INTRODUCTION

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Some philosophers need no introduction. Julius Kovesi is a philosopher who, regrettably, does need introducing.[1] This book is intended to reintroduce him, more than twenty years after his death and more than forty years after the publication of his only book, *Moral Notions*.[2] This Introduction will sketch some of the key features of his life and philosophical thought. However, it is the essays that follow that will do the real work of showing how he may still have a significant contribution to make to philosophy today.

Kovesi's career was as a moral philosopher and intellectual historian. He was born in Budapest in 1930, and grew up in Tata, a country town in north-western Hungary. The mid-twentieth century brought war, invasion, and occupation first by German troops and then, after prolonged fighting in the countryside near his family home, by the Russians. After the War, Kovesi was a student at Budapest University, where he attended the philosophy lectures given by George Lukàcs. As communist rule became increasingly oppressive, and barbed wire began to encircle the country, he and his brother decided to escape while it was still possible, only to be caught at the Austrian border. Kovesi, even then ideologically quick on his feet, told the guards that he and his brother were not rejecting communism, they were only foolish young bourgeois students who wanted to see Paris before the final collapse of capitalism. Whether or not this was a convincing defence they were released, after a beating, but only on condition

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[1] This biographical sketch is based on the introduction to Julius Kovesi, *Values and Evaluations: Essays on Ethics and Ideology*, Alan Tapper ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), written by Janet Kovesi Watt and Alan Tapper. With permission from the publisher.

[2] Julius Kovesi, *Moral Notions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); republished as *Moral Notions, with Three Papers on Plato*, R. E. Ewin and Alan Tapper eds. (Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2004), with a Foreword by Philippa Foot and an Afterword by Ewin and Tapper. Hereafter we will refer to these as *Moral Notions* 1967 and *Moral Notions* 2004. Kovesi also published four later papers on moral philosophy: 'Valuing and Evaluating', *Jowett Papers 1968–69*, B. Y. Khanbhai et al eds. (1970), pp. 53–64; 'Against the Ritual of "Is" and "Ought" ', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, III (1978), pp. 5–16; 'Descriptions and Reasons', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1979–80), pp. 101–13; and '*Principia Ethica* Re-examined: The Ethics of a Proto-Logical Atomism', *Philosophy*, 59 (1984), pp. 157–70. These are collected in Kovesi, *Values and Evaluations*.

that they reported on fellow-students who might also be planning to escape. Within days they again headed for the border, and this time succeeded in crossing it.

Six years after migrating to Western Australia in 1950, Kovesi had mastered English, completed a first class honours degree in philosophy, and taken up Australian citizenship. He was awarded a scholarship for postgraduate study at Balliol College, Oxford. At Oxford in 1956–58, besides studying for the degree of B. Phil. and writing his thesis (on 'How Good is "The Good"?'—in some respects a forerunner of *Moral Notions*) he collaborated with Anthony Kenny in producing a journal of philosophical parody called *Why?* The story of *Why?* is told by Kenny in his contribution to this book. Kenny paints a picture of the Oxford of the 1950s, when it was commonly viewed as the centre of English-language philosophy. The philosopher who had the greatest influence on Kovesi's thought during his time at Oxford and for some years afterwards was his supervisor, J. L. Austin. Just before his final exams at Oxford, Austin gave Kovesi a note reading: 'Be relevant. Read and answer the question.' It was a note he framed and kept on his desk for the rest of his career.

After Oxford, Kovesi spent a year at Edinburgh University, followed by three years at the University of New England in New South Wales, before returning to the University of Western Australia in 1962. He remained on the staff there for the rest of his life, where he taught until a week before his death in 1989.

Though Oxford-trained and acutely interested in concepts, Kovesi was no narrowly analytical thinker. Students who took his classes would find themselves reading and discussing Plato, Joachim of Fiore, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Emile Durkheim, Lukàcs, R. G. Collingwood, Rudolf Bultmann, Claude Levi-Strauss, Leszek Kolakowski and Peter Winch. He had a special interest in Moses Hess, the Jewish-born Young Hegelian who converted Engels to communism and who influenced Marx's idea of a revolutionary and redemptive proletariat.[3] Three-stage theories of history, such as those of Marx and the Young Hegelians, fascinated him; he saw them frequently in operation in public debate. His experience of the 1970s and early 1980s was one in which a flood of 'answers' in ethics, religion and political life crowded out any genuine interest in the questions. He hated world-views

[3] See Kovesi's essay, 'Moses Hess, Marx and Money', in *Values and Evaluations*, pp. 128–82.

and ideologies that supply answers without questions. Most of his philosophy was an attempt to think about the conceptual tangles that bedevil our shared life. This made him very much a public person, though one who held few public positions.

