

Afterword: Whither Moral Philosophy?

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I

Most of the essays collected here are essays *in metaethics* seeking in exacting and interesting ways to resolve problems raised by the familiar options in metaethics we outlined in our Introduction. Richard Brandt, for example, forcefully argues, going much against the at least modestly holistic grain of our time, for a foundationalism (non-cognitivist though it be) which would be foundational in both metaethics and normative ethics. R.M. Hare makes a brief but systematic defense, which is both spirited and clear, of his prescriptivism (a species of what we, following tradition, have called 'noncognitivism,' but which he argues should instead be called 'nondescriptivism'). His arguments here for his position – call it nondescriptivism or noncognitivism – are directed forcefully against ethical naturalism (descriptivism) and specifically against the naturalism of Philippa Foot. Nicholas Sturgeon and David Copp contribute elaborate and rigorously argued defenses of ethical naturalism, or, as they might prefer to call it, 'moral realism.'¹ Copp argues that we can have all the advantages of

1 As David O. Brink points out, ethical naturalism and moral realism should not be taken to be identical. Moral realism is, he has it, a metaethical view committed "to the objectivity of ethics." Moral realists believe that there are "moral facts and moral properties whose existence and nature are independent of people's beliefs and attitudes about what is right and wrong." While moral realism is

ethical naturalism's externalism while still retaining, in what is nonetheless a strictly externalist framework, the insights of internalism. Sturgeon indirectly defends ethical naturalism through a critique of both J.L. Mackie's 'error theory' and Simon Blackburn's revisions of it, arguing that, besides its internal difficulties, error theory revised or unrevised fits badly with both Mackie's handling of the problem of evil and that of rational revisions of such a treatment, where evil is taken as a reality to be squared with God's ways to human beings. Allen Wood, for whom Mackie is again an object of critique, as he is as well in Jean Hampton's contribution, argues that a really thoroughgoing and powerful error theory would provide a metaethical critique of the very institution of morality and its practices. Mackie himself pulls back from the deep iconoclasm of such a critique insisting instead that he is providing a *second-order* critique of objectivism and objectivizing ontologies of value – the familiar claims of moral and religious intuitionists and ethical naturalists – while treating morality itself and its various *first-order* practices as something that is generally intact, though admitting of some internal tinkering by good normative ethicists. But no claim is in sight that *morality as such* stands massively in error. His moral skepticism, in short, is not a skepticism about morality itself, or holus bolus, concerning its practices and *first-order* moral beliefs, but about *philosophical* accounts of morality, including the ill articulated accounts of common sense. It is a *second-order* matter directed against what Mackie would call 'objectivist ontologies' and what we would call 'objectivist theories' (intuitionism and moral realism) in metaethics. Wood, like Gilbert Harman, regards this as a tepid kind of moral skepticism hardly deserving the iconoclastic tag – 'moral nihilism' – with which Sturgeon tags it. Wood argues that to see the articulation of a non-tepid form of error theory, we should turn instead to Marx and Nietzsche, most particularly to Nietzsche. In their writings we will find a profound theoretical challenge to our very morality and

compatible with objectivist forms of ethical naturalism (forms that have the above views about moral facts and moral values), it can, and has, taken intuitionist forms as well, as it did with G.E. Moore, W.D. Ross and A.C. Ewing. However, the typically held forms of *present day* moral realism are objectivist forms of ethical naturalism (Brink 1995, 511-12).

moral practices and ways of being: the genuine *first-order* stuff that constitutes our moral lives.

Wood seeks to isolate within Marx's and Nietzsche's writings a rational kernel of at least a putatively sound critique of morality that, he argues, our complacent Anglo-American and Scandinavian metaethical accounts seem at least not to even recognize exists. Mackie spoke in an early essay, "The Refutation of Morals," of the error of *believing in morals* (Mackie 1946, 77-90). What his own critique comes to, as distinct from Nietzsche's and Marx's more radical critiques, is that of a claimed error in *objectivist moral theory*. The challenge of Marx and Nietzsche, Wood has it, is to *morality itself*: to the very idea that morality is something to which a rational and clear-sighted person must be, or even should be, committed. This is a far more radical critique than Mackie's, though the dangling, tell-tale little words 'must' and 'should' leave us, of course, with questions here. Such a radical critique, put just like that, may be incoherent. The interesting question is whether it can be coherently demythologized.

We will now shift gears. What is largely ignored in this volume, Francis Sparshott's contribution apart, is any discussion of the dissatisfaction with metaethics that has arisen since the 1970s. Many moral philosophers, even those who do systematic ethical theory, who, for the most part, just stick self-consciously to doing substantive ethics, do not characterize even a part of their work in these terms. They just do not utilize the metaethics/normative ethics distinction. John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, Kurt Baier, Onora O'Neill, Thomas Nagel, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha C. Nussbaum stand out as prominent examples. Moreover, none of them are skeptical about the philosophical enterprise itself and in this way are anti-theorists (anti-theory *theorists*, if you will), or even just anti-theorists in ethics or even philosophers not committed to doing systematic ethical theory (Williams 1985 and Nielsen 1989). Rather they just do not make the distinction at all, let alone take the doing of metaethics as the *principia* of moral philosophy, though it might in turn be countered (perhaps with some force) that they in effect make metaethical arguments and, in effect, though not in name, adopt metaethical positions.

The revolt, particularly against Golden Age metaethics (roughly 1930-60), goes even deeper. Perceptive philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Annette C. Baier, Martha C. Nussbaum, Cora Diamond and

Hilary Putnam have argued that the dichotomy metaethics/normative ethics, if not forcefully jettisoned, should at least be benignly neglected. It isn't that philosophers should stop doing metaethics and turn to doing normative ethics instead, but that philosophers should have no truck and trade with either. We should no more do philosophy, after the fashion of Henry Sidgwick, Hastings Rashdall or W.D. Ross than we should do it after the fashion of Axel Hägerström, A.J. Ayer or Charles Stevenson. Normative ethics and metaethics take in each other's dirty linen. We should break with those traditions and conceive of moral philosophy quite differently, more in line with, as, say, for Martha Nussbaum, a certain understanding of how a naturalized Aristotle (liberated from the dead weight of the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition) proceeded or, as for Annette Baier, with how Hume – building on Aristotle, but more thoroughly eschewing rationalistic elements – proceeded (Nussbaum 1990; Baier 1985, 207-91). If we do either of these things, the claim goes, we will get a moral philosophy that looks very different from either metaethics (even the new metaethics) or normative ethics. Moreover, it will not only look very different, it will yield, it is said, a much better understanding of what is involved in the moral life of our attempts to ascertain how we should live and what is the good for human beings and indeed what the correct answers to these questions are. And, after all, this is what we most want out of moral philosophy. It is, that is, what we should most want to come to know in reflecting about morality. Said just like that, the proffered alternative is cryptic and has something in it of a cluster of dark sayings, engendering, understandably, skepticism. We will, as we set it out, in contrast with metaethics and normative ethics, in Sections III and IV, make what is involved clear.

However, things do not end here with metaethics and its discontents. There are also questions about scope. Martha Nussbaum, for example, wants to do systematic ethical theory in a naturalized Aristotelian way and where philosophy and literature get integrally linked. Annette Baier, with her Humean model, is less clearly committed to systematizing and pragmatist philosophers still less. Bernard Williams and Susan Wolf are also philosophers who remain wary of grand scale ethical theorizing. And Richard Rorty and Kai Nielsen, in a thoroughly pragmatist manner, reconceptualizing philosophers into being critical intellectuals, take it as a task of such philosophers to try to see a little

better, and in a non-hedgehogish way, how things hang together (Rorty 1982 and Nielsen 1991). But in doing so, they see moral critique (critique of ideologies, moral practices, conceptions of life) as the central thing and they set aside both metaethical theory and systematic ethical theory, though they are not above making in a Wittgensteinian manner what in effect are metaethical remarks when that would be useful in dispelling some moral-cum-conceptual confusion. This is often called 'anti-theory theory' in ethics. But in a way this is a misleading description, as if a Deweyan concentration, which theirs resembles, *not* on the problems of philosophy, but on the problems of life was anti-theoretical or anti-intellectual Ludditism raising its ugly head. But we will let the phrase 'anti-theory theory' stand for it does suggest an important contrast with much else that is done in moral philosophy.

What these various things add up to is to the fact that the challenges to metaethics, old and new, and its model(s) for proceeding in investigations concerning ethics, are both deep and varied. Moreover, much of it comes from inside analytical philosophy itself and not from phenomenologists, existentialists, Heideggerians, deconstructionists, the Thomistic tradition, or anything of the kind. Cora Diamond, at the end of her wonderfully insightful "Having Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is," puts our situation well when she remarks that the attempt by some philosophers (she has in mind Nussbaum but it would apply widely)

to take as a starting point a widely agreed and inclusive notion of the aim of moral philosophy is pretty much doomed. No one knows what the subject is; most widely agreed accounts of it depend on suppositions that are not obvious and that reflect particular evaluations and views of the world, of human nature, and of what it is to speak, think, write or read about the world. The more inclusive an account is, the more likely it will include what many philosophers would not dream of counting as part of their subject (Diamond 1991, 380).

We will return to these issues in Sections III and IV. We will there examine the conceptions of moral philosophy articulated by Annette Baier and Martha Nussbaum in contrast both with avowedly metaethical conceptions and traditional normative ethical theories. In doing that we will try to ferret out something of what is most deeply at issue and try to see if we can get a sense of how we should proceed when we try to do moral philosophy. Theories like those of Annette

Baier and Martha Nussbaum seem at least, in contrast with metaethical theories (even the new metaethics), more anchored in life. *Vis-à-vis* metaethics we shall be asking Francis Sparshott's question, "What is the function of such an ethic in the course of life?"

II

Before we turn to that, we want to examine a cluster of issues arising from two of the essays we have collected here: Peter Railton's "Made in the Shade: Moral Compatibilism and the Aims of Moral Theory" and Jean Hampton's "Naturalism and Moral Reasons." Railton's essay is wide ranging and insightful, articulating a naturalistic account of both substantive naturalism (ethical naturalism and, as well, cosmological or worldview naturalism) and methodological naturalism.² He shows how

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- 2 Methodological naturalism is a conception we did not deploy in our Introduction when we sorted out some types of naturalism. However, both Hampton and Railton use it. Methodological naturalism is, as Hampton puts it, "the view that philosophy, and indeed, any other intellectual discipline must pursue knowledge via empirical methods exemplified by the sciences and not by a priori or non-empirical methods." Peter Railton characterizes it, as involving "a commitment to employing the norms and methods of inquiry characteristic of the developed empirical sciences." Railton's characterization is a weaker one, and, just for that reason, may be preferable, for it leaves a less controversial place for mathematical reasoning, which is surely, in many of its deployments, a part of scientific reasoning. As Hampton characterizes methodological naturalism, a methodological naturalist would have to rule out "logic and mathematics," and the characteristic modes of reasoning that go with them, unless they can be shown to be "empirical enterprises after all." But that, to state it conservatively, is a very problematic claim. The Railton conception of methodological naturalism seems at least more plausible for, *if* our understanding of mathematical and logical reasoning, as it forms a part of science, requires an understanding of them as a priori forms of reasoning, we can still accommodate them, so construed, as "methods of inquiry characteristic of the developed empirical sciences." This, though less 'metaphysically satisfying,' gives far fewer hostages to fortune. It should further be noted that one can be a cosmological naturalist and an ethical naturalist without being a methodological naturalist and vice versa. Moreover, noncognitivists can without any strain at all be methodological naturalists. A

they interrelate, argues that both cosmological and methodological naturalism comport well with factualism (descriptivism) and argues that this combination yields the best funding conception of ethics available to us and that it provides the best grounding and rationale for moral critique and for constructing a critical normative ethic. Railton, in a fair-minded way, as well as with subtlety and rigor, articulates a comprehensive project. His account arguably does much to move things along in moral philosophy. In a similarly subtle, rigorous and programmatically articulated essay, Jean Hampton argues that we do not have a clear conception of what an adequate naturalism would look like. The conceptions in hand, she argues, are rather plainly inadequate and particularly so for the purposes of ethical and social theory. Ethical naturalism, noncognitivism and error theory alike are all methodologically and cosmologically naturalist, but we have, she claims, no even nearly adequate understanding of what naturalism is. We have, she argues, no notion of 'natural' that has been precisely defined and we have "no commonly accepted statement of what makes a theory scientifically acceptable or unacceptable." Yet Hampton, argues for – or at least seems to argue for – a form of ethical naturalism that is, as she puts it, a form of 'moral objectivism' and a 'moral realism.' (She clearly argues for a moral objectivism and moral realism. It is less clear that she is an ethical naturalist. See our third note.) She powerfully argues that a "naturalism hostile to morality" – an error theory, a moral nihilism, and noncognitivist theories in their extreme forms – does not make out its case and it operates with an inadequately specified conception of naturalism: the so-called scientific worldview with which our thinking about morality must, such naturalists have it, be in accordance.

She, however, makes too much out of not being able to get *conclusive* or *decisive* arguments here. We have very good reasons to believe

methodological naturalist need be neither a cosmological nor an ethical naturalist, though cosmological naturalism and methodological naturalism *usually* go together. They are, as the compatibilist Railton might put it, nicely compatible. They fit together, though without there being any mutual entailments. The quotations from Hampton and Railton are from this volume.

we will never get that for any interesting issue in philosophy. An account cannot reasonably be defeated, unless it itself foolishly claims conclusiveness, by showing it is not conclusively established. All we are going to get – indeed the very best we can get – are plausible arguments that are always less than conclusive. The aim should be not conclusiveness or decisiveness but greater plausibility (Smart 1966, 377-90). But that notwithstanding, her criticisms of J.L. Mackie, Gilbert Harman and Bernard Williams – in effect, good plausibility arguments on her part – are very much to the point. Moral skepticism has not made out its case for opting for a form of naturalism which claims that moral beliefs are not vindicable because they do not, or, more strongly still, cannot, pass scientific muster and as a result stand in conflict with a properly naturalistic scientific worldview. These bold iconoclastic claims, she argues, have not been made out. Neither do we have in hand, she argues, an account which has clearly and usefully specified what naturalism is, nor has it been clearly specified what a 'scientific worldview' is or what is 'scientifically acceptable and unacceptable.' These notions have not been articulated in sufficiently clear and untendentious ways so as to clear the extant views on these matters of dogmatism, arbitrariness and vagueness. Neither the moral skeptic nor anyone else has done anything to show that the funding theories of an objectivist naturalism or moral realism are scientifically problematic.

