

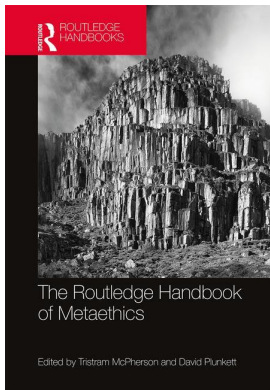
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Mores and Morals: Metaethics and the Social World

Kenneth Walden

Anyone who has taught an introductory ethics course has found themselves having to explain that some important words can be used in different ways. There is the way social scientists talk when they refer to the *norms* of a Balinese cockfight, the *values* of early modern scientific culture, and the *morality* of Bolsheviks. And then there is the philosophers' use of the same words when they talk about the normativity of rationality, the value of persons, and the moral law.

How should we explain this duality? There are a few very simple answers. One is to say that words like “norm” and “moral” are polysemous. They have separate, unrelated meanings in the mouths of social scientists and philosophers. A second is that these uses are related, but indexed to different perspectives: one descriptive and one normative. Whereas the social scientist is describing the culture and customs of the Bolsheviks or Balinese, the philosopher is prescribing or evaluating them (Gert 2002). A third answer makes gestures about reality and appearance. The social scientists' words describe beliefs or opinions or maybe even theories about the things denoted by the philosophers. So while it is true that the Balinese take themselves to have certain reasons regarding cock-fighting, that early modern scientists valued things like intellectual self-sufficiency, and that compromise is immoral for Bolsheviks, there are further questions—philosophical questions—about whether cock-fighting considerations are *genuinely* normative, self-sufficiency is *actually* valuable, and compromise is *really* immoral. These are the questions that moral philosophers ask.

All three of these answers seem too simple. “Morality” is plainly not polysemous in the way “bank” is: its meanings are not wholly unrelated. It may be polysemous in a more subtle way, as “sanguine” is. That is, the word may carry multiple meanings connected in some interesting way. But that possibility invites the question of what that connection is, which takes us back to where we started. The suggestion that one usage is descriptive and the other normative also seems misguided, for the norms of the Balinese cockfight are certainly normative *for the cockfighter*. They are not normative for the social scientist, but

that's not a feature of the norms themselves; it's a feature of the social scientist's detached perspective. (However, one could deny that they are "robustly" normative in McPherson's [2011] sense.) The last option may be most plausible, but it also seems too simple. There is more to a group adhering to a norm than their *believing* or *accepting* that they have reasons to follow it, and it seems procrustean to characterize the morality of Russian revolutionaries as tantamount to a *theory* about the true nature of morality in the way that general relativity is a theory about space-time.

These problems may lead us to a more complicated answer, and possibly to one that brooks a more substantive and intimate connection between, as it were, mores and morals. That possibility is the subject of this chapter. But before turning to that work, we should record the familiar difficulties faced by proposals in this genus—problems that make the idea that morality may be closely tied to social mores an unpopular one amongst ethicists these days. These objections all involve our considered judgments about the nature of morality. When we say that something is good or bad, wrong or right, we probably don't think that we are expressing our community's conventions; we probably think we are trying to say something that *transcends* our community. We probably think systems of mores can themselves be evaluated, as when we say that the abolition of chattel slavery was a form of moral progress. And we probably doubt that moral facts are constituted by whatever chaotic forces shape our culture. Finally, we are appropriately reluctant about aligning a subject too closely with the social practices concerning that subject: we wouldn't want to take religious practices to be the final word on the metaphysics of God. (Russ Shafer-Landau [2003] develops some of these objections in greater detail.) Any answer to our question about the relationship between mores and morals that makes them too nearly coincident is likely to clash with these judgments and end up looking like a poor characterization of morality.

On the other hand, there are considerations that favor a close connection. One motivation is naturalism. Many philosophers attribute features to morality that are hard to fit into our scientific picture of the world. For example, many think that we have reasons to be moral even when it does not advance any particular end we have adopted, but the entities we would need to countenance to vindicate this supposition seem irremediably queer, and so it is hard to square their existence with a naturalistic conception of reality (Mackie 1977). But if we turn our attention to social practices, this concern looks exaggerated. The reasons these practices give us appear to have exactly the kind of character that this argument deems queer: I have a reason to queue in line even if it's not the most direct means to satisfying some end. And yet there is good reason to suppose that we can explain social practices without leaving the aegis of naturalism, so social practices are a potential model for explaining the same features in morality. (Perhaps Mackie would also find queerness here, but his skepticism looks all the more dubious if it forces us to believe that there are no such things as social practices.)