Kovesi went through a period of estrangement from the Catholic Church, because—to use Selwyn Grave's phrase—it seemed 'willing to allow theological dissent to transform doctrines beyond recognition'.[4] During this period he ceased to practise his religion, only returning to it eighteen months before his death. Though he died before the full collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, he did live to see the first beginnings of that collapse with the opening of the Hungarian border, and the symbolic presentation to President George Bush senior of a piece of barbed wire in July 1989.

Kovesi's only book, *Moral Notions*, was published in 1967, in the series *Studies in Philosophical Psychology* edited by Roy Holland. It was highly praised in a Critical Notice in *Mind*, by Bernard Mayo, who described it 'a lightning campaign of a mere 40,000 words' which is 'somewhat intoxicating', and which 'decisively and permanently alters the balance of power' in the debate about the relationship between facts and values. The book presents 'a general theory of concept-formation, meaning, and rules of usage', which is then used 'to solve or dissolve an impressive list of standard problems in moral philosophy'. 'Time and again a startling paradox brings us to a halt, and we want a recapitulation of the steps in the argument that got us there. Nearly always we are driven back to realise that a favourite preconception has been subtly charmed away.' Mayo concluded that 'This is a thoroughly disturbing book, and should lead to some agonising reappraisals'.[5]

Mayo saw the book as 'strongly original', but also as carrying forward the work of Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot. Writing in 2004, Foot herself also observed that *Moral Notions* is 'like no other book of moral philosophy' and is 'radically different from anything else on the scene, either then or now'.[6] It is a claim worth pondering.

Elizabeth Anscombe's important 1958 essay, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', contended provocatively that 'it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously

[4] Selwyn Grave in Kovesi, *Values and Evaluations*, p. 74.
[5] *Mind*, 310 (1969), pp. 285–92.
[6] *Moral Notions*, 2004, pp. ix–x.

lacking'.[7] Her warning seems to have prompted the opposite effect from that intended. Moral philosophy underwent a boom period, though one of variable quality. Beginning with John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971), political philosophy sought a grounding in moral philosophy. Rawls's example provoked a massive literature. At about the same time, 'applied ethics' became a growth industry. Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) was an early example; his best-selling *Practical Ethics* (1979) came later. More orthodox moral philosophy, such as Geoffrey Warnock's *The Object of Morality* (1971) and Alan Donagan's *The Theory of Morality* (1977), also appeared. Philippa Foot gave new life to 'virtue ethics' through her *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (1978), though her first essays date from the early 1960s. Mary Midgley's *Beast and Man* appeared in 1978. The boom in modern 'meta-ethics' is usually seen as starting from John Mackie's 'error theory': his *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* appeared in 1977, ten years after *Moral Notions*. John Finnis's *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980) led a revival of natural law theory with a jurisprudential dimension. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) followed Foot as a virtues theorist, though one—like Anscombe—sceptical of the state of modern moral thought and practice.

Kovesi's work preceded this flurry of publication (some of Foot's and MacIntyre's essays excepted). *Moral Notions*, though a short book, is—we think—a remarkably advanced and complete work for its time. It had few precedents. But it also had few followers. For whatever reason—and, Kovesi's originality, as noted by Foot, may be one reason—only one of these landmark books, *Beast and Man*, made reference to Kovesi.[8]

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[7] 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy*, 33 (1958), pp. 1–19, p. 1.