She and Railton *appear* at least to be allies in the articulation and defense of an objectivist naturalistic project. Yet Hampton's probing critique at least seems, like a dog biting his tail, to cut back on that very naturalistic project. It appears, after all, if Hampton's arguments are sound, that no one has a sufficiently clear conception of naturalism such that it can provide the kind of funding theory that she and Railton, along with many others, want.³ It is not only error-theorist, projectivist,

3 That Hampton is arguing for an objectivist form of ethical naturalism seems reasonably evident in her essay and that is how we have read her. But some remarks in her final footnote cast some doubt on that reading. Moral objectivism and moral realism are staunchly affirmed. But, bucking trends, she *may*, surprisingly enough, be returning (some would say reverting) to some form of the older intuitionist (nonnaturalist cognitivist) form of moral realism. She remarks in that footnote that in her forthcoming *A Theory of Reasons* she will

and subjectivist-naturalist accounts that come acropper, but – or so it seems at least – objectivist-naturalist accounts, too. If things are as bad for naturalism, as she believes, being a naturalist of any kind comes to just taking a dogmatic stance and an unclear one to boot. It is, if Hampton's account is on the mark, to do little more than to uncritically accept the folklore of our *scientific* culture. It seems reasonably clear that Hampton does not want that result. She wants to be a good moral objectivist-naturalist: a good, soundly thinking, robust moral realist. (But again, see our note 3.) Still, such difficulties may be an unintended and untoward consequence of her own perceptive critical account.

We shall argue that naturalism is not nearly as badly off as she believes, and that a sound conception of a non-scientistic naturalism is available to us, that, tied with Railton's generalized compatibilism, makes naturalism a very attractive conception on which to fund morality, if we are to be in the funding business at all. Assuming for the nonce we are in that business, we should attempt, in Railton's words, to give "a fairly general, coherent account of what sort of thing morality is, what it presupposes or entails, how it stands in relation to the rest of human activity and inquiry, and what it would need to be in good order." More than that, a naturalistic account such as his own or Richard Miller's goes some way toward showing that some of our moral beliefs actually are in good order by showing that we have some empirically confirmed moral knowledge: knowledge of, among other things, natural properties on which moral properties asymmetrically *supervene*. In that very broad and non-scientistic sense, we can speak, as John Dewey did, of having a scientific ethic (Dewey 1946, 211-49. This article was actually written in 1903, the same year as *Principia Ethica*.).

argue, as a *moral objectivist*, that "objectivist moral theories contain occult, nonnatural elements, but go on to show that the same occult, nonnatural elements occur and *must* occur in scientific theories" (italics ours). This sounds like, and perhaps is, a complete, root-and-branch, rejection of naturalism. A defense of the necessity of appealing in both science and morality to occult elements, as no doubt Hampton recognizes, is to defend a very paradoxical claim that would take very powerful arguments to make even plausible. But no such strong claims are made in her essay in this volume, though her arguments against some forms of naturalism may prefigure them.

A plausible form of substantive naturalism will not be scientific (Bernstein 1995, 57-76 and Nielsen 1996). It will not claim that all our knowledge is scientific knowledge or derivable from scientific knowledge. It will only claim that what is known must not be incompatible with what is, or at least can be, known by the best scientific theories and thus, that is, be compatible with a naturalistic framework. But Hampton well sees that there is a problem with speaking of 'a naturalistic framework' and with the 'that is,' for we do not know very exactly what naturalism is and the 'that is' begs the question. We have no precisely defined notion of 'natural' or of 'natural properties' or 'natural characteristics' or 'natural facts.' We will run into difficulties, if we try to go operational and use what she calls (using scare quotes) 'the science-based definition' in effect making "current theories of science the ultimate arbiters of what counts as natural...." If we so proceed, we "do not define science in terms of the natural, but the natural in terms of science. Naturalism is just what current science is and what is compatible with current science. The empirical world contains just what a true complete physical science would say it contains." Why, Hampton queries, should we give to physics or anything else the authority to define or be the arbiter of what is real? Without a prior conception of what is real why should we make physics or biology such an arbiter? As she puts it:

The metaphysical authority of physics is puzzling if the natural is defined in terms of it rather than vice versa. If it is true that the world is made up of all and only the sorts of entities that physics studies, then what physics tells us about the world should be authoritative for our beliefs. But if we don't have any way for knowing, or even characterizing, what is real independent of any particular theory, then for any of our favorite theories (take your pick) we have no particular reason to believe that (only) this theory depicts the real or the natural.

We have, she stresses, no justification for believing that all that exists or is real is what science at any given time posits. As Hampton puts it, that "ontological faith is undefended, and difficult to know how to defend." It is one thing to claim that we have good reason to believe that the statements of physicists or biologists in their particular domains are the most reliable claims in those domains that we can have during the period when they are being made. It is another thing again to say that what they say is determinative of the real. If you want to know what is the most reasonable thing to believe at a given time

about DNA or AIDS, consult the relevant scientists. It is reasonable there to accept their authority. Over such matters should we, by contrast, each make our own investigations and be our own authorities? That is plainly absurd. But it does not follow that, if we have no science about what is humorous or what is right, there can be no sound truth claims about humorousness or rightness.

Some naturalists of a very *scientific* sort say that it is physics, and physics alone, which tells us what the ultimate constituents of the world are. However, even if we try to take this at face value, the notion of these particles being natural is itself bizarre. But, more importantly, as Quine (a charter member *scientific* naturalist) argues, and here Hampton is one with him, all this talk of the *ultimate* components of the universe is foolishness at best. Such a conception could not be a proper part of science. *Such* ontological speculation is at best idle. (Perhaps *all* ontological speculation is idle, but that is another matter.)

Suppose, instead, we attempt a substantive definition of 'natural.' 'Natural,' so conceived, denotes the kind of object or property which is the opposite of nonnatural. So conceived, what is natural is, as Hampton puts it, "conceptually prior to our understanding of science, and (at least in part) determinative of the subject matter of science." But that distinction (putative distinction) is not very helpful for we do not understand the supposedly contrastive term 'nonnatural.' As discussion of G.E. Moore's gesturing at a use brought out, we do not know what a nonnatural property is or, in the relevant sense, what a 'nonnatural object' is. We are caught with something like a *via negativa* here; we do not know, with that mystery term 'nonnatural,' what the relevant contrast with 'natural' is. 'natural object' and even 'natural property' can seem pleonastic. Of course, 'natural' answers to a number of reasonably (in many contexts) unproblematic distinctions: natural/artificial, natural/conventional, natural/contrived, natural/social, or perhaps even, as in old-fashioned natural moral law discussions, natural/unnatural. But, for what is at issue in the naturalism discussion, none of the above contrasts and the distinctions that go with them are relevant. For naturalism, an artificial object is just as natural as a natural object. For what we are trying to capture with the conception of naturalism both rocks and cars are natural objects. But then it starts to look like 'natural object' really is pleonastic. What we are trying to capture in speaking of naturalism, is the distinction (putative distinction) between natural/

supernatural where 'supernatural' refers to theism, deism, idealism and the like. A naturalist is someone who rejects such beliefs. She *may* even reject the conceptions that go with them, regarding them as somehow incoherent. Still, it is not clear how to be more complete about 'the like' and 'such' here. We seem just to have some examples.

It would, we believe, be helpful in trying to make sense of 'naturalism' to turn away from thinking of physics and the so-called basic stuff or basic structure of the universe and to think instead of Darwin and biology and of human beings in Darwinian terms. We should, as Dewey did, and after him as Daniel Dennett, Richard Rorty, and Donald Davidson do, look at human beings as complicated language-using animals whose minds should be thought of as a very large network of intentional states: states attributed to an organism with a behavior that is very complex. These intentional states are elements in a causal interaction of this organism with its environment. We are animals – albeit intelligent and reflective animals – that in certain respects are like and in certain respects different from the other animals. We differ, as Hume stressed, in being language-using animals, capable of reflection and of forming and acting on moral conceptions. All of this is shown in how our behavior is in certain respects distinctive from that of the other animals and how this behavior, instantiating these concepts, is shown likewise to be useful for animals like ourselves in coping with our environment. In such a way we are complicated objects (macro-objects) from the point of view of physics. To so view human beings is to be the kind of non-reductive physicalist that Dennett, Rorty and Davidson are (Rorty 1991, 113-25). And it is the kind of naturalist that Dewey was, as he Darwinized Hegelian conceptions, and that David Hume was still earlier. It is a thoroughly secularist way of viewing things eschewing *recherché* objects and transcendental conceptions. While Kant postulated a *noumenal* realm – something that is plainly nonnaturalistic – to square free agency with conceptions of science (something that many present-day Kantians find difficult to swallow), contemporary naturalists, as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume did before them, will adopt some form of compatibilism. And unlike nonnaturalists such as Kant, Thomas Reid, or Richard Price, they will take acting from duty to be realizable by, and explainable of, as Peter Railton put it, "a being who is (among other things) a causal being situated in a causal world."

The distinction between naturalism and nonnaturalism, between natural objects, properties and conceptions and nonnatural ones, comes out in the above contrasts. Naturalism takes human beings to be complicated animals (and thus objects) in causal interaction with other physical objects, and it will not postulate entities acceptable to, and in some instances required by, nonnaturalism, to wit, *noumenal* beings, God, gods, bodiless minds, minds as some private physically indescribable something mysteriously interacting with bodies or as remaining somehow distinct from but still parallel to bodies. So, after all, we do get, where the human animal and other animals are concerned, a natural/nonnatural contrast. Moreover, as can be seen from the above, it is a contrast which is nonvacuous, at least if we do not push too hard about the coherency of the nonnatural notions, e.g., *noumena*, God, spirits and the like. It is not the case (*pace* Hampton) that we cannot specify what the nonnatural is as distinct from the natural. And, though we appealed to Darwinian notions rather vaguely and generally, the specification of natural here is conceptually prior to our scientific understanding. Hume, whom Darwin read, put it, much as we have put it, commonsensically, but in a way which comports well with Darwinianism.

In speaking of a substantive conception of what is natural, Hampton rightly observes,

in the seventeenth century naturalists called themselves 'materialists,' insofar as they thought of the world as made up of 'solid, inert, impenetrable and conserved' matter that interacts deterministically and through contact.

Unfortunately for naturalists, she remarks, physics itself came to undermine in our century this "popular and seemingly sensible conception of the natural...." Twentieth-century physics "posited entities, and interactions between these entities, that do not fit the materialist characterization of the real." But we do not need to consider microphysics when we are talking about macro-particles (middle-sized objects like us). Whatever an ant, toad, or a human being 'ultimately' is made up of, they are observationally identifiable and, their movements are quite deterministically predictable. Something roughly like Newtonian mechanics works there. And a biologically and socially oriented naturalism centrally concerned with human and other animal behavior is concerned with middle-sized objects, and there is no

good reason to think that materialism and physicalism of a non-reductive sort are not quite in place here. Moreover, it is the complex behavior of just such objects – including their social behavior – in its interaction with their environment that is relevant to morals, and this does not require the specification of anything that cannot be specified in naturalistic terms. ‘Freedom (‘counter-causal freedom’) among the electrons,’ if indeed there is any, is quite irrelevant.

It may be responded that this is not a conception of a *complete* naturalism. A naturalism that is complete would be a specification of the entire world, showing what the world – all of it – is made up of, its micro-particles as well as its macroparticles. The above Deweyan-Dennettian-Darwinian account does not show how everything in the universe, including microentities, can be specified in naturalistic (physicalistic) terms.

Why, it can be replied, should we find it important for our naturalism to be complete, particularly when the very idea of a complete specification of the entire world is not a very lucid idea? What is important is to be able to talk of human beings and the environment in which they interact in naturalistic terms. And that we have done. Moreover, talk about the *nature* of microparticles is a slippery business. And if we think that is the way to get at ‘ultimate reality,’ then we should, in turn, respond to this with Quine’s ridicule, shared by Hampton, concerning talk of the ultimate constituents of the universe. To this we should add here, following J.L. Austin, how it is nonsense to speak, as Hampton does, of ‘the materialist characterization of *the real*’ or of ‘the idealist characterization of *the real*’ or ‘the theistic characterization of *the real*.’ No sense has been given to ‘the real’ here, and it is unclear that any non-tendentious sense can be given to it. It is as bad as talk of being or being as such or of the ground of being. We have something sensible when we talk of ‘real beer’ as distinct from ‘beer without alcohol,’ or ‘real butter’ as distinct from margarine, or ‘real philosophy’ as distinct from the philosophy of sport, or a ‘real hike’ as distinct from a stroll. *Persuasive* definitions of ‘real’ are, of course, at work here, but still we do have a genuine contrast and, not infrequently, a contrast with a point, a contrast that is clearly not arbitrary. Stevenson, who, along with I.A. Richards, showed us so deftly how *persuasive* definitions work, was also concerned to stress that they were not *all* arbitrary and without a reasonable point. But when we just, *sans contexte*, speak of an investi-

gation of, or reflection on, *the real*, there is no contrast with the unreal. What is the difference between a materialist characterization of the real and a materialist characterization of the unreal, unless the characterization we have in mind is to speak of trees, seas, lemurs and human beings in contrast with gods, *noumena*, pure spirits, bodiless intellects, entelechies, the *élan vital* and the like? (Note again the trouble with completing 'the like.')

But the latter cluster of terms in the comparison are of doubtful coherence. It is not at all like comparing 'real cream' and 'nondairy creamer.' But, if this is so, we are back with the familiar Deweyan-Dennettian-Darwinian contrast which was not thought to be a general-enough specification of 'natural' to identify it with the real. But the point is that there is no sensible talk of 'the real' except in a *determinate context* (Hägerström 1964, 41-74 and 313). But the kind of naturalism relevant to a social understanding of *our* world is much more contextualist than such a vast speculative endeavor as a putative investigation of the real *sans phrase* (Nielsen 1996). There is no context-free identification or discovery of 'the real,' or defining of 'the real.' Put otherwise, *contra* scientific forms of naturalism, a non-anthropomorphic naturalism is both unwelcome and unnecessary. To try to go for it reflects the metaphysical compulsions of philosophers and some scientists (usually physicists or mathematicians) running out of control. Again language has gone on a holiday.

Hampton, as a self-proclaimed moral objectivist and moral realist, is in search of "the only true description of the world" but such a quest is unintelligible. There is, of course, a deep and persistent metaphysical temptation to try to speak of the way the world is just in itself or of how things just are anyway. But it is incoherent to speak of how the world is or of how things are independently of any choice of a vocabulary, independently, that is, of how they can be described, or of how a vocabulary we have, or can come to adopt, characterizes them or will come to characterize them, as if nature has something like 'her own language.' Nature, so to speak, speaks to us. But in cold sobriety we need to recognize that it makes no sense to try to discover the way the world is apart from any linguistic description of it (Putnam 1990 and 1994). Hampton cannot have her one true description of the world. There can be no such thing. Rather, descriptions are products of human needs, interests, and purposes, the problems and resulting perspectives that people come to have. There is no intelligible 'point of view from

nowhere' or 'absolute conception of the world,' that is, a point of view or a conception that is interest-free, perspective-free, and could yield the one true description of the world, so that, free of some determinate human interests, scientific or otherwise, we could just say – describe how – the way the world is *anyway* quite apart from any human interests and resultant ways of describing and conceptualizing things, so that we could intelligibly say that the world really is mereological sums of space-time parts or *whatever*. There is (*pace* Hampton) *no just finding out about reality so that we could discover whether, after all, it is really naturalistic or otherwise*.