A second reason is that the norms of morality look and function an awful lot like the norms of social convention. They claim to tell us how to treat other people, purport to be unconditional, and don't seem easily reducible to norms of rationality or prudence. Naturally, few would agree that judgments like "you really mustn't leave Cindy to be eaten by that crazed manatee" are completely on par with ones like "you really mustn't wear a hat in the clubhouse." But it is notoriously difficult to find a durable, principled, and clean way of drawing this distinction. Proposals focusing on alleged asymmetries in scope,

application conditions, or the properties invoked by moral and conventional judgments face serious problems (Southwood 2011; Letsas 2014). We needn't conclude from these difficulties that there is no difference between the moral and conventional. After all, children as young as three seem to have some sense of the dichotomy (Turiel 1983). But it does suggest that our explanation of *why* a given moral principle has normative force for an individual may overlap in significant ways with our understanding of the same force in conventional norms. This would both blur the line between the reasons provided by morality and those provided by convention and promise to make studying their entanglements profitable.

A third reason is that it is part of our very idea of morality that it is a social institution. (Or, more guardedly, it must be *realized by* such institutions.) Moral principles, rules, and ideals are internalized by communities and regulate the activity of their members. This happens in overt ways, like the enforcement of laws and formal conventions and the forms of rebuke and punishment that accompany that punishment. And it happens in more subtle ways: in the normalization of certain behaviors, the sifting and structuring of the options that an agent considers in her deliberations, and the advice that one friend gives another. These are not incidental features of morality, but ones we cite when we want to say what morality is. They are part of our *concept* morality if you like. Now, not everyone would agree with this conceptual claim. It was popular in the nineteenth century: different versions of the thought motivated Hegel (1991), Marx and Engels (1998), and Nietzsche (1998). But it was less so in the twentieth century: the analyses in, e.g., Frankena (1966) and Smith (1994) don't mention these features at all. Let's bracket this disagreement. If some version of the conceptual thesis is true, then the social function of morality may produce a substantive constraint on what morality can be, not unlike the constraint that some see motivational internalism placing on our conception of morality: morality must be the kind of thing that can play a particular role in regulating the social order.

A final reason is that we find features of the social world implicated in popular candidates for the basis of moral facts. I'll mention two examples. Emotions, feelings, and allied states are affected by culture, tradition, convention, and other social phenomena in obvious ways. But some social scientists have argued that these effects are more pervasive and systematic than we might realize. In a classic study, Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) argues that certain professions demand the cultivation of distinctive and sincere emotional responses, and, as a result, acculturation into these professions involves the internalization of certain "feeling rules" and with them an enduring reshaping of the sentimental self. This study suggests a hypothesis: that certain crucial facts about such emotions, feelings, and allied attitudes—that we are capable of certain emotional responses at all, that particular stimuli regularly produce specific responses, that our emotional attitudes are associated with certain cognitive and motivational states—can only be explained by understanding their role in enabling and regulating particular social practices. If this is right, then sentiments are social entities. This conclusion has important consequences for those who believe that the sentiments of moral arbiters are part of the ground of moral facts. For when combined with our hypothesis, this view entails that moral facts are partially constituted by whatever social conditions shape our emotions.

A similar point can be made about agency. What agency amounts to would seem to vary from one social milieu to another. When we talk about those capacities possessed by the factory worker and the pre-historical forager that enable them to efficaciously control

their actions, we are probably talking about rather different things. This isn't to say that they don't share a generic kind of agency, but it also seems theoretically defensible to talk about the different *forms* that agency can take when a person internalizes the practices, rules, and schemas of a given social structure. This is the attitude of most sociologists. For them, it is not a question of *whether* agency is realized in different ways within different social contexts, but *how* social structure and agency depend on each other. For example, according to Anthony Giddens's "structuration" theory (1986), social structures and individual agency stand in a relationship of mutual interaction. Structures are enacted by the behavior of agents, while agency is enabled and constrained by the same structures. This has important consequences for constitutivism, the idea that the constitutive requirements or aims of agency correspond to norms that have authority over agents, independent of their particular aims, desires, or ends. For if such norms can be derived in the way constitutivists suggest, and agency is shaped by social structure, then it seems possible that some practices and schemas that make up that structure will turn out to have precisely this normative force.