[8] See also Midgley's 'The Lack of Gap Between Fact and Value', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement*, 54 (1980), pp. 207–24. Three books of that time that did present a Kovesian approach to ethics are J. M. Brennan, *The Open-Texture of Moral Concepts* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1977); Peter A. French, *The Scope of Morality* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1979); and R. E. Ewin, *Cooperation and Human Values: A Study of Moral Reasoning* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981). Also notable is Bernard Harrison, 'Kant and the Sincere Fanatic', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, 12 (1978), pp. 226–61, which describes *Moral Notions* as 'The only book on ethics written since the war which is wholly free from the influence of positivism....' (pp. 260–61). See also his 'Moral Judgment, Action and Emotion', *Philosophy*, 59 (1984), pp. 295–321. Another ethicist much influenced by Kovesi is the theologian Stanley Hauerwas; see his autobiography, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 85 ('Kovesi's critique of G. E. Moore, his account of rules, and his understanding of how descriptions work struck me as being crucial for developing further an ethics of the virtues').

Of course, R. M. Hare—Kovesi's tutor at Balliol in 1956–58—did predate Kovesi. *Moral Notions* is in part a reply to Hare's 1952 *The Language of Morals*,[9] but it is much more than that. The book shows a deep knowledge of the history of moral philosophy, most obviously of Plato, Aristotle, Hume and G. E. Moore. Kovesi was replying to Hume and Moore as much as to Hare. *Moral Notions* is based, as Mayo noted, on 'a general theory of concept-formation, meaning, and rules of usage'. His account of concepts was in some ways familiar to philosophers of his time. Something of this theory was to be found in Wittgenstein's account of language games, though Kovesi shows how Wittgenstein himself failed to get his own point when he formulated the idea using the 'family resemblance' metaphor: 'family resemblances' are such that if we try to use them to explain a concept such as 'game' we find that there are chains of similarities between activities that mean that we cannot explain why some activities are not games.[10] In the 1960s most philosophers had accepted three key points from Wittgenstein: that concepts are public, not private, phenomena; that their meaning is in some way a matter of how they are used; and that their usage involves some form of rule-following. Kovesi was building on those contentions. More to the point, J. L. Austin taught that we understand a concept fully only when we grasp a variety of examples and instances. Kovesi himself thought that his own theory of concepts and concept-formation is to be found in Socrates and Plato. He was a life-long reader of Plato and learned from him at least as much as he learned from Wittgenstein or Austin. What he learned from Plato was a way of understanding concepts. Plato's Theory of Forms, he thought, was an attempt to talk about how concepts can remain one and the same while also having various subdivisions and many diverse instantiations. This was not a matter of the so-called problem of universals—the problem of how the one concept can apply to many instances. It was a different problem altogether—the problem of how one concept can have many diverse applications. It was this that was central to Kovesi's thinking.

Kovesi's reply to Hume and Hare flowed from this understanding of concepts. Hume and Hare had expressed a widely-shared assumption that moral thought is one side of a fundamental divide between 'facts' and 'values'. Kovesi's reply was that recognition of the fact/value distinction

[9] R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).

[10] Wittgenstein, Kovesi thought, 'is still looking for empirical similarities between A and Z…'. *Moral Notions* 1967, p. 22; 2004, p. 19.

> has been very important and quite understandably it impressed us so much that we tend to regard other types of activities as only subdivisions or variations of these two main activities, of making factual statements and of making evaluative judgments. It is this further assumption, namely that all, or most, human activities are subdivisions or variations of these two, that has got moral philosophy entangled in the second of our great divisions. Quite understandably if we can choose only between these two fields, the subject-matter of moral philosophy is somewhere in the second field. Then usually this is what happens. We regard those features of these two fields to be their general and typical characteristics that distinguish them from each other, and so various philosophers arrive at various sets of characteristics as the general and typical characteristics of evaluative judgments. Then, since moral judgments are thought to be within this field, they too are first burdened with these characteristics and then, since in fact they are not at all like evaluative judgments, they are somehow distinguished from evaluative judgments.[11]

Here we are quoting from a later essay, but it sums up neatly the problem *Moral Notions* sought to resolve.

