**Introduction**

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**Abstract**

The editors introduce the essays and themes discussed in the volume. They clarify the aim and focus of the volume and provide an overview of the contributions. The aim of the volume is to explore the significance of Wittgenstein’s and Wittgensteinian philosophical thought for moral philosophy, with a focus on the later Wittgenstein. Contributions exhibit two main foci. Firstly, they examine the relevance of Wittgenstein’s own work for moral philosophy. Secondly, they focus on what might be called a Wittgensteinian tradition in moral philosophy and its relation to more mainstream analytic moral philosophy. The editors highlight the Wittgensteinian character of the contributions, make explicit the connections between the chapters and situate the essays in relation to debates in contemporary moral philosophy.

**Aims and main questions**

The essays in this collection explore the significance of Wittgenstein’s philosophical thought for moral philosophy, with a focus on the later Wittgenstein. Their aim is to clarify and illustrate by way of examples how discussions in moral philosophy could be advantageously brought into contact with Wittgenstein’s work and the work of philosophers who have made use of his insights and methods. Thus, while research on Wittgenstein and ethics typically centers around exegetical questions about what his views on ethics were, the main point of this collection of essays lies elsewhere – even if the question of Wittgenstein’s relevance cannot be entirely separated from the question regarding his views.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Contributions to this volume exhibit two main foci. Firstly, relating to Wittgenstein more directly, we believe that the relevance of Wittgenstein’s later thought for moral philosophy depends, not only on his views on ethics, but also on the methods he introduces, on his views on the nature of philosophy and philosophical problems, as well as on his insights into the workings of language. In this vein, it is important to consider whether and how Wittgenstein’s ways of approaching problems in the philosophy of logic and language, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of mathematics can be made use of in moral philosophy, and what could be gained in this way. Is it possible to employ a logical or linguistic method in moral philosophy, such as Wittgenstein employs in his philosophy generally, and what are the philosophical commitments of such an approach? Given the persistence of moral philosophical problems, are there forms of expression connected with moral philosophy that send us “in pursuit of chimeras”, that is, in search for illusory philosophical entities, postulates and explanations of the kind that Wittgenstein identified in the philosophy of logic and language (PI §94)? Are there pictures, conceptions or ways of thinking, that might hold our thought captive in moral philosophy, holding us back from successfully dealing with moral philosophical problems (PI §115)?

A key question that informs this volume therefore is whether and how Wittgenstein’s methods and points about logic and language can be applied to problems in moral philosophy, given also that he did not himself discuss moral philosophy at any great length. For example, Wittgenstein questions the assumption that it is always possible to give an overarching definition of a concept that covers all cases falling under it. But how more precisely do his views about conceptual complexity and modes of conceptual unity, such as family-resemblance, bear on problems in moral philosophy? What consequences do they have for the development of overarching philosophical accounts that focus on what is common to different cases rather than seek to acknowledge variation? Wittgenstein also advises us to pay attention to and to investigate the “general facts of nature” that underlie language use in order to grasp the function of our concepts (PI §142). How would such an approach work in the case of moral concepts? Moreover, what are the consequences of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations for the application of moral concepts and principles? What does his emphasis on initiation into linguistic practices, training and learning mean for our understanding of morality and moral concepts? What implications does his point that justification comes to an end have for moral philosophy, and can this help to clarify the notion of moral justification (PI §217)?

Secondly, the volume focuses on what might be called a Wittgensteinian tradition in moral philosophy and its relation to more mainstream analytic moral philosophy. Several moral philosophers have made use of Wittgensteinian ideas and methods in their work, starting with Wittgenstein’s students Elizabeth Anscombe and Rush Rhees, as well as G.H. von Wright and, up to a point, their contemporaries Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch.[[2]](#footnote-2) Other prominent representatives of a Wittgensteinian approach include Peter Winch, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Raimond Gaita, and Sabina Lovibond.[[3]](#footnote-3) Besides the work of the aforementioned and its connections with Wittgenstein, chapters in this volume also address the work of Richard Hare, Jeff McMahan, James Rachels, Peter Singer, Bernard Williams, and David Wiggins. How have these philosophers employed Wittgenstein’s ideas in discussing moral philosophical problems or how do their approaches contrast with Wittgensteinian ones? In what ways have Wittgensteinian ideas enabled them to address these problems in new and interesting ways or how do those ideas bring out difficulties with more mainstream accounts? Could insights from Wittgenstein further help to address relevant problems? Again, the question is not so much whether the Wittgensteinian approaches are based on correct understanding of Wittgenstein, but rather how they have contributed, or can contribute, to debates in moral philosophy, possibly subsequent to modification.

