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MORAL REALISM AND INFINITE SPACETIME IMPLY MORAL NIHILISM

1. INTRODUCTION

I argue that if the future is infinite, as contemporary astronomers believe it is, then moral nihilism is true if both moral realism and aggregative value theory is true. Usually, moral nihilism is defined as meaning *nothing has value*. But I am a moral realist, indeed a global moral realist, since I believe everything has value. I argued that everything is intrinsically valuable in my 1997 *Ethical And Religious Thought In Analytic Philosophy Of Language*. Nonetheless, I believe the recent astronomical discovery that future time is infinite implies that it does not morally matter what we *do*. This is what I mean by moral nihilism. It does not matter what *actions* humans or other agents perform. My derivation of moral nihilism has as one of its premises that moral realism is true. So this is a different approach from that of emotivists such as A. J. Ayer or relativists such as Nagel, Nietzsche and Sartre, who derived moral nihilism from moral anti-realism.

The summary of my argument has three premises. My argument is:

1. Necessarily, global moral realism is true.
2. Necessarily, aggregative value theory is true.
3. Contingently, it is true that future time is infinite.
4. Therefore, moral nihilism is contingently true.

For those interested in the philosophy of religion, I will later show that this argument implies that God does not exist. It may be of interest to note that this is a new kind of argument for atheism. Usually, atheists argue that the arguments for theism are unsound and that the argument from gratuitous evil is sound (whether this be spelled out in terms of the probabilistic argument from evil or the deductive argument). But I argue from moral nihilism to the non-existence of God. A further interesting twist is that I reverse the usual argument for nihilism. Traditionally, it is argued that nihilism is true because God does not exist. I argue the converse; God does not exist because nihilism is true.

To make my argument precise, I first need to define the relevant expressions.

D1: Moral Nihilism is true if and only if, for any empirically possible action A, it is morally indifferent if A is performed or not performed.

The performance of an action is morally indifferent if and only if the performance of that action neither increases nor decreases the amount of value in the universe. An action is empirically possible if and only if it is consistent with the boundary conditions (intuitively, the arrangement of particulars) and the laws of nature in the actual world.

Moral realism is true if and only if particulars possess value non-dependently upon whether conscious organisms believe they have value. Global moral realism is true if and only if all organisms, inanimate mass and energy, and space and time, and states of these entities, have value non-dependently upon whether conscious organisms believe they have value. I believe global moral realism is a justified belief on the basis of the several arguments I gave for it in my 1997 book. I have not argued elsewhere that the aggregative value theory is true, but I believe that other thinkers, both philosophers and economists, have provided sound arguments that justify the belief in aggregative value theory. As a scientific aside, I would note that (in addition to a massive amount of other, older evidence) the most crucial new discovery that has convinced previously uncertain astronomers that future time is infinite is the 1998 observations of the recession velocity of distant supernovae that indicate that the universe has an expansion rate that will ensure it will not contract but expand for an infinite amount of time. For a non-technical but accurate discussion of this new evidence, see the January 1999 issue and the January 2001 issue of *Scientific American*. It was the 1998 observations of the supernovae that provided the evidence that moral nihilism is true.

Aggregative value theory is true if and only if units of value can be totalised in some way, either by adding them, averaging over them, measuring the equality of their distribution, measuring the minimum, etc. There is a massive body of literature both explaining and justifying aggregative value theory and I shall here merely explain the minimal amount necessary to understand my argument.

First, I will simplify my argument by using only one type of aggregative value theory, namely, additive value theory, where the units of value are called "locations". Each location has a finite amount of value. A location can be a person, any other animal, a plant, a particle of matter or energy, a point of space or time, or some larger complex of particulars of these kinds, for example, a forest, an orchestra or an hour of time. Some, such as Vallentyne and Kagan, even define locations in terms of topological regions.

The future is infinite if there are aleph-zero number of equal length temporal intervals of some length, such as an aleph-zero number of hours. For the sake of familiarity, I will not use my theory that the past is infinite as well, but will use the more familiar theory that time began about 15 billion years ago with the big bang (my theory is that the familiar, so-called "scientific theory" that past time is finite is based on a metaphysical theory of time that includes a number of false metaphysical assumptions and invalid inferences). According to the astronomical observations, our universe is hyperbolic, which implies in big bang cosmology that at each time space is infinite, e.g., that there are aleph-zero, non-overlapping, equal sized cubes of space.

I believe global moral realism and aggregative value theory are necessarily true and the infinitude of the future is contingently true. Thus, I believe that moral

nihilism is contingently true. In another possible world, where the universe is finite, moral nihilism is false.

2. THE MORAL INDIFFERENCE OF EVERY EMPIRICALLY POSSIBLE ACTION

A necessary condition of a person being morally obligated to engage in an action is that the performance or consequence of the action either increases positive value or prevents the decrease of positive value. If the future is infinite, it is impossible to increase or decrease the amount of value, since there are aleph-zero hours and each hour includes at least one unit of value (even if all that is valuable is matter or energy, or slices of space, or intervals of time). Suppose, for example, that there is an action A that has two units of value and that there is a possible history of a universe that is exactly like our universe except for the fact that action A is not performed at the time t_1 when it is actually performed (and all the future consequences of the non-performance of this act). Let us suppose the non-performance of this action at time t_1 implies that no units of value have been added at this location but that two units would have been added at this location if the action had been performed. Then, if time begins at t_0 , we have two endless histories of the universe that differ in value at least at time t . Action A, we shall say, contributes to the overall value of the universe at time t , making this value consist of 800 units. The not-A universe differs at t by having only 798 units of value and (if the action has consequences whose units of value make the not-A history differ at every time later than t), we may represent the two histories as follows:

The A-history of the universe:

t_0	t_1	t_2	t_3
200	800	860	920

The not-A history of the universe:

t_0	t_1	t_2	t_3
200	798	840	600

Each time has at least one unit of value. Since there are an infinite number of times, say hours, ordered in the order of the positive integers, omega, the A-history and not-A history both have the same number of units of value, aleph-zero. But this is wrong, since space is infinite at each time and each cube of space of any given size has some value. Thus, at time t_1 , there are infinitely many equal-sized and non-overlapping cubes of space. Each cube has some value, even if it has the minimal unit of value, one, by virtue of being a cube of empty space (assuming a cube of

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