Kovesi thought that the treatment in Plato's dialogues of the Socratic question 'What is X?' (justice, piety, beauty, courage, etc) provided a key to dealing with the fact/value dichotomy. The solution to the problems of modern moral philosophy is to be found in Plato's 'art of proper divisions'. The philosopher—Plato says—must follow the 'objective articulations; we are not to hack off parts like a clumsy butcher'.[12] As Kovesi understands the matter, these divisions are conceptual distinctions of a perfectly everyday kind. Plato's interest is not in any supposed world of transcendent Forms but in ordinary conceptual distinctions. Nor does he presuppose that the so-called 'physical world' has built-in 'objective articulations'. As he says, he is 'not arguing over the inventory of the universe'.[13]

The thought that concepts contain 'objective articulations' will strike many philosophers as far-fetched. How can concepts be 'objective'? In two main ways. Firstly, concepts are the means by which we classify the world, as distinct from merely naming empirical similarities in the world. Concept-usage is fundamentally different from naming. Concepts should be thought of in functional terms. This is the gist of Chapter One of *Moral Notions*, entitled 'Between Good and Yellow'. Here Kovesi provides an

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[11] Kovesi, 'Valuing and Evaluating', in *Values and Evaluations*, p. 15.

[12] *Phaedrus* 265e, quoted in *Moral Notions*, 1967, pp. 136–37; 2004, p. 98; Plato's method is discussed further in *Moral Notions*, 2004, pp. 133–41. Kovesi's interpretation of Plato is discussed in this book by Brian Mooney and Lee Churchman.

[13] *Moral Notions*, 1967, p. 19; 2004, p. 17.

account of how concepts form interconnected structures. Some concepts such as 'good' play a very general or 'formal' role in our classification systems. Others such as 'yellow' have a much narrower function. To put it simply, they order our thought in terms of our needs and interests. Secondly, he transformed the idea of rule following. Chapter Two is entitled 'Following Rules and Giving Reasons'. Kovesi argued that the crucial point about concepts is that they enable us to give reasons and not just to follow rules. Concepts are what enable us to function rationally.

Taking these two Kovesian claims together, we can start to see how he thought of concepts as 'objectively articulated'. But this objective articulation is a general feature of concepts. It holds good of any concepts, whether they be those employed in science or those employed in morality, or those employed in any other branch of human thought. *Moral Notions* discusses diverse examples: colours, tables, inadvertent actions, meteorology, economic predictions, bus tickets, nursing care, lying and murder. A central point in the book is that there is nothing very special about moral concepts. Of course they play a different role from other concepts, in that they play the role of structuring our moral life—or perhaps it would be simpler and less misleading to say that they structure the most general features of our social life. But moral concepts are no different from other concepts in that they are 'objectively articulated'. Attacks on the objectivity of moral concepts will therefore have the effect of attacking the objectivity of any other concepts.

Kovesi tried to express his insights with the introduction of a terminology that did not catch on. He called the reason-giving aspect of concepts their 'formal element'. The aspects of concepts that ground them in the world he called their 'material elements'. The material elements of the concept 'table' are all the many and diverse ways in which something can be a table: it can be wooden or plastic or whatever, it can have various numbers of legs, it can be variously coloured, and so on. The 'whatever' and the 'and so on' are important in making this point. Concepts are 'open-textured'; that is, new ways of instantiating any given concept are always possible. 'We cannot give a complete enumeration of the conditions that must be fulfilled for the proper use of a term. Not because of the indefinite number of these conditions, but because these conditions have an open texture. Nor can it be stated how many of these conditions must be present and how many may be absent'.[14] At the level of their material elements,

[14] *Moral Notions*, 1967, pp. 7–8; 2004, p. 9.

concepts are endlessly variable, and this may be what makes them seem anything but 'objective'.

Kovesi's idea of the 'formal element' of concepts is the most difficult point in his thought. The formal element of the concept 'table' is, truistically, whatever it is that any table must exhibit in order to be counted as a table. But giving content to that idea in any particular case is not easily done. The concept 'table' is explained partly by relating it to other concepts such as 'furniture' but also by telling a story about the role of tables in human social life, especially in providing flat surfaces for eating from, writing on, etc. The concept of 'bacteria' won't be explained in this way, since the role bacteria play in our lives—as causes of disease or as facilitators of digestion, for example—is not essential to the concept. That sort of concept will be explained in terms of its role in how we classify the natural world, alongside cognate concepts such as *virus* and *microbe*. Moral concepts, such as the concept of 'murder', will be explained in terms of their role in guiding our social behaviour and in protecting our social life. Murder, for example, resembles theft, rape and assault, as being a species of injustice. Thus, talk of the 'formal element' is a way of distinguishing between functional object concepts, natural world concepts, moral concepts, and others. The particulars of each of these various cases differ, as they should, but the general point is that concepts serve our purposes, and this is what gives them 'objective articulation'.[15]

