Insights into Ethical Theory and Practice

Insights into Ethical Theory and Practice:

Principia Eclectica

Edited by

Francis Fallon

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Insights into Ethical Theory and Practice: *Principia Eclectica*

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“A great necessity is laid upon you, if you are honest with yourself,
a great necessity to be good.”
—Boethius

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FOREWORD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LONG ISLAND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

GLENN STATILE

The Long Island Philosophical Society held its first meeting in 1964 at an auspicious moment in American history. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy had just been assassinated the previous year and America's new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, had just begun to launch his new plans for the Great Society. Meanwhile in New York City a British band from Liverpool would make a high profile debut performance upon American soil with its appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, the leading television variety program of the era. While all this was going on the Long Island Philosophical Society (LIPS) held its own inauspicious first meeting in the apartment of a local New York City philosopher. Long Island is technically and demographically designated as being comprised of four New York State counties. Suffolk and Nassau Counties are what most people consider to be Long Island proper. While Brooklyn and Queens are two of the five boroughs of New York City they double as an integral part of the Long Island peninsula. In a looser sense it was always proper to think of LIPS, and remains so today, as a philosophical society representing all of New York City and Long Island. Throughout the first several decades of its existence it remained an annual, and sometimes biannual, locus of professional philosophical activity for New York City and Long Island dwellers alike. As I write this brief historical profile in 2019 LIPS has grown, first to regional, then to national, and now to international proportions.

"Mighty oaks from small acorns grow," states an old proverb, a variant of which can be found at least as early as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1374). From this small seed, consisting of a half dozen local philosophers from the Long Island and greater New York City areas, sitting around a living room exchanging philosophical ideas, a venerable and highly regarded institution, the Long Island Philosophical Society, was born. It would not be amiss to invoke the celebrated Butterfly Effect of chaos theory to describe the thoroughly unpredictable fact that the Society is both still in existence and thriving in a new century, over fifty years since its very low profile inception.

Among the earliest members of LIPS during its nascent stages was Professor James P. Friel who spent his teaching career at SUNY Farmingdale. Both gregarious in his demeanor and generous in his efforts to further the careers of local philosophers Jim was not only there at the beginning, what Saul Kripke might designate as a *baptismal* moment, but also seems to have been the glue that helped keep the society afloat a number of times over the ensuing decades. It was Jim who first gave me the opportunity to present a paper when I attended my first LIPS meeting back in 2001. And it would be Jim who, as cochairperson of the Society along with Dr. Margaret Cuonzo of LIU (Brooklyn Campus), would hand the conference organizing baton over to me several years later. It was always quite apparent to all who know Jim that the philosophical race must go on. While Jim was not a professional philosopher in the strict sense in that he taught in his University's English department he dedicated his entire career to stirring in others a love of wisdom, the true *telos* of the philosophical spirit. Jim is a fine poet and published a first rate journal of the Humanities named *Aitia* for decades.

The Long Island Philosophical Society continued to hold regular conferences through the 1960s and 1970s. Two of the doyens of Long Island area philosophy, Dr. Philip Pecorino (CUNY Queensborough Community College) and Dr. Luis E. Navia (New York Institute of Technology, Old Westbury campus) guided the organization at various junctures during the 1960s and 1970s. Phil has become quite well known for his prowess in developing online courses, while Luis has written a number of highly regarded philosophical books. The steady hand of Dr. Eugene Kelly of the New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury would guide the Society through the Reagan years. Among his accomplishments were his organization of a number of high profile conferences in specialized subject areas, which in turn led to the publications of three Proceedings, two of which were edited by Gene. Here Gene recalls his years presiding over LIPS.

> We had some special conferences while I was chairman of LIPS, for which I have years, if not dates. We had a conference on Socrates in 1983 at NYIT, to which we invited Eric A. Havelock as keynote speaker. The Proceedings of that conference were edited by me and published by University Press of America. Another conference, *Ethics and the Environment*, was held on April 13, 1985 at C.W. Post. Its Proceedings were edited by Richard Hart and were also published by University Press of America. A third special conference, *Professional Ethics in Health Care Services*, was held on March 21, 1987 at the New York Chiropractic College. The keynote speaker was Michael D. Bayles. Its Proceedings were edited by me and were again

> published by University Press of America. Then in 1989 I chaired a special conference on the philosophy of Max Scheler at SUNY-Stony Brook. This was a two-day conference. The keynote speaker was Manfred Frings. Its Proceedings were not published. We had a treasurer in my time. The first was Daphne McKinney, and the second Maureen Feder. Joe Filonowicz took over the leadership from me in the early 1990s.