In this introductory section, I have offered a hodgepodge of reasons for and against a "substantive" connection between mores and morals. On balance, I think we have reason to take the idea seriously. Of course, I've been pretty vague about what I mean by "substantive." In what follows, I try to get more specific by considering what a "substantive" connection might obtain and how it might figure in debates within moral philosophy and metaethics. I will consider three issues. First, I examine the possibility that the social aspects of morality might tell us something important about what morality must be, and thus inform our metaethics. Second, I will make a case for a profitable engagement between metaethics and foundational questions about the social world. Finally, I will summarize how extant metaethical views might accommodate, and indeed gain support from, the social features of morality.

DOES THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF MORALITY CONSTRAIN WHAT MORALITY IS?

The third reason I gave for supposing a more substantive connection between mores and morals was that it is part of our very idea of morality that it plays a certain role in society. This idea has motivated an important tradition in ethical theory. It would be too much to try to survey this entire tradition, so instead I want to pick out two proposals that represent two extremes for how tightly bound morality is to particular social arrangements. The first is a sober and relatively limited account from Kurt Baier; the second is a more fervent line of thought from Alasdair MacIntyre.

Baier (1995) says that to understand what morality is we must first understand the notion of a *moral order*. This he understands on the model of Hart's "legal order": as a social order that has additional structure and institutions. Baier criticizes a "Platonistic" tradition in philosophy that aims to describe an ideal version of such an order. The attraction of these ideals is that they promise univocal, unassailable answers on all moral questions. But this promise proves unfounded when we try to actually use the ideals and find that "bridging the gap" between them and moral questions is just as difficult as the questions themselves. Baier's alternative is to characterize the minimal conditions on a social

order qualifying as a moral order. The key idea here is that a moral order is distinguished from an order of “Pure Custom” by having practices, offices, and institutions devoted to the *critique* and *regulation* of the mores of the society. Whereas a social order of Pure Custom operates by simply accepting mores as *how things are done here*, the moral order includes provisions for challenging and reforming those mores. There is no independent conception of how these challenges and reforms are to go, save that they are motivated by the demands of practical reason. This, too, Baier understands as an essentially social enterprise. For him, practical reason is the dialogical practice of giving, requesting, and accepting reasons. Like any other practice it must be transmitted through training, and it may be realized according to different customs and conventions in different social orders.

So Baier offers a conception of what morality is that interacts with the social in three distinct ways. First, the raw material that morality is supposed to regulate, our mores, are features of our social order. Second, the particular mechanisms of regulation—the offices of moral critic and moral reformer—are socially constructed. Finally, the process that guides this regulation, practical reason, is itself a particular practice that can vary from one social order to another. Without these connections, Baier suggests, a system would not be a *moral* system at all.

Suppose Baier is right about the need for these interfaces. Does anything of interest for metaethics follow? One potential consequence is moral relativism. If substantial variation amongst social orders with respect to any of these points of contact is possible, then “what are sound moral guidelines in one moral order may be unsound in another” (1995: 275). I don’t think a particularly full-blooded form of relativism is in the offing here, however. A comparison between Baier’s view and T. M. Scanlon’s contractualism may be helpful. Scanlon distinguishes between relativism, according to which there are no universal moral principles whatsoever, no matter how general, and a view he calls “parametric universalism” (1998: 329). The latter brooks universal moral principles but maintains that the application of these principles can vary quite substantially depending on context. I think Baier’s view is an instance of parametric universalism that takes features of social structure as essential parameters. Indeed, the final form that Baier thinks that moral regulation tends toward—an ideal of mores that codify what members of a society, when engaged in practical reason, would want from each other—is not so far from Scanlon’s own contractualism. Scanlon says that “an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced, general agreement” (1998: 153). The major difference between Baier’s view and Scanlon’s contractualism concerns the standard of “reasonableness.” Whereas Scanlon thinks it is an objective standard, Baier sees it as determined by the rational practices of a given society. In this way, Baier’s view may be *more* relativistic than Scanlon’s insofar as reasonableness is determined by a community’s norms rather than matters of fact, but I don’t think it entails a particularly radical form of the doctrine.