Moral concepts serve three functions, Kovesi argued:

> (a) moral notions have to be public twice over: they not only have to be formed from the point of view of anyone, but they also have to be about those features of our lives that can be the feature of anyone's life; (b) they provide not only the rules for our thinking about the world but also the rules for our behaviour, while other notions are not at the same time rules for the behaviour of their subject matter; (c) partly as a consequence of (b), if other

[15] Whatever its merits, Kovesi's theory of concepts had little influence on the philosophy of language until recently. But in *Word and World: Practice and the Foundations of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison have argued at length and with much sophistication for a position that is substantially similar to Kovesi's. Hanna and Harrison trace the genealogy of *Word and World* back to Wittgenstein, but with additions and inputs taken from Peter Geach, Len Goddard and Kovesi. In 1978 Harrison spent a year at the University of Western Australia and spent much time talking with Kovesi. He has said that he regards *Moral Notions* as the best book on moral philosophy written since the War, and that 'I have constantly recommended the book, whenever I have had the chance, to dozens of people over the succeeding thirty years, and used it in teaching a lot before I retired' (Personal communication to Alan Tapper, 24th September, 2008).

> notions did not exist those events that are their subject matter would still go on happening, but without moral notions there would be nothing left of their subject matter.[16]

In fact all concepts—even highly specialised concepts—are formed from the point of view of anyone, so that does not especially distinguish moral concepts:

> moral notions do not reflect the needs, wants, aspirations or ideals of any one person or a group of individuals, but those of anyone. This is so not because we happen to be such nice people that we formulate our notions from the point of view of anyone, but because our language is public. To presume that our notions reflect anyone's views because we are such people, or because we are fair, is to presume that our language is a private language which is turned by our benevolence into a public language. But the very notion of fairness is a notion that can exist only in our public language.[17]

It is Kovesi's second and third points that pick out the distinctive features of moral concepts. If we human concept-users did not distinguish in our actual social life between murder and manslaughter, there would simply be no distinction between the two. But because we do so distinguish, there is an objective difference between the two. The difference is both conceptually distinguishable and practically real. For Kovesi, moral concepts have two 'directions of fit', not one. They serve as guides to action and as guides to judgment—the direction of fit runs both from word to world and from world to word.

Pursuing this point further could take us into the debate between moral realist and anti-realists that sprang up after the publication of Mackie's *Ethics* in 1977. Kovesi had already made an important contribution to that debate *avant la lettre*, we think, but it was not much noticed and it is not simply summarised.[18] Bacteria would exist, whether or not the concept 'bacteria' existed. But tables would not exist without the concept 'table', and neither would murders exist without the concept 'murder'. If true, this

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[16] *Moral Notions*, 1967, pp. 147–48; 2004, p. 106.

[17] *Moral Notions*, 1967, p. 111; 2004, p. 81.

[18] For further discussion, see the 'Afterword' by Ewin and Tapper, *Moral Notions*, 2004, pp. 143–74; and, for useful comparison, the idea of Relative Realism (as opposed to Referential Realism) defended in Hanna and Harrison, *Word and World*, pp. 347–82 and in Hanna and Harrison, 'The Limits of Relativism in the late Wittgenstein', *A Companion to Relativism*, Steven D. Hales ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp. 179–97. Also relevant are Brian Morrison, 'Mind, World and Language: McDowell and Kovesi', *Ratio*, 15 (2002), pp. 293–308; and T. Brian Mooney, John N. Williams and Mark Nowacki, 'Kovesi and the Formal and Material Elements of Concepts', *Philosophia*, 39 (2011), pp. 699–720.

at least shows that moral concepts are not the only concepts that are constitutive of the reality they describe.