After a decade at the helm of LIPS Gene Kelly stepped down and returned to the fold as a frequent conference presenter. Our new leader was Dr. Joseph (Duke) Filonowicz of Long Island University (Brooklyn Campus). A longstanding point of confusion in LIPS has always been the official title accorded to the person running the organization. We see above that Gene Kelly refers to himself as chairperson, while in the following program from a 1998 conference held at Suffolk County Community College (see below) we learn that Dr. Filonowicz is the president of LIPS. This confusion continues to this day but is unproblematic. The program indicates that Dr. Lowell Kleiman was the coordinator of the conference at the host institution. Lowell, two decades later, remains the chairperson of the philosophy department at the Ammerman campus of SUNY Suffolk Community College. Lowell is famous in Long Island philosophical circles for organizing an annual spring conference at SCCC for the last two decades. As is Joe Filonowicz, Lowell is an able musician and performs regularly in the SCCC jazz band. Along with Jim Friel and Gene Kelly, Lowell has contributed more than he can properly be thanked for in regard to acting as a catalyst for the survival and thriving of professional philosophy in the greater Long Island area. He has been a confidante, consultant, and able problem solver to everyone running LIPS for many years. If LIPS had a Hall of Fame then Jim Friel, Gene Kelly, Joe Filonowicz, and Lowell Kleiman, would be the first to be enshrined in the LIPS version of Cooperstown on the Long Island Sound. Many other contributors to the LIPS cause from its earliest years also merit our equal recognition and gratitude, among them being Philip Pecorino, Luis E. Navia, and Richard Hart.

After serving for ten years as president of LIPS Dr. Filonowicz handed the LIPS baton to Dr. Margaret Cuonzo, whom he had himself hired at LIU (Brooklyn Campus). It would be Margaret who would usher the organization into a new century. Margaret is a first rate philosopher whose first book, entitled *Paradox*, was published by MIT Press. I first met Margaret as a graduate student at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. Little did I know that our philosophical careers would be knotted together a few short years later when I gave my first presentation at a LIPS conference that she organized. During Margaret's tenure at the helm of LIPS she was aided by the perennial LIPS stalwart Jim Friel, to whom I remain grateful for accepting my first LIPS submission. Together they served as cochairpersons.

Margaret was a veritable workhorse in that for several years she organized two LIPS conferences per year, one in the Fall and one in the Spring. Attendance at LIPS events had begun to swell significantly since the early days when a member's apartment might suffice as the conference venue. Many more papers than in past conferences were also presented during Margaret's years as the visible head of LIPS. One especially memorable LIPS conference during the Cuonzo years was cosponsored along with the neighboring New Jersey Regional Philosophical Association.

In 2007 Margaret Cuonzo, due to the ardors of serving as chairperson of the philosophy department at her home university, selected Dr. Glenn Statile of Saint John's University to replace her as cochairperson. She continues to attend and participate in events and serves in the background as both Executive Director and Treasurer. In 2013 Dr. Statile, after the gradual retreat of Jim Friel from active service in the organization, would be joined as co-chairperson by Dr. Leslie Aarons of LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). Under their leadership LIPS was able to celebrate its golden anniversary in 2014. Over the course of the last decade and a half LIPS conferences have outgrown their once local and regional boundaries. Now held once a year in the spring LIPS conferences have hosted philosophers from over thirty-five states and fifteen different countries. One special feature of each LIPS conference over the last decade has been the reading of a new philosophical poem by local philosopher and poet, Professor John F. DeCarlo of Hofstra University. John serves on the LIPS Board of Directors. For his many poetic contributions to the Society he was named LIPS Poet Laureate about a decade ago. Beginning in 2008 LIPS entered into a verbal agreement with Molloy College to hold its annual conference at Molloy in every even numbered year. Dr. Howard Ponzer, the chairperson of the philosophy department at Molloy and a valued member of the LIPS Board of Directors, explained that Molloy wanted the LIPS conferences to serve as the keystone event of Molloy's annual spring Philosophy Week. This policy is still in effect at the present time. We hope that the greater Long Island Community will still be served by LIPS at the time of what would be its centennial anniversary in 2064. LIPS not only provides a convenient forum for the development and advancement of both local and nonlocal philosophers, it also provides them with an audience. To paraphrase Plato: the unexamined philosophy paper is not worth reading.

Current Board of Directors of the Long Island Philosophical Society

1) Dr. Alina Feld
2) Dr. Anton Alterman
3) Professor John F. De Carlo - Poet Laureate of LIPS
4) Dr. Howard Ponzer
5) Dr. Moti Mizrahi
6) Dr. Francis Fallon - Editor of LIPS Proceedings
7) Dr. Leslie Aarons - (Cochairperson and coorganizer)
8) Dr. Margaret Cuonzo - Executive Director and Treasurer
9) Dr. Glenn Statile - (Cochairperson and coorganizer)

Here is the LIPS program as run by Drs. Joseph Filonowicz and Lowell Kleiman referred to above.

****

Suffolk County Community College
AMMERMAN CAMPUS
1. PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT
Lowell Kleiman, Philosophy Department Head
and
Joseph Filonowicz, President of LIPS
Invite You to Join Us
for the
Spring '98 Meetings
of the
Long Island Philosophical Society
Saturday, May 16th

Continental Breakfast
9:30 - 10:30
The Mildred Green Room, Babylon Student Center

Morning Plenary Session
10:30 - 12:00
2. Frederic Schick, Rutgers University
on
3. *"Ambiguity, Choice, and Action"*
The Mildred Green Room, Babylon Student Center

Complimentary Buffet Luncheon
12:00 - 1:15
Babylon Student Center

Afternoon Concurrent Sessions

1:30 - 2:30 Islip Arts Building, Room 110 Chair: Philip Pecorino, SUNY Queensborough Community College Speaker: James Pearce, Dowling College "Incommensurability - An Historical Perspective" Commentator: Rita Nolan, SUNY Stony Brook	1:30 - 2:30 Islip Arts Building, Room 112 Chair: Hugh Silverman, SUNY Stony Brook Speaker: Kristana Arp, LIU Brooklyn Campus "Simone deBeauvoir's Existentialist Ontology" Commentator: Gertrude Postl, SUNY Suffolk Community College
2:30 - 3:30 Speaker: Frederick Michael, CUNY Brooklyn College "Leibnizian and Aristotelian Worlds" Commentator: Margaret Cuonzo, LIU Brooklyn Campus	2:30 - 3:30 Speaker: Ray Stern, CUNY Medgar Evers College "Mill's Utilitarianism" Commentator: David Benfield, Montclair State University

Closing Reception
Afternoon Tea
3:30 - 4:00

INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS FALLON

This book wants to be read by accident. It does not attempt to provide a collection for the specialist, though specialists of different kinds can benefit from it. It does not attempt a survey of the broader field, though what it offers may prove surprisingly useful in that respect. Though the formal student may of course gain perspective or insight from what follows, perhaps the ideal reader is the autodidact, motivated to investigation by idiosyncratic purposes, pursuing the project via eclectic means. To you, as much as to anyone, we present *Principia Eclectica*.[1]

As any of the contributors to this volume will know, there is routine call for introductory ethics texts. Still, it is by no means a given for an instructor to adopt one for the duration of a course. The variety of individual expertise and inclination, coupled with an embarrassment of riches from which to choose, makes such a choice very difficult. The inclusion of contemporary debate has to be balanced against regard for the historical literature that helps shape them; novelty must be balanced against influence.[2] Perhaps a loose consensus exists that it is important in some form to cover the 'big three' – virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism.[3] Some would urge inclusion – probably wisely – of critiques of the notoriously tempting but ultimately fallacious schools of moral relativism, as well as of the pseudo-science of so-called 'Social Darwinism'.[4]

---

[1] Thanks to Glenn Statile for the idea for the main title – a pun on the influential text *Principia Ethica*, by G.E. Moore – as well as for much else.

[2] See Joseph Forte. *Moral Issues and Movies*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt, 2001, for an excellent new approach to striking this balance.

[3] Secondary sources on these aren't necessarily reliable or accessible, but can be: even the initiated will find Roger Crisp. *Mill on Utilitarianism*. New York: Routledge, 1997, e.g., helpful on utilitarianism.

[4] Rachels' classic - James Rachels. The Elements of Moral Philosophy. 7th ed., Edited by Stuart Rachels. New York: McGraw Hill, 2012 - chapters 2 and 3, neatly counter relativistic arguments. Hofstadter - Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. Boston: Beacon, 1968. - gives an invaluable historical take on Spencer, which helps facilitate its debunking.

Initially, the very notion of familiarization with a field of study can be daunting. A helpful analogy[5] runs as follows: Imagine being locked in a room, without any particular knowledge of what is outside of it. What can be learned? The thickness of the walls, the height of the ceilings, the presence or absence of molding, the materials of the floor, doors, hinges, etc., all can speak to the age and style of the edifice. The presence of any plumbing will allow some generalization about the location of pipes elsewhere. Electrical sockets will give clues about the country. Even aside from the view from the windows, the cast of the shadows provides evidence of the orientation of the room. The view from the windows tells more about climate and location. Likewise, the careful consideration of even a single course, text, or artefact can lead to a complex appreciation of associated matters.

Comprehensive introductory texts – ones that strive to cover all or most of the main issues or thinkers in the field – might be compared to the observation deck on the Empire State Building, equipped with panoramic views and powerful telescopes. There is, in a way, too much information. A visitor comes away impressed but not necessarily enlightened.[6] This slender volume, on the other hand, bears comparison with a classroom or office at one the LIPS institutions, such as St. John's University or Molloy College. The less ambitious form can work as an invitation to closer acquaintanceship. A modest view can be a memorable and meaningful one.

If this much is granted, then these chapters can serve as a resource, including for the enthusiastic beginner. In acknowledgement of the true variety displayed here, rather than offer what would have to be a very strained overview as part of this introduction, we have preferred to offer "interstitial" commentary – passages between the chapters. While the chapters and these associated passages can be read out of order, their arrangement is deliberate and potentially helpful. The commentary, which is editorial (and does not necessarily reflect the views of the other contributors, nor mainstream views generally, for that matter), makes occasional cross-references, as well as bibliographical suggestions, in an effort to help augment the novice's frame of reference.

Philosophy has a unique capacity to resist convention. These essays – not only their selection and presentation, but also their content – are offered in this spirit.

---

[5] Thanks to the late John Connelly for this.

[6] There is also the dangerous illusion of impartiality: Russell's book - Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2004/1946 - while beautifully written and insightful in places, very much bears the stamp of its author's preferences, while appearing to the beginner to be an objective account.

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I. THEORETICAL ISSUES

We begin with chapters whose concern lies primarily in the basic conceptual treatment of ethics. We might have begun with the historically-inspired chapters (which follow in Part II), but this way perhaps most easily allows for the introduction of ideas that will recur throughout the volume.

We broach theory via a discussion of a rather anti-theoretical approach. As Chapter 1 explains, "practice-first ethics" emphasizes the importance of having authentic, relevant experience in coming to ethical conclusions. The appeal of calling the ivory-tower moralist back down to earth is, of course, evergreen. Wilde, as is so often the case, may have put it best when he wrote in A Woman of No Importance, "Intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing." Daru's critique of the practice-first amounts to exposing an irony: practice-first ethics is, in short, impractical (though it does hold valuable lessons for us).

CHAPTER ONE

NO-NONSENSE NATURALISM: ON THE CHALLENGES OF PRACTICE-FIRST ETHICS

HANNAH DARU

Schools and companies today are increasingly paying attention to matters of diversity and inclusion, and in recent years we have been witnessing moments of social reckoning all over the United States. This is rightly so. Each person brings a unique insight. In aggregate, these views may bring people in a discussion to a better understanding of each other and the state of affairs, and in projects, diverse inputs can lead to the completion of a better product. Leaving out certain voices not only has the consequence of being detrimental to the whole, but it also fails to recognize the dignity of each person.

However, what works methodologically in these settings might not work so well as a paradigm for crafting moral principles. In her 2015 address to the American Philosophical Association, Elizabeth Anderson advocates for "moral updating" through "processes of interpersonal claim-making that include those occupying the full range of diverse situations in society."[1]

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[1] Elizabeth Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices: A Pragmatist Perspective," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 85

That is, she hopes that by engaging in discussions and even "contentious politics" with those from many different backgrounds, we will eventually reach improved understandings of what we owe to each other morally—and so update the moral principles we follow. While I wholeheartedly agree that all voices should have a part in discussions for the purpose of collectively gaining understanding, Anderson's pragmatist method of searching for moral principles may ultimately be less effective at promoting the values of dignity and respect than she expects. In what follows, I will critique her proposal for a pragmatic approach to ethics and propose a closer look into a well-known alternative to both her pragmatist ethics and the reflective equilibrium that she devotes most of her time to discrediting.

While it is impossible to provide a full account and defense of the kind of naturalist ethics that I have in mind here,[2] I hope to at least establish that it not only addresses the heart of Anderson's concerns, but also avoids some of the shortcomings of her pragmatic method. It should be noted that while this is, on the big picture, an argument about metaethical approaches, a key distinction between the two approaches—Anderson's pragmatist and the naturalist one that I put forward—centers on the inclusion of metaphysics as a component of ethical theory. In short, while Anderson's pragmatist approach rejects the inclusion of metaphysics (here including categories of being, universals, and the properties of human existence)[3] as a means of reaching moral principles, I suggest that including reference to those elements in an ethical theory makes practical application of the ethical theory more equitable.

(American Philosophical Association - Central Division, Newark, DE: American Philosophical Association, 2015), 41.

[2] For a full account of this perspective, I recommend Heinrich Albert Rommen, *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998).

For a defense of the theory against the "is-ought" problem, I recommend John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed, Clarendon Law Series (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33-48, 66-75. And: John Finnis, "Natural Law and The "Is"-"Ought" Question: An Invitation to Professor Veatch," *Catholic Lawyer - Notre Dame Law School* 26 (1982): 266–77.

[3] See, for instance, a common account of metaphysics: Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan, "Metaphysics," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2020 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/metaphysics/>.

Philosophers' Biased Blunders and the Pragmatist Proposal

One of the biggest issues with most moral theories, as Elizabeth Anderson points out, is that philosophers tend to (1) be of a very particular (often exceptionally privileged) demographic and (2) generate "universal" theories that represent that demographic and its imaginations quite well but (presumably unknowingly) fail to represent all people, thereby doing a disservice to others with different backgrounds.[4] The biases of privileged individuals can be embedded in the theories in both assumptions and in the neglect of real-life constraints. "Philosophers engage in moral reflection in the 'cool hour,'" Anderson writes, "at points and sometimes on whole matters in which we do not have immediate stakes." Further, these reflections often take place "monologically," and in the rare event that "dialogue is actual, it typically takes place around a seminar table or classroom composed of largely relatively privileged people."[5] In cases when these theories are put into practice, disadvantaged groups can sometimes face consequences not foreseen by the philosophers—at least in part because the philosophers lack relevant knowledge and/or do not face the issue outside of the safe confines of the mind. Problems like these are motivation enough to want to evaluate philosophical methodology.

Given this problematic state of affairs, it is not surprising that some philosophers favor a practice-first approach, as Anderson does. "Philosophers presume that they can learn what we owe to each other under the social conditions in which we practice moral philosophy," she observes.[6] However, these presumptions may be mistaken, and testing them in order to reach a better "moral methodology" can help us to reduce the mistaken beliefs and practices.[7] By preventing, or at least fixing, the irrelevant and biased views that emerge and inform social practices, we can better prevent problems in practice.

One of the key examples that Anderson employs to illustrate this is the effect that the abolitionists had (or, perhaps better, did *not* have) in converting people from pro-slavery views.[8] In that case, the religious, white abolitionists "operated on the assumption that the core moral bias of slavery advocates was hard-heartedness" and so sought to "arouse people's sympathies” and “encourage sentimentality and open-heartedness.”[9] They were so adamant about following the strategy that they had in mind—namely to make the slaves both appear as incapable and as objects of pity—that they refused to allow the former slaves to play the active role that they could (and should) have. In reality, the abolitionists failed to understand—and therefore to communicate—the slaves’ “interest, capacity, and worthiness for freedom and dignity,” which only the current and former slaves themselves could provide.[10] Similarly, Anderson would suggest that pure theorizing without input from all of the relevant perspectives almost inevitably results in moral theories that fall severely short of being either convincing or fair.

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[4] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 21-27.

[5] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 24.

[6] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 21.

[7] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 21.

[8] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 21.

In Anderson’s example, the privileged individuals in power made assumptions about how best to reach and communicate a moral good *without* the input of those from a minority or otherwise marginalized perspective. Further, they did this even when those perspectives would have been from the individuals with most at stake and a better insight to the situation. Anderson would say that this is a prime example of what is wrong with the reflective equilibrium methodology. In reflective equilibrium, philosophers “move between intuitively appealing general moral principles and intuitions about particular cases,” and then they “use each to modify the others until … arriv[ing] at a set of principles that accounts for our moral judgments of all particular cases.”[11] This method relies upon the imagination of those generating the theory, so if they are not attuned to certain issues or think that some outcomes are more valuable than others given their own experiences, the outcomes will tend to favor those notions. If this results in something like the case of the abolitionists, then this is a problem and clearly not a reliable method. She calls on us to “replace the quest for ultimate or highly general principles with methods for intelligently updating our current moral beliefs.”[12]

A Pragmatist’s Motivation for Methodology

There is a lot worthy of praise in a system that aims to recognize unheard voices, eradicate biases whenever possible, and stay relevant to lived experiences. For all of these reasons, a pragmatic method like Anderson’s is appealing. Her version is also fueled by respectable values and is attuned to the unexpected things we encounter every day. After all, life is messy, and there are more contingencies than we can count. We are not in a static place, so if a theory is static, it is suspect for its ability to accurately represent life and prescribe actions. Opting for a pragmatic method that, in the words of a famous original pragmatist, embraces experimenting with practices and that acknowledges "that people cannot attain absolute certainty concerning questions of fact,"[13] seems a much more manageable (and intellectually humble) task than attaining universals.

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[9] Anderson, “Moral Bias and Corrective Practices,” 21.

[10] Anderson, “Moral Bias and Corrective Practices,” 21.

[11] Anderson, “Moral Bias and Corrective Practices,” 22.

[12] Anderson, “Moral Bias and Corrective Practices,” 23.

The environment in which many ethical theories are developed is a red flag for Anderson, and justifiably so. Frequently, moral theories are developed based on intuitions in the sterile laboratory of one (usually privileged) mind as it attempts to fill the roles of a multitude of views in a private, mental "dialogue." Even when the theories are formed as part of a group effort in discussion, the context in which they are developed and tested typically remains in an isolated philosophy department filled with comparatively privileged individuals of a largely homogenous race and class—things that inform intuitions, despite heroic attempts to imagine otherwise.[14] Part of her concern is that some experiences and perspectives are simply inaccessible to certain populations. For example, people who cannot give birth will never understand the experience of childbirth, no matter how hard they strain their imaginations. The same can be said of wealthy and educated people imagining the experience of the poor, blue-collar workers on the other side of the country. To theorize about those values makes the resulting moral system subjective and exclusive to those making the claims. Therefore, applying the universals derived by these methods misses important perspectives in practice, and it may even rob people of their agency.

In this sort of system, Anderson observes, most philosophers do not have great justification for their intuitions. They fail to answer questions concerning why anyone should place confidence in their thought experiments, which are remote from lived experience, or why *their* intuitions are better than the "folk" intuitions.[15] There are further concerns about learning from history. "Why think our moral intuitions are realistic now when past ones were clearly prejudiced," she asks, and "why think that our moral intuitions are reliable now when they have changed quite radically over time?"[16] These questions pose problems especially for theories that are developed on the basis of intuitions. This is because, among other reasons, theories and thought experiments do not always accurately capture our real-life experiences; philosophers themselves, as a consequence of their relatively privileged lives, are not privy to (and therefore "lack stakes" for) the many struggles people face. Further, history is proof of changes over time, which can undermine the project.[17] Anderson's narrative ultimately suggests that changing practices and argumentative strategies towards representation solves the problem.

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[13] Charles S. Peirce, "The Scientific Attitude and Falliblism," *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler, Dover Books T217 (New York, NY: Dover, 1955), 58-59.

[14] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 24.

[15] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 25.

[16] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 26-27.

This strategy reduces to two major factors of moral interest. First, she is an advocate of "practical collective action" over "pure moral argumentation;"[18] that is, she wants people to engage in discussions and otherwise actively engage each other outside of a purely theoretical discussion in a philosophy seminar room or article. Second, she emphasizes the active participation of those being oppressed in challenging the status quo.[19] She believes that collective action focused on engaging in "contentious practices" is the best way the get the attention of those in power and truly change social norms, largely because she does not see traditional argumentation changing minds as effectively or on as large a scale.[20] She defines "contentious practices" as things that "span a spectrum from pure moral argument at one end, to riots, war, and other violent acts on the other."[21]

Her thought is that by encouraging action on the theory—and not just dialogue—people "manifest… their refusal to go along with the moral norms they are rejecting."[22] This kind of action, Anderson surmises, may even result in "collective moral learning—learning on the part of societies—that pure moral argument cannot" accomplish.[23] In other words, not only do actions speak louder than words, as the trite saying goes, but actions also necessarily have content and accomplish something while words can be empty.

Challenges to a Practice-First Method

Anderson provides an excellent critique of the problems encountered in practice and the failures of some popular moral methodologies. I am especially inclined to agree with her critique of reflective equilibrium. I also think that her proposals are potentially quite helpful for evaluating our practices and improving our knowledge. However, I am skeptical of their ability to accomplish everything she claims. In short, I accept her method insofar as it might help us to gain knowledge in order to act more virtuously, but I reject its weak condemnations of wrong action and its time-consuming search for moral principles. It also seems clear that despite Anderson's insistence to the contrary, she still assumes some universals that can only be grounded in empirical observation.

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[17] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 25-27.

[18] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 32.

[19] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 32.

[20] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 33-34, 39.

[21] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 32.

[22] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 32-33.

[23] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 33.

For instance, let us take Anderson's example of slavery. It is morally abhorrent. It has also been part of human history for millennia, all over the globe. If we are to take Anderson's method, then we would expect to see current and former slaves in all of those places making their voices heard and agency known, engaging in "contentious politics" when ignored. Those are not bad actions. It is notable, though, that on her account we would expect to see such "contentious politics" everywhere that slavery is or was practiced. Such an assumption indicates that she is accepting some universal principle, or universalizing some idea about human nature, without explicitly acknowledging it. Further, instead of acknowledging any element of universality, her proposal to depend on the appropriate conversations happening leaves room for error in practice. It is conceivable that in some place where agency is being modeled and contentious practices being engaged, an unsavory conclusion may still be reached. Anderson's pragmatist method does not leave a person in a position to say much beyond observing that collective moral updating on some given matter is, at best, incomplete. Her method, which ultimately focuses on collective moral growth (and the subsequent updating of practices), in a sense weakens any conclusion that the current state of affairs is still wrong. For example, the conclusion in practice may be to keep slavery and so, in a pragmatist's terms of moral growth, that conclusion merely fails to reflect effective, collective moral updating. This is true enough, but it lacks both force in condemnation and a concise justification for why.

There are, then, three main points that I wish to address: (1) the assumption of universals concerning human nature in a theory that explicitly rejects any such metaphysical accounts, (2) the time-consuming and unpredictable process of the pragmatist's moral methodology, and (3) the subsequently tenuous relationship with and inability to forcefully express certain moral truths (like that slavery is always wrong). Taking each of those points in more detail, let us turn first to the assumed universals. When people think that it is good for slaves to be freed, they think that for a reason, and that reason is probably not just because the slaves told them so; people tend to doubt others' testimony *all the time*. And, if it is because the marginalized individuals stood up and claimed the dignity that they deserved in another active way, then it is implicit that the reason it was *recognized* was because there was some truth to the matter.

On Anderson's account, what was lacking was the slaves' account of their direct experience that could inform the citizenry's knowledge used in applying moral principles to the laws. A category (e.g., full, rational human) was (arguably quite *willfully*) unknown by the pro-slavery citizens who were listening. And, presumably the current and former slaves conveyed that knowledge, which subsequently forced the audience to change their mental categorization (e.g., "inferior human" to "full, rational human" following the testimonies). That change in category could have resulted in the change in application of moral principles—the effect that Anderson observed. To be sure, pro-slavery individuals should not have needed this sort of exposure to properly categorize the slaves as human beings with agency, people who deserve to be free and treated according to the same moral maxims as other free people. Whatever the case was, though, it is not evident that this example supports Anderson's argument.

We might go around propagating the conclusion (that slaves should be freed and treated with the same dignity as other persons) in a number of ways, which might include the example of having the freed slaves or other minorities speak for themselves. However, what does that show if not some sort of a universal value or kind of equality in human lives and the respect due to each human being? If their expressions earn the respect and dignity that they deserve, is it just because they *demanded* it, as Anderson suggests? Or, is it rather because they said something *true* about what it means to be a human? We can reach these truths of human nature in different ways, but once it is established that there are facts about human nature that come to the service of justice when applied, then we have a *theory* (and a metaphysically informed theory, at that). The theory is informed by the realities of life, and it should go on to inform our actions. There is also no reason to believe that basic natural facts change, which means that the ensuing *moral* facts are universal if rightly applied. For instance, not eating food or drinking water will always kill people, and that fact will never change. Therefore, the related moral fact stands: in a normal situation we ought not to deprive ourselves or those under our power of sustenance. This follows from the simple first principle of natural law—that one ought to promote what is good, like life itself.[24]

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[24] See, for instance: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Treatise on Law: The Complete Text*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), I-II.94.2.

Once a universal truth and subsequent moral law is established, then it is possible to consider the other flaws with Anderson's method—namely, (2) and (3) above. The pragmatic method is time-consuming because it requires "experiments in living."[25] Instead of appealing to a universally known conclusion, or at the very least universally know*able* premises, the emphasis is put on collective learning and subsequent moral updating. Of course, this can happen on a natural law account, and may sometimes be necessary, but it should not be the primary focus. The goal of the natural law ethicist is to help argumentative opponents to see the truth of the matter and see in concrete terms *why* something like slavery is wrong. The goal of the pragmatist is also to expose people to some truth—or at least some preferable state of affairs—but the moral updating she describes, while it may come with some personal conversion as a result of experience, it might also seem to *depend* on personal experience. That could be time-consuming if we are to convince everyone that, say, slavery is wrong, but it also makes it more difficult to articulate one's conviction that it is wrong.

Is it wrong only because I feel something deep inside when I think I see someone showing his or her agency? What is the foundation of that feeling or inclination? Is it stable? Can I extrapolate that feeling from slavery to some other equally bad situation, such as genocide? What about other situations involving human dignity that might not be quite the same life-and-death matter but are related, like a moral defense of labor laws that prohibit excessive labor, the labor of juveniles, or unjust compensation for time and risk? A natural law argument about human dignity would have no trouble with quickly constructing an argument, but it is less clear that a pragmatist's methodology would be equally as time-efficient and grounded in something concrete. This makes a pragmatist argument for just labor laws, for instance, potentially more complicated and less certain in conviction.

By contrast, an alternative that appeals to universal properties of human life, such as the capacity for reason, would ground ethical norms like dignity and respect. Anderson, of course, steers clear of the metaphysical territory. One might counter the metaphysical model with her proposal for including a variety of voices and recognizing morality as an "experiment in living."[26] I concede that it is important to evaluate individuals' experiences and consider how those experiences reflect upon the execution of a moral theory. I worry, though, that trying to hear every perspective in the process of forming moral beliefs lands us in rather muddled philosophical territory. Here, the cacophony of differing views and experiences leads us to confusion and even contradiction. By contrast, because certain things are

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[25] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 23.
[26] Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices," 23.