More broadly, contributors to this volume discuss how Wittgensteinian approaches relate to mainstream outlooks in moral philosophy, as exemplified by utilitarianism, Kantianism and virtue ethics, and how a Wittgensteinian way of addressing particular philosophical problems differs from or resembles ways in which contemporary authors approach these problems. For example, the authors examine how Wittgensteinian accounts relate to prevailing conceptions of truth, justification, reason-giving and objectivity in ethics, to ethical naturalism, empiricism and relativism. They look into the relevance of Wittgensteinian insights for meta-ethical debates, for example those between cognitivists and non-cognitivists. Other points of contention relate, for instance, to the question whether moral considerations and concepts are to be applied to beings on the basis of uniformly specifiable criteria, such as rationality or sentience, as assumed by Kantians and utilitarians respectively. Can such an exceptionless account be given for what makes a being worthy of ethical considerations without falling into false simplicity? Similarly, can such an overarching account be given for whether an action is morally good or right with reference to features such as the motives of the agent or the consequences of actions? If reality is more complex and diverse than the Kantian and utilitarian theories assume in maintaining that such overarching accounts are possible, is there another way to understand the function of theories such as the Kantian and utilitarian ones that avoids the problem of falsification through simplification? Is there a role for idealizations, for example, idealized and simplified clarificatory concepts in moral philosophy? Regarding virtue ethics and neo-Aristotelian approaches that seem more willing to acknowledge the complexity of reality and of moral concepts, and which have (re)gained prominence in moral philosophy over the last 30-40 years, how should we understand their relation to Wittgensteinian approaches? Can Wittgenstein help us to understand the relationship between the ethical and the political? Beyond merely human affairs, can the ethical relations between humans and animals be helpfully clarified from a Wittgensteinian perspective?

In sum, the present volume focuses on the philosophical or systematic interest of Wittgenstein’s later thought for moral philosophy, aiming to situate Wittgensteinian moral philosophy within the field of contemporary moral philosophy by comparing it with other contemporary approaches. In so doing, it aims to contribute, not only to Wittgenstein studies, but to a variety of debates in moral philosophy, covering methodological questions as well as problems in so-called meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics, assuming a relaxed use of these notions without the possibility of a strict theoretical separation of moral philosophy into independent distinct areas. Such a broad approach suits this collection on Wittgensteinian ethics in particular, given its aspiration to show the relevance of Wittgenstein’s and Wittgensteinian philosophy for moral philosophy.

**Overview of contributions**

The first two essays of this volume are methodological in nature. Oskari Kuusela asks whether and how the logical-linguistic approach characteristic of analytic philosophy up to the 1970s might be fruitfully practiced in moral philosophy. Iris Murdoch criticized the analytic moral philosophers of her time, such as Hare, who aimed to explain the nature of morality by clarifying the logical function of moral judgments and concepts, for narrowness, ahistoricity, and for imposing a false unity on the phenomena of morality. Later similar criticisms were made by Bernard Williams. Kuusela’s aim is to outline a variant of the logical-linguistic method, based on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of logic and his account of the logical function of philosophical clarificatory accounts, which is not vulnerable to Murdoch’s and Williams’s criticisms, but resolves the problems they raised for analytic moral philosophy. According to this variant, in order to clarify the logical function of ethical concepts and judgments, one ought to examine the role such locutions play as part of activities and forms of life in which their use is embedded. Although this may seem to risk the collapse of philosophy into an empirical, anthropological or sociological investigation, Wittgenstein’s method enables us to distinguish clearly between philosophical and logical investigations and merely empirical investigations. One advantage of this approach is that it puts us in a position to reject simplistic assumptions about the uniformity of use of ethical notions and misleading assumptions about conceptual unity. Similarly it enables us to address the problem of ahistoricity of moral philosophical accounts. While Wittgenstein’s method puts us in a position to acknowledge the historicity of ethical concepts and practices and links between moral goodness and empirical facts about humans, it does not follow that logical or philosophical clarifications of the use of ethical locutions constitute empirical descriptions. Rather, on the Wittgensteinian account, philosophy spells out clarificatory models, that is, modes of representing/describing the relevant uses of language and/or phenomena, whereby logical exceptionless necessity is conceived to be a characteristic feature of such models, rather than a characteristic of what they are models of. This allows one to understand such models as clarifications of the essential, as opposed to accidental and contingent, features of morality and ethical language use, but excludes the possibility of our elevating descriptions of any historically contingent forms of morality into claims about the ahistorical essence of morality. Instead, philosophical statements of necessity can now be understood as constituting historically indexed clarificatory devices that bring into focus specific aspects of the complex phenomenon of morality, without our having to claim that any particular models should exhaust its essence. Thus the problem of narrowness can be dealt with too. Understood in the proposed way, moral philosophical clarifications are sensitive to empirical facts and history – as opposed to representing morality as a timeless abstract object which philosophical statements of necessity describe – but avoid the collapse of moral philosophy into empiricism or anthropology.

Edward Harcourt, too, asks whether and how Wittgenstein’s later “linguistic” methods of conceptual clarification could be applied in moral philosophy. He emphasizes that, where there is a problematic concept (such as the concept of a rule, or concepts of bodily sensation), Wittgenstein often asks which general facts of nature underlie our possession of it. A crucial question for a Wittgensteinian moral philosophy then becomes which general facts of nature underlie our possession of *moral* concepts. There may, however, seem to be a problem with this question, because it presupposes that there *are* some distinctively moral concepts, an idea that has been called into question by some recent literature on Wittgenstein and ethics. Harcourt discusses the view that there are no distinctively moral concepts in some detail. First, he distinguishes it from Anscombe’s view that the very idea that there *is* a concept for the distinctively moral “ought” to express is a kind of philosophical illusion. Secondly, he distinguishes it from a view that he calls “expansionism”, the view, with which he agrees, that we need to “expand our inventory of forms of moral thought” (Crary 2007a, 1). Expansionism, though, does not imply that there are no distinctively moral concepts. On the contrary, Harcourt argues that expansionism implies that there *are* distinctively moral concepts.

Once this has been established, the question, “What are the general facts of nature that underlie our possession of moral concepts?” comes to the fore again. According to Harcourt, a Wittgensteinian moral philosophy would “look like a description of a relationship between a more primitive practice and a more complex one, where the latter involves some puzzling word(s) but where the puzzle they pose lessens when we see the relation to the former”. He offers the example of words like “kind” and “virtue”, and shows how they are built on primitive practices that are free of moral concepts. Similarly, Harcourt indicates how the notions of “promise”, “reason” and “good” are underlain by a specific sort of relatively primitive language game. His method exemplifies the Wittgensteinian approach of relating problematic (moral) concepts to underlying facts, “with the concepts getting progressively more less puzzling as one relates the concept to progressively more basic concepts and (if we try really hard) to preconceptual activities”. Harcourt adds: “In so far as it’s true that the further down we get in this kind of conceptual genealogy, the more the *explanantia* are descriptions of features of our common human natures, this method can also be seen as one species of naturalism in ethics, a naturalism which aims not to reduce the moral to the natural but to demonstrate the continuity between the moral and the non-moral”.

The issue of naturalism brings us to the third chapter, where Annie-Marie Christensen discusses the idea of a fundamental continuity between the ethical and the natural. She asks what a Wittgensteinian form of naturalism in ethics might look like, and she distinguishes three forms of naturalism. The first, hard or scientific naturalism, is characterized by an ontological commitment to the conception of nature found in the natural sciences, and an epistemological commitment to the idea that knowledge of nature does not involve any normative claims. The second form of naturalism is wider or more liberal and allows for the idea that normative features of the world are part of nature. These two forms of naturalism are restrictive, because they identify nature with *part of* what is real. The third form of naturalism, however, is *unrestricted*: nature is what is real, there is nothing outside nature.

Christensen argues that various objections against hard naturalism in ethics, developed by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, are successful. For some virtue ethicists, this means that we should embrace liberal naturalism, a version of which can be found in the works of John McDowell. The core of McDowell’s liberal form of naturalism, summarized in the notion of second nature, is the idea that human beings are by nature norm-developing animals. Although this is not something that would be denied within a Wittgensteinian, unrestricted form of naturalism, and although McDowell refers to Wittgenstein at several points in his work, Christensen intends to show that some aspects of McDowell’s naturalism are in tension with a truly Wittgensteinian approach. Both Wittgenstein and McDowell show how aspects of human life that are instinctive, given or natural are “intertwined with and developed in our normative practices”. But while McDowell’s concept of second nature presupposes that there is a general distinction to make between first and second nature (between hard and liberal naturalism, between the instinctive and the learned, between nature and culture), that presupposition is not to be found in Wittgenstein’s later work: “What we find instead are different mixtures of instinctive and learned reactions and capabilities, which means that it varies from investigation to investigation where it would be intelligible for us to draw a distinction between nature and reason”. Whereas, for McDowell, first nature underlies second nature, there is no hierarchy of this kind (second nature is first nature *plus* something) in Wittgenstein’s work. According to Christensen, this is an advantage, and Wittgensteinian, unrestricted naturalism is a better framework for investigations in virtue ethics than liberal naturalism, if only because it directs our attention away from the time-consuming question of where to draw a line between what is natural and what is not. We can then turn our attention to a more detailed investigation of the different virtues and, in line with some of Wittgenstein’s recommendations, put a greater emphasis on the importance of context for an understanding of virtue.

As Christensen notes, however, “the view that the realization of the virtues is context-dependent may renew the ever-present worry that virtue ethics really reduces to a form of cultural relativism”. This worry is taken up by Sabina Lovibond, whose main question is: “In what sense, if any, might it be correct to credit cultural *tradition* with moral or intellectual *authority*?” How can immersion in a tradition be “a respectable mode of access to the real”, as John McDowell has put it (1996, 98)? Lovibond discusses this question in relation to the later Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations, and to his conception of rational constraints as integrated with the “weave” or “stream” of human life.

One aspect of Wittgenstein’s legacy has been a questioning of the standard (quasi-deductive) modern paradigm for practical reasoning. This paradigm, which Lovibond calls the “syllogistic model”, risks going wrong not only about morals, but about the character of reasoning in general. The problem with the idea that our (ethical) thought could be codified in the form of syllogisms is not that we cannot make a start on the codification of our knowledge, but the thought that such theoretical codifications could incorporate everything known by someone successfully initiated into a tradition, or, as we might put it, that “knowing-how” could be reduced to “knowing-that”. The view that it cannot be so reduced reconnects us to the Aristotelian idea of an incompletely articulate “practical wisdom”.

There can be no such thing as intellectual or moral authority without embeddedness in a cultural tradition that cannot be codified completely. That does not mean, however, that all we are left with is mere conventional morality. In order to show that, Lovibond distinguishes conservatism from quietism. A quietist philosophy, in contrast to a conservative one, “does not tell us what to do, so *a fortiori* it does not tell us which of our inherited assortment of social practices … to accept as self-evidently reasonable and which to call into question”. A quietist philosophy, inspired by the works of Aristotle and the later Wittgenstein, is not hostile at all to Kantian ideals of intellectual autonomy; rather, it enables us to do away with mistaken pictures of what such autonomy comes to.

The way in which John McDowell has developed certain lines of thought from Wittgenstein’s later work in relation to moral philosophy receives a significant amount of attention in this volume. Alexander Miller’s contribution focuses on a classic exchange between McDowell and Simon Blackburn about the significance of the later Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations for the debate in meta-ethics between moral cognitivists and non-cognitivists. According to McDowell, says Miller, non-cognitivists are typically committed to the following two claims:

1. *The Disentangling Thesis* (D): “[W]hen we feel impelled to ascribe value to something, what is actually happening can be disentangled into two components. Competence with an evaluative concept involves, first, a sensitivity to an aspect of the world as it really is [a feature that is there anyway, independently of anyone's value experience being as it is] … and, second, a propensity to a certain attitude - a non-cognitive state that constitutes the special perspective from which items in the world seem to be endowed with the value in question” (McDowell 1998, 200-201).
2. *The Shapefulness Thesis* (S): “[E]valuative classifications correspond to kinds into which things can in principle be seen to fall independently of an evaluative outlook” (McDowell 1998, 216).

Miller then reconstructs McDowell’s argument against non-cognitivism as follows:

1. Any serious non-cognitivism presupposes (D).
2. (D) presupposes (S).
3. (S) is undermined by Wittgensteinian reflections on rule-following.

While (2) is, according to Miller, a trivial truth, the key steps in McDowell’s argument are (1) and (3). Miller outlines several reasons that may be taken to justify (1), but he argues that what McDowell needs for his attack on (S) is somewhat different from what his discussion of rule-following shows, so that (3) is inadequately supported. There are strong and weak versions of both (a) and (b). While the strong versions are vulnerable to McDowell’s argument (that is, undermined by Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule-following as McDowell understands them), the weak versions are not and can serve the non-cognitivist’s needs. The overall conclusion of the chapter, defended against objections by Simon Kirchin and Debbie Roberts, is that for all that McDowell’s discussion shows, Wittgensteinian concerns about the nature of rule-following have no impact on the contemporary debate between ethical cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

That debate also plays a central role in De Mesel’s chapter. De Mesel observes that participants in the debate between non-cognitivists and cognitivists seem to presuppose that morality is semantically uniform: either all moral judgments express beliefs, or they all express something else (emotions, prescriptions, etc.). In that respect, the term “non-cognitivism” is misleading, as it suggests that everyone who is not a cognitivist, that is, everyone who does not agree with the claim that all moral judgments express beliefs, is a non-cognitivist. That is not how non-cognitivism is commonly understood in contemporary meta-ethics, where non-cognitivism is not just the position that not all moral judgments express beliefs, but the position that all moral judgments express some kind of “non-belief”. If the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism is understood in this way, there is some logical space between them: it is possible both to deny that all moral judgments express beliefs *and* that all moral judgments express non-beliefs. What if some judgments express beliefs and others do not?

De Mesel suggests that this may well be the case and that the question “Cognitivist or non-cognitivist?” poses a false dilemma. If that is true, important consequences follow for the way in which meta-ethical debates function. Many cognitivists argue for cognitivism by arguing against non-cognitivism (and the other way round). The reasoning is: if non-cognitivism can be proven wrong, then cognitivism is right (and the other way round). But if there is some logical space between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, if they are contraries rather than contradictories, this way of arguing for a position by arguing against its contender will no longer work.

De Mesel intends to show, by way of examples, that the semantic uniformity of morality cannot be taken for granted. He then tries to understand, using some ideas from Wittgenstein, especially from the *Blue and Brown Books,* why it has nevertheless so often been taken for granted. It is suggested that a generalizing tendency and a preoccupation with the method of science play a role in the answer to that question. De Mesel notes that he is not the first to have remarked that the dilemma between cognitivism and non-cognitivism may be a false one. He reviews some recent proposals by meta-ethicists to overcome the dilemma, but concludes that these proposals all exhibit a generalizing tendency. The question then arises whether meta-ethics without a generalizing tendency is possible. Wittgenstein’s ideas of family resemblance and surveyable representations are part of De Mesel’s sketch of the contours of such an approach.

The debate between cognitivists and non-cognitivists centers around the question whether moral judgments are truth-apt. The question of truth in ethics is discussed in Cora Diamond’s chapter, starting from a disagreement about this topic between Bernard Williams and David Wiggins. According to Wiggins’s account of truth, there are many moral questions about which truth can be attained, moral questions that admit of answers that are substantially true. He uses, in that regard, the formula that *there is nothing else to think but that p.* In mathematics, you can come to see, on the bases of reasons supporting *p,* that there is nothing else to think but that 7 plus 5 is 12. Wiggins has argued that Wittgenstein’s conception of objectivity and truth in mathematics provides a good model for objectivity and truth in ethics, and Diamond examines the use that Wiggins makes of Wittgenstein’s ideas. The analogy between mathematics and ethics suggests, according to Wiggins, that in morality too there are cases in which there is nothing else to think but that p.

An example is the case of slavery. Wiggins argues that, in response to the question about its moral legitimacy, there is nothing else to think but that it is unjust and unsupportable. Williams disagrees. All that we can get, according to Williams, are cases where there is nothing else *for us* to think but that *p,* or nothing else for some other group of people to think but that *p.* Williams’s basic argument makes use of the famous distinction between thin and thick ethical concepts. As Diamond puts it, the core of Williams’s argument is that, “in order to get the kind of substantial truth that Wiggins thinks we can get in ethics, there would have to be some thick concepts that were not local and particular but universal. But there aren’t any; there is an irreducible plurality of thick concepts”.

Diamond shows that some things are going wrong in Williams’s argument against Wiggins. Williams moves away from Wiggins’s example of slavery, thus obscuring important features of what Wiggins has to say. The issue about slavery, she argues, does not crucially depend on thick concepts of the sort that Williams discusses, and Williams misses what is at stake in the debate about slavery. She then focuses on Wiggins’s counter-argument, the argument that, “if you claim that there is something else to think about the moral and political question of slavery, other than that slavery is unjust and unsupportable, you are at risk of depriving yourself of the possibility of putting together a workable system of moral ideas”. This argument is considered in relation to pro-slavery thought, and things turn out to be less straightforward than Wiggins assumed, although Diamond remains sympathetic towards Wiggins’s argument. Diamond uses ideas by Wittgenstein, Anscombe and Wiggins himself, in order to respond to some questions that Wiggins’s argument raises.

A central question in Diamond’s essay is whether the failure of those who argued in favour of slavery was a failure of rationality, a failure of not seeing the reasons that there are (and were) against slavery. Questions about reason and morality are at the heart of Lars Hertzberg’s contribution. Do we have reasons for being good? Can we have reasons? Do we need reasons? Can we think, or be led by others to think, our way to a morally responsible stance? Hertzberg discusses these questions from three different angles. He starts by discussing an essay from Philippa Foot, “Moral Beliefs” (1967), in which she criticizes the non-cognitivist idea that there are no constraints on the reasons someone may choose to advance in support of a moral judgment. Foot argues that there are such constraints, but ultimately seems to ground them in our self-interest. According to Hertzberg, her argument is based on too stark a contrast between our natural desires and the demands of morality. A genuine concern for the demands of morality is not dependent on reasons of self-interest and may not even be dependent on reasons at all.

Hertzberg’s second discussion partner is Bernard Williams. In “Internal and External Reasons” (1981), Williams argues that there are limits to the extent to which I may appeal to reasons in order to persuade someone to act in a morally responsible way. On Williams’s account, as Hertzberg describes it, “unless the person I am addressing has some suitable motives with which my arguments will engage, I will simply fail to provide her with reasons”. Hertzberg shows that Williams thought about reasons as things that simply “exist”, without taking into account, as Wittgenstein encourages philosophers to do, the variety of ways in which reason for action are talked about in everyday discourse. Moreover, whether a person has a certain motive may be indeterminate. The upshot is that Williams’s internalist view, in contrast to what is suggested by Williams himself, does not seem to involve any clear restrictions on the kinds of reasons I may invoke in trying to persuade someone to act in a morally responsible way. In the third part of his chapter, Hertzberg discusses the case of the Badou family. The Badous adopted 22 children, some with special needs. Hertzberg contends that their way of life was not based on any specific set of reasons. He concludes by saying that whether we can have or need reasons to act in morally responsible ways are not questions that can be answered in general.

The problem of justifying one’s moral position and giving reasons for it is taken up from a somewhat different angle in Jeremy Johnson’s chapter. Johnson starts from the observation that, in morality as elsewhere, we often run out of pertinent things to say in order to explain or justify our position. In Wittgenstein’s words, what has been reached at this point is “bedrock” or “rock bottom”. Johnson intends to show how this notion of bedrock applies to morality. He argues, first, that it points to a kind of foundationalism that may be called, in Avrum Stroll’s words, “heterogeneous foundationalism”. Johnson asks what the foundations of this form of foundationalism consist of and discusses several proposals that have been made in the literature, namely that the foundations consists of rules, of ways of acting, and of hinge propositions. He then focuses on “a split within the foundations between an absolutely impermeable layer [bedrock certainties] and a tough layer that can soften and shift in the right circumstances [river-bed certainties]”. River-bed certainties are bipolar, in the sense that their truth excludes a possibility, more or less in the way in which “I was born at 4 am” excludes the possibility that I might have been born at 5 am. Bedrock certainties, by contrast, are bipolar and do not exclude possibilities, they only exclude nonsense: “2 + 3 = 5” does not exclude the possibility of 2 + 3 being 6, for there is no such possibility. The difference between river-bed certainties and bedrock certainties points at a difference between cases where a challenge to certainty is conceivable in principle and cases where the challenge is inconceivable. Johnson maintains that our deepest moral foundations are bedrock certainties, hence non-bipolar. (Note the similarity to Wigginsian statements discussed by Diamond.) Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the use of words such as “true” and “right” is perfectly acceptable with respect to these foundations.

Do the bedrock certainties justify what rests upon them? In relation to this question, Johnson highlights the distinction between justificatory and transcendental support. While bedrock certainties do provide transcendental support for what rests upon them, which mean that they *make it possible,* they do not *justify* it. Moral bedrock certainties make it possible for moral bipolar assertions to have sense. This claim invites two questions that Johnson subsequently deals with. First, what happens to moral arguments if moral bedrock certainties cannot be used to justify bipolar assertions? Second, what are we to say to the sceptic who is only interested in the justification of our bipolar moral beliefs, not in what is required for them to be possible?

Questions of justification take central stage too in Craig Taylor’s contribution to this volume. Do we need a justification for treating human beings and animals differently, and if so, what kind of justification could that be? Taylor focuses on certain ideas in Wittgenstein that bear on our moral relation with our fellow human beings and other animals. These ideas, which can be brought together under the label “the common humanity view”, have been developed by, among others, Cora Diamond, Raimond Gaita and Stephen Mulhall, and criticized by, among others, Jeff McMahan. According to Taylor, many critics have misunderstood the common humanity view. These critics often start from the idea that what justifies our treatment of an individual, be it a human beings or an animal or a robot, are the particular characteristics or properties possessed by that individual, such as whether it can suffer, has certain interests, or is rational. Taylor calls this view “the property view”.

Proponents of the property view have argued that, if for Wittgensteinians our respect for other beings is not grounded in any properties possessed by individuals, it must be grounded in a different sort of property, a relational one. This argument misunderstands the common humanity view, because on that view our different treatment of animals and human beings is not justified in terms of *any* properties, either possessed by the human being/animal or relational. The property view gets matters the wrong way around, as if we first recognize some property and take that as a reason for treating people or animals in a certain way. Rather, however, Taylor points out that “the way in which we respond *prior* to any such justification, on the one hand to human beings and on the other to animals helps determine in the first place our conception of what it is to be a human being and what it is to be an animal”. In order to clarify the common humanity view, Taylor discusses some passages from Wittgenstein’s work about pain, passages that show how our responses to another are often immediate and unthinking, not based on any thoughts about them. These responses ground our sense of what human fellowship consists in, as well as our sense of what it is to share a creaturely life with other animals. The responses, and the sense of fellowship, are not based on reasons, but that does not make them unreasonable, as McMahan suggests. To call them unreasonable would in fact be to say that it would be better to do away with them. But, asks Taylor, what kind of moral world-view would we be left with after such a revision?

Alice Crary’s chapter is also concerned with the moral status of animals. It begins with a controversy about the invidiousness of comparisons between the Holocaust and animal slaughter. Some have found these comparisons very offensive, which has to do, among other things, with the role of comparisons to animals in the rhetoric that the Nazis used to motivate the social exclusion and murder of European Jews: Jews were often depicted as parasites, apes, pigs or dogs. The racist idea of Jews as subhuman animals is integral to Nazi antisemitism. On the other hand, it is important not to lose sight of the motivation of the animal advocates’ employment of comparisons between the treatment of animals and the Holocaust. These advocates see animals as in themselves morally significant beings, and the Holocaust comparison is meant to impress on us that the way we treat animals in abattoirs resembles the Holocaust in its momentousness and horror. Nevertheless, Crary insists, there are straightforward respects in which the Holocaust comparison is indefensible. It obscures, for example, the extent to which Nazi methods were designed to target specifically human susceptibilities.

Although the Holocaust comparison is objectionable, it does not follow that we need to abandon the concerns that led animal activists to make use of it. Crary argues that we still need a way of talking about the value of human life that does not indulge into what Will Kymlicka has called “human supremacism”. One might think that such a way of talking can be found in the work of philosophers such as Jeff McMahan, James Rachels and Peter Singer. Crary criticizes their positions, however, in a way that is similar to Craig Taylor’s criticisms in the previous chapter. Like Taylor, she finds in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, and more specifically in his treatment of mental concepts, a line of reasoning that avoids both human supremacism and the problems of the property view. The upshot of this line of reasoning is that human and animals merit specific forms of attention not on the basis of certain properties or capacities, but *just as the kinds of beings they are.* The result is “an approach to moral standing that makes it possible to prize humanity without stationing humans ‘above’ animals”. This approach to moral standing has implications for how the motivating concerns of animal activists could be affirmed. Crary shows how we can refuse to employ analogies such as the Holocaust comparison without downplaying the magnitude and horror of the harms done to animals.

Discussions about the concerns and methods of animal activists take place at the crossroads of moral and political philosophy. The relationship between the ethical and the political is the theme of Lynette Reid’s chapter on Peter Winch, whose work on moral philosophy is sadly neglected nowadays. Reid begins with an exploration of central themes in Winch’s political philosophy, such as his critique on legal positivism and contract theory. While legal positivism, according to Winch, evades the problem of the legitimacy of political authority, contract theory gives an inadequate answer to it. Reid argues that the central themes of Winch’s political philosophy colour some of his best-known interventions in moral philosophy: “The Universalizability of Moral Judgment” (in Winch 1972) and “Particularity and Morals” (in Winch 1987). Both papers discuss someone who is confronted with a dilemma about what to do. What interests Winch in the dilemmas, according to Reid, is the challenge of living with what one has done. Winch claims that these dilemmas are *moral* dilemmas. Reid explains why Winch claims that, but she also questions this claim, relying on Winch’s own work in political philosophy: contrary to what Winch suggests, Reid shows that both dilemmas crucially rely on a contrast between morality and political duty.

Some commentators on Winch’s political thought have characterized the relation between the political and the ethical in Winch’s mature work as follows: the conditions for political legitimacy are the fragile conditions under which ethical conceptions can be active in social life; the alternative to political life under such fragile condition is that power alone rules, leaving us in the realm of force. Reid argues that this is an unlikely view, both in itself and as an interpretation of Winch. Her argument is supported by a discussion of “The Expression of Belief” (1996), a late paper by Winch in which he returns to the moral dilemma from his universalizability paper and connects it with Wittgenstein’s discussions on aspect-seeing. Reid uses “The Expression of Belief” to reflect on the complexity of Winch’s views, and to show how some of Wittgenstein’s aspect-seeing discussions throw light on the relation between the ethical and political, as Winch understood it. A key idea is that the political dimension of our action transforms our perspective on the morality of these actions.

We hope to have established, with this volume, the relevance of Wittgenstein’s and Wittgensteinian philosophical thought for contemporary moral philosophy. Accordingly, we hope to see, in the near future, more work in which Wittgensteinian ideas and methods are used to challenge extant views and positions, or to sharpen their articulation. We would like to end this introduction by expressing our sincere gratitude to all those who have helped to make this book possible.

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1. Recent monographs that explore themes related to those treated in this volume include Crary 2007a and 2016; De Mesel forthcoming; Hermann 2015; Iczkovits 2012; Lovibond 2002; Litwack 2009; O’Connor 2008; O’Hara 2018; Wisnewski 2007. Additionally, there are two journal special issues that focus on Wittgenstein’s views on ethics and on Wittgensteinian ethics (Gleeson 2002; De Mesel and Thompson 2015), and one collection of essays (Crary 2007b). A very recent collection on Wittgenstein and moral philosophy with an exegetical focus is Agam-Segal and Dain 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Anscombe 1981, 2006; Rhees 1969 and 1999; Foot 2002; and Murdoch 1989 and 1998; von Wright 1963. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Cavell 1999; Diamond 1991 and forthcoming; Gaita 2002, 2004; Lovibond 1991, 2002; McDowell 1998; Winch 1972, 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)