He takes up this meta-ethical theme again in Chapter Five, on 'Evaluation and Moral Notions'. Kovesi was deeply opposed to the kind of dichotomous thinking that sets up morality at one pole and then places something else—rationality or science, usually—at the other pole. He used two kinds of argument in opposing this sort of dichotomy. Firstly, as already suggested, all rationality is concept-dependent. Secondly, there is no dichotomy in human thought, but many different fields of thought, including moral, prudential, functional, scientific, legal, religious, and aesthetic. Each of these fields has its own specialised lexicon. Thus, we need to think of concepts as clustered into broad categories. The clustering is another way of thinking about Kovesi's 'formal element'. Moral concepts are formed from 'the moral point of view', just as functional concepts are formed from the functional point of view, and so on. Someone who has no understanding of the relevant point of view cannot understand the concepts that are formed from that point of view.

Moral Notions is also a book about moral reasoning, and is thus highly relevant to what came to be known—tautologically perhaps—as 'applied ethics'. Moral reasoning is the main theme of Chapter Three, on 'Commands, Rules and Regulations', criticising Hare's account of the matter, and Chapter Four, on 'Moral Notions and Moral Judgments', setting out his own account. Applied ethics typically deals with problematic moral cases or types of case. Many actions and situations do not fall straightforwardly under one simple moral description. Reasoning is required to make the action or situation match up with our conceptual resources. As he says:

> moral reasoning is not deductive but analogical. Only if it were deductive should we worry about cases where there is no principle by the help of which we could deduce what to do in such and such a situation. By analogical reasoning I do not mean that we have certain paradigm cases that we know to be good or right, and then by analogy we work out what to do in similar cases. [...] When we are looking for a formal element we are looking for that which alone is common to a variety of things or actions. This common element we are looking for is not one of the empirical similarities but that which brings a variety of things together as examples of the same thing. Things, happenings and situations differ from and resemble each other in many ways; what we regard as the same depends on the formal element of our notions. But sometimes the appropriate formal element is precisely what we are looking for. We can direct our attention to the appropriate formal element by trying to consider what we would or would not regard as

> instances of the same something. By trying to think of another instance of a situation that would be the same we are trying to think what makes the situation to be what it is. In the extraordinary situations our predicament is exactly this: we have no principle to help us because our situation has not been brought under a formal element which could enable us to form a notion of what it is. Without a notion and a term corresponding to it in our language we cannot formulate a principle. Looking for a principle is looking for a formal element.[19]

Kovesi's general strategy was, as Mayo observed, a 'Copernican' one.[20] He contended that it is in our concepts—especially our social and moral concepts—that objectivity is to be found, while it is facts in the world that are diverse and variable. 'Unexpectedly, the fact that our interests enter into our social and moral notions twice does not make these notions more subjective. [...] Whether we are objective depends on whether we form and use our terms according to interpersonal rules'.[21] Many modern philosophers, following a scientific model, have assumed the opposite: that facts in the world govern our concepts and those facts supply the only objectivity that the concepts might hope to achieve. On this view, if the facts lack determinate structure then so too must the concepts that name those facts. Perhaps it is his rejection of this quasi-scientific model that is most difficult to absorb in Kovesi's moral theory. Yet it is important to note that he did not suppose that knowledge of our concepts gives us automatic understanding of our social and moral life:

> in studying [our moral and social life] we have to chart out and explore intricate structures of conceptual relationships. But knowing this is not like knowledge of our intentions and in fact it is even more difficult to know than the physical world. The embodiments of our intentional endeavours in our language and culture are not the making of an individual agent, and yet only individuals can know, so however much that world is in a sense our creation, the maker and the knower are not the same.[22]

In assembling this book we—the editors—have learned, somewhat to our surprise, that Kovesi's work has had a vital impact on a select few

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[19] *Moral Notions*, 1967, pp. 114–15; 2004, p. 83.

[20] '[T]here is a strongly Kantian theme: a new version of the Copernican revolution. Nature and morals are both man-made; Nature, for reasons not altogether un-Kantian; morals, for precisely the same, and therefore quite un-Kantian, reasons.' Mayo, 'Critical Notice', p. 285.

[21] *Moral Notions*, 1967, pp. 54–55; 2004, pp. 41–42.

[22] Kovesi, 'Descriptions and Reