to what individuals supposedly are doing in the first morality project.

However, the people who are engaged in the first morality project are every bit as convinced that they are on the 'right' track to understanding the nature of morality as Dr. Harris is. Those individuals have come to a different understanding of the relationship

between 'facts' and 'values' than Dr. Harris has, but other than that, both the first and second morality projects noted by Dr. Harris constitute theories that attempt to describe and explain why people do what they do.

Dr. Harris might believe that he has done a better job of clarifying our understanding of moral thinking and behavior than those who are engaged in the first kind of morality project, but this is just his take on the issue, and it is not necessarily correct. People engaged in the first morality project also busy themselves, in their own way, with trying to clarify our understanding of moral thinking and behavior.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier, they go about the foregoing process of clarification differently than Dr. Harris does. As a result, they arrive at a different set of conclusions about the relationship, or lack thereof, between 'facts' and 'values.'

I think it is rather presumptuous for anyone to try to claim that he or she thinks more clearly about, say, moral issues than does someone else. I also think it is rather presumptuous to suppose that one has the right -- by virtue of an allegedly superior knowledge and understanding -- to try to tell other people how they should live their lives.

In fact, isn't the foregoing sort of presumption exactly the sort of thing about which Dr. Harris' complains in relation to religious fanatics? The only difference is that, now, a theology of science is replacing a theology of religion.

By all means, write books or formulate lectures/talks that give expression to the way one thinks or feels about a given issue. However, writing such books and giving such talks does not, thereby, automatically mean one's position is superior to the position of other individuals or that it entitles one to induce or convince people to adopt the new theology.

One offers what one has to offer, and one hopes that, in some way, what one has to offer constitutes a constructive contribution to a given issue. Or, one provides people with food for thought that might, or might not, be of assistance to them. Or, one points out possible errors, mistakes, lacunae, and problems with this or that perspective not

because one is necessarily right, but because this is who one is and what one has to offer.

One is just another individual among many others who have points of view that are seeking to be heard because this is what human beings do. We communicate with one another about our respective experiences and understandings concerning our beliefs about the nature of various aspects of reality.

According to Dr. Harris, the first and second morality projects outlined by him provide different approaches to the question of how morality relates to the natural world. "In 1, 'morality' is the collection of impulses and behaviors (along with their cultural expressions and neurobiological underpinnings) that have been hammered into us by evolution. In 2, 'morality' refers to the impulses and behaviors we can follow so as to maximize our well-being in the future." (page 50)

There are many theories about the relationship between morality and evolution. I am not aware of any theory that has incontrovertibly demonstrated how it has correctly nailed the nature of that relationship.

The central component in all of the foregoing theories entails some variation of the idea of adaptive value. In other words, if a given practice, behavior, or trait has adaptive value, then, this explains why such a practice, behavior, or trait has persisted.

One could agree that such explanations might explain why a given practice, behavior, or trait persists, but such an explanation does not explain how such a practice, behavior, or trait arose in the first place. In fact, all such adaptive explanations presuppose the existence of whatever these sorts of explanations claim has adaptive value of one kind or another.

One could concede that moral qualities of patience, forgiveness, fairness, tolerance, and so on all have adaptive value of one kind or another and, therefore, are likely to persist as long as they continue to have some degree of practical utility. Nonetheless, such a concession does not preclude one from asking: How did the capacity for such moral qualities come into being in the first place?

Dr. Harris says that the first moral project might claim that such capabilities have been hammered into us by evolution. The question

remains: hammered into us how? What is the specific neurobiological pathway – or set of such pathways -- that came into existence that underwrote such a capacity, and how did such a pathway – or set of such pathways – come into being?

Even if one were able to identify this kind of pathway or set of pathways – and, currently, there is nothing more than the crudest of correlational data tying certain simple emotions (and not complex moral principles) to certain regions of the brain (e.g., the limbic system, the amygdala, the anterior cingulate cortex) -- nevertheless, establishing the existence of these sorts of pathways says absolutely nothing about how such pathways came into existence in the first place. Furthermore, even if one could identify such pathways or sets of pathways, this does not necessarily mean that, thereby, one understands how – or if -- the qualia of consciousness (that is, the realm of phenomenology) arise (arises) through the activity of such pathways, let alone whether, or not, properties of logic, reason, insight, and so on are generated by the activities of those sorts of neurological pathways.

Dr. Harris believes that the difference between the first project of morality -- in which people seek to describe and explain the patterns of behavior that are hammered into us by evolution -- and the second project of morality (which seeks to identify those impulses and/or behaviors what will enable us to maximize our well-being in the future) is a matter of properly aligning issues of facts and values in conjunction with an appropriate understanding of well-being. Nonetheless, if we don't know what well-being is – and, although we might be able to differentially distinguish among some situations with respect to those that appear to be more conducive to well-being than are others, this does not necessarily tell us what the nature of well-being is relative to the nature of the universe -- then we don't know what it means to maximize such well-being. If we do not know – except in a very limited and relativistic way -- what the actual nature of well-being is vis-à-vis the nature of existence, and if we do not know what it means to maximize such well-being, then, one is in no position to identify the impulses or behavior that are likely to enhance one's amorphous sense of well-being.

Under such circumstances, our situation concerning behavior, well-being, and maximization is best described in the words of Winston Churchill (who was referring to Russia) – namely, “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” It is not readily evident how Dr. Harris has advanced the morality project beyond what people were attempting to do when they claimed – according to Dr. Harris – that morality was a matter of what had been hammered into us by evolution.

Even if one were to agree with Dr. Harris that his morality project was a matter of trying to identify those impulses and behaviors that could maximize well-being (which it is), and even if one were to agree – for the sake of argument – that Dr. Harris and his fellow neurobiologists have been able to establish an understanding of what was entailed by the ideas of well-being and the maximization of well-being that met with, more or less, universal agreement (which they have not), none of this would explain how the capacity for such impulses and behaviors came into existence in the first place. Apparently, Dr. Harris wishes to reject the idea that the sort of impulses and behaviors that are at the heart of his second morality project were not the result of evolutionary hammering. So, the question with which one is left is: How did the capacity for such moral impulses and behaviors come into being?

If one wishes to argue that the moral impulses and behaviors of the second morality project give expression to memes that spread culturally (and earlier in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris did introduce the idea of memes into the discussion in this sort of manner), and, therefore, one wishes to claim that the task of scientists is to demonstrate that memes are constructive and that memes are destructive with respect to matters of well-being, one still has to account for how human beings came to have the capacity to respond to, and act on, such memes. In addition, one also has to explain how such memes came into existence in the first place – that is, how did they get thought up?

If one wishes to argue that the capacity to think up memes and the capacity to respond to them is not a function of what has been evolutionarily hammered into us, then one must provide an alternative account of what makes such capacities, impulses, and behaviors

possible. However, Dr. Harris has no such account – at least, he has no reliable, empirically demonstrable account concerning such an idea that provides one with a step-by-step explanation of how those capacities and impulses came into being.

Despite lacking much in the way of evidence that is able to rigorously and plausibly verify his hypothetical constructs involving morality, well-being, maximization, or the relationship between ‘facts’ and values, nevertheless, Dr. Harris wishes to talk about a third morality project. This latter project is one in which scientists must induce people to recognize that whatever those people previously believed with respect to morality was foolish and harmful – according to scientists like Dr. Harris – and, then, the ones who are to benefit from the wonders of science must take a leap of faith in order to commit themselves to a program of maximizing well-being in accordance with, as of yet, some vaguely defined and problematic set of impulses and beliefs that, currently, have been identified by a given group of scientists who believe that such impulses and behaviors will maximize well-being -- although, those scientists might be wrong since subsequent scientists could, conceivably, demonstrate that some other set of impulses and behaviors are the ones that should be foisted on everyone ... because, after all, science should remain open to change even as people are expected to remain closed to any possibilities other than what science dictates.

Dr. Harris ends his chapter on ‘Moral Truth’ in *The Moral Landscape* with an example from his own life. He relates a story about how a handsome man who goes to the same gym as Dr. Harris’ wife sought to seduce her. Notwithstanding the fact that Dr. Harris’ wife indicated that she was married, her would-be suitor -- the guy at the gym -- continued on with his pursuit of her.

When his wife told Dr. Harris of the events at the gym, Dr. Harris describes the sorts of emotion that coursed through his being. Jealousy, anger, and embarrassment all paid a visit to his consciousness.

Dr. Harris states: “No evolutionary psychologist would find it difficult to account for my response to this situation.” (page 51) Actually, while no evolutionary psychologist would experience any difficulty in linking such behavior to a biological imperative that seeks

to ensure that one's genes will be contributed to the larger population's gene pool and, thereby, provide his genes with the opportunity to continue on into the future, the fact is, all those evolutionary psychologists would encounter difficulty explaining how the capacities for jealousy, embarrassment, and anger came into being in the first place.

Jealousy, embarrassment, and anger might all have an adaptive role to play under the right circumstances, but this is an ex post facto reconstruction of the function that such emotions might play from the perspective of the notion of adaptation. Such an adaptive approach to the emotions in questions says nothing about how the capacity for such emotions arose in the first place.

Dr. Harris proceeds with the tale of his wife's attempted seduction by a gym rat and outlines some possible impulses and behaviors that might have ensued from the sort of capacities that, presumably, had been hammered into him by evolution. More specifically, he talks about possibilities such as blood feuds, murder, and so on – each of which would likely be shaped by the sort of culture in which one lived.

The foregoing discussion by Dr. Harris leads into a brief exploration of some of the possibilities that might arise in the context of the second kind of morality project that he had outlined earlier in his book. In such a context, an individual might begin to reflect on how to approach the attempted seduction problem from a somewhat more tolerant, forgiving, patient, expansive point of view that involved a concern for issues of well-being in relation to his wife, the guy in the gym, society and himself.

Once again, however, just as Dr. Harris has no plausible account for how the capacity underwriting any of the primitive feelings that arose in him in response to the seduction-attempt and which coursed through his being as a result of having been hammered into him by evolution first came into being, so, too, Dr. Harris has no plausible account for how the capacity for reflecting about the issue of well-being first arose in human beings. In other words, Dr. Harris can't even account for the origins of the capacities that make his second project of morality possible. Like the position of the evolutionary psychologists from whom Dr. Harris departs at a certain juncture, Dr. Harris assumes the existence of the capacities he wishes to incorporate into his

account of things without being able to explain the origins of such capacities.

Why is the issue of origins important here? Well, if one doesn't know how a certain capacity came into being, then one can't necessarily suppose that one understands how such a capacity is connected to issues of either well-being or the nature of the universe.

In other words, while one knows some facts, there are many other facts that one does not know. This sort of ignorance tends to cast a substantial epistemological shadow across the landscape one is purporting to chart.

There is a phenomenon in psychology known as confabulation. This is a process that describes the tendency of people to fill in gaps of memory with fabricated ideas that seem to fit in with what one actually does remember.

In a way, evolutionary psychologists and Dr. Harris – each in their own way – are doing something very similar to the process of confabulation. There are gaps in their epistemological understanding of reality.

As a result, they fill in those gaps with fabrications concerning what they believe must be the reason why things are the way they are. Yet, when pressed, none of them can provide a coherent, plausible, empirically verifiable account of how things came to be the way they are.

Scientists, of course, refer to such fabricated fictions as hypotheses. However, until one can empirically verify such fictions, then they remain expressions of some variation on the idea of confabulation ... trying to fill in the gaps in relation to what we do not understand.

Chapter Eighteen

Dr. Harris believes that human cooperation is the key to resolving whatever the problems might be with which humankind is, or will be, confronted. He feels whatever difficulties, crises, tragedies, and horrific events that are being reported by the media all give expression, in one way or another, to instances of failed cooperation.

He asserts that the names we give to the process of thinking about issues of human cooperation are morality or ethics. For, Dr. Harris, the two terms are interchangeable.

While the problem of human cooperation certainly is one of the issues that might be explored through the process of morality or ethics, it is not necessarily the only sort of issue that might be entertained. An individual also could explore ethics or morality with the purpose of trying to figure out how one – as an individual – should engage life with integrity quite apart from considerations of cooperation, and while whatever principles of integrity that might be established through such an investigation would likely have ramifications for one's interaction with other individuals, the purpose underlying this kind of exploratory process is not really primarily a function of one's concerns about matters of human cooperation.

Asking questions about the purpose of life can be an ethical pursuit. If one comes to the conclusion that life has no purpose, nevertheless, this has ethical ramifications for how one proceeds in life and has the capacity to shape how one thinks about an array of issues – including, but not restricted to, the theme of human cooperation.

'Who am I?' and 'What is my potential?' are two further questions that have the capacity to be appropriate subject matter for ethical reflection. Both of the foregoing questions might have implications for issues involving human cooperation, but neither of them is necessarily reducible to such considerations.

In a world that is very much in need of cooperation but which often seems indifferent to such a notion, the challenge of life might be a matter of how can one be an ethical, moral human being even in circumstances when other human beings might not be much interested in cooperating with one another or in situations when other human beings are engaged in the sorts of endeavors in which one

might not wish to be a cooperative participant (e.g., war, oppression, torture, exploitation, sexual abuse, gangs, racism, and the like). Indeed, before one can even address the problems that form barriers to human cooperation, one has to have some sense of who one is, as well as what the nature of reality is and how one fits into the nature of things, before one will be ready to take on the issue of human cooperation.

In a sense, human cooperation is a problem precisely because people do have different ideas about what the purpose, if any, of life is, as well as because people have different ideas about what it means to be a human being or what sort of potential is inherent in human beings – considered both individually and collectively -- and because people have different ideas about how one should proceed in life when cooperation is either not feasible or highly problematic. Ethics or morality is a critically reflective process of trying to discover and, then apply what one discovers in order to be able to constructively negotiate all of the foregoing sorts of questions and difficulties with integrity or in some consistently principled and coherent sense.

Dr. Harris believes many, if not all, of the foregoing sorts of differences often are rooted in factual considerations of a scientific nature. This is why he argues: “As we better understand the brain we will increasingly understand all of the forces – kindness, reciprocity, trust, openness to argument, respect for evidence, intuitions of fairness, impulse control, the mitigation of aggression, etc. – that allow friends and strangers to collaborate successfully on the common projects of civilization.” (pages 55-56)

Once we have the scientific facts, differences will fade away. Once we have the facts, the road to values such as human cooperation will be cleared of all debris.

Presumably, such debris refers to all those people who don't have the proper “respect for the evidence” or who don't exhibit the appropriate “openness to argument,” or who don't possess the right sort of “intuitions of fairness.” These are the people who will have to be induced or convinced that their ideas about things are foolish and harmful. Cooperation becomes much easier when, in one way or another, one eliminates the opposition.

Dr. Harris' position is predicated on the assumption that enhanced understanding of the brain will necessarily translate into a better

understanding of the myriad of forces that surface in human behavior. However, just as coming to a better and deeper understanding of how a television set works provides one with absolutely no insight into the content of programs that will be translated into pictures and sound by any given television set, so, too, it might be the case that a progressively enhanced understanding of brain functioning might not provide one with any insight into, on the one hand, either the nature of consciousness, intention, intelligence, reason, insight, language, and understanding, or, on the other hand, insight into how a human being puts all of this together to generate programs of: philosophy, science, spirituality and other worldviews, hermeneutical frameworks, and ethical systems.

The confidence that Dr. Harris has in science to unveil the secrets of the universe is an expression of a faith system. He has no proof that science will be able to accomplish what he believes it will in the future, but, rather, he is using an inductive argument whose form is somewhat akin to the following: Because cases 'a', 'b', and 'c' in the past were resolvable through science, then cases 'x', 'y', and 'z' also will be resolved through science.

The foregoing form of argument has at least one blind spot. It is revolves about the issue of the 'black swan.'

More specifically, if a person's only experience has been that all swans are white, then, one might predict that the next swan one encounters also will be white. This sort of thinking seems sound until one comes across a black swan that is, statistically speaking, quite rare but, nonetheless, do exist.

The discovery of black swans has implications for both deductive and inductive arguments. For example, whereas previously, one might have been able to argue that: All swans are white. Gus is a swan. Therefore, Gus is white.

Nonetheless, after encountering black swans, the primary premise for the previous deductive argument is no longer true, and this will affect the tenability of one's inclusion in such a deductive argument. Moreover, whereas previously it might have seemed straightforward to reason that because all past encounters with swans indicated they were white in color, then predicting that the next swan will be white should not be problematic in any way, nevertheless, once a black swan

shows up, certainty concerning the nature of future experience based on inductive thinking disappears in the realities of empirical evidence.

The ability of science to have solved any number of problems in the past says absolutely nothing about its capacity to solve the next problem one encounters. Whatever success neurobiology has had in the past with respect to uncovering various facts concerning brain functioning, none of these successes permits one to predict, with any degree of certainty or even probability, that neurobiology will have the sort of successes in the future that will enable it to unravel the mysteries of consciousness, intelligence, creativity, language, reason, insight, and so on.

What happens if it is not the case that as we increasingly come to understand the brain that, simultaneously, we also will increasingly come to understand the nature of forces such as kindness, reciprocity, and trust? What happens if understanding the nature of brain functioning only takes us so far, as when understanding how a television set operates only takes one a certain conceptual distance with respect to understanding anything about the networks, advertisers, artists, and technicians that are behind the broadcast of programs which are received by a television ... despite the fact one might understand television sets quite well?

Of course, one might argue that such a hypothetical counter-proposal is rather fanciful. However, in what evidence is such a claim rooted?

Is it anymore fanciful to say that consciousness, intelligence, creativity, and the like might be the function of something other than the brain than it is to say, given our present state of ignorance, that the brain is the sole cause of such phenomena? Since there really isn't any evidence that indicates what the truth of the matter is, one's notion of what constitutes a flight of fancy in such circumstances might be more a function of one's faith system than any actual empirical data or proof. Consequently, I am not exactly sure how charges of foolishness or delusional thinking – which Dr. Harris often directs toward religion in general – reconciles itself with values such as having a “respect for evidence” or “remaining open to argument,” that, supposedly, will be so important to resolving problems of human cooperation.

At one point in his book, Dr. Harris claims that the relationship between science and religion is a zero-sum game with respect to the “facts.” At another point in his book, Dr. Harris states that the best solutions to human conflict will not be a function of zero-sum scenarios.

Is one to suppose that because, according to Dr. Harris, the relation between religion and science is a zero-sum game with respect to the facts, and because, according to Dr. Harris, the best solutions to conflicts are not zero-sum in nature, then, therefore, the conflicts between science and religion are not resolvable except in terms of some least best, zero-sum conflagration? And, given that Dr. Harris’ perspective concerning the promise of science – especially neurobiology – has zero facts about how the brain generates (and is not just correlated with) consciousness, intelligence, creativity, talent, language and the like, is this how Dr. Harris retains an “openness to argument,” and maintains a ‘respect for facts,” or acts on his “intuitions about fairness” concerning the conflicts between science and religion?

Apparently, what Dr. Harris means by “respecting the evidence” is respecting evidence in the way he does. Seemingly, what Dr. Harris means by having “openness to argument” is being open to argument in the way he is open – which also means being closed to possibilities in the way he is. Evidently, what Dr. Harris means by human cooperation is a matter of understanding these issues in the way he does – that is, human cooperation is a function of the relationship that certain kinds of brain states concerning consciousness have with events in the world when those events are parsed in accordance with Dr. Harris’ way of understanding the “facts” of such events and, subsequently, translated into the form of values that Dr. Harris believes are warranted by such “facts.”

One could agree with Dr. Harris about any number of particular instances of horrific behavior on the part of people who purport to be religious. Yet, Dr. Harris uses such specific examples as part of an inductive argument for rejecting, in principle, the process of spirituality or religion. If one were to follow the logic of such reasoning, then, one might suppose that one should understand the mistakes and errors of an array of scientists over the centuries as

constituting a legitimate ground for condemning, in principle, the process of science.

Truths often emerge from subjecting the dross metals of human error to the heat of critical inquiry. This is true in science, and it is true in religion ... although I will admit that the way in which many people engage the process of religion does not always as readily lend itself to deriving the refined metal of truth from the dross metal of error as is often the case with respect to the way scientists often are able to successfully engage the process of science and, thereby, produce a refined form of truth.

Someone might wish to claim at this point that one should prefer the simpler of two theories, and since scientific theories concerning the nature of human beings and the universe are simpler than religious theories, then, therefore, one should prefer them to religious theories. Such an individual might even cite Occam's (Okham's) Razor as a precedent, of sorts, for shoring up such a claim.

Many people believe, mistakenly, that Occam's (Okham's) Razor asserts something to the effect that one should accept the simpler of two theories. In fact, the essence of the principle in question is: "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity" (*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*).

The fulcrum of leverage in the foregoing principle must be considered in relation to the rock of "necessity." How does one determine what is necessary in any given case?

If a given explanation and its attendant assumptions (entities) adequately accounts for all the facts of a given set of circumstances, then it might be unnecessary to introduce any further assumptions (entities) into the explanation. If further data indicates that one's former explanation and its attendant assumptions are no longer able to adequately account for the facts of the old set of circumstances plus the new set of facts, then at that point it might be necessary to either add a new assumption into the mix or one might have to jettison one, or more, of the old assumptions and find something else to replace it (them).

Ultimately, the necessity of Occam's (Okham's) Razor is a function of the truth. Once one knows the truth of a matter, then one

understands, at least in principle, which kinds of entities are unnecessary to multiply with respect to such truth since the multiplication of those sorts of entities can do nothing but distort and undermine the nature of one's understanding concerning the truth.

However, if one does not understand the truth of a matter, then one is not in any position to determine where the rock of necessity is to be found so that one might be in a position to leverage the principle inherent in Occam's (Okham's) Razor. Both scientists and proponents of religion often struggle when it comes to understanding (as opposed to merely having beliefs concerning) the ultimate nature of the universe or the place of human beings in that universe. Therefore, one is not in a position to say which, if either (or both), is (are) 'multiplying entities beyond necessity.'

Is the ultimate nature of existence completely a function of some set of material/physical processes – perhaps, some form of unified field theory? Is the ultimate nature of existence totally a function of some set of non-material processes – perhaps, some form of a mystical unified field theory? Is the ultimate nature of existence a function of both sets of considerations?

The fact is, we don't know. And, because we don't know, we lack the understanding that will enable us to conform to the principle that we should not multiply entities beyond what is necessary since we don't have a proper understanding of what the truth is concerning such necessity.

Chapter Nineteen

The term “black swan” has at least one other kind of significance when it comes to reasoning about the nature of reality that is different from the sorts of ideas noted earlier in relation to inductive and deductive thinking. More specifically, Nassim Taleb wrote a book in 2007 entitled: *The Black Swan* and, then he updated the work three years later.

Taleb’s ‘Theory of the Black Swan’ refers to the manner in which events that have considerable impact on humanity – whether these events are matters of discovery, invention, or historical occurrence – are often unexpected and unpredictable, and, as a result, most of us are not only incapable of taking such possibilities into consideration with respect to the way we go about conducting our lives, but, as well, we are largely unaware of the extent to which such events – despite their rare nature -- shape and influence our lives.

In addition to the foregoing properties, Taleb’s ‘Theory of the Black Swan’ also maintains that due to the unexpected, unpredictable, rare character of such momentous events, human beings often have a tendency to engage in ex post facto reconstructions of those events and, thereby, try to make sense out of them, and, in hindsight, we tend to consider such events to be rendered as understandable and explicable through such ex post facto reconstructions even though these sorts of accounts don’t necessarily correctly explain what has taken place. In other words, in the terms of an earlier discussion in this essay, human beings engage in confabulation with respect to such ‘Black Swan’ events – that is, human beings have a tendency to try to fill in the gaps of ignorance or memory with ideas that seem to lend coherence to that which one does not actually understand or properly remember.

Oftentimes, theologians are fully engaged in such an exercise. However, scientists also are often caught up in such a process.

For example, on page 56 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “In truth, human cooperation and its attendant moral emotions are fully compatible with biological evolution. Selection pressure at the level of the ‘selfish’ genes would surely incline creatures like ourselves to make sacrifices for our relatives, for the simple reason that one’s relatives can be counted on to share one’s genes.” The term “selection

pressure” is an expression of confabulation and the Black Swan Theory at work.

What are the specific physical dynamics of “selection pressure at the level of the ‘selfish genes’ ”? What are the precise physics of that dynamic? Is it an example of a field phenomenon of some kind? If so, what, specifically, is the nature of the process through which such a field is propagated? What are the structural characters of the ‘forces’ – in concrete terms -- involved in such “selection pressure”?

The idea of “selection pressure” is, in fact, an empirically empty concept. Its task is to give someone the impression that there is a rational, explicable connection between one point in evolutionary history and a subsequent point in evolutionary history when the latter point in evolutionary history gives expression to capabilities and capacities that are not present in the earlier point of evolutionary history.

In other words, someone might wish to argue: ‘Why do selfish genes develop the capacity for co-operation? Well, it is because of the selection pressure that is present.’ Selection pressure brings about (somehow) the sort of changes in behavioral capacity that cannot be plausibly explained by a combination of random occurrences and natural selection on their own.

After all, if there was some ontological dynamic called “selection pressure” taking place, then the idea that there is a determinate transition from selfish genes to cooperative genes that arises through the presence of ‘selective pressure’ would make sense – well, sort of, in a very vague sense. One would, then, have an evolutionary “explanation” for what is going on.

However, if one understands that “selection pressure” is an empirically empty concept -- and, therefore, an expression of confabulation – then, the seeming explanation of what is transpiring in an evolutionary context disappears. Under such circumstances, this sort of “explanation” is understood to be illusory and delusional because the idea of “selection pressure” has no ontological reality that can be shown to exist and that can be shown to have a specific physical and material character.

The appearance of a presumed biological capacity – for example, consciousness, intelligence, language, creativity, talent, and so on -- that did not previously exist is one of the rare events that has an tremendous impact on the population in which it emerges. It could not have been predicted. It was non-computable.

Yet, such capacities clearly do exist. So, human beings engage in ex post facto attempts to reconstruct such events and render the latter explicable.

Now, some such events might be amenable to these sorts of ex post facto reconstructions. In other words one might be able to piece together what actually happened in the instance of a given rare event that has had considerable impact on human beings. Unfortunately, more often than not, such reconstructions are exercises in generating the illusion of explanation when, in point of fact, we don't really know or understand why things are the way they are in a given case.

Dr. Harris -- along with a variety of other individuals – discusses ideas such as kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and sexual selection as a means of attempting to explicate various kinds of biological phenomena involving different aspects of cooperation. Nonetheless, a fully explicated etiology of the origins of such capacities never appears in such discussions.

The history of biological life is rife with Black Swan events. Evolutionary literature is replete with ex post facto, confabulated accounts of such events.

The ideas of: kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and sexual selection might lend a certain coherence with respect to how and why certain kinds of behavior are adaptive and, therefore, such ideas have a certain amount of heuristic value in providing a way to describe how and why certain organisms behave as they do in certain contexts. Nonetheless, such ideas do nothing to explain how the capacity for such behaviors came into being.

They are ex post facto accounts of why some capacity exists and what functions (possibly adaptive) it serves. However, those accounts don't necessarily actually explain the nature of the Black Swan event that generated such a capacity.

Dr. Harris mentions the work of Michael Tomasello, a psychologist, who talks about the unique sensitivity to gaze that exists in human beings. Unlike other earthly creatures, including primates, the sclera -- or the portion of eyes that surrounds the iris -- is white. This characteristic in the eyes of human beings makes it very easy to follow the direction of gaze in human beings, and this is true even in children at least as young as twelve months old.

Dr. Tomasello believes that this feature of human beings has facilitated the development of both language and cooperative behavior in human beings. While it might be true that the unique sensitivity to gaze exhibited by human beings serves a useful role in both language and cooperative behavior, and while it might be true that the sclera is central to such behavior, neither the value of such sensitivity nor the role played by the sclera necessarily explains how such a sensitivity arose in the first place – although the implication of both Drs. Tomasello and Harris is clearly that somehow the adaptive value of something accounts for how (and not necessarily why) something comes into existence.

The adaptive value of something might account for why that something persists. Nevertheless, such adaptive value, in itself, does not explain how the capacity for such adaptability came into existence in the first place. ‘Explanations’ involving adaptive value are ex post facto confabulations concerning a Black Swan event ... or series of Black Swan events. Such attempted explanations concerning the significance or meaning of these sorts of Black Swan events do not necessarily reflect the actual truth of why things are the way they are.

Furthermore, let us suppose we have a creature – some sort of primate – that inexplicably -- and quite uniquely -- acquires the property of sclera. How does this event prove that its presence facilitated the development of linguistic or cooperative behavior?

By using the term: “facilitated” in the foregoing paragraph, I do not mean that the presence of sclera cannot be shown to play a role in the sensitivity of human beings to gazing behavior. Rather, in using the term “facilitated,” I am alluding to, or implicitly raising questions about, the causal character of the relationship between the presence of sclera and the subsequent appearance of new capacities for, say, language ability.

The first occurrence of sclera is a Black Swan event. The first occurrence of linguistic behavior or cooperative behavior is a Black Swan event.

What is the causal connection between the sclera Black Swan event and either of the other two Black Swan events? We don't know, but by introducing ideas like 'adaptation,' 'selection pressure,' 'randomness,' and 'facilitate,' we can create the confabulated illusion that we know why things are the way they are and how the two Black Swan events are related – namely, evolution – even as evolution really doesn't necessarily explain anything that has occurred ... and this is especially the case given that we really don't know any of the step-by-step DNA/RNA events that give expression to the etiology of how any given biological capacity came into being.

In a very Escher-like sense, the introduction of the concept of randomness is a Black Swan event of a special kind. In other words, the idea of randomness is an unpredictable, rare event that has had tremendous impact on human thought but its structural properties seemingly preclude any attempt to provide an ex post facto explanation for why things are the way they are because, at the heart of the notion of randomness is the 'fact' that there can be no explanation for why things are the way they are ... that is what makes them random.

Nonetheless, the idea of randomness becomes an explanation for why things are the way they are. Yet, such an idea does not necessarily explain why things are the way they are or how the notion of randomness came into being in the first place. Consequently, the idea of randomness, itself, might constitute a form of confabulation that purports to "explain" the nature of being even as it, simultaneously, seeks to rule out all other attempts to speak about the meaning, significance, and/or purpose of the universe.

Randomness can never be anything more than an assumption concerning the nature of reality. The reason this is so is because there is no way to disprove that what is taking place might be a function of some sort of algorithmic process whose steps we do not currently understand.

One might be able to show that particular forms of algorithmic processes are not capable of generating the current state of things.

However, there is no general form of proof that is capable of showing there could never be, or never was, some form of algorithmic process that might account for why the universe is the way it is.

Consequently, from a certain perspective, the notion of randomness could be understood to be an index of ignorance. We say a dynamic is random precisely to the extent that we don't understand the nature of such a dynamic.

Chaos theory, complexity theory, and dissipative structures have sought – each in its own manner – to show that there are determinate forces and principles at work within various systems that, under the right sort of circumstances, become manifest when, previously, no such forces or principles were believed to be present in such a system. The related idea of “emergent properties” attempts to explicate the form of the relationship between different levels of a system's operational dynamic in which ‘higher order’ functioning naturally arises out of ‘lower order’ functioning under the right sort of conditions even though the former sort of phenomena (that is, higher order functioning) might not have been predictable given our previous understanding of the way the ‘lower order’ nature of such a system manifested itself.

Chaos, complexity, and dissipative structures have been used by some to argue that random systems are capable of generating determinate structures that are non-computable and, therefore, unpredictable on the basis of our understanding of how such systems normally operate. All of these concepts are Black Swan events that proceed to give rise to a variety of confabulated explanations (i.e., chaos theory, complexity theory, far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics, and emergent properties) concerning a class of phenomena – namely, Black Swan events.

Like the idea of randomness, the ideas of chaos theory, complexity theory, dissipative structures, and emergent properties are a reflection of our ignorance. We don't know why ontology is the way it is, so we invent “explanations” that appear to have explanatory power but which, ultimately, show that what we previously believed we understood is not necessarily so even as such new ideas do not necessarily really explain why things are the way they are.

There is an heuristic value inherent in the foregoing sorts of ideas that helps lead to the realization of certain kinds of truths and practical utility (i.e., pursuing such ideas has led to the development of ways and methods – often mathematical in nature -- that are capable of being used to solve certain kinds of work-a-day world problems.) However, as an ultimate account of why things are the way they are, they all fail in one way or another even as they have a significant impact on human thinking. As a result, they reveal themselves to be true Black Swan events.

On page 59 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris seeks to “simplify matters enormously.” To accomplish this, he outlines a three-part progression concerning the evolution of cooperation.

First, “genetic changes in the brain give rise to social emotions, moral intuitions, and language.” Secondly, such genetic changes “allowed for increasingly complex cooperative behavior” – such as: “the keeping of promises.” Finally, such increasingly complex cooperative behavior “became the basis for cultural norms, laws and social institutions whose purpose has been to render this growing system of cooperation durable in the face of countervailing forces.”

How, specifically, did “genetic changes in the brain give rise to social emotions” and the like? How, specifically, did such genetic changes allow “for increasingly complex behavior”? How, specifically, did “such increasingly complex cooperative behavior “become the basis for cultural norms, laws and social institutions”?

What is the nature of the countervailing forces against which such cooperative behavior is seeking to endure? Must one necessarily suppose that all forms of cooperative behavior are necessarily constructive and directed toward enhancing the nature of well-being?

Commenting, first, on the latter questions, criminal enterprises involve cooperative behavior. Monopolies and corporations that exploit people involve cooperative behavior. Corrupt, oppressive governments and institutions have a use for cooperative behavior. Militaries that kill innocent civilians by the millions (and there are studies which indicate that the vast majority of people who are killed in almost all military conflicts are civilians and not soldiers) involve cooperative behavior.

Isn't it possible that the "countervailing forces" to which Dr. Harris alludes are merely a matter of people seeking to rid themselves of the pathologies inherent in certain forms of "cooperative behavior"? Indeed, Dr. Harris spends a fair amount of time in *The Moral Landscape* (see footnote 14, pages 199-201) condemning the sort of "cooperative behavior" which sought to perpetuate the practice of sexual abuse that has been rampant in certain religious institutions, so, one cannot automatically suppose that "countervailing forces" are necessarily immoral, nor can one automatically suppose that "cooperative behavior" necessarily gives expression to moral behavior that deserves to remain durable.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, Dr. Harris has equally substantial problems embedded in his 'enormous simplification' of issues concerning his progressive, three-part, evolutionary history of cooperative behavior. More specifically, at no point does Dr. Harris explain how a series of genetic changes in the brain gave rise to such capacities as social emotion, moral intuitions, and language.

One is to assume -- again and again and again -- that, somehow, a set of random events led to the appearance of such capacities. The idea of a set of random events generating such capacities is not an explanation, but, rather, it is the avoidance of such an explanation even as it purports to "explain" what transpired.

In effect, random events 'cooperated' to generate order. Is this sort of position really all that different from creationist accounts that speak about how 'form' arose out of the formless? Does dressing up the unknown in the language of science, thereby in itself, automatically make the unknown become more understandable?

Similarly, what really is being explained when one argues that the foregoing sorts of genetic change "allowed for increasingly complex cooperative behavior"? 'Allowed' how, and in what way, and why, and with what justification? Were such increasingly complex forms of cooperative behavior necessarily directed toward enhanced well-being, and how does one sort out those forms of cooperative behavior that are constructive from those forms of cooperative behavior which are destructive in light of the fact that the presence of distortion and error in historical accounts of such "cooperative behavior" are often

the result of another kind of problematic “cooperative behavior” in the writing of history?

Furthermore, is one any further ahead when one says that the sort of complex cooperative behaviors that were “allowed for” by some unknown set of genetic changes in the brain “became the basis for cultural norms, laws and social institutions”? Unless one can specify the character of the “cultural norms, laws, and social institutions,” one really is no position to know whether the sorts of complex cooperative behaviors that are “allowed for” by an unknown set of genetic changes are the sorts of things that ought to be durable or whether they are the sorts of things against which one hopes that some form of countervailing force will rise up and do away with such norms, laws, and institutions.

Dr. Harris proceeds to explore the case of the Dobu islanders who were caught up in a system of malignant sorcery in which almost every facet of life was a function of either casting or warding off ‘magical’ spells. There is a dimension of cooperative behavior entailed by the Dobu system of sorcery since the methodology for learning how to cast such spells usually was passed down via a maternal uncle.

As well, such spells had their own commodities market. This means spells were bought and sold through a process of cooperation that linked buyers and sellers.

One further facet of the Dobu system of sorcery that is noted by Dr. Harris concerns the manner in which the Dobu islanders believed that the power of any given spell increased in direct proportion to the degree of intimacy existing between two individuals. Dr. Harris believes that this feature of the Dobu system of sorcery eliminated all possibility for giving rise to either love or friendship.

While it might be the belief of the Dobu islanders that the potency of a spell is a function of the degree of intimacy existing between any two individuals, this, in and of itself, wouldn’t necessarily eliminate all possibility for love and/or friendship. All forms of love or friendship create a certain degree of vulnerability in us such that the stronger the relationship of love and friendship, the more deeply do we experience any sort of betrayal and, therefore, constitutes a risk. Nevertheless, the possibility of such betrayal does not prevent us from developing intimate relationships with people.

Having the power to hurt someone does not necessarily mean that one will exercise such power. Believing that someone will not exercise such power is rooted in an intimacy that nurtures the development of a trust and faith concerning the circumstances under which that sort of power is likely to be exercised.

As is evidenced by the epidemic of domestic violence in many societies – including the United States – there are all too many instances in which the ones we love, and who claim to love us, could turn on us at any time. Most of us have witnessed, to one degree or another, such abusive relationships, and, yet, such empirical data does not prevent us from seeking out intimacy with other people.

Why should things be any different for the Dobu islanders? Yet, Dr. Harris is of the opinion that the Dobu islanders could not possibly love their friends and families as much as we love our families and friends because the potency of a spell is a function of intimacy.

Dr. Harris believes the appropriate picture of the Dobu islanders that we should have is: ...”of a society completely in thrall to antisocial tendencies.” I’m not so sure this is correct – although, to be frank, I only have Dr. Harris’ brief description (along with a quote from Ruth Benedict) to work with.

Real (as opposed to feigned) intimacy could not possibly arise unless there were a series of experiences that engendered the formation of a certain amount of faith and trust in another human being. Consequently, the existence of a principle of sorcery that indicates there is a strong relationship between the potency of a spell and intimacy serves as something of a prima facie case that people might be likely to seek out intimacy but that there will be acknowledged risks associated with such intimacy.

Conceivably, an individual might start out seeking intimacy with someone in order to increase the potency of any spell that the individual might cast in relation to such a targeted person. Nevertheless, in time, a form of real intimacy might arise in which the person who started out with the intention to enhance the potency of a spell might never wish to exercise such a spell.

Furthermore, I am a little unclear how Dobu society could be “completely in thrall to antisocial tendencies” when people are

prepared to trust maternal uncles sufficiently to suppose that what is being passed on to them through such an uncle is 'authentic sorcery.' Moreover, I am not certain how such a society could be completely ruled by antisocial tendencies if the members of that society are prepared to exchange money or other commodities in order to gain access to spells that are 'advertised' as being authentic ... although I suppose that buyer's remorse could set in after the purchase of any given spell, or, perhaps, the Dobu equivalent to the FDA might step-in in order to try to regulate the trafficking of over-the-counter counterfeit spells.

On page 61 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states that in Dobu society: "if a man fell seriously ill or died, his misfortune was immediately blamed on his wife, and vice versa." (page 61) What Dr. Harris doesn't discuss is what happens if a man doesn't fall seriously ill or die. What Dr. Harris doesn't discuss is why people bothered to get married at all. What Dr. Harris doesn't discuss is why it wouldn't be just as likely for one to blame other members of the family with whom the ill or deceased husband might have been just as intimate if not more so, than was the case in relation to a wife... I mean, what about the maternal uncle - he seems like a strong suspect if you ask me. Moreover, maybe there is a folk song in Dobu society that has a warning refrain similar to the one from the old calypso-like song: 'Never make a pretty woman your wife,' except the refrain would be: 'Never make an intimate woman your wife.'

Dr. Harris claims: "Once we more fully understand the neurophysiology of states like love, compassion, and trust, it will be possible to spell out the differences between ourselves and people like the Dobu in greater detail." (pages 61-62) Aside from my previously noted caveats about whether advances in neurophysiology and neurobiology actually will bring us any closer to understanding such phenomena as 'love, compassion and trust', the fact of the matter is, I'm not convinced there are all that many differences between the Dobu Islanders and so-called moral, civilized human beings.

Although we might use an array of rationalizations other than sorcery (e.g., racism, ethnic cleansing, misogyny, religious antipathies, national interests, patriotism, philosophical differences, political hostilities, rivalries of one kind or another, theft and exploitation

disguised as economics, and so on) for why we believe it is 'reasonable' to point fingers at everyone but ourselves, nonetheless, in a very Dobu-like manner, we do manage to try to blame this person or that person, or this group and that group, or this idea and that idea, or this policy or that policy, or this religion or that religion for our problems. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us regularly engage in episodes of blaming spouses, children, relatives, neighbors, bosses, politicians, religion, science, or God for our difficulties. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us indulge in suspicions concerning the intentions of others. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us engage in commerce despite, perhaps, not quite trusting the 'guy' with whom we are doing business. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us betray spouses, friendships, and family. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us get married to people despite being aware of the risks that are inherent in marriage and intimacy. Like the Dobu islanders, many of us are prepared to render ourselves vulnerable to the potential potency of the 'spell' that other human beings might cast over us through friendship and love.

Do we understand qualities such as 'love, compassion, and trust' better than do the Dobu islanders? I don't know since the data set concerning the Dobu islanders is too limited, but I wonder about the tenability of Dr. Harris' claims of alleged differences between 'them' and 'us' with respect to issues of well-being.

To be sure, the Dobu islanders appear to have some real problems. On the other hand, so do we, and I'm not sure how one goes about measuring things in a way that necessarily would indicate how our notions of seeking well-being are all that different or better than the way in which Dobu islanders seek their version of well-being.

If the Dobu islanders have never participated in genocide, then they already are way ahead of us modern types as far as matters of well-being are concerned. One might also want to consider issues such as the comparative rates for suicide, sexual abuse, substance abuse, homelessness, hunger, divorce, domestic violence, mental illness, traffic fatalities, theft, pollution, rape, corruption, workplace safety, and murder with respect to the issue of well-being in relation to the Dobu islanders and us modern types.

Dr. Harris seems to think that by outlining examples like the Dobu islanders, he is creating clear examples of the sort of 'Bad Life' that can be contrasted with his notion of the 'Good' Life. However, I'm not sure he has done anything more than to frame data in a way that is compatible with the sort of philosophical and scientific destinations toward which he is seeking to induce his readers to travel.

Am I trying to say that everything is relative and that the Dobu islander way of life is just as good as is our, modern, civilized way of life? No!

Rather, what I am saying is that, perhaps, neither the Dobu islander way of life nor Dr. Harris' approach to things necessarily provides any real insight into the nature of well-being. Dr. Harris has his ways of understanding and doing things, and the Dobu islanders have their ways of understanding and doing things, but what does any of this tell about us about -- let alone prove -- what the actual character of well-being is? Moreover, I am not all that confident that advances in neurophysiology and neurobiology will get us any closer to understanding what the nature of well-being might be in terms of the capacity of such an understanding to reflect the actual truth concerning the nature of the universe -- which is the only way that one can speak meaningfully about what constitutes well-being and what, if anything, ought to be sought in the way of well-being.

'Sorcery' is the Black Swan event that serves to generate explanations among the Dobu islanders concerning why things are the way they are, and why they ought to be that way. 'Evolution' and neurobiology encompass one of the possible sets of Black Swan events used in the modern, scientific world that serve to generate explanations among people like Dr. Harris concerning why they believe that things are the way they are or why things ought to be one way rather than another.

However, although there might be any number of more factually correct things to cite with respect to the modern, scientific way of understanding things, I'm not sure, after all is said and done, that people such as Dr. Harris are any closer to the truth of things concerning the nature of well-being than are the Dobu islanders. If what he believes turns out to be incorrect with respect to neurobiology being the royal road to understanding the truth

concerning the nature of consciousness, the events of the world, well-being, the ultimate nature of reality, and how all of these factors are tied to together by “facts” of a certain kind, then, aside from bragging rights, what does getting more peripheral facts right really do for one as far as the issue of well-being is concerned?

Chapter Twenty

In philosophical terms, Dr. Harris describes his position as a combination of “moral realism” and “consequentialism.” He claims to be a moral realist because he believes there can be true and false facts concerning moral issues, and he is a consequentialist since he maintains that the “rightness of an act depends on how it impacts the well-being of conscious beings.” (page 62)

The term: “moral realism”, might not correctly reflect Dr. Harris’ perspective. A moral realist is someone who believes that the nature of moral truths is independent of human conventions and reflects something inherent in the structural character of existence or the universe.

Plato was a moral realist. He believed in the existence of ‘Forms’ – including justice -- that existed independently of human conventions. Through a process of rigorous questioning and critical reflection, one had to struggle one’s way toward discovering the character of the ‘Forms’ that had been present all along and that, ultimately, are the reason why the world is the way it is – including those aspects of the world that involved issues of morality or ethics.

According to Plato, unless one is successful in using rational thought to apprehend the nature of the ‘Forms’, then one forever will be condemned to deal with existence through shadowy filters. The ‘Allegory of the Cave’ was Plato’s way of trying to induce people to look beyond the perceptions of everyday experience and inquire about the nature of that which made possible the shadows that populated our normal engagement of existence.

Science gives expression to a set of human conventions that outlines a methodology for engaging experience and generating verifiable understandings concerning the nature of such experience. As such, science is directed toward differentiating between true and false statements concerning the character of experience.

The capacity to generate differentially true and false statements concerning the nature of experience is not necessarily the same thing as being able to say that, for example, a given moral perspective reflects the way of the universe. What Dr. Harris is offering is a form of “moral objectivism” and not “moral realism” because he believes it is

possible to produce objectively true and false statements about moral issues even though such statements do not necessarily reveal anything about whether, or not, the nature of the universe entails one set of moral principles rather than some other set of such principles.

Even if one were to agree with Dr. Harris that issues of well-being were morally important considerations, this concession does not force one to accept the idea that, therefore, considerations of well-being (even assuming one could agree on a definition) give expression to the moral nature of the universe. In other words, it is possible that the nature of the universe is such that while matters of well-being might have a role to play in moral considerations, nevertheless, the ultimate nature of the universe might not be reducible to issues of well-being.

For example, let us, for the sake of argument, suppose that the ultimate nature of the universe were rooted in an essential imperative to discover the nature of truth, purpose, meaning, identity, and potential – no matter what the costs might be and irrespective of whether, or not, such discoveries were conducive to well-being. Obviously, given such a scenario, then despite possessing a methodology for being able to differentiate between true and false statements with respect to considerations involving well-being (however it might be defined), such a science will not necessarily help one to determine the ultimate nature of the universe or to act in accordance with such an understanding.

Could science be reconfigured to seek out to differentiate between true and false statements concerning the ultimate nature of the universe? Possibly, but there is no guarantee that any given set of true and false statements produced by such a science will reveal the ultimate nature of the universe.

One could have an objective method for differentiating between true and false statements – that is, a method that is self-correcting with respect to biases that distort one's mode of exploring experience. Nonetheless, this does not mean that any of the differential truths one establishes through such a method will necessarily capture the moral nature, if any, of the universe, nor does possessing such a method necessarily ensure that one will ever come to apprehend the truth about what the universe might demand in the way of realizing – in

terms of our on-going hypothetical -- truth, purpose, identity, potential, and the like.

In giving expression to his consequentialist starting point, Dr. Harris argues: "Without potential consequences at the level of experience – happiness, suffering, joy, despair, etc. – all talk of value is empty." (page 62) Nevertheless, according to the hypothetical construct being considered, it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that at the heart of existence are issues of truth, purpose, identity, and potential that might have priority over considerations of well-being.

Therefore – and, in contrast to Dr. Harris' foregoing claim -- such talk would not necessarily be an empty exercise despite the absence of a preoccupation with matters of: "happiness, suffering, joy, despair, etc." Rather, the emotional and psychological consequences at the level of experience could be just the price of admission for participating in the 'Big Show' of being.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, Dr. Harris' consequentialist starting point is entirely arbitrary. In other words, there is no set of "facts" that requires one to adopt that sort of starting point rather than, say, a starting point that gave emphasis to issues such as purpose, meaning, identity, and potential that might not only be explored independently of the notion of well-being but, as well, a starting point that might begin with the understanding that such a journey might come with a heavy cost to considerations concerning one's well-being.

Furthermore, those who, along with Dr. Harris, adopt a consequentialist starting point do so as a convention and not because the nature of reality demands it. Such individuals could, if they wish, develop and apply a method that is geared toward generating differential statements of truth and falsehood with respect to the issue of well-being, but none of this necessarily reflects anything of an essential nature concerning the structural character of the universe or the relationship of human beings to the ultimate reality of the universe.

Consequently, I believe it makes more sense to refer to Dr. Harris as a moral objectivist rather than a moral realist. Moreover, the consequentialist aspect of his moral objectivism is, as noted above, an

arbitrary starting point as far as methodological considerations are concerned.

More specifically, even if one were to agree with Dr. Harris and accept his sense of the idea of morality (and by this term Dr. Harris only means there are true and false facts that can be determined in conjunction with moral issues), this would not settle matters. Furthermore, even if one were to agree with Dr. Harris that considerations of well-being were, in some sense, at the heart of moral issues, one still would face a variety of problems.

For instance, no matter how many 'facts' one has, until one is able to grasp the ultimate character of well-being, one cannot say that any one approach to well-being is better or worse than some other approach to well-being because the standard for correctness is what the ultimate nature of well-being is according to the universe, and such a standard cannot be a function of some methodology that might be capable of generating differential statements of truth and falsehood about this or that aspect of reality but that might not necessarily be capable of assisting one to come to a juncture wherein one might be able to realize the full truth concerning the ultimate nature of well-being.

From the perspective of a certain set of factual statements, one might be inclined to believe that one condition of well-being is better than some other condition of well-being. However, such a comparison is relative to the existing facts and not to any universal standard of well-being. Therefore, such relativity tends to undermine, if not vitiate, the tenability of anything one wishes to recommend, suggest, or impose in the way of a program of well-being.

In a variety of places in *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris asserts that the idea of well-being is fluid and, as a result, open to change in the light of new facts. Such fluidity and openness are commendable but are relatively useless when it comes to deciding which conditions should be pursued as far as the sort of well-being is concerned that is – and, for the sake of argument we are assuming this to be so -- inherent in the nature of the universe.

Facts might assist one to differentiate between truth and falsehood in any given set of circumstances. Nevertheless, such facts do not necessarily enable one to understand how those facts relate to

the ultimate character of the universe, and in the absence of such an understanding, recommendations concerning programs of well-being are inherently risky.

To illustrate what is being said in the previous paragraphs, one might return to the issue of chlorpromazine or Thorazine that was briefly discussed earlier in this essay. When chlorpromazine was first introduced into the mental health community, the drug undoubtedly was considered by many to be something that possessed the potential to enhance the well-being of individuals suffering from schizophrenia. In time, this newly established neuroleptic Garden of Eden was found to have a serpent coiled within it, ready to strike in unpredictable ways.

It might be a fact that chlorpromazine has a certain potential for enhancing well-being. However, it also became a fact that chlorpromazine has a considerable potential for a downside with respect to issues of well-being.

Is a person's well-being enhanced by the use of chlorpromazine, or is that well-being undermined or threatened by chlorpromazine? In answering this question, one cannot restrict one's reflections on the matter to whether, or not, a person develops tardive dyskinesia, but, as well, one must consider the sort of trade-offs with which patients often are faced – namely, on the one hand, there is the possibility when taking a neuroleptic that certain kinds of symptoms (e.g., hallucinations and delusional thinking) might disappear, but, on the other hand, there also might be various side effects of the drug beyond tardive dyskinesia that have the potential for adversely affecting a person's ability to think, create, and/or feel human.

There is a reason why individuals who are on neuroleptics often go off their meds. Despite the improvements with respect to the issue of problematic symptoms that might accompany usage of a certain drug, there also might be other factors associated with such drug usage that are unpleasant, uncomfortable, painful, and/or that rob a person of certain dimensions of her or his humanity.

There are contraindications associated with virtually every drug known to human beings. How one weighs such contraindications against the possible benefits of a drug might involve the consideration of a variety of facts generated by science, but the evaluation of such

facts is not, itself, a scientific fact but is, rather, a judgment. Science might help inform such a judgment, but the judgment itself is not necessarily an expression of science but tends to be extra-scientific since the findings of science do not necessarily justify such a judgment as much as those findings merely bring one to a point where one must make a leap of faith concerning what one believes might be in the best interests of another human being.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, one might also think about the possibility that drugging individuals -- rather than treating them through non-drug modes of intervention -- might be a solution that does not necessarily serve the best interests of an individual. Rather, such drugging activity might be pursued because it best serves the interests of those who don't want have to put up with the behaviors and problems of certain groups of people (e.g., school systems inducing children to take Ritalin or Adderall) or best serves the interests of those who wish to control the behavior of certain 'undesirables' (and what happened to some of the inmates in certain Russian psychiatric facilities in the 1970s and 1980s is but one example of what I have in mind here) or best serves the interests of those who find it is more profitable or cost-effective to drug people and release them into the community than to treat them in other more resource-intensive ways.

One might wish to throw into the mix the issue of "spontaneous remission" and the 'fact' that some people will recover from debilitating disorders even if they receive no treatment. Alternatively, one might want to keep in mind that it is not always easy to disentangle issues involving the 'placebo effect' and the extent to which the active ingredients in a drug can be shown to be responsible for certain effects ... something that carries implications not only for trying to establish the actual efficacy of a given form of drug regimen but, as well, for tallying the costs associated with the use of drugs that, ultimately, really might not be all that effective.

Is the impact of mental disorders on society a legitimate issue about which to think? Yes, it is.

Are considerations of cost-effectiveness legitimate issues upon which to ponder? Yes, they are.

Are questions concerning the array of different possible ways for distributing finite resources important ones to consider? Yes, they are.

Nevertheless, such issues and questions are not necessarily reducible to matters of science, even as science frequently has things of value to introduce into the discussion. In other words, considerations of well-being tend to be very contentious in nature.

Therefore, despite the fact that at one point in time a given person or group of people might come to a decision concerning what is believed to enhance well-being, there is no guarantee that future decisions concerning such matters will necessarily be a progressive improvement over earlier decisions. Instead, such future decisions might just give expression to a different manner (and not necessarily a "better" way) of making judgments about such matters.

The facts generated through science might change. However, judgments concerning those facts often arise from the interstitial spaces between the facts where various hermeneutical considerations become just as important, if not more so, than the existence of any given set of facts that are -- given the incremental way in which science operates -- likely to be incomplete.

Consequently, touting the fluidness and openness of the relationship between science and well-being is sort of like recommending that someone (e.g., society) should start taking a certain drug without critically investigating the contraindications that might be associated with that sort of recommendation. All such suggestions need to be filtered through a cautionary principle that engages those pronouncements concerning well-being with an appropriately skeptical and critical process of evaluation that is not necessarily tied to the biases, assumptions, and possible limitations of physical sciences with respect to issues of well-being as well as many other considerations.

Furthermore, since we do not know the ultimate nature of the universe, the problem before us is much more complicated than Dr. Harris' approach to issues of well-being would seem to suggest. In line with the discussion of the last several pages, not only are all short-term judgments concerning the nature of well-being subject to contentious, extra-scientific considerations, but, as well, in the light of our ignorance about the ultimate nature of the truth concerning the

universe, no claim concerning the nature of well-being can ever be anything more than a claim steeped in ignorance no matter how many facts might be associated with such a claim.

Relative to a given set of scientific facts, well-being might assume a certain kind of appearance. Relative to another set of such facts, well-being might assume a different manner of appearance,

However, in neither case will one necessarily know or understand what the relationship is, if any, between such notions of well-being and the ultimate nature of the universe. Therefore, even though ideas of well-being might be surrounded by, and rooted in, scientific facts of one kind or another, one can't be certain -- or even necessarily be plausibly confident -- that such understandings are actually conducive to the well-being of human beings when measured against the backdrop of our ignorance concerning the ultimate nature of reality.

One cannot always make a plausible, tenable argument that because 'x' number of facts are in our possession, we are obligated to act according to our best judgments concerning such facts. Sometimes, not acting in the face of incomplete evidence is better than acting prematurely in such a context of epistemological incompleteness, and all too frequently those individuals who are pressuring people to make such premature decisions are individuals who have a vested interest in pushing activity of some kind rather than exercising a certain amount of caution with respect to these sorts of decisions.

Chapter Twenty-one

According to Dr. Harris: “Even within religion, therefore, consequences and conscious states remain the foundation of all values.” (page 62) He attempts to prove the foregoing claim by pointing out that: “If one fully accepts the metaphysical presuppositions of traditional Islam, martyrdom must be viewed as the ultimate attempt at career advancement.” Furthermore, Dr. Harris claims: “The martyr is also the greatest of altruists: for not only does he secure a place for himself in Paradise, he wins admittance for seventy of his closest relatives, as well.” (page 63) Finally, Dr. Harris asserts that Muslims have been told what the consequences of such acts are in both the Qur’an and hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him).

Every facet of Dr. Harris’ foregoing description concerning the nature of Islam is problematic – if not just plain wrong. I have explored some of these problems in my short book: *Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim’s Critical Response*, and I don’t wish to repeat myself here, but there are a few things that might -- and, perhaps, should -- be said.

First, one needs to draw a distinction between what Muslims believe and what Islam actually is. The two don’t always coincide.

While it might be true that some – maybe even many – Muslims have adopted a consequentialist approach with respect to their understanding of Islam, this does not necessarily mean that, in ultimate terms, Islam merely gives expression to one, or another, form of consequentialism. The manner in which a consequentialist approach to spirituality prevents one from developing a deeper and richer understanding of Islam is an issue to which the Sufis – who pursue the esoteric, mystical dimension of Islam – have been trying to direct the attention of Muslims for more than 1,400 years.

If the reason why one sacrifices one’s life is to attain Paradise, then the alleged act of martyrdom (and martyrdom is about sacrificing one’s own life and not a matter of killing other people) is not really an act of martyrdom because the intentional waters have been muddied with considerations that are predicated on the desire to gain a reward

for oneself. True acts of martyrdom can only be done for the sake of God without any attendant desires concerning self-benefit.

Contrary to what Dr. Harris maintains, one doesn't have to accept "the metaphysical presuppositions" of Islam in order to arrive at the foregoing position. One just has to have some degree of appreciation for the idea that the manner in which some Muslims think about Islam is not necessarily what Islam actually teaches, and one just needs to keep in mind that just as is true in relation to Dr. Harris, many Muslims are ignorant about the actual nature of Islam.

Dr. Harris waxes eloquently about the importance of "facts," but he is very selective in the facts he chooses to consider when talking about Islam – as is also true with respect to the way he explores other religious traditions. More often than not, Dr. Harris focuses in on the "facts" about this or that horrific deed of this or that Muslim or emphasizes the "facts" about this or that Muslim's belief concerning the nature of Islam without engaging in any critically rigorous or methodical exploration of whether what such Muslims do or believe is actually consonant with the teachings of Islam.

Even if one wishes to treat Islam as nothing more than a philosophical system, there are documents (e.g., the Qur'an) that can be consulted to determine whether, or not, some given perspective is capable of being reconciled with such documents. If one wishes, one can – as Dr. Harris does – reject the Qur'an as being anything more than a human construction, but this doesn't mean that one is free to read anything one likes into such a construction.

Dr. Harris reads a few articles, watches a few programs, talks to some people, reads a book or two concerning Islam, or, takes a quick look at the Qur'an and hadith (although he usually takes things completely out of context when he does this), and, suddenly, he is an expert whose pronouncements about Islam are "factual." I have been studying Islam for nearly 40 years in a fairly intense way, and I am still just scratching the surface of Islam's nature, and, yet, Dr. Harris wants everyone to believe that his understanding of things Islamic is vastly superior to that of anyone else – even that of those who have spent a lot more quality time with Islam than has Dr. Harris.

If someone were to try to claim that he or she were qualified as an expert in neurobiology simply because such a person had read a few

books, or watched a few DVDs, or talked to a few neurobiologists, I feel fairly confident that Dr. Harris would be amused by, if not highly critical of, such a claim of expertise. Yet, when Dr. Harris does the same sort of thing with respect to Islam, then somehow the same rules don't apply, and he seems to believe – without tongue firmly planted in his cheek – that his manner of explicating Islam should be considered as being neither amusing -- if not ludicrous -- nor critically suspect.

In *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris talks about the importance of having respect for the facts and being open to argument. Unfortunately, Dr. Harris frequently exhibits: neither a respect for facts -- nor an openness to arguments -- that run contrary to his numerous opinions about so many different things – especially when it comes to religion, in general, or Islam, in particular.

Even Dr. Harris' understanding of 'altruism' is problematic – and this is for reasons that are quite independent from the manner in which he seeks to relate the idea of altruism to Islam. More specifically, any act or behavior that is done, even in part, for purposes of acquiring a personal benefit or reward is not an altruistic act.

Just as an alleged act of martyrdom that is performed in order to gain Paradise is not really a true act of martyrdom, so, too, an alleged act of altruism that is done for the sake of gaining a benefit for oneself is not really an act of altruism even though others might benefit from such an act. To qualify as an act of martyrdom, one's intention must be solely for the sake of God, and to qualify as an act of altruism, one's intention must be directed solely toward the benefit to others. In fact, not only should such acts be done entirely for the sake of others in order to qualify as being altruistic, but, as well, there often needs to be an element present in such an act that involves some form of sacrifice which entails a high likelihood of death, injury, or substantial loss.

Leaving aside the foregoing sorts of considerations concerning the nature of altruism, even if one were to accept as true Dr. Harris' pronouncement that the Qur'an and hadith both tell Muslims what consequences will follow from an act of martyrdom – and there is much that might be said as to why such a pronouncement is not necessarily factually correct – taking these sorts of consequences into account cannot play any role in the intention underlying an act of martyrdom, and, therefore, such acts are inherently non-

consequentialist. Merely stating the possible consequences for an act is not necessarily the reason why a person might, or should, perform such an act – and, indeed, in the case of martyrdom, such potential consequences must not be part of one’s intention.

Is such a pure act ever possible? The Sufi mystics spend their lives engaged in a process of purification in an attempt to root out all motivations involving either rewards (e.g., Paradise or spiritual states) or negative possibilities (e.g., Hell or suffering), and, thereby, purify intentions so that not only will every act be done just for the sake of God but, as well, so that such acts will resonate and give expression to the truth of things.

Dr. Harris goes on to argue: “The fact that would-be martyrs are almost surely wrong about the consequences of their behavior is precisely what renders it such an astounding and immoral misuse of human life.” (page 63) Putting aside, for the moment, the manner in which Dr. Harris tends to conflate and confuse martyrdom with suicide bombing (the two have nothing to do with one another) – and, unfortunately, this sort of conflation and confusion is also true of all too many Muslims – and putting aside, for the moment, the fact that Dr. Harris offers absolutely no evidence or proof to support the foregoing assertion, and even assuming, for the sake of argument, that Islam is a completely false system of thought (which is Dr. Harris’ position), Dr. Harris fails to understand the concept – namely, martyrdom -- on which he is passing judgment.

As noted earlier, if one’s intention is a function of the consequences of an act, then such an act, by definition, does not qualify as an act of martyrdom. Consequently, Dr. Harris’ entire argument is based on a misunderstanding concerning the nature of martyrdom, and, therefore, his claim that even religion is necessarily consequentialist in character is incorrect.

Chapter Twenty-two

While criticizing Joshua Greene, a neuroscientist with philosophical inclinations, Dr. Harris takes exception with Dr. Greene's perspective that people should treat all claims of moral realism with skepticism. Dr. Greene seeks to justify such skepticism concerning moral realism by asking a question: How would anyone prove that one's position concerning moral realism is correct?

The foregoing question is a good one. However, Dr. Harris dismisses it by arguing: "Moral view A is truer than moral view B, if A entails a more accurate understanding of the connection between human thoughts/intentions/behavior and human well-being. Does forcing women and girls to wear burqas make a net positive contribution to human being?" (page 65)

Now, I agree with Dr. Harris when he replies to his own question and rejects the idea that: "forcing women and girls to wear burqas" makes " a net positive contribution to human beings". Nonetheless, neither the general form of Dr. Harris' argument nor the particular example he chooses to illustrate that general principle, actually addresses the question being asked by Dr. Greene.

More specifically, Dr. Harris hasn't shown that when considered against the actual nature of the universe, the position he is espousing is true. Rather, Dr. Harris is engaged in a relativistic sort of argument in which, if one arbitrarily considers well-being to be a function of people being happier, more compassionate, and more contented – as measured in some undefined way -- then one will be able to prove, in some unspecified way, that forcing girls and women to wear a burqa will lead to a lesser state of well-being than if one does not force girls and women to wear a burqa. However, since such a study has not yet been conducted, Dr. Harris' position is little more than an unproven hypothesis.

Dr. Harris' intuition concerning things might be correct, but intuition is not proof, and Dr. Greene is asking for proof. Moreover, not only is Dr. Greene asking for proof, but, as well, he is asking for a form of proof which demonstrates that the principle of morality at issue correctly reflects the nature of the universe.

Fundamentalist Muslims like the Taliban also have moral intuitions concerning the wearing of burqas. Dr. Harris' foregoing argument doesn't demonstrate that the Taliban intuitions on this issue are incorrect, but, instead, his argument shows that when considered from a perspective concerning the sort of well-being that Dr. Harris favors, he believes he can prove that the forced wearing of burqas is associated with a lesser state of well-being than is a situation in which girls and women are not forced to wear such clothing.

Irrespective of whether, or not, Dr. Harris actually could prove what he claims to be able to prove, this doesn't necessarily have anything to say about the nature of the universe and what, if anything such a nature requires in the way of moral behavior involving burqas. Furthermore, the challenge of showing that it was 'the forced wearing of burqas and only this' which was the reason why people might be shown to be: 'happier, more compassionate, and more contented,' and the challenge of demonstrating that what one meant by 'happier, more compassionate, and more contented' is what everyone should mean by these terms, and the challenge of demonstrating that how one went about measuring such concepts was valid, and the challenge of explaining why not everyone in the study necessarily exhibited greater happiness, compassion, and contentedness, all of these challenges constitute huge methodological problems for the sort of study that Dr. Harris is proposing.

What happens if Dr. Harris' method for trying to prove his moral intuitions concerning the matter of burqas involved invading Afghanistan and, in the process of doing this, killed tens of thousands of people, displaced hundreds of thousands of other people, destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, created conditions that were conducive to the growing and exporting of heroin, saddled the country with corrupt politicians, ensured that the country would suffer from the presence of depleted uranium from many of the munitions used to conduct such a war, destabilized the geo-political region, cost hundreds of Americans their lives, injured countless thousands of other Americans, and imposed hundreds of billions of dollars in debt onto Americans – both present and future generations? What would be the "net contribution to human beings" for having established a set of conditions through which he might be able to test his hypothesis?

Let us assume that at some point in the aforementioned war every Taliban-oriented individual were killed or imprisoned. Let us assume that a point of political stability were achieved following the war in which girls and women were no longer forced to wear the burqa. Would it necessarily be the case that given the steep price – past, present, and future – which has to be paid for such a result, the vast majority of the people would be ‘happier, more compassionate, and more contented’ as a result of all this?

Even if one could sort out all of the foregoing issues through some sort of sophisticated form of statistical analysis – a project of dubious promise – Dr. Harris still would not be able to answer Dr. Greene’s question – namely, how does one prove that what one has done reflects the moral truth of the universe? Even if we were able to show that people living in a condition which involved no forced wearing of a burqa were happier, more compassionate, and more contented than were those living in a condition in which the wearing of a burqa were forced on girls and women, one would not have necessarily revealed anything about the moral character of the universe, and, therefore, one’s standard for evaluating the situation is entirely arbitrary and tied to one’s likes and dislikes concerning the idea of what constitutes well-being.

Dr. Harris contends that: “Moral view A is truer than moral view B, if A entails a more accurate understanding of the connections between human thoughts/intentions/behaviors and human well-being.” (page 65) Yet, we have no reliable, independent, plausibly justifiable way to establish the criteria for determining what constitutes an “accurate understanding” of things with respect to the alleged connection between human thoughts/intentions/behaviors and human well-being ... other than, that is, what Dr. Harris claims to be the case on the basis of the assumptions he makes about a great many things and on the basis of the biases he has about a great many things.

To say that the forced wearing of burqas is morally wrong doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with issues of well-being ... although such a connection might exist if one were able to show that a certain notion of well-being was inherent in the nature of the universe. Moreover, to say that the forced wearing of burqas is morally wrong doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with being able to prove what

the ultimate moral nature of the universe is – which, I think, would be a very difficult, if not impossible, undertaking ... although we are all free to adopt this or that belief concerning such matters. Rather, the forced wearing of burqas is morally wrong precisely because we are ignorant concerning the ultimate nature of the universe and precisely because whatever proofs we offer in this regard can be shown to be problematic in one way or another, and, therefore, we have no basis to justify forcing the matter one way or the other.

In epistemological matters, the cautionary principle should loom large. If one cannot prove to the satisfaction of a substantially large group (significantly more than a bare majority) of reasonably-minded and reasonably-hearted people that one's beliefs correctly reflect the ultimate nature of the universe, then one needs to proceed with considerable caution when it comes to forcing anyone to do anything, and one might say that violating such a principle entails an element of immorality or ethical impropriety.

This is a sense of immorality that is not a function of having a correct understanding concerning the nature of the universe. Rather, precisely the opposite is the case, since such a notion of immorality is rooted in our ignorance concerning the nature of the universe and involves a transgression against the most prudent way (at least in general terms) through which to proceed under such circumstances – namely, via the cautionary principle.

Will refraining from forcing girls and women to wear the burqa lead to a net increase in well-being? Perhaps yes and perhaps no, but irrespective of which of these might be the case, the immorality that is present in such a situation is a function of using force in a context of epistemological uncertainty, and under such conditions of unknowing the use of force cannot be justified, and, therefore, considerations of well-being are irrelevant.

Contrary to the claims of Dr. Harris, the “connections between human thoughts/intentions/behaviors and well-being” are largely steeped in ignorance. Under such conditions, perhaps the most moral thing one can do is to proceed with caution ... especially when it comes to the exercise of force within such conditions of epistemological unsettledness.

Chapter Twenty-three

On page 68 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris talks about some of the paradoxes that supposedly arise out of discussions involving ‘population ethics.’ He begins by pointing out that Patricia Churchland, a philosopher, notes how human beings have difficulty trying to compare the pain of five million headaches with the pain experienced by several people who have broken legs, or, more personally, comparing the interests of one’s own children relative to the needs of a hundred children who are brain-damaged but unrelated to one.

Dr. Harris proceeds to discuss some of the research of Paul Slovic and his associates. Their work appears to indicate that while it might seem to make rational sense for one’s concern about people’s welfare to be consistent as one moves from considerations concerning just one person to considerations concerning more than one person, nevertheless, experimental research seems to suggest that the concern exhibited by people for the welfare of others tends to go down once one moves beyond situations involving a single individual.

More specifically, Dr. Slovic and his colleagues discovered that when subjects had a chance to donate money to children in need, then both practically and emotionally, such subjects seemed to demonstrate a willingness to help single children in need rather than greater numbers of needy children. Apparently, as the number of needy children went up, then people’s empathy for the plight of such children and people’s willingness to contribute to help them went down.

To really get a feel for what any given piece of experimental research actually does, or does not, show, one has to look at the original research. Among other things, this means one has to critically examine: (1) the nature of the sample; (2) the character of the experimental problem that is given to subjects and how that problem is presented; (3) whether, or not, a different kind of problem might affect whatever outcome measures one is using; (4) the manner in which variables are measured; (5) the sort of quantitative methods that are used in a study to analyze its empirical data; (6) whether, or not, the laboratory findings will transfer, or carry over, to real life situations; and, (7) the assumptions in which such research is rooted.

For example, with respect to (7) – the issue of assumptions – one might ask the following sort of question with respect to the aforementioned research of Paul Slovic. Is it necessarily rational to argue that people should maintain the same level of practical and emotional commitment with respect to the matter of offering assistance as one moves from one person to greater numbers of people in need?

Dr. Slovic and Dr. Harris appear to believe that such an assumption is tenable. I'm not sure it is.

At different times in my life, I have traveled to India and Pakistan. The extent of poverty in those countries is incredible.

Let us, for the sake of simplifying the situation, put aside such 'facts' as: there are street scams in those two countries in which adults use children to induce people to give money, and such professional begging scams earn some adults considerable amounts of money (Think: *Slumdog Millionaire*). Let us assume that all those who appear to be poor are poor.

On a number of occasions, I found myself in situations in which despite my concern for the plight of all the poor children surrounding me, realistically and practically, I had finite resources. I could have given away every rupee I had, and the only difference it might have made is that tomorrow when those children gathered to beg for money, I would have been right there with them begging as well because I had given away all my money the previous day.

I might care about all the hungry people in the United States, and I might contribute supplies to food banks or soup kitchens in order to act on my concern, but there will come a time – often much more quickly than I might like – when the existing need will dwarf my capacity to help alleviate such need. Am I being rationally inconsistent under such circumstances when I claim to care about the plight of the hungry and, yet, there comes a point when I stop giving in order to avoid becoming, among other things, one of the hungry ones myself?

People who have jobs involving issues of mental health, poverty, homelessness, hunger, and the like are all familiar with the problem of 'burn out.' For a time, an individual gives a great deal of her or his: time, money, emotion, intellect, and commitment in order to try to

help solve certain kinds of problems and/or to try to help as many people as possible, but a point often comes when that person has nothing left in the tank to enable her or him to continue on with such work.

Are those individuals still concerned about such problems and do they still have empathy for the plight of the millions who are caught up in such problems? Yes, they are, and, yes, they do. However, from a practical point of view, human beings often are fairly limited with respect to the extent and ways in which such concern can be translated into behavioral acts of an appropriate kind.

Furthermore, the logistics of helping one person are considerably less daunting than are the logistics involved in helping more than one person. This is especially the case since the more people one is seeking to help, the more diverse the target community becomes, and, therefore, attendant contingencies tend to proliferate at an incredible rate.

Buying shoes for one individual is fairly straightforward. Buying shoes for a thousand different people of different ages, sexes, circumstances, and locations becomes much more difficult.

Even people who are sincere about their concerns for the problems of others might be susceptible to easily becoming overloaded with the problems that surround, and are entailed by, trying to help more than one person at a time. Not everyone is emotionally and temperamentally capable of undertaking such a challenge.

Consequently, if various people demonstrate a resistance to becoming involved in such projects, this is not necessarily because they don't care about certain kinds of issues or because they are being rationally inconsistent. Instead, such resistance might be because those people don't feel emotionally and intellectually able to deal with various logistical problems in an effective way or because their own circumstances might interfere with their ability to engage such issues in a competent fashion.

When medical professionals engage in triage, is this because they are being rationally inconsistent? Or, is triage merely an expression of an understanding about how the real world works and what is

necessary when one has finite resources – including time -- to deal with a given problem?

Are the subjects involved in the Slovic research demonstrating some sort of paradoxical behavior in the context of a problem in population ethics? I don't think so, and I don't find the Slovic research findings – in which people's willingness to help those in need will tend to diminish as more people exhibiting such need are added to the pot of crisis – all that strange or startling.

Helping a single individual from Palestine, Darfur, Somalia, Rwanda, the Balkans, Afghanistan, or Iraq is one thing. Helping more than one individual from any of those locations becomes a much more complex issue even if one didn't have to worry about the elements of politics, ethnicity, race, religion, or corruption that tend to permeate such human tragedy. Trying to resolve the underlying problems inherent in those situations entails even more difficulty.

Why wouldn't being able to devote all my attention and resources to one person who is in need be a lot easier to get my mind and heart around than being asked to devote all my care, concern, and resources to a multiplicity of people? How does one show one's concern equally for a thousand or a million people – especially if one doesn't know any of them?

Dr. Slovic uses the term “psychic numbing” to refer to the tendency of people to become more disengaged with respect to human suffering when numbers begin to climb. He also uses the term “genocide neglect” as a more complex version of “psychic numbing” when one is discussing the issue of human suffering on some massive scale.

However, one might question whether either of the aforementioned terms – namely, “psychic numbing” or “genocide neglect” -- necessarily captures the full reality of what might be transpiring in situations of extensive human suffering. In practical terms, what should one do in such circumstances?

For example, should one quit one's job, liquidate one's assets, and move to such regions in order to contribute everything one has, only to find that everything one has to offer will not be enough to solve the problem and only to find that no matter how much one gives, someone

will always be left out? Should one march on the capitol of the country in which one lives and demand that one's national government do the right thing, and what will one do if that government is not prepared to do the 'right' thing or if that government decides that it is not in the national interests to become involved?

We live in an era – and probably this has been true for a very long time -- in which many people feel completely powerless amidst the extensive powers of various governments, militaries, corporations, international bodies, institutions, banks, and the media. We live in an era – and this also probably has been true for a very long time -- in which people with power don't appear to believe they need to, or should have to, pay any attention to the concerns of the 'little' people. We live in an era – and probably this has been true for a very long time – in which people in power appear to be more interested in gaining control or retaining control over everyone else than they seem interested in actually solving problems.

While it might be the case that there is a failure of moral intuition amongst some individuals, I'm not sure that the experimental results being discussed by Dr. Harris demonstrate that the kind of moral failure is taking place that is being outlined in *The Moral Landscape*. I believe many people understand that those who exercise power help to orchestrate the conditions out of which genocide and many other human tragedies arise, but the problem is, what does one do with such a realization?

When an experimental study seeks to tap into the way people supposedly think and feel about certain issues, one must take care to ascertain that what one believes one is measuring is actually what is being measured. The Slovic study being discussed by Dr. Harris doesn't necessarily demonstrate – as Dr. Harris seems to believe is the case -- that there is some sort of failure of moral intuition occurring among people who showed a willingness to be more emotionally and practically involved with the problems of single individuals than with the same sorts of problems in relation to a larger number of individuals. Instead, such a study merely might be giving expression to the practical tendency in people to realize that trying to help many people is a much more complicated and problematic issue than situations in which one is trying to help just one or two individuals.

On page 70 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “What makes these experimental findings [i.e., the Slovic research – my parenthetical note] so striking is they are patently inconsistent: if you care about what happens to one little girl, and if you care about what happens to her brother, you must, at the very least, care as much about their combined fate. Your concern should be (in some sense) cumulative. When your violation of this principle is revealed, you will feel that you have committed a moral error.” Actually, I do not believe there is any inconsistency involved in how people respond to the experimental problems entailed by the Slovic research, nor do I believe there is necessarily any moral error that is being committed by those subjects.

There are very real limits to how much emotion, empathy, and/or sympathy an individual can invest in other people. There are very real limits to just how equally such emotional investments can be made across individuals. There are very real limits to the extent to which one can practically translate one’s emotional concern into actual assistance. There are different orders of difficulty entailed by helping one person as opposed to helping many people.

One might be committing a moral error if one were in a position to help someone but did not do so despite previously having stated that if one were to encounter such a person in need, then one would help that individual. One might be committing a moral error if, despite previously having gone on record that one should exhibit concern and care for a person in need, yet, nonetheless, when presented with such a case, one felt no concern for that individual.

However, what is the nature of the inconsistency or moral error that is present when a person exhibits, in some way, one’s willingness to help people in need and, when the occasion arises, does so to the best of one’s ability even though – in practical terms -- this means there might be some individuals who fall beyond the horizons of one’s capacity to help? In principle, one could be committed to the idea of being concerned with the welfare of everyone who is in need, but this does not, thereby, necessarily morally commit one to have to be willing to help everyone, and such a person is neither being inconsistent nor is she or he committing any kind of moral error as a function of such alleged inconsistency.

There is a divide between our capacity for concern and our capacity to act on our concern. This divide is a reflection of the practical reality that acting on our concerns tends to be more resource intensive than merely having such concerns is.

Furthermore, just as there is a risk of 'burn out' in relation to those who are engaged in trying to solve various social problems, so, too, there is a similar sort of phenomenon with respect to the extent to which one can feel concern for others. Like the former sort of burn out, one can only handle so much frustration, stress, disappointment, and the like with respect to one's concerns about other people before one is forced to distance oneself emotionally from such concerns.

Dr. Harris argues that one's concern should be cumulative. However, the stresses and problems associated with such concern are also cumulative. Consequently, one's actual, practical capacity to handle those stresses often is easily outstripped by one's belief in the appropriateness of being concerned for the welfare of others.

As a result, one might expect the sort of results that are expressed in the Slovic research that are being discussed by Dr. Harris rather than consider those results startling and troubling. In other words, as the number of people who need to be helped increase, people might exhibit a certain tendency to become less emotionally involved because the price in stress dollars that must be paid to maintain any sort of continuous, intense, irresolvable involvement is too costly. If this is the case, then there is not necessarily any inconsistency being manifested between how people respond to problems (either in terms of emotion commitment or practical acts) involving single individuals in need and how they respond to problems (either in terms of emotional commitment or practical acts) involving larger numbers of individuals.

The logic that many people use with respect to the relationship between concern and action is of a practical nature. However, Drs. Slovic and Harris seem to want to impose some sort of universalized standard of consistency and moral error upon people for which a proper foundation in rationality has not been laid down since nothing has been established as to why concern must be cumulative or why one would not expect practical contingencies to modulate the extent to

which either concern or behavior was manifested when confronted with increasing numbers of people in need.

According to Dr. Harris: "... one of the great tasks of civilization is to create cultural mechanisms that protect us from the moment-to-moment failures of our ethical intuitions. We must build our better selves into our laws, tax codes, and institutions. ... We must build a structure that reflects and enforces our deeper understanding of human well-being. This is where a science of morality could be indispensable to us ..." (page 70)

While one can applaud Dr. Harris' very real and sincere concern about enhancing the welfare of human beings, there are quite a few potential problems entailed by the manner in which he would like to go about putting such concern into practice. First, and as noted earlier, what Dr. Harris considers to constitute "moment-to-moment failures of our ethical intuitions" is not as clear-cut as he seems to believe is the case. Secondly, the experimental research he cites to support such a contention – that is, the Slovic material – doesn't necessarily prove what Dr. Harris believes it does.

Thirdly, his stated intention of wanting to build our better selves into law is disturbing on two levels. To begin with, what if the "better selves" that Dr. Harris wants to build into the "laws, tax codes, and institutions" are not really our better selves but only Dr. Harris' ideas about what he believes this means? Moreover, building such "better selves" into laws and institutions seems to imply an element of coercion and oppression with respect to all those individuals who might not see the world of "better selves" through the same framed prescription as does Dr. Harris. And, indeed, a few sentences following the foregoing quote, Dr. Harris states: "We must build a structure that reflects and enforces (my emphasis) our deeper understanding of human well-being." (page 70)

The foregoing sorts of concerns are deepened when Dr. Harris begins to talk about how a "science of morality could be indispensable" (page 70) to humankind because, such a science would enable us "to make intelligent decisions about which social policies to adopt" (page 70) since those decisions would be rooted in an understanding of the "causes and constituents of human fulfillment" (page 70) This is nothing more than the hyperbole of a faith through which Dr. Harris

fervently seeks to gather parishioners for his church or temple of moral science since there is nothing to this point in his book that provides the sort of indisputable, rigorous evidence that would incline one to believe that Dr. Harris is capable of making a credible case demonstrating the 'factual' links among science, morality, human nature, and intelligent decisions in relation to the "causes and constituents of human fulfillment."

Chapter Twenty-four

On page 71 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris begins to explore some of the paradoxes that, supposedly, are inherent in any attempt to try to maximize the well-being of a population. Such paradoxes are, supposedly, a function of the way in which there are two general ways to approach the idea of maximizing things in a population – namely, through some notion of total well-being or through some sort of averaged well-being – and each of these modes of engaging the idea of maximizing well-being is said to entail paradoxes of one kind or another.

There is a problem at the heart of Dr. Harris' manner of talking about the issue of maximizing well-being during this portion of his book. The paradoxes he discusses arise in a context of providing quantitative assessments for various packages of well-being, and, yet, neither truth of things nor qualitative considerations enter into the discussion.

If one doesn't actually understand the nature of well-being with respect to human beings – and throwing around a few neurobiological facts doesn't necessarily give expression to any sort of deep understanding concerning the nature of well-being -- then no matter how one quantitatively parses any sort of well-being package one cares to imagine, such an exercise is completely arbitrary. For instance, Dr. Harris claims: "If we are concerned only about total welfare, we should prefer a world with hundreds of billions of people whose lives are barely worth living to a world in which 7 billion of us live in perfect ecstasy." (page 71)

The logic of the foregoing claim escapes me. What is the justification for supposing that well-being is something that can be reduced to quantitative terms, and even if one were to go along with such a quantitative assessment, what justifies assigning one mode of quantitative metric to such an assessment process rather than some other form of quantitative metric?

If one is considering "a world with hundreds of billions of people whose lives are barely worth living," then what, exactly, is the metric for giving quantitative definition to the well-being of such a population? Moreover, if the quantitative measure of well-being in the world with 7 billion people is "perfect ecstasy," then how does one

quantitatively compare such a metric of well-being with the ill-defined metric of well-being in the world where life is barely worth living?

One is talking about different modalities and scales of well-being in the two cases. This would be like trying to compare apples and oranges. Furthermore, even if one quantified the physical properties of those two, respective fruits, this would not necessarily help one to compare them when it comes to their respective tastes or the differential ways in which various people will qualitatively – not quantitatively -- engage those fruits.

What does Dr. Harris even mean by the notion of “perfect ecstasy”? Is the ecstasy experienced by persons A and B necessarily the same even if, in each case, those conditions are referred to as being perfect in some sense of the term?

Let us suppose that person A experiences a perfect ecstasy of well-being when listening to jazz, but person B experiences a perfect ecstasy of well-being when listening to country music. How are their conditions the same – quantitatively or qualitatively – even though we might use the same vocabulary of “perfect ecstasy” to refer to their respective conditions?

One might even question whether, or not, the idea of “perfect ecstasy” is an appropriate description in relation to the issue of well-being. Is well-being a matter of happiness or pleasure or ecstasy? Aren't such notions entirely arbitrary ways of rendering well-being, even if we were successful in coming up with an acceptable metric for measuring happiness, pleasure, or ecstasy?

Maybe well-being is a function of being able to get the most out of a given, individual potential under a certain set of life-circumstances at a given point in history. Even if such a potential were realized, it doesn't mean that ecstasy, happiness, or pleasure is the appropriate way to assess such a realization. It might be that the ideas of contentment or competency are, in some sense of those terms, a more appropriate reflection of a realistic conception of well-being

Life is filled with problems. Life is daunting. Life is subject to change. Life is sobering and humbling.

To engage life successfully and in accordance with the full realization of one's potential doesn't necessarily mean one will be in a

condition of “perfect ecstasy.” One might have to settle for a life well-lived amidst difficult circumstance and settle for the understanding that one has done as well as one could have given the nature of one’s potential and given the nature of life’s circumstances and attendant problems.

Perhaps it is the case that as long as one is in a state of “perfect ecstasy” one is not necessarily in a proper condition to take on the problems of life and resolve them in a moral manner. Perhaps well-being is a function of some unknown combination of ecstasy and sobriety.

Just as attempts to construe the idea of ‘maximizing well-being’ in terms of some notion of the total quantity of well-being seems to be an entirely arbitrary -- and therefore, fruitless -- exercise, so, too, the logic of trying to construe the idea of ‘maximizing well-being’ in terms of some notion of averaging the quantitative character of well-being seems to give expression to an entirely arbitrary -- and therefore fruitless -- exercise. According to Dr. Harris: “Privileging average welfare would also lead us to prefer a world in which billions live under the misery of constant torture to a world in which only one person is tortured ever so slightly more.” (page 71)

Aside from the implausibility of realizing a world in which one actually could torture one individual ever so slightly more than the cumulative torture experienced by billions of other individuals, one faces the problem of whether, or not, the phenomenological quality of one individual’s experience involving torture really could be averaged with the phenomenological quality of the experiences of billions of other people with respect to torture.

The attempt to quantify a phenomenological quality is fraught with problems. The decision to average such an attempt is fraught with even more problems.

When one speaks of “average” is one referring to the mean, mode, or median of a given data set? One’s choice of the kind of average one has in mind oftentimes will give differential emphasis to various dimensions of a given data set and, consequently, will shape the way in which one tries to argue about the significance or value of various quantitative representations of the notion well-being ... something that goes on in applied statistics quite frequently.

Moreover, what considerations justify selecting one metric, rather than another, for rendering an average? In other words, why select, say, torture as the component that is to be quantitatively considered?

Surely, there are many components that might be entailed by the idea of well-being. How does one average qualitatively different components of well-being? How does one compare the averaging of such qualitatively different components?

Dr. Harris does acknowledge: “Clearly, this proves that we cannot rely on a simple summation or averaging of welfare as our only metric. And, yet, at the extremes, we can see that human welfare must aggregate in some way: it really is better for all of us to be deeply fulfilled than it is for everyone to live in absolute agony.” (page 72) While one might be prepared to agree that “it really is better for all of us to be deeply fulfilled than it is for everyone to live in absolute agony,” – assuming, of course, that one knew what it meant for human beings to be deeply fulfilled or in absolute agony relative to the ultimate nature of the universe – it doesn’t necessarily follow that “human welfare must aggregate in some way.”

Oftentimes, Dr. Harris seems to give the impression that what constitutes well-being is, more or less, a function of quantitative considerations – and, surely, this is one of the implications of his foregoing use of the term: “aggregate.” However, our everyday experience of issues of well-being is that people appear to require qualitatively and quantitatively different sorts of things in order to be able to realize a sense of well-being.

People are influenced by different sorts of personalities, temperaments, interests, needs, talents, intellects, families, communities, strengths, weaknesses, and problems. What does well-being mean in such a context of qualitative differences? What does “deep fulfillment” mean in such a context of qualitative differences? What does “agony” mean in such a context of qualitative differences?

How does one factor in the way in which various people might be satisfied or fulfilled with different quantities of some component of well-being? How would one distinguish between claims of fulfillment and actual fulfillment under such circumstances?

According to Dr. Harris, many people become confused about the idea of consequentialism – namely, the idea that the only value worth considering are the consequences that behavior has on conditions of well-being – because there seem to be many puzzles, problems, and paradoxes that arise when trying to pursue a consequentialist analysis of life. Such difficulties don't easily lend themselves, if at all, to any sort of consistent quantitative formatting.

Nonetheless, Dr. Harris goes on to state: "... such puzzles merely suggest that certain moral questions could be difficult or impossible to answer in practice; they do not suggest that morality depends on something other than the consequences of actions and intentions." (page 72) The foregoing claim is problematic in a number of ways.

Actually, what such puzzles – i.e., the paradoxes of population ethics – suggest is that as long as one stumbles about in ignorance, then all one is likely to encounter are irresolvable puzzles, paradoxes and problems. What such puzzles suggest is that if one can't solve something in actual practice, then perhaps, one's methods of engaging such problems are inherently defective.

How can one possibly know whether, or not, "morality depends on something other than the consequences of actions and intentions" unless one knows the nature of reality? To claim that consequentialism is the way in which one must engage life – irrespective of whether problems are, in principle, solvable through such a form of engagement and irrespective of the ultimate nature of existence – seems rather foolish and not at all rational or reasonable.

One cannot assess the consequences of a given intention unless one knows the reality of the situation in which certain behaviors and intentions arise. Without an understanding of the full truth of such matters, all one's claims about consequentialism amount to little more than speculation concerning the possible, but unknown, meaning and significance of the manner in which this or that "fact" links up with some other "fact" or set of "facts".

A person might be able to see that consequence 'Q' follows from behavior 'Z', but consequence 'Q' might not tell the whole story. Only if one understands the full nature of a given situation would one be in a position to know how to assess the meaning or significance of 'Q' with respect to issues of well-being, and without such an understanding, all

assessments of 'Q' are completely arbitrary and a function of one's interests, biases, inclinations, and beliefs with respect to a set of "facts" that are made to cohere around such interests, biases, and so on.

Dr. Harris asserts: "...consequentialism is less a method of answering moral questions than it is a claim about the status of moral truth. Our assessment of consequences in the moral domain must proceed as it does in all others: under the shadow of uncertainty, guided by theory, data, and honest conversation." (page 72) Presumably, the "claim about the status of moral truth" is a reference to Dr. Harris' belief that there are true and false things which can be said concerning any given moral issue.

Nonetheless, there are problems inherent in the foregoing perspective. Which theory or theories should guide such assessments and why? Which data is to guide such assessments and why? Moreover, given that Dr. Harris wants to exclude various people from the discussion – after all, he is on record (which I have noted earlier) as saying that the opinions of some people ought not be considered in relation to many issues -- and given that Dr Harris only appears to want to admit physical/material forms of scientific investigation into the discussion of moral issues, what are the criteria for determining what constitutes an "honest conversation"?

The form of what Dr. Harris claims in many of his foregoing statements gives the appearance of saying something concrete and significant. However, when one begins to peel back the layers that make up the structure of what he says, one's experience is very much like that involved in peeling an onion – in other words, one experiences a lot of tears with respect to the odious quality of the arguments one has to peel away on the way to discovering that there is nothing to be found at the heart of Dr. Harris' moral onion once the peeling process has been completed.

Dr. Harris has said in *The Moral Landscape* that the best forms of conflict resolution are unlikely to be zero-sum in nature. Nevertheless, as long as Dr. Harris (and those who meet with his approval) insists on being the one who determines what theories ought to guide our assessment of moral issues, and as long as he (and those who meet with his approval) insists on being the one who determines what data ought to guide such assessments, and as long as he (and those who

meet with his approval) insists on being the one who tells us what constitutes an “honest conversation,” then there seems to be a considerable amount of inconsistency between what he claims about how to resolve conceptual or social conflict in a reasonable fashion and his apparent resistance to permitting anything other than his way of doing things and understanding things to enter into the assessment process.

On page 74 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “To bring the discussion back to the especially low-hanging fruit of conservative Islam: there is absolutely no reason to think that demonizing homosexuals, stoning adulterers, veiling women, soliciting the murder of artists and intellectuals, and celebrating the exploit of suicide bombers will move humanity toward a peak on the moral landscape. This is as objective a claim as we ever make in science.” Aside from the fact that Dr. Harris has difficulty – as do many Muslims – distinguishing between an interpretation of Islam and the reality of Islam, and, consequently, contrary to what Dr. Harris says, there is no such thing as “conservative Islam” -- only conservative interpretations of Islam in which people reify their interpretation and claim such interpretations give expression to the reality of that which is being interpreted -- one could agree with much of what Dr. Harris says in the foregoing quote.

However, one might also add: There is absolutely no reason to think that permitting Western governments, banks, corporations, and militaries to kill, injure, exploit, pollute, and oppress billions of people around the world or that permitting scientists to conduct junk science in conjunction with issues involving climate, depleted uranium, pharmaceuticals, health care, ecology, psychology, origins of life, and 9/11 will move humanity toward a peak on the moral landscape either. Furthermore, one might note that these latter statements are also “as objective a claim as we ever make in science.”

Dr. Harris maintains that: “The peculiar concerns of Islam have created communities in almost every society on earth that grow so unhinged in the face of criticism that they will reliably riot, burn embassies, and seek to kill peaceful people over cartoons.” (page 74) It is truly breathtaking to witness the irrational manner in which Dr. Harris seeks to reduce Islam down to a matter of “peculiar concerns”

when, again and again, in his writings he demonstrates little more than a considerable ignorance about, and arrogance toward, Islam. Moreover, one can't but notice the manner in which Dr. Harris frames his discussions about Muslims to reflect his own biases in a way that is intended to induce others to become infected by those same antipathies.

There are one billion Muslims in the world. How many of them rioted, burned embassies, and sought to kill innocent people over cartoons? How many innocent people were actually killed during such 'cartoon riots'? Was it innocent people who were killed during such exercises, or were the ones who died the rioters themselves? How many embassies were actually burned?

There is a reason why Dr. Harris deals in amorphous generalities when it comes to Muslims in cases such as the cartoon affair. He can't prove what he wants to by sticking to the facts, so he uses innuendo and vagaries to do the job for him.

For nearly ten years, there have been thousands of innocent people who have been killed in Afghanistan by the American military and its private security company allies. For nearly twenty years, there have been tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands or millions, of innocent people who were killed in Iraq at the hands of American foreign policy. For nearly fifty years, America has stood by and done nothing to stop the Israeli government from killing thousands of people in Lebanon and Palestine or committing an array of atrocities that are in violation of International Law ... done nothing, that is, except to funnel more than \$60 billion into the Israeli economy - much of this in the form of military aid.

The issue of proportionality or rational analysis is completely missing from Dr. Harris' treatment of Muslims. How does he manage to keep missing the horrific beam in the eye of America while he frets about the mote in the eyes of a few Muslims who rioted or tried to burn embassies or sought to kill - if they actually did this -- innocent people with respect to the cartoon issue?

The death of even one innocent person is unacceptable. However, there is no comparison between what some Muslims might have done in relation to the cartoon issue and the terrible suffering, death, destruction, and displacement that American foreign policy has forced

upon millions of innocent people in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine -- and for what? ... oil, gas, drugs, the defense industry, military bases, and corrupt governments both abroad as well as at home.

In passing, Dr. Harris notes that while Muslims will get unhinged over cartoons, nonetheless, they will not riot, burn embassies, or seek to kill innocent people: “in protest over the continuous atrocities committed against them by their fellow Muslims.” (page 74) Since Dr. Harris’ previous statement lacks specificity, it is hard to know to what countries he is referring, but he ought to keep in mind that many of the atrocities committed against Muslims by their fellow Muslims have been at the hands of Muslim governments who were supplied with weapons, military intelligence, military training, and many other kinds of financial support by the United States.

For example, the chemical and biological weapons that Saddam Hussein used on Iraqis were supplied to him by the United States. Just whom did the United States think that such weapons might be used against?

Furthermore, following the first Gulf War, people in the south of Iraq were encouraged by the United States to rise up in revolt against Saddam Hussein, and those people were promised military and financial assistance if they did undertake such a revolution. Unfortunately, when those people revolted, the United States let them be slaughtered by remnants of Saddam’s Red Guard.

Consequently, Dr. Harris is quite wrong when he tries to claim that Muslims would not riot or protest with respect to the “atrocities committed against Muslims by their fellow Muslims.” Unfortunately, one of the problems that Muslims face when they seek to rise up against such atrocities is that the United States is often quite willing to assist the perpetrators of various atrocities to brutally quell such protests or riots.

Dr. Harris is incredulous that there are some Muslims who would get unhinged over a few cartoons. I have an experiment for Dr. Harris to perform.

Let him take some of his Danish artists and go into virtually any fraternity or college pub in the United States – two of the hallmarks of

American social and cultural life -- and proceed to draw cartoons disparaging the values, beliefs, or beloved family members of the people in such locales and observe just how unhinged people can get ... over cartoons for Pete's sake! I would be very surprised if Dr. Harris and his Danish friends would get out of any of those establishments without someone's blood being spilled. Moreover, I am willing to bet that more than a little raucous rioting might transpire during such cultural exchanges.

Yet, no matter what the provocation and no matter how unjustly or unfairly Muslims are treated at the hands of Westerners, Muslims must be the perfect paragons of virtue or risk the self-righteous diatribes of people like Dr. Harris. Even when 99.99 % of Muslims did nothing as a result of the infamous cartoons (or in relation to the precedent-setting Rushdie affair some twenty years earlier) Dr. Harris still feels justified in pointing fingers at the miniscule few who were riled up by so-called Muslim leaders -- who, in many cases, were merely seeking to feed their own egos and sense of self-importance -- and, in the process, Dr. Harris seems to be in total denial with respect to all the nasty things that countries in the West are doing, and have been doing, in relation to Muslim communities around the world for hundreds of years.

Chapter Twenty-five

On page 78 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr Harris outlines some of his reasons for rejecting revealed religion as a source for moral guidance. He believes his reasons for dismissing religion in this manner are incontrovertible and obviously correct.

His first reason for rejecting revealed religion in this manner is: “There are many revealed religions available to us, and they offer mutually incompatible doctrines.” Since Dr. Harris doesn’t offer any examples of what he has in mind, one is not entirely sure what he means at this point.

However, let us assume there is some degree of truth in what he says. Let us concede his idea that the proponents of different religious traditions do offer a certain amount of mutually incompatible doctrines.

Does such an acknowledgement also force one to grant that there are no doctrines or principles held in common by such religious traditions? I have been engaged in the study of the mystical dimension of different religious traditions for more than 40 years, and during this time, I have met and talked with quite a few individuals who actively pursued this or that form of mysticism, and, as well, I have read fairly extensively in such areas.

One of the things that I have noted during my studies is this: Whatever the exoteric differences might be with respect to the theological doctrines that surround people’s interpretation of spiritual experience, there is an underlying agreement across many religious traditions concerning the critical importance of certain principles. For instance, every religious tradition I have studied – from Native American spirituality, to Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and so on – gives great emphasis to the issue of character.

The idea of character involves both positive and negative dimensions. On the positive side, all the traditions I have studied are unanimous in their approval of qualities such as patience, honesty, humility, gratitude, sincerity, compassion, charitableness, forgiveness, love, fairness, courage, perseverance, self-sacrifice, friendship, and kindness. At the same time, all of those spiritual traditions were unanimous in their disapproval of qualities such as hatred, arrogance,

anger, ingratitude, jealousy, cowardice, insincerity, dishonesty, deceit, gossip, selfishness, incivility, and cruelty.

In addition to the foregoing sorts of agreement concerning issues of character, there was also another kind of unanimity that existed across such spiritual traditions. This had to do with the kinds of practices that were necessary to pursue in order to help establish the constructive aspects of character and to weaken the destructive aspects of character – namely, fasting, meditation, contemplation, seclusion, prayer, chanting, charity, and community service.

People might have a tendency to couch such practices and issues of character in all manner of theological trappings that, on the surface, might induce someone to suppose there is nothing but incompatible doctrines present with respect to the nature of existence or the human being. However, such tendencies and such conclusions fail to reflect the underlying reality of the commonalities that actually exist.

Since Dr. Harris' tendency is to dismiss religion in its entirety, he never appears to stop and ask such questions as: Do surface differences hide the presence of underlying commonalities and similarities? Or, should one consider the possibility that while there might be differences in interpretation of life-experiences, nonetheless, there is considerable agreement with respect to the general nature of the methodology that is emphasized and considerable agreement in relation to the general purposes that such methodology are intended to serve – namely, to strengthen the constructive facets of character and to weaken the destructive aspects of character?

Unfortunately Dr. Harris' explorations into spirituality tend to be rather shallow and lacking in much rigor. More than anything, he seems to be driven by what psychologists refer to as "confirmation bias" – that is, Dr. Harris seems more interested in trying to find data that confirm his desire to dismiss religion rather than trying to explore such issues in any sort of balanced or truly rational way.

Are there differences of understanding with respect to religious issues? Of course, there are. Nevertheless, this fact in and of itself says absolutely nothing about whether, or not, there are any truths to be found in relation to such issues.

The second reason that Dr. Harris has for dismissing religion is as follows. “The scriptures of many religions, including the more well-subscribed (Christianity and Islam) countenance patently unethical practices like slavery.”

I challenge Dr. Harris to locate the passage(s) in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John showing that Jesus (peace be upon him) advocated human slavery. Christianity is rooted in the being and character of Jesus, the Christ (peace be upon him), and whatever some group of theologians might have decided would be appropriate with respect to adding this or that book to ‘augment’ or complement the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him), those additions don’t necessarily have any relevance to what the actual teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him) might have been.

Similarly, I challenge Dr. Harris to locate any passages in the Qur’an or among the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that describe slavery among human beings as being a good thing which should be practiced in society. In fact, the basic direction of Quranic teachings and the teachings of the Prophet were reformist in nature and sought to induce people to give up the practice of slavery and, as well, indicated that the act of freeing slaves would find favor with God and would serve to wipe the slate clean with respect to a variety of other errors in ethical behavior that might have been committed in the past

Many of the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet gave expression to ways of reforming Arab society. These reforms included: the treatment of women; the practice of slavery; the abuse of alcohol; the treatment of orphans and the poor; duties of care to the community; condemning the practice of usury, and stringent ethical considerations governing the conduct of war.

Now, maybe, Dr. Harris is upset – as I am -- that all too many Muslims seem to have forgotten the teachings of the Qur’an or the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, as a result might engage in, say, the practice of slavery. However, one needs to distinguish between what some people do in the name of religion and what such religions actually might have taught originally.

Maybe Dr. Harris is perturbed that Islam was directed toward helping resolve an array of social ills long before the United States

even existed and long before the United States ever began to start cleaning up its own act with respect to issues such as women's rights and slavery. After all, it must be somewhat embarrassing to someone like Dr. Harris to realize that a religion – namely, Islam -- was more than 1400 years ahead of the curve and that the teachings of another religious figure – namely, Jesus (peace be upon him) -- were more than two thousand years ahead of the curve with respect to so many ethical values that he believes, quite incorrectly, only began in modern times. Naturally, one could mention any number of religious figures from different spiritual traditions that were equally ahead of the curve with respect to an array of ethical issues relative to the position of modernity which seeks to take credit for ideas that did not begin with modern times ... indeed, many principles in the Bill of Rights reflected, to varying degrees, the thinking of Native Americans who had a very strong spiritual tradition and a very democratic way of doing things and, as a result, had been consulted by some of the 'framers of American democracy' during the discussions leading up to the writing of both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights

The third reason that Dr. Harris mentions in relation to why he believes dismissing religion as a source of moral guidance is the obviously right thing to do is summed up as follows: "The faculty we use to validate religious precepts, judging the Golden Rule to be wise and the murder of apostates foolish, is something we bring to scripture; it does not, therefore, come from scripture." Presumably, the "faculty" to which Dr. Harris refers is "reason," and if this, indeed, gives expression to what he means in the foregoing statement, then perhaps, Dr. Harris would provide a cogent, coherent, plausible, detailed account of what makes reason possible and where it comes from.

To say that reason arose through a series of random, evolutionary events is a useless and relatively empty statement as far as hard evidence is concerned. In fact, such a claim is really only a hypothesis in need of empirical proof.

Now, maybe, reason did arise, in some unknown fashion, via a set of random mutations across millions of years ... random mutations that, quite amazingly, consistently had adaptive value in various environments and, as a result, were seized upon by natural selection to help enhance the likelihood that an organism with such a capability

would survive long enough to contribute that sort of capability to the gene pool of a given population. What I do know is that evolutionary theory has not provided any step-by-step evidence that such is the case -- and having heuristic value is not the same thing as constituting detailed evidence that ideas with heuristic value accurately explain why things are the way they are.

In the terminology of an earlier discussion, reason is a Black Swan event. In other words, the appearance of a capacity for 'reason' is a rare event with a huge impact on human beings and society.

As a result, over the years, many people have sought to account for the origins of reason. Moreover, as is true with respect to philosophical and theological accounts concerning the origins of reason, evolutionary theory's modes of trying to account for the existence of reason are really nothing more than confabulations concerning a phenomenon that such modes of explanation clearly do not understand.

Consequently, Dr. Harris' third reason for dismissing religion as a source for moral guidance is not really a tenable position -- any more than his first two reasons for doing so were tenable. Dr. Harris seems to be under the mistaken impression that simply because one can point to this or that problem, then, ipso facto, what one is seeking to dismiss is justified, when, in reality, all that is going on is a reflection of the kinds of problems that are generated when someone employs a mode of exploration that lacks critical rigor and methodological sophistication.

Furthermore, one should keep in mind that thieves, swindlers, murderers, rapists, and liars all often employ reason to plan their crimes and to avoid detection -- as do corrupt governments, corporations, and educational systems that exploit people. Therefore, the presence of reason, in itself, is not sufficient to explain ethical behavior, and, maybe, this is why things like the Golden Rule are formulated -- namely, to help shape and guide the exercise of reason.

A fourth reason cited by Dr. Harris for dismissing religion as a source of moral guidance is: "The reasons for believing that any of the world's religions were 'revealed' to our ancestors (rather than merely invented by men and women who did not have the benefit of a twenty-first century education) are either risible or nonexistent." Since this

reason is devoid of anything but assertion, it is difficult to assess the value, or lack thereof, of what Dr. Harris is saying here or even what he might mean by such a statement.

Let's turn the situation around a little bit and ask Dr. Harris the following questions: What is your proof that such revelations did not occur? What is your proof that God or some 'Higher Power' or some 'Great Mystery' or some 'Transcendent Being' does not exist? What is your proof that communication between such a Being and human beings is not possible?

Dr. Harris' entire modus operandi is to: (1) consider the arguments of some given individual concerning the existence of God or the nature of revelation, (2) point out what he believes are the weaknesses of such arguments, and (3) conclude that, therefore, God does not exist. However, once again, one is dealing with a Black Swan event -- namely, the introduction of an idea involving the existence of that which is transcendent to normal modes of experience, perception, and understanding and that is capable of communicating with human beings -- and, therefore, the attempts to explain the existence of such an idea through theology or science might be nothing more than confabulations in which we seek to fill the gaps in our ignorance with this or that explanation for why we believe things are the way they are.

Isn't Dr. Harris' inclination to refer to the arguments of those who believe in God as "risible" little more than the pot calling the kettle black and, thereby, gives expression to a certain amount of tit-for-tat in payback for the manner in which some of those who believe in God or a Transcendent Presence of some kind tend to refer to the arguments against the existence of God by people like Dr. Harris as being "either risible or nonexistent"? Furthermore, as someone who has experienced the so-called 'benefits' of a modern education and as someone who has taught in 21st educational institutions, I can safely say there are a large number of biases, prejudices, unproven assumptions, foolish theories, and unverifiable beliefs that exist within the boundaries of such educational processes, and, therefore, there is a dark underbelly to the alleged "benefits" of a modern education that suggests the possibility that maybe those who graduate from such institutions don't necessarily know as much as they think they do ...

although they might know a great deal about this or that confabulated set of ideas.

The final reason that is part of Dr. Harris' allegedly formidable arsenal of reasons for rejecting religion as a source for moral guidance is fairly simple. "The idea that each of these mutually contradictory doctrines is inerrant remains a logical impossibility."

First, as noted earlier, the fact some of the doctrines from a variety of religions might be mutually contradictory does not prove that all such doctrines are mutually contradictory. There are problems with the sampling techniques being used by Dr. Harris in relation to his examination of such doctrinal issues. As a result, his conclusions are skewed in accordance with the biases existing in those techniques.

Secondly, it might be rationally sound to argue that if mutually contradictory doctrines make claims to inerrancy, it is logically impossible for all such claims to be true. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow one also can rationally argue that it is logically impossible for truth to exist anywhere amidst those mutually contradictory doctrines.

After all, it is entirely possible that either one of the doctrines is correct while the other one is incorrect. Alternatively, it could be the case that different doctrines from different traditions might be correct even as certain doctrines concerning the same issue from other traditions were incorrect.

One might also keep in mind a story that dates back at least to the inception of the Jain religion but is a teaching that also is related through other spiritual traditions, as well. More specifically, four blind men were positioned so that each held a different part of an elephant and were asked to describe what it was they held. The blind man who held the tail said he was holding a rope. The blind person who had hold of a leg believed he was holding onto the trunk of a tree. The blind individual who had hold of the elephant's trunk believed he had hold of a snake of some kind. The blind man who had hold of the elephant's ear believed he was grasping some sort of huge palm leaf.

All of the blind men were incorrect with respect to their interpretations of their respective experiences. At the same time, there was a certain degree of rationality and logic that tied their

interpretations of their experiences to the reality of the elephant's being.

Like the nature of the elephant, the nature of existence is one. There is a multiplicity of interpretations concerning the nature of such existence, because, like the men in the foregoing story, we are all blind, to one extent or another, concerning the ultimate nature of Being.

Our descriptions of reality might be rooted in a certain degree of factualness and reasoning. Nonetheless, such descriptions do not necessarily lead to a correct understanding of what is being described.

Conceivably, there might be aspects of certain descriptions that are correct even as those descriptions are embedded in doctrinal interpretations that are mutually contradictory with one another. So, even though it might be true that mutually contradictory claims to inerrancy cannot simultaneously be correct, nonetheless, this doesn't mean there couldn't be certain truths present in such descriptions even as the overall interpretations of the meaning or significance of such truths are not necessarily correct and are mutually contradictory with one another.

Taken either individually or collectively, the five reasons cited by Dr. Harris on page 78 of *The Moral Landscape* for "dismissing revealed religion as a source of moral guidance" don't amount to much. In fact, contrary to what Dr. Harris wishes to argue, there is nothing at all obvious or compelling about any of the reasons he gives for rejecting religion as a source of moral guidance.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, one is not thereby required to suppose that any and all statements of an allegedly religious nature constitute reliable moral guidance. One can neither automatically reject nor automatically accept some form of moral guidance that purportedly comes via revealed religion.

Instead, one must make an appropriately critically rigorous and thorough effort before arriving at some sort of, hopefully, judicious conclusion concerning such matters. Quite frankly, Dr. Harris has presented little evidence in either *The End of Faith* or *The Moral Landscape* to indicate that he has undertaken such a quality exploration when it comes to the issue of 'revealed religion' and moral guidance.

Chapter Twenty-six

On page 78 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris begins a brief, three-to-four page examination of some of the ideas of John Rawls concerning the issue of justice. Dr. Harris outlines the basic methodological starting point for Rawls' perspective – namely, the 'original position.'

Essentially, the original position gives expression to a question. The question is as follows: If one didn't know what sort of economic or social position one had in a given community, how would such ignorance affect one's thinking about the idea of distributive justice?

Rawls referred to this condition as a 'veil of ignorance.' He believed that such a veil would have a huge impact on how any given individual or group of individuals might go about trying to decide what constituted fairness with respect to the allocation of social, economic, and political 'goods.'

Coupled with the notion of a 'veil of ignorance' was the assumption that people were motivated by the idea of 'self-interest'. Rawls' challenge involved playing ignorance, self-interest, and fairness against one another to arrive at a rational solution to the problem of distributive justice within society – that is, the process of allocating goods and services in any given society.

Dr. Harris believes there are problems with Rawls' contractual approach to distributive justice (and, in essence, Dr. Rawls is seeking to delineate the nature of a social contract that is governed by principles of fairness). For example, at one point Dr. Harris argues: "How would we feel if, after structuring our ideal society from behind a veil of ignorance, we were told by an omniscient being that we had made a few choices that, though entirely fair, would lead to the unnecessary misery of millions, while parameters that were ever-so-slightly less fair, would entail no such suffering?" (page 79)

There is an incoherency at the heart of Dr. Harris' concerns. To begin with, imagining omniscient beings who suddenly inform us that a choice that seemed fair, nonetheless, had horrific consequences, is not much of an argument. In fact, it is sort of arguing by fiat – that is, because an omniscient being allegedly informed us that human misery

ensued from a supposedly fair decision, then, by definition, there is something wrong with the position one is criticizing.

John Rawls' work: *A Theory of Justice*, is nearly 600 pages in length. Whether one agrees with him or wishes to take exception with his idea of 'justice as fairness,' I believe a great injustice is done to the nuances and complexities of the arguments put forth in the aforementioned book by seeking to dismiss that nuanced complexity by merely saying: 'What if an omniscient being said that John Rawls' theory leads to misery?'

One could just as easily respond with: What if the omniscient being was a liar and rarely told the truth? After all, omniscience doesn't necessarily entail honesty? Would John Rawls' position still be in trouble?

As long as Dr. Harris remains at the level of vague, hypothetical counter-examples, one begins at no beginning, and one works toward no end. If Dr. Harris wishes to criticize the position of Dr. Rawls, then Dr. Harris should take specific arguments concerning the ideas of justice as fairness, the veil of ignorance, the original position, the social contract, or treating individuals as ends in themselves and then actually critique what was said rather than become lost in some sort of hypothetical construct that doesn't make a great deal of sense.

For instance, what does it mean to make choices that are "entirely fair" and, yet, led to "the unnecessary misery of millions"? One might suppose that if certain choices led to "the unnecessary misery of millions," then such choices might not really have been all that fair to begin with. In other words, due both to the "unnecessary" nature of such consequences, as well as because of the dimension of 'misery,' then there would seem to be something inherently problematic about the underlying claim of fairness.

However, the whole matter is rendered murky due to the vague manner in which Dr. Harris has gone about criticizing Dr. Rawls. Since we don't know how the anonymous people in Dr. Harris' alleged counterexample have structured society from behind a veil of ignorance, and since we don't know how such supposed fairness led to the misery of millions, and since we don't know what sort of minor adjustment might involve slightly less fairness but would simultaneously entail the elimination of all of the misery created as a

result of the previous social arrangement, it is quite difficult to understand the 'force' of Dr. Harris' criticism of Dr. Rawls.

Presumably, the point Dr. Harris is trying to make is that a procedure could be fair, and, yet nonetheless, such a procedure still might lead to human misery. Thus, Dr. Harris stipulates: "The moment we conceive of justice as being fully separable from human well-being, we are faced with the prospect of there being morally "right" actions and social systems that are, on balance, detrimental to the welfare of everyone affected by them." (page 79)

Seemingly, Dr. Harris is just throwing labels around at this point to suit his inclinations. Just because Dr. Harris refers to the idea of some set of actions or a given social system as being "morally 'right'" while simultaneously being "on balance, detrimental to the welfare of everyone affected by them" seems rather self-serving. By proceeding in such a fashion, Dr. Harris appears to be trying to avoid all the heavy conceptual lifting that would be necessary in order to be able to construct the edifice of a plausible, concrete argument with respect to John Rawls' notion of 'justice as fairness.'

In any case, Dr. Harris goes on to note that John Rawls says things which are tantamount to conceding philosophical defeat with respect to the foregoing point since Dr. Rawls is on record as having admitted that just institutions might not necessarily lead to the maximization of the good. Furthermore, Dr. Harris concedes that while engaging individuals as ends in themselves – something that is important to John Rawls' perspective -- might be a good method through which to protect overall human well-being, nevertheless, the bottom line in such discussions should be that treating people as ends in themselves must serve the greater good ... or, in the terminology of Dr. Harris, must 'maximize well-being.'

If a social arrangement concerning the distribution of justice that is centered around the idea of fairness – that is, a social contract – turns out not to serve the greater good (however that is defined), would such an arrangement give expression to either a 'morally right' action or social system? Such a question leads to another question: What are the criteria for determining whether, or not, something constitutes a morally right action or social system?

John Rawls' answer is rooted in considerations of fairness as a function of decisions made under a veil of ignorance. His answer is concerned with matters of procedural fairness.

If two individuals are required to operate in accordance with the same principles of procedural fairness, and, yet, the two individuals possess markedly different levels of intelligence, talent, drive, and the like, then even if the rules of procedural fairness are observed, and even if the two individuals are ignorant about the extent of the differences between them, as well as ignorant of the differential impact such disparities might have on their respective futures, a possibility exists that such fairness still might lead to misery for some and enhanced well-being for others. This is one of the reasons why Dr. Rawls believes that one of the principles of justice as fairness that needs to be developed while operating out of a veil of ignorance should include some sort of mechanism that ties improvements in the life of some (e.g., the more talented and/or intelligent) to also improving the lives of the least well-off people in society, as well.

Now, it is conceivable that even with the addition of such safeguards, one will never maximize well-being or the good. Nonetheless, one still will have provided a way through which to improve the condition of the least well off in any given society as some sort of function that, in part, reflects enhancements in the condition of those who – due to talents, motivations, and intellect – are able to improve their lives under conditions of procedural fairness more so than are those who are less talented are able to do under the same conditions of procedural fairness.

Consequently, by admitting that his notion of justice as fairness might not lead to a maximization of the good for all people who are operating out of such a social contract arrangement, John Rawls does minimize the gap between disparate groups because the fortunes of the least well off will always be tied, in beneficial ways, to enhancements in the lives of the people who are better off. Therefore, John Rawls is not so much conceding philosophical defeat to Dr. Harris' notion of maximization of well-being as much as Dr. Rawls is arguing that, on the one hand, concerns about maximization of well-being don't really get one very far until one decides what constitutes 'the good' -- 'well-being' -- or what constitutes the criteria for

maximizing 'the good,' while, on the other hand, Dr. Rawls' idea of 'justice as fairness' provides one with a reasonable starting point and methodology through which to explore how one might go about structuring a social contract quite independently of the many problems that surround the idea of trying to determine what it means to "maximize well-being."

While the problem of distributive justice – that is, the allocation of goods and services – in society is an important one, I'm not sure that the idea of "justice as fairness" is necessarily being fair to the issue of justice. Proposing a theory of how one might go about constructing social arrangements under a veil of ignorance concerning one's actual condition is one way of addressing the problem of justice, but such a proposal might have nothing to do with the property of justice that might – or might not – be inherent in the very fabric of being.

More specifically, like Dr. Harris' notion of maximizing well-being, John Rawls' idea that justice as fairness is a function of the sort of social arrangements that might be established under a veil of ignorance is an exercise in arbitrariness. For instance, what if problems surrounding the allocation of goods and services are only one dimension of the nature of justice?

What if one asks: What purpose, if any, is to be served by any given system of allocation? Suppose someone asked: What is the nature of the relationship between any given system of allocation and the realization of essential identity or human potential? Or, what if someone were to inquire about the relationship, if any, between, on the one hand, a given system of distributive justice involving the allocation of goods and services and, on the other hand, the nature of truth?

Can one reduce justice down to a matter of procedural fairness concerning the allocation of goods and services? Does such a conception do justice to issues such as truth, purpose, identity, and human potential?

Even if one were to develop a means for ensuring that everyone in a given society received equal amounts of goods and services, would such a system of allocation necessarily permit people to discover the truth of things or the nature of their essential identity – if any, or the purpose of life – if any, or to develop their potential? How should one

proceed if being preoccupied with quantitative allocations of goods and services distracts one from pursuing other dimensions of doing justice to the nature of existence? What does one do if a system of distributive justice in which people are allocated equal portions of goods and services does not serve the qualitative needs and interests of people such that different people might need different packages of goods and services in order to pursue and realize the nature of truth, purpose, identity, and potential in the context of an individual's life rather than in some collective sense?

The truth of the matter is that our natural condition is one of operating under a veil of ignorance concerning the truth of so many things. Issues concerning a just allocation of quantitative goods and services constitute only one dimension of such ignorance. If one wishes to put forth a theory of 'justice as fairness', then, presumably, one will need to take into consideration all of the many things to which fairness might be addressed.

If one established a system of distributive justice that was fair to human beings, would this necessarily be fair to the environment or to the ecological systems of Earth? If one established a system of distributive justice that was quantitatively fair to human beings, would this necessarily be a system that was qualitatively fair to human beings and/or the environment?

How does one establish procedural fairness when qualitative considerations are thrown in with quantitative issues? When procedural fairness is merely a matter of quantitative allocation, the problem is difficult enough. However, when one introduces qualitative factors into the issue of procedural fairness, then the nature of the problem becomes qualitatively different from the one that John Rawls is exploring.

Without the truth, all starting points are arbitrary. The idea of a 'veil of ignorance' is an interesting methodological device, but, in the end, without truth, all one possibly can derive from the 'original position' is speculation concerning arrangements that are built around arbitrary notions of 'justice.'

The idea of 'justice as fairness' -- when construed as a set of procedural principles that will allocate goods and services in an manner that will not reflect the hidden differences of intellect, talent,

or social position and, therefore, will be impartial in character – is a coherent, rational approach to the problem of distributive justice. Nevertheless, Dr. Harris’ omniscient being that indicated how seemingly fair choices led to misery raised the wrong issue – more specifically, the omniscient being should have entered into a Socratic mode of questioning and asked: What does ‘justice as fairness’ have to do with the truth of things ... that is, what do we mean by justice, and what justifies such a meaning? Apparently, Dr. Harris’ omniscient being wasn’t as omniscient as Dr. Harris supposed.

Dr. Harris claims: “Injustice makes its victims demonstrably less happy, and it could be easily argued that it tends to make its perpetrators less happy than they would be if they cared about the well-being of others.” (page 80) There is a potential difference between perceived injustice and actual injustice.

If someone is being treated justly but believes he or she is being treated unjustly, then, what does the unhappiness such a person feels about the situation have to do with anything except a misperception of a given set of circumstances? Similarly, if someone is treating another person unjustly but believes she or he is engaged in just behavior, will such an individual necessarily be interested in becoming more concerned about the welfare of others? Such a person is likely to ask himself or herself: How can I be more just than just? How can I enhance the well-being of others when everything I am doing is dedicated to the well-being of others (however mistaken this assessment might actually be)?

If someone doesn’t realize that he or she is being treated unjustly, will that person necessarily be unhappy with her or his situation? On the other hand, if someone realized he or she was behaving unjustly and also realized that if she or he would become more concerned about the welfare of others, then the person’s well-being might become enhanced, would such a person necessarily not, thereby, enjoy whatever perverse pleasure might be derived through such an act of injustice? Is the possibility for achieving a condition of greater well-being in the future enough to induce a person to stop being unjust in the moment?

If one does not know what, if anything, constitutes injustice from the perspective of Being, then irrespective of whether, or not, some

given set of circumstances makes one feel more, or less, happy, this doesn't necessarily say anything about the nature of justice or well-being. Moreover, even if I realized that – in principle – I might be happier if I were more concerned about the welfare of others, and, concomitantly, if I were less dedicated to perpetrating 'injustice,' nevertheless, if I don't know what the truth of the matter is with respect to issues of injustice or well-being, then I'm not certain what conceding such a generalized philosophical point does for me or anyone else.

Apparently, Dr. Harris' ideas about maximizing well-being don't necessarily get one any closer to the truth of things than does Dr. Rawls' ideas involving justice as fairness. They both are rationalized systems of thinking that are rooted in assumptions that are arbitrary. Unless one can demonstrate how the underlying assumptions for those frameworks accurately reflect the way of the universe, then, not only are both frameworks surrounded by a litany of unanswered questions, but neither approach to things appears to be all that compelling.

Toward the end of Dr. Harris' limited exposition of John Rawls' notion of 'justice as fairness', he states: "While there may be some surprises in store for us down the path, there is every reason to expect that kindness, compassion, fairness, and other classically 'good' traits will be vindicated neuroscientifically – which is to say that we will only discover further reasons to believe that they are good for us, in that they generally enhance our lives." (page 80)

I'm still a little fuzzy on how one will demonstrate that character traits such as kindness, compassion and fairness will be neurologically vindicated in the sense of being good for us. Good for us in what sense?

For thousands of years, mystics have been singing the praises of the aforementioned character traits, along with a number of other such qualities. Whatever one might gain in the way of added 'goodness' – which, for Dr. Harris involves, in some sense, an enhanced sense of well-being -- by adhering to the observance of the foregoing sorts of traits, nonetheless, the reasons for such adherence are not necessarily just a function of well-being or even necessarily a function of well-being at all.

As far as I can determine, one question that Dr. Harris has not addressed or answered in *The Moral Landscape*, is why should one suppose that traits such as 'kindness,' 'compassion,' 'fairness,' and the like give expression to, each in its own way, the condition of well-being. Even if one felt good about being kind, compassionate, and fair, why assume this means that one is experiencing a condition of well-being?

If kindness, compassion, and fairness are not somehow inherent in the nature of the universe of Being, then feeling good about doing such things is nothing more than a statement of liking with respect to the feeling one gets when one is kind, compassionate, or fair. From such a perspective, well-being becomes a function of whatever makes one feel good or is pleasurable ... unless, that is, Dr. Harris can show that some modalities of feeling good are more in sync with the nature of things than are other forms of feeling good. Moreover, if Dr. Harris cannot establish a connection between certain conditions of consciousness and the nature of the universe, then his approach to well-being is entirely arbitrary.

Many mystics consider qualities such as kindness, compassion, and fairness to be important not because their presence necessarily results in an enhanced condition of well-being – although this might be the case in some instances -- but because such qualities help form an orientation of consciousness that might provide the best opportunity we have to access truth concerning the nature of the universe and the manner in which human beings are linked to that universe. In fact, many mystics believe that without the presence of such qualities, a great many truths will be hidden from an individual.

Such qualities are prerequisites to providing one with an opportunity – nothing more – for, possibly, coming to understand a more complete sense of the truth concerning the universe and one's relationship with that universe. From such a perspective, all questions of well-being are antecedent to, and dependent on, questions concerning the truth of things.

As such, considerations of kindness, compassion, and fairness must be pursued independently of whether, or not, one feels better doing such things and independently of whether, or not, one's well-being is enhanced – whether in the short run or in the long run --

through observing such qualities. According to the mystics, without such qualities, one's access to truth will be blocked, limited, or distorted.

Realizing the truth of things might serve as a guide to discovering the nature of well-being. However, the search for truth goes on independently of whether, or not, one's sense of well-being feels enhanced by such a pursuit.

Moreover, as almost all mystics will attest, and as our own individual experiences are likely to substantiate, the road to developing character traits such as patience, tolerance, honesty, fairness, compassion, sincerity, courage, charitableness, forgiveness, humility, gratitude, and so on, is a fairly rocky road with many pitfalls along the way.

Having to swallow, or modulate, one's anger is not an easy thing to do. Furthermore, while one is in the process of doing battle with such anger, the benefits of this sort of struggle are not necessarily evident. Therefore, understanding how controlling anger enhances one's well-being is not immediately apparent – and this is especially true when controlling anger doesn't necessarily lead to an improvement in whatever situation provoked one's anger in the first place ... as is often the case since, while one might be able to control what one does, one can't control what other people will do or how they will respond to one's attempt to exercise some mode of anger management.

There is, however, one dimension of struggling with anger that does tend to become readily evident over time. As long as one is in the throes of anger, one often is cut off from the truth of things because anger serves to filter -- and, therefore, bias – everything one sees and does in the direction of the character and nature of one's anger.

What is true in relation to anger also holds in relation to all other negative character traits. Like anger, negative character traits such as: arrogance, impatience, selfishness, jealousy, ingratitude, enmity, cowardice, intolerance, cruelty, and the like all distort the truth of things, each in its own way.

Alternatively, positive character traits tend to permit one to at least have the opportunity to access a deeper, more complete understanding of oneself, others, the universe, and life. Even if the

price of observing such positive character traits results turns out to be a matter of a person being treated with injustice by others – and, oddly, this is often the case – and, therefore, even though, as a result, one’s well-being might not be enhanced in any measurable way through the observance of such positive character traits, nevertheless, such an orientation keeps alive the opportunity to pursue the truth of things in as receptive a manner as possible.

One does not need neurobiology to verify the foregoing – even if it were able to come up with a methodological means capable of reliably and accurately measuring such issues. The fact of the matter is most of us are aware of the veracity of the foregoing perspective through the empirical convolutions entailed by our individual lives.

Furthermore, the foregoing does not give expression to well-being in Dr. Harris’ sense of the term. For example, (1) the issue of positive or constructive character traits does not involve any sort of quantitative maximization of such states (e.g., How would one even go about assigning meaning or a meaningful metric to the idea of maximized patience, tolerance, humility, and the like?); (2) the issue of positive or constructive character traits does not, in itself, constitute a straightforward, easily understood condition of well-being since such conditions often are permeated with struggle and ebbs and flows -- therefore, measuring the degree of well-being in such conditions of turmoil seems fraught with a variety of methodological difficulties and problems; (3) gaining control over the negative, destructive character traits and developing a facility for giving expression to the positive, constructive character traits is not necessarily a means for arriving at a condition of well-being but is, instead, a way station on the way toward trying to seek the truth of things with as few sources of biases present as is possible – and this process of exploratory seeking does not easily lend itself to any form of quantitative measurement or assessment as far as issues of well-being are concerned ... even if we knew what might be meant by the notion of “well-being” – which we don’t; (4) until one knows the full truth of things, any position one takes concerning the issue of well-being will be arbitrary since well-being is, necessarily, a function of the way things are rather than being a function of speculative guesses concerning the relationship between

whatever “facts” – assuming they are facts -- have been gathered to date and how such facts are hypothesized to relate to the rest of Being.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Dr. Harris believes that Kant's notion of the "categorical imperative" has resonance with Dr. Harris' approach to moral issues – namely, as a function of consequences in relation to the impact of our behavior on the condition of well-being. According to Kant, one should only act in accordance with a principle to the extent that one can, at the same time, recommend or will that such a principle should be extended to, or be generalized, to everyone else in some sort of universal sense.

This is what Kant means by the term: 'categorical imperative.' Any given category of principle must be capable of being universalized to everyone else (that is, this condition is an imperative one which, therefore, carries the force of 'ought') if one is to argue justifiably, according to Kant, that acting on such a principle is the right or moral thing to do.

I have stumbled through life in a search for truth and justice. Does the fact I might have done things in a particular way and used certain principles during my journey commit me to suppose that everyone else should have done things in the same way as I have and that everyone else should have used the same principles as I did? Not necessarily!

What works for me might not work for other people. Furthermore, I don't believe that other people ought to repeat my mistakes during their quest for the truth or for justice.

There is another point that has relevancy to the present discussion. What if I truly believed in the principles that I employed during my journey through life? What if, as a result of my belief, I believed that everyone else should adopt such principles and encouraged them to do so, only to find out later on that my beliefs were incorrect?

Where, exactly, does Kant's categorical imperative leave me? As far as I can see, it leaves me – and, consequently (given the nature of the categorical imperative), others -- vulnerable to a lot of difficulties.

Thieves and murderers might be able to operate in accordance with the categorical imperative quite comfortably. They could encourage everyone to be a thief or murderer and might the best man

or woman win ... that, presumably, each thief or murderer might believe would be herself or himself.

Politicians, corporations, governments, abusive spouses, and militaries all could operate in accordance with the categorical imperative and let loose considerable suffering upon the world. Indeed, they have done so.

Let's all play variations on a real-life – but more brutal and free-flowing -- version of Australian No-Rules Football (actually, despite appearances, there are an array of rules in Australian Football intended to limit the possible destructiveness of play in any given match). Surely, as long as I believe that everyone should play by the same set of rules, then the outcomes of such 'games' could entail any manner of injury, death, misery, oppression, exploitation, and the like. Yet, the basic conditions of the 'categorical imperative' will have been observed.

Dr. Harris maintains that the essential intuition of Kant's categorical imperative is one that reflects the moral intuitions that many of us have concerning issues of fairness and justification – that is: "One cannot claim to be "right" about anything – whether a matter of reason or a matter of ethics – unless one's views can be generalized to the others." (page 82)

Actually, the so-called moral intuition to which Dr. Harris is alluding might more correctly be understood as a reflection of egocentric thinking than as a form of reliable moral intuition. After all, many, if not most of us, are of the opinion that others ought to see things the way we do, and we often find it difficult to understand how people can fail to grasp what is so 'obvious' to ourselves. As a result, we frequently are quite prepared to generalize our way of thinking to everyone else.

Thus, Dr. Harris argues: "It seems abundantly clear that many people are simply wrong about morality – just as many people are wrong about physics, biology, history, and everything else worth understanding." (page 86) Of course, in line with the best forms of egocentric thinking, I am sure Dr. Harris does not mean to include himself amongst those who are -- in an "abundantly clear" manner -- simply wrong about morality or "everything else worth understanding."

People from many different kinds of political, philosophical, economic, religious, and scientific orientations believe they are right. Because they believe this, they are quite prepared to generalize such views to others and insist that all of the others must live in accordance with whatever such orientations indicate is the “right” thing to do. I don’t see how the categorical imperative will help sort any of this out, especially with respect to the issue of “rightness,” since believing that something is right is not necessarily the same thing as one’s belief actually being right.

Apparently, issues of truth are irrelevant to the idea of the categorical imperative. As long as one is prepared to take the principles upon which one acts and generalize them to other people, then the force of ought is rooted in one’s willingness to generalize such a principle for everyone. As a result, matters of truth fall by the wayside.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Returning to the issue of egocentrism from, yet, another direction, on page 88 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris follows up on a quotation from psychologist Jonathan Haidt in which the latter describes how, during most attempts to persuade other individuals with respect to some given moral argument, many people tend to sail past one another like ships in the night and, therefore, never gain sight of the other person's perspective concerning whatever issue is being explored. Dr. Harris states: "Such failures of persuasion do not suggest that both sides of every controversy are equally credible. For instance, the above passage perfectly captures my occasional collisions with 9/11 conspiracy theorists ... Many of these people believe that the Twin Towers collapsed not because fully fueled passenger jets smashed into them but because agents of the Bush administration had secretly rigged these buildings to explode."

Dr. Harris goes on to indicate that although during such occasional encounters, he and the 9/11 conspiracy theorists might exchange arguments that are intended to influence the other side, nonetheless, after all is said and done, both sides are left unmoved and feel that the other side has been closed-minded and insincere with respect to the manner in which they engaged the discussion since – despite what are perceived to be perfectly sound evidence and reasoning -- there has been no movement on either side toward the perspective that each side feels is correct. Then, Dr. Harris says: "It is undeniable, however, that if one side in this debate is right about what actually happened on September 11, 2001, the other side must be absolutely wrong." (pages 88-89)

The latter statement is a tautology. More specifically, the reasoning runs as follows: If one of the two sides of a debate is correct, then the other side is absolutely wrong, and, consequently, the criterion for accepting the stated conclusion is included in the premise.

Dr. Harris seems to be suggesting there are only two ways to go in relation to the events of 9/11 with respect to explaining why the Twin Towers were destroyed. His way of framing things is not tenable.

First of all, Dr. Harris is, himself, a 9/11 conspiracy theorist because he accepts the government's position that 19 Muslim hijackers conspired together with 'Usama bin Laden and Khalid

Shaykh Mohammed to fly jets into the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania on 9/11. So, the issue, then, becomes a matter of whether Dr. Harris' version of a conspiracy theory is more credible than the conspiracy theory of those who believe that someone beside the 19 hijackers might be responsible for what happened on 9/11, and it is clear from what he says not only in *The Moral Landscape* but, as well, *The End of Faith*, that he believes his own conspiracy theory is more credible than the alternative conspiracy theory.

However, what if neither of the foregoing conspiracy theories were correct? In other words, what if Dr. Harris' theory that the Twin Towers were destroyed as the result of fully fueled jets flying into them was incorrect, and what if the alternative theory cited by Dr. Harris – namely, that “agents of the Bush administration had secretly rigged the buildings to explode” – were also incorrect?

What are the criteria of credibility concerning explanations for what took place on 9/11? Is it possible to engage the events of 9/11 without referring to the term: “conspiracy” at all? What if one simply tried to follow the evidence and see where that led?

The 9/11 Commission Report provides no account of what caused the Twin Towers to be destroyed – although the report does allude to the idea that because the Twin Towers were struck by two passenger jets, and because these collisions led to fires, then, therefore, one might suppose such events were the cause of the destruction of the Twin Towers. However, such an account is not a causal explanation but is, rather, a narrative description of events.

Despite the fact that NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) -- the branch of the Commerce Department that carried out a technical account of sorts concerning the Twin Towers -- has, itself, indicated that it's 10,000 pages of technical material distributed across the various reports released by NIST concerning the World Trade Center does not provide an explanation for what destroyed the Twin Towers, many people operate with the misunderstanding that the NIST reports explain what destroyed the Twin Towers and Building 7 on 9/11. This is not so. Moreover, as indicated above, NIST, itself, admits as much.

Instead, the NIST reports concerning the Twin Towers and Building 7 offer only several, very problematic theories that postulate

– and do not prove -- what might have led up to the point just prior to when the buildings began to encounter a possible, progressive failure. An empirically verifiable account of the progressive failures, themselves, are not actually delineated in those reports – although a general narrative is provided – and, even more importantly, the account given by NIST cannot be reconciled with what millions of people witnessed on 9/11 with respect to the nature of the destruction of the Twin Towers .

In other words, if one examines the NIST theories and tries to match them against actual video and photographic evidence, the former theories do not reflect the actual visual evidence. Moreover, the NIST theories do not reflect a great many other evidential considerations concerning the events at Ground Zero on 9/11.

I use the phrase: “several, very problematic theories” in the foregoing description concerning the alleged explanations put forth by NIST about the destruction of the Twin Towers and Building 7 because the conclusions reached by NIST employees are little more than junk science that is not capable of withstanding critical scrutiny. NIST had to fudge its data, as well as make a variety of unverifiable assumptions about the location of fires, intensity of fires, duration of fires, and the extent of damage supposedly caused by such fires. Even then, its theories were unable to provide a coherent, plausible, evidentially backed account of what transpired at the World Trade Center on 9/11.

For example, a key ingredient in the NIST theory was built around the idea that some of the floor assemblies in the Twin Towers failed due to fire damage and, as a result, led to the progressive collapse the Twin Towers. However, Underwriters Laboratories proved that not only would the floor assemblies not have failed in the manner described by NIST, but those assemblies would have been capable of withstanding stresses far in excess of what is likely to have occurred on 9/11.

In addition, the NIST account cannot plausibly account for the fact that the Twin Towers and Building 7 disappeared at speeds that, at times, involved conditions of free fall. Furthermore, the NIST account cannot plausibly account for: why all three buildings (the Two Towers and Building 7) fell, in large part, with such symmetry; or what force caused the top 30 stories of the South Tower to seemingly contravene

the principle of angular momentum; or why the amount of debris from the three buildings does not reflect the amount of debris that should have resulted from the destruction of two 110-storey buildings and a 47-storey building; or why the seismic readings associated with the destruction of the Twin Towers and Building 7 do not reflect the sort of reading that one would expect from the 'fall' of such multi-hundred thousand ton buildings; or why the 'Bathtub' foundational structure beneath the Twin Towers (among other things, it helps prevent the Hudson River from flooding Manhattan) was not fractured by the combined weight of two 110-storey buildings, and, yet, that Bathtub was fractured and significantly damaged by the weight of earth-moving equipment that is only a small, miniscule fraction of the weight of the Twin Towers; or why the shopping plaza and subway areas below the Twin Towers were not crushed out of existence by the weight of the mass that supposedly was raining down on those areas; or why so much of the material of the Twin Towers was dustified to such an extent that even Governor Pataki remarked in a television program how everything (including office furniture, equipment, and fixtures) had been reduced to dust; or why there were thousands of cars near 'Ground Zero' that exhibited strange properties (they were often missing engine blocks and door handles and seemed to have rusted extraordinarily quickly) that cannot be accounted for by the idea of fires; or why there were so many circular holes about 24 feet in diameter that populated Ground Zero (both with respect to some of the buildings as well as the grounds); or why many of the bodies of the people who died in relation to the Twin Towers were never found and why many of those that were found - including individuals who jumped while fires burned in certain parts of the towers -- were severely disassembled; or why the destruction of Building 7 was, in the words of NIST, "whisper quiet" rather than raucous as one might expect with 47 stories jack-hammering down one another; or why the magnetic field of the Earth changed five times in precise conjunction with events at the World Trade Center (two fluctuation events were correlated with whatever struck the Twin Towers, and three other fluctuation events occurred in relation to the time of destruction for the two Twin Towers, as well as Building 7)?

The Pentagon Performance Report is equally filled with junk science. Among many other things, that report cannot account for why

the National Transportation Safety Board's 'Black Box' flight recorder data for Flight 77 – which, supposedly, hit the Pentagon -- indicates that the plane depicted in the released flight data could not possibly have hit the Pentagon in the way indicated, nor could it have hit the five light poles that allegedly were knocked down during the flight path of that vehicle. Furthermore, *The Pentagon Performance Report* cannot explain how 13 witnesses (including three Pentagon police officers) -- quite independently of one another -- all indicated that the plane which supposedly struck the Pentagon had a flight path that carried the plane along the north side of the former Citgo gas station situated about a quarter mile, or so, from the side of the Pentagon that was 'hit', and, if correct, this means that if a plane actually did hit the Pentagon, then it could not have done so in a way that is consistent with the assessment given in *The Pentagon Performance Report*. One might also note that April Gallop who had top security clearance and who was at the precise location where the alleged plane struck the Pentagon has given sworn testimony that although the area was destroyed, there were no fires, no plane engines or other plane parts, no luggage, no dead passengers, or any passenger seats, and nothing she touched with her hand or feet (her shoes had been blown off by the event) was hot when she led a number of people out through the hole in the side of the Pentagon shortly after the Pentagon event.

I have written about all of the foregoing issues, along with many others, in much greater detail in two books: *The Essence of September 11th* and the recently released *Framing 9/11*. Interestingly, none of what I have to say involves invoking any sort of conspiracy theory concerning 9/11 ... I just try to follow the available evidence and ask what I feel are appropriate questions.

Dr. Harris clearly believes that his conspiracy theory concerning the events of 9/11 is quite credible. However, such a belief is likely nothing more than an expression of his complete absorption in his own condition of egocentrism concerning the matter because I am not aware of his ever having offered a fact-based account of what destroyed the Twin Towers, Building 7, or part of the Pentagon. Therefore, the only things that appear to matter to Dr. Harris are not the facts of 9/11 but merely his own factually-challenged opinions concerning those issues.

I know that Dr. Harris' conspiracy theory concerning 9/11 is not a function of his atheism or agnosticism. After all, Barrie Zwicker, an atheist from Canada, has written a book – namely, *Towers of Deception* – and released at least one DVD (namely, *The 9/11 News Special You Never Saw*) in which he criticizes the official government conspiracy theory concerning 9/11 and reveals some of the ludicrous aspects of that theory.

I don't necessarily agree with everything that Barry Zwicker has to say in relation to 9/11. I do believe, however, that Mr. Zwicker is committed, in a fair and open way, to uncovering the sorts of evidence and reasoning processes that are directed toward generating a judicious assessment of the events of 9/11,. Consequently, one can only suppose that Dr. Harris' factually-challenged conspiracy theory constitutes a failure of reason on his part rather than being a reflection of anything having to do with his views about atheism and/or agnosticism.

Whatever else might be the case with respect to the Twin Towers and Building 7, the idea that those buildings were destroyed because two fully fueled jets struck them (and this is Dr. Harris' position on the matter) is nonsensical. Unfortunately, rather than critically examining the evidence, Dr. Harris has permitted himself to be flummoxed by a media that is as error-prone concerning issues involving 9/11 as are the members of the 9/11 Commission, NIST, and *The Pentagon Performance Report* team.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Dr. Harris does not believe human beings have free will. He believes that what we know about the brain undermines any possibility of human beings possessing free will, and he refers to a variety of scientific findings in an attempt to back up his claims concerning the issue of free will.

For instance, Dr. Harris mentions the research of Dr. Benjamin Libet, a physiologist. Dr. Libet discovered something rather interesting with respect to the process of making certain kinds of decisions.

More specifically, Dr. Libet ran experiments in which subjects were required to flex their finger at a time of their choosing and to note the time on a clock concerning such an action. The experimental data indicated that, on average, subjects took approximately 0.2 seconds to flex their finger after supposedly deciding to do so.

However, during the experiments, the subjects were hooked up to an encephalograph, which measures certain kinds of electrical activity in the brain. According to the EEG readings, there was an electrical spike approximately .350 milliseconds before the time that subjects claimed to have made their decision to flex their fingers. Dr. Libet referred to this spike in electrical activity as a “readiness potential.”

Dr. Libet interpreted the readiness potential to mean that in the pre-motor state of the brains of his subjects (that is, in the period before a finger was actually flexed) there was unconscious, physiological activity taking place in the brain that preceded a subject’s awareness of a decision having been made to flex his or her finger. In other words, the readiness potential seemed to indicate that prior to the time when a subject was aware of having made a decision, ‘something else’ – presumably physiological in nature -- actually was formulating such a decision, and a subject’s awareness of the time when such a decision became conscious was interpreted by the subjects to be the time when a decision to flex their fingers had been made ... although the EEG readings indicated that such was not the case.

Dr. Harris alludes to still other experiments. These further experiments employed fMRIs, or functional magnetic resonance

imaging techniques, that are capable of providing more precise data than the EEG readings in the Libet experiments.

These more advanced studies indicate that certain kinds of allegedly 'conscious' decisions could be foretold through the presence of specific markers some ten seconds prior to the point when subjects believed they were making a conscious decision about some given task. On the basis of such empirical considerations, Dr. Harris concludes: "The truth seems inescapable: I, as the subject of my experience, cannot know what I will next think or do until a thought or intention arises; and thoughts and intentions are caused by physical events and mental stirrings of which I am not aware." (page 103)

However, is such a conclusion necessarily warranted? Dr. Libet believed there was an array of physiological processes occurring that resulted in a readiness potential of a certain kind. Dr. Harris also believes that prior to conscious awareness of thoughts and intentions, there are various physical events and unconscious "mental stirrings" that occur.

What shapes, orients, orders, and regulates such physiological and physical processes that occur outside of normal consciousness? What are the events that lead up to the appearance of the readiness potential, in the case of Dr. Libet, and the fMRI indicators, in the case of later studies, that permit a scientist to know that some sort of 'conscious' intention or action will be made by a subject before the subject, herself or himself, knows what will transpire?

The fact of the matter is that neither Dr. Libet – who passed away a little over three years ago in July 2007 – nor Dr. Harris know the answer to the foregoing question. They assume that whatever goes on prior to the reported conscious experience of subjects is entirely physiological in character – that is, such events are a function of brain states. However, neither Dr. Libet nor Dr. Harris possess a step-by-step explanation for why such readiness potential brain states take place or have the structural character they do.

One could agree that, perhaps, what we take to be normal waking consciousness is not necessarily the 'decider' of intentions, decisions, or actions and, as such, one must reformulate one's understanding of how human beings operate. Nonetheless, such a concession does not

necessarily force one into the sort of physical or physiological corner that Dr. Libet and Dr. Harris apparently wish to place human beings.

Until one can establish what causes the readiness potential to occur when it does and why it has the character it does, then the perspective of Dr. Libet and Dr. Harris concerning, among other things, free will is premature. It might be the case that the readiness potential is entirely explicable in terms of nothing but physiological processes. Then again, one cannot necessarily rule out the possibility that the source of human decisions and intentions is something other than a function of physiological events and brain states.

To provide something of the flavor of what I have in mind here, consider the following illustration drawn from my own life. For years now, I have been doing the Jumble Puzzle that is syndicated in newspapers around the world.

For those who might be unfamiliar with the nature of the puzzle, it consists of anywhere from four to six jumbled words, and in the boxes where each of the unscrambled words is to be written, some of the squares in those boxes containing letters of the unscrambled word are circled, and these squares with circles indicate that letters are to be drawn from any given jumbled word when that word is properly sorted out to form an English word. The circled letters from each properly resolved jumbled word are to be collected until one has a set of circled letters that, when unscrambled, will solve the cartoon, plus caption, that accompanies the jumble puzzle.

Although one is permitted to jot down the words in the boxes provided in the puzzle so that one will be able to keep track of the circled letters that will enable one to solve the cartoon/caption puzzle, I usually try to solve the whole thing in my head. Occasionally, I get stumped, but most of the time the puzzle gets solved in a couple of minutes or less.

However, the question I have is: Who or what really solves the puzzle? I study the puzzle with my normal, waking consciousness. Although that mode of consciousness does lend its assistance in various ways, the fact of the matter is that something other than my normal waking consciousness is actually solving the problem.

I look at the jumbled letters, and, then, oftentimes, all of a sudden, without even having to rearrange the letters, I know what the word is. The same sort of things happens when I assemble all the circled letters in my mind and try to figure the word or words they spell that will answer the cartoon/caption puzzle.

Something in me is a lot smarter and a lot more aware of what is going on in my world than my normal waking consciousness is. The same realization extends to many of the things I do in life.

Someone asks me a question of trivia, and an answer emerges into consciousness that, more often than not, is correct. How does my memory sort out an appropriate response to such questions?

I am writing a book – say the present one -- and I am working on an analysis of some given position. Out of the depths come insights that appear to be beyond the capabilities of my normal waking consciousness.

Sometimes my waking consciousness reflects on whatever insight might have arisen, and I enter into a dialogue with myself concerning the strengths and weaknesses of such insights in relation to the problem at hand. Nevertheless, not only do such strengths and weaknesses, themselves, seem to come from beyond the horizons of my normal waking consciousness, but, as well, so does the judgment concerning the direction in which I should go with respect to such a self-dialogue.

I speak in a public gathering, and my normal, waking consciousness seems to have no idea where things are headed ... perhaps even getting a little nervous about what will transpire in the near future with respect to such talking. Yet, much to the surprise of normal, waking consciousness, the words come and seem to form a coherent, rational perspective concerning whatever might be the topic on which I am speaking.

Although many people suppose that our normal waking consciousness is the ring master who is running the show, there is considerable evidence to indicate that there is something else within us which is very much more aware of both the external world and the internal world than such waking consciousness is.

Usually, people refer to that 'something else' as the 'unconscious'. However, what does this really mean?

What is conscious and what is unconscious when that which is 'unconscious' seems eminently more aware of what is going on and more aware about what is necessary to be able to respond intelligently, constructively, and practically to different ongoing problems than does normal, waking consciousness? There seems to be an inversion of capabilities in which our normal, waking consciousness – sometimes referred to as the ego – often seeks to take credit for that which has been proven again and again in our everyday experience to belong to something else that operates beyond or at the horizons of normal, waking consciousness.

That which we refer to as the 'unconscious' is really the ringleader ... a ringleader that appears to be very aware of what it is doing as it does it and appears to be very aware of what is necessary to get on with what is being done. On the other hand, what we refer to as normal, waking consciousness, seems to be more unaware -- and therefore, unconscious -- with respect to issues of memory, intelligence, insight, understanding, language, problem-solving, creativity, and the like.

In many ways, our normal waking consciousness is the dumbest kid on the block. The clever one is like the Wizard of Oz and works from behind a screen, and the screen is our normal waking consciousness.

The nature of normal, waking consciousness seems to be very consonant with the notion of 'working memory' in psychology. Working memory is a sort of workbench where various ideas can be assembled as they are worked on by what we often refer to as the 'unconscious' – except this unconscious entity is a craftsman that knows how to arrange things laying on the workbench of memory and, thereby, is able to generate constructive products of reasoning, analysis, assessment judgment, and the like.

Working-memory is capable of being aware of some of what is going on, but this is more in the sense of keeping track, after the fact, of what is being shaped and fashioned elsewhere in the mind. Working-memory might reflect on the contents of the workbench and be cognizant – even appreciative -- of their presence, but the

craftsmanship is performed elsewhere in a manner about which working-memory is unaware.

Now, in some ways, I think that Dr. Harris and Dr. Libet might agree with much of the foregoing comments. The difference would be that they would claim that the craftsperson behind the scenes is really nothing more than an array of physiological systems that, somehow, became integrated with respect to this or that task, whereas I feel that such a perspective is quite incomplete and problematic.

For instance, how are physiological systems aware of anything? How do physiological systems differentiate appropriate from inappropriate memories in relation to some ongoing issue in waking consciousness? How do physiological systems determine language sequences that reflect things going on in waking consciousness and proceed to generate rational assessments and analyses of such objects of phenomenology? How do physiological systems solve mathematical, philosophical, or scientific problems? How do physiological systems generate intelligence or give rise to art, poetry, music, and other modes of creativity? How do physiological systems develop hermeneutical systems of meaning, insight, and wisdom?

Dr. Harris cannot answer any of the foregoing questions. So, why should anyone assume that his explanation that the unconscious is nothing but a function of physiological systems?

Moreover, if Dr. Harris wants to know what does explain such phenomena if not physiology and neurobiology, the answer is simple: I don't know, but, then, I am not the one who claims to understand what is going on in the mind or how it is possible. Dr. Harris is the one who is trying to give the impression that he knows what is going on. Yet, neither he, nor his colleagues in neurobiology, have any plausible, verifiable proof that such phenomena are nothing but a function of physiological processes.

One can acknowledge the empirical findings of Dr. Libet with respect to the existence of the readiness potential and the manner in which it appears to indicate that despite the mistaken beliefs of many people to the contrary, normal, waking consciousness is not the source of intention, decisions, or actions in human beings. However, one is not, thereby, forced to conclude – as Dr. Harris and Dr. Libet do – that, consequently, there is no such thing as 'free will' in human beings.

Instead, all that one can conclude is that the source of free will -- if it exists -- is not rooted in normal, waking consciousness.

Thousands of years before the idea of readiness potentials and fMRIs were even a gleam in the eyes of their progenitors, mystics from many different spiritual traditions were indicating that what we refer to as normal, waking consciousness does not even remotely convey the potential of awareness that is inherent in human beings. In fact, according to the mystics, more often than not, what takes place in normal, waking consciousness often serves as little more than a form of interference for those dimensions of human beings that were capable of extended awareness with respect to the nature of reality. Indeed, by becoming immersed in the dramas of normal, waking consciousness, one becomes distracted from more essential and more fundamental truths concerning the nature of things.

Consequently, the discovery of the readiness potential and the results of the various fMRI studies to which Dr. Harris refers in *The Moral Landscape*, is quite consistent with things that many mystics have been saying long before the existence of neurobiology. Do such scientific findings prove the mystics are right about things? No, but such findings don't prove them wrong either, and, if the mystics were so inclined, they would be entitled to cite such findings as being quite consonant with certain of their beliefs.

Dr. Harris refers to the work of the biologist Martin Heisenberg who talks about the manner in which many processes in the brain -- for example, the opening and closing of ion channels in the membranes of neurons or the release of neurotransmitters into the synapse, or space, between a given neuron and the dendrite of some other neuron -- take place in a fashion that are not strictly determined by environmental stimuli. According to Dr. Heisenberg, this realm of indeterminateness might encompass a sort of self-generated form of free will.

The way in which Dr. Harris critically responds to the foregoing perspective is as follows. "If I were to learn that my decision to have a third cup of coffee this morning was due to a random release of neurotransmitters, how could the indeterminacy of the initiating event count as the free exercise of my will? Such indeterminacy, if it were generally effective throughout the brain, would obliterate any semblance of human agency." (page 104)

One might tend to agree with Dr. Harris that trying to derive free will from the indeterminacy of random events would seem to undermine what such an attempt is trying to establish, nonetheless, perhaps both Dr. Harris and Dr. Heisenberg are approaching the issue from the wrong direction. What if, instead of talking in terms of 'random' events, one were to ask the question: What is a random event?

Does an event that is called random actually give expression to an indeterminate dynamic, or, is the complexity of the underlying dynamic simply of such a nature that the structural character of that dynamic cannot be discerned? As a result, what is actually of a determinate nature appears to be random in character -- or, at least, is labeled as such -- because we have no algorithm or set of physical laws for accurately capturing what is taking place?

Dr. Harris contends that: "... no account of causality leaves room for free will. Thoughts, moods, and desires of every sort simply spring into view -- and move us, or fail to move us, for reasons that are, from a subjective point of view, perfectly inscrutable." (page 104) Yet, Dr. Harris provides no account of why such thoughts, moods, and desires either move us or fail to move us.

If free will is a causal agent that operates in accordance with the potential of its own internal structural character -- just as gluons and quarks, in their own way, operate in accordance with their internal structural character -- then the idea of free will could be considered as one of the forces that shapes the structural character of a given causal dynamic. If so, then Dr. Harris belief that "no account of causality leaves room for free will" would be incorrect.

Are we entirely at the mercy of thoughts, moods, and desires that emerge into waking consciousness? Sometimes, perhaps, but there are other times in which such thoughts, moods, and desires are engaged and decisions are made that resist, or run contrary to, such thoughts, moods, and desires.

The whole struggle between the constructive dimensions and the destructive dimensions of character suggests that, possibly, such a struggle gives expression to a dynamic in which free will might be as much a source of the sorts of forces that could shape moral behavior as are one's thoughts, moods, and desires. Indeed, the thoughts, moods,

and desires that are resisted are as much a part of moral behavior as are the thoughts, moods, and desires to which one accedes.

Less than 50 years ago, no one suspected the existence of quarks or understood the internal dynamics of entities like neutrons and protons. Now, such things are much better understood -- even as science has a way to go before such processes are completely understood ... if this will ever be the case.

Is it possible that free will shares some similarities with the discovery of quarks and the acquiring of a certain degree of insight into the nature of their dynamics? In other words, isn't it possible that although many people suspect the existence of free will, nevertheless, the fact is that while, currently, we don't necessarily understand the internal dynamics of such an entity or what makes it possible, this doesn't mean there isn't such a dynamic or that such a dynamic could not serve a causal role in the generation of moral behavior?

Dr. Harris argues that: "Actions, intentions, beliefs, and desires are the sorts of things that can exist only in a system that is significantly constrained by patterns of behavior and the laws of stimulus-response." (page 104) However, one would like to know where the proof is that justifies such an argument.

In fact, Dr. Harris doesn't even know the sorts of things "actions, intentions, beliefs, and desires are" -- at least he has provided no evidence to demonstrate that he does know what sorts of things those sorts of things are. Furthermore, he really hasn't demonstrated what the precise characters of the patterns of behavior are that supposedly 'significantly constrain' things like "actions, intentions, beliefs, and desires" or why such things must be restricted to issues of stimulus-response. This is all merely argument by stipulation on his part.

Dr. Harris claims that: "Our belief in free will arises from our moment-to-moment ignorance of specific prior causes." (page 105) Yet, Dr. Harris' belief that free will is an illusion arises, perhaps, from his moment-to-moment ignorance of the nature of free will, what makes it possible, and its relevance to the issue of moral behavior.

A little later Dr. Harris seeks to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary actions. He claims: "A voluntary action is accompanied by the felt intention to carry it out, while an involuntary action isn't.

Where our intentions themselves come from, however, and what determined their character in every instant, remains perfectly mysterious in subjective terms.” (pages 105-106)

I hate be the one to break it to Dr. Harris, but that which is “perfectly mysterious in subjective terms” is equally “perfectly mysterious” in objective terms. Despite his bravado, Dr. Harris has no reliable evidence to indicate that he has any better understanding of what is transpiring in consciousness than, subjectively, might be the case for most of the rest of us.

The work of John Lorber, an English clinician, might have some relevancy here. John Lorber studied, among other things, the condition of hydrocephaly.

Hydrocephaly occurs when, for whatever reason, cerebral-spinal fluid becomes trapped within the four ventricles that are tucked within the brain. If not treated – for example, through the insertion of a shunt that helps to relieve pressure -- the accumulation of cerebral-spinal will begin to occur and start to compress brain matter against the interior portion of the skull.

If this continues unabated over time, the brain will be reduced to a very thin filament – perhaps, a millimeter or two in thickness – running around the interior of the skull, and the rest of the cranial space is occupied by cerebral spinal fluid. Usually, such compression results in severe mental retardation in the individual who is so affected.

Interestingly, however, John Lorber discovered that not all people suffering from hydrocephaly ended up severely retarded. In fact, he found that quite a few of these individuals tested out with IQs that were greater than 100. Moreover, in at least one case studied by John Lorber, a subject actually had graduated from university with an honors degree in mathematics.

More specifically, of the more than 600 CAT scans conducted by John Lorber, about 50, or so, of the scans were of individuals in which at least 95% of the cranial cavity had been filled with cerebral-spinal fluid. Yet, half of that group tested out with IQs greater than 100 despite the extremely compressed nature of their brain, even as the

other half of this group of roughly 50 individuals were severely retarded.

Following the release of John Lorber's study, Roger Lewin wrote an article entitled: "Is Your Brain Really Necessary?" that was based on that research. This article was published in the prestigious magazine *Science* in December 1980.

There have been a number of critics of John Lorber's work who point out that interpreting CAT scans can be very tricky. Such people indicate that it is very easy to miss brain mass when interpreting such scans, and they are of the opinion that John Lorber is guilty of having committed such errors in his study.

John Lorber acknowledges that, indeed, interpreting CAT scans can be tricky. Nevertheless, he claims his work contained no such errors.

Oddly enough, I am not aware – which is not to say this has not happened and I simply am not aware of it -- of any of the aforementioned critics (or anyone else, for that matter) who have expressed a willingness to examine the CAT scans in John Lorber's study in accordance with appropriate double-blind safeguards and provide the hard evidence that demonstrates how John Lorber was, in fact, wrong with respect to his belief that he had not committed any errors with respect to his interpretation of the scans of various individuals suffering from hydrocephaly. Apparently, like the church officials who condemned Galileo, none of John Lorber's critics seem willing to look through his 'telescope' – consisting of CAT scans – in order to see what, if any, brain matter shows up in such a viewing process.

Some of John Lorber's critics also refer to the fact that the brain has a variety of redundant systems built into it, and, consequently, such back-up systems could account for why some human beings are able to retain a high level of functioning despite the condition of their brains. However, if very little of a person's brain remains, one might wonder why such redundant systems would be any more likely to survive the compression process than the rest of the brain.

Whatever the ultimate value of the research of John Lorber might be, and even if someone were to come along and disprove such

research – if this is not already the case, but I just don't know about it -
- Dr. Harris' situation is not really improved all that much since Dr. Harris still has no idea how things such as consciousness, language, insight, reason, intelligence, and creativity are possible. On the other hand, if Lorber's research findings are able to stand the test of time, then Dr. Harris has even more problems that have been heaped on his plate that need to be explained, and I would be interested to see how he might try to digest such 'food for thought.'

Chapter Thirty

On page 108 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris states: “It seems to me that we need not have any illusions about a causal agent living within the human mind to condemn such a mind as unethical, negligent or even evil, and, therefore liable to occasion further harm. What we condemn in another person is the intention to do harm.” Aside from the possibility that Dr. Harris might have confused things with respect to whether, or not, it is a causal agent living within the human mind rather than the other way around, Dr. Harris position at this point seems rather muddled.

If Dr. Harris is correct that what is condemned in another human being is “the intention to do harm,” how does he propose to speak about intention without invoking a causal agent of some kind? Alternatively, if Dr. Harris wants to discuss moral issues independently of considerations of intention, then he is going to have to come up with a much, much better account – meaning more plausible and credible, with fewer problems, unanswered questions, and explanatory lacunae -- of how human actions are generated. Irrespective of whether, or not, intention is a function of some set of integrated physiological systems or the result of the activity of a capacity for free will, the existence of intentions and their character needs to be explained since whatever its ultimate nature might be, we all have the phenomenological experience of intending to do things.

Dr. Harris believes this can be done “without any recourse to notions of free will.” (page 108) Unfortunately, Dr. Harris doesn’t actually provide a fully delineated account of how the phenomenological experience of intentionality arises or what the forces are that shape and orient such experience.

Instead, what he often does do is to issue a promissory note that is tied to future research. He has faith that such an account – that is, one devoid of issues involving the idea of free will – will be forthcoming, but, certainly, neither he nor any of his colleagues have such a fully elaborated account at the present time ... or, quite frankly, they don’t even have a partially elaborated account since Libet’s idea of the readiness potential remains an unexplained concept in terms of what, exactly, gives rise to and shapes such a potential.

Strewn throughout certain portions of *The Moral Landscape*, one finds sentences similar to the following: “An MRI of the man’s brain revealed a tumor the size of a golf ball in his medial prefrontal cortex (a region responsible for the control of emotion and behavioral impulses).” (page 109) In relation to such a statement one might ask: What, exactly, is the nature of the relationship between, on the one hand, the ‘medial prefrontal cortex’ and, on the other hand, responsibility for controlling emotion and behavioral impulses? In other words, in just what way is the medial prefrontal cortex responsible for emotion and behavioral impulses?

Is consciousness generated in the medial prefrontal cortex? If so, how?

Alternatively, is consciousness generated in some other part of the brain? If so, how, and, in addition, how does the medial prefrontal cortex come to participate in such consciousness in order to be able to give rise to emotions or behavioral impulses about which normal waking consciousness becomes aware? Moreover, if there is nothing that normal waking consciousness can do with respect to emotion or behavioral impulses, then why does normal, waking consciousness occur at all since it would seem to have no functional purpose?

How does the medial prefrontal cortex control emotion or behavioral impulses? What is the precise character of such control mechanisms, and how did those control mechanisms arise in the first place?

How do understanding, insight, interpretation, meaning, logic, reasoning, purpose, and judgment arise in the medial prefrontal cortex in order to help control emotion or behavioral impulses? How is all of this coordinated in some coherent form of coping strategy?

When Dr. Harris claims that the medial prefrontal cortex is responsible for emotions and behavioral impulses, he seems to want to give the impression that some fundamental understanding concerning the way things work in the human mind is being conveyed. Unfortunately, this is not the case since there is no real understanding being conveyed through statements like the one previously excerpted from page 109 of *The Moral Landscape* ... and, as indicated earlier, there are many statements of the foregoing kind that appear in Dr. Harris’ book.

The previously quoted statement is somewhat akin to a repair person saying that a given circuit is responsible for regulating the vertical or the horizontal character of what appears on a television screen when answering a customer's question about where the story-line, meaning, logic, emotion, and dialogue come from that is given expression through the images on the television screen. While such circuits do play their role in permitting coherent, stable images to be seen on a television screen, they are hardly an explanation of why television programs have the character that they do.

During a discussion of moral responsibility in which Dr. Harris seeks to show how one could think about such issues without having to refer to the idea of free will, he says: "While viewing human beings as forces of nature does not prevent us from thinking in terms of moral responsibility, it does call the logic of retribution in question ... The men and women on death row have some combination of bad genes, bad parents, bad ideas, and bad luck – which of these quantities, exactly, were they responsible for? No human being stands as author to his own genes or his upbringing, and yet we have every reason to believe that these factors determine his character throughout life." (page 109)

One could agree with Dr. Harris that we might do well to question the whole logic of retribution quite independently from issues of moral responsibility. Nonetheless, Dr. Harris' foregoing words appear to miss an obvious dimension of the issue of moral responsibility. More specifically, although the men and women on death row did not author their own genes, parents, or the communities in which they were born, they very well might have authored their mode of responding to such givens.

Many people grow up in a context of bad genes, bad parents, bad ideas, and bad luck. Nevertheless, they don't all end up on death row or in prison.

Is this just a matter of differences in the way that the vagaries of chance shine upon their respective lives? If so, how would one ever be able to prove this?

Dr. Harris claims that "we have every reason to believe that these factors [that is, genes, parents, ideas, and luck – my addition] determine" the character of a person's life. I've been studying

psychology for more than 40 years. Moreover, over the years, I have taught a variety of courses in psychology and criminology, but I am not aware of any definitive proof that the nature of the character of one's life can be reduced down to a combination of genes, parenting, ideas, and luck ... although all of these factors do play significant roles in helping to shape the character of one's life.

Consequently, I am wondering what, precisely, is entailed by the phrase: "every reason" that would be capable of persuading us that things are the way Dr. Harris claims they are. Dr. Harris' book: *The Moral Landscape* would be an excellent place to explicate what he means by the phrase: "every reason," but I haven't come across such an explication in his book ... although I have seen a lot of argument by fiat in *The Moral Landscape* in which Dr. Harris insists that things are the way he depicts them despite the fact that he fails to provide the necessary evidence to back up such claims.

We don't choose our genes, parents, or the communities into which we are born. Nonetheless, where is the proof that we don't choose how we will respond to such factors? Where is the proof that we don't make choices about the sorts of ideas and influences that we will permit to shape our lives? Where is the proof that we don't make choices concerning with whom we will identify and model ourselves after and why? Where is the proof that one can't both acknowledge: (1) the manner in which genes and parents impact our lives, while simultaneously (2) making choices concerning how one will respond to such factors? Where is the proof that free will does not exist? Where is the proof that human beings are nothing more than biological organisms?

If Dr. Harris wishes to counter with: "Well, where is your proof that such is not the case?" I will quite readily admit that I have no such proof. What I do have – and this book, plus many other works of mine, along with the scholarly efforts of a variety of other individuals, all give expression to such a perspective – are strong arguments indicating that people like Dr. Harris cannot substantiate many of their basic premises and assertions, and in the absence of such demonstrable evidence, one is free to pursue other possibilities concerning the potential of human beings and the nature of the relationship between human beings and the universe.

On many occasions, I see little difference between the sorts of philosophical neurobiology that emanate from people such as Dr. Harris and the theological frameworks that emanate from the sorts of individuals whom Dr. Harris frequently seeks to criticize. In both cases, people have faith in their beliefs. As a result, they wish to make their perspective an expression of some sort of categorical imperative in which they seek to impose their ideas on other people irrespective of whether any of those perspectives are capable of demonstrating the correctness of that which such individuals are seeking to induce other people to accept.

“Imagine” says Dr. Harris, “for the sake of argument, that every relevant change in the human brain can be made cheaply, painlessly, and safely. The cure for psychopathy can be put directly into the food supply, like vitamin D. Evil is nothing more than a nutritional deficiency. If we imagine that a cure for evil exists, we can see that our retributive impulse is profoundly flawed.” (page 109) From Dr. Harris’ perspective, evil becomes “nothing more than a nutritional deficiency” because Dr. Harris has asked his readers to imagine as much – and let’s keep in mind that what Dr. Harris is saying is nothing more than an exercise in imagination that is quite devoid of facts. Moreover, even if, for the sake of argument, one were to go along with such a notion, the likelihood -- given the problematic track record of many pharmaceutical companies and the FDA – that such a cure would be cheap, painless, and safe is, perhaps, asking us to imagine too much.

Theologians also have asked us to imagine, for the sake of argument, how every relevant change in the human soul “can be made cheaply, painlessly and safely.” In a way that is similar to Dr. Harris, they ask us to imagine that evil is nothing more than a problem in our spiritual diet -- a nutritional deficiency of the spirit. As is all too frequently the case with pharmaceutical cures for what ails us, the cures of all too many theologians are rarely cheap, painless, or safe.

Theologians don’t necessarily understand the nature of the soul or the spirit any better than neurobiologists necessarily understand the nature of the brain or what animates human beings. Both sides seek to induce people to cede their moral and intellectual authority to a system of faith, and the fact that one of these systems is dressed up in

the language of science doesn't remove the dimension of faith that is at the core of such a framework.

Dr. Harris argues that: "It seems to me that few concepts have offered greater scope for human cruelty than the idea of an immortal soul that stands independent of all material influences, ranging from genes to economic systems." (page 110) I'm not exactly sure to whose concepts Dr. Harris is referring in the foregoing statement, but I am not familiar with anyone who tries to argue that the soul "stands independent of all material influences," but, if I were familiar with such a perspective, I would not agree with such a characterization of things.

In fact, the case tends to be the reverse of the manner in which Dr. Harris describes things in the foregoing quote. People who are spiritually inclined tend to indicate that the human soul is all too vulnerable to "material influences, ranging from genes to economic systems", and, as a result, the problem is: How does one disentangle the soul from such influences?

Furthermore, following Dr. Harris' lead with respect to his belief that bad ideas (along with bad genes and bad parenting) supposedly descend upon poor unfortunates and determine everything, one might ask the following question: Even if someone were trying to induce people to believe there was an immortal soul that existed and was independent of all material influences, how did such an idea come into being in the first place, and what induced people to cede their moral and intellectual authority to such an idea? If free will does not exist, then how do people come to adopt such an idea, and why did they do this, and how are some individuals able to resist such ideas (and, in this regard, I find Dr. Harris' allusion to some form of stimulus-response sort of behaviorism as being relevant to the discussion to be terribly antiquated in the sense that behaviorism – despite the value of some of its principles in some cases -- has been shown to be problematic and inadequate in so many ways as a means of plausibly accounting for such phenomena as: learning, interpretation, understanding, insight, memory, language, and the like)? And, if free will does not exist, then how does one stop ceding one's moral and intellectual authority to bad ideas like the one being cited by Dr. Harris in the foregoing quote?

Dr. Harris has tried to piece together the outlines of how he might respond to such questions throughout *The Moral Landscape*. The problem is – as the present work has sought to demonstrate – there is very little in Dr. Harris’ perspective that gives expression to anything that is remotely plausible or evidentially warranted as a means of credibly accounting for, or explaining, the nature of human beings or what the relationship is between human beings and the rest of the universe.

Presumably, Dr. Harris’ solution to the problem -- raised in the last sentence of the paragraph before last -- might involve some variation on the idea that the brain states of people must be changed by external intervention – for example, through the administering of an appropriate pharmaceutical agent that “cheaply, painlessly, and safely” will alter the brain states of an individual so that such an individual will no longer feel emotionally and intellectual tied down by such and such a bad idea. However, who gets to determine which ideas are bad and on the basis of what justification, especially given that the current status of science is certainly not even remotely close to providing such justification?

Moreover, what makes such “scientific” interventions -- in which certain ideas (and their therapeutic agents) are imposed on individuals -- any better than theological interventions in which certain ideas are imposed on individuals? One cannot say that the former manner of engaging the issues has more facts whereas the latter approach to things does not possess such facts, because in neither case are the facts that exist sufficient to plausibly and credibly push the argument in one direction rather than another in a manner with which everyone would agree or that might, somehow, justify intervening in the lives of people.

The concept on which Dr. Harris wishes to hang his faith is “well-being.” In other words, the criterion for determining the basis for justifying any decision concerning issues of morality is “well-being.”

Unfortunately, there is nothing in *The Moral Landscape* capable of lending a plausible coherency to the sorts of data that Dr. Harris puts forth. In other words, there is nothing in *The Moral Landscape* – and I believe the foregoing pages demonstrate this quite well – that is capable of leading readers of his book to a clear understanding of the

nature of well-being; the criteria for determining what constitutes well-being; the nature and potential of conscious beings; the relationship of such conscious beings to the rest of the universe, and how none of the foregoing requires references to notions of free will, the human soul, or spiritual possibilities.

Chapter Thirty-one

According to Dr. Harris, "... human language is a very recent adaptation." (page 114) Somewhere between 6.3 million years ago – when homo sapiens and chimpanzees diverged from a common ancestor – and approximately 52,000 years ago – when certain members of homo sapiens began to exhibit the sort of social and technical breakthroughs that seem to presuppose the presence of some sort of capacity to communicate -- the language adaptation appeared.

"Language adaptation" is code for the fact that no one has the foggiest idea about how all of the complexities of linguistic ability or the capacity for a process of reciprocal symbol manipulation came into being. To be sure, there is no end to theories concerning the emergence of such a capacity, but none of those theories can provide the sort of step-by-step account that gives a clear picture of what happened when during the development of such capacities. Instead, unverifiable assumptions are made at a variety of crucial junctures to "explain" how such a developmental process made the transition from one hypothetical stage to the next.

Dr. Harris euphemistically alludes to the foregoing black hole of ignorance by stating: "... there is still controversy over the biological origins of human language, as well as over its likely precursors in the communicative behavior of other animals." (page 114). This is an eloquent way of saying: 'we got nada, zip, or zilch with respect to the origins of the human capacity for language.'

The foregoing quote from Dr. Harris is also a form of misdirection that seeks to give people the impression that although we don't have all the details for how this took place, we are certain that it was a function of evolutionary processes. Consequently, the previous quote is an excellent example of scientific faith at work.

Dr. Harris continues on with his 'explanation' by saying: "The power of language surely results from the fact that it allows mere words to substitute for direct experience and mere thoughts to simulate possible states of the world." (page 115) With respect to the foregoing perspective, one might ask: How does language allow "for mere words to substitute for direct experience," and how do "mere

thoughts” “simulate possible states of the world,” and what is the relationship between thought and language?

In order to link words and experience, there must be an ability to organize the former (words) in a manner that is capable of reflecting and giving expression to the latter (experience). Both syntax and semantics have complex roles to play in order to be able to pull such a trick off. In addition, there is a complex set of relations that, in turn, link thought to syntax and semantics – and vice versa -- in order to generate simulations of experience that are capable of retaining the structural character of such experience in a way that is able – one hopes – to reflect something of the structural character of the world.

In order to accomplish the foregoing, one needs a high order capacity for intelligence, insight, understanding, concept-formation, consciousness, reasoning, model building, and memory. Evolutionary theory has no better explanation for the origins of such abilities than it does for the origins of language.

Dr. Harris states: “The brain’s capacity to accept such propositions as true – as valid guides to behavior and emotion, as predictive of future outcomes, etc. – explains the transformative power of words. There is a common term we use for this type of acceptance: we call it ‘belief’ ” (page 115)

To begin with, Dr. Harris is assuming that the brain is what accepts a given proposition as true. In other words, to use Dr. Harris’ own terminology, such an assumption gives expression to his belief concerning the truth of things with respect to the relationship between truth and the brain.

Nonetheless, to believe that something is true does not make it true. Moreover, Dr. Harris is glossing over a litany of issues that are entangled in what it means to say that a given belief is true.

Dr. Harris mentions the idea of “validity.” However, he does not detail the complexities that are inherent in trying to determine whether a given belief system is, in some sense, valid, nor does he indicate what is required to demonstrate validity in a way that would meet with intersubjective agreement.

Dr. Harris also mentions the idea that true beliefs are capable of predicting the future. Yet, he fails to note that there are many facets of

human belief – even in science (e.g., evolutionary theory, cosmology, psychology) -- in which the ability to predict the future is, sadly, largely absent.

Consequently, one is still uncertain what it means to say that: “The brain’s capacity to accept such propositions as true ... explains the transformative power of words.” Although the term: “explains” is used by Dr. Harris, no actual explanation is present ... there is just an allusion to explanation – and this remains so irrespective of whether it is the brain that is the organ of truth or whether something beyond the brain (but in conjunction with the brain) is responsible for the realization of such truth.

According to Dr. Harris: “Knowing that George Washington was the first president of the United States and believing the statement ‘George Washington was the first president of the United States’ amount to the same thing.” The foregoing contention is not tenable.

In order to know that George Washington was the first president of the United States, one has to understand something about history. Presumably, this means going back and checking a variety of documents, records, letters, and the like that independently corroborate the ‘fact’ George Washington was the first president of the United States and that do not generate any credible or persuasive data that indicates otherwise.

Strictly speaking, someone who reads a textbook indicating that George Washington was the first president of the United States doesn’t actually know this to be true but has a belief concerning the truth or falsity of what is said in the textbook. Textbooks have often been found to contain errors. As a result, until one has undertaken the necessary steps to verify the truth of something – and this means one needs to be able to arrive at a position of understanding concerning how an array of data fit together in a verifiable fashion – then one can’t really claim to know that something is true (and even when such claims are made, they are subject to critical examination).

Therefore, Dr. Harris is incorrect when he says that ‘knowing something to be true’ is equivalent to ‘believing that the same something is true.’ The difference between the two conditions is a function of understanding how something is true – an understanding that is present in knowledge but not necessarily present in belief.

Dr. Harris goes on to maintain: “When we distinguish between belief and knowledge in ordinary conversations, it is generally for the purpose of drawing attention to degrees of certainty.” Again, Dr. Harris is incorrect – and I am quite certain of this – because the issue that distinguishes belief and knowledge is understanding and not a matter of certainty. One could have an understanding about which one is not certain, and, yet, the understanding might be true, while one could have a belief about which one is very certain that lacks understanding even if it turns out to be true.

The reason why someone tends to become certain about the truth of a given issue is a function of one’s understanding of such an issue. In ordinary conversations, the distinction between belief and knowledge is a matter of whether, or not, someone actually knows or understands what she or he is talking about.

Dr. Harris believes: “The acceptance of such statements as true (or likely to be true) is the mechanism by which we acquire most of our knowledge about the world.” (page 116) In order for one to say that the acceptance of a statement as true gives expression to knowledge, that which is being accepted as true must actually be true, and one must understand something of the underlying issues that are said to enable some given statement to give expression to the truth.

The unfortunate fact is, most of what we claim to be knowledge about the world is merely belief, some of which might actually be true. In the absence of an understanding of how something can be said to be true, one can, at most, hope that one’s beliefs are true.

Most people have a worldview, philosophy, paradigm, theological framework, or belief system. While there might be this or that fact or truth entailed by such perspectives, there often is an absence of any kind of understanding capable of grasping how and why such statements are true. Consequently, there often is an absence of any real knowledge concerning the relationship of such perspectives and the nature of the universe.

Therefore, while I agree with Dr. Harris when he says: “Most of our beliefs have come to us in just this form: statements that we accept on the assumption that their source is reliable ...” (page 118), nevertheless, such beliefs do not constitute knowledge even if those statements turn out to be true. This is the case unless the requisite

understanding concerning how and why those statements are true is also present.

For example, Dr. Harris continues the foregoing quote with: "... or because the sheer number of sources rules out any significant likelihood of error." (page 118) This addition to the previous quotation is problematic because, as Dr. Harris pointed out earlier in *The Moral Landscape*, consensus does not necessarily guarantee that something is true, nor does such consensus necessarily rule "out any significant likelihood of error" – in fact, sometimes consensus merely ensures that the erroneous will live on while the truth languishes beyond the horizons of such consensus. – and Irving Janis' notion of 'groupthink' is but one example of this phenomenon

Dr. Harris continues elucidating his perspective by stipulating that: "...everything we know outside of our personal experience is the result of our having encountered specific linguistic propositions – *the sun is a star; Julius Caesar was a Roman emperor, broccoli is good for you* – and found no reason (or means) to doubt them." (page 118) Aside from his incorrect usage of the term "know" in the foregoing statement, Dr. Harris doesn't mention the fact that many people are indifferent to such linguistic propositions (which is one of the reasons why such 'knowledge' is forgotten as soon as it is "learned") unless those propositions can be shown to have some relevance to their personal experience (which is one of the reasons why so much of education misses human beings altogether). Furthermore, Dr. Harris doesn't indicate that even if such linguistic propositions are, somehow, introduced in a way that renders them of relevance to personal experience, nonetheless, the perspective that arises out of personal experience might – for better or worse -- reject or modify such statements as a function of the sort of understanding (which still might not give expression to knowledge since the understanding that is present might not be correct) which has been established through personal experience.

On page 118 of *The Moral Landscape*, Dr. Harris says: "For a physical system to be capable of complex behavior there must be some meaningful separation between its input and output. As far as we know, this separation has been most fully achieved in the frontal lobes of the human brain. Our frontal lobes are what allow us to select

among a vast range of responses to incoming information in light of our prior goals and present inferences. Such “higher-level control of emotions and behavior is the stuff of which personalities are made.” (page 118)

To begin with, use of the phrase “as far as we know” in the foregoing quote is problematic. More specifically, we don’t actually know that it is the ‘frontal lobes’ that “allow us to select among a vast range of responses to incoming information in light of our prior goals.” In fact, ‘as far as we know’ we don’t know what Dr. Harris claims we do because, so far, we don’t understand how neurons, glial cells, action potentials, synapses, neurotransmitters, neural circuits and neural networks – individually and/or collectively -- generate consciousness, intelligence, understanding, reason, insight, judgment, intention, decisions, language, and the like.

One can concede the fact that there is a set of correlations between, on the one hand, activity in the frontal lobes and, on the other hand, certain kinds of behavior that are judged to be purposeful, voluntary, meaningful, motivated, and so on. What we know are such correlations, but the rest (i.e., Dr. Harris’ theory about what is happening) is speculation dressed up in scientific language.

Moreover, Dr. Harris is a little cavalier with his language when he claims in the foregoing quote that such: “Higher-level control of emotions and behavior is the stuff of which personalities are made.” While there are many theories of personality, there is very little agreement among psychologists about what personality actually is or whether, personality is something that is created after birth or personality is something that exists, in some manner, prior to birth and is, then, modulated in various ways through life experience.

Moreover, questions such as: What is the relationship, if any, between temperament and personality? are still being probed by developmental psychologists. There are no definitive answers to show for their efforts.

In effect, Dr. Harris is doing nothing more than providing his readers with a series of propositional statements that he is claiming are ‘likely’ to be true – a euphemism for ignorance – and presenting what he says to be knowledge when, in truth, such statements give expression to nothing more than beliefs mixed with a few correlated

facts, since there is a complete absence of any actual understanding concerning either whether what is being claimed is actually true or if true, how it is true.

Dr. Harris claims: "... we are not likely to find a region of the human brain devoted solely to beliefs. The brain is an evolved organ, and there does not seem to be a process in nature that allows for the creation of new structures dedicated to entirely novel modes of behavior or cognition. Consequently, the brain's higher-order functioning had to emerge from lower-order mechanisms." (page 119) Since neither Dr. Harris nor any of his colleagues can explain in a step-by-step fashion how the brain's higher order functioning (assuming, of course, that such higher-order brain functioning actually exists) emerged from "lower-order" mechanisms, what Dr. Harris is talking about in his foregoing statement is, in truth, a catechism according to neurobiologists ... that is, a system of belief rather than any system of knowledge that involves actual understanding of what is transpiring now or how such physical systems came into being.

Moreover, one has difficulty understanding what Dr. Harris is saying when he claims that: "there does not seem to be a process in nature that allows for the creation of new structures dedicated to entirely novel modes of behavior or cognition." What is creativity or invention ... chopped liver?

Of course, no one knows how creativity or inventiveness is possible, and no one knows how new insights or ideas come into being, so one understands, to a degree, why Dr. Harris might say there doesn't "seem to be a process in nature that allows for the creation of new structures" and so on. However, irrespective of whether Dr. Harris - or his any of his colleagues -- understands how creativity works, it is a phenomenological fact that is familiar, in a very intimate way, to almost every human being whenever we talk and utter sentences that we have not said before or which we have not necessarily even heard other people previously utter.

In addition, we think thoughts that have never been thought of before, and we communicate these thoughts to one another through ever-varying patterns of linguistic behavior. And, of course, none of the foregoing touches on the creativeness that is exhibited in art, plays,

literature, poetry, music, dance, movies, medicine, law, technology, and science.

Dr. Harris continues with: “Another factor that makes the strict localization of any mental state difficult is that the human brain is characterized by massive interconnectivity; it is mostly talking to itself.”(pages 119-120) One could agree with the foregoing statement, but this still doesn’t tell us what the relationship is between such interconnectivity and any given mental state, nor does the phrase: “massive interconnectivity” really explain what the nature of the talk is or whether this sort of talk can account for such phenomena as consciousness, intelligence, reasoning, insight, creativity, or language.

According to Dr. Harris: “Representation results from a pattern of activity across networks of neurons and does not generally entail stable, one-to-one mappings of things/events in the world, or concepts in the mind, to discrete structures in the brain. For instance, thinking a simple thought like *Jake is married* cannot be the work of any single node in a network of neurons. It must emerge from a pattern of connections among many nodes.” (page 120) How does one know that: “representation results from a pattern of activity across networks of neurons” if one has no idea how even simple thoughts – such as ‘Jake is married’ – emerge from the pattern of connections among many nodes or how even such a pattern arose in the first place?

What purports to be an explanation in the foregoing quote is really nothing more than a statement of belief – which lacks the understanding necessary for knowledge – concerning the nature of brain activity and what such activity has to do with the phenomenology of mental states. A few facts about correlation have been transmuted into a belief system that is being promoted as knowledge concerning the nature of human beings and the relationship of human beings to the universe.

Dr. Harris indicates that a portion of his doctoral research involved exploring the ideas of belief, disbelief, and uncertainty via fMRI techniques – that is, functional magnetic resonance imaging which involves generating images while subjects are performing different kinds of tasks and then mapping the correlations between the performance of various sorts of tasks or functions and the parts of the brain that seem to light up under such circumstances. Moreover, Dr.

Harris indicates that his research tended to lend credence to a belief of Spinoza, a philosopher of the 17th century, who argued, among other things, that “understanding a statement entails the tacit acceptance of its being true.”

There is a difference between, on the one hand, understanding what would be necessary for a statement to be true and, on the other hand, accepting, in some tacit way, that such a statement is true. There is a difference between understanding what someone means by a statement and accepting such a statement as being true, however tacitly.

I believe – but I might be wrong – that I understand the meaning of much of what Dr. Harris says in *The Moral Landscape*. Nevertheless, I am quite certain that I accept very little of what he has to say in his book as being true ... not even tacitly.

I understand Dr. Harris believes that much of what he says is true. However, given that I don't believe Dr. Harris beliefs are true, I'm not exactly sure how – even tacitly – I must accept his beliefs as being true merely to understand them to be false.

Dr. Harris alludes to several other studies that also lend credence to Spinoza's aforementioned contention. He then goes on to conjecture that: “Understanding a proposition may be analogous to perceiving an object in physical space: we may accept appearances as reality until they prove otherwise.” (page 120)

What seems more likely is that we acknowledge that a given appearance has a certain reality or structural character – which, might, in some circumstances, be like viewing an object in physical space (depending on one's capacity to think in physical imagery, and not everyone is so oriented) – and we move on from there ... not in the sense that we “accept such appearance as reality until” proven otherwise, but in the sense that we accept our understanding of the structural character of such an appearance as having the structure our understanding says it does until one is shown that our understanding is incorrect. The structural character of our understanding of a situation is one thing, and the actual structural character of the situation to which our understanding alludes or is making identifying reference might be another thing altogether.

According to the research conducted by Dr. Harris: "... mathematical beliefs (e.g., '2 + 6 + 8 = 16') showed a similar pattern of activity [in brain fMRIs - my note] to ethical belief (e.g., 'It is good to let your children know that you love them') ... This suggests that the physiology of belief may be the same regardless of a proposition's content." (page 120) Although one might be willing to acknowledge that the physiological correlates associated with belief might be the same irrespective of content (i.e., mathematical or ethical), none of this says anything about the truth value of what is believed ... all that it involves is a matter of what one believes the truth to be.

At this point, Dr. Harris conducts a very interesting sleight of mind. He notes that earlier in *The Moral Landscape*, he had put forth the idea that there is no chasm between facts and values because "values reduce to certain kinds of facts."

He proceeds to indicate that his research concerning belief/disbelief tends to suggest that any attempt to separate values and facts should be entertained with suspicion. More specifically, he argues: "The finding of content-independence challenges the fact/value distinction very directly for if, from the point of view of the brain, believing 'the sun is a star' is importantly similar to believing 'cruelty is wrong' how can one say that scientific and ethical judgments have nothing in common?" (page 122)

While one might be prepared to agree with Dr. Harris that values are capable of being reduced down to certain kinds of facts concerning the truth or falsehood of those values when measured against the structural character or nature of the universe, nonetheless, we tend to encounter difficulties making such measurements or establishing an appropriate metric for gauging the nature of the relation between a given 'value space' metric and the nature of the universe. Consequently, the separation between facts and values tends to be a reflection of the epistemological gulf that exists with respect to our current ability to actually know how to reliably and plausibly reduce values down to one kind of fact rather than another - that is, reducing values down to facts that we know to be true or false ... rather than statements that we just believe to be true or false.

In addition, Dr. Harris' discovery that there is a similarity in physiological patterns -- as manifested in fMRIs - between, on the one

hand, beliefs about, seemingly, objective statements of mathematics or physical science and, on the other hand, beliefs about moral statements, says absolutely nothing about whether, or not, any of the things that are believed – irrespective of their content – are true. Therefore, although scientific and ethical judgments might give expression to similar physiological patterns in fMRIs and, as a result, do share something in common as far as beliefs are concerned, such physiological commonalities do not necessarily have any relevance to the ontological nature of the world independent of the beliefs with which such physiological correlates are associated.

In short, Dr. Harris' research does not bridge the gap between facts and values as far as the ontology of the universe is concerned. Instead, his research only shows that irrespective of the character of a belief – that is, independently of whether beliefs are about scientific ideas or ethical judgments – such beliefs have a similar physiological profile as measured by fMRIs.

One can acknowledge the foregoing research of Dr. Harris' without being forced to simultaneously maintain that the relationship of such beliefs to the actual character of the universe or the actual nature of human potential gives expression to truths concerning the nature of ontology. The only truth to which such beliefs give expression is that someone believes that his or her beliefs are true, and, consequently, the gulf between facts and values remains as far as being able to understand – and prove that we understand -- the truth about the nature of the universe and whether, or not, moral values are inherent in that nature.

Chapter Thirty-two

I could continue on in relation to the next 70 pages of *The Moral Landscape*, as I have done with respect to the first 122 pages of that book. However, I believe I already have addressed all of the basic premises in Dr. Harris' perspective.

Not only does Dr. Harris fail to make a convincing case for why anyone else should jump on the bandwagon with respect to his ideas about the moral landscape. In fact, his position is not even sufficiently strong or plausible for one to say something to the effect of: "While I do not feel he has put forth a sufficiently strong epistemological position to warrant me following him in his moral enterprise, I understand why he, as an individual, might wish to proceed in such a direction" because the fact of the matter is there is little rational or scientific clarity, coherency, or plausibility inherent in his position.

If I were his teacher, the way I might put it is as follows. For effort, he gets a B or B-, but in terms of execution – that is, in terms of putting forth a well-argued, factually strong, conceptually compelling case for either himself or others – his work in *The Moral Landscape* deserves a failing grade.

The state of things vis-à-vis science, reality, human potential, and the like is such that there are many spaces that exist in and around the known facts. These interstitial spaces provide an incredible opportunity to explore possibilities that populate the horizons of such facts without necessarily having to run contrary to those facts.

I like science because it has the capacity to give rise to such interstitial spaces. I like spirituality because it also has the capacity to give rise to such interstitial spaces.

The challenge is to discern which of the possibilities in interstitial space are true and which are false. Like the process of plotting a regression line that best fits the scattered data points in a given set of circumstances, we are all trying to figure out the character of the hermeneutical regression line that seems to best fit the data points of experience that arise through lived life, and we hope – but often cannot be certain – that such a regression line reflects the truth of things.

In the context of such uncertainty, the relationship between the available facts and the interstitial spaces that permeate and surround such facts often tends to be one of faith. This is true whether one is inclined to science or one is inclined to spirituality or one is inclined to both.