A second important consequence of Baier’s view is the “teachability” of morality. The moral order is distinguished by its having particular social roles like moral critic and moral reformer. The existence of both these things depends on the training up of new generations in the appropriate rules and roles. Might this requirement rule out some otherwise promising moral theories? We might think it excludes theories on which moral expertise is a significant achievement, like Plato’s, Aristotle’s, or the Stoics’. We cannot

count on training future generations to be sages, so there is no way moral judgment could depend on sage-like insight. But maybe we are assuming an overly simplistic model of moral instruction. There may be minimal rules that members of a society must internalize for that society to be a moral order, but the way to teach these rules may not be to drill children on them. It may instead involve training them in habits and dispositions, the *perfection* of which are the virtues. So I'm not sure that even these theories are excluded by the teachability requirement.

Teachability also involves a kind of publicity: everyone must understand the moral order and its structure well enough to play their part in its enactment. But this is a very weak kind of publicity, and it is hard to see what it would exclude. A moral order in which the true strictures of morality are known only by the illuminati, in which the *hoi polloi* are given dummy rules that will, given their limitations, allow them to best act enact the moral order—even *this* kind of order would seem to satisfy such a weak publicity requirement, since each person knows what they need to carry out their role. There is, however, a stronger notion of publicity. According to this condition, the *reasons* justifying morality for everyone subject to morality must be accessible to everyone and this accessibility must be common knowledge (Rawls 1999: 115). (For similar constraints see Gert [2005] and Gaus [2011].) Rawls proposes this as a condition on our conception of right, and uses it as a premise in his argument for the Original Position. The trouble with this stronger publicity requirement is that even though it is commonly associated with Baieresque accounts of social morality, I don't see any way of justifying it on grounds like those produced by Baier. The justification of social conventions and mores in general, much less common knowledge of this justification, is not required for these conventions to exist and perform the function Baier specifies. Indeed, many of these conventions and mores could be expressions of false consciousness and do their job just fine. There is no reason to think that matters would be any different for the particular social roles and institutions that distinguish a moral order. (What seems to do the crucial work for Rawls is a Kantian conception of public reason not entailed by Baier's picture.)

So much for Baier's social conception of morality and what it can do to constrain moral theory. Let's look at a burlier version of the same idea. Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) has argued that different conceptions of rationality, morality, and, ultimately, justice arise out of different socially-embedded traditions of inquiry. In the lecture "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" (1984), he expounds on the significant consequences of this dependence. MacIntyre contrasts two conceptions of morality. The first is "liberal" morality, which understands the moral point of view as characterized by impartiality, impersonality, and neutrality. MacIntyre doesn't give the second conception a name, but it might as well be called communitarian morality. "On this view it is an essential characteristic of the morality which each of us acquires that it is learned from, in and through the way of life of some particular community." As a result, "the form of the rules of morality as taught and apprehended will be intimately connected with specific institutional arrangements." Morality will be "the highly specific morality of some highly specific social order."

MacIntyre gives a few reasons for adopting a communitarian conception of morality. First, morality requires us to forgo personal benefits, so to be properly motivated we need to appreciate the benefits of the form of life morality makes possible. But in this respect, we will never be motivated by generic social goods; we will rather be motivated by the *particular* social goods that we encounter in *our* community. Moreover, for many people,

the integration into specific social networks is an indispensable part of moral motivation. The second reason is that MacIntyre believes that those who practice a liberal morality will not be loyal to their community in the ways required to defend the community against outside aggressors, and so liberal morality is inimical to the perpetuation of social bonds in a way that communitarian morality is not.

Unlike Baier, who argues for more or less formal conclusions about the nature of morality on the basis of its social function, MacIntyre thinks that communitarian morality entails particular values. In particular, he thinks it entails that a strong form of patriotism is a virtue.

If first of all it is the case that I can only apprehend the rules of morality in the version in which they are incarnated in some specific community; and if secondly it is the case that the justification of morality must be in terms of particular goods enjoyed within the life of particular communities; and if thirdly it is the case that I am characteristically brought into being and maintained as a moral agent only through the particular kinds of moral sustenance afforded by my community, then it is clear that deprived of this community, I am unlikely to flourish as a moral agent. Hence my allegiance to the community and what it requires of me—even to the point of requiring me to die to sustain its life—could not meaningfully be contrasted with or counterposed to what morality required of me.

This appears to be a sort of transcendental argument: one's particular moral community is a condition on moral thought and moral motivation, therefore a commitment to the preservation of that community is entailed by the moral point of view. The argument depends on a problematic premise. MacIntyre discounts the possibility that we might abstract from particulars in our ordinary ethical thought and be motivated by such abstractions—that we can care about respect for persons as such rather than honoring our chieftain. If this *were* possible, then the purported advantages of communitarian morality over liberal morality would disappear. He assumes that moral thought could not possibly be something that transcends the concrete rules and blandishments instituted by a given community. This is a very strong assumption—much stronger than Baier's—and I can see no good reason for accepting it. After all, we are certainly capable of abstracting from particular rocks and stones and thinking about masses and forces in our theoretical endeavors, and we can be motivated towards this abstraction by values like curiosity. Why is the analogous abstraction impossible in the practical realm? Without support for this crucial premise, I don't see a good reason for accepting MacIntyre's conclusion.

In this section, I have looked at two proposals about how the "social function" of morality might constrain the nature of morality. The results have been mixed. Baier's account of "moral orders" seems plausible, but the constraints it entails on what morality must look like are relatively undemanding. On the other hand, MacIntyre's communitarianism does entail substantive conclusions—the virtue of patriotism—but to get there it relies on dubiously strong premises about the ties connecting moral thought and motivation to particular social arrangements. The lesson of these results, I think, is that if we want more interesting ethical and metaethical conclusions to follow from the place that morality occupies in the social world, then we are going to need to go further out on a limb about what precisely that place is.

CAN THE SOCIOLOGY OF MORALITY INFORM OUR PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY OF MORALITY?

To do this, it would be very nice to have an off-the-rack empirical theory about the sociology of morality. We could then rely on that instead of on armchair speculations. Unfortunately, when we look to the social sciences, we find no such thing. Instead, we find very different theories of the sociology of morality, which (I will suggest) arise from different stances on the metaphysics of social facts. Once again, instead of offering a panoramic view, I will focus on two exemplars.

On the one hand, we find Max Weber, who, as a methodological individualist, does not countenance emergent social phenomena. All social regularities must ultimately be reducible to the dispositions of individual actors. What other social theorists are apt to call social structures or institutions or practices, Weber would instead regard as clouds of probability concerning the likely behavior of individuals (1978a). This outlook leads Weber to the view that we cannot talk about morality as an objective structure like Baier's "moral order," but only as constellations of subjective judgments held by individuals. A corollary of this thesis is that there is very little that we can say to critique moral claims on the basis of their place in a social order. We can offer technical criticisms about the efficacy of actions in achieving particular ends, comment on the consistency of an agent's axioms, and calculate the costs of holding those axioms. But since there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as "social morality"—only the moral judgments of individuals and the probabilities of certain events given those judgments—we cannot expect to ground substantive and non-trivial constraints on morality from this putative feature, much less expect what Weber calls

a "realistic" science of morality, in the sense of a demonstration of the factual influences exercised on the ethical convictions which prevail at any given time in a group of human beings by their other conditions of life and in turn by the ethical convictions on the conditions of life, [that] would produce an "ethics" which could ever say anything about what ought to be the case.

(1978b: 80)

For Weber, then, we can see a relatively straight line from his methodological convictions about the nature of the social to his conclusion that there isn't much for sociology to say about morality.

The opposite extreme is occupied by Emile Durkheim, who does countenance emergent social phenomena. Sociology, Durkheim (1997: 37) says, "rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual." Durkheim's model for emergence is the relationship between an organism and its components. The cell contains nothing above and beyond particular chemical elements, and yet the distinctive properties of life cannot be *reduced* to these elements. These properties emerge only in the wholeness of the cell (or the organism). By the same token, even though a society contains nothing above and beyond individuals, what distinguishes a society only emerges at the level of the whole, of the society itself (2014: 10). This analogy positions Durkheim to identify social morality with a particular organismic function. Thus, he writes (1984: 331):

We must say that which is moral is everything that is a source of solidarity, everything that forces man to take account of other people, to regulate his actions by something other than the promptings of his own egoism, and the more numerous and strong these ties are, the more solid is the morality.

This functional identification gives Durkheim both a standard by which to identify morality as we find it in a given society and a standard by which to evaluate such morality. In the introduction to the same work, Durkheim explains, “because what we propose to study is above all reality, it does not follow that we should give up the idea of improving it. ... A state of moral health exists that science alone can competently determine and, as it is nowhere wholly attained, it is already an ideal to strive towards it” (1984: xxvi). A network of moral standards can be evaluated, then, by how far it succeeds in securing a state of social “health” analogous to the health of the cellular organism. Durkheim’s own standard of health and pathology looked to frequency: features of healthy societies recurred in many different societies, while deviations were probably pathologies. This conception leads to a kind of moral conservatism and is contentious, to say the least. But Durkheim’s basic thought of connecting morality to the health of social organism can perhaps be developed in more palatable directions (see, for example, Bosanquet [1898] and Bradley [1927]).

What we see in Weber and Durkheim is how initial assumptions about the subject matter and methodology of sociology—which amount, in part, to metaphysical views about social entities—can lead to radically different conceptions of the place of morality in society. Weber’s skepticism about the very idea of social entities leads him to think that the sociality of morality places very little constraint on what morality might be. Durkheim’s insistence on those same entities and his particular model for understanding their ontology gives him a muscular, if sketchy, standard by which to evaluate particular moral standards.

Obviously, these are just two examples, and, as with most subjects in philosophy, progress from metaphysical foundations to methodological upshots can be stymied at many points. Nonetheless, I think the discussion does demonstrate that there is enough place for reasonable disagreement on philosophical questions about the foundations of social science that we cannot expect the hope that I began this section with to materialize: we are not going to find a simple and uncontroversial answer to the question of *what* the putative “sociality of morality” consists in, which makes it all the harder to understand *how* that sociality might entail more substantive metaethical conclusions than we saw in the previous section.

This is not all bad news, though. What we have seen is that disagreements about the metaphysics of the social world are palpably relevant to metaethics because they are relevant to what kind of social function morality has. And that is an opportunity, for these two philosophical occupations have seldom been pursued together. If we want a metaethics that is adequate to the sociality of morality—whatever that ends up being—and an account of social actors adequate to their status as moral beings, then we must see them as connected in a way that we hitherto have not.

HOW CAN A METAETHICAL THEORY SATISFY THE DEMANDS OF SOCIALITY?

Of course, there are exceptions to the claim I just made, and in this section, I want to provide a too-brief synopsis of some of them. I have so far focused on the question of how

the putative “sociality” of morality might inform us about the nature of morality, and thus offer a point of friction for metaethics. Here, I shall head in the other direction by looking at how different schools in metaethics have tried to exploit the social features of morality. I will mention four such views, corresponding roughly to four possible grounds of moral facts: nature, reason, agency, and sentiment.

Nature. Naturalists are interested in whether moral facts can earn their keep in our scientific worldview by explaining empirical phenomena. It seems unlikely, however, that moral facts will explain mundane laboratory phenomena like the conductance of copper wire, and some philosophers have argued that they are also irrelevant to the explanation of individuals’ moral attitudes. Realists have countered these arguments by latching on to the possibility that moral facts may explain *social phenomena*. A simple example is Nicholas Sturgeon’s (1989) suggestion that the rapid rise of anti-slavery movements in some regions is explained by the slavery practiced in those being *morally worse* in those regions. (Also see the essays in Harman [2000].) Peter Railton (2003) offers a more systematic version of the same idea. Railton begins by giving a naturalistic definition of non-moral goodness based on the “objective interests” of individuals which “are supervenient on natural and social facts.” Railton goes on to propose the possibility of moral principles grounded in what he calls “social rationality”—the rationality of a perspective neutral between all members of a society. Railton proposes that, just as explanations of individuals’ behavior will sometimes mention the rationality or irrationality of that individual, our explanations of a society will naturally advert to that society’s distance from the ideal of social rationality. For example:

Just as an individual who significantly discounts some of his interests will be liable to certain sorts of dissatisfaction, so will a social arrangement—for example, a form of production, a social or political hierarchy, and so forth—that departs from social rationality by significantly discounting the interests of a particular group have a potential for dissatisfaction and unrest.

One cannot help but see the specter of Durkheim in this proposal. For both Railton and Durkheim, moral facts gain explanatory significance through their connection to an assessment of the health, stability, or well-functioning of a social entity. Of course, Railton shows that we need not use dubious phrases like “the health of the social organism” in describing this entity, but it nonetheless seems that a notion of “social rationality” will be plausible precisely insofar as it tracks some salutary quality. As a result, Railton’s style of naturalism will have debts similar to Durkheim’s: we will need to be willing to invest the integrity or health of social entities with moral significance.

Reasoning. Motivational internalists maintain that for someone to have a reason to do something, it must be possible to motivate them to do it through a process of reasoning. But it is hard to see how any kind of reasoning could bring some knaves to moral conclusions, and so this thesis imperils the common supposition that everyone has a reason to do what is morally required. Just how imperiled this thesis is, however, depends on what kind of process reasoning is. It is often supposed that reasoning is a solitary endeavor: churning through premises or intuiting some rational reality all alone. If this is right, then the problem of the knave is acute. The products of reasoning will involve other people only if the inputs do; the act of reasoning itself has no interpersonal character.

But recently, some have argued that this is a stilted view of reasoning, and the activity is better understood as a shared activity: reasoning is a process of inviting others into our “space of reasons”—of justifying ourselves to them, making ourselves intelligible to them and they to us, planning with them, advising them (Graham 2002; Laden 2012; Manne 2013; Manne 2015). If one of these claims is correct, then motivational internalism and categorical moral reasons may live in harmony, despite the knave. Such reasons may be assured not by the inputs of reasoning but by the structure of the activity itself. For example, if practical reasoning necessarily involves certain forms of cooperative deliberation, then the norms of this deliberation may push us towards the adoption of moral systems structured by analogous formal principles (Habermas 1990, 1996). Alternatively, if reasoning necessarily involves *acting together* with another person in a substantial sense, then there is reason to think that it also encompasses what Margaret Gilbert (2014) calls “joint commitment” and thereby engenders significant obligations all by itself—maybe even a Kantian duty to respect our co-reasoner as an end in herself (Korsgaard 2009: 177ff).

Agency. I have already mentioned how constitutivism—the claim that the requirements of agency are categorical norms—may interact with the thesis that agency is socially situated. Some versions of the thesis are particularly well-positioned to capture this fact. J. David Velleman (2009) says that the constitutive aim of action is self-understanding. An action is correct just insofar as it renders the actor intelligible to himself in light of his antecedent commitments and aims. This criterion is individualistic in the sense that it concerns the ability of the actor to understand himself, but Velleman argues that it is social in practice. The best way for neighbors to secure their respective self-intelligibility, Velleman says, is to enter into patterns of interaction that render them mutually intelligible. The most effective patterns, Velleman says, are ones that push us in the direction of our “moral way of life.” For example, this aim “favors developing intrapersonally coherent and interpersonally shared values.” For agents who are interacting, it “requires them to join in an improvisational collaboration, which is facilitated by adherence to socially shared scenarios.” Moreover, these collaborations are “generally facilitated by mutual understandings and hindered by deception” and “recognizing one another as rational agents should inspire a complex interpersonal regard.” And finally, “our participation in joint improvisation fosters the development of a discrete mental process that functions in various ways ordinarily associated with conscience.” These arguments suggest “a rough configuration that our dealings together would acquire from practical reasoning in the very long run: shared values and scenarios, discouraging private exceptions, minimizing occasions for deception, shaped by acknowledged common interest in comprehensibility, consequently free of unnecessary distinctions amongst persons, and supported by a psychological process recognizable as the conscience.” More recently, Velleman (2013) has backed away from the suggestion that there is a substantive enough conception of agency *as such* to guarantee that this picture will see everyone nudged in the direction of the same morality. Instead, he thinks that the interpersonal demands of agency can be met in different ways by different societies, and that this possibility furnishes a foundation for moral relativism.

