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IN DEFENSE OF ETHICAL NATURALISM

by

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Date
Ethical Naturalism (EN) is the position that moral reasoning, perception, and behavior are natural processes that make no use of transcendental features of reality or of human nature. EN holds that morality is a situated, embodied skill possessed by social animals of sufficient complexity, not a body of laws or facts gleaned from context-independent sources.

In Chapter One, EN is defended against attacks directed at it by Virginia Held in her paper, "Whose Agenda?" It is argued that Held caricatures the sciences from which EN draws, exaggerates EN's dependence on those sciences, improperly isolates moral theory from empirical disciplines, and draws too sharp a division between facts and values. The conclusion is that Held offers no compelling reason to fear or reject EN.

In Chapter Two, an application of EN is described, that of Paul Churchland's moral network theory (MNT). Connectionist models of cognitive science are described, and their implications for the structure of concepts are explained. Churchland's application of connectionism to moral reasoning is explicated. The chapter concludes with a defense of EN and MNT against some philosophical objections.

In Chapter Three, the implications of EN are discussed. First, EN implies that moral training ought to be moved back to the center of moral life, in contrast to Kantian and utilitarian theories that cast moral behavior purely as a product of the will. Moral training is a holistic affair that takes place in the total environment through exposure to various exemplars and feedback with regard to moral performance. It involves a significant degree of luck. Second, EN implies that moral theory can not do the normative work expected of it by modern moral philosophers. EN suggests that moral philosophy can make significant metaethical contributions, describing the conditions under which effective moral reasoning takes place, but that it holds no privileged place in the normative activities of evaluation and recommendation. Normative debate is distributed throughout society, and cannot be settled by philosophers through recourse to unique philosophical tools, methods, or facts. In the moral conversation of humanity, philosophy is but one voice in the chorus, not the conductor.
Contemporary academic philosophy is almost entirely isolated from the larger community that surrounds it. It is virtually invisible outside the academy, and consists primarily in professors writing to other professors. This came as somewhat of a shock to me. As an undergraduate, I turned to philosophy precisely because I was concerned with the pressing problems facing my culture: the paucity of political debate, the continuing degradation of the environment, the shrill and seemingly irresolvable clashes between cultures and subcultures. U.S. culture has become centered around material and technical progress, stumbling blindly into the future at a breakneck pace, and that the project of situating our lives in the framework of a larger, meaningful narrative has been all but abandoned as hopeless.

But when I immersed myself in (analytic) philosophy, I found a discourse seemingly oblivious to broad cultural problems. Logical questions are scrupulously dissected, logical protocols scrupulously observed. The only acceptable philosophical form is "argument," construed as conclusions derived from uncontroversial premises. The shape of analytic philosophy was cemented by the logical positivists, who believed that "conceptual analysis" would lead to clarity about philosophical problems. Today, we have abandoned most of the positivist tenets that gave the belief substance, but no one seems to know where to go from here, so most philosophers continue to write in the pinched language of logical argumentation. As a result, the large, vague, and messy questions that grip us in our daily lives are invisible in analytic philosophy -- its form dictates that only the most small, tidy, and clearly delimited problems be addressed. Analytic philosophy endlessly draws distinctions within distinctions until any subject becomes a landscape of such
complexity that only "expert" philosophers can navigate it; each subfield has a
cadre of philosophical technicians whose only job, seemingly, is to further
complicate their shared intellectual domain. This makes dialogue with the
larger culture virtually impossible. Little progress is made, for we are no
longer sure in what progress consists, so arguments become their own
warrant, carrying on without much hope of resolution or sense of what
would follow if resolution were achieved. Perhaps worst of all, analytic
philosophy is aesthetically unappealing. It is boring.

I expected the same of ethics, and, in my limited exposure, found what I
expected. The tradition of modern moral philosophy casts morality as an
autonomous domain, different in kind from the workaday practical domain.
Our course in the moral domain is to be charted by reference to formulaic
principles, which apply (or fail to apply) regardless of particular or
idiosyncratic circumstances. In any situation, a course can be "derived" from
the proper rule. (Of course, in practice, the rules and principles offered by
Kantian and utilitarian theories are hopelessly remote from our situated
experience and can be fleshed out in a host of incompatible ways.) Morality is
the province of the philosophical technician, whose task is to instruct non-
philosophers as to the correct rules and their scope. Philosophy is thus cast as
the privileged judge and arbitrator of practices, intellectual, political, and
cultural. Today, we find a situation parallel to that described above: we have
abandoned the metaphysical tenets that gave rule-based morality its warrant,
but mainstream philosophy carries on through sheer momentum, unable or
unwilling to release its grip on its illusory privilege.

On closer inspection, however, I find reason to hope in ethics. The
resurgence of virtue theory has begun to turn the focus away from the
Rational Agent and back to real people, with real traits and dispositions,
acting in the context of real traditions. While virtue theory has its own problems, it is a step in the right direction. My own return to ethics is inspired by my exposure to two related movements gaining popularity in contemporary philosophy: pragmatism and naturalism. Pragmatism tells us that our reasoning should be focused on improving practice rather than divining ultimate Truths; naturalism tells us that we are biological creatures, that reason is a natural capacity developed in and conditioned by the long course of evolution. My purpose in writing this paper is to defend a pragmatic, naturalist vision of morality and moral philosophy. I hope to contribute to the project of returning ethics to its proper place, intertwined with other areas of inquiry and with experience as a whole. It is only through such a return that moral philosophy can regain relevance and a place in the contemporary cultural conversation.

If I succeed, the reader will be gripped as I have been by the notion that ethics is a feature of animal life — the life of the human animal. It is a contingent practice with no transcendental foundations and no assurance of success or even progress. Our moral task is not to find a point or a principle that transcends practice, one that can establish with certainty what practices are legitimate and illegitimate. Rather, our task is to improve practice from within. In this task, we have no tools other than situated, fallible reasoning and debate. Morality is a practical skill, a matter of continuing practice and experimentation, not a body of transcendent facts. Only by acknowledging this fact can we turn with clear eyes to the task of encouraging and improving the moral skills of those in our community.

We are engaged in a vast experiment, designing a life together in which we can all flourish. There is no certainty to be found, but much work to be done, and philosophy has stood on the sidelines for too long.
There are several people to thank for their help in the development of this paper, though none of them, it should be emphasized, are responsible for its undoubtedly copious faults. First, I want to sing the praises of John Dewey, who, in my carefully considered opinion, was right about just about everything. On reading Dewey, I consistently find myself echoing the sentiment of Oliver Wendell Holmes: "So methought God would have spoken had He been inarticulate but keenly desirous to tell you how it was." In addition, I want to acknowledge my considerable debt to Owen Flanagan, whose book *Varieties of Moral Personality* opened my eyes to the possibilities of moral philosophy, a discipline in which I had largely lost hope. His careful, level-headed, judicious substantiation of the claim that ethics ought to take account of psychology convinced me that moral experience and moral philosophy need not proceed in ignorance of one another. Dewey and Flanagan have been, in different ways, my guiding intellectual lights.

The production of this paper, my MA thesis, was aided in innumerable ways, direct and indirect, by my thesis committee: Andrew Light, Albert Borgmann, and Bill Chaloupka. Though none are likely to agree with everything I have said here, each has, in his or her own way, provided me with a moral and philosophical exemplar. Professor Chaloupka deserves special thanks for his heroic last minute efforts. Andrew, the chair of my committee, has been particularly helpful throughout my stay at the University of Montana, providing me with a steady supply of professional advice and assistance without which I would (still) be thoroughly adrift.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My MA studies would have been impossible without several generous grants from that most flexible and forgiving of charitable foundations: my parents. I disagree with my parents, Larry and Leslie Roberts, on almost every explicit tenet of moral (not to
mention political, economic... n) theory, yet I am continually awed, educated, and put to shame by the exemplary virtue with which they conduct their lives. I have learned more from their behavior than I could from any set of arguments or texts. Jeff and Daniel, my brothers and best friends, are endlessly both sources of support and reasons for pride; they are mystified by what I do, but their respective excellences (medicine and music) have informed my thoughts on morality more than they know. What follows is dedicated to my family; it is a wan and inadequate attempt to do justice to their moral example.
Chapter One
The Is-Ought Distinction: Two Kinds of Objections to Ethical Naturalism

Before I begin, I should clarify what I will be defending in this paper as "ethical naturalism" (EN). Much of the latter portion of the paper will be devoted to clarifying my vision of a productively naturalized moral philosophy and psychology; for now, it is enough to sketch the outlines, to say something about what I do not mean. There are two basic kinds of EN: normative and metaethical. Normative EN attempts to answer moral questions on the basis of how people actually perceive, reason, judge, and act. In its most radical form, it claims that moral questions are exhaustively answered by scientific knowledge drawn from biology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and so on. It unabashedly and straightforwardly deduces ought from is, or claims to. Radical normative ethical naturalists are rare, but normative EN certainly has historical proponents. Bentham's utilitarianism, a target of G. E. Moore's original attacks, is a form of normative EN – it claims that humans do seek pleasure and avoid pain, thus pleasure is the good and pain the bad, thus we ought to act to maximize the former and minimize that latter.

Metaethical naturalism, on the other hand, makes claims about how we ought to conceive of morality, what moral reasoning consists in, and what conditions are conducive to the effective practice of moral perception and behavior. Like any type of metaethics, it makes claims about how moral theories ought to be constructed and what their scope should or can be. What makes it a distinctive form of metaethics is that it draws heavily on empirical research about how effective reasoning takes place. Also, it draws on empirical research to se broad limits and establish criteria that any moral
theory should meet. A good example is Owen Flanagan’s Principal of Minimal Psychological Realism (PMPR): “Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us.” As Flanagan is quick to admit, this principal is “not remotely sufficient to fix the right moral theory” (VMP 32); however, it does set limits on the shape a moral theory may take. For instance, it rules out the more radical forms of act utilitarianism, since it is impossible to envision a human being who finds it psychologically possible to compute the sum total of the effects of her actions at each and every possible moral juncture (33-34).

Simplistic and radical versions of normative EN are rightfully scorned. They make the mistake of ignoring the fact that a large part of human life is speculation, imagination, and recommendation about future forms of life. They ignore that what is reflects only a minuscule fraction of what could be. As Heidegger noted, human beings are future-looking. We think, plan, and dream about what could be, what is possible for us, and moral theory is one way that we guide our efforts. To construct moral theory simply on the basis of how present human beings think and act is grossly parochial, conservative, and unimaginative.

The EN that I defend in this paper is primarily metaethical. It is first and foremost a theory about what morality and moral reasoning are. However, a robust metaethics will issue, I will argue, in changed practices; thus, while my version of EN avoids the reductive conservatism of straightforwardly normative naturalism, it is not without normative consequences (see Chap. 3, sec. II).
The prospect of naturalizing ethics raises hackles across a broad spectrum of philosophical positions and for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, the objections of EN's opponents tend to cluster around one concept: the "is-ought" or "fact-value" distinction. The distinction between statements of fact and valuative claims about what ought to be is also indexed as the difference between description and prescription, description and evaluation, and explanation and justification. (There are important differences among these ways of formulating the distinction, but for now, it suffices that they be considered synonymous, at least in spirit.)

I. The "Logical Fallacy" Objection

There are two general types of objection based on the distinction between the descriptive and the normative. The first, made famous by G.E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica*, accuses EN of the "naturalistic fallacy;" as the word "fallacy" indicates, this accusation is meant to expose a logical error. As Kant famously asserted, in any logical deduction the conclusion must be contained in the premises, and presumably, descriptive premises do not "contain" anything normative, making the deduction of a normative conclusion illicit. According to Moore, virtually every moral philosopher prior to Moore had made this error. The commission of the naturalistic fallacy rendered (most) prior moral theories not just flawed or incomplete, said Moore, but flatly false. The notion of the naturalistic fallacy is predicated on the assumption that states of affairs in the world and moral properties are different in kind. In Moore's notoriously suspect formulation, the good is "real" but not "natural" -- it is "non-natural." To draw a conclusion about a
non-natural property from premises about natural facts is, on this formulation, a logical error.

Though few contemporary philosophers subscribe to Moore's intuitionism or his characterization of moral facts as non-natural, his legacy nevertheless lives on, as evidenced by the fact that much philosophical discussion of the is-ought distinction remains centered around logic. There is still (in some quarters) thought to be a difference in logical kind between descriptive and normative assertions. If the logical objection is accepted at face value, it is very difficult to argue against, though there have been many attempts. One recent rejoinder, for instance, appears in an article by Oswald Hanfling entitled "'Is', 'Ought' and the Voluntaristic Fallacy," which attempts to circumvent the logical objection with a point about the relationship among terms in the premises and terms in the conclusions of allegedly fallacious is-ought deductions.\(^5\) His central example is the following:

(1) What they are doing is evil.

(2) Therefore, they ought not to do it. (IOVF 537)

The conclusion follows, Hanfling says, simply because "ought not" is analytic to "evil," that is to say, "evil" contains "ought not" in the same way that "bachelor" contains "unmarried man." In other words, to make the deduction we do not have to consult the world or our moral intuitions; we simply have to note the meanings of words in our language. In a similar way, "murder," "stealing," "lying," etc. are analytic to "ought not."

What if the premises are rephrased so that any reference to, say, "murder" is taken out? It is irrelevant, says Hanfling; "killed with premeditation and not in self-defense" is analytic to "murder," "murder" to "ought not," and the conclusion still follows from meanings alone (539).
describe factual situations because values are "built into" the fabric of language.

Philosophers have failed to notice the significance of this fact due to the "voluntaristic fallacy" referred to in the title of the essay. The fallacy is that a language-user "assents" to using a language the way she assents to playing a game, that she voluntarily decides to accept the rules of the game and thus is free to refuse to accept particular rules (for instance, the rule that "murder" carries valuative meaning). But this is a mistake, according to Hanfling; there is no "decision" to use the proper meanings of words (545). The language user finds herself in a situation in which meanings are established, in which she finds values woven into language, however she might choose to critique those values. Thus, normative meanings can be deduced from certain descriptive words, because these descriptive words already contain normative meaning.

I do not think that Hanfling's argument works, for several reasons. One is that, thanks to Quine, the notion of analyticity has been rendered extremely problematic. Another is that the values in any social fabric (or, to mirror Hanfling's appropriation of Wittgenstein, "form of life") are various, ambiguous, and frequently contradictory; these qualities reflect themselves in language. Therefore it seems unlikely that teasing a normative conclusion from descriptive premises, if it is indeed possible, will often or ever be a matter of simple deduction, because words, particularly words with valuative connotations, are rarely crystal clear in their meanings. Natural language contains an ineliminable element of ambiguity, and thus there is indeed a degree of voluntary, conscious deliberation involved in the process of is-to-ought inference.
Hanfling is not to be faulted in particular, though. I do not believe that the logical objection can be met with logical rebuttal. In fact, I think that the logic-centered debate over the is-ought principle is degenerate; it has not been and will not be philosophically fruitful. I suspect that phrasing the problem in terms of logic is what has made it, in principle, unsolvable. However, it is not my intention to argue that point here. Instead, I want to turn to the second type of objection based on the is-ought distinction, one that I think reflects more legitimate worries and is a more open and fruitful topic of discussion.

II. The "Bad Idea" Objection

The second type of objection that I have in mind is pragmatic. That is to say, rather than characterizing EN as involving a logical fallacy, it simply claims that naturalizing ethics is ill-advised, a bad idea. It claims that naturalizing ethics will have undesirable effects on human practices. As a pragmatist, it is my view that this is where the battle should be fought.

The fear is that EN's willful fudging of the distinction between is and ought in effect threatens the ought. It is claimed that moral philosophy has a unique role—recommendation—whose character is in danger of being corrupted by the invasion of naturalism's descriptive focus. This fear is widespread. I will focus here on an essay that reflects many common sentiments against EN: Virginia Held's "Whose Agenda? Ethics versus Cognitive Science." The essay appears in a collection of essays called *Mind and Morals* that is nominally on the growing conversation between ethics and cognitive science, but in fact strays much wider; Held's argument, for instance, is clearly directed not only at cognitive science, but at EN in general.
Her aversion to EN is motivated by the fear that in "the culture in which we live and work, the normative is constantly in danger of becoming swallowed by the empirical, not just in the social sciences themselves but even within philosophy" (WA 69). Rather than more closely allying itself with the human and social sciences, Held urges, "[t]he important task for moral philosophy in relation to these other areas seems to be to keep the distinctively normative alive and well.... What ethics should not do is lose sight of the distinctive and primarily normative and evaluative agenda for which it should continue to press" (70). I will argue that Held 1) misrepresents the scientific disciplines that she sees as threatening moral philosophy, particularly cognitive science and moral psychology, 2) misrepresents EN and its relation to these scientific disciplines, 3) misrepresents moral philosophy, and as a result, 4) portrays too large a chasm between description and recommendation in ethics. These four mistakes are characteristic of those who fear the naturalization of ethics.

**Causality, Science, and Subjectivity**

Held makes much of science's search for causal explanation. She lays out her general attitude towards the causal models of science in her 1993 book *Feminist Morality*. The repeated theme of her discussions of science is that scientific accounts, or "causal accounts" more generally, are incompatible with subjective experience. The implication seems to be that the sciences - cognitive science, psychology economics, sociology, anthropology - to the extent that they are indeed sciences, cannot adequately explain human behavior. She gives the example of a girl seeing an automobile advertisement with a tall, beautiful woman draped over the car. After seeing
the advertisement, the girl begins to worry more than she would have about her appearance. But, says Held,

the image doesn't cause her to do so in a way the model of causal explanation can well handle. Further, if the same woman discusses with other women how those who pay for the advertisements of a commercial culture use the images of women for their own gain and in the process damage the aspirations of girls and women, this woman can come to be less influenced by the advertising that surrounds her. Again, this change in her consciousness and activity cannot well be dealt with in the causal explanations developed for the sciences. (FM 8)

Held gives no explanation for why a causal account is impossible here. On a surface reading, what she says is flatly false. The logical positivists would have said that the entire series of incidents can be exhaustively explained at the level of physics. However, this radical reductionism no longer univocally characterizes the philosophical view of science. The non-reductivist philosopher of science would happily admit that one can not capture the relevant causal mechanisms unless one rises to a higher level of explanation. What that level would be is somewhat controversial. Patricia Churchland might say that neurobiology is sufficient, but even that degree of reductionism is hotly contested. More likely, to fully account for the girl's behavior, cognitive psychological and sociological explanations will have to be offered. But these will still be causal accounts. What can Held mean?

She is obviously not positing any unmoved movers or uncaused events. Rather, it seems that Held's antipathy towards science arises from the fact that it doesn't provide the kind of understanding that she is after. This is consonant with her other remarks, which return again and again to the notion of subjectivity. Indeed, she concludes the example with these words:
“Subjectivity must be taken seriously in human experience” (FM 9). What she is after in the example, then, is an understanding of the girl's action from the point-of-view of the subject, of the girl (or, perhaps more broadly, the folk-psychological point-of-view).

Discussing moral experience, she makes reference to Kant's antinomy between "on the one hand, the freedom we must assume to make sense of moral responsibility, and explanation and prediction in terms of the causal laws of nature" (WA 72). Moral theory, she says, must make the subjective, the view from which we are free to make choices, central. Science, with its objective, third-person point-of-view, can not account for or explain away subjectivity, though it has tried (or rather, philosophy of mind has tried on its behalf). On this score Held refers, both in her book and in her essay, to Thomas Nagel's account of the unbridgeable gap between the third- and first-person perspectives (WA 73; FM 34).

The debate over Nagel's characterization is long and complex, and I do not want to attempt a position here. Rather, I will briefly examine two particular areas of science that Held targets, areas that will play a non-trivial role in EN: cognitive science and moral psychology. In particular, I want to index some (relatively) recent developments in those fields that Held either willfully ignores or of which she is simply ignorant. The developments work against the claim that these disciplines have nothing to say about experience and against Held's characterization of them (and science in general) as interested only in what is "reducible to the properties of individual entities that can be observed by an outsider and mapped into a causal scientific framework" (FM 8). In general, they work against Held's implicit picture of all science as cold, positivistic, behavioristic, and wedded to a simplistic "billiard ball" model of causation. Furthermore, the developments serve to
make cognitive science and moral psychology increasingly amenable to use in ethical reflection.

1. Cognitive Science

Held seeks a conception of mind that is compatible with experience, and she thinks that philosophy of mind "that has grown out of or is compatible with cognitive science" (WA 73) is bankrupt on that score. In fact, despite the context of her article, this is about her only reference to cognitive science as such, apart from repeated references to (and gross generalizations about) "adherents of the view that cognitive science can advance moral inquiry" (71). After slipping from cognitive science to philosophy of mind, she proceeds, without acknowledging or defending the strategy, to equate philosophy of mind entirely with functionalism. Functionalism does indeed focus on "properties of individual entities," and it has indeed characterized much philosophy of mind, but its relationship to cognitive science is not as clear or univocal. I will leave that to one side, however, and simply discuss some recent developments in cognitive science.

Traditionally, cognitive scientists sought after the formal features of cognition, problem solving, etc., and tried to abstract away, to the extent possible, from contingencies of environments and particular situations. This led them to focus almost exclusively on an inner, computational and representational theory of cognition, modeled after the central processing units and stored memory characteristic of computers. Interaction with the world was seen as "low-bandwidth," limited to input (the data of perception) and output (afferent signals to the muscles, etc.). Meaning was located in semantical representations stored in memory. (John Haugeland argues that
this presupposition – that the mind is an independent realm that can be understood in abstraction from the world – is part of Descartes’ lingering legacy. Recently, many cognitive scientists have embraced connectionism, which abandons the metaphor of the central processor and its attendant stored memory. Connectionism describes intelligence as distributed throughout the brain via a web of neural connections of varying weights. Representations, on this model, are not explicit but rather implicit in the weight distribution among connections, or more generally, in the brain’s cognitive structure.

A recent and growing movement in cognitive science that postdates connectionism (and whose relation to it is controversial) is referred to by various names, generally "embedded cognition." The outline of this new movement is described in Haugeland’s essay, “Mind Embodied and Embedded.” It is characterized first by its rejection of the view that mind, body, and world are functionally separable (that is, the functionalist view that cognition could be preserved if the physical body were removed and replaced with, say, a computer or a robot), that mind produces meaning, and that meaning is always in the form of semantic representation. The details of this view are too complex to deal with adequately here; I will only touch on three theses that Haugeland extracts from this statement by Hubert Dreyfus:

When we are at home in the world, the meaningful objects embedded in their context of references among which we live are not a model of the world stored in our mind or brain: they are the world itself. (qtd. in MEE 27)

The first thesis is that the locus of meaning is not only in the head, as not only traditional cognitive science but much traditional philosophy has had it, but in the world as well, in the natural and human-made artifacts and
situations with which we are surrounded. The meaning in the world is not
derivative, assigned by human minds, but original; in other words,
"intelligence itself abides 'out' in the world, not just 'inside'..." (28). The
second thesis is that not all meaning is representational. Meaning, in a broad
sense, inheres in "objects embedded in their context of reference." As
Haugeland puts it:

   A hammer, for instance, is significant beyond itself in terms of what it's
   for: driving nails into wood, by being wielded in a certain way, in order
   to build something, and so on. The nails, the wood, the project, and
   the carpenter him or herself, are likewise caught up in this "web of
   significance," in their respective ways. These are the meaningful
   objects that are the world itself; and none of them is a representation.
   (29)

Thus, meaning extends beyond what can be captured in linguistic formulas.
The third thesis is that we live and act within meaning; that is, that
intelligent behavior is not an output of the brain but an interaction or
collaboration with the environment, with the meaning embedded there.
Haugeland gives the example of taking the highway to San Jose. Traditional
cognitive science would postulate an internal map representing the route and
a CPU sending out instructions on how to get there; rather, Haugeland says,
we should consider the behavior a collaboration between ourselves and the
road. The road itself, on this model, is an integral part of the intelligent
system; the intelligent behavior is a collaboration (31).

   These are but sketches, but their relevance to Held's worries should be
   clear. The movement toward embedded cognition turns away from a focus
   on the "properties of individual entities" in favor of theorizing a network of
   meaning through which the property of intelligence is distributed. This
conception offers intelligent action as an emergent feature of complex, “wide-bandwidth” interactions between persons and their environments -- an indefinite number of recursive, reciprocal causal strands, not a linear series of billiard-balls colliding. Furthermore, unlike traditional cognitive science, this conception does not abstract from situated action to formal features of cognition; rather, it conceives of situated, embedded action as the site and necessary precondition of cognition. It focuses on the integral, or as Haugeland puts it, “intimate” implication of mind in world. In other words, it studies embodied experience. The encounter of Held’s girl with images of feminine beauty and the meaning it represents, as well as her subsequent appropriation and response to that meaning, are not outside its purview, nor are her interactions with the supportive women in her environment. Indeed, Haugeland’s cognitive science will have much to say about the process that Held’s example represents.

2. Moral Psychology

What of moral psychology? Held says somewhat less about this discipline, but her worries seem much the same: “The search for causal explanation dominates in... moral psychology as usually pursued” (WA 70). Again, her complaint about this branch of science seems to be that it is a branch of science. It is difficult to know what to make of Held’s antipathy towards causal explanation, other than to interpret it as a misguided expression of her more legitimate antipathy towards the social sciences, which have, like most areas of society, historically been insensitive to the concerns and experience of women. All explanations, it seems to me, are causal in some way or another – for instance, how might we explain the
exclusion of family-centered ethical concerns from mainstream moral philosophy, a topic central to Held’s work, other than by saying, “it happened due to (i.e., because of) factors x, y... n”? Indeed, Held herself does much of this type of explaining. She states repeatedly that causal explanation is sharply distinct from normative recommendation, a subject I will address in subsequent sections; however, while this might explain her desire to distinguish these disciplines from moral philosophy, it does not explain her evident antipathy towards them.

Again, it is best to focus on Held’s more implicit background concerns, which are more particular and more legitimate. These are, again, that science works on a narrow model of causality that factors in only the “properties of individual entities” and that it is incapable of taking account of or speaking to subjective experience.

On the first score, it might be argued that moral psychology doesn’t actually do much causal explaining. The general modus operandi of the discipline is to conduct experiments and point out regularities in the responses of subjects. For instance, in the third part of Varieties of Moral Personality Flanagan points out several regularities that have emerged from psychological research. Here are a few examples:

The Law of Social Impact: “the intensity of social impact is a function of the strength (S) – that is, the power, status, persuasiveness, and so on – of those creating a force; the immediacy (I) – that is, the proximity in space and time – of the force; and the number (N) of people presenting the force. More formally, intensity of social impact = f(SIN)” (VMP 301).

Corollaries: The Principle of the Decreasing Marginal Effectiveness of Adding Numbers over Two “says that the effect
of adding numbers to the source of social impact increases at a decreasing rate" (ibid), and the Principle of the Diffusion of Social Impact "says that the intensity of impact is (experienced as) diffused over, possibly simply divided by, the number of persons at whom it is directed" (ibid).

Fundamental Attribution Tendency "involves an inclination to overestimate the impact of dispositional factors and to underestimate situational ones" in producing behavior (306).

Corollaries: Agent-Observer Divergence "involves a tendency of observers to attribute actions of others to standing dispositions in them, even where in their own case they attribute such actions to situational variables" (307), and Self-Serving Bias "involves attributing desirable actions to standing dispositions in oneself and undesirable acts to external factors" (310).

This is but a small sample of the tentative results of psychological experiments, but a few things are already clear. First, these are not "laws" in the strict sense, of the kind we find in physics; they do not posit causal forces, they simply point out regularities in behavior. Of course, some of them conform well to what we would expect through folk psychology, where we do frequently phrase such matters in causal terms. Some of them, however, are quite counterintuitive. For instance, folk psychology would predict that the chance of someone helping a victim at an auto accident would increase as more people showed up (after all, with more people, the chances of an expert appearing in the crowd increase). However, \( f(SIN) \) reveals that the chance of someone helping actually decreases with the growing number of onlookers.

Regardless, these results bear little resemblance to Held's picture of science: they are highly tentative and probabilistic, they are not exclusively
focused on the "properties of individual entities" (groups of varying sizes play in integral explanatory role), and they are not framed in terms of a strict, billiard-ball model of causation.

What about the role of subjectivity? Held's belief that moral psychology takes no account of subjectivity is just false. In the early part of the century, to be sure, psychology was dominated by behaviorism, which took pride in its ability to explain behavior without reference to the subject's point-of-view. Even as behaviorism waned, psychologists still took for granted that morality was easily defined and explicable in terms of reinforcement or "internalized anxiety." However, this changed decisively in the latter part of the century. In a paper on philosophy's influence on psychology, Augusto Blasi traces the turning point to the seminal dissertation of Lawrence Kholberg. Blasi writes, "Kholberg... consciously split with this tradition... by assuming the necessity of a cognitive phenomenological perspective: morality must be defined by the individual's beliefs; these are constructed by the individual himself in interaction with his social world.... It was as if psychology were finally attempting to deal with morality as people experience it" (HSP 39). Blasi calls this the "assumption of phenomenalism," which proceeds "by considering the individual's judgment and intention as necessary to define the moral phenomenon" (57). This "programmatic emphasis on the subject's perspective" seems to fly directly in the face of Held's complaint that subjectivity is ignored in the social sciences.

Kholberg's moral stage theory has come under considerable criticism in recent years, most notably by Carol Gilligan. Gilligan's thesis is that Kholberg's emphasis on morality as justice obscures the fact that many subjects phrase (and presumably experience) their moral concerns in terms of compassion, empathy, and care. (Gilligan objects as a scientist conducting
scientific research, but despite Held’s stated antipathy towards science’s incursions into morality, she makes much use of Gilligan’s distinction between justice and care.) This criticism amounts to saying that Kholberg has disregarded his own “assumption of phenomenalism” and imposed parochial normative conclusions on his data. We will return to the relationship between the descriptive task of psychology, on the one hand, and normativity on the other, but it should be clear that subjective experience plays a large role in defining the domain and explaining behavior in moral psychology.

3. Therefore

It is clear, then, that Held’s characterization of the sciences she criticizes is based on a caricature. Her description of these sciences as focusing exclusively on the “properties of individual entities” is misguided. While it is true that both seek causal accounts, it is not the case that they do so in the simplistic way that Held implies, as though social norms, moral beliefs, judgments, and actions were billiard balls that simply strike and bounce off one another. The new movement in cognitive science towards acknowledgment and theorization of the situated, embodied character of cognition and action mitigates the criticism. The accounts will still be causal in a broad sense, but the focus on the embedded character of thinking and action involves a recognition that the causal strands involved are indefinite in number and complexity because they extend well beyond the brain and into the environment. Moral psychology is moving towards a similar recognition of complexity, and appropriately restrain itself to mapping what
regularities it finds, regularities which take social groups, not merely "individual entities," as crucial to explanation.

The objection that the sciences cannot account for subjective experience is more complex. It is certainly false that cognitive science and moral psychology have no place for subjective experience in their explanations. Since embodied cognition involves "not principled separation but all sorts of close coupling and functional unity" (MEE 33) of mind and world, and since it acknowledges that mind does not create meaning but rather move and acts within it, the subjective appropriation of meaning is central to any explanation of cognition. Cognition is not a formal structure that can be abstracted from situated experiences, but rather an emergent product of those experiences; thus, subjective experience plays a central role. And moral psychology, as we have just seen, gives the subject's point-of-view a central role as well, since especially in the area of moral reflection and action, the subject's first-person judgments and intentions are crucial because "morality essentially, that is, by definition, depends on the agent's subjective perspective" (HSP 59).

These debates center on subjectivity, on first-person experience, despite Held's characterization of the sciences. Now, Held might still say the following: "yes, the subject's verbal reports are taken into consideration, but these are then treated as objective data and studied from third-person perspective." If the point is that scientists necessarily function as observers and not participants, then the point is undoubtedly (and trivially) true. But if this alone disqualifies scientists from having legitimate things to say about morality, then we are left with the following conclusion: only those who are subjectively, actively involved with a moral problem may participate in debate or theorizing about it, and in doing so they give the voices of other
subjectively, actively involved agents complete priority. They set the agenda for moral theory and determine how much if any empirical data will be involved in it. As I will argue shortly, this insistence on the hegemony of the first-person perspective is unpalatable.

Ethical Naturalism and Its Relation to the Sciences

If Held's characterization of the sciences is misleading, her characterization of EN is almost parodic. Again, it is difficult to determine in specific cases whether this is due to ignorance or hostility. In the following, I will review some of the statements she makes about EN and explain why they are misleading. Since "ethical naturalism" is an umbrella term that covers several not entirely consistent theories, I will adopt as my exemplar of EN Owen Flanagan's conception. I do this for two reasons: first, I find Flanagan's the most sensible and consistent version that I have encountered; second, Flanagan's programmatic statement of EN – his essay "Ethics Naturalized: Ethics as Human Ecology"16 – appears less than thirty pages prior to Held's essay in Mind and Morals. She attended the conference where the paper was presented and cites it in her own essay. If she is to be held accountable for some knowledge of EN, why not hold her accountable to a clear statement in close proximity?

Held writes:

Ethical naturalism has lately been presented as a view... that avoids such metaphysically peculiar entities as moral norms or normative properties. Ethical naturalism is seen as having what is taken as the great advantage of being consistent with science and metaphysical materialism. But as Jean Hampton usefully reminds us, such a view is
hardly new; it has already had an eloquent exponent in Hobbes. She shows how even Hobbes "cannot keep normative standards of value and reasoning out of his theory" and argues that since contemporary naturalists employ objective normative standards for such matters as instrumental rationality and coherent, healthy preferences, they have no defensible grounds for dismissing objective moral norms.

An additional reaction might be that since so many theorists and students of ethics recognize the reasons to move beyond Hobbes's naturalistic reduction of the moral to the empirical, they should be able to see how similar arguments apply to contemporary versions of ethical naturalism. (WA 71-72)

This passage is characteristic of Held's argument. It runs together several important distinctions and damns contemporary EN by association with Hobbes, with no textual support for the assertion that the two are substantively identical. Since this passage reflects common suspicions of EN, it is worth deconstructing.

Held says that it is a purported strength of naturalism that it "avoids" metaphysically suspect entities like ("real") moral norms and properties. But this is ambiguous. If by "avoids" she means that it does not depend for its plausibility on their existence, she is surely right. But if she means that EN positively denies the existence of such entities, she is wrong. Flanagan explicitly states that "ethical naturalism implies no position on the question of whether there really are, or are not, moral properties in the universe in the sense debated by moral realists, antirealists, and quasi-realists. The important thing is that moral claims can be rationally supported, not that all the constituents of such claims refer or fail to refer to 'real' things" (EN 23). As a
pragmatist, Flanagan is concerned with the ability of norms to effectively guide practice, not their metaphysical status.

Held then says that EN is "consistent with" science and materialism, and this is "thought to be" an advantage. But, unless she proposes some form of theism or dualism (which, to my knowledge, she does not), it is unclear what this is meant to contrast with. She repeatedly condemns "scientism" and says that science is but one way of looking at the world, but she never points to her proposed alternative or says exactly in what "scientism" consists. The implication in the passage above seems to be that the existence of ("real") objective norms is incompatible with scientific materialism, but if this is indeed the implication, then Held is contradicting the views and experiences of a whole host of thinking people who are materialists and who believe in moral norms, and who see no contradiction.

The implication is made clear in the sentences that follow. Without support, contemporary EN is equated with Hobbes's naturalism, and it is pointed out that Hobbes "cannot keep normative standards of value and reasoning out of his theory." Nor, says Jean Hampton, can today's naturalists. But exactly what kind of norms can they not avoid? The phrase used is "objective norms," but again, this is ambiguous. If "objective" means "real apart from human beings or their projects," as the metaphysical realist would have it, then EN implies no particular position, including denial (EN 23). If "objective" means something like "intersubjective and rationally defensible," then EN does not attempt to "dismiss" such norms; on the contrary, it embraces them (it is difficult to make intelligible the notion of avoiding any and all norms, whatever Hobbes may or may not have said).

So, EN certainly uses norms to guide its reasoning, and discusses the most fruitful methods of determining norms as well. What Flanagan does
claim is that the ethical naturalist will not claim to have *deduced* moral norms, not from truths of reason or logic like the rationalist, nor from descriptions of the world like some moral realists. EN makes no use of, nor does it try to establish, any "demonstratively moral" norms: "[The ethical naturalist] points to certain practices, values, virtues, and principles as reasonable based on inductive and abductive reasoning" (EN 23). Moral norms are not special or particular in this respect; they are underdetermined by their premises, but his in no way distinguishes them from epistemic, scientific, or other types of norms. (This requires some defense, but that will have to wait for the next chapter.)

Held finishes the passage by wondering why contemporary ethical naturalists are so dense as to not have noticed that "Hobbes's naturalistic reduction of the moral to the empirical" failed. This is at the heart of most fears with regard to EN: that it reduces the moral to the empirical or, put another way, that it equates what is (now) with what ought to be. But it is wildly inaccurate to univocally characterize EN as having this goal; there are those who defend it, but Flanagan is more representative of the new ethical naturalist movement in clearly rejecting it.

As he says on the second page of his essay, naturalized ethics, like naturalized epistemology (and, I will argue later, naturalized economics, anthropology, sociology, etc.), has two components: a descriptive-genealogical-nomological (d/g/n) component and a normative component (EN 20).\(^\text{18}\) The d/g/n component will specify certain basic capacities and propensities of *Homo sapiens*, such as sympathy, empathy, egoism, and so on, relevant to moral life. It will explain how people come to feel, think, and act about moral matters in the way(s) they do. It will explain how and in what ways
moral learning, engagement, and response involve the emotions. It will explain what moral disagreement consists of and why it occurs, and it will explain why people sometimes resolve disagreement by recourse to agreements to tolerate each other without, however, approving of each other's beliefs, actions, practices, and institutions. It will tell us what people are doing when they make normative judgments. And finally, or as a consequence of all this, it will try to explain what goes on when people try to educate the young, improve the moral climate, propose moral theories, and so on. (20-21)

The normative component will explain "why some norms - including those governing choosing norms - values, virtues, are good or better than others" (21). Different strategies for selecting, systematizing, defending, and propagating norms will be "evaluated pragmatically" (ibid). Whatever one's opinion of this conception of the role of normativity, it could hardly be made more clear that the ethical naturalist is not attempting to "reduce" the normative to the descriptive. Indeed, the normative is given a distinct and indispensable place in the theory.

At the end of an extended attack on cognitive science which, again, accuses it of trying to "reduce human experience to what can be explained scientifically," Held states that "[t]he domains of literature and art, in facilitating imaginative identification with others, and in providing vicarious moral experience, are at least as relevant to ethics as is science.... If ethics must choose between the perspectives of science and art, it should not reject art" (WA 75). This passage is rather remarkable in that Held comes very close to claiming outright that ethics should reject science - in her essay, she progresses from saying first that ethics should center on experience, second that the viewpoints of science and experience (which art and literature
provide vicariously) are incompatible, and third that if ethics has to choose, it "should not reject art." She cannot bring herself to reject science outright, but the sentiment hovers about her essay.

Does EN ask us to choose between art and science? Consider this passage from Flanagan:

Overall, the normative component [of EN] involves the imaginative deployment of information from any source useful to criticism, self and/or social examination, formation of new or improved norms, and values: improvements in moral educational practices, training of moral sensibilities, and so on. These sources include psychology, cognitive science, all the human sciences, especially history and anthropology, as well as literature, the arts, and ordinary conversation based on ordinary everyday observations about how individuals, groups, communities, nation-states, the community of persons, or sentient beings are faring. (EN 21-22)

Or: "What is relevant to ethical reflection is everything we know, everything we can bring to ethical conversation that merits attention: data from the human sciences, history, literature and the other arts, from playing with possible worlds in imagination, and from everyday commentary on everyday events" (EN 35). This seems, on the surface, to be a clear statement that science is but one of many sources of material for moral reflection tapped by EN. Held, however, sees through such talk.

Philosophers influenced by cognitive science seem to say we do not need to choose: we can use art and literature and anything else to provide data for moral beliefs. But they interpret art and literature as providing material to be studied by science, whereas an aim of art may be to express a unique perspective or to escape scientific explanation.
And art must often reflect a subjective point of view not open to any observer. I agree we should not choose between art and science, but that requires us to live with incompatible views, not to reduce art – or ethics – to what can be studied by science and “accounted for” by causal explanation. (WA 75)

Held give absolutely no support to the contention that ethical naturalists interpret art and literature as “providing material to be studied by science;” it is unclear what this can even mean. Science may attempt to explain what goes on at the neural or cognitive level when someone “imaginatively identifies with another” through immersion in art or literature, but no scientist claims to be able to explain the arts themselves. Indeed, this passage raises several questions that Held makes no attempt to answer. How would one study a work of art “scientifically”? Exactly how would an artist set about creating a work of art with the aim of “escaping scientific explanation,” and what evidence is there that any artist has expressed such an aim? And, how is it possible that art could reflect a point-of-view “not open to any observer” – does the production and dissemination of art not by definition make the artist’s point-of-view accessible, at least to a degree? Isn’t that the point of art?

In the above passage it becomes plain that Held is determined to view science as fundamentally at odds with subjective human experience and to view EN as scientific, despite textual evidence to the contrary. But as the preceding passage by Flanagan should make clear, the ethical naturalist has no desire to “reduce” anything to scientific terms; in fact, the goal is to draw from as broad a range of sources as possible, including but not limited to science, in the process of ethical reflection. The material from these sources will not exhaust the naturalist’s moral theory, despite Held’s claim –
Flanagan states again and again that the descriptive underdetermines the normative, and that the normative is indispensable.

When Held engages actual thinkers, her strategy is no more charitable. First she spends a section refuting the "moral realists" Peter Railton, Richard Boyd, and Nicholas Sturgeon (WA 75-78). None of these thinkers refers to himself as an ethical naturalist, but Held labels them as such anyway. She takes their strategy of inferring the metaphysical reality of moral properties from their usefulness in explanation as typical of EN, despite the fact that none of the avowed naturalists in Mind and Morals endorse the strategy.

When engaging authors who make specific cognitive scientific claims, her tactic is to either say "we already knew that" (in response to Alvin Goldman's work on empathy in moral behavior and Mark Johnson's work on the use of metaphor in moral reasoning) or "that doesn't provide anything normative" (in response to Goldman's and Johnson's work, and to Paul Churchland's moral network theory of moral learning) (78-82). She never explains why further scientific work should not be done in these areas or why, despite their lack of normativity in themselves, they cannot contribute to normative reflection.

*Moral Philosophy*

Held thinks that there is and should be a sharp distinction between empirical fields that describe phenomena and moral philosophy, which makes recommendations. The two should not be confused: "ethics is normative rather than descriptive" (WA 69, my italics). She envisions a host of fields concerned with normativity: "In addition to ethics in its most general form, we need inquiries in all the more specific areas where ethical
considerations should guide us.... we ought to have inquiries we could call moral sociology, moral psychology, moral economics, moral political science, moral health sciences, and so on” (ibid). She concedes that the descriptive and the normative will “intermingle” in these areas, and that philosophers involved in them should be aware of the relevant empirical realities, but insists that in these areas moral philosophy “should set its own goals and recommend that in all these various fields we not only include a normative component along with everything else that is to be explained but that we give priority to our normative aims.... The key is whether what is primarily being sought is causal explanation or moral guidance” (70). Moral psychology, for instance, either seeks to explain how we do develop moral attitudes and make moral judgments or it deals with how we ought to do so. If the latter, then it is not a branch of psychology, but rather, “it is a branch of moral philosophy... it is moral philosophy of a particular kind...” (ibid).19

But we should be suspicious of this sharp a separation. It seems post hoc, motivated more by Held’s antipathy towards science (scientism?) and her eagerness to distance her occupation from it than by close consideration of the actual work of moral reflection and recommendation. To say that moral theory “sets its own agenda” and that any attempt to recommend lands one within moral philosophy implies two dubious suppositions: one, that empirical inquiry involves value-neutral description, and two, that moral inquiry involves fact-neutral recommendation. We will take a closer look at these suppositions in the next section. First, let’s take a closer at Held’s characterization of moral philosophy and its sources.

I begin with a broad thesis: there are two sources on which we can draw in moral reflection, the immanent and the transcendental. The immanent -- the world, nature, stuff -- we describe in terms of our experience of it, and
empirical science is one form of such description. The transcendental – Reason, God, Truth, all the usual capitalized suspects – is in ill repute in today’s “disenchanted,” “post-metaphysical” (pick your buzzword) world. Regardless of whether the transcendental exists or whether we can deduce practical moral advice from it, Held presumably has no wish to seek her justification there.

Held responds to these kinds of considerations in the following way. The distinction between “natural” and “supernatural” (what I have called “immanent” and “transcendental”) is “misleading” and other distinctions are more useful: i.e., “the distinction between that which is specifically human and that which belongs to a natural world that would be much as it is with no humans in it, or the distinction between the subjective point of view of the conscious self and the objective point of view of the observer studying nature and the human beings in it and seeking explanations of its events” (WA 85). Thus, she might say, we have a third source for moral inquiry that I have missed: moral experience, which is “distinctively human” rather than natural and subjective rather than objective.

As to the former distinction: one truth that science from Darwin forward urges on us is that the capacity for conscious experience is emergent from, and continuous with, lower level processes that are most certainly natural (even in Held’s sense). Furthermore, a central insight of EN, supported by empirical results in the natural and social sciences, is that moral experience is continuous with other kinds of experiences, including experiences (fear, territoriality, fellow-feeling) that are not distinctively human. It is (almost) certainly true that the self-conscious deliberation of homo sapiens is unique in the natural world; nevertheless, it seems odd to think that we can learn nothing about moral experience from the scientific
study of the human animal. Moreover, it seems odd to think that knowledge about how and why we have moral experiences will not help us improve ourselves and our moral environment.

As to the latter distinction: Held holds that practice should inform theory as well as vice versa, that sometimes "gut reactions," or immediate moral impulses, should lead us to revise our principles. She holds that "the moral experience of disapproval or approval may sometimes be independent of our beliefs, including our moral beliefs, at any given time, and that, indeed, we ought to decide what moral theories to believe in conjunction with the independent moral experience to which such theories should be subjected" (FM 25). This is a form of Rawls' reflective equilibrium, but rather than balancing immediate judgments and principles, it balances immediate intuitions and principles. It amounts to saying that we should trust our ethical impulses, that we know in our gut more than we can capture in our stated beliefs. In other words, objective moral norms are beholden to subjective moral experiences.

But the fact that our moral experience extends beyond what we may be able to adequately capture in linguistic formulas is itself an objective empirical fact, one open to study. Indeed, Paul Churchland's work on moral networks gives a convincing explanation for why experience has this character.21 Held would say of Churchland's neurobiological work that "it can give a causal account of our moral experience, but it cannot provide anything normative." But the existence of subjective moral experience provides nothing normative either, not in itself. The fact that we have gut reactions does not in itself council us to heed them. If we decide to heed them, we ought to do so because we have good reason to think they will guide us effectively in practice, which is itself an empirical matter. If there is
an empirical scientific account that tells us how and why they exist, should we not learn from it? More generally, can we not learn about subjectivity through objective empirical inquiry?

Held’s division of the natural into the “as it would be without humans” and the “distinctively human” may be useful for some purposes, but it obscures more than it reveals. Many of the vital philosophical insights of the last half of the 20th century (in, e.g., philosophy of mind and language) are rooted in the Darwinian acknowledgment that we are animals, that the “distinctively human,” which for centuries was taken to be metaphysically unique, is built on and constrained by a foundation of much older and more deeply rooted adaptive features that we share with creatures close to us on the phylogenetic tree. How “distinctively human” moral experience may be is an empirical matter; Held’s a priori disjunction between the human and the natural is unconvincing in and of itself, particularly as a means of excluding biology, evolutionary theory, and ethology from moral theory.

As for the distinction between subjective consciousness and objective scientific description, it is also useful for some purposes -- for instance, it helps focus attention on the “hard problem” of consciousness itself -- but it does not, in itself, give us a principled reason to heed one and disregard the other in developing a moral theory. To be fair, Held acknowledges that we must, in Nagel’s words, “hold the opposition clearly in [our] minds without suppressing either element” (qtd. in WA 73). But this “opposition,” if interpreted too strongly (as both Nagel and Held do, in my opinion) obscures the fact that human experience is a whole, not two mutually exclusive perspectives, and what we learn from one perspective inevitably informs and affects the other. Despite her “more useful” distinctions, Held has given us no reason to reject Flanagan’s proposal that we should admit “everything we
know” into ethical discussion. In an attempt to defend it from dimly perceived threats, Held defines moral philosophy too narrowly, as not this or that other discipline, and thereby cuts it off from the very sources that give it purchase in the world around us, the one world we describe from all our perspectives.

Descriptions and Recommendations

Now we can return to the assumption that seems to underlie Held’s sharp division of the descriptive and normative fields of inquiry, or at least without which it cannot stand as it is presented. That is the assumption that they are functionally separable, that there exist norm-free descriptions and fact-independent recommendations. Held agrees “that the line between fact and value is neither sharp nor stable,” but she holds that “there are important differences between clear cases of fact and clear cases of value” (WA 71). But this is a potentially misleading way to phrase the issue. The contention of the pragmatist is not that there is a fuzzy, moving line between two distinct categories, factual description and valuative recommendation, but that the two are necessarily implicated in each other.

1. Values in Facts

Any descriptive ontology or typology is motivated by an interest, a purpose – there are an indefinite number of ways to divide reality, and doing so in one way rather than another reflects a value structure. This statement will trigger a variety of negative responses, so it requires some qualifications and explication.
There are several things that I do not mean by this. I am not recommending idealism. The world that we divide is real, but the fact remains that both physiological structure and socialization render certain features, boundaries, processes, and so on salient and others invisible. Metaphysical realism is compatible with the realization that we are limited with regard to the facets of reality of which we are capable of becoming aware.

I am not defending the notion of a "conceptual scheme" so well debunked by Donald Davidson. The notion was meant to capture differences among human cultures/paradigms, while the point I’m making is broader. What I am highlighting is the relatively benign insight that different natural creatures live in different quality spaces, spaces constrained in important ways by physiological and (in some species) social traits. A pigeon’s color space is tetra-chromatic; a human’s is tri-chromatic. Minute differences in wind currents go unnoticed by humans; bats take them quite seriously (if I can presume to guess what it’s like to be a bat). Some species are highly aware of and responsive to the behavior of other members of the species; some species’ members live lives of self-contained isolation.

And finally, I am not committing something analogous to Hanfling’s "voluntaristic fallacy." We do not “decide” to inhabit one quality space rather than another; or, put another way, we do not decide what our fundamental interests will be. (Again, this militates against the notion of incommensurable conceptual schemes.) For instance, objects on a vertical axis are more perceptually salient to us than objects on a tilted axis because we have a long-standing interest in noticing objects (e.g., big hairy beasties) looming above us. Our basic interests greatly predate our capacity to decide anything; centuries of evolution have “hard-wired” certain traits and capacities into us, thereby fixing the parameters of our quality space. (Of
course, similar interests may lead to vastly different traits and quality spaces --
contingency plays a large and frequently underappreciated role in evolution.)
It might be objected that it is unwise to call these biologically-based interests
"values," the latter term seems to imply deliberative endorsement. But I
mean "values" in a broad sense, as "regarding that which is better or worse
relative to our well-being," these values exist apart from any conscious
recognition or endorsement. In this sense, our descriptions of our
environment are not value-neutral. Even the most seemingly value-
indifferent descriptions, such as those of astronomy, are traceable to (or side-
effects of) discriminations the capacity for which was of use in survival; this
follows, I believe, from evolutionary theory.23

Humans are remarkable, not only because our social spaces -- shaped by
interests and values about which we can make decisions -- are so large and
important in our lives, but because we are capable of suppressing or
redirecting hard-wired interests (e.g., avoidance of pain) through force of will
or unhappy socialization. We are not so remarkable, however, that we can
will ourselves to smell with the olfactory range of a dog or navigate by sonics
like a bat -- though humans are also remarkable in their ability to expand
their quality spaces with scientific instruments.

The preceding is an elaborate way of restating the basic philosophical
point, now widely accepted, that descriptions of reality are necessarily
perspectival, situated in a biological, cultural, and historical context. And,
since our perspectives are conditioned by our interests, purposes, and values -
- biological, social, and intellectual -- any description will be, in a loose sense,
"value-laden" (or "theory-laden," which amounts largely to the same thing).
Science's goal is to reduce this valuative element as much as possible.
Thomas Kuhn became famous by pointing out that it is ineliminable, dashing
the utopian hopes of (some) positivist philosophers of science. Of course, the debate still rages over whether or how closely humans can reach “objective” (construed as value-neutral) truth in science. I plan to avoid this debate because 1) I do not believe that the theory-ladenness of our descriptions is particularly alarming or exciting, and 2) I think it is clear that, whatever the status of the “hard” sciences, the social sciences, as well as everyday “folk” descriptions, are clearly value-laden, and they are what is of most (not exclusive) relevance to ethics, which is my focus here.

So, it seems clear that fact and value are implicated in one another, to varying degrees, more so when it comes to ethics. Held holds that there are differences between clear cases of fact and clear cases of value. It is more appropriate to say that descriptions of fact range from those arising from universally shared values to those that rest on more controversial values. Take Held’s example: “To know the caloric intake per day that a child needs to survive is different from deciding that we morally ought to provide these calories” (WA 71). It would be difficult indeed to find a human being who was not motivated to distinguish “enough food to survive” from “less than enough.” Nevertheless, we pick this fact out because we value (i.e., have an interest in) survival -- again, we do not “create” the fact in a metaphysical sense, nor do we “decide” to notice it, so it serves functionally as a “bare fact,” but this should not lead us to the conclusion that it is value-neutral. Furthermore, the fact that we are built to value survival is obviously relevant to (not, pace Held’s caricature of EN, determinant of) whether we help another survive. I do not mean to imply that the two – knowing minimum caloric intake and deciding to provide it -- are not different. It is true that they are different; the important question is how so. What I am claiming is that the difference does not map onto a strict disjunction between fact and value.
It would be better to describe it as a difference between, in Flanagan's terms, natural and social psychological values implicit therein.

So what? Will the natural/social interest-reflection distinction not do the same work as Held's fact/value distinction? Held's concern is that values not be reduced to facts. If we rephrase the concern as desiring to avoid the reduction of more controversial social interests to natural interests, is the concern not functionally the same? The answer is yes and no. We should keep in mind that social interests are problematic, debatable, subject to conversational and theoretic alteration, while natural interests are, for practical purposes, fixed. EN should avoid the temptation to cast social interests as fixed in the same way as natural interests, as some radical moral realists attempt to do. But at the same time, rephrasing the distinction as one between natural and social interests emphasizes the fact that what is at issue is not a dichotomy -- even one with an indistinct, shifting line separating the two -- but a continuum.

On this continuum, social interests may lie at varying distances from fixed natural interests. For instance, consider the communitarian concern that human beings require a (relatively) homogenous social fabric with shared traditions to flourish because persons are in part constituted by the projects and values represented in that fabric. An overly heteronomous or fragmented fabric, the communitarians contend, will lead to disjointed, unanchored, mildly schizophrenic persons. This is a socio-political concern, but it is tied to "facts," that is, the developmental requirements of a healthy person arising from natural psychological interests. An example of a more shallow social concern ("shallow" not in the sense of unimportant, but simply closer to the social end of the natural/social continuum) is whether or not handguns should be available to the public. It would be pointless to argue
that banning (or making available) handguns would violate natural psychological interests. The debate will make reference to practical, psychological, or social consequences, not to deep psychological traits or interests. How much relevance our natural interests have to any particular normative concern is an empirical matter; it would be misguided, and indeed morally irresponsible, to minimize factual, empirical accounts of human life in moral theory on the basis of an a priori distinction between facts and values.

2. Facts in Values

Held points out that "moral assumptions are necessarily being smuggled into the social sciences unacknowledged much of the time" (69), but she fails to note that the smuggling trade thrives in her own discipline as well. Empirical contraband finds its way into philosophy as well. Moral theory is a perspicuous example. Flanagan points out that virtually all noted moral theories of the past have included testable empirical assumptions, beginning with Socrates' "he who knows the good does it" and proceeding all the way to the communitarians' notion that persons are constituted in part by the goals and values of their communities (EN 21). In other words, a credible moral theory has a d/g/n as well as a normative component. It is difficult to imagine a moral theory that involves no such assumptions, just as it is difficult to imagine an empirical theory that involves no theoretical/valuative assumptions. Or rather, it is possible to imagine a moral theory with minimal empirical assumptions, but such a moral theory will inevitably verge on vacuity. In fact, I will argue in the following chapter that a moral theory is useful just in so far as its d/g/n component
reflects current and complete empirical understandings. To the extent that a moral theory is independent of empirical facts, it is correspondingly vacuous and unhelpful in the moral trenches.

III. Conclusion

I have argued that EN of the variety described by Flanagan escapes the criticisms traditionally leveled against it, criticisms generally based on the is-ought distinction. I have said that the logical objection -- that is-statements and ought-statements are different in logical kind and thus improperly conjoined in argument -- is bankrupt, based on an outmoded positivist conception of language as having a formal structure that primarily reflects or represents reality, though I have not argued overmuch in support of this contention. I have argued more extensively against the pragmatic objection that muddying the distinction between is and ought is a bad idea. In doing so, I have focused on Held’s essay “Whose Agenda?” While it may seem that I have been picking on Held, and perhaps there is some truth to this, I have done so because I believe that her objections are reflective of widely shared concerns about EN.

Dewey said that “moral science is not something with a separate province. It is physical, biological, and historic knowledge placed in a human context where it will illuminate and guide the activities of men” (qtd. in EN 35).27 Read charitably, this is a fine statement of metaethical naturalism. It would no doubt infuriate Held, first for its reference to a “science” of morality, second because it seems on a surface reading to “reduce” moral knowledge to empirical knowledge. Indeed, she says that
Dewey's ethics remain fundamentally unsatisfactory... because he thought moral theory was the sort of theory to which sciences like cognitive science could provide answers. He wrote as if moral problems simply present themselves and as if the tasks of morality are to find empirical solutions to such problems. Moral problems, however, do not simply present themselves. We decide to make certain empirical situations into moral problems, to interpret them as moral problems. (WA 84-85)

Two things are worth mentioning here. First, Held writes as if empirical situations are static and value free, and thus that the "decision" to problematize an area comes de novo from a flash or moral insight or revelation. The example she gives is the confinement of women to household roles. Forty years ago, she says, very few people saw this empirical situation as a moral problem. Then "a few persons, later joined by others, made the normative as distinct from empirical judgment that it was unjust," and things changed (85).

But this, it seems to me, is precisely the kind of simplistic, blinkered picture that results from ignoring the way that empirical realities are intertwined with moral space and create openings within it. To paint an adequate picture of the women's movement, one would have to make reference to the vast number of women who entered the workplace in WWII, to the prosperity that followed the war and the improved educational and material circumstances it brought a generation of women, to the tension and successes of the civil rights movement, to the pop culture movements that emerged in response to the Vietnam War and other global upheavals, and to an indefinite number of other complex empirical circumstances.
These “empirical situations” — economic, political, technological, and otherwise — were fluid and rapidly changing, not static. In any society, particularly one that has moved at our speed for the past century, there are tensions as new practices and mores begin to chafe the old. This friction creates new problems, challenges, and opportunities, moral and otherwise. In the context of an extraordinarily complex and friction-filled era, (some) women became aware of a growing tension between their economic and political freedom and their confinement to the household. In other words, women’s confinement began to present itself to some women as a problem, and they found and helped expand a social space for protest. Let me emphasize that I do not mean to downplay the courage and moral integrity of the heroines of the women’s movement. It is simply the case that moral practice is intimately integrated with “empirical situations.” One does not have to be a Marxist materialist or a determinist to acknowledge that moral judgment does not appear de novo; it arises in dialectic with material circumstances, as often ad hoc or post hoc as initiatory. This suggests that the morally aware and concerned would do well to make themselves intimately familiar with empirical circumstances.

The second thing worth mentioning is that, in the passage from Dewey quoted above, everything turns on what is meant by placing physical, biological, and historic knowledge (to which Flanagan adds knowledge from the social sciences, from art and literature, and from everyday conversation) “in a human context.” Held interprets this as meaning that knowledge from these other areas will “provide answers” to moral questions, which are empirical in nature, and she takes this to be a reduction of the normative to the empirical. But the “human context” is one of open-ended possibility; in recommending our future course, we are always faced with a range of
possibilities that accord with what we know empirically. We need empirically-tested norms, to be sure, but the empirical will always underdetermine the normative. This is why Dewey says empirical knowledge "illuminates" conduct -- illumination and determination are crucially different. That this is so clearly true makes Held's worry over the alleged disappearance of the normative seem peculiar, particularly as a motivation to isolate moral theory from the disciplines with which it desperately needs to engage in dialogue. It may be that the arrangement of disciplines in the academy needs reordering, but this worry is more structural than moral theoretical (perhaps Held needs to have a talk with her dean).

My arguments in this chapter have been primarily negative. I have attempted to defend EN against common objections, and in doing so I have focused almost exclusively on what EN is not. First, I argued that the sciences of which EN makes use are not the cold-hearted, positivistic, anti-social, anti-subjective beasts that Held paints them as. Second, I argued that EN's relationship to these sciences is not one of uncritical servitude; it draws on them (along with other sources) in formulating its d/g/n component, but it retains a space for distinctively normative reflection on the conviction that empirical descriptions underdetermine valuative conclusions. Third, I argued that, in response to a dimly-perceived threat to the very existence of the normative, Held distinguishes moral philosophy too sharply from other types of inquiry; in fact, she has given us no good reason not to draw on sciences to the degree that seems appropriate. What degree that is will be determined by more fine-grained considerations -- the question should not be decided on the basis of an a priori distinction between the "distinctively human" and the natural or between the subjective and the objective. Finally, I argued that Held presents too large a chasm between description and
recommendation, between facts and values. Facts and values are in fact implicated in one another to varying degrees, both in empirical descriptions and in moral recommendations. Moral philosophers should be aware of this but not disturbed by it. The dialectic between facts and values is characteristic of human experience, and the relationship is intimate and potentially mutually fruitful.

In the following chapter, I will present a more positive picture of what EN is. I will attempt to make it an attractive and viable option, arguing that naturalism in ethics is both more realistic and more pragmatic. Compared to classical moral theory, EN more closely reflects our situation in the world and is productive of more helpful and fine-grained strategies for recommendation.
Chapter Two
Ethical Naturalism in Action

In the preceding chapter I defended EN against common objections: that it (allegedly following the physical sciences) disregards subjective experience and that it reduces the normative to the empirical. Everything rides on what is meant in this latter phrase by the terms "reduce" and "empirical." Held takes "empirical" to mean that which is studied by science, in which phenomena are accessible to any observer, effects are replicable, and conclusions are quantifiable. On this interpretation of "empirical," the charge against EN is simply false. Flanagan explicitly points out that EN draws on "everything we know," from science to art to ordinary conversation. Anything relevant to the problems an agent or community faces in attempting to live well is taken into account in moral reasoning. If "empirical" is interpreted more broadly, in James' "radical" sense, to mean something like "of experience," then the empirical is indeed the sole source and focus of the ethical naturalist's claims. It is only in situated experience that problems and problem-solving skills emerge; this fact deflates the special status that modern moral philosophers gave to transcendental forces, structures, and principles. EN holds that reasoning, moral and otherwise, emerges in and is conditioned by biological and social history; it is context-bound, not transcendental. Morality is not based on ahistorical features of human nature or of reality, features that we access and obey in opposition to our natural, evolved animal instincts -- we are entirely animals, and whatever skills we use in gaining and applying moral knowledge are skills
available to animals like us. If "empirical" is interpreted broadly as "of experience," then EN does not object to the charge that it "reduces" morality to the empirical -- though reduction is a misleading way to describe it, since little is lost but transcendental moorings.

In this chapter, I will not give an exhaustive account of EN, first because such a task requires more space than I have and second because EN can not easily be summarized as a set of principles. It is illuminated in action, in application. Thus, in this chapter I will review a case, an application of EN, in the hopes that it will show more than a summary could. I will focus on Paul Churchland's "moral network theory" (MNT -- the name comes from Flanagan), which is an excellent example of the kind of account of morality favored by the naturalist. The chapter will proceed as follows: first, I will briefly recount the role of rules in modern moral philosophy and their subsequent slide into ill repute; second, I will review some recent cognitive science -- and Churchland's application of it to ethics -- that casts serious doubt on both the epistemological and regulatory role of rules in moral action; and third, I will defend EN against some general philosophical objections and MNT against some more specific objections. The first section is meant simply to point out the bankruptcy of modern moral philosophy. The second is meant to serve as an example of the interplay between moral theory and cognitive science, and in a more ancillary way, the interplay between moral theory and other areas of inquiry generally. The third is meant to circumvent criticisms that MNT elicits in order to pave the way for the following chapter, in which I will explore what I take to be some of the consequences of MNT and EN generally.
I. Rules in Modern Moral Philosophy

In her seminal 1958 paper, "Modern Moral Philosophy," G.E.M. Anscombe advances the thesis that philosophers should cease doing moral philosophy until it can be done profitably. She says that the differences among (English speaking) moral philosophers from Sidgwick on are insignificant and that the entire prevailing framework of moral philosophy should be jettisoned. Whence come these provocative theses?

Anscombe points out that modern moral philosophy is centered around the concepts of moral duty and moral obligation, which are closely tied to rules; rules imply duties and create obligations. Duty and obligation acquired a distinctively moral sense in the following way: "The ordinary (and quite indispensable) terms 'should,' 'needs,' 'ought,' 'must' acquired this special sense by being equated in the relevant contexts with 'is obliged,' or 'is bound,' or 'is required to,' in the sense in which one can be obliged or bound by law, or something can be required by law" (MMP 5). Anscombe traces the use of duty and obligation (in the "special" moral sense) in moral philosophy to Christianity and its notion of divine law, borrowed from the Torah. "In consequence of the dominance of Christianity for many centuries, the concepts of being bound, permitted, or excused became deeply embedded in our language and thought" (ibid). Belief in divine law has waned, Anscombe says, but the notions of moral duty and obligation live on.
In civil law, the state is the law-giver. But who or what is the
law-giver in the moral domain? Anscombe spends her article
canvassing alternatives. The Christian god fell into disrepute during
the Enlightenment and remains there, so modern moral philosophers
have attempted in various ways to find a source for the moral law, the
moral ought, outside of the divine. Anscombe discounts the major
alternatives, from Butler’s conscience to Kant’s self-legislation (an
internal vote that always has a 1-0 result) to Mill’s pleasure principle.
She concludes that the notion of moral obligation has simply outlived
the legalistic framework that made it coherent, as though “the notion
‘criminal’ were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had
been abolished and forgotten” (6). “Ought” has become “a word
retaining the suggestion of force, and apt to have a strong psychological
effect, but which no longer signifies a real concept at all” (8). Hume
disturbed many moral philosophers by showing that moral obligations
could not be derived from facts, but as Anscombe points out, “this
word ‘ought,’ having become a word of mere mesmeric force, could
not, in the character of having that force, be inferred from anything
whatever” (8). It is “because ‘morally wrong’ is the heir of [the concept
of divine law], but an heir that is cut off from the family of concepts
from which it sprang, that ‘morally wrong’ both goes beyond the mere
factual description[s] and seems to have no discernible content except a
certain compelling force, which I should call purely psychological” (18,
italics in original).

Several moral philosophers since have noted the same feature
of modern moral theory. In a discussion of categorical imperatives, or
“binding” moral commands, Philippa Foot explores how such
imperatives come to acquire the “special dignity and necessity” that Kant ascribed them.\textsuperscript{29} Philosophers continue to speak of “unconditional requirements;” “they tell us what we have to do whatever our interests or desires, and by their inescapableness they are distinguished from hypothetical imperatives” (HI 308). Like Anscombe, Foot concludes that none of the standard ways of explaining the inescapableness of moral rules is convincing, and like Anscombe, she concludes that the force of moral commands has become primarily psychological (311-312). As agents come to perceive the emptiness of the claim that moral rules are “categorical,” as many in contemporary moral philosophy are, they may also come to disrespect moral theory entirely. Thus, she says, we should abandon the persistent fantasy that moral judgments have some intrinsic, inescapable claim on our attention.

The conclusion we should draw is that moral judgments have no better claim to be categorical imperatives than do statements about matters of etiquette. People may indeed follow either morality or etiquette without asking why they should do so, but equally well they may not. They may ask for reasons and may reasonably refuse to follow either if reasons are not to be found. (312)

Richard Taylor follows Anscombe in tracing the modern moral notions of duty and obligation to religious divine law.\textsuperscript{30} “In the absence of legal prohibitions one can commit homicide, but not murder; one can enter upon, but not trespass; can occupy, but not own; can take, but not steal. All such pairs of actions differ, it is obvious, \textit{only} with respect to the existence or non-existence of laws prohibiting
them” (AWMF 61, italics in original). However, modern moral
theorists continue to refer to moral rules without citing the authority
from which these rules issue. This, Taylor asserts, happens because “it
is fair to say we do not know where they are supposed to come from or
how they are to be known” (62, italics in original). In the absence of
some authority, “it is difficult to see how the moral laws or principles
upon which such distinctions must rest can be presumed to exist at all”
(63). Taylor again follows Anscombe in concluding that modern moral
philosophy is bankrupt.

Philosophers can, to be sure, make up moral principles, to their
hearts’ content, and have in fact done so with great abandon.
The result is that we have a wide selection from which to
choose, ranging from the categorical imperative of Kant to the
greatest happiness principle of Mill. Or we can do what these
authors have done and fabricate some new rule of our own, one
that will enable us to praise as ‘morally right’ those actions we
happen to approve of and to condemn as ‘wrong’ those we
happen to dislike. But to note this is, I believe, equivalent to
saying once more that, there is no such thing as philosophical
ethics, if that discipline is supposed to be concerned with the
ideas of moral right and wrong and moral obligation. (Ibid,
italics in original)

What, then, is to be done (assuming we still want to do moral
philosophy)? Anscombe hints at two different avenues for moral
philosophy to take. The first is that we use the word “ought” “in a
non-emphatic fashion, and not in a special ‘moral sense’” (MMP 15);
the second is that we look to human virtues and vices for moral
guidance rather than rules distinguishing "right" action from "wrong" (14-15).

Taylor adopts the second suggestion and advocates a return to the moral philosophy of the ancients; in this, he echoes a host of contemporary virtue theorists. Virtue theorists reject rule-based moralities, for (broadly speaking) two reasons. The first is described above: rules make no sense without rule-givers, and there is no plausible candidate for the role of moral rule-giver. The second reason is that the moral domain includes both the public and the private; that is, it includes considerations of how to balance competing interests, divide resources, and adjudicate conflicts, as well as considerations of how to understand oneself, how to relate well to one's friends and family, and how to be, in a broad sense, happy. In short, the moral domain embraces the whole human life. Even aside from the difficulties with rules discussed above, rules plausibly apply only to the interpersonal sphere. No one has offered or defended universal rules with regard to how to understand oneself, how to integrate one's self-image with descriptions of oneself offered by others, or how to make and keep good friends. Modern moral theorists focused exclusively on rules only by excluding the private; thus, according to virtue theory, rule-based moralities are radically insufficient.

EN follows virtue theory in conceiving of the moral domain as inclusive of human life generally. It also follows virtue theory in focusing primarily on character, on the physiological, psychological, and social prerequisites of a morally praiseworthy person. As Aristotle pointed out, a person with a virtuous character has the practical wisdom to perceive the proper course of action in a broad variety of
situations. And finally, EN echoes virtue theory's suspicion of rule-based morality, particularly the variety that offers universal rules. Abstract rules inevitably fall short of the flexibility, usefulness, and situation-sensitivity of practical wisdom. These features of EN will become clear in the following two sections.\(^3\)

What of Anscombe's first, less-fully-articulated suggestion, that we use the word "ought" "in a non-emphatic fashion, and not in a special 'moral sense'" (MMP 15)? Philippa Foot explores this option in her article "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." As the title indicates, she suggests that we abandon the notion of a "categorical imperative," conceived as a moral rule that is exceptionless, inescapable, and intrinsically reason-giving. Instead, she says, we should conceive of moral rules as hypothetical imperatives, practical principles for action that are tied, like all practical principles, to the achievement of goals or fulfillment of interests. Kant found this alternative unthinkable because, as he put it in *Critique of Practical Reason*, "all material practical principles are, as such, of one and the same kind and belong under the general principle of self love or one's own happiness" (qtd. in HI 313). Kant believed that all non-moral principles are self-serving and hedonistic. This belief has persisted under the surface of almost all moral philosophy since.

However, this psychological profile of humanity is false -- it is believed not only by contemporary psychology, but by simple observation of art, literature, and day-to-day life. It is evident that people have interests and goals that extend beyond narrow self-interest: the welfare of family, friends, and communities, human and biotic. It is simply implausible that the psychological force of moral commands (recall
Anscombe and Foot’s point that psychological force is the only way of explaining the perceived inescapableness of such commands) has alone led to actions on behalf of communities beyond the self. Human beings have what Hume called “fellow-feeling,” what Wilfrid Sellars calls “we-intentions,” intentions that necessarily involve social coordination. On Foot’s conception of morality, moral rules will reflect “what we do” and will presume that the subject shares “our” group intentions, values, and goals. Moral progress will involve expanding our moral community, extending our fellow-feeling to those that have been heretofore excluded. This notion causes anxiety among those attracted to transcendental foundations for morality. They fear that we cannot depend on others sharing our benevolent intentions; they want the concept of “duty” to do the work that we-intentions cannot do. Foot replies: “Perhaps we should be less troubled than we are by fear of defection from the moral cause; perhaps we should even have less reason to fear it if people thought of themselves as volunteers banded together to fight for liberty and justice and against inhumanity and oppression” (HII 315-16). This suggests, like Anscombe’s second suggestion, that we pay close attention to and cultivate the virtues, for it is a virtuous person that cares about and for her community.

In the fourth section, I will argue that moral rules and principles, construed as hypothetical imperatives, do and should play an important role in our collective moral life. I argue this in contrast to some strains of virtue theory and, indeed, in contrast to some strains of EN. The place of rules and principles in moral life should be reconceived, but not trivialized. Before that, however, I will review
some work in cognitive science that lends support to Anscombe's condemnation of rule-centered morality.

II. Prototypes: Reasoning as Pattern Recognition

There has been a small explosion in recent years of work at the intersection of cognitive science and ethics.\textsuperscript{35} Like any fledgling area of philosophy, this work is characterized by alternating moments of hesitancy and bravado, pervaded by high hopes. Cognitive scientific discoveries about the role of empathy, simulation, and imagination in cognition and learning have been applied to moral theory, with mixed results. I will not attempt a review of all the literature, which is diverse; rather, I will focus on the recent speculations of Paul Churchland, specifically with regard to morality. Since thoroughly summarizing the details of connectionist cognitive science would take up a prohibitive amount of space, at some points I will refer the reader to outside literature. My intent here is suggestive rather than demonstrative. I want to show how EN makes use of knowledge from other inquiries; the plausibility of EN should not be seen to rest on the plausibility of Churchland's conjectures.

\textit{Connectionist Networks}

Churchland's moral speculation is based, like much work in current cognitive science, on connectionism.\textsuperscript{36} Andy Clark offers this brief summary of connectionist, or parallel distributed processing (PDP), networks:
[Connectionist] networks consist of a complex of units (simple processing elements) and connections. The connections may be positive or negative valued (excitatory or inhibitory). The features of a stimulus are coded as numerical values (corresponding to the intensity of the feature or the degree to which it is present) across a designated group of units. These values are then differentially propagated through the network courtesy of the positive or negative connection weights. A good assignment of weights is one that ensures that activity in designated output units corresponds to some target input-output function. Several layers of units may intervene between input and output. The activity of the units in each such layer will generally correspond to some kind of recoding of the input data that simplifies further processing. It is often fruitful to take each unit of such an intervening ("hidden") layer as one dimension of an acquired representational state space and to investigate the way the system responds to specific inputs by creating patterns of activity that define locations in this space (hidden unit activation space).37

Connectionist networks of this type have been built, with positive results that outstripped expectations.38 Learning rules have been developed that allow them to alter their own connection weights, and thus, in a sense, to learn from experience. They differ from the "classical" model of cognitive architecture in several ways. For one thing, representations are dispersed throughout the network, not written out in a programming language. Processing is not serial, with one operation being performed at a time -- the von-Neumann model,
on which all personal computers are based at present -- but parallel, with dispersed connections being altered in tandem. And the networks learn by practice, by comparing outputs with target outputs, rather than having explicit rules programmed into them by their creators. Based both on philosophical considerations and experimental results, there is good reason to believe that the human brain works on the model of massively parallel distributed processing.39

The learning process engaged in by such a network results in "high-dimensional state spaces with associated semantic metrics" (CPS 112). The state space is high-dimensional in that the connections and levels of connections possible in a network increases exponentially with the number of simple processing units. (The number of possible connections between neurons is estimated to exceed the number of atoms in the known universe.) The term "semantic metric" is meant to emphasize the geometric nature of representation; roughly, it refers to a multi-dimensional pattern of connections that is completed or extended by new inputs. A path across state space is a "vector."

With this picture in mind, we now turn to reasoning. Clark notes four features of the learning process that results in such high-dimensional state spaces.

1. It is exemplar-driven.
2. It is not bound by the similarity metric on the input vector.
3. It yields prototype-style representations.
4. It treats inference and reasoning as vectorial transformations across state spaces. (CPS 112)

First, connectionist networks are exemplar-driven. A network designed for the recognition of facial expressions, for instance, does not
operate according to rules regarding recognition -- e.g., "partially-closed eyes indicate sleepiness." Rather, it learns through repeated exposure to faces. It begins -- first randomly, unless it is built with initially biased connection weights\textsuperscript{40} -- to encode features of faces as patterns, or state spaces, and offer output. It then proceeds by comparing its actual output to the targeted output and altering its synaptic connections to move the two closer. This is not speculation; EMPATH is a facial recognition connectionist network developed by Garrison Cottrell and Janet Metcalfe. Churchland summarizes the results:

On a training set of (8 emotions $\times$ 20 faces $=$) 160 photos in all, and after 1000 presentation of the entire training set, the network reached high levels of accuracy on the four positive emotions (about 80%), but very poor levels on the negative emotions, with the sole exception of anger, which was correctly identified 85% of the time. (ERSS 125)

Though EMPATH is a poor performer relative to an average human, it is worth pointing out that its strengths (the positive emotions and anger) and weaknesses (the negative emotions other than anger) map isomorphically onto those of the average human.\textsuperscript{41} Here, the point is that EMPATH was not provided with any rules to follow in executing its task; it learned purely through exposure to exemplars and feedback about its performance.

Second, the network is "not bound by the similarity metric on the input vector." This means that the network can learn to store similar inputs (think of the attractive person across the room smiling at you versus smiling at the person behind you) into drastically different categories, or dissimilar inputs (think of a customer bursting...
in with a shotgun versus slipping you a written robbery demand) into the same category. "The state space defined by the hidden units might thus come to reflect a moral metric, whereas the input space depicted a visual one" (CPS 113).

Third, the network "yields prototype-style representations." Prototypes are discussed in the following section in some detail, as they are central to Churchland's account.

Fourth, in a PDP network, inference and reasoning are conceived of as "vectorial transformations across state spaces." One associates a pattern with another pattern by connecting the two in representational space. That is to say, reason and inference are "processes of pattern completion and pattern extension" (114). Intelligent, situated reasoning involves skillfully moving from one state space to another and linking appropriate spaces together into higher-level associative patterns (think of learning to associate a certain type of crispness in the air with coming rain). Reasoning is decisively not, on this model, a process of applying rules to situations that fall under their scope. Instead, it is a process of beating down a neural path through the underbrush (as it were) between one pattern of features and another, and thereby developing the practical skills to recognize patterns and respond appropriately.

Prototypes

What of prototypes? Prototypes are best understood in contrast to concepts on the "classical view," as it is known in cognitive science. The classical model of concepts holds that words/concepts are
characterized by definitions "that specify individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the application of the word" (ECS 338). On this model, an instance either is or is not subsumable under a particular concept, depending on whether it has the necessary and sufficient features. But the prototype model suggests that the edges are fuzzy. Over a period of exposure, the network "extracts the so-called central tendency of the body of exemplars, that is, a complex of common, co-occurring features" (CPS 113). Such a complex constitutes a prototype.

Prototypes are constructed according to the frequency, or "typicality," of certain central features. A particular exemplar, then, can fall closer or farther away in state space from the prototype, depending on the number of features the exemplar shares with the "central tendency." That concepts have this structure is supported by experimental results in cognitive science. So-called "typicality ratings" "predict performance in a wide variety of tasks. If subjects are asked to decide as quickly as possible whether an item is an instance of a concept (e.g., 'Is a fig a fruit?'), they are faster the more typical the instance. Another task is memory retrieval. If asked to generate from memory all instances of a concept, subjects retrieve typical before atypical instances" (ECS 339). As Goldman points out:

These typicality effects seem inhospitable to the classical view. They suggest that not all instances of a natural kind concept are equal; yet equality is what one might expect if every instance met the same definition of the necessary-and-sufficient-conditions type. This argument is strengthened by the additional finding that virtually all the properties listed by subjects as relevant to a
concept are not strictly necessary, for example, the property of being sweet for fruit or the properties of flying and singing for bird. (Penguins don’t fly and vultures don’t sing.) Similar findings apply to other concepts, including artifact concepts such as “furniture” or “clothing.”

A single network can simultaneously encode for several such complexes of features; these complexes, or prototypes, are “each coded for by distinct patterns of unit activation and hence determine different locations in a general state space whose dimensionality corresponds to the number of processing units” (CPS 113).

A prototype should not be confused with an exemplar in the normative sense -- that is, an excellent particular specimen. Nor should it be confused with “the ideal specimen.” It is a bundle of features, some of which, in some cases, may be impossible to realize simultaneously in the same instance. It groups features by their frequency (and thus their repeated role in weight-adjustment); thus, two features that are equally frequent but never co-existent may lie equally close to the center of the prototypical state space. Again, it should be emphasized that a prototype is different in significant ways from a concept in the classical sense, the most important for the present purpose being that an exemplar is not recognized by applying a rule regarding certain necessary and sufficient conditions. It is recognized by its proximity to a prototype, a pattern of most-frequent features; “this, after all, is the point of having concepts: to allow us to deal appropriately with the always novel but never-entirely-novel situations flowing endlessly toward us from an open-ended future” (ERSS 145).
**Moral Network Theory**

It is easy to see the application of connectionist-style learning to cases such as a submarine radar learning to identify and avoid mines, and perhaps even for a human being learning to identify and avoid poisonous plants. But what of morality? What of a human being learning to identify and avoid, say, emotional manipulation? Or disrespect, or injustice? Churchland's somewhat startling theses are first, that

...an examination of how neural networks sustain scientific understanding reveals that the role of learned prototypes and their continual redeployment in new domains of phenomena is central to the scientific process. Specific rules or “laws of nature” play an undeniably important but nonetheless secondary role, mostly in the social business of communicating or teaching scientific skills. One's scientific understanding is lodged primarily in one's acquired hierarchy of structural and dynamical prototypes, not primarily in a set of linguistic formulas.\(^{43}\)

The second thesis is that grammatical knowledge may also be embodied in a hierarchy of prototypes, rather than a list of grammatical rules (NRSW 100).\(^{44}\) (After all, children learn language with or without instruction in its formal rules.) The third thesis is that moral perception and moral behavior also operate on the prototype model.

What follows from these three theses is a unified picture of human perception and behavior; whether in the scientific,
grammatical, or moral domain, the neural networks deployed by
human beings extract patterns from their environment and encode
them in high-dimensional representational space. Both effective
perception and effective action involve initiating the proper prototype
vector.

Before I fill out Churchland's MNT in more detail, it is worth
noting two broad philosophical characteristics. First, it is thoroughly
pragmatic: "the quality of one's knowledge is measured not by any
uniform correspondence between internal sentences and external facts,
but by the quality of one's continuing performance;" what the child
learns through moral experience is "the structure of social space and
how best to navigate one's way through it. What the child is learning
is practical wisdom: the wise administration of her practical affairs in a
complex social environment." Proper moral action is tied directly to
practical affairs, in contrast to modern moral philosophy's sharp divide
between prudential considerations -- which were taken to reflect self-
interest only -- and moral concerns. On this model, moral skills are
among, and the same in kind as, other skills necessary for "wise
administration of practical affairs." Secondly, MNT is thoroughly
naturalist. Moral reasoning is conceived as a natural skill that makes
use of evolved biological and social capacities.

How might the prototype model of perception and action be
applied to morality? Children acquiring moral skills learn, on the
model of MNT, not from being taught rules of conduct, but from being
exposed to a variety of social situations.

Children come to see certain distributions of goodies as a fair or
unfair distribution. They learn to recognize that a found object
may be someone’s property, and that access is limited as a result. They learn to discriminate unprovoked cruelty, and to demand or expect punishment for the transgressor and comfort for the victim. They learn to recognize a breach of promise, and to howl in protest. They learn to recognize these and a hundred other prototypical social/moral situations, and the ways in which the embedding society generally reacts to those situations and expects them to react. (NP 299, italics in original)

In other words, children come to recognize features of social space in the same way they come to recognize features of physical space, and learn to navigate social space accordingly.

What does this reveal about linguaform rules and principles? It reveals that...

...our individual moral knowledge and reasoning may not be fully reconstructible in the linguistic space afforded by public language, moral dialogue, and discussion.... Given the size of the brain’s resources, the expressive capacity of biologically realistic inner systems looks unimaginably huge. The attempt to condense the moral expertise encoded by such a system into a set of rules and principles that can be economically expressed by a few sentences of public language may thus be wildly optimistic, akin to trying to reduce a dog’s olfactory skills to a small body of prose. (CPS 114)

As Churchland points out, the preceding point is not only true of our moral knowledge. Consider facial recognition: human beings are experts at reading one another’s faces, but who among us can summarize in a body of guidelines the complex feature-recognition
skills at work? Churchland contends that this "cognitive priority of the preverbal over the verbal shows itself, upon examination, to be a feature of almost all of our cognitive categories" (ERSS 144).

The point has significant implications for morality. The human neural network is one of almost unfathomable complexity and dimensionality. The space afforded for nuanced knowledge about various features of our environment is virtually unlimited. But the resources of moral theory -- linguistic summary of moral knowledge -- are limited in a host of ways. It is a commonplace of day-to-day life, though one that modern moral philosophy has led us to view with displeasure, that moral reasoning "may issue in judgments that are by no means irrational but yet resist quasi-deductive linguistic reconstruction as the conclusion of some moral argument that takes summary expressions of moral rules and principles as its premises" (CPS 114-15). When morality is reconceived as a skill, a matter of know-how rather than a domain of facts reflected in a body of fundamental premises, the point that language may fail to capture moral knowledge is unsurprising. The best carpenters, the best cooks, the best dancers, the best basketball players, the best writers, the best scientists -- none can fully capture what it is that constitutes their respective excellences in a set of propositions or rules. As a skill, morality is acquired and honed through practice and exposure to feedback regarding one's performance.

The inability of linguistic formulas to reflect the complexity and richness of our moral know-how has been remarked on by several recent cognitive scientists and philosophers. A common observation is that this feature of morality naturally emphasizes upbringing and
training, in accord with virtue theory. Another important implication is that improper moral behavior frequently, perhaps most of the time, does not arise from a lack of knowledge of what is right and wrong, or an unwillingness to do what is right -- that is, from ignorance or akrasia with regard to a rule of conduct. Rather, immoral behavior issues from misperception, from the inability of a moral network to activate the proper prototype in response to features in the environment. An agent acts in a morally improper way because she cannot see what kind of situation she is involved in.47

Moral disagreement frequently centers on competing ways of characterizing a situation rather than conflicting moral rules. The abortion debate is an obvious example (cited by Churchland), but there is no shortage of others. Think of the current debate in the U.S. over handguns: are federal restrictions on the sale and ownership of handguns an imposition on the Constitutional rights of citizens, or are they legitimate means of protecting the populace from a growing health threat? Or consider a political argument with a spouse: is one party simply trying to demonstrate intellectual superiority, or is he or she standing up for a principle? Giving money to a homeless beggar: is it a case of compassion or of encouraging sloth and dependency? Allowing homosexuals in the military: an expression of freedom and tolerance or a blow to military morale and effectiveness? It is evident that parties who agree on the same basic set of moral principles can disagree in many concrete situations as a result of conceiving a particular situation (or set of situations) differently, as different types of situation.
Our intuitions, which reflect what Mark Johnson calls “Moral Folk Law Theory,” tend to resist this way of framing disagreements. We are inclined to insist that, say, an abortion is either the ending of an innocent life or an exercise of a woman’s right to control her body. Or that homosexuality is either a legitimate sexual orientation or a perversion hostile to the values of the nuclear family. Our intuitions reflect the fact that moral theory for centuries has been modeled on propositional knowledge rather than practical knowledge (i.e., know-how). On the modern moral theoretical model, moral knowledge reflects a domain of moral facts. The law of noncontradiction says that $A$ and $not-A$ cannot both be true; moral knowledge, if propositional, obeys the law of noncontradiction. But if we conceive of moral knowledge as know-how, as a practical skill, a different analogy suggests itself.

Consider the game of tennis. If I receive a hard shot down the line on my forehand side, should I view it as an attack to be fought off by placing a long shot against the opponent’s baseline or an opportunity to trick my opponent by changing up and laying a backspin dropshot just over the net? A host of factors extrinsic to the velocity and position of the ball are relevant: Is my forehand stronger than my back hand? Is my opponent the type to expect a defensive game from me? Am I winning and thus free to take risks, or is the score tied, in which case I should play conservatively? Do the psychological benefits of doing the unexpected and unsettling my opponent outweigh the risks of attempting a dropshot? Kant might say that there is a right and a wrong way to approach the shot -- if we fix the relevant circumstances, we will see that the shot falls under some rule (e.g.:
"when behind in a set-determining game and presented with a backhand attack, respond defensively"). But prototype-theory suggests that the circumstances are of such complexity and situation-specificity that we should follow Aristotle in saying that the proper shot in the situation is simply the shot that an excellent tennis player would make.

This is another way of saying that the excellent tennis player has honed her skills by playing a great deal of tennis and that she is thus adept at doing what works to win games. She will not perform the cognitive operation of fixing a description and applying a rule; in fact, she will most likely perform no cognitive operations. Her skill at tennis is such that she simply and unreflectively sees the shot as one of a certain kind and responds appropriately. She sees it one way rather than another because doing so has worked in the past and thus will presumably work again. Another tennis player might see the shot in a different way; significantly, the dispute will not be settled by debating which rule applies to the shot but by results. If one player is right, it is not because her description of the shot more adequately "reflects reality" but because she plays better.

The same is true of EN's model of morality: morality is the skill of effectively navigating social space. The morally proper action in a given situation follows from the skillful perception of and response to prototypical situations. This skill cannot be summarized by a body of moral premises and rules.
III. Reflections on Moral Network Theory

The sketch of MNT provided in the preceding section is just that: a sketch. If I have succeeded, enough features of the theory are clear to make its contrast with modern moral theory conspicuous, particularly with regard to the place of linguaform rules and principles in moral reasoning. No doubt, however, the reader has more questions than answers at this point. The purpose of this section is twofold: first, to respond to some questions and objections with regard to EN and MNT (proceeding from philosophically general to specific), and second, to speculatively explore what practical consequences might issue from Churchland's theory.

General Philosophical Objections to EN

1. Circularity

EN is a species of pragmatism. It holds that dispositions, judgments, and acts are morally good just insofar as they improve practice, as they help us flourish. This stands in opposition to accounts of morality, transcendental and otherwise, that cast moral knowledge as representational, reflecting facts about reality or human nature. EN emphasizes that morality is primarily a matter of navigating our environment; it is a matter of knowing how, not simply or even principally knowing that. An obvious and notorious objection is that pragmatism's instrumental view of morality is circular. The good is that which improves practice, but what constitutes improvement?
Does any interpretation of "improve" not already presuppose some independent moral norm? According to the objection, judgments of what is better or worse practice are purely practical; recourse to practical norms alone cannot adjudicate moral claims. To do that, we need a point-of-view that is independent of any set of practical claims.

The pragmatist response is that the notion of a context-independent, neutral point-of-view, moral or otherwise, is incoherent. There is no "natural starting point" (Richard Rorty's term) or "Archimedean point" (Bernard Williams' term) that can serve as an anchor for moral reasoning. We may decide to start from some point or another -- perhaps our basic moral intuitions -- but this will be a decision, not a discovery. The ethical naturalist presumes no fixed point of reference from which we can adjudicate between normative claims; norms can be debated, and norms with regard to the development of norms can be debated. Particular judgments with regard to good practice are based on what, all things considered, has worked to help a community flourish. The use of "flourishing" as a goal of ethics will presumably be fleshed out in a variety of ways, none of which has a claim to final superiority. "The naturalist is open to conversational vindication of normative claims, she admits that her background criteria, cashed out, are open to criticism and reformulation, and she admits that phrases like 'what works' and 'what conduces to flourishing' are superordinate terms. Specificity is gained in more fine-grained discussion of particular issues" (EN n8). The process of "fine-grained discussion" is chaotic, influenced by a host of pressures moral, immoral, and amoral, and thus is only partially
rational. It is rarely confined to a simple disagreement over moral rules or principles.50

What counts as "working" and "flourishing" depends on a host of historic, cultural, political, geographic, and temperamental features that will vary among communities. In Japan, an extremely small and populous island country with a history of defending itself from hostile outsiders, it has worked to inculcate a sense of collective purpose and an attitude of formality of etiquette and deference towards elders. In the U.S., an extremely large country with vast open spaces, it has worked to inculcate a sense of self-reliance, adventurousness, and suspicion of authority. In both countries, the norms just mentioned are under attack from various quarters, the accusation being that they no longer work. Circumstances have changed, new challenges have arisen, and to flourish, both communities will need to call on their citizens to cultivate new attitudes.

There is no neutral point-of-view, only a vast pattern of interdependent connections. Human beings possess a web of knowledge, each strand of which is held in place by others, each of which can be rewoven in theoretical debate or everyday conversation. EN needs no fixed point of reference. When it says that the focus of morality is social practice, it presumes no immutable, transcultural standards of good or bad practice. This latter point emphasizes the need for dialogue between moral philosophy and other areas of inquiry.

2. Vacuity
If EN says that morality is tied to practice, but offers no uniquely moral standards against which to measure practice, is it not vacuous? There are two answers. The first is that normative standards are extracted from practice: from history, science, art, literature, and every other domain of human experience. The moral philosopher does not contribute normative standards derived from a uniquely moral realm of facts, for there is no such realm. The task of the moral philosopher is syncretic; she gathers insights from various domains of experience (and from those who study these domains) and attempts to use them to illuminate each other and experience as a whole. Her task, then, is not separable from the tasks of other scholars and thinkers generally in the way that Held characterizes it; if it is distinct, it is distinct in that it ranges broadly across domains, not in that it is exclusively "normative" as opposed to "descriptive." The moral philosopher's task is to focus on -- speculate about, imagine, argue for -- what works for a community or communities to flourish.

The second answer is that EN has no pretensions of being a general-purpose moral theory that provides specific moral guidance to everyone alike. The suggestion that, morally speaking, we ought to do what works to help us flourish is primarily a metaethical one. It says that we should focus on improving practice rather than on what is inherently "right" and "wrong" for all times and places; this focus, in turn, emphasizes that morality is a practical skill rather than a body of representational knowledge. EN points up the importance of imagination and creativity in moral reasoning; neither it nor any other moral theory can serve as a substitute for imagination and creativity.
Concrete moral guidance is found in fine-grained, situated reasoning and debate, not in a general-purpose moral theory.

3. Relativism

If EN focuses on practice, which varies from community to community, and eschews the inherently "right" and "wrong," which are presumably universal, is it not relativistic? The answer is yes. The search for a general-purpose moral theory, one that will hold for all people at all times, has been a colossal waste of time. It amounts to the attempt to say something significant about the common feature that unites all actions we describe as "moral." As Richard Rorty puts it, pragmatists doubt:

...that there is much to be said about the common feature shared by such morally praiseworthy actions as Susan leaving her husband, America joining the war against the Nazis, America pulling out of Vietnam, Socrates not escaping from jail, Roger picking up litter from the trail, and the suicide of the Jews at Masada. They see certain acts as good ones to perform, under the circumstances, but doubt that there is anything general and useful to say about what makes them all good.51

The search for an all-purpose moral theory is predicated on the belief that morality can be profitably modeled on the physical sciences, which have been characterized by theory convergence and progress. ("People have, oddly enough, found something interesting to say about the essence of Force and the definition of 'number'" (ibid).) That morality differs strikingly from the physical sciences in both respects,
despite centuries of attempts to the contrary, should lead us to abandon the comparison between the two. The difference between the two is not a difference in kind (recall Churchland's theory of inquiry). They are both human inquiries and make use of the same tools. Rather, the difference is in the nature of the subject matter. As Flanagan points out,

...the links between any inquiry and the convergence and/or progress such inquiry yields is determined in large part by the degree of contingency and context dependency the target domain exhibits and the way the end or ends of inquiry are framed. The basic sciences, due to the univocality and consistency of their ends, and to the nonlocal nature of the wisdom they typically seek, converge more and give evidence of being progressive in ways that ethics does not. The explanation has to do with the fact that the ends of ethics are multiple, often in tension with each other, and the wisdom we seek in ethics is often local knowledge -- both geographically local and temporally local, and thus convergence is ruled out from the start. (EN 24)

Of course, Flanagan does not mean to imply that the ends of science are entirely unambiguous or that scientific inquiry is not shaped by contingent, contextual forces. He is simply pointing out that moral ends display a tension and a contingency that is far greater in degree, and thus that moral theory should not be expected to yield generalizations of the same scope and context-independence as those of the physical sciences.

If we are to compare morality with a science, we should follow Flanagan in comparing it to ecology (EN); the moral philosopher
studies one or more social ecosystems, and like the ecologist, realizes that each has its own character and that particular generalizations may not apply to each one equally or at all. It is worth emphasizing that EN places no a priori constraints on the scope of moral generalizations (a point to which I will return). It simply points out that moral theories that have sought to both be universal in scope and provide specific moral guidance have failed, usually on both counts.

A common fear is that relativity is destructive of morality, that the relativist cannot rationally criticize moral systems other than her own. But the objection that the relativist cannot condemn evil where she finds it is inevitably unimaginative. As Flanagan points out, relativism is the position that “certain things are relative to other things,” not that everything is relative to everything else (EN n43). The fact that there is no one “right” answer to moral questions does not mean that any answer is as good as any other. The ethical naturalist is attuned to relationships among things that matter for morality. By abandoning the quest for absolute moral truth, one does not give up the human capacity to compare alternatives and judge some better than others. “Even if there is no such thing as ‘transcendent rationality’ as some philosophers conceive it, there are perfectly reasonable ways of analyzing problems, proposing solutions, and recommending attitudes. This is the essence of pragmatism. Pragmatism is a theory of rationality” (ibid).

The force of EN’s relativism lies in its pluralistic attitude. It acknowledges that moral virtue has been achieved by many different kinds of people in many different kinds of ways. It acknowledges that
the virtues necessary for some community to flourish may be less important in others, and that the same is true of different individuals.

It is a futile but apparently well-entrenched attitude that one ought to try to discover the single right way to think, live, and be. But there is a great experiment going on. It involves the exploration of multiple alternative possibilities, multifarious ways of living — some better than others and some positively awful from any reasonable perspective. The main point is that the relativist has an attitude conducive to an appreciation of alternative ways of life and to the patient exploration of how to use this exposure in the distinctively human project of reflective work on the self, on self-improvement. (Ibid)

Or as James somewhat more poetically put it: “Each attitude being a syllable in human nature’s total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely” (qtd. in VMP 336).

I have neither the space nor the skill to fully defend EN’s variety of relativism here. It is enough to say that EN closely heeds the results of other inquiries, and when the historical, anthropological, ethological, economic, political, and psychological data is in, relativism is simply the most realistic conclusion. (Or if one were not of a scientific temperament, one could simply peruse the great works of literature and religion.) There are an indefinite number of realizable human personalities, and among those an indefinite number of personalities that are morally praiseworthy, blameworthy, and every shade in between. Furthermore, each person will find herself with a set of fundamental traits, some of which she will need to tend and develop, others she will need to suppress or redirect. Her moral task is
different than that of someone with different traits. The attempt to
develop a unified, all-purpose moral theory -- either as a rule or an
algorithm, a la modern moral theory, or as a single set of virtuous
traits, a la virtue theory -- is both inauthentic and more harmful than
helpful.

Objections to MNT

1. Normativity

The most common and intuitive objection to MNT is that at
best, it is purely descriptive, and at worst, it denies the possibility of
normativity. It tells us how we appropriate and classify novel
phenomena, not how we ought to judge the results of that process.
The accusation is that those who purport to apply prototype theory to
morality miss "a fundamental distinction ... between how we represent
or understand our moral concepts and how we apply or use them."54
According to the objection, it may be true that we more quickly and
intuitively classify, say, a robin as a bird than an ostrich. "Fine. But
ostriches are no less birds than robins."55 Similarly, we may
unreflectively classify a husband's (false) denial of an illicit love affair
as "more of a lie" -- that is, closer to the "central tendency" of features
of the prototypical lie -- than his (false) comment that he likes his
wife's new haircut. However, upon reflection, we judge that both are
lies, that morally speaking, a lie is a lie is a lie. We may have an
internal representation of "lie" that has a prototypical structure, but
when we apply the concept, when we morally judge someone who has
told a lie, we do not characterize their act as "more" or "less" of a lie. "Whatever aid in classification this prototypical structuring lends us, we retain and ... readily utilize underlying principles or knowledge that provide critical controls on treating these classificatory differences as differences in what it is to be [e.g., a lie]" (MIR 403).

In essence, the objection states that the use of moral concepts according to the necessary-and-sufficient-condition model does not presume that we internally represent them as having necessary and sufficient conditions; rather, the application of moral concepts according to the classical model is normative -- we apply them so because we think we ought to. When we self-consciously reflect on the results of our situated classificatory reasoning, we may choose to revise the results according to the normative principles of science and/or morality. This objection is thought to blunt MNT's criticism of commonsense "moral law folk theory;" though we reach judgments based on prototypes, "we have the capability of assessing and revising these judgments, without surrendering our commonsense morality." (MIR 402). It may be, then, that rules and principles play precisely the self-regulating role that modern moral theory claims for them.

In a brief discussion of MNT, Held makes a similar point. Her fear is that the process of moral change and development described by MNT is purely causal rather than rational. Referring to Churchland's example of the shift from seeing society as a group of siblings ruled by a father to seeing society as a group of parties to a contract (the latter is "more arresting" and thus prevailed), Held objects:

But this is not a process that happens as if by itself. We decide what prototype to make "more arresting," that is, which to
consider morally or descriptively better. We can try to explain why such transitions have occurred.... But such explanations do not tell us whether the replacement of one moral paradigm by another or one socioeconomic system by another was or would be morally justified. (WA 77)

In short, developing new prototypes is not the same as justifying new prototypes. Held wants to emphasize what other critics of MNT have pointed out: that moral reasoning involves the use of self-critical standards and norms, which are separate from any given person's hierarchy of learned prototypes.

The objection just recounted is complex and tricky. It is difficult to disentangle its merits from its flaws. It is true that prototype-theory --- especially in as brief and sketchy a form as I have presented -- can underemphasize the self-reflective and self-corrective capacities of reasoning, flirting with reductionism.\textsuperscript{56} Held wants to insist that there is more than unreflective (merely neural?) classification going on in moral reasoning. But everything turns on how "more" is characterized. One way of characterizing it simply reflects the Kantian distinction between causality and Reason, which transcends causality. On this description, the development and deployment of prototypes is a (causal) neural process which can (and should) be amended through the use of Reason, which has access to transcendent standards and principles. While neither Held nor other critics would explicitly characterize the objection in this way, the echoes are clear.

Held is uncomfortable with the thought that reasoning "happens as if by itself" like a natural, causal process. "Moral experience ... requires us to assume we can choose between alternatives
in ways that should not be expected a priori to be subsumable under scientific explanations, whether psychological, biological, ecological, or any other" (WA 72). Somehow, the causal process must be regulated by something else. Held is clearly motivated by the same concern that motivated Kant: that humans not act from irrational causes but from rational reasons. Human beings develop their prototype hierarchies through socialization, which is a causal process for which they can not be held accountable. Only if there are reasons independent of causal processes -- reasons to which we have access through our deployment of Reason -- can persons be held responsible for their moral judgments and actions.

The ethical naturalist decisively rejects this way of framing the issue. The distinction between irrational causes (nature) and rational reasons (human beings) is utterly misleading. The naturalist believes that human beings are natural creatures, and that nature behaves through and through in a causally lawful way. (It should be emphasized that the assumption that a process is explicable according to natural laws does not entail that we have, or ever will have, a complete scientific account thereof -- systems as complex as human beings present us with the problem of a "combinatorial explosion" that may forever outstrip our scientific ability). Whatever capacity human beings have to act rationally, to engage in self-reflection and self-correction, has emerged in and through the evolution of natural creatures. Reason is a natural capacity, not one that transcends nature -- this is essential to naturalism. MNT holds that the development of norms regarding moral perception and action proceeds primarily through the development and revision of prototypes. The claim is not
that human behavior is purely causal and thus irrational but that reasoning is both causal and rational.

How can MNT account for criticism in addition to classification and reaction? The examples noted by critics tend to be misleading, as they regard “natural kinds” -- dogs, birds, numbers. For instance, Adler points out that “it is less surprising that I may find it easier or faster to classify the familiar collie as a dog than the rare Akita, than it would be that I represent the former as ‘more of a dog’ than the latter (I know that they are both dogs) or that the nature of one is to be ‘more’ dog than the other” (MIR 402-03). There are two ways of addressing this kind of example. The first is to note that necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of biological natural kind terms have been fixed by biology, and these can be consulted by someone attempting to discern whether or not a particular animal is a dog. Over time, a community can stipulate necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept; that is, a community can dictate that a concept be applied as though it had classical structure. This is most evident in the physical and natural sciences, in which the “distinction between how we represent or understand our concepts and how we apply or use them” is necessarily sharp. I will discuss the role of fixed public concepts shortly, but suffice to say here, many who presume to apply cognitive science to ethics fail to acknowledge and/or emphasize the ability of a linguistic community to give certain concepts determinate (classical) structure.

The second way of approaching the example is to point out the vast difference between it and most moral examples. The biological definition of “dog” is fixed and clear, but the same can not be said of the
moral definition of a "virtue" or a "right." The subject matter of morality, as Flanagan points out, is far more contingent and context-dependent than that of the physical and natural sciences. Moral concepts will be significantly dependent on contingent features of the community or tradition in which they develop. Despite the efforts of modern moral theorists, we have not discovered anything like "natural kinds" in morality. This is evident to a degree even in our basic moral concepts, for instance, a "person." The abortion debate demonstrates that the very scope of the concept is contentious (thus, it surprising neither that we are inclined to classify a child as "more of a person" than a fetus nor that we may explicitly represent it as such).

But the indeterminacy of our moral concepts is even clearer on the ground, in the trenches as it were. When does self-confidence become arrogance? When does optimism become self-deception? When does contentment become complacency? When does autonomy become emotional isolation? When does the desire to protect one's friends and family become parochial?

In moral reasoning, we rarely err simply by failing to note that an instance falls within the scope of a concept, because in morality, as in most situated skill-deployment, concepts do not have the classical structure that would make subsumption a clear-cut matter. How then, can we be self-critical of our own classifications and reactions?

Churchland's description of the morally exemplary agent is illuminating:

People with unusually penetrating moral insight will be those who can see a problematic moral situation in more than one way, and who can evaluate the relative accuracy and relevance
of those competing interpretations. Such people will be those with unusual moral imagination, and a critical capacity to match. The former virtue will require a rich library of moral prototypes from which to draw, and especial skills in the recurrent manipulation of one's moral perception. The latter virtue will require a keen eye for local divergences from any presumptive prototype, and a willingness to take them seriously as grounds for finding some alternative understanding. Such people will by definition be rare, although all of us have some moral imagination, and all of us some capacity for criticism.

(ERSS 146-47, italics added)

Moral situations are extraordinarily diverse; rarely do any two appear with exactly the same features. Remember: the processing of a connectionist network "is not bound by the similarity metric on the input vector;" that is to say, small or subtle differences in the features of situations can lead us to classify them as belonging to drastically different prototypes. An imaginative moral (scientific/pedagogical/economic/chess-playing/etc.) reasoner has a broad array of prototypes and the ability to flexibly deploy them looking for the right fit. A self-critical reasoner will be highly sensitive to the varied features of a situation, particularly features that are not well accounted for by the prototype at hand. History provides no shortage of examples of moral reasoners that have squeezed vast swaths of experience into simple categories, often with literally violent results -- Pol Pot classified almost every feature of Cambodia's culture (even eyeglasses) within the prototype of "bourgeois elitism." We intuitively understand that this can be done only through a kind of blindness to
certain types of features, a blindness connected to a pathological unwillingness to consider other ways of viewing a situation or situations.

MNT can account for the employment of norms in self-critical reasoning, and thus for normativity. Norms range from the implicit (and more personal) -- e.g., the embodied skills a kayaker deploys in navigating rapids -- to the explicit (and more public) -- e.g., “do not discriminate according to race.” Norms, on MNT’s model, are manifest in a connectionist network as dispositions (patterns of connection weights) to connect certain environmental patterns with patterns of response. Self-criticism occurs when we sense that the prototype through which we are interpreting a situation or situations is insufficient, and perhaps that none of the prototypes we have are sufficient. The fear that naturalizing normative ethics will lead to a process of moral development that is “merely causal” and will turn morality into a “mere power struggle” turns “on certain genuine difficulties with discovering how to live well and with a certain fantastical way of conceiving of what is ‘really right’ or ‘really good.’ But these difficulties have everything to do with the complexities of moral life -- of life, period -- and have no bearing whatsoever on the truth of ethical naturalism as a metaphysical thesis or on our capacity to pursue genuinely normative and critical ethical inquiry” (EN 22, italics in original).

2. Conservatism
A related question is the following: how can we avoid unreflective transmission of parochial or harmful prototypes from generation to generation, or "mere" socialization? How can socialization be rational? The modernist might say that we socialize rationally by discovering, obeying, and assiduously transmitting the correct practical and moral principles, attempting to structure our community in accord with them. If asserting moral propositions that reflect reality -- which "is as it is separate from human cognitive states" -- is our goal, radical moral critique is possible. After all, reality is as it is apart from whatever prior philosophers may have said. It is possible, perhaps likely, that the principles we obey and transmit now may be radically mistaken, and perhaps some philosopher may come along and prove so with a knock-down deductive argument (such success has been claimed more than once).

How can MNT promise rational rather than "mere" socialization? Flanagan quotes Churchland raising the worry:

What is problematic is whether this process amounts to the learning of genuine Moral Truth, or to mere socialization. We can hardly collapse the distinction, lest we make moral criticism of diverse forms of social organization impossible. We want to defend this possibility, since ... the socialization described above can occasionally amount to a cowardly acquiescence in an arbitrary and stultifying form of life. Can we specify under what circumstances it will amount to something more than this? (NP 300)

As Churchland points out, the same question applies equally to any area of inquiry, including science, since most learning, of morality or of
science, is second-hand. The pragmatist holds that our performance, rather than an imagined relationship between theories and facts, reflects the quality of our knowledge. Humanity's great successes (many accomplished in "prehistorv") in terms of survival, propagation, and civilization indicate that "there remains every reason to think that the normal learning process ... involves a reliable and dramatic increase in the amount and the quality of the information we have about the world" (301). So too with morals:

When such powerful learning networks as humans are confronted with the problem of how best to perceive the social world, and how best to conduct one's affairs within it, we have equally good reason to expect that the learning process will show an integrity comparable to that shown on other learning tasks, and will produce cognitive achievements as robust as those produced anywhere else. This expectation will be especially apt if, as in the case of "scientific" knowledge, the learning process is collective and the results are transmitted from generation to generation. In that case we have a continuing society under constant pressure to refine its categories of social and moral perception, and to modify its typical responses and expectations. Successful societies do this on a systematic basis. (302)

Moral norms and skills are shaped by pressure from the environment, just as practical skills are. Judged by our success in navigating our environment, we should have every faith in the quality and amount of our moral knowledge. Churchland is optimistic about the progress and convergence of moral knowledge, sometimes excessively.57 I will offer a somewhat more tempered picture (see chap. 3, sec. II).
An important objection to MNT (and to EN) is that it is allegedly conservative. Since it describes the development of prototypes based on experience, then people can only be as moral as what they experience in their environment, and they can only be moral in the same way. This paints an uncritical picture in which repressive or unjust social and moral systems can be (merely causally) transmitted. Is there room in MNT for radical moral critique?

There are two ways of approaching the question. The first is to recall Churchland’s description of a moral community “under constant pressure to refine its categories of social and moral perception.” It is important to emphasize that this pressure is not exclusively moral pressure. A host of interests drive our behavior. Geographic and social changes can be sudden and drastic; environmental pressures can shift unpredictably. Held says that we “decide what prototype to make ‘more arresting,’ that is, which to consider morally or descriptively better,” but again, the word “decide” is too tidy. It is worth emphasizing again Dewey’s point that moral problems and tensions emerge from tectonic -- and sometimes explosive -- shifts in other empirical domains. Since environmental pressures can shift radically, so too can moral prototypes.

As an example, consider free markets. The ethical naturalist will be keenly aware of the shifting circumstances brought about by economic globalization, and will attune her arguments for or against unregulated markets to those empirical realities. This may involve a radical critique of either laissez-faire or welfare states. To the modern moral theorist, this might be seen as a discovery -- we had thought free markets “good,” but we have discovered they are in fact “bad” (or vice
versa) -- but the ethical naturalist will see nothing alarming in admitting that free markets were once appropriate (good) and are now, if unrestrained, inappropriate (bad). EN does not see moral truths as static. Radical critique is possible in part because radically changing circumstances are possible.

Again: a response to shifts in environmental pressures is not “mere” response, like the recoil of a billiard ball. Effective response to the environment is the essence of rationality.

“But surely there is more to collective moral development than response to extra-moral pressures.” Yes. The second way of approaching the question of radical critique is to point out that morality itself is heterogeneous: moral ends are varied and in some cases mutually exclusive; moral heroes and exemplars are wildly diverse, virtuous and flawed in a host of different ways; and commonsense (traditional) moral principles contradict one another willy-nilly (e.g., “stop and smell the flowers” / “a day late, a dollar short”). EN need not be conservative because it draws not only on present moral alternatives, but on all those tested throughout history and all those imagined in the arts and literature, past and present.

To judge ideals, it will not do simply to look and see whether healthy persons and healthy communities are subserved by them in the here and now. We require that current “health” is bought without incorporating practices -- slavery, racism, sexism, and the like -- that can go unnoticed for some time and keep persons from flourishing, and eventually poison human relations, if not in the present, at least in nearby generations. (EN n40)
Moral perspectives are as varied as life is rich, and persons of every culture, no matter how repressive, have access to moral perspectives other than the one that dominates. This is not to marginalize or trivialize the power and persistence of totalitarian regimes, nor the possibility of effective propaganda, simply to point out that radical critique is possible within morality because the possibilities for reviving, reinterpreting, or recombining the radically different moral voices already singing in the moral chorus are effectively limitless. Nothing in MNT or EN generally implies limits on the revolutionary or radical nature of moral critique.

If it is still objected that MNT does not allow for radically new prototypes -- only those to which we have had or could have exposure -- then the response can only be that there is "nothing new under the sun." New models do not appear *de novo*, they grow over time. But this does not set limits on how striking or compelling or new-sounding a sudden flash of moral insight may be. Our prototype space is vast, and the number of possible vectors among prototypes is astronomical. We may, in the course of moral life, discover the moral usefulness of a prototype drawn, perhaps recontextualized, perhaps recombined, perhaps in a strikingly new shape, from some other domain of experience. Consider Churchland's notion of "context-fixers," here discussed by Clark:

Imagine someone trying to solve a problem. To solve it ... is to activate an appropriate explanatory prototype. Sometimes, however, our attempts to access a satisfying (explanatory) prototype fail. One diagnosis may be that we do not command any appropriate prototype, in which case there is no alternative
to slow, experience-based learning. But an alternative possibility is that we do command just such a prototype but have so far not called it up. This is where a good piece of context fixing can help. The idea is that a bare input that previously led to the activation of no fully explanatory prototype may suddenly, in the context of additional information, give rise to the activation of a developed and satisfying prototype by being led to exploit resources originally developed for a different purpose. (CPS 116)

The development of prototypes is organic and extended in time; this much, MNT need not deny. Perhaps, as Held and other feminists argue, the metaphor of morality-as-economic-exchange should yield to the metaphor of morality-as-maternal-care. While this may be a new prototype for morality, it is not a new prototype. But again, for the reasons just described, MNT suggests no a priori limits on the intensity or radicality of moral critique. This suggests that the charge of conservatism against EN is, at least on theoretical grounds, unsubstantiated.
Chapter Three
Implications of Ethical Naturalism

In the first chapter, I defended ethical naturalism against the charge that it is a handmaiden to science, that it reduces the normative to the descriptive. In the second chapter, I attempted to flesh out a picture of EN by exploring an example, Churchland’s moral network theory. I concluded the chapter by defending EN against further philosophical objections that came into clear focus through the presentation of MNT, and by defending MNT against claims that it is purely descriptive and that it is conservative. But enough defense -- in this chapter, I will examine what I take to be some implications of EN generally and MNT specifically. The chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will discuss EN’s implications for moral education. I will assert that moral training is absolutely central, that it is holistic rather than confined to institutional settings, and that it necessarily involves a degree of hypocrisy. I will conclude the section by applying the insights of EN with regard to moral education to a contemporary debate, the debate over multiculturalism. Second, I will discuss EN’s implications for moral theory generally. I will assert that our hopes for a normative moral theory that will guide us in case-by-case decision-making is forlorn, and that this implies a central role for trust in moral life. I will then attempt to explain our collective moral failure through a consideration of commitment, both in its role as heritage-preserver and its role as heritage-developer. I will conclude the section with a discussion of linguaform moral rules and principles, asserting that they rightfully play a central role in moral life, though this role is not that given them by modern moral theory. This chapter will be decidedly speculative; EN of the form I favor is young and it remains to be
seen whether, how much, or in what ways it will substantially effect moral philosophy.

I. Moral Education

While Aristotle emphasized the central role of moral training, modern moral philosophy has not. Kant was famously impressed by the morality of the "common man," symbolized by the plowman who has had no formal training of any sort. It is not difficult to see why. If all moral action is dictated by the categorical imperative, then it will simply consist in acting such that one would will that everyone acted according to one's reasons. What is needed is not primarily knowledge or experience but will. All humans are endowed with Reason, which provides normative dictates, if agents but have the fortitude to obey its legislation. The same is true of utilitarianism. Since all human beings act for pleasure, what they need is the force of will to act such that pleasure is maximized. Both Kantian and utilitarian moral theories hold that morality is based on intrinsic features of human nature, though they differ on the relevant features, thus both hold that all humans (with the exception of children and the mentally disabled) are equally endowed with the capacity to act morally. While the preceding is perhaps more caricature than judicious summary, it is fair to say that Kantians and utilitarians are united in the belief that moral theory ought to be such that it is equally accessible to all who possess the will to obey it.

Holism
EN deflates this hope and follows Aristotle in restoring the absolutely central role of moral training. However, much rides on how one construes the term "moral training." EN emphasizes that morality is more a skill (knowing how) than a body of knowledge (knowing that). Moral training, then, should not -- indeed, can not -- be confined to institutional settings. The morality that young minds absorb is not captured in the linguaform moral facts, principles, or theories that enable them to pass the final exam in Introductory Ethics 101. Moral learning is not isolated or autonomous, but holistic. Children learn moral skills from the moment they interact with other human beings.

MNT holds that learning is a matter of exposure to exemplars and consistent feedback. Children learn from their environment to see situations, actions, and persons as belonging to a certain type and to react accordingly. As Clark states, "the successful acquisition of moral knowledge may be heavily dependent on exposure not to abstractly formulated rules and principles but to concrete examples of moral judgment and behavior" (CPS 114). Such concrete examples are present first and foremost in the behavior of those surrounding a child. These examples will be her primary source of moral education. As Flanagan emphasizes,

...the total [moral] network comprises more than the neural nets that contain the moral knowledge a particular individual possesses. Whatever neural net instantiates (or is disposed to express) some segment of moral knowledge, it does so only because it is 'trained' by a community. The community itself is a network providing constant feedback to the human agent. (EN 30)

_Hypocrisy_
It would seem then that there is little hope in the admonition "do as I/we say, not as I/we do." Hypocrisy, according to MNT, might seem not only pernicious but utterly impotent. By and large, children will see situations according the ways people in their environment see the same types of situations, and do what they see around them is the "thing to do." If speaking disingenuously about one's interests and motives is part of an environmental pattern, it will find its way into the prototype space of those who are exposed to it. We cannot mediate the ill effects of widespread immoral behavior simply by making our public exhortation to moral behavior louder and more frequent. Actions speak louder than words. But I want to suggest that we not dismiss the power of a certain kind of hypocrisy: the hypocrisy of encouraging the expression or representation of moral prototype hierarchies, or, to drop the jargon, value systems to which we do not conform, either individually or institutionally. While our actions may show that we do not normatively endorse these alternative value systems (this is a necessary and desirable condition of coherent socialization), we should nevertheless remain devoted to the metaethical value of diversity.

The Debate Over Diversity

MNT suggests that we take seriously the formative power of imaginative identification with what Clark calls "virtual moral reality" -- the moral situations, agents, and actions present in novels, movies, works of history and anthropology, television shows, commercials, pop songs, magazine advertisements, internet pages, and all the varied corners of symbolic space, even that small corner called academic philosophy. In
(suitably diverse) virtual moral reality, children are likely to be exposed to moral prototypes (sometimes radically) different than the ones at work in their present social context, more so than in their day-to-day interactions with others in their community. Remember: MNT suggests that moral excellence will be due in part to an agent’s possessing a large and diverse library of prototypes. Since the total moral network extends beyond the neural network of the agent, it is fair to say that the majority of agents cannot be expected to have a wide variety of prototypes unless there exists a sizable and heterogeneous range of exemplars on which to draw. Put more strongly: the possibilities and resources for social critique increase in proportion to the number, diversity, and accessibility, not just of moral theories but of moral examples.

We have reached a point where we can profitably apply EN to a contemporary debate: the debate over multiculturalism, or as the slogan goes, “diversity.” What EN suggests is that the debate is, or should be, metaethical rather than normative. Critics of the campaign for diversity are quick to point out that “diversity” is often used in a disingenuous way, as a guise for criticizing the moral code of the Western tradition and supporting the moral codes of other cultures. While this is true in many cases, a more trenchant criticism is that proponents of diversity often frame diversity as an inherent normative good. But EN suggests that the primary virtue of diversity is metaethical; that is to say, diversity of moral alternatives is conducive to an environment in which reliable moral judgments can be made. Diversity of moral exemplars is a condition of effective moral reasoning. This leaves the question of diversity’s normative virtues open. Proponents of diversity, by saying, as they frequently do, that “one ought not favor one (our) moral code over others,” frame the debate in a diversionary and self-contradictory way.
Anyone committed to one moral code over others -- or committed, as 
communitarians are, simply to the virtues of committing to one moral code 
or another -- will be inclined to resist this way of presenting the issue. Rather, 
proponents of diversity ought to say that “moral reasoning, which may or 
may not lead one to favor one moral code over others, is facilitated by the 
presence of a wide variety of heterogeneous moral exemplars.”

For instance, consider the compelling and urgent debate over ritual 
female genital mutilation as practiced in some Islamic cultures. On one 
hand, one hesitates to engage in “moral imperialism,” judging the practices of 
another culture from the parochial perspective of one’s own. On the other 
hand, one hesitates to abandon the possibility of meaningfully criticizing 
cultural practices (or practices within one’s own culture) that one finds 
morally repugnant -- and it is difficult for North American moral 
philosophers to see genital mutilation as anything but morally repugnant. 
Feminists in particular are torn over the issue, as they want on the one hand 
to criticize the hegemonic tendencies of patriarchal ethics, and on the other 
hand to defend the health of young women forced against their will to 
damage their bodies and, symbolically, their womanhood.

While the issue cannot be decided in a summary paragraph, it seems 
that EN suggests the following strategy: what we ought to say is not that “it is 
a mistake to judge ritual female genital mutilation wrong from one’s own 
moral perspective,” but that “it is a mistake to judge ritual female genital 
mutilation wrong without a relatively thorough understanding of the moral 
perspective from which the practice issues.” Or, in the language of MNT, “it 
is a mistake to presume the superiority of one’s own moral prototypes 
without having considered the adequacy of alternative prototypes.” Of 
course, the question of what if any is the appropriate action to take if one
judges, under the proper circumstances, that genital mutilation is morally wrong is one that will be fought out in the moral trenches (see sec. II).^59^

As an aside, it is interesting to note that we have drawn a normative conclusion — "we ought to make available a wide variety of moral exemplars" -- from statement of metaethical fact -- "the availability of a wide variety of moral exemplars is conducive to effective moral reasoning." This supports two assertions I made in Chapter One: first, that the distinction between is and ought is misleading, and second, that metaethics strays closer to normative ethics than is generally acknowledged.

*Conclusion*

EN strongly implies that the ability to act morally, both in understanding diverse moral systems and adjudicating among them, is a function of, among other things, adequate moral training. Morality is not simply a matter of referencing a transcendent code or a single foundational feature of human nature and mustering the will to do what it dictates. Moral excellence requires a large and diverse library of moral prototypes, an imaginative ability to manipulate one's perceptions in terms of those prototypes, and a critical ability to closely and carefully discern the varied features of situations and their fit with one or another prototype. These are developed through moral training, i.e., exposure to a wide variety of moral exemplars and consistent feedback with regard to one's moral performance. It is entirely possible -- in fact, more than likely inevitable -- that some agents will receive better moral training than others. This is a regrettable but at least somewhat remediable fact of our moral life.
Furthermore, the quality of one's moral training will depend in significant ways on luck. Since one's moral training will take place in the context of one's whole environment, not simply in the context of institutional settings, it is unlikely that the quality of moral training can be raised to a uniformly high standard simply through equalization of institutional educational quality and opportunity (though such equalization is important). Providing all children with uniformly excellent moral training is part of the larger product of providing them with uniformly excellent material and cultural circumstances -- that is, the larger project of improving society as a whole.

II. Moral Philosophy

Though it has historical precedents, EN of the particular variety for which I have argued is extremely young. The impetus for EN's re-emergence has come from empirical disciplines, primarily psychology and cognitive science. If it is to become a viable and healthy presence on the largely unhealthy and culturally isolated landscape of moral philosophy, it will have to extend its scope beyond those disciplines. As I said before, EN is syncretic -- it gathers the insights of other disciplines and attempts to paint a broad picture of moral reasoning, perception, and action. A robust EN will integrate the wisdom of politics and economics, history and anthropology, sociology and psychology, as well as the wisdom manifest in ordinary conversation and debate. It remains to be seen whether EN will gain momentum, whether or how much it will influence the practice of moral philosophy. I believe that a healthy dose of naturalism is much needed across philosophical space, particularly in ethics, and that those who support naturalism are, to borrow a
bit of pablum from our president, on the "right side of history." EN has the potential to impact moral philosophy in a host of ways. My intention in this section is to speculate on the shape such impact might take.

**Normative Moral Philosophy**

I have said that EN is primarily metaethical; it attempts to discern and describe conditions under which effective moral reasoning can take place. What of normative moral philosophy? If we accept the sharp division between metaethics and normative ethics, EN might be construed as implying the following thesis: normative moral philosophy, as an autonomous domain of philosophers, is chimera. Moral reasoning is a form of situated reasoning that is highly sensitive to contextual features of the environment. It is ultimately geared towards the improvement of practice, an increase in the quality and distribution of human flourishing, and what this consists in will be importantly, though not entirely, relative to historical and sociocultural context. Philosophy can tell us what effective reasoning consists in, but it can not reason for us. Or rather: a philosopher can engage in moral reasoning, as any concerned, thinking individual can, but philosophers have no access to truths regarding transcendent Reason or ahistorical facts that would give their situated moral reasoning a validity that is lacking in the moral reasoning of those outside philosophy. On this Rortyan model, it is pointless for philosophers to pretend that they possess distinctively "philosophical" tools that give the discipline of normative moral philosophy any special claim to validity. Moral philosophers of the past, though they have couched their theories in the raiments of ahistorical deductive certainty, have done little but reflect the moral assumptions of the
tradition from which they write. Despite their pretensions, they have not, nor could they have, established a normative theory that holds for all times and places.

While I am sympathetic to this general line of argument, I nevertheless think that moral philosophers can make real and unique contributions to normative ethics. My reasoning is as follows. Philosophical metaethics, as I have said, is syncretic. It takes a broad and inclusive look at what we know about the practice of morality -- moral perception, action, reasoning, debate, education, institutionalization, etc. From the fragments of insight found in other disciplines and in common practice, it paints a holistic picture of effective moral practice. This will consist less in characterizing any particular institution, practice, act, or personality as "right" or "wrong" than in characterizing the circumstances under which situated moral reasoners can effectively make such judgments. But as I said in section I, metaethical positions are not without normative implications. From the metaethical position -- in this case drawn primarily from cognitive science -- that children learn to perceive and behave morally through exposure to exemplars rather than to abstract rules, we might draw the following normative conclusions (all of which, it should be said, are tentative and require argument):

1. We ought to insure that each child, in his or her crucial stages of development, has a mentor or mentors that can serve as an immediate role model, if not a parent then someone from the extended family, or if not family then someone from the community, or if not that then someone working for a socially-concerned charity, foundation, or (least desirable of all) government program. The influence of gangs in economically disadvantaged areas, for example, will not be removed through state violence in the form of arrests and harassment. Children find role models, like it or not. Role
models (moral exemplars) are a necessary element of cognitive and social development.

2. We ought to expose children consistently and from a young age to a wide variety of arts and literature, in homes, in schools, and in public spaces. Publicly funded art, and educational programs in arts and literature, should not be thought of as luxuries that we provide when extra money is available, but as central and immensely important tools of socialization. This includes works of art and literature that embody moral prototypes of which we do not approve.

3. We ought not pretend that children can separate “entertainment” from “instruction.” The movies, comic books, television shows, professional sports, pop music, and video games to which children are exposed (far more often than explicit instruction) contain moral exemplars just as present community practices do. This does not, in my mind, amount to an argument for censorship, but rather an argument for adult guidance and for diversity. If consumer-driven pop culture provides nothing but endless violence and loveless sex, and our community does nothing either to influence its course or provide compelling alternatives, the future looks grim.

There are other metaethical positions that have relevance to how we construct and conduct social life. I will briefly consider one more. Flanagan’s Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism (PMPR) asks that we “make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us” (VMP 32). Flanagan emphasizes that this leaves room for norms that are uncomfortable, difficult, or even impossible for us at present -- we may decide that we should teach
our children to be creatures so different from ourselves that we can no longer relate to them.

Consider, now, what at present seems to be our prevailing public moral ideal (not in philosophy, that is, but in U.S. culture at large): the citizen who, in Bill Clinton's rousing and inspirational phrase, "works hard and plays by the rules." Of course, this is not to say that the phrase describes our prevailing ideal -- the citizen who works little, doesn't get caught, and becomes famous and/or filthy rich is probably closer to the mark on that score -- but simply the prevailing moral ideal. This reflects both the rampant hypocrisy and the moral anemia of current public life in the U.S., but I simply want to consider the ideal itself. Fleshed out, it paints a picture of someone who goes to work dutifully by day and fulfills her duties; nights (perhaps) and weekends are the allotted time for "recreation," which is to be conducted without violating any laws. Though Marx made the point long ago, many recent books have reminded us that this sharp separation of life into work and play is psychologically debilitating, leaving both work and play without larger meaning. (It has been pointed out that, for many contemporary North Americans, work has become a place to form relationships, to feel "at home," while the home has become a place of stress and constant demands.) It is debatable whether the complete separation of the spheres of work and play is psychologically possible, whether it violates PMPR. But if the metaethical principle of PMPR is made a bit less "minimal," as I think it should be, it could clearly be used to mount a normative argument against the current model of the moral life at work in the U.S.

But, lest I wander too far down the path of speculation, let me summarize. According to my interpretation of EN, normative ethics should not be conceived of as a special branch of philosophy but as a practice at work
throughout culture, embodied in concrete situations, exchanges, and debates (in which philosophers, of course, should take part). There may be those who make it their life's work to engage in normative persuasion, but they will not do so as academic philosophers but as concerned citizens and thinking human beings. Philosophers do not possess unique (transcendental or ahistorical) tools that enable them to engage in normative debate from a privileged position. The search for a theory that will dictate what to do on a case-by-case basis is as misguided in philosophy as it is in the sciences, physical, natural, or social. However, philosophy, due to the wide-ranging syncretic nature of the discipline, is well-positioned to do metaethics, which can, I have argued, imply normative positions. Though the bulk of normative work will be done in the culture at large, philosophers can make a distinctive contribution. This opens a space, direly needed in the current cultural climate, for academic philosophy to interact fruitfully with the larger culture.

Trust

What the preceding point -- that philosophy can provide no firm theoretical anchor for normative ethics -- implies is that trust plays a central role in ethical life. Modern moral philosophy is often motivated by the implicit assumption that people (non-philosophers), in the context of their day-to-day lives, should not be trusted to reach moral conclusions and establish normative ideals without a philosophical theory on which to draw. Kant himself idealized the morality of the untutored "common man," but his faith in the common man has not persisted in moral philosophy quite so strongly as his assumption that "all material practical principles are, as such,
of one and the same kind and belong under the general principle of self love or one's own happiness." The assumption that, in their practical affairs, people will act at worst selfishly and at best parochially has lain beneath the surface of a great deal of moral philosophy before and since Kant. Most economic theory is explicitly based on the assumption that agents are, or can profitably be modeled on, self-interest maximizers. Much moral theory has adopted this picture, more or less explicitly. It is most explicitly evident in game theory.

But this psychological picture is decidedly one-sided. My intuition is that if it were true, humanity could not possibly have established the complexly cooperative social life that it has (despite the elaborate constructs of game theory). It is also implausible that moral philosophy alone has enabled us to do so. Pragmatism holds that morality is itself a practical affair, that all affairs are practical in the sense that they are based on and answerable to human experience. This suggests that people have done all right -- or at least as well as they have done -- without guidance from facts or principles that transcend experience. Moral philosophers should learn to trust that they will continue to do so.

What MNT holds is that "when such powerful learning networks as humans are confronted with the problem of how best to perceive the social world, and how best to conduct one's affairs within it, we have ... good reason to expect that the learning process will show an integrity comparable to that shown on other learning tasks, and will produce cognitive achievements as robust as those produced anywhere else" (NP 301). We trust that human beings learn to conduct their practical affairs well without a faculty of Reason that transcends causality, without reference to principles of deductive
certainty; the philosopher should have commensurate trust in our ability to learn to conduct moral affairs well without them.

This trust, if genuine, will take the bite out of the deflationary picture of moral philosophy offered in the preceding section. It will also encourage tolerance and discourage dogmatism. As Flanagan says: "Attunement to contingency, plural values, and the vast array of possible human personalities opens the way for use of important and underutilized human capacities: capacities for critical reflection, seeking deep understanding of alternative ways of being and living, and deploying our agentic capacities to modify our selves, engage in identity experimentation and meaning location within the vast space of possibilities that have been and are being tried by our fellows" (EN n43). One disadvantage of modern moral theory is that, since it conceives of morality as a deductive affair, it is unfriendly to pluralism -- one is either right or wrong, morally speaking, and alternative courses of action are not simply different, but immoral and thus to be condemned. This is a disadvantage because pluralism is a perspicuous and (in my opinion) desirable feature of contemporary life. EN conceives of morality as an imaginative skill, and thus acknowledges that there may frequently be multiple courses of action in any situation that are equally desirable morally, or desirably in morally different ways. These courses of action cannot be adjudicated among deductively -- none has a decisive claim to being "right." As Flanagan puts it, there is a vast experiment galloping forward, and we would do better to relax our grip on the moral theoretical reins (our firm grip was always illusory).

Commitment
As the reader has no doubt been eager to point out, the picture of collective moral development offered thus far is excessively rosy. In the discussion of MNT in Chapter Two, I said that humanity's successes warrant the belief that moral learning is as reliable as scientific learning. But just as perspicuous as humanity's moral success is its long, shameful, and continuing record of moral failure. Churchland's picture of moral learning occasionally verges on Panglossian. Our collective moral development has simply not shown the progress and convergence evident in science. Moral virtue remains a regrettably rare quality, both in individuals and in communities.

In my discussion of EN's relativism, I mentioned one reason that might account for this record of failure: the subject matter of morality is significantly more contingent and context-dependent than that of science. Here I want to offer another reason, one that is, in the spirit of the chapter, more speculative. I have said that morality is a pragmatic affair, a matter of effectively navigating social space. The purpose of morality is to improve practice, to held us live well together. But how, as pragmatists, can we explain the long-standing sentiment that navigating social space effectively often involves treating others badly and thus that the purpose of morality is precisely to regulate our natural dispositions in this area rather than to aid them? For instance, I might think that I am better able to navigate social space if I have more material wealth; thus, for me, and perhaps for my family and friends, effectively navigating social space will involve accumulating wealth by any means, moral or immoral. This is what Kant had in mind by practical as opposed to moral reasoning. If I restrict my perspective to the flourishing of myself or those close to me, there seems to be no reason that acting to secure our flourishing will involve acting morally. Indeed, I may
purchase that flourishing at the expense of others outside my circle of intimates.

I said that the psychological picture of humans as self-interest maximizers is one-sided, incomplete. While this is true, it is certainly the case that maximizing our own (and our family's, friends', and immediate community's) flourishing occupies a large portion of our motivational space. In what sense, then, can we say both that morality is practical and that it is meant to regulate the parochial tendencies frequently at work in our practical reasoning? The assumption of the pragmatist moral philosopher is this: the purpose of morality is to increase flourishing for as wide a community as possible, including humanity as a whole and, perhaps, the wider biotic community. Moral behavior will serve our interests, and thus be practical in character, but the interests that it serves are often, particularly in the public sphere, long-term, global interests. These interests may or may not line up with the interests of any individual or individuals.62

A concrete example will help make the point clear. Consider a dilemma: in my younger and less cautious days, I committed a felony (one that involved no harm to anyone but myself). Now, I find myself faced with an application for a job that will lead to a distinct improvement in my material circumstances. If I tell the truth about my prior conviction, I will more than likely not get the job. If I lie, I will more than likely get the job, and I have good reason to believe the lie will not be discovered. My practical interests and those of my family, it seems, are best served by lying. In what way can the pragmatist hold that telling the truth is also a "practical" decision? The pragmatists answers as follows: history has taught us that communities as a whole function more effectively, are better able to provide for the flourishing of their members, if those who constitute it are honest in
their interactions with one another. Being honest serves a long-term interest of the community, and is thus practical. But it is clear that the relationship between this long-term interest and my specific act is highly indirect. It may seem to me that my short-term interests overwhelm the practical benefits of "everyone being honest." After all, no one will be directly hurt, and my family will be directly helped.

What is it, then, that leads us to act morally even when our immediate practical interests are not well-served by doing so? The answer is: commitment -- commitment to the long-term health of our community (which, in more and more places, will be intertwined with the health of the global community), both those who presently constitute it and those in future generations. This commitment will manifest in two ways. The first is in a resolute determination to act in accord with the wisdom found in the moral principles, rules-of-thumb, proverbs, stories, and heroes that constitute our cultural heritage. This determination is based, as I said, on trust in the effectiveness of human neural networks or, to put it a bit more inspirationally, trust in the collective wisdom of humanity. We trust that the accumulated moral wisdom of our tradition -- and, when we encounter them, other traditions -- is worthy of our respect, which means, according to the pragmatist, that it is genuinely conducive to the expansion of flourishing in both quantity and quality. The second way that commitment will manifest itself is in a resolute determination to use our developing knowledge -- scientific and moral -- to adapt our cultural heritage to present circumstances. This prong of our commitment will be critical. We resolve not accept our cultural heritage purely on faith, purely on trust. We adopt a certain amount of detachment from our heritage is in order to insure that it grows is in strength and is in quality. It is in this second prong of our commitment that
pragmatism plays a crucial role. Only if we cast our moral knowledge as practical (rather than categorical or deductively certain) can we achieve the distance from it necessary to facilitate its growth. The two prongs of our commitment will frequently come into conflict. As I have emphasized throughout this paper, these conflicts cannot be resolved simply through reference to a moral theory. They are resolved is in the same way that our ancestors resolved them, through situated, open, messy, fallible conversation and debate.

The second answer, then, to the question of why moral failure is a persistent and perspicuous feature of our moral lives is that we frequently suffer a failure of commitment. First, we often fail through inadequate commitment to the wisdom of our heritage. This constitutes the failure of trust. Second, we often fail through inadequate commitment to our own ability to enhance and develop our heritage. This constitutes a failure of criticism. The first kind of failure leads to arrogance, the second to dogmatism.

*Linguaform Moral Rules and Principles*

Now we are in a position to return to a question that has emerged several times throughout our inquiry: what is the proper way to conceive of the role of linguaform rules and principles in moral life? What has been said so far should imply a general picture, one which I will now attempt to make more explicit.

MNT shows us that it is extraordinarily unlikely that the moral knowledge embodied is in our connectionist moral networks can be captured is in a summary body of linguaform rules and principles. This is a fact
acknowledged by an increasing number of those working at the intersection of cognitive science and ethics. As Clark says, "the rule-based moral vision, according to this emerging consensus, is a doomed attempt to reconstruct the high-dimensional space of moral reason in a fundamentally low-dimensional medium" (CPS 114). Churchland describes the attempted reconstruction: "Any declarative sentence to which a speaker would give confident assent is merely a one-dimensional projection -- through the compound lens of Wernicke's and Broca's areas onto the idiosyncratic surface of the speaker's language -- ... of a [high] dimensional solid that is an element is in his true kinematical state" (NP 18). These one-dimensional projections are shadows on the wall of Plato's cave (ibid). Kant thought he had found the moral rule from which all moral judgments are derived; is in fact, he had simply skimmed the rule from their surface. The wisdom present is in any human moral network dwarves what is found is in the categorical imperative.

As I said is in the previous chapter, once we conceive of morality as an embodied skill it is not particularly surprising to find that we cannot summarize our moral wisdom is in a condensed body of rules. Julia Childs is a far better cook than I, though I have read the instructions in her cookbook closely. When I cook, I pore over her recipes; according to Childs, she rarely if ever consults a recipe. Several investors, by all appearances wildly wealthy, appear on late-night television offering how-to books on the process of becoming wildly wealthy. Thousands of people buy these books; rarely is there a corresponding surge is in the number of wildly wealthy people. Cooking is no algorithm, nor is capital investment, and both are far simpler than the sum process of effectively navigating social space.
The question is now: what are the consequences of our inability to capture our moral knowledge in the medium of language? Is in their 1990 paper "What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise," Dreyfus and Dreyfus postulate a five stage moral developmental model: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, and expertise. Explicit linguistic instruction plays a prominent role in the novice stage; "the instruction process begins with the instructor decomposing the task environment into context-free features which the beginner can recognize without benefit of experience" (WM 240). Strikingly, linguistic instruction plays a decreasing role as the stages proceed, and plays no role whatsoever in the expert stage. The expert, according to Dreyfus and Dreyfus, acts intuitively and unreflectively; she "does not deliberate. She does not reason. She does not even act deliberately. She simply spontaneously does what has normally worked and, naturally, it normally works" (243). We might say that morality has become "second nature" for the expert. On this model, a moral agent will rely on rules and principles just to the degree that she has failed to achieve moral excellence.

What, then, constitutes moral conflict, if not disagreement over explicit linguistic formulas, either their validity or their applicability to a particular situation? Churchland says:

...moral disagreements will be less a matter of interpersonal conflict over what "moral rules" to follow, and more a matter of interpersonal divergence as to what moral prototype best characterizes the situation at issue; more a matter, that is, of divergences over what kind of case we are confronting is in the first place. Moral argument and moral persuasion, on this view, will most typically be a matter of trying to make salient this, that, or the other feature of the problematic
situation, is in hopes of winning one's opponent's assent to the local appropriateness of one general moral prototype over another. \(ERSS 147\)

We might rephrase Churchland's point is in the following way. Prototypes are high-dimensional state space representations of patterns in the environment. But it is a mistake to think that a prototype is like a picture of the environment, as though, in moral reasoning, someone or something is in the brain has to do the additional work of consulting the picture and formulating a response (according to which moral rule's necessary and sufficient conditions are satisfied by the picture's features).

The work of description and the work of prescription are not accomplished by separate neural processes. The activation of a prototype carries information about what kind of situation is being faced and the range of proper responses; the two can not be separated. If a fetus is a small person, then naturally we should preserve its life. If it is a growth attached to a woman's body, then naturally we should let the woman dispose of it as she chooses. If a corporation's laying off American workers and subsequently opening a factory is in Mexico is a necessary step towards preserving the global economic competitiveness of the U.S., then naturally we should accept it. If it is a betrayal of an implicit agreement with domestic workers done to profit a small body of stockholders, then naturally we should socially censure the perpetrator. Moral conflict, according to Churchland, is most frequently a matter of deciding how best to characterize a situation. (Again, the word "decide" can be misleading -- a developed moral network makes the question of which prototype to apply explicit and conscious only under unusual circumstances, such as intense moral debate.) Once agreement has been
reached on a characterization, agreement on the subsequent course of action usually follows as a matter of course.

The picture of moral expertise offered by Dreyfus and Dreyfus and the picture of moral conflict offered by Churchland combine to paint a bleak portrait of the role of linguaform moral rules and principles. Indeed, the authors just mentioned are united in their attempt to marginalize rules and principles in moral life. Or rather, they are united in their attempt to marginalize the place of rules and principles in our thinking about moral life -- after all, the authors tell us, rules and principles are already marginal in actual moral practice, though not, unfortunately, in moral philosophy.

Churchland goes on to reconceive the place of linguaform debate in moral life. The place of linguistic rules and principles is to serve as "context-fixers" (see my discussion at the end of chap. 2). Clark summarizes Churchland's view as follows: "...moral debate does not work by attempting to trace out nomological-deductive arguments predicated on neat linguaform axioms. But summary moral rules and linguistic exchanges may nonetheless serve as context-fixing descriptions that prompt others to activate certain stored prototypes in preference to others" (CPS 117-18). While this provides linguistic debate a place in moral life, it is primarily a manipulative one, as Clark emphasizes: "Moral rules and principles, on this account, are nothing more than one possible kind of context-fixing input among many. Others could include well-chosen images [think of the pictures of fetuses used by anti-abortion advocates; D.R.] or non-rule-invoking discourse. Thus understood, language simply provides one fast and flexible means of manipulating activity within already developed prototype spaces" (118).

Modern moral philosophers, and rule-based moral theories generally, cast rules and principles as rational reconstructions of proper moral
reasoning. MNT deflates this picture; the reasoning that takes place is in a high-dimensional state space can not be reproduced adequately is in the one-dimensional medium of language. But Clark emphasizes that the manipulative power of linguaform rules and principles need not be seen as trivial. Drawing on experiments using the video game Tetris, Clark postulates the existence of high-level normative policies that guide situated reasoning. Is in Tetris, "expert play looks to depend on a delicate and nonobvious interaction between a fast, pattern-completing module and a set of explicit, higher-level concerns or normative policies" (ibid). The same may be true of expert moral skill:

Such commitments -- the upshot of individual moral reflection -- may help us monitor the outputs of our online, morally reactive agencies. When such outputs depart from those demanded by such policies, we may be led to focus attention on such aspects of input vectors as might help us bring our outputs back into line.... To do so is to allow the natural operation of our on-board reactive agencies to conform more nearly to our guiding policy.... The summary linguistic formulation, on this account, is a rough marker that we use to help monitor the behavior trained-up networks.... Is in addition to the basic, fluent pattern-recognition-based responses exemplified by a trained connectionist net, the human expert relies on a second skill. This is the ability to spot cases in which these fluent responses are not serving her well. Such recognition (a kind of second-order pattern recognition) is crucial since it can pave the way for remedial action. And it is especially crucial in the moral domain. Here, surely, it is morally incumbent on us not to be hostage to our own fluent daily responses, no matter how well "trained" we are. We must be able to
spot situations ... is in which these fluent responses are failing to serve us. The effect of formulating some explicit maxims and guidelines provides us with a comparative resource is in a sense external to our own online behaviors. This resource is neither binding or a full expression of our moral knowledge, but it can act as a signpost alerting us to possible problems. (119-20)

This way of characterizing the power of linguaform rules and principles emphasizes commitment, is in line with my discussion is in the preceding section. Based on our trust is in the effectiveness of the moral reasoning of those who contributed to our cultural heritage, we commit ourselves to the collective wisdom that they have condensed into summary rules and principles (on the revisable assumption that the rules and principles will lead to widespread, long-term flourishing). Adhering to these commitments involves a "second-order pattern recognition" -- that is, we learn to adopt a degree of detached critical perspective on our own situated, online behavior, and to recognize when our behavior does not conform to our higher-level commitments. When such a situation obtains, our second-order commitments lead us to alter our future input vectors, to lend significance to certain features rather than others. (Kant's second practical imperative might be thus construed: "is in interactions with others, always try to characterize situations is in terms of features relating to others' autonomy and human dignity.") This suggests that the picture of moral reasoning offered by Dreyfus and Dreyfus is incomplete; linguaform rules and principles serve a second-order function is in the reasoning of the moral expert as well as the novice.

However, both Clark and I believe that the place of rules and principles is in moral life extends beyond their power to manipulate the function of individual trained-up moral networks. The tendency to cast rules and
principles simply as hopelessly inadequate expressions of moral knowledge unwittingly falls prey to a seductive positivistic picture of language: language as a mirror, reflecting reality. The tendency to cast rules and principles simply as context-fixing devices used to manipulate another falls prey to a significant danger is in connectionism and cognitive science generally: focusing unduly on individuals and insufficiently on groups. On both scores, a dose of pragmatism helps. The pragmatist conceives of language as a tool, not a mirror, and the tool’s function is not confined to the manipulation of one individual by another. Rather, language plays a central role is in our collective life, is in our collaborative efforts to adjudicate disputes, develop and improve institutions, enrich and transmit our heritage, and generally structure social space so as to encourage peace and flourishing.

What, then, is the role of linguistic exchange is in our collective moral life? Language is a tool, and using a tool involves a skill, an embodied know-how. Our linguistic know-how “consists” is in our commanding a certain kind of well-developed prototype space ... that is interestingly second-order is in that the prototypes populating it will need to concern the informational needs of other beings: beings who themselves can be assumed to command both a rich space of basic prototypes concerning the physical, social, and moral world and a space of second-order prototypes concerning ways to use language to maximize cooperative potential” (123).

Is in our collective moral life, we can point to two broad ways that linguistic know-how is deployed to “maximize cooperative potential.” The first is collaborative learning. Is in the process of collaborative learning (which emerges at roughly the same age as “second-order mental state talk -- talk about other people’s perspectives on your own and others’ mental states” [121]), we share perspectives, considering and criticizing those of our fellows.
Crucial features include "discussion, joint planning, critiquing of each other's ideas, and requests for clarification" (ibid). In this way we supplement our perspectives or combine them with others' in order to solve problems that we can not solve alone. In expressing our moral perspectives through summary principles, we can contribute to the process of perspective interaction, the process of finding solutions to moral problems that are unavailable simply through recourse to any one individual's perspective.

The example of collaborative problem solving Clark uses is how children solve the initially puzzling problem of how the same volume of water fits equally into differently-shaped containers.66 But it is not difficult to see how collaborative problem solving works in the context of higher-level moral problems. For instance, consider the contemporary problem of widespread social pathology is in economically disadvantaged inner cities. One party in the discussion (say, a Republican) may notice that, in general, children socialize more effectively in two-parent homes, and may thus offer the following moral principle: "fathers ought to take equal responsibility is in the rearing of children they sire." Another (say, a Democrat) may notice that the "Drug War" being waged is in the U. S. has the unfortunate side-effect of removing many lower income males from their families and, by imprisoning them, placing them in an environment that encourages their disrespect for the law; she may thus offer the following moral principle: "drug use ought to be treated as a health rather than a criminal justice problem; we ought to council and rehabilitate drug users rather than imprisoning them." Both may have failed to consider the perspective of the other; together, they may develop a solution to the problem that avoids the imbalances of either perspective taken is in isolation.
The second way that linguistic know-how may contribute to maximizing cooperative potential can be characterized as "practical negotiation." Practical negotiation is of use in problematic situations in which clashing perspectives cannot be integrated to find one solution amenable to all perspectives involved. Here, the goal of sharing moral perspectives, as summarized in rules and principles, is not to find theoretical but simply a practical resolution. The purpose of formulating and sharing rules and principles is in these types of situations is to make clear the shape of the problem-domain: the directions that debate may travel and the limits of the possibility-space that solutions may inhabit. This type of problem is a ubiquitous feature of our multiethnic, multicultural, pluralistic society.

For instance, consider the refusal of Scientologists to allow themselves or their children to be treated with the tools of modern medical science. One perspective (Scientology) casts medical science as pernicious and its use as a distraction from our individual and collective physiological and spiritual powers. The other perspective (just about everybody else) casts medical science as a powerful force for good and the refusal to use it as a wanton endangerment of the lives of children. It is doubtful that either perspective can make itself desirable or compelling to the other, or that theoretical détente is possible. Our only recourse is to forge a practical solution, a policy that each can view as an acceptable compromise — e.g., intervening with medical science only in cases of impending death or permanent disability. The process of practical negotiation is messy and rarely fully satisfying to any single party involved, but it is crucial in contemporary culture, and it is well-served by effective skill in linguistic exchange, including the exchange of summary moral rules and principles.
Clark summarizes the robust role that summary linguaform rules, maxims, and principles play is in moral life:

The attempts by each party to articulate the basic principles and moral maxims that inform their perspective provide the only real hope of a negotiated solution. Such principles and maxims have their home precisely there: is in the attempt to lay out some rough guides and signposts that constrain the space to be explored is in the search for a cooperative solution. Of course, such summary rules and principles are themselves negotiable, but they provide the essential starting point of informed moral debate. Their role is to bootstrap us into a kind of simulation of the others' perspectives, which is ... the essential fodder of genuine collaborative problem-solving activity. No amount of such bootstrapping, of course, can preclude the possibility of genuine conflict between incompatible principles. But it is the exchange of such summary information that helps set the scene for the cooperative attempt to negotiate a practical solution to the problem at hand. Such a solution need not (and generally will not) consist is in agreement on any set of general moral rules and principles. Instead, it will be a behavioral option tailored to the specific conflict encountered.... Thus viewed, the rules and maxims articulated along the way are not themselves the determinants of any solution, nor need we pretend that they reveal the rich structure and nuances of the moral visions of those who articulate them. What they do reveal is, at best, an expertise is in constructing the kinds of guides and signposts needed to orchestrate a practical solution sensitive to multiple needs and perspectives. This is not, however, to give such formulations a marginal or novice-bound role, nor is it to depict them as solely tools
aimed at manipulating all parties into the activation of a common prototype. Rather, it is a matter of negotiating some practical response that accommodates a variety of competing prototypes. (122)

III. Conclusion

Despite the pretensions of much rule-based moral philosophy, linguiform rules, maxims, and principles do not capture anything but a sliver of our embodied moral knowledge, nor do they reflect the high-dimensional complexity of our moral reasoning. They are not derived deductively from an unquestionable "Archimedean point," for there is no such thing. They are not beyond question or negotiation, nor do they have a categorical status lacking is in practical principles, nor should we expect them to apply across all present or future contexts. They do not determine solutions to moral debates, nor do they strictly determine a course of action is in any but the most unproblematic situations. The hope that a moral theory based on a limited and fixed set of rules can be adequate to experience is forlorn. As Martha Nussbaum says, "principles are perspicuous descriptive summaries of good judgments, valid only to the extent to which they correctly describe such judgments. They are normative only insofar as they transmit is in economical form the normative force of the good concrete decisions of the wise person and because we wish for various reasons to be guided by that person's choices."67

However, moral principles, suitably conceived, do play a significant role is in moral life. We ought to conceive of them as hypothetical imperatives, as Philippa Foot urges. They are geared towards the satisfaction of interests. What distinguishes them from most practical principles is not
that they are "categorical" -- such a notion is ultimately senseless, gaining whatever credibility it has from the psychological force with which it is taught and repeated -- but rather that the interests they serve are often long-term or global interests of the community (which increasingly means the community of humanity or even the global biotic community). Such interests are often connected only indirectly to the interests of any particular individual or individuals. For this reason, widespread adherence to moral principles must involve an equally widespread concern for the fate of the wider community (fellow-feeling), which, to dash the hopes of modern moral theory, is a thoroughly contingent matter. We ought to do whatever we can to cultivate such concern for the wider community, a commitment to its health, even when that commitment means sacrificing individual interests. Cultivating such concern is a matter of moral training, which EN restores to its properly central role is in moral life.

A committed individual will treat the moral principles distilled from her tradition as though they are categorical because she trusts is in the collective wisdom of humanity and of her heritage particularly; however, her commitment to her community's health will involve a equally resolute determination to criticize and develop her moral heritage, on the conviction that changing local and global circumstances demand it. As Mark Johnson says, "to assume, without critical examination, that our traditional concepts and standards must 'fit' ... new cases is in some way is merely to deny the possibility of change is in the character of our experience" (MI 106); however, such change is a ubiquitous feature of human life.

Pragmatism urges us to conceive of moral principles not as fixed truths, but as tools for coping with experience. They are not "recipes for action, but ... reminders of what one's tradition has found, through its
ongoing experience and reflection, to be important considerations is in reflecting on past actions, courses of action open to us, and the choices of people we regard as possessing practical wisdom" (105). The messy indeterminacy of moral life is ineliminable, and the difficult work of coping well with new experiences is accomplished is in the moral trenches, is in situated experience, not is in a moral theory. This suggests that moral philosophy has no claim to priority is in normative debate. Normative morality is an ongoing process distributed throughout the community, not a special province of moral philosophy. Each of us has a responsibility to fully engage our moral tradition and our moral circumstances. As Dewey said:

...the object of moral principles is to supply standpoints and methods which will enable the individual to make for himself an analysis of the elements of good and evil is in the particular situation is in which he finds himself. A moral principle ... gives the agent a basis for looking at and examining a particular question that comes up. It holds before him certain possible aspects of the act; it warns him against taking a short or partial view of the act. It economizes his thinking by supplying him with the main heads by reference to which to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important considerations for which he should be on the lookout.68

I would add that the object not only of moral principles but of moral theory itself is not to dictate but to simply to inform and improve the moral agent's situated moral reasoning. The hope that it can do more is a relic of discredited philosophical doctrines with regard to transcendent faculties and facts, immutable features of human nature, and the ahistorical nature of Truth. EN urges us to abandon that hope along with those doctrines. Our
hopes for moral theory will thereby be more tempered but more realistic. Realism is a form of authenticity, itself a worthy moral goal.
Conclusion

The central insight of EN is that "our moral understanding is complex, multidimensional, messy, anything but transparent, and utterly resistant to absolutes and reductive strategies. This is not to say that we shouldn't seek as much clarity, determinateness, and stability as we can realistically manage, but only that we must never be fooled into thinking that our formalizations can stand in for our embodied, ongoing, historically situated, and imaginative moral experience" (MI 260). I hope (perhaps against hope) that I have gone some way towards breaking the spell of totalizing moral absolutism. Our moral life is characterized by the presence not only of multiple moral systems and theories, but of an irreducible plurality of virtues, goods, and ideals in each individual life. The giddy hopes and revelry of Enlightenment-based moral thinking have left us with an unfortunate hangover: we are still inclined to think that there is one ideal moral life, or one ideal moral personality, or one ideal moral course of action in any situation, or one ideal moral goal towards which all cultures should proceed. But these thoughts are belied not only by the historic inability of moral philosophers to come to final agreement, but also by our own situated experience. We are all familiar with the tug of moral options, the choice of which of our traits to nurture and which to suppress or redirect, the time-pressed and ad hoc character of our moral reasoning. Indeterminacy, contingency, and historicity are constitutive features of moral life.

As Dewey pointed out, human experience is characterized both by stability and by change. Balancing the two is what allows us to develop rather than stagnate or accelerate into chaos. The search for a fixed, all-purpose moral theory reflects the human need for stability, but in the domain of
morality, we have become unbalanced. We are now inclined to reject a moral theory that does not offer timeless stability and guidance. We have forgotten, in other words, that change is as characteristic of the moral domain as it is of any domain of experience. As Dewey said:

When we observe that morals is at home wherever considerations of the worse and better are involved, we are committed to noting that morality is a continuing process not a fixed achievement. Morals means growth of conduct in meaning; at least it means that kind of expansion in meaning which is consequent upon observations of the conditions and outcome of conduct. It is all one with growing.... In the largest sense of the word, morals is education. It is learning the meaning of what we are about and employing that meaning in action.  

The fact that morality is a continuing, creative endeavor, responsive to experience, indicates that moral theory must take into account the circumstances found and the insights gleaned in other domains of experience; "the need for constant revision and expansion of moral knowledge is one great reason why there is no gulf dividing non-moral knowledge from that which is truly moral. At any-moment conceptions which once seemed to belong exclusively to the biological or physical realm may assume moral import." The process by which they "assume moral import," as I have said, can not simply be characterized as a "decision" on our part, as Held characterizes it. Consider the once morally inert fact that some diseases are caused by genetic rather than environmental factors. Once we develop the ability to detect the relevant genetic indicators in the womb, a woman will have the option of terminating a pregnancy if her child is likely to have a debilitating disease -- a distinctly moral decision. Thus, the genetic origin of
the disease takes on moral import. Moral problem-space does not have static borders.

The primary task of moral theory, I have urged, is understanding, not guidance. Moral theory can provide us with a rich and fine-grained understanding of the moral domain, but it can rarely "tell us what to do" in a problematic situation. The process of negotiating environmental obstacles involves a situated, real-time skill; knowledge and training can make us adept at negotiating obstacles, but no rule or principle will transform the process into an algorithm. Our creativity, imagination, trust, and commitment all play an ineliminable role. These are not static, ahistorical qualities of Human Nature, present in equal degrees in all human beings. Each is developed (or not) through training, and training is a contingent affair, dependent on a host of cultural, social, economic, and geographical circumstances — dependent, in short, to a significant degree on luck. If moral philosophy expects to contribute to the creation of a moral community, it will have to do more than fix the "correct" theory. It will have to engage fully in the culture-wide project of socialization.

EN is a moral theory that integrates the insights just described. It emphasizes, above all, that moral philosophers must shun the ivory tower. A good moral theory will be empirically informed. It will learn from neurobiologists about the physical locations and connections of moral centers in the brain; from biologists and evolutionary psychologists about our traits and capacities, where each lies on the continuum from natural to social; from cognitive scientists and psychologists about the nature of effective moral reasoning, what it is and when/how it fails; from anthropologists and sociologists about the social circumstances under which widespread rational socialization and effective community adaptation are facilitated; from
economists and (maybe someday) politicians about social structures and institutions conducive to effective moral training, open cultural criticism, and continuing rational development.

And, last but assuredly not least, it will learn from people. The opposition that Held sets up between causal explanations in science and first-hand moral experience is a false one. Both contain information relevant to the practice of morality. Science is only a part of our total knowledge, still a relatively small part with regard to morality, for two reasons. The first is that our knowledge from all the empirical domains described above is highly fallible, due not only to the natal status of some of the sciences, but to the contingent and context-bound character of some of the subject matter and the indeterminacy created by the heterogeneity of cultural forces and interests at work in the course of inquiry.

The second reason is that much moral wisdom is embodied in our high-dimensional moral networks, manifesting in habits of perception and behavior that do not lend themselves to summary linguistic formulation (particularly in a type of philosophical discourse that models itself on the sciences). The wisdom implicit in such habits can not be formalized, but it can be transmitted from generation to generation because it can be embodied in ordinary (and not-so-ordinary) interaction, self-expression, conversation, and debate, and represented in works of art and literature, cultural and religious mythology, and some kinds of philosophy -- think Plato's dialogues, Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, or Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (better yet, don't think of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*). A significant degree of moral socialization is accomplished through exposure to both embodied and represented moral exemplars. EN draws on everything we know, and much of what we know in morality is implicit in our perception and behavior,
forming a extraordinarily complex, evolving web of tacit moral know-how. Despite Held’s fear, EN does not privilege scientific discourse a priori over direct moral experience.

EN is met with resistance and/or hostility across a wide swath of philosophical space. Many of the fears I have attempted to mitigate over the course of this paper: that EN is a slave to science; that it is deaf to the voices of moral experience; that it is purely explanatory, accounting for causal change but not for normativity, the activity of justification; that it is conservative, with no space provided for radical critique of social structures.

Some fears, however, I have not attempted to mitigate. The fear that EN is significantly relativistic is well-founded, as is the fear that it is, in a sense, circular. These are fears that no pragmatic naturalist will attempt to mitigate; rather, she will urge the philosophical and wider community to overcome them. These fears are related to hopes and expectations that our tradition has embedded in our thinking. We have been led to expect that a moral theory will provide consistent, uniform, transcontextual guidance to all human beings alike. We have been led to hope for a fixed, ahistorical foundation upon which moral reasoning can be constructed. But we have been led to hope for and expect things that do not exist.

EN is relativistic because morality seeks the flourishing of human beings, and what flourishing consists in depends on a host of contingent, context-specific features of human life. These features include both those specific to communities -- historical, geographic, environmental, and economic features -- and those specific to individuals -- idiosyncratic features of one’s psychological configuration. Different virtues and principles will aid in the flourishing of different communities and individuals. While EN sets
no a priori limitation on the universality of particular moral judgments or
to demand that moral knowledge be universal in order to qualify as moral.

Furthermore, there are more moral personalities possible than are
dreamt of by man or woman, and far more moral ideals possible than have
been advocated or attempted. It may be that similar communities or
individuals flourish in widely different ways, and that we need not force a
moral decision between them when none needs to be made. Indeed, it is
rightfully thought to be a good thing that individuals and communities
explore different tracts of moral space, as they widen the options available to
succeeding generations. Relativism is appropriate in a world of endless and
magnificent natural and social complexity.

EN is “circular” as well, but notice that the label carries its force purely
through contrast to its alternative: “linear.” A circle begins from all points, or
rather, from no point, while a line begins from a distinct point. The
accusation that EN is circular simply reveals that there is no point in its
moral reasoning that is immune to revision or refutation. Morality is geared
towards human flourishing, but any description of flourishing is as subject to
revision as any description of how to achieve it.

EN asks in response: in what could such a point consist? To the
naturalist, the notion of such a point is incoherent -- all points are in and of
nature, in and of history. The charge of circularity carries force only if
contrasted to reasoning that is linear, that is, derived from an Archimedean
point. Since there is no such point, circular reasoning is just reasoning, for
better or worse. There is no anchor or foundation waiting to be discovered.
Like it or not, we’re winging it.
The fear of relativism and circularity is based on the desire for something else, something that cannot exist. Relativism, of course, does not mean "anything goes." It means that "what goes" is relative to certain features of human life, not relative to anything and everything. Our moral reasoning is constrained by a host of contextual features, some present in all present human contexts (e.g., limited natural resources), some present in a subset of contexts (e.g., devotion to Yahweh), some present only in the context of a particular individual (e.g., deep-seated subconscious fear of rejection). The task of moral philosophy is not to dictate a priori transcendental or conceptual constraints, but to find, empirically, what constraints actually operate on our natural, situated reasoning.

Nor does circularity mean "anything can count as reasonable." Particular strands in our web of moral reasoning are held in place through tension with others; not just any arbitrary strand will fit the web. "Anything goes" and "anything counts" make sense only in the imagined absence of something that 

*detemines* what goes, that 

*detemines* what counts. But we determine these things. We should not hope or expect to be freed from that responsibility.

We ought to abandon the fruitless hopes and expectations that our heritage has bequeathed us. Indeed, we owe it to our heritage to do so. Our commitment to moral life should involve a resolve not only to respect tradition but to criticize it. Indeed, criticism is a form of respect, the respect we pay a tradition that is still living and breathing, still a vital force.

But we should not proceed with glum disappointment. The hope for what can not exist is no virtue; abandoning such a hope is not an occasion for regret. There are no certainties in moral life, no fixed points of reference. We are engaged in an epic history of creation: of social life and of the wisdom to
sustain and improve it. We will not discover who we "really" are through philosophy, nor what we should "really" do. We are in the process of creating ourselves and our life together, a process in which philosophy plays a significant but not a privileged role. Such a process should not be undertaken with fear and insecurity, but with exhilaration,

... the exhilaration that can come from seeing the human project as a creative one, of seeing ourselves as actively involved in the process of making ourselves who we are, with the resources available in our vicinity. In addition, this way of seeing things, and living one's life, seems better than the alternative of devoting oneself to the wrongheaded project of trying simply to discover one's essence or awaiting passively its inevitable unfolding. The idea that our project is, or can be, a creative, aesthetic one, but one with extremely high personal and ethical stakes, is daunting. But the picture of us as individually and collectively making ourselves into many of the different kinds of beings we can be, and of bringing philosophical criticism to bear on these projects of self-creation, seems to me the best way, given the facts of our case, to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. (VMP 335)

The glass of moral philosophy is filled half way. Once we thought it was full, but it was a trick of the light. Nevertheless, we are humans first and philosophers second. If we tear our gaze from the glass we will notice -- remember -- that outside, it is raining.


6 I can only gesture at what such an argument would look like. The logical objection to is-to-ought inference involves a positivistic hangover; it conceives of language as having a determinate formal structure, as being designed primarily to represent (mirror, map, etc.) reality. Descriptive statements, on this conception, represent states of affairs in the world, while normative claims represent – depending on the philosopher – either subjective mental states (preferences, desires), social constructs, or necessary facts about the world (provided either by God or Reason). Whatever the case, normative claims and descriptive statements are logically different in kind, so any inference from one to the other is fallacious. But we ought not to accept the positivistic picture. Instead, we should conceive of language as a practical tool used by embedded, embodied natural creatures, a tool that is contingent, historical, and in many ways continuous with other practices. It is a tool used for communication and for the extension of cognition. If we adopt this more pragmatic conception of language, the force of Moore’s logical distinction fades. Perception and judgment are inextricably intertwined in our daily interaction with our environment, and our language, as a tool used in that interaction, reflects
this fact. An argument that attempts to establish a clear boundary -- or any boundary --
between facts and values will have to do more than point out an a priori logical distinction.

Ethics and Cognitive Science, eds. Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Andy Clark (Cambridge,

8 Virginia Held, Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1993). Hereafter cited in the text as FM.

Ho (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1995). Hereafter cited in the text as MEE.

10 For an argument that the distinction between content (representations) and form (cognitive
architecture) is “an unhelpful instrument with which to orchestrate [cognitive scientific]

11 Any summary this short of the history of cognitive science is inevitably radically
insufficient. I don’t mean here to stake any particular cognitive scientific claims, either for
connectionism or for embedded cognition (though I am sympathetic, to some degree, with both)
but rather to make the point the cognitive science is not monolithically concerned with
“individual entities,” nor is it monolithically incapable of speaking about real-time, situated
experience in the world of the variety that Held valorizes.

12 Haugeland, op cit., is one of the more radical presentations of this view. For other sources
less radical but still sympathetic with the general insight -- that mind/cognition “just ain’t
(only) in the head” -- see L. Suchman, Plans and Situated Actions (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
University Press, 1997) on situated cognition; R. Beer, Intelligence as Adaptive Behavior (New
child development; E. Hutchens, Cognition in the Wild (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) on
collectives of agents; and R. McClamrock, Existential Cognition (Chicago: University of

13 Hume, of course, would say that the laws of physics are no different; they point out "constant conjunctions" in experience, but it is illicit to go on to infer "causality" underlying those conjunctions. On this conception, the psychological generalizations just listed are different from the laws of physics only in degree. This is a debate in philosophy of science that I am not going to touch with a ten foot pole.


15 See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) for an introduction. For an extensive list of references to works criticizing Kohlberg’s moral stage theory, see Flanagan, *VMP*, 185. References to works on the general debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan are scattered throughout Part III of *VMP*.


18 As Flanagan says in a footnote, it is not clear whether there are anything like "laws" of the mind relevant to ethics; the "nomological" in d/g/n is meant to hold a place for them if they show up (EN n4).
Held is a step ahead of many moral philosophers, in my view, in acknowledging that moral philosophy should attend to particular areas and that many if not most norms are domain-specific. This is an application of the general pragmatist insight that there is no such thing as philosophy in itself— or rather, there is, but it is confined to trivial constructs of deductive logic or some form of rationalism. Philosophy should be about something, some problem or area; there should only be philosophy of this or that, not philosophy an sich. This is not to advocate narrow compartmentalization of the variety that unfortunately characterizes analytic philosophy today— John Dewey’s work is as unified and broad in scope as any philosopher’s— nor is it to say that unity and integrity of one’s worldview is not a worthy goal. It is simply to say that the philosopher should attend to the specific empirical realities about which she speaks. The more philosophers pay close attention to the complex empirical details of the domains about which they write, the less willing they will be to generalize willy-nilly across domains. When we believed in a transcendental Reason, we could get away with global generalizations; now, I think, we are appropriately wary of them.

Most philosophers have defined “empirical” far too narrowly, as something like “of the senses.” Philosophical empiricism, coupled with this definition, leads to science worship. A more adequate empiricism would be closer to William James’ “radical” version, which focuses on human experience as a whole, not just “raw sense data” (that great positivist myth). Human experience includes affect, evaluation, deliberation, awe, existential angst, transcendence, and everything else described in the long history of art and literature, not just “that’s hot” and “red there.” Held makes the same point (WA 72), but seems to think that any and all experience that extends beyond sense data is beyond the scope of science. Leaving the question of science’s scope aside, let me just point out two things. First, Held ignores the fact that EN looks to every source that has something to say, not just the sciences, and second, she ignores that empiricism comes in forms (e.g., James’) far more broad than that of the positivistic straw man that she continually attacks.

Davidson’s argument appears in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1984). He concludes, via reflections on the nature of language and translation, that humans share a common and direct connection to the world that is not mediated by any “scheme” of concepts. I am inclined to agree, with qualifications. First, I think the point could be made without reference to language, simply by reflecting on the immense evolutionary history and near-identical genetic structure that all humans share. It is simply improbable, given these wide commonalities, that we could end up with fundamentally different (“incommensurable”) “ways of seeing the world.” Second, the fact that our connection to the world is direct and unmediated by concepts does not mean that it is not conditioned by physiological and psychological traits, which in turn reflect interests ranging from “natural” to “social” (in Flanagan’s terminology). In other words, our reports on reality may be true, but they only report on a sliver of the truth, and in many cases, which sliver that is makes a big difference. Third and relatedly, I think Davidson overstates his conclusion. While the conceptual differences among human beings only make sense in the context of a wider shared reality, the differences tend to be over the very things that are most significant to the quality of human life. They are not epistemically significant, perhaps, but they are quite significant ethically.

My discussion here is indebted to the work of Daniel Dennett, particularly his notion of the “intentional stance.” From this stance, we interpret the behavior of other creatures as reflecting basic interests and values, whether or not the creatures are aware of them, or indeed, whether or not they are aware of anything. Dennett has presented and defended this view in
numerous articles and in each of his books. The view is presented most comprehensively in *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/A Bradford Book, 1987). The view's relation to evolutionary theory is explicated in *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995). Further references can be found in both books.

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Kuhn’s book is perhaps the most widely read and widely misread work of philosophy in the past half century. The notion of a “paradigm” that conditions how we view reality has been misappropriated by a wide variety of thinkers. However speculative this paper may be otherwise, I think I am safe here in simply pointing out that Kuhn made clear that the raw, uninterpreted (i.e., value-neutral) sense data that were to anchor the “unity” and linear development of positivistic science are a myth. Of course, the idea was around before Kuhn, even among the logical positivists themselves, but Kuhn has become its public face.

By “universal” I do not mean “ahistorical” or “necessary” or “intrinsic to human nature” – the universality to which I refer is a contingent result of a historical process of evolution. These values reflect what Flanagan calls “natural” as opposed to “social” psychological traits; that is, “features which turn up in some recognizable form regardless of cultural context and historical time, and therefore are taken to lie closer to our basic biological and cognitive architecture than certain other traits” (*VMP* 41). Flanagan follows this distinction with a characteristic series of careful qualifications and disclaimers; I will leave it to the reader to seek them out if he or she desires. They do not alter the basic gist, which is clear.

James Sterba’s essay “Justifying Morality and the Challenge of Cognitive Science,” which also appears in *Mind and Morals*, is seemingly an example of moral theory which assumes nothing empirical. His thesis is that rationality requires morality, where morality is conceived of as a balance between self-interest and altruism. The conclusion of his essay is that the startling and counterintuitive results produced by recent cognitive science are compatible with his conception. But it is difficult to imagine what empirical results would not be
compatible with such an abstract conception of morality; it is just as difficult to imagine what concrete moral guidance might follow from it.


31 Virtue theorists differ on the relative weight to assign to the public and the personal. Alisdair MacIntyre thinks that the central question of moral life is personal: “what kind of person shall I become?” Others, such as Kurt Baier, hold that public questions of moral obligation should be supplemented, not eclipsed, by questions of character. For an introduction to MacIntyre’s version of virtue ethics, see *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For Baier’s thoughts on virtue theory, see “Radical Virtue Ethics,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy. Volume XIII. Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, eds. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, Jr., and Howard Wettstein (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

32 The relationship of EN to virtue theory is an interesting topic in its own right, one which I have somewhat regretfully decided to leave for another time. I have heard EN described as a variant of virtue theory, but I do not think that such a description is accurate. For a discussion of the distinctions between the two, see Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality*, esp. the introduction and Part IV.

34 Richard Rorty makes much of this point in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. ch. 9. Rorty argues, plausibly, that literature has done more that moral theory to expand fellow-feeling, particularly since the Enlightenment (see part III).


36 A considerable amount of jargon is unavoidable when discussing cognitive science. However, if all goes well, enough can be decoded to provide an accurate sketch of a very complex subject matter. What follows is by no means an exhaustive description.


This claim is hotly contested within cognitive science. The literature is enormous; again, for an introduction to connectionism with references to the wider debate, see Clark, op cit.

For a reconception of "innate knowledge" as an evolutionarily-developed pattern of biased vectorial paths, see Andy Clark, "Minimal Rationalism," *Mind* 102:408 (Oct. 1993), 587-611.


For a critique of Chomskyan grammar from this perspective, see Clark, "Minimal Rationalism."

See Goldman, op cit., Churchland, op cit., and Johnson, op cit.

In "Modern Moral Philosophy," Anscombe says something similar about Kant and Mill: they did not understand the significance of the fact that a situation can be described in various equally valid ways, sometimes invoking contrary moral rules (thus the enduring difficulty with Kant’s ethics: which maxim to universalize in a given situation). Depending on the way a situation is described -- or rather, the way it is perceived -- it will invoke differing response patterns. Interestingly, Plato, long a foil for naturalists and pragmatists, seemed to have something like this in mind when he asserted that to know the good is to do it. If we conceive of moral skills as practical, we might rephrase Plato this way: the excellent moral agent will learn to perceive situations such that the moral course is the obvious one to take, the one for which there are the most and best reasons. When she learns to perceive situations in this manner, it makes sense to say that, in her case, knowing the good and doing it are strongly connected. Of course, this picture is too pat and too rosy, like Plato’s, but it captures and gives some support to his intuition.

"The Moral Law Folk Theory:

Human beings have a dual nature, part bodily and part mental. It is our capacity to reason and to act upon rational principles that distinguishes us from brute animals. The free will, which humans possess but animals do not, is precisely this capacity to act on principles we give to ourselves to guide our actions. Therefore, our freedom is preserved only in acting on principles our reason gives to us. There is a deep tension between our bodily and mental aspects, because our bodily passions and desires are not inherently rational. That is why we need reason to tell us how we ought to act in situations where our actions may affect the well-being of ourselves and other people.
Reason guides the will by giving it moral laws -- laws that specify which acts are morally prohibited, which are required, and which are permissible. Universal reason not only is the source of all moral laws but also tells us how to apply those principles to concrete situations. Moral reasoning is thus principally a matter of getting the correct description of a situation, determining which moral law pertains to it, and figuring out what action that moral law requires for the given situation." (MI 7)

Johnson points out that, for this theory to be true, it also has to be true that each situation must have one correct conceptualization, that there must be “literal concepts with univocal meanings,” and that each situation must be conceptualizable according to a fixed list of features (which determine whether they fall under a moral rule) (8). Prototype-theory challenges each of these corollaries, and thus Moral Law Folk Theory as a whole.

49 The player’s skill will obviously not result purely from practice. Some players are more naturally gifted than others. If morality is a skill, then the same is true of moral practice: some moral agents, through no doing of their own, have natural endowments that make them more likely to be moral and to succeed in navigating social space. For an interesting discussion of moral luck, see Bernard Williams, Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

50 Too often, cultures or systems of morality are conceived as static, stable, and internally coherent -- as nouns rather than verbs, billiard balls rather than clouds. When we think of them this way, we tend to see their interaction as a collision in which that with the most momentum triumphs. Discomfort with the purely causal nature of this process is connected with the desire to discover a purely moral perspective from which to decide which billiard ball is right. (Kant said that it is only in reason that we transcend causality -- we are the only intelligent billiard balls.) But cultures and moral systems are less like billiard balls than clouds, less like nouns than verbs. They are patterns in the process of being enacted by their constituents. They interpenetrate and mutually influence one another in a host of subtle ways.
Sometimes each retains its shape and integrity; sometimes one or both is given a new shape; sometimes they merge. Saying that a human being is a vast collection of billiard balls (i.e., entirely within causality) is compatible with saying that she behaves rationally. As the ethical naturalist emphasizes, rationality is a situated skill -- moral claims will be decided in the trenches, in situations, in practice, not all at once through reference to a transcendent standard.

51 Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xiii.

52 "We expect our fellow discussants to be consistent in their beliefs and attitudes, and thus we can ask them reasonably to show us how it is that their normative system is consistent. We can ask them to say more about some normative judgment to help us to see its rationale. We can ask them to provide a deeper rationale or a reason for taking them seriously as reliable normative judges, and so on. A 'reason' is anything that can be said in favor of some belief, value, or norm -- any consideration that weighs in favor of it. Since the things that can be said on behalf of almost anything constitute an indefinitely large class, reasons abound in normative life. No set of reasons may yield conviction in the skeptic or in someone whose life form lies too far from our own. But this in no way distinguishes normative life from the rest of life." (EN n30)


56 This is particularly true of Mark Johnson, op cit. Also, consider this passage by Goldman:
How does the way concepts are represented bear on moral philosophy? In many areas of moral philosophy there is much controversy over whether a certain item is an instance of a certain concept. For example, on the issue of abortion it is controversial whether a fetus is an instance of a person (or a human life). Often people try to settle this issue by trying to find necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person. This seems to presuppose, however that such a definition is in principle forthcoming, that we (tacitly) represent the concept of a person in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. (ECS 340)

But as Adler might respond, it seems that the debate could continue even under the assumption that we do represent “person” prototypically. The debate might be conceived as being over whether we ought to establish (by community fiat, as it were) necessary and sufficient conditions for falling under the concept “person.” Whether or not prototype-theory is descriptively true, there might still be legitimate normative debate over whether we ought to apply concepts as though they had classical structure. This is an instance where the ethical naturalist ought to take pains to avoid the reductionism of the normative to the descriptive with which she is frequently charged.

57 Flanagan criticizes Churchland for excessive optimism in “Ethics Naturalized.” Much of my discussion in this section is indebted to Flanagan’s paper.

58 The point that moral theory ought to focus on the metaethical conditions of effective moral reasoning rather than normative assertions is made by philosophers ranging from Rawls to Habermas to Rorty. Framing the virtue of diversity as metaethical rather than normative seems to me to open a space for integrating liberal and communitarian insights. However, I have no intention of wading into a debate that continually grows more deep, complex, and nuanced, not to mention weighty in terms of sheer pagination.

59 Another interesting application of the metaethical argument for diversity, the extended treatment of which I will leave to another time and place, is to the trend towards increasing
homogeneity in popular American entertainment. The trend is driven in part by the fact that
the outlets of public entertainment are increasingly owned by a shrinking number of global
mega-corporations, and that global mega-corporations have less connection to any culture than
to the bottom line. It would be interesting to see whether EN could mount an argument in
support of, for instance, controversial or "offensive" publicly-funded art (national or local) on
the basis of the metaethical virtue of diversity.

Richard Rorty makes this point with regard to philosophy as a whole, as do many
sympathetic with the alleged "end of philosophy." On Rorty's model, philosophy will be a
form of literature like any other, lacking the special validity that many philosophers have
claimed for it. He makes the argument in several works, most completely in Philosophy and

Mark Johnson frames the issue this way:

Do theories in physics tell us how to do physics? Do they give us methods for
getting truth? Clearly not, even though some philosophers in the past have thought
that they might. Yet our theories in physics do inform our approach to doing physics,
and thus they do influence our practice.

Do psychological theories tell us how to be better people, or more fulfilled
people, or people whose lives have more meaning? Not directly, yet knowledge of the
nature of cognition, motivation, development, learning, and so forth, can have some
bearing on how we live our lives. Such knowledge will not, however, give us rules for
living.

Do sociological theories tell us how to behave toward other people? Not in any
direct way: that is, they do not give us general laws about how to interact in groups.
Yet the more sociologically well-informed we are, the more likely we are, on the
whole, to understand the subtleties of group dynamics and to be more socially astute.

Moral theories are just like these other types of theory. Their purpose is not,
and cannot be, to tell us the 'right thing to do' in different situations. They tell us, rather, about the nature of moral problems, moral reasoning, and moral understanding. They help us explore our moral traditions to see how they arose, what their standards of justification are, and what their limitations are. They inform us about what is common and what is different in moral traditions around the world and throughout history. They give us knowledge of the imaginative structure of our moral concepts and the reasoning we do with them.

*A theory of morality, then, should be a theory of moral understanding.*” (MI 188, italics in original)

If Johnson is correct, there is little hope for Held’s project of establishing distinctively normative subfields in all the academic disciplines. No theory can tell us what to do from situation to situation. A theory can inform us about the nature of the domain in which we are acting, and thus improve our ability and dispositions to perceive and act in effective ways, but in the work of deciding what to do from situation to situation — that is, in the work of living — we are on our own.

62 Bernard Williams, among others, has argued that moral interests, which are global and long-term (misleadingly characterized as “categorical”), should not always trump individual projects and interests. A certain minimal amount of moral decency should be required, but beyond that, we should be free to pursue our own parochial projects. For an elaboration of this argument, see Williams’ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Carol Gilligan has argued that viewing moral interests as global and long-term is but one way of seeing moral issues -- the “justice” perspective -- and that viewing moral interests as involving the care and nurturing of those close to us is an equally valid moral perspective (one found predominately in females). For an elaboration of this argument, see Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Both these arguments are directed against modern moral theory’s tendency to cast moral goals and
principles as global, categorical, and exceptionless — on this view, moral principles assume an automatic priority over all others. My own view is that both our parochial and our global interests are ultimately practical in nature; they are not different in kind, but in degree. They frequently clash. Both are valid and neither has a categorical claim of priority over the other; balancing them will be a matter of case-by-case situated reasoning, not a matter of theory. Whether one, the other, or both should be called "moral" is of little importance.