Hampton takes Bernard Williams's conception of an absolute perspective to be relatively unproblematic and claims that he has just arbitrarily excluded moral properties and objects from being a part of the absolute perspective. But this misses the problem, pressed by both Putnam and Rorty, concerning whether such a conception makes any sense at all, so that a coherent debate could be carried on between her and Williams over 'moral realism.'

We have found unpersuasive some of the things Hampton says about difficulties in deciding what passes muster scientifically and what doesn't and about 'the natural' in naturalism; and we have found, or thought we have found, alternative naturalistic accounts that are not vulnerable to her acute criticisms of some forms of naturalism. But all that notwithstanding, it should be stressed that her tightly organized, and carefully reasoned, series of arguments are formidable and deserve careful scrutiny, including skeptical sober second thoughts concerning the soundness of the above criticisms of her account. She has, at a minimum, put forms of *naturalism hostile to morality* (to adopt her not untendentious way of putting things) very much on the defensive. But all of that is on her *nay-saying* side, the side that she is principally concerned with in her essay in this volume. But, along the way, she also makes positive claims and utilizes distinctive conceptions which are at least as vulnerable as the naturalistic claims and conceptions she finds problematic. She announces on the first page of her essay that she is a moral objectivist, as if, with that, we have anything even reasonably clear or unproblematic. Someone (Rawls, for example) not tempted by moral skepticism or subjectivism might still well want to say that the notion of objectivity, particularly in such domains, is elusive. Perhaps to speak of objectivity in such a context is only to speak

of some form of rather full intersubjectivity or of what would be affirmed in *wide* and *general* reflective equilibrium? (Rawls 1995, 140-1) Yet some philosophers have wanted something more, but what that is, or whether they can have it, is anything but clear. There has, in the history of our subject, been metaphysical cravings for all kinds of things, cravings that have, again and again, turned out to be incoherent. What it is to be a moral objectivist does not wear its meaning on its sleeve. The same thing is true of moral realism, which Hampton also unselfconsciously avows. Even if Mackie's and Harman's arguments do not go through, the very idea of moral realism remains thoroughly problematic. It seems to have all the difficulties of metaphysical realism plus the additional ones connected with normativity as well (Coulture and Nielsen 1993, 365-87). Even noncognitivists can correctly say, and account for, the claim that moral utterances are either true or false, if they stick, as well they might, with a minimalist or deflationist account of truth (Smith 1994). If the moral realist claims a stronger substantive correspondence theory of truth, all the standard difficulties arise concerning whether we can make sense, in any domain (even the-cat-is-on-the-mat domain) of correspondence, beyond Tarski's correspondence-platitudes, platitudes accepted by both minimalists and deflationists. We have Donald Davidson's point that the very "notion of fitting the facts, or of being true to the facts adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true" (Davidson 1984, 193-4). Realism, moral or otherwise, has arguably an incoherent, or at least an unnecessary, conception of truth: more metaphysical baggage standing in the way of gaining a good understanding of morality.

However, we need not, and indeed should not, flee to anti-realism or to irrealism either, and adopt some form of noncognitivism. We can perfectly well, not going beyond minimalism, say that moral utterances can be true, and, if they are, then there are moral facts again in the perfectly minimalist and uncontroversial sense that a fact – moral, mathematical, empirical or whatever – is just what a true statement states. But that platitude (true all the same) does not take us to moral realism or metaphysical realism, where there is a claim that truth is correspondence to facts, where, as Peter Strawson puts it ironically, facts are taken to be non-linguistic sentence-shaped objects: kinds of replicas of *that*-clauses – very queer kinds of objects indeed – somehow just there in the universe. But this is an obvious reification which

neither nature nor the *noumenal* realm (if such there be) dictates by already containing in the natural world or in the *noumenal* world sentence-shaped objects, like *that*-clauses, simply, in a quasi-language, depicting the way the world is, including the way the moral world is, that we can somehow just access in a passive way and, if our language is to get things right, it must simply so record what we so passively access. But this is pure mystification. Yet Hampton quite unblushingly speaks of moral objects (a particularly fishy-sounding notion) and of moral facts to which we somehow have direct access.

We would hope that Hampton's account could be demythologized into an ethical naturalism something like Peter Railton's, which is a naturalism, including an ethical naturalism, that *needs* make no commitment either to moral realism or to moral anti-realism or to a moral objectivism that involves anything other than wide and general reflective equilibrium (Daniels 1996 and Nielsen 1996). (We can have objectivity without objectivism, to wit, a thoroughgoing and general intersubjectivity.) The funding theory Railton articulates squares with a scientific worldview – the Darwinian view we gestured at – unless we unrealistically mean by 'scientific worldview' a view that would not in its account contain anything evaluative or normative, insisting on a normatively neutral vocabulary, again assuming, given the infusion of the normative into our language, that anything like that even could obtain, i.e., be a coherent possibility.⁴ But Railton does not believe that a scientific worldview should, or perhaps even could, be so sparsely Galilean. His is "a funding theory of morality that would enable us to see the compatibility of our moral categories and assumptions with going empirical theory."

In coming to understand the strength of ethical naturalism, it is important to consider *supervenience* and specifically the supervenience of the normative on the factual. Railton says important and on the whole convincing things here. But it is well to start with a leaner remark of

4 In note 5 of his essay in this volume, Peter Railton makes it clear that what he calls 'a funding theory' could also be called 'a metaethical theory' as 'metaethics' is construed by the *new* metaethics. What it is incompatible with is the restrictions of analytic metaethics.

Allan Gibbard's made in his "Reply to Railton" (Gibbard 1993, 52-9). "Norms," Gibbard remarks, "apply to types of possible circumstances. If they apply, then, to two possible circumstances differently, that must be because the circumstances are of different types. *No normative difference without a factual difference*: if what to do differs in two possible circumstances, the facts differ" (ibid., 55; italics ours). This notion is obviously naturalist-friendly, but nonnaturalistic cognitivists (if there still are any) and noncognitivists also can acknowledge it, as indeed they would have to if it really is, as Gibbard takes it to be, an a priori and necessary truth (in whatever sense we are going to make of that notion in these post-Quinian times) (ibid., 55-6). We say it is naturalist-friendly for, as Railton put it, without any identification (even *de facto* identification) of the moral with the natural or moral properties with natural properties, "the supervenience of moral properties upon natural properties brought an inevitable commitment to seeing morality as such that the natural world could support it." That this is so, and how it is so, if it is so, Gibbard's remark makes plain. Railton comments that some take supervenience to be a metaphysical or a normative claim. But these are confusions, if Gibbard's claim is so, for then the supervenience of the moral on the natural is a conceptual, in a broad sense a logical, claim rooted in our use of normative, including moral, language. It is, if Gibbard is right, a feature of what in the bad old days would have been called 'the logic of moral discourse.' But seen in this 'clean' way, as Railton stresses, it "carries no presupposition of the existence of moral properties." One is only constrained to believe, if one cares about consistency and intelligibility, that if two situations differ morally they must also be different in their (non-indexical) natural properties. 'No moral difference without a factual difference' is not a moral or even meta-moral imperative, but has the same status as 'No bachelorhood without unmarriedness.' We would not even understand moral talk, or other normative talk, unless we had at least an implicit recognition of supervenience. (It might with many, indeed most, just be a knowing how rather than as well a knowing that.)

Two situations, to see rather more concretely what is involved here, cannot differ *solely* in their moral character. Sven and Erik are two adults similar in all relevant respects and relevantly similarly situated. We cannot intelligibly say that it was vile the way Sven was slashed, beaten, and strangled and go on to say that it was perfectly all right the way

that Erik was slashed, beaten, and strangled when that way was the same and there are no relevant differences between Erik and Sven or in their circumstances (Nielsen 1985, 91-101). We are not here just making moral judgments from which someone might coherently dissent, but we are in effect reminding ourselves of how the moral language game is played. Calling it 'vile' is no doubt a strong moral response expressive of our moral emotions and tending to evoke similar emotions in others, but it is rooted in our seeing what happened to Sven and in knowing that, if the same thing happens to Erik and there is no relevant difference between Sven and Erik or in their circumstances, we must – to be consistent, must – whether we feel the same emotion or not, believe the same thing about what happened to Erik. We can, of course, say that consistency is simply a hang-up of pedantic minds, but then we convict ourselves of irrationality. If, in turn, we respond 'So what!', then it is not clear what more is to be said. But it is understandable that people will quickly lose interest in the discussion, if that is what it is to be called, if it takes that turn. We are held to a certain kind of consistency patterned upon the sameness of the facts in the case (the natural facts, if that is not pleonastic) (Stevenson 1983, 13-37).

Whenever something is good, right, just, fitting, suitable to the situation, and the like, it is so because of certain non-ethical, factual characteristics. The noncognitivists may be right that to say that something is good, right, fitting, and the like is not to report or describe some natural state of affairs (let alone some 'non-natural' state of affairs), but to express a pro-attitude toward such states of affairs or to prescribe that such states of affairs obtain. Nonetheless, as Railton puts it, such moral judgments "have an intimate relation to such states of affairs – moral qualities are constituted by or grounded in natural qualities." Moreover, this is a strong connection. It is not the claim that moral judgments merely correlate with or harmonize with such statements of fact. Rather, the naturalist claims, again in Railton's words, that if "moral judgment is ever in place, it is in place because the world (apart from moral opinion) is such as to make it so." But then questions about the way the world is (under some description, of course), questions about what explains what, about what might constitute what – "in short, questions raised by the development of empirical inquiry – can reach to the heart of morality." Moreover, the supervenience of the moral on the factual is not a reciprocal supervenience, but an asymmetrical one:

the factual must constitute or at least produce the moral, but surely not the other way around. We see here what Railton calls "a core truism of the moral realm – the dependence of the moral upon the natural." (If Hampton's account is on the mark, considerable havoc would have been played with that claim.) Moreover, if Gibbard is right, this 'No normative difference without a factual difference,' as distinct from 'No factual difference without a normative difference' is a proposition that is "a priori and necessary: it holds independently of experience, and applies to all possible situations" (Gibbard 1993, 55-6). This core truism, if it really is that, if it could be successfully linked with compatibilism, would strongly underwrite ethical naturalism. Moreover, it would be a non-reductive, non-definitional naturalism that need not be troubled by the *open-question argument*: the open question could remain *open* and still this naturalism could remain firmly in place. Moreover, it could, and indeed should, accept the expressiveness and prescriptivity stressed by noncognitivists as well as the essential action-guidingness, and, in that sense, the practicality of moral judgments also stressed by noncognitivists. Moral utterances could, in their very nature (if there is such a thing), be expressive-evocative and action-guiding and still asymmetric supervenience would obtain: with the factual producing the moral such that if someone claims that something is good, right, just, fitting, suitable to the situation and the like, it must (a) be because of certain natural facts about it and (b) that, as well, when the same situation obtains, or a relevantly similar situation obtains, including the sort of people involved being the same or relevantly similar, the same moral judgment must, in consistency, be made.

We only have *lebensraum* for normative argument here over whether the situation is relevantly similar (Nielsen 1985, 91-101). Moreover, as Railton also stresses, this non-reductive ethical naturalism is compatible with the acceptance of an 'is'/'ought' gap. Natural facts can produce or even constitute values while it remains true that there is "a logical gap between any alleged fact and any conclusion expressed in moral terms." We can begin to see that and how this is so, if we consider the fact that supervenience is compatible with Mackian-Blackburnian moral skepticism: "the possibility that our moral thought is massively in error." If Hampton's and Sturgeon's arguments are on the mark, such an error theory is very problematical. But neither would claim, nor could they reasonably claim, to have decisively or conclu-

sively disproved it. It still seems to be at least a logical possibility that our moral thought is massively in error. So the truth, indeed the logical truth, of the asymmetric supervenience of the moral on the factual does not guarantee that fixing the natural properties of the actual world a priori guarantees the presence of *any* moral properties. If an error theory is right, then there are no real oughts, not even *ought not*s. Facts produce or constitute oughts, *if there are any oughts*, so we cannot have a moral difference without a factual difference. If there is something we ought to do, it is, Railton argues, because of something in the world that makes it so. But perhaps there is nothing at all that we either ought to do or ought not to do, because the very idea of 'ought or ought not to doness' is illusory: there being no genuine ought, neither oughts nor ought not. *If there is something we ought to do, the facts will show it, but if there is nothing that we ought or ought not to do, the facts will show that too.* But an appeal to the facts is not sufficient to *logically* guarantee which situation actually obtains, which situation is the case. This should hardly be surprising. It was a notion that Hume and Kant very early were onto as later Henri Poincaré and Max Weber were as well, and it was expressed forcefully by Moore and by the non-cognitivists. The acceptance of asymmetric supervenience does not affect that. There still remains, even with the acceptance of such an ethical naturalism, something of the 'is'/'ought' gap.

However, Railton argues, rightly it seems to us, that, though an ethical naturalist can and should accept that much of the autonomy of ethics (the 'is'/'ought' gap), she also should be a good fallibilist – perhaps even a pragmatist-fallibilist – and, accepting the logical autonomy of ethics, deploy the method of wide and general reflective equilibrium, a method, as Railton puts it, that “knows of connections that are more than logical.” It will want to display the most plausible fit between our various moral judgments and our actual beliefs, including the (for us now) best established “substantive and methodological elements of empirical science.” Moreover, wide and general reflective equilibrium will seek to show how we can have a cluster of moral beliefs that avoids “intolerable strains with the substantive and methodological elements of empirical science.” Suppose that Sturgeon and Hampton are right against Harman. Central moral notions (virtue, duty, and agency) play not only a *justificatory* role, but also an *explanatory* role, explaining in particular situations not only what we do, but what we believe we

ought to do in those situations. Note, however, that to explain what we believe we ought to do is not *eo ipso* to explain what we ought to do. Still, if people are not worked up, not bombarded with ideology and have good and accurate information concerning the situation in question, then, if they believe they ought to do something in that situation, then we have a very good reason to believe they ought to do it. There is, of course, no entailment, but people who work with reflective equilibrium routinely use connections that are weaker than entailments. It is reasonable for us to want to be compatibilists about this, if we can: we will want these explanatory roles we attribute to moral notions to square with whatever we know or reasonably believe about how the world operates. We are not, to repeat, looking for entailments, but to see how these notions can be compatible. How, for example, we can be free even if the universe, for macroscopic objects at least, is deterministic. "Showing compatibility is a way of promoting the autonomy of moral reasoning for it would show that we are not running afoul of our own convictions about the relation of the moral to the natural" (105). Given what we know, or at least plausibly think we know, about the world, including its continuing, though with ups and downs, demystification, we do not wish to postulate Kantian *noumenal* agency, *contra*-causal freedom, a space of reasons holding independently of what has empirical warrant, systematic error to all moral thought, complete lack of human freedom, and the like. We will eschew such notions, if we reasonably can. We will try to get a wide and general reflective equilibrium without such notions, a wide and general reflective equilibrium within an utterly naturalistic framework (no transcendental notions, no *élan vital*, no *noumena*).

We want, and reasonably so, to be able to see, and to perspicuously represent, how things hang together in a way that makes sense of our moral convictions and, as well, of our scientific and commonsense knowledge of the world (commonsense knowledge that has good empirical backing). Error theory is something we would reasonably accept only if all such attempts at wide reflective-equilibrium rationalization fail and fail after repeated and careful attempts.

So reasonability dictates a compatibilist strategy (a generalization from its original home in the freedom-determinism controversy), though it does not a priori, or in any other way, guarantee its truth. But that is no defect, for it is foolish to look for such guarantees. To quest

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for certainty is always a mistake. Reflective equilibrium sets us, instead, to the articulating of a naturalistic funding theory (in the broad latter-day sense, a metaethical theory) rooted in our very ordinary reflective thinking about ethics, which will also be a theory that will ground our moral thought and practice in the natural world and, though some moral beliefs will be revised and some abandoned, it will fund as well many of our most centrally embedded moral convictions, showing there can be a moral life that has a rationale and a point without our succumbing to illusions or to blinding ourselves to how our world is (Daniels 1996 and Nielsen 1996). Here, as we have seen, asymmetric supervenience is a crucial conception. Reflections on it and on the plausibility of a general compatibilist strategy make the case for a nonreductive, nondefinitional ethical naturalism (what we called in our Introduction a 'synthetic ethical naturalism') very attractive. It is an ethical naturalism that leaves the open question *open*, and the 'is'/'ought' gap in place. But note the sea change here. In the history of metaethics it has often been taken to be a definitional truth that to be an ethical naturalist one must deny that there is an 'is'/'ought' gap. But this is a very tendentious history, for it would turn John Dewey into someone who was not an ethical naturalist.

III

In the previous section we argued, for the most part, from within metaethics, and, in doing so, we argued that, both building on and criticizing Hampton's and Railton's accounts, (a) that there is a strong case for ethical naturalism rooted in general naturalism and (b) that a strong case has also been made for setting aside those naturalisms, such as error theories, that support moral skepticism. We now, doing a bit of a *volte face*, want to turn to a discussion of those conceptions of moral philosophy mentioned in Section I which, on the one hand, reject metaethical conceptions (old and new) of doing moral philosophy, as well as the tradition of normative ethics, and, on the other, not content with just *nay-saying*, set out an alternative substantive conception of moral philosophy. We will spell out a bit what is involved here and contrast such accounts with metaethical conceptions, particularly with a new metaethics which utilizes the method of wide and general reflective equilibrium. In

doing this, we will try to ascertain whether we can come to see a little better how we should proceed in engaging in moral philosophy.

Annette C. Baier, Cora Diamond, and Martha C. Nussbaum are much more skeptical than we are over whether, with such metaethical funding theories, we have a good conception of what we should be about in doing moral philosophy. They, Diamond most deeply, are skeptical of what goes on in both the metaethics and the normative ethics business. We have already quoted Diamond to that effect; Baier is not that deeply skeptical, but she certainly is skeptical of what she takes to be the rationalist ways of going on that are typical of most ethical theorizing (both metaethical and normative ethical). Yet, after expressing her skepticism concerning "system lovers who want to construct moral theories," Baier still goes on to speak of wanting and seeking to articulate a more adequate moral theory constructed on different lines (Baier 1994, 15-16). And it is indeed something she sets out to do. But, given what ethical theory has been, there must be for her a *nay*-saying prolegomena. We must break the rationalism that has so obsessed moral philosophers, both rationalist and empiricist. Still, like Diamond, she is perplexed by, and skeptical about, how to proceed, remarking: "I think we still need to learn how best to reflect on morality" (Baier 1985, 220).

Systematizing, after the fashion of Kant, Sidgwick, or W.D. Ross, Baier takes to be at best pointless. But she is also unwilling to say that "we should live by our inherited fuzzy moral intuitions and do no moral philosophy at all" (ibid., 224). We should, she has it, only acquiesce in our untutored intuitions "if there is no way to think about our morality except by attempting to contemplate a better world with its perfect moral system": a world with precise moral principles and rules, with definite decision procedures and perfect compliance (ibid., 223-4). If this is the only way of doing systematic moral philosophy on offer, then it is more reasonable to be against theory. But we have alternatives other than those which – going back to analytic metaethics – just consist in analyzing and explicating moral concepts. Moreover, and for her more importantly, we can try instead to reflect on the actual phenomenon of morality, to see what it is, how it is transmitted, and what difference it makes in our lives. We may, as a result of the emerging reflective consciousness of what morality is, think "we can make some improvements in it ..." (ibid., 224). But this, she adds, "will not come from surveying abstract possibilities but from seeing how, given

the way it is, it can, by some move we can now make, improve itself, work better, correct its faults" (ibid.). But philosophers should not run off like Don Quixotes' taking the high a priori road, for only "when we think we know what [morality] is, how it is now working, what it is doing will we be in any position to see how it might really change, let alone know if that change would be for the better" (ibid.). In this endeavor, if we are going to get anything with real substance, philosophers, anthropologists sociologists, historians, political economists, sociobiologists, psychologists must work together, "to find out what an actual morality is ..." (ibid.). We must not assume that just by sitting in our studies and taking thought, even careful thought, that we will come to have a good understanding of this. We need, as well, to study history to find out how morality has changed and, making a point also stressed by Diamond and Nussbaum, Baier adds, "we need to read novels to see how it might change again" (ibid.).

Having said all this, things we take to be perfectly unexceptional, she then goes on to say, rightly, but, as we shall see, also perplexingly, that to have any proper confidence that "a really possible change, a takeable step from here, is an improvement," we have to have some sense of the direction it is taking. We need, as she puts it, "some sort of moral compass" to "guide us, not only in our individual actions but in our institutional and educational reforms and innovations" (ibid.). But, after all, 'moral compass' is a metaphor, and it may be no better than another much used metaphor, 'Archimedian point,' and this may be to damn it with faint praise. How do we cash in the metaphor 'moral compass'? A metaphor that can have no literal paraphrase is no metaphor at all. After all, conceptually speaking, it is always in order to ask of a metaphor, or putative metaphor, what it is a metaphor of. Well, in trying to cash our moral compass metaphor in, we may say that we are speaking here of a norm that guides us, that tells us, or suggests to us, what direction we should take: what we should do now along with an explanation of why. But then what kind of norm is it? Is it some principle specifying some end that we should strive to attain? But, assuming it is, how do we, or how can we, come to know that this end is desirable or even reliable, that it is the end, or even an end, that we reflective moral agents should strive to realize? What kind of knowledge or sensible hunches could we have here? Traditional metaethical questions galore come trippingly on the tongue.

Baier, we think, is plainly right, against the whole tradition of rationalist philosophers from Plato to Alan Gewirth, in claiming that such a guide is "not something we are likely to think up in an armchair, but something that will evolve by the testing of generations" (ibid.). But what reason do we have to think anything in the domain of morals or of ethics *evolves* rather than just changes, going from *Sittlichkeit* to *Sittlichkeit*? What criteria do we have here for evolution or development? We can be as Darwinian as we like and still feel stumped here.

It is fair enough to say with a kind of proper caution that the most we philosophers can do is "to see ways of tinkering with existing moral compasses, not ways of inventing them *ex nihilo*" (ibid.). But how are we to ascertain, or how are others, say generations of people, to ascertain when our tinkering has been an improvement: whether we have constructed or discovered a better cluster of norms? It is not exactly like building a better mousetrap. What is testing and 'seeing' here, and what role in this process do novels, dramas, history, and the social sciences play, or do they only show what morality is, how it can change, and in what direction it might change (a not inconsiderable set of achievements), while the philosopher supposedly retains his grand specialist's position of showing how it *should* change? We are confident that Baier, Humean anti-rationalist that she is, would not have such a purist or specialist, philosopher-king conception of philosophy and of how philosophers should proceed; yet, good intentions notwithstanding, these rather traditional problems remain to trouble Baier's conception. We do not say that they cannot be surmounted, and adequately so, but simply that they do not appear to have been or to have been justifiably set aside and that they need somehow to be responded to. This is a pressing matter before we conclude that we actually have with Baier's conception a new departure in moral philosophy from business as usual.

Baier rejects and deplores, as we have noted, what she takes to be the contemporary rationalist trend in moral philosophy, Kantian in spirit, whether utilitarian or pluralistic, deontologist or perfectionist. It is a conception of moral philosophy which does not even see that there still could be such a thing as moral philosophy, if there is no such thing as 'the moral law' or 'moral principles' or 'moral rules.' She tells us that she does not think that such a conception can, its pretensions to the contrary notwithstanding, provide the moral compass we need. Philosophers as diverse as Richard Brandt, Alan Gewirth and David

Gauthier, Baier argues, though in different ways, have theories which in essentials suffer from the rationalism of an essentially Kantian conception of moral theory, a conception which Alan Donagan puts more straightforwardly than they do when he says that "the Theory of Morality is a theory of a system of laws or precepts binding upon rational creatures as such, the content of which is ascertainable by human reason" (ibid., quoted from Donagan 1978, 7). She thinks that this is little more than a Kantian prejudice, for which no justification has been given. We have no reason to believe that morality stands so grounded in rationality. All attempts to establish such grounding have failed, and there have been many, some of them impressive, in the long history of moral philosophy. It is not here where we can reasonably look for a moral compass.

By contrast, Hume, Baier believes, gives us a distinct, distinctive and viable nonrationalist, but not irrationalist, alternative to the prevailing rationalist morality. It has the kind of concreteness previously described, where we start, using history – remember that Hume was also a historian – and the human sciences, and careful everyday observation and reflection on our common life, to see what our actual moralities, including centrally our moral practices, are like and how this *mélange* functions and indeed how *mélangeish* it actually is. As she sees it, Hume's account is not a normative theory, and it is not a metaethics either, though in passing Hume sometimes makes what some of us would call metaethical remarks. Contrasting Hume's approach to ethics "with the post-Kantian and post-Benthamite moral philosophy that went in for theory construction," Baier remarks that "Hume's way involves no normative theory ..." (ibid., 236). It does, however, involve "a psychological theory ... and it involves a political-economic theory, about the actual workings of human right-determining institutions" (ibid.). The psychological theory gives us an empirically testable account of the human emotions and how they can be self-regulating. His political theory, rooted in his psychological theory and historical research, again is an empirical activity. Working within this empirical framework, Hume gives us a thoroughly empirical account of human nature and, in relation to it, an account of the workings of institutions and of how they affect the lives of people and of how human beings sometimes change these institutions and why.

Baier goes on to remark that given "this factual base, the moral philosopher's special interest will be in the workings of all the reflective

sentiments, those sentiments reacting to other sentiments and in particular those that claim to be moral reflections, that is reflections from a steady and general viewpoint" (ibid., 237). This is moral philosophy, to use Hume's own phrase, as *mental geography*: a "descriptive moral and social philosophy, understanding the modes of individual and moral reflection as they actually exist now ..." (ibid.). It is, as we have already said, thoroughly empirical and naturalistic, eschewing transcendental arguments and availing itself neither of "Kantian noumena nor any of those full compliance human utopias favoured by normative theorists" (ibid.). This mental geography does not seek to set out 'the logic of moral discourse' (not trying to do analytic metaethics), but rather seeks, doing an interpretative and descriptive job, to provide an accurate map of the actual moral terrain, but not of the abstract possibilities of what morality might be in various possible worlds. This mental geography must rely on historical studies and the human sciences. But in doing this, this mental geography cannot, like metaethics, old and new, be a purely armchair activity. However, to return to our earlier problem with Baier's account, *a map is not a compass*: It perspicuously displays the terrain, if it is a good map, but it still does not tell us where to go or even predict where we are going. However, if, other than rather blindly, we are going anywhere, we will need it. Still, the cashing in of her moral compass metaphor in a Humean nonrationalist, empirically oriented moral philosophy is a task yet to be accomplished.

What follows might take us part of the way. Philosophy, if carefully cultivated by a reasonable number of people, and by being "gradually diffused ... throughout the whole society," will, Hume has it, "bestow a ... correctness on every act and calling" (ibid.). The fact aside that it is rather utopian to think that anything like this is going to happen, how is it (to raise a conceptual problem) that this interpretative-descriptive map – this mental geography – bestows a *correctness*, tells us not only what we *do* and *why*, but, as well, what we *should* do? How can a description, even a very clear description, provide a moral compass? Hume, so understood, has a moral philosophy that is a mental geography. It gives us, let us suppose, an account of procedures and practices of our common life and, in that sense, *methodizes* it. But, to repeat, how is it, and on what basis is it, in the very doing of this, sometimes as well a way of *correcting* these procedures and practices: a pointing out how they went wrong and of how they should be altered? How does

methodizing them do this? How do we get moral criticism and assessment from even the most accurate moral description? How, that is, are we to get a critical moral theory out of such descriptive-interpretative theory?

Perhaps we can get a sense of how this can be done by keeping in mind that Hume's mental geography was, centrally a "geography of our powers of reflection and our reflective practices" (ibid., 238). Hume, in his thoroughly nonrationalist way of proceeding, argues that, as Baier put it, "the correction of motives, sentiments, and habits catering to them can be done by sentiment and custom, and is not the prerogative of a purely intellectual 'reason'" (ibid.). We can see well enough how the type moral reflection Hume advocated and practised can be empirically informed, rooted, as it is, in psychological, sociological, and historical knowledge or at least in careful speculation. But how it can be practical (action-guiding), beyond being informed, and critically reflective, is less clear. Perhaps just to be those things is to be action-guiding? And perhaps this is a sufficient response? Baier rightly sees Hume as launching a "bold antirationalist moral philosophy" yielding "a better way of being a moral philosopher, a way avoiding unworldly intellectualism." Moreover, it is to be a moral philosophy "as willing to correct its own methods as to criticize the customs of others" (ibid.). It is, again in Baier's words, "a call for a self-critical nonintellectualist and socially responsible moral philosophy" (ibid.). These are attractive notions, yet it remains unclear what they come to when looked at with a critically skeptical eye. Just how in such an account does careful observation, and arrangement of observations, lead to, or constitute, a *reflectiveness* that becomes *critical*? Reflectiveness, taken by itself, not infrequently is utterly undisciplined and free-spinning, not clearly distinct from dreamily ruminating. Presumably it is the careful observation and arrangement of observation that does the work. But these things can and do go on without reflectiveness and without criticalness. What we are trying to understand is how reflectiveness in such circumstances, or any circumstances, yields criticalness. It seems to be a necessary condition for it, but not a sufficient condition. But perhaps it is a mistake to look for necessary and sufficient conditions here or indeed in any substantive domain?

Moral sentiment, in continuing and in expanding the self-correction of our natural responses to the situations in which we find ourselves, is a *sentiment-correcting sentiment*, a *second-order* reflective sentiment to be sure, but a *sentiment* all the same. It supposedly is not

our reason – our intelligence – correcting our sentiments. That is the rationalism that Hume, Baier, and Nussbaum as well want to overthrow, and it is not – or so they have it – just that our sentiments change with a fuller knowledge of the facts. Rather the claim is that our reflective sentiments do the critical corrective work. We are, that is, being guided by our emotions. “Moral attitudes,” Baier remarks, “are corrections of spontaneous human responses of trust and love, fear and hostility, corrections encouraging some responses, altering others” (ibid., 224). Being “such an inherently responsive thing, a response to natural responses,” morality has “inbuilt into it a potential for self-correction” (ibid., 224–5). We have, that is, reflective responses turning on our more spontaneous responses. If we attend seriously to our emotions we will find they guide us, and sometimes reasonably so, in our lives. That they *sometimes* lead us astray, as they led Jacques, Flore, and Roubaud wildly and disastrously astray in Zola’s *La Bête Humaine*, is no more reason for not trusting them than it is a reason not to trust our thinking because *sometimes* it leads us down the garden path, as it did Mary Baker Eddy, Berkeley and Schelling. Let us not compound a Cartesian error.

In this way, with such reflective responses to our responses, with due consideration (due reflective response), the sentiment of moral approval and disapproval is supposed to give us a moral compass. Or more exactly, that is what our moral compass consists in: reflective moral approval and disapproval in response to our more spontaneous responses. In this way, reflective moral development is a bootstrapping operation. Again to quote Baier: “Morality is throughout responsive to already given responses, and its norms are reflective versions of natural responses to the risks and opportunities interdependence involves” (ibid., 223). Seeing it in this way is supposed to preserve the critical element in morality – its critical normativeness – that normative theorists of the rationalistic tradition wanted to stress. But on Hume’s account, it is naturalized and freed of rationalistic residues. A proper moral philosophy should not only be an explainer and explicator of our norms, but be a *criticizer* of our norms and our beliefs about our norms as well, and that essentially so. Criticism is seen naturalistically as a reflective response emerging from morality’s “more primitive role as corrector of natural responses” (ibid.). Little Johnny gobbles up all the cookies and little Sue has none. Mom or Dad corrects little Johnny’s response by responding with disapproval, telling him ‘That’s not fair.’ They en-

large, or try to enlarge, Johnny's repertoire of concepts with those responses – he now learns something about fairness – and in doing so Mom or Dad express disapproval of his unfairness, though the very norm fairness, on such a Humean account, is itself nothing more than a particular reflective response. (And there, it is reasonable to say, we see revealed an implicit metaethical theory of a noncognitivist sort.) But, the moral skeptic will ask, where is the *correction* there? Johnny may get changed – socialized as they say – one response overpowering another response, stressed as it is by powerful figures upon whom Johnny is totally dependent. But how does this count as a *correction* where that is not just a change as a response to another response? Well, though Mom's or Dad's responses are automatic, a result, as well, of their previous conditioning, somewhere along the line the expressive norm fairness – a response to a response – was, the account has it, a reflective response: a response, we might say, on due consideration and after taking the matter to heart.

However, if 'due consideration' means considering the causes of such a response and the consequences of so responding, we still have an intellectual something: something more than some vague mulling it over, something that Dewey might have called the use of intelligence in morals. But Hume-Baier (and Nussbaum as well) want more, they want *the criticalness to be in the very sentiment itself* and not just in our knowledge of the causes of the sentiment and of the effects on ourselves and others of having it and acting on it. The very sentiment in being reflective supposedly becomes critical. It does not just *goad* us, but it, as well, *guides* our lives. But, like the repressed, our question returns: how does it become critical and what does the distinction between goading and guiding come to here? What are we talking about here? How is it anything more than, or other than, a sentiment that we would approve of after reflection, a sentiment that would not be extinguished on reflection, a sentiment that we would continue to have with full information vividly present to us? Can we reasonably content ourselves with responding that, under such conditions our sentiment would *eo ipso* therefore count as critical? But that seems – though appearances *may* be deceptive here – a bit reductive and unjustifiably so, a bit like stipulating a result. How sentiments *qua* sentiments can be critical remains elusive on the

Hume-Baier account. How Humean interpretative-descriptive naturalism – a naturalism eschewing normative theory or even normative engagement – can become critical remains opaque.

I think here Hume, and Baier, as she follows him, in effect, rely, in a way Nussbaum does not, on a sharp dualism or dichotomy of reason/sentiment, thought/desire, belief/attitude, thinking/feeling. What should be said instead is that these states are also not sharply separable. That is perhaps most easily seen with belief/attitude if we think back to the debates of the 1950s about 'independent emotive meaning' and whether there can be pure disagreements in attitude not rooted in disagreements in belief. The upshot of these discussions was the recognition that you cannot just have an attitude without having a belief and a belief that is suffused into the very attitude in question (the suffusion being reciprocal). To have an attitude of resignation, for example, is to have a somewhat distinctive range of beliefs – though that is not all it is – and the same is so with the other attitudes. So there is no dichotomy belief/attitude, though there are some beliefs, which are attitude-sparse (propositional attitudes apart) and other beliefs which are attitude-suffused. If a person has a certain sentiment – suppose she feels bitter, angered as she is, over the exploitation of children – that carries with it inevitably a certain range of beliefs. Moreover, they are beliefs which can be reasoned beliefs and can be affected by reasoning. Her sentiment is not a 'flashing thing,' an occurrence within her, like a sensation, say a shooting pain. Sentiments are not like that at all. Rather her sentiment is reason-structured, if not always reason-governed. And, conversely, what we take to be a reason, a rational ground, a rationale, or what we take to be reasonable and the like, is typically sentiment-suffused. We cannot sharply split those faculties (capacities) apart.

The same thing holds for thought and feeling. If a person feels like resigning from some position she holds, this cannot occur without having certain thoughts, and to think that one should vote is not just an intellectual operation, but carries with it certain feelings. Similarly with thought/desire. Someone cannot just desire apple pie or just want to be more conscientious without having certain thoughts, and these matters are not just contingently connected (except in the Quinean sense in which *everything* is contingently connected). These affective states cannot obtain without certain belief states (Nussbaum 1990, 41-3).

So Baier's setting reason and sentiment apart and trying to make reflective sentiments correct other sentiments makes a mystery where there isn't one. Or are we mistakenly foisting that dichotomizing on her where it actually isn't intended? Either way, the vital substantive point is to recognize that our sentiments, both reflective and unreflective, involve, and necessarily so, reason; and, with reflective sentiments, there is a big dose of reasoning. We (sometimes) take to heart what we feel, but such taking to heart involves thinking about it and turning it over; and, duly considering, even more plainly so (Falk 1986, 198-232 and 248-62). We feel strongly about, say, Québec secession, but that, and necessarily so, is both a matter of thought and feeling inextricably mixed. There is no possibility of sorting out the two components. To think that we can is to be held captive to the mythical picture of 'a pure norm.' In reasoning about it – thinking about, if you will – certain feelings get reinforced, altered, diminished, or sometimes even extinguished and with them certain beliefs. And the reasoning itself comes with certain feelings. We have emotion-guided thought and thought-guided emotion. Criticalness comes in this mix. It is not, as rationalist myth would have it, some pure taking thought. There has been too much talk of reason in the history of philosophy.

One can, as the last remark hints at, reject such a dualism while still accepting Baier's Humean critique of rationalism in ethics. Her proper object of critique, as was Hume's, is rationalistic normative ethics: abstract, hierarchically organized, ethical theory, with one or more first principles taken to be synthetic a priori truths, clear to the light of reason, from which, with the aid of 'purely factual' minor premises, all the conclusions of ethics, or at least most of them, could be derived and thereby justified. Such a picture, with its 'tyranny of principles' and deductive model of justification (as distinct from reflective equilibrium), as Baier well argues and as many others have as well, is deeply mistaken for a variety of reasons. But it should also be noted that such a rationalism is not an important contender among normative theories today. John Rawls's, Brian Barry's, G.A. Cohen's, Norman Daniels's, Thomas Nagel's, Thomas Scanlon's, Stuart Hampshire's, Richard Miller's or Peter Railton's accounts, different as they are, are not such rationalisms. They make none of the rationalistic assumptions mentioned above, assumptions that, Baier rightly argues, are out to lunch.

Baier has also failed to show how her appropriation of ethical theory as a Humean mental geography yields a new way of proceeding in moral philosophy, setting itself in contrast with the main currents of what is now being done. Hers is admittedly not a systematic, or for that matter an unsystematic, normative ethical theory, and it is plainly not an analytical metaethics of the Golden Age (as in the work of A.J. Ayer, Paul Edwards, P.H. Nowell-Smith, and the early R.M. Hare) which limited itself to the analysis or elucidation of moral concepts and to an examination of 'the logic of moral discourse.' But it is metaethical in the sense in which the work of Peter Railton, Allan Gibbard, Simon Blackburn and Richard Miller is metaethical, where to do metaethics is neither to try to proceed a priori, nor to limit oneself to an analysis of language, but to proceed instead empirically, utilizing elements of the relevant sciences, and not to claim normative neutrality. The difference between Baier's conception of how to proceed in moral philosophy and the conceptions of how to proceed utilized by Peter Railton, David Copp and Nicholas Sturgeon is not fundamental. They all proceed holistically, do not utilize in any pervasive way a deductive model of justification, seek to adumbrate a critical moral stance as something that emerges from their empirically oriented metaethics, or, as Railton prefers to call it, funding theory. The differences between them – differences in detail aside – are differences of *scope* and in the level of abstraction deemed to be suitable, on the one hand, and in the sciences they take as most relevant to moral theorizing, on the other. Semantic theory, decision theory, cognitive science, Darwinian theory, and rational-choice theory are important for ethical naturalists such as Railton and Copp, and as well for noncognitivists such as Gibbard and Blackburn, while Baier takes such concrete, nitty-gritty studies as anthropology, history, and political economy to be more useful and more enlightening for moral philosophy than decision theory, cognitive science, or evolutionary theory. But these are disputes, vitally important as they are, within metaethics (funding theory) and not deep disputes about radically different conceptions of what moral philosophy should be. Baier, her self-understanding to the contrary notwithstanding, is actually doing metaethics in the sense of the new metaethics, and so arguably was, at least sometimes, Hume, though in a less abstract way than Gibbard or Railton. Indeed the two somewhat different ways, it is not unreason-

able to believe, or at least hope, complement each other. Baier's Humean way ties moral philosophy more clearly to our common life, while an account like Railton's or Gibbard's concentrates on more abstract matters. *Perhaps* their way yields a better understanding of criticalness and normativity than Baier's. At least these were places where Baier's account seemed at least not to be very satisfactory. Here we can rightly say, without succumbing to eclecticism, let many flowers bloom. Which flowers turn out to be the more frost-resistant may shake itself out with continued, sustained, careful and non-*parti pris* writing and discussion.

IV

We want now to characterize and consider the views of Martha C. Nussbaum on how moral philosophy and ethical theory are to be conceived of and practised, including her views on what we call, rather pedantically, ethical methodology. They are views which are becoming influential and which stand in both stark and interesting contrast to the dominant views in contemporary ethical theory, including the views represented in this volume. But there is a fresh wind ablowing and views like Nussbaum's may in the next decade become the dominant views. Moreover, if we go back a bit in time, we will see that she has very distinguished ancestors. Looked at from the perspective of the long view of history, metaethics (particularly analytical metaethics) is the maverick position. Nussbaum's return in moral theory to a kind of naturalized Aristotelianism in method, aim and structure, without the obscure blather of a Leo Strauss or Alan Bloom, and extensively sensitive to the latest developments in analytical philosophy, affords a new window on the world of moral philosophy. It is imperative that we consider it in relation to the development of metaethical theory and to the larger question of how we should conceive of and pursue moral philosophy.

Nussbaum's views in certain respects are similar to Baier's, but, unlike Baier's, they could never be mistaken for attacks on theory in ethics (as Gibbard and Scanlon mistook Baier's account to be; Gibbard 1995 and Scanlon 1995a). But, as we shall see, they also are in certain important respects, particularly with what we are centrally concerned with here, different than Baier's.

Nussbaum's views, like Baier's, are rich and subtle, informed not only by analytical philosophy but also by a close study of the classical authors. Moreover, her central working repertoire is not only Plato and Aristotle, the Hellenistic philosophers, the Greek tragedians and historians, but also the novel which she does not take (as it is often taken by moral philosophers) either as a casebook for ethical theory or as a kind of adornment to moral theory, but as central and distinctive to our moral understanding and (more surprisingly) to the working out of an adequate ethical theory. (On this see Diamond 1991, 367-81.)

Her conception of moral philosophy and its import and her working out of an ethical theory stand at a polar opposite to analytical metaethics as it was done in its heyday (say in the work of A.J. Ayer, Charles Stevenson, Paul Edwards, and R.M. Hare). She breaks, and not unintentionally, the restrictions they sought to impose. Indeed, most of what she does *for them* would not even count as philosophy. But how she conceives of her subject and how she proceeds will resonate with many philosophers and other reflective persons, though for some, including us, that resonating will be ambivalent. Her conception of the aim of moral philosophy speaks to what deep down, well below methodological hang-ups, many of us would wish to do, if we thought it could be done. It is something that brought many of us to the subject in the first place. Is it, we ask genuinely skeptically, merely a residual positivist prejudice to have reservations about the very idea of it? Be that as it may, it should be quite clear that to go Nussbaum's way involves breaking with the metaethical tradition both old and new.

However, we must first say what Nussbaum's way is. "Philosophical inquiry in ethics," Nussbaum remarks, is to be seen "as ways of pursuing a single and general question: how human beings should live" (Nussbaum 1990, 15). We want to know what is a human life and how we should live it, if we are to flourish and be fully human (*ibid.*, 'fully human' here plainly functions normatively). And here, *pace* Richard Rorty, we do not regard 'a human life' *merely* as a biological category. The study of ethical matters classically has been and, Nussbaum believes, should continue to be, "practical and not *just* a theoretical enterprise" (*ibid.*, 16 italics ours). This, of course, is not how the logical positivists saw it or linguistic philosophers or nonnaturalists such as Moore, Pritchard, and Ross. But this is how classically moral philoso-

phy was understood.⁵ "From Socrates and Plato," Nussbaum remarks, "straight through to the Hellenistic schools there was deep agreement that the point of philosophical inquiry and discourse in the area of ethics was to improve, in some manner, the pupil's soul, to move the pupil closer to the leading of the good life" (ibid.). Improving 'his soul,' or 'our souls,' presumably comes to making us better or more adequate persons, persons of greater sensitivity, reflectivity, decency, fairness, understanding, having more nuanced passions, having a better sense of life and, as well, to enable us to act with greater integrity, intelligence, and with fine attunement. Such a *practice-oriented* conception of moral philosophy requires, of course, a "good deal of reflection and understanding." This being so, producing understanding is an important part of moral philosophy. Still its underlying *aim* is not understanding but *practice*: to enable us, in our inescapable interdependence with others, to live better lives. It was to come to recognize truth in and concerning ethics and with that coming to have an enhanced sense of life, as she puts it, and with this enhanced sense of life to live more adequately. Moral philosophy must be such that it helps us to become the kind of people who could recognize truths about the good life and

5 However, one of the Golden Age metaethicists, P.H. Nowell-Smith, writing (1954) when analytic metaethics was the fashion, saw it exactly that way. Here, among analytic philosophers of his time, he stands alone. He thought in doing *metaethics* he should practice normatively neutral conceptual analysis. There he went with what at the time was the fashion in analytical circles. But he did not identify moral philosophy with metaethics and he thought that moral philosophers should do moral philosophy in much the terms Nussbaum describes, but he also left room, though as parasitic on moral philosophy as traditionally conceived, for the *second-order* task of conceptual clarification that just was, in his view, metaethics. It is what later came to be called analytic metaethics. And it is what he did, and impressively so, in his book, while all the while (and quite consistently) defending the idea that the goal of moral philosophy was *practice*. But metaethics, if properly done, was strictly *meta*. But unlike Ayer, for example, he did not see that to be *the* task, let alone the *sole* task, of a moral philosopher. *Au contraire*, for Nowell-Smith, "moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions in the form "What shall I do? ..." (P.H. Nowell-Smith 1954, 319. See also 11-47.) For commentary, broadly in sympathy with, and explicatory of, Nowell-Smith here, see Nielsen 1967, 117-19 and Diamond 1991, 367-76.

to act in accordance with them. Moral philosophy tries to ascertain, Nussbaum has it, the most important truths of a really human life.

