

## THE MORAL WAGER

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# THE MORAL WAGER

Evolution and Contract

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 Springer

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## PREFACE

In the following chapters, I offer an evolutionary account of morality and from that extrapolate a version of contractarianism I call *consent theory*. Game theory helps to highlight the evolution of morality as a resolution of interpersonal conflicts under strategic negotiation. It is this emphasis on strategic negotiation that underwrites the idea of consent. Consent theory differs from other contractarian models by abandoning reliance on rational self-interest in favour of evolutionary adaptation. From this, more emphasis will be placed on consent as natural convergence rather than consent as an idealization. My picture of contractarianism, then, ends up looking more like the relativist model offered by Harman, rather than the rational (or pseudo-rational) model offered by Gauthier, let alone the Kantian brands of Rawls or Scanlon. So at least some of my discussion will dwell on why it is no loss to abandon hope for the universal, categorical morality that rational models promise.

In the introduction, I offer the betting analogy that underwrites the remaining picture. There are some bets where the expected utility is positive, though the odds of winning on this particular occasion are exceedingly low. In such cases, we cannot hope to give an argument that taking the bet is rational. The only thing we can say is that those predisposed to take this kind of bet on these kinds of occasions will do better than those with other dispositions, so long as such games occur often enough. The lure of morality is similar. Moral constraint is a bad bet taken in and of itself, but a good bet when examined statistically. The game of morality occurs whenever strategic negotiation takes place, and since this occurs often enough for social creatures such as us, an attraction for moral dispositions exists.

Components of this work have appeared in print before. Sections 3.1 to 3.3 are modified from my “A Catalogue of Mistaken Interests: Reflections on the Desired and the Desirable,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11/1 (2003): 1–23. Chapter 7 is a modified and expanded version of my “Concerned Parties: When Lack of Consent is Irrelevant,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 18/2 (2004): 125–40.

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