I have defended a similar but more radical version of the same proposal according to which intelligibility to other agents is not merely instrumentally useful to achieving the aim of action, but constitutive of agency itself (Walden 2012). The idea is that action must

be subsumed by a distinctive class of natural laws—the laws of agency—but whether the principle we act on is such a law (rather than, say, a law that applies to all animals) depends on it being appropriately recognized by other actors. This makes such recognition a condition on our meeting the constitutive requirements of action. If this suggestion is correct, then we are committed to an ideal very close to what Kant calls the Realm of Ends just by dint of the nature of action.

Sentiment. I also already suggested how work on the sociology of emotion may intersect with the sentimentalist views of moral judgment. The potential for sentiments to be shaped by social processes has actually been a cornerstone of sentimentalist views since they first crawled out of the Firth of Forth in the eighteenth century. At the center of Adam Smith's (1976) view, for example, is a conception of sympathy whereby we aim to share the feelings of others as closely as possible. This concordance is not automatically assured, however, and so it leads us into an ongoing negotiation between persons "principally concerned" with a given event and those trying to sympathize with them. In the typical case, the former try to restrain the vigor of their reactions while the latter try to intensify theirs. When successful, the two meet in the middle. It is this process of mutual sentimental attunement that grounds the virtues. The "awful" virtues of self-restraint are those that allow us to rein in our sentimental reactions, and the "amiable" virtues of compassion allow us to more fully feel the joys and pains of others. For Smith, to sympathize with someone's feelings is to approve of them, and for this reason *moral* evaluation corresponds to the sympathy that would be experienced in an idealized version of this process of mutual attunement. To sympathize as we suppose a fully informed, impartial spectator would sympathize is to bestow moral approval on an individual's feelings, and moral norms are expressions of the feelings of an impartial spectator. Ultimately, then, for Smith, morality is an idealization of the process whereby our sentiments are successfully socialized.

More recent work premised on the idea that moral judgment is based on sentiment sees a more limited role for social induction. According to Jonathan Haidt's (2001) "social intuitionism" model, for example, the shaping of our sentiments in reaction to our neighbors is something that only happens in youth, and even this is restricted to the "maturation and cultural shaping of endogenous intuitions." In adulthood, "people can acquire explicit propositional knowledge about right and wrong ... but it is primarily through participation in custom complexes." At this stage, sociality is less a means of shaping moral sentiments and more an impetus for lawyerly defenses of one's rigid reactions. This restriction ends up being important. For if what moral judgment ultimately tracks are cultural articulations of endogenous intuitions and the values we soak up from our eleven-year-old peer group, then moral judgment's subject matter is hardly something that we should be happy calling *morality*. Smith's sentimentalism is different: it can be a moral theory precisely *because* it has a robust social mechanism for the negotiation of sentiments that encodes structural features of morality: concern, equity, and impartiality.

In this section, I have suggested how different metaethical schools have attempted not only to accommodate the social dimensions of morality, but to exploit them in defense of their preferred theory. What I would like to note in closing is that there is no obvious reason that all these stories about the sociality of morality—or similar ones—cannot be true at the same time. It can be the case that at least some moral norms are categorical because of their connection to socially contingent forms of agency, that these forms of

agency reflect and are reflected in the particular forms that reasoning takes in a social milieu, that this reasoning is reinforced by affective systems that are similarly structured, and that this complex of agency, reason, and affect is a feature of the social “organism” that can be evaluated as well- or ill-functioning in a fashion that is explanatorily consequential. Saying all this would mean giving up on claims of explanatory priority, of course, and the details may be difficult to spell out, but our most satisfying account of the interaction between morality and the social world may very well be one that posits more than one point of contact.

RELATED TOPICS

Chapter 2, “Naturalistic Realism in Metaethics;” Chapter 19, “Ethical Judgment and Motivation;” Chapter 20, “Reasons Internalism;” Chapter 22, “Mind-Dependence and Moral Realism;” Chapter 23, “Constitutivism;” Chapter 35, “Ethics and Morality.”

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