Having, though perhaps only through a glass darkly, seen something of this – something that always will be revisable – we should go on “to construct discourses whose form would suit the ethical task, enlivening those elements in our ethical sensibilities that seem to be the best sources of progress” and forming in us “desires in accordance with a correct conception of what matters, confronting them with an accurate picture of what has importance” (ibid., 16). The goal of moral philosophy is the good human life and not just to understand what ‘good’ means or what ‘the good human life’ means or what kind of ethical theory would utilize such conceptions. These matters are, of course, important too, but their *primary* value is instrumental to the living of a good human life.

To this, not unsurprisingly, analytical metaethicists, and not only them, will respond that to so characterize what moral philosophy is is to give it a task it cannot meet and, as well, to beg a lot of central questions about ethics or morality and about what philosophy can achieve. Nussbaum’s account, they will argue, could not be *the proper starting point* in moral philosophy, for only if certain questions she begs have certain sorts of answers could anything like what she urges be achieved or even approximated. Conceiving of things as she does, just takes sides in the dispute between cognitivism and noncognitivism and, moreover, takes sides without ever either even entering into the argument or conceptually dissolving that dispute by showing that it rests on conceptual confusion. It just assumes moral utterances can be either true or false and *in some more than minimalist way*. It just assumes that we have some way of ascertaining which ones are known to be true, or at least have some reasonable warrant for some of them, such that we can justifiably accept them and guide our lives in accordance with them. It just begs the question by ignoring the alternatives that Edward Westermarck, Axel Hägerström, J.L. Mackie, and Simon Blackburn argue for, namely that there is such massive and pervasive error in our ethical thought that we cannot reasonably believe that any of our moral beliefs are justified. It just begs the question over the force, or indeed over even the existence, of the kind of metaethical attacks on the very institution of morals with its associated practices that Allen Wood ascribes to Marx and Nietzsche and that could plausibly be ascribed to

Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard as well. Moreover, even if (*pace* error theorists) we think that judgments about what is 'good' and 'bad' or 'right' and 'wrong' are sometimes in place, we may still doubt that the vaguer and more portentous notion of 'the good human life' is in place or that we have some reasonably firm sense of what we are talking about when we speak of such a thing or when we speak of 'good ethical development' or of 'general human flourishing.' It is not evident that it is unreasonable to doubt that any sound sense can be made of these notions. Having such doubts is not mere analytical fastidiousness, the nit-picking to which some analytical philosophers are addicted. Perhaps such Nussbaumian phrases lack any firm descriptive content and primarily function emotively, relying on implicit and unrecognized arbitrary *persuasive* definitions?

Nussbaum simply assumes that philosophy – the reflective activity that it is – could, and should so proceed. It should, that is, try to answer such desperately obscure questions. She simply assumes that we can come to have some non-ideological and coherent consensus concerning such matters. She assumes that there is some reasonable prospect of a non-ideological and coherent, and, if coherent, beyond that knowledgeable, consensus concerning what really matters in the good life for human beings or even a consensus over what it would be like to even gain 'an accurate picture of what has importance' in such domains. Not only postmodernists think that we have no coherent idea of what 'an accurate picture of the good life for human beings' could be. It isn't just that, in our diverse and pluralistic cultures, people, if they give 'answers' to such matters at all, often give different answers, but that neither we philosophers nor anyone else has a grip on what it would be like to answer such questions correctly. We do not know – it is possible reasonably to believe – exactly, or, worse still, even inexactly, what we are talking about or asking for here. We do not understand under what circumstances we would have come to have a correct conception of what really matters in the good life for human beings. It is not indifference to morals or even cynicism that triggers such reactions, but bafflement about what is going on and about what it would be like to find our sea legs here. Nussbaum just conceives of moral philosophy in such a way that, in the very doing of moral philosophy, we must just accept a cognitivist position in metaethics and indeed a strong form of cognitivism at that. Only if we *assume* that Gibbard,

Mackie, Harman, and Blackburn are fundamentally in error and *assume* that the right way to construe metaethical matters is either, on the one hand, some more Aristotelian version of a Railton-Miller-Sturgeon-Copp-type naturalistic cognitivism or, on the other, some rather Aristotelian nonnaturalist cognitivism, can we be justified in accepting Nussbaum's conception of moral philosophy and ethical theory. And even that would only be a necessary condition, for, remember, her cognitivism is also *practice-oriented*. We need a theory that not only informs the mind but as well galvanizes us differently so that we will become better persons and all from some 'philosophically justified vantage point.' But that is a very perplexing notion indeed. It is not at all unreasonable – or is this to be held captive to what are in effect positivist dogmas? – to be skeptical about that and to think Nussbaum is trying to give philosophy a task that it cannot coherently meet. In all these matters, Nussbaum just begs central issues concerning the new metaethics and concerning philosophy more generally, about which, as Cora Diamond put it, there is no consensus. Moreover, these issues were central during the Golden Age as well and have echoes in moral philosophy going at least back to the emergence of the Enlightenment. If we wish to be reasonable, we will not set things up such that philosophers in the skeptical tradition cannot even be doing moral philosophy, such that such reflections, however mistaken they *may* be, are not even a bit of moral philosophy.

Yet it is possible to feel – perhaps ambivalently feel – that such criticisms, natural and reasonable as they are, are still somehow blinkered or at least without the kind of charity that would aid perceptiveness about morality and about what we would reflectively want moral philosophy to do. Nussbaum's conception of the moral philosopher's task, vague and question-begging as it is, remains attractive. When we think – concretely and non-evasively think – about our own moral lives, the conflicts within ourselves, our interpersonal conflicts and tensions, as well as our aspirations for lives together, Nussbaum's conception strikes home. It also does so when we think of the deep and pervasive socio-economic and political problems in our societies and in our world seen globally. We very much, faced as we are with such matters, want moral philosophy to be something like what Nussbaum describes. We would like to know, if there is such a thing, what the good life for a human being is, what human flourishing is, what a truly human life would be

like and the like. We would like to know, if such an understanding can be had, how we should live. Perhaps the existentialist's and prescriptivist's stark response that in the end you must just decide is all that can coherently be said. But we would have to have very compelling reasons to accept such a bleak picture. Moreover, the argument in our Introduction should be recalled here concerning the intelligibility of talking about 'in the end' or 'in the final analysis.' Such skepticism may be generated by an incoherent philosophical picture. Such skepticism, common as it is, may in reality be unmotivated.

We would very much like, as Nussbaum puts it, "an account of ethical inquiry that will capture what we actually do when we ask ourselves the most pressing ethical questions" (ibid., 24). We would like *that* even when we suspect (even strongly suspect) – heirs of a skeptical tradition that we are – that there can be no such inquiry, that these notions, e.g., 'the good life for humans,' are *short on sense*. Yet, after all, we do not know – skepticism about skepticism purring again – that they actually are so short on sense that we can make nothing of them. Moreover, these 'big questions' are close to our hearts. Only positivist or ordinary-language-philosophy self-deceptiveness can obscure this from us, can make us turn away from such questions with Carnapian scorn or Austinian irony. Moral philosophers who are philosophical foxes are likely also, and, of course, ambivalently, to have something of the hedgehog buried in their hearts. We would very much like to know if there is some reasonable form of inquiry into such hedgehogish questions, or (less intellectualistically) some kind of honest, nonevasive way to get a grip on such questions. We want to continue to ask, and to try coherently to answer, the question: 'How should we, as a society, as a global community, as individuals, live?' Traditionally moral philosophers, novelists, dramatists, religious thinkers, historians, even sometimes social scientists (Weberian scruples notwithstanding) have tried, as many plain people have tried, to answer, or at last get a grip on, these questions. There are books, engaged in this project, or linked with it, including skeptical ones, that we want to study attentively. We, as Nussbaum well put it, read for life. And, though with fear and trembling, if we are at all sensitive, we want to make such deliberations ourselves. Reading for life, we also, with that as a part integrated into the very web of who we are, want to think with integrity for ourselves, trying to get some grip on these questions, though with a sense of

Weber's warring gods in the background to keep us from sliding into Straussian obscurantism. Before we would abandon such a quest the arguments would have to be very strong and very conclusive indeed for abandoning all such deliberations as being in irremediable error: our gibbering together over questions which turn out to be incoherent questions, questions, their emotive wallop aside, that in reality are pseudo-questions. The skeptical argument would have to be sufficiently strong such that we would have conclusive, or close to conclusive, reasons for believing that no coherent positive answers to such questions are possible and that all we can intelligibly say is that they are so short on sense that nothing can be made of them. But (*pace* positivists, Max Weber and some ordinary language philosophers) such a case has not been made out. So in this way Nussbaum's attractive project stands.

However, it is also true that at least three other projects for how to proceed in doing moral philosophy so stand as well. (1) Can we (*sans* foundationalism) articulate an ethical naturalism as a funding theory (a metaethics), such as, say Peter Railton's or Richard Miller's, which might provide a more scientific support than we find in Nussbaum for doing things roughly in the way Nussbaum urges? Or is this *scientism* raising its ugly head again? (2) Can we and, if we can, should we, keeping its essential spirit, redescribe (partially reconceptualize) Nussbaum's project so that it is compatible with, without losing any of its force, a sophisticated noncognitivism such as Gibbard's or Blackburn's? It is not clear to us that this could not be done or that the doing of it would be pointless or in any other way unhappy. If noncognitivism is indeed, as not a few believe, the best metaethics going, so combining it with Nussbaum's theory, if it could be done, would only strengthen her account. After all, their enterprise is resolutely *second-order*, while hers is, for the most part, directly normative and *first-order*. (1) and (2) – most particularly (1) – can generate a third project: (3) Jettison – this third project's central claim goes – all such metaethical or funding theories, 'theories hardly conducive to salvation,' and just engage directly in ethical inquiry (moral philosophy in a broad sense) as an inquiry into trying, quite directly, to ascertain how a human being should live or what the, or at least a, good life for human beings is. Don't worry about, or concern yourselves with, the assumptions with which we earlier said we should concern ourselves! (We refer here to the assumptions we noted that Nussbaum makes, at least seemingly

unconsciously.) Just make, brusquely brushing these issues aside, an investigation which is both theoretical and practical: *with the underlying point of it being essentially practical*. We want to know what the good is so that we can live well. We know, this third project proposes, that we beg certain metaethical or funding questions in so proceeding. So we beg them then in order to get at, without endless, probably irresolvable, prolegomena, what we human beings really want to know, if we can, in our attempts to make sense of our lives and to find the best way to live together. We may – nay, no doubt will – repeatedly fail. And we will never get anything more than partial and incomplete answers, always in some ways unsatisfactory. Still, that is not nothing. We should not set ourselves on the quest for certainty and finality. Moreover, in this resolute fallibilism, we *may*, after all, not be so far from Nussbaum, for nothing that Nussbaum says or suggests should lead us to believe that she is on such a quest. She is not a *traditional* Aristotelian and certainly not a Thomistic-Aristotelian (Nussbaum 1992, 9-11).

Perhaps, however, things may even be worse than they are sketched above. Some form of *strong* noncognitivism may be true and, if that is so, then even the above modest project, i.e., (3), cannot, or so it would seem, succeed. But we cannot justifiably claim that the historical record establishes, or even makes probable, that pessimistic conclusion – recall Hampton on Mackie on disagreement in ethics. Gradualistic progress is compatible in ethics, as it is in science, with persistent disagreement: disagreement which is never total (indeed, we do not even understand what it would be like for it to be total) and, if Charles Peirce and Donald Davidson are near to the mark, must always presuppose a massive unproblematic background agreement.

We do not know whether we can in moral philosophy successfully do the sort of thing that Nussbaum both describes and tries to practice. But we do not know that we cannot, either. Fallibilism is inescapable. But something like the Nussbaum thing is something we want, and humanly and reasonably so, so why not, as so many of our ancestors have, continue such a quest? Perhaps we are knocking our heads against a brick wall, but then again perhaps we are not. We only need despair if we take ourselves, in making such an inquiry, to be on the quest for certainty. But we, by now, having *at most* something of a wistful nostalgia for the Absolute, have – or should have – been cured of the urge to go on such questing,

having firmly learned the lessons of the fallibilism that is common to, and uncontroversially so, both modernity and postmodernity.

This third project is a pragmatic (in a broad sense) and practical way of defending giving a central place to Nussbaum's project for moral philosophy, though not exactly on her terms. There is, as well, and compatible with the above pragmatic approach, a more 'theoretical' Wittgensteinian defense of the core of Nussbaum's project that might find favor with Cora Diamond. However, Nussbaum might not, at least on first consideration, go for it, for it runs against her defense of a sturdy metaphysics (something she shares with Hampton), her refusal to join Williams and Rorty "in dismissive assaults on systematic ethical theory" and her conception of philosophy as "just the pursuit of truth" (Nussbaum 1990, 27, 29; and Nussbaum 1994b, 59-63). But if a Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy is on the mark, these metaethical disputes, as well as foundational claims in normative ethics, will be seen as houses of cards and not as articulations of accounts which need to be decided on – the correct or most plausible account established – before we are justified in doing Nussbaum's broadly, and naturalistically, Aristotelian thing. Nussbaum, that is, could adopt a Wittgensteinian metaphilosophy to chase away the wolves bent on attacking her modestly Aristotelian conception of moral philosophy without giving up anything in her practical philosophy except perhaps some high-soaring metaphors. Her Aristotelianism, after all, is deeply demythologized.

However, what is involved here needs some spelling out. Paul Horwich has put Wittgenstein's therapeutic conception of philosophy (metaphilosophy, if you will, though that is not the way Wittgenstein himself would talk) succinctly and accurately. Horwich remarks:

I take the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy to be his idea that philosophical questions derive from confusion rather than ignorance, that this confusion typically comes from being misled by superficial aspects of language, that the questions cannot be answered but must be dissolved by exposing the mistakes on which they are based, and that the result will be no new knowledge but merely the absence of confusion. This view ought to be regarded, it seems to me, as an empirical generalization, justifiable to the extent that philosophical problems turn out to be susceptible to Wittgenstein's analysis. Nothing about meaning is presupposed. In particular it need not be assumed that philosophical questions and answers are all meaningless (though some may be). Their defect is rather that, engendered in confusion, unmotivated and uncalled-for, one has no reason to take them seriously (Horwich 1993, 155-6).

Wittgenstein said very little about ethics, though it has been said by some that his underlying intent was ethical or ethico-religious. But we can set that contestable claim aside and focus instead on Horwich's characterization. Stanley Cavell, James Conant and Hilary Putnam would argue that Horwich's Wittgenstein is too positivist. We think *au contraire* that such a reading of Wittgenstein makes the best and least obscurantist sense of what he was up to. But, too positivist or not, we will, for the point we wish to make here, let Horwich's characterization stand. After all, if we accepted the Cavell-Conant-Putnam claim, all that would be set aside concerning Horwich's remarks about Wittgenstein's view on what philosophical problems are like is Horwich's claim that it should be taken to have the status of an empirical generalization, and nothing in that would touch our appropriation of Horwich's understanding of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy. What, that is, he says about philosophical questions deriving from confusions and being up for dissolution could stand. Only the claim that that claim is itself an empirical generalization would be dropped.

Taking, then, Horwich's understanding of Wittgenstein as it stands, we should note that Wittgenstein's principal cases on which he practised his conceptual therapy were on philosophical discussions of language, mind, mathematics, and knowledge. But the metaethical discussions going on in this volume and elsewhere, and in most traditional normative ethical theory as well, also raise typically philosophical (here conceptual) problems, problems – really confusions, if Wittgenstein is right – that arguably seem at least to be up for Wittgensteinian therapeutic dissolution. Take, for example, the issues which often divide noncognitivists and cognitivists: internalism/externalism, whether moral utterances are truth-apt, whether there is an is/ought divide, whether moral utterances are essentially expressive, whether descriptive meaning or emotive meaning is primary, the relation between thick and thin concepts, whether the descriptive and expressive elements of moral talk can be isolated, whether there are any 'pure norms' or 'pure normative components' which are just expressive-evocative, whether there is, or even can be, moral knowledge, whether, if there is, it is just a *knowing how* rather than sometimes, as well, a *knowing that*. These matters *may* very well be up for Wittgensteinian dissolution as resting on confusions rather than on

ignorance and thus, if that is so, they are not things that need to be investigated. They are not objects of legitimate inquiry but puzzles to be dissolved. Entanglement with these problems may derive from confusions, confusions where our language has led us astray, where we are, that is, dominated by a mistaken, and, in some instances, even a delusive, picture of our language, a picture which obsesses us when we try to do philosophy and, in turn, continues to drive us to do philosophy. We neither say that Wittgenstein says that *all* pictures of language must be mistaken – after all he sometimes speaks of perspicuous representations – nor, Wittgenstein aside, that that is in fact so. Here we side with Putnam and Conant (Putnam 1994). But what is needed in circumstances where we are dominated by such a ‘false picture’ is not inquiry or investigation, but conceptual therapy (the providing of a sufficiently clear description of the troubling stretch of our language so as to free us from the obsessional hold a certain picture of our language has on us).

However, if this Wittgensteinian therapy applies to these metaethical ‘theses,’ why not just as much to Nussbaum’s philosophical conceptions? How can this help Nussbaum rather than take her from the frying pan into the fire? Why would not this therapy apply just as well to Nussbaum’s own pet philosophical conceptions: her conception of moral philosophy and her conception of philosophy *simpliciter*? Whether talk of the good for human beings, a truly human life, or talk of philosophy, as she does, as “just the pursuit of truth” have much sense beyond their visceral emotive appeal is not at all clear. As attractive as such notions may be to us, as attached as we may become to them, they may still be short on sense. Suppose close analysis of the truth predicate takes us, *via* Tarskian disquotationalism, to a deflationary conception of truth. Are we then going to, in cold sobriety, think that truth is the aim or end or goal of inquiry or of moral reflection? (Rorty 1995, 281-300). We would, if deflationism or even minimalism is so, have to do some fancy footworking demythologization of her talk of philosophy as the search for truth, and it is possible to think that similar things might obtain for talk of the good life or for any *general* account of what it is to live well. Yet, *à la* Wittgenstein, questions about these very questions about Nussbaum’s notions can be turned back on themselves seemingly endlessly. Still, whatever way we go, it leaves us with wheels spinning in the mud. It leaves us both with wanting to ask certain questions, to carry out certain pursuits, *and* with the feeling

that such questions and such pursuits may, after all, rest on confusions which need to be dispelled. So perhaps the way to go is the way Rorty, Williams, and Foucault go, and to jettison, while retaining moral and political seriousness, ethical *theorizing*: Nussbaum's naturalized Aristotelianism, Baier's Humeanism, as well as the grand tradition of systematic normative ethics and metaethical theory. Nussbaum would surely not wish to go this way, but, going this way, would continue to allow close attention, as we see in the work of Foucault, to the particularity and to the concrete detail of the moral life that she finds in novels and that can be found, as well, in historical interpretative description, anthropological description, good journalism and the like, unencumbered by philosophical theories often rooted in metaphysical conceptions that defy critical inspection. It is possible that to be serious about morality, politics and our lives, is to be *unserious* about ethical theories, metaethical or otherwise. This is anti-theory *theory* all the way down.

We are neither giving to understand that we endorse nor that we reject such anti-theory. Our Afterword is not very much in either the endorsing or rejecting business, as if that was a task of philosophy, but seeks instead to raise issues, seeks to locate tensions and to set out possibilities – sometimes neglected possibilities – for ethical theory, including anti-theory theory and for reflection *sans* theory about morality. It tries to depict some of the salient possibilities of how, with or without theory, to go, in thinking about ethics with honesty, integrity, and to some point, in trying to decide how we should live our lives. However, endorsement aside, we do not try for the impossible, namely, ethical neutrality or neutrality about how to do moral philosophy. We depict possibilities, but in doing so, we, not infrequently, make judgment calls about what is the most plausible and reasonable thing to believe or to argue for. We express views, as everyone else does who is not utterly bland, about what we think are the more plausible conceptions, while providing dissenting views with the strongest voice we can muster for them. In other words, we engage in dialectic. We engage, that is, in the unending task of this engagement – this attempt at honest reflection – that is also wide ranging, trying to cover, never very successfully, all the plausible bases. In doing this, at least one of us is *sometimes* strongly inclined to think that a thoughtful anti-theory theory response *may* be the best response in the unending task of trying to be truthful, clear-visioned, and serious in thinking about morality – in thinking about how to live in our

inescapably, and not at all to be regretted, interdependency, and in thinking relatedly about how our societies should be shaped (Nielsen 1991 and Nielsen 1995). But again it may not. Perhaps philosophy need not be so chastened and *perhaps* a Wittgensteinian therapeutic approach may not be as applicable to Nussbaum's approach or to Baier's as it at least seems to be to grand normative ethical theories and metaethical theories. Nussbaum's and Baier's accounts are less plainly *conceptual*, than traditional accounts, either metaethical or normative ethical. Instead, they are broadly speaking empirical-cum-normative, putting the *ethical* back into ethical theory, something so many philosophers have failed to do, even in the doing of normative ethical theory.

We will illustrate our point about 'being less conceptual.' A metaethicist might say 'Moral utterances can neither be true nor false in any substantial sense.' That is a plainly *second-order*, and plainly a conceptual, remark, very possibly ripe for Wittgensteinian treatment. By contrast Nussbaum would have us as moral philosophers "search for ways of living together in a community, country, or planet" (Nussbaum 1990, 24). This is surely no easy thing. Part of what is said here is no doubt baffling and no doubt many of the things said have conceptual outcroppings. But the bafflement here is at least characteristically unlike the plainly conceptual perplexities Wittgenstein was so obsessed to free us from. Moreover, Nussbaum's searching for ways to live together, as daunting and demanding as it is, does not appear to reflect conceptual perplexity or at least not principally so. And, even to the extent that it is a conceptual perplexity, it does not appear to be, or at least not primarily, something deriving from confusion rather than from ignorance or a lack of deep and persistent sympathetic reflection. Nussbaum's search, vague as our and her understanding of it is, is still a *first-order* ethical-cum-empirical matter, not a conceptual puzzle, like whether there could be a private language or whether we could ever really know the mind of another or whether self-deception is possible. There are important differences between Nussbaum's question and these plainly conceptual puzzles. For these conceptual puzzles, we know that the answer that is blindingly obvious (e.g., 'Of course, self-deception is possible for people deceive themselves over and over again.') is not what is at issue. And it is also the case that we are not infrequently lost as to what is at issue. For Nussbaum's question, it does not seem amiss to try to answer it or at least to try to get some reasonable and reflective grip on it.

It is not like a puzzle up for dissolution. To be gripped by Nussbaum's question does not seem to place us in anything very like the situation of Wittgenstein's philosophers caught up in their obsessions which they may not even recognize to be conceptual. They are obsessively in the grip of a false picture of how language works. But that seems at least to ring false for people trying to gain some purchase on Nussbaum's question. The self-deception puzzle, by contrast, is very much like the Achilles-and-the-tortoise puzzle. We know that self-deception is common, but when we think about self-deception we do not see how it could even be *possible*. Other-deception yes, but self-deception no! But Nussbaum's question does not look like that at all – though appearances here *may* be deceiving. It does not appear to be one of those conceptual puzzles up for Wittgensteinian dissolution. Perhaps appearances are misleading here, but certainly not plainly so.

There is – to shift gears again – a sense of both urgency and exuberance in Nussbaum's writing, and perhaps neither are misplaced. There is, in all kinds of complicated ways, and often, as well, in rather straightforward ways, much that is amiss in our lives and in our societies, and with some of these ways of being amiss we have the sense that time is running out on us. They, of course, are typically not ills that just getting a better grip on the sense of the question 'How are we to live?' will resolve or even do much to push forward toward a resolution. But they also typically are *in part* ethical, and perhaps really honest and thoughtful ethical investigations will help in their resolution, particularly when the people doing the investigating are factually well informed as well. Suppose, for example, we believe that our societies should be transformed into more egalitarian societies than the ones we are in. But, if this is what we believe, we must, if we are really in earnest, develop a reasonably feasible picture of how we might go from where we are now to a more egalitarian state of affairs. We must be able to give at least a rough sketch of some plausibly possible routes. Moral reflection here is not enough. But, that notwithstanding, both moral reflection *and* conceptual clarity are also vital. (We hope by now it is clear that they do not come to the same thing.) There has been in our world an extensive jolting-up of our thinking and feeling (of our very ethical *sensibilities*). Postmodernism isn't all bad, though there is *déjà vu* here. After all, this demystifying and resistance to re-enchantment has been going on since the beginning of the Enlightenment.

As a result of this jolting, we are faced with a bewildering array of options personal, and, on a national and global scale, political and socio-economic, and there is an imperative need in all sorts of contexts to answer Lenin's question 'What is to be done?' Hence the sense of urgency. But Nussbaum also has a sense of exuberance, in the face of all that, that many may not share. She tells us that "this is a rich and wonderful time in moral philosophy," unlike in the bad old dull days of analytical metaethics. Even by the time she was a graduate student at Harvard in 1969, these bad old days, she tells us, were becoming a thing of the past. She remarks "By this time, the positivist-metaethical movement in ethics that had for a long time discouraged the philosophical study of substantive ethical theories and practical ethical issues, confining ethics to the analysis of ethical language, was dying" (Nussebaum 1990, 13 and 169).

Nussbaum's exuberance needs to be counterbalanced by Diamond's skepticism, their partially shared outlook notwithstanding. Recall Diamond's remark, previously quoted by us, from her "Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is," that

No one knows what the subject [of moral philosophy] is; most widely agreed on accounts of it depend on suppositions that are not obvious and that reflect particular evaluations and views of the world, of human nature, and of what it is to speak, think, write or read about the world. The more inclusive an account is, the more likely it will include what many philosophers would not dream of counting as part of their subject. (Diamond 1991, 380)

Still, exuberance aside, it is perhaps not unreasonable to hope that something like the way Nussbaum recommends that we proceed could fruitfully be carried on, largely displacing anti-theory, traditional normative ethics and metaethical theory. Isn't this the way we should go in doing moral philosophy?

Let us run with this a little more. Nussbaum takes her starting point and procedure to be essentially that of Aristotle, whose procedure and starting point should be clearly distinguished, as she stresses, from his "own ethical conception which is just one of the conceptions it [his procedure] considers" (Nussbaum 1990, 25). This procedure or method is also a procedure or method followed by philosophers as different as Sidgwick, Hegel, and Rawls (*ibid.*). The method is dialectical and comparative. But we start, before we get on the dialectical see-saw, with "a very broad and inclusive question: How should a human being live?" (*ibid.*).

This question presupposes no creeping Kantianism, that is, no specific demarcation of moral and non-moral domains, but includes initially, a very wide conception of how we might live and what our distinctive goods are. Moreover, "his inquiry is both empirical and practical: empirical, in that it is concerned with, takes its 'evidence' from, the experience of life; practical, in that it aims to find a conception by which human beings can live, and live together" (ibid.). As is Sidgwick's and Rawls's as well, Aristotle's procedure, a procedure that Nussbaum adopts as her own, is *comparative*. It requires "a deep and sympathetic investigation of all the major ethical alternatives and the comparison of each with our active sense of life" (ibid., 27). We set out – attempt perspicuously to display – the different moral theories, Aristotle's own, religious ethical theories, perfectionist theories, Kantian theories, utilitarian theories, pluralistic deontological theories, and anti-theory theories. Each theory is worked through – both sympathetically and critically – held before our gaze in the clearest light we can muster, and compared with the other theories and also against our beliefs and feelings, our active sense of life (ibid., 26). Consistency, coherence, clarity of articulation are, of course, also sought. But that is not all. Perceptiveness, a vivid sense of life, a fine attunement, are sought as well.

What is looked for is what will provide "the best overall fit between a view and what is deepest in human lives" (ibid.). What is sought is "coherence and fit in the web of judgment, feeling, perception, and principle, taken as a whole" (ibid.). With Aristotle, Sidgwick and Rawls, it is only ethical theories or ethical and political theories that are so compared. What is distinctive, and significantly so, about Nussbaum's extension of this account, an extension fully in keeping with its dialectical structure, is that novels and dramatic works should enter into the comparison as well. They enter in, as something which in both *form* and *content*, yields a distinctive ethical understanding and attunement. Moreover, they should not enter as junior partners. Her prime examples are the novels of Henry James and Marcel Proust and the works of Greek tragedians, but many other literary works could and should be added as well, as should historians such as Thucydides, Gibbon, and Hume and profound essayists (if that is the right word for them) such as Montaigne, Pascal, and Newman. (Call them instead philosophers, if you will. 'Philosophy' does not name a natural kind.) They enter in, to, among other things, counter the rationalist bias that Hume, William James, and

Annette Baier find in most moral theory, enabling us to gain a richer and more inclusive sense of our opening question: how should a human being live? Without these texts, along with the standard philosophical texts as well, we will not be able even to approximate gaining "all that our sense of life urges us to consider" (ibid.). Without them, we will not get a full comparison of the ways of thinking morally and thinking about morality and about conceptions of ways of living and responding. The idea is not at all that we *substitute* the study of literary texts for that of philosophical treatises – including demanding philosophical treatises – on ethics. Rather the "proposal is that we should add the study of certain novels to the study of these works on the grounds that without them we will not have a fully adequate ethical conception, one that we ought to investigate" (ibid., 27). Novels, particularly James's and Proust's novels, are vital in this comparison because, against generalizing theories, with their tendency to overstress principles, they will teach us, in the overall procedure of ethical deliberation, the value of "attention to particulars, a respect for the emotions, and a tentative and non-dogmatic attitude to the bewildering multiplicities of life ..." (ibid.). They teach us the value, including the ethical value, of a passionate love of particulars, "the role of love and other emotions in the good human life"; they teach us the "epistemological value of emotion" and, relatedly, the importance of "commitment to cognitive guidance by the emotions" and they help us to realize that in certain circumstances relying on our emotions can be more reliable than what can be ground out by abstract reasoning (ibid., 186). In the very way she depicts how our understanding of life is enhanced by how the Jamesian and Proustian stress gives a particular spin on things, we also very much need, as a counterbalance to them, the different spin that the dramas of Brecht and the plays and novels by Sartre provide. In both cases there is a love of particulars and a fine attunement, but James and Proust, on the one hand, and Brecht and Sartre on the other, have very different views on the particularities of life and of what is most significant. It is important that we have such differences vividly before us.

This dialectical method which she describes as seeking a *perceptive equilibrium* has many features of Rawls's reflective equilibrium, but avoids what she thinks is its residual Kantian and rationalist biases. What is distinctive about perceptive equilibrium – it has also been called 'extended reflective equilibrium' – is what it *adds* to reflective

equilibrium as conceived by Rawls. Indeed, as we see it, though we are inclined to think that these very notions are already at least implicit in Rawls's conception, the elements it 'adds' certainly ought to be part of any wide and general reflective equilibrium. And certainly Nussbaum has, and rightly, given these notions a stress that they have not generally received from philosophers using the method of reflective equilibrium.

What we need to do, is to intelligently, sympathetically, and impartially, with attentive attunement to detail and nuance, though not without a critical eye for their lacunae, attempt to see how these accounts of ethical life square with ascertainable fact, our considered convictions, what we deeply, but sometimes rather inarticulately, feel, including our emotional sensibilities and a sense of the details of life. We should also consider how, if at all, these different ethical conceptions (here taking a page from Hegel) are embodied in institutions and social practices and consider as well our felt reactions to these institutions and practices. Knowing that we will never get anything even within the ballpark of an algorithm here, in the inescapable *messiness* of the enterprise of perceptive equilibrium, we try to answer the question of how we are to live, to get, considering all these things, the most coherent conception we can get of how to live together and, of course, how to live as individuals as well, though our interdependence makes it the case that we are always in one way or another together (Baier 1987, 41-56; Code 1987, 357-82; and Nielsen 1987, 383-418). We seek to get a picture that will match best with what we know – or at least reliably think we know – and, as well, with our most deeply and persistently felt sensibilities and considered convictions.

For Nussbaum, no more than for Aristotle, Hume, Sidgwick, Hegel, or Rawls, is there a possibility of standing free from such sensibilities and convictions. We cannot, as David Gauthier thinks he can, set aside these sensibilities and convictions and, *trusting instead to theory*, go on with our ethical inquiries and deliberations (Gauthier 1986, 268-9).⁶ It is also an open-ended process with nothing even remotely like final

6 For criticism of Gauthier here, see Nielsen 1994, 57-62.

closure. There is no Archimedian point or all-purpose moral compass. Life is not like that and theory will not be either, if it is any good. We need to avoid Cartesianism in morals as we need to avoid Cartesianism elsewhere. But we need also to recognize, what moral philosophers are almost professionally incapable of recognizing, that the *goal* of moral philosophy is not theory but *practice*; and that the intellect is not the only part of the reader worth addressing (Nussbaum 1990, 186). Nussbaum remarks in a passage that should be quoted in full:

Throughout this open-ended inquiry, we will need to maintain as much self-consciousness as possible about our own method and our implicit ends, asking what evaluative content they themselves express. Perceptive equilibrium is not the same end as reflective equilibrium; it does not use the same judgments or the same faculties. This does not mean that there can be no objectivity in ethical inquiry; it does not mean that all choices of method are subjective. But it does mean that procedures themselves are value-laden, and thus part and parcel of the holistic enterprise they organize; replaceable, like any other part, to the end of a deeper and more inclusive attunement. So we must examine them at each stage, asking whether they are capable of doing full justice to everything that our sense of life wants to include. (ibid.)

This commitment to extending wide and general reflective equilibrium into an extended reflective equilibrium, including an equilibrium of the emotions, seems to us a very attractive way to go in moral philosophy. It can be combined with a metaethics of the new dispensation. Peter Railton, for example, in his nuanced, naturalistic account, uses the method of wide reflective equilibrium, and sensibility theories, such as those developed by John McDowell and David Wiggins, are thoroughly non-scientistic, non-moral realist (but also not irrealist) versions of ethical naturalism. Both of these accounts combine well with Nussbaum's account. Though at a more abstract metaethical level than Nussbaum's account, and designed for metaethical work, they are attuned to and account for the ethical phenomena with which Nussbaum is concerned. The sensibility theories in particular square well with Nussbaum's Henry Jamesian conception of moral perception. (But note Isaac Levi's criticism of McDowell on such matters in this volume.) So, as we move away from the old analytical metaethics and from rationalistic, and *sometimes* scientific, conceptions of metaethics, such as we find moral realists committed to, conceptions which go hand and glove with metaphysical realism, there is with such a travelling no

conflict in underlying structural conception between Nussbaum, on the one hand, and metaethical philosophers such as Miller, Railton, McDowell, and Wiggins, on the other, though there is a difference in emphasis (e.g., from explanation to practice), a difference concerning what is most worth doing in moral philosophy and a difference concerning where to place our priorities. (The underlying structural alignment to the contrary notwithstanding, it is tempting to respond that these are the really important differences and that they are considerable.) There is, as Nussbaum remarks herself, a considerable difficulty in “discovering a nonprejudiced description of ethical inquiry” (ibid.).

If we look at two much admired books in the recent tradition of metaethics, David Gauthier’s *Morals by Agreement* and Allan Gibbard’s *Wise Choices Apt Feelings*, and compare them with two also much admired books – and sometimes much admired by the same people – Martha C. Nussbaum’s *Love’s Knowledge* and Annette C. Baier’s *Moral Prejudices*, we get the jarring impression of two very different genres, reflecting deep differences about what is important, how to proceed, how to read one’s predecessors (compare, for example, Baier and Gauthier on Hume), and over what is most crucial to utilize from outside moral philosophy in doing moral philosophy. For Gauthier and Gibbard (though sometimes variously), rational choice theory, decision theory, cognitive psychology, Darwinian theory, microeconomics (for the most part, very abstract theories) is where it is at; by contrast, for Nussbaum and Baier (though again sometimes variously), social anthropology, history, sociology, political economy, clinical psychology and literature (all very concrete matters and, where theoretical, concretely theoretical) is where it is at. The resulting accounts of Gauthier and Gibbard are abstract, sometimes formidably abstract; the accounts of Baier and Nussbaum, by contrast, are concrete with fine attention to detail and context. The very aims of the contrasting types of theory seem at least to be at odds, or at least very different, so different that it is possible to wonder if they are in the same ballpark or if they are playing the same language-game or have much in the way of common underlying aims. Yet all four of these philosophers are very able and have a finely nuanced understanding of what they are about and a good understanding of at least some of the alternatives to their ways of doing things. Moreover, all of these philosophers are roughly contemporaries with a similar analytical training. Yet it is – or so it

seems at least – difficult to think that there is much point in doing things the Gauthier-Gibbard way if we are taken by the Baier-Nussbaum way and vice-versa. (We are not suggesting that for either Gauthier-Gibbard, on the one hand, or for Baier-Nussbaum, on the other, their ways are identical. They certainly are not, but each member of the contrasting pairs stands in much the same tradition to the other in the same paired group, while, when the pairs taken together are contrasted, it is evident that they are ‘worlds apart.’)⁷

So in thinking for ourselves about how to proceed in doing moral philosophy which way should we go? Or should we try somehow to combine them? Or should we say ‘A plague on both your houses’ and go in some still different way? But, if so, what way and how shall we characterize it? Surely the above ways are not the only alternatives. Yet both of these alternatives are in their own ways attractive. They are two roads that “diverged in a yellow wood and sorry we cannot travel them both and be one traveller.” But then which, if either, road should be taken? In trying to see how to proceed in moral philosophy, this remains a deep unsettled issue concerning which it is difficult not to fall into – in choosing or even in ambivalently swinging back and forth between them – a partisan stance (Daniels 1996 and Nielsen 1996).

V

We will in closing raise a still different issue about metaethics and the doing of moral philosophy. During the Golden Age of metaethics, even where metaethics was not taken to be all that was philosophically viable in moral philosophy, it was still taken to be its *principia*. We would, so it was thought, never have any plausible normative theories or reasonable practice-driven theories of the moral life or even secure reasonable moral practices, if we did not get to first things first, and to get to first things was to conceptually clarify our fundamental moral con-

7 For a paradigmatic articulation of such differences, see Annette Baier’s critical notice of *Morals by Agreement* and Gauthier’s response (Baier, 1988, 315-30; and Gauthier 1988, 385-418).

cepts, to gain an adequate analysis of moral terms and more generally of our moral language. The deepest and most fundamental reflection in or concerning morals consists in conceptual clarification – or so went the tacit assumption – an assumption that we think is a philosopher's conceit. In a characteristic drum roll for analytic metaethics made during its heyday, Henry Aiken remarked in his *Reason and Conduct* that "the task of clarifying such golden words as 'liberty,' 'justice,' 'democracy,' 'person' and 'love' is ... essential to the well being of any people whose way of life is expressed in terms of them. For if they are unclear or confused or inconsistent then the way of life is also" (Aiken 1962, 30). William Frankena, making similar remarks, believes that this task of metaethical clarification is essential in our age of cultural crisis (Frankena 1964, 452-4). Otherwise, he in effect has it, we will stagger from one irrationality to another defenseless before the siren songs of postmodernism.

Such remarks seem to us incredible; they attribute magical healing powers to conceptual clarification, but, more interesting theoretically, they have, as John Rawls argues in good Quinian spirit, things backwards. It is only when we have done good and reasonably systematic *substantive* work, made a careful broadly empirical study of our substantive moral conceptions, done what Hume calls our mental geography and done it well, will a useful analysis of moral terms and concepts be possible and then, in that circumstance, it may very well not be necessary or even of much value.

We will run a bit with Rawls's way of putting the matter in his "Some Remarks About Moral Theory" in his *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971, 46-53). Rawls remarks, "I wish to stress that a theory of justice is precisely that, namely theory. It is a theory of the moral sentiments ... setting out the principles governing our moral powers, or more specifically our sense of justice" (ibid., 50-1). He goes on to remark,

A theory of justice is subject to the same rules of method as other theories. Definitions and analysis of meaning do not have a special place: definition is but one device used in setting up the general structure of theory. Once the whole framework is worked out, definitions have no distinct status and stand or fall with the theory itself. (ibid., 51)

Rawls goes on to add that in "any case it is obviously impossible to develop a substantive theory of justice founded solely on truths of logic and definition. The analysis of moral concepts and the a priori, how-

ever traditionally understood, is too slender a basis. Moral philosophy must be free to use contingent assumptions and general facts as it pleases" (ibid.). Then, in a remark that is strikingly pertinent to the metaethics/substantive ethics distinction, to traditional claims for the former's priority and centrality and to claims, *à la* Aiken, Frankena, and a host of others, for the great clarifying powers of conceptual analysis, Rawls remarks:

... if we can find an accurate account of our moral conceptions, then questions of meaning and justification may prove much easier to answer. Indeed some of them may no longer be real questions at all. Note, for example, the extraordinary deepening of our understanding of the meaning and justification of statements in logic and mathematics made possible by developments since Frege and Cantor. A knowledge of the fundamental structures of logic and set theory and their relation to mathematics has transformed the philosophy of these subjects in a way that conceptual analysis and linguist investigations never could. One has only to observe the effect of the division of theories into those which are decidable and complete, undecidable yet complete, and neither complete nor decidable. The problem of meaning and truth in logic and mathematics is profoundly altered by the discovery of logical systems illustrating these concepts. Once the substantive content of moral conceptions is better understood, a similar transformation may occur. It is possible that convincing answers to questions of the meaning and justification of moral judgment can be found in no other way. (ibid., 51-2)

This fits very well with the development of analytic philosophy in a more holistic, contextually oriented and pragmatist manner with the work of Quine, Davidson, Rorty and Putnam (Rorty 1985, 89-121). Rawls, always a person of understatement, does not say anything so strong, but his remarks give a large part of the rationale of why metaethics, taken as a distinct enterprise, can be, and indeed should be, quietly laid to rest. It is a testimony to the good sense of philosophers that something like this is quietly happening. And, for the most part, those philosophers who still think of their work as metaethical, or in part metaethical, have so transformed the very idea of metaethics, that it no longer makes a significant contrast with substantive ethics. Our task is to do, and to work out good ways of doing, substantive ethics. Shall we go anti-theory all the way down like Richard Rorty and Michel Foucault, or shall we develop substantive theories after the fashion of John Rawls, Norman Daniels, Kurt Baier, Thomas Scanlon, or Brian Barry, or shall we take the 'less rationalistic ways' of

Annette Baier and Martha Nussbaum, or should we continue with something of a metaethics linked with substantive ethics after the fashion of Peter Railton or Richard Miller? All these options remain open and no one of them is clearly the most reasonable way of going about things. Moreover, it should be noted in this context, that the distance between Scanlon and Rawls, on the one hand, and Railton and Miller, on the other, is not that great. Still, across this whole spectrum there are important differences, perhaps even vitally important differences. Foucault and Railton – to fasten on the extremes – are up to rather different things, have very different priorities and agendas. So which way to go? There are a number of roads in the yellow wood with no agreement about which one we should take. But that need not be a matter for regret, and to speak of despair here is absurdly histrionic. Something rich and sound *may* emerge from this extensive, but sometimes also very self-conscious, dissensus? Still, a good dose of skepticism concerning this seems to us healthy. Perhaps, after all, Nussbaum is right and this is “a rich and wonderful time in moral philosophy” (Nussbaum 1990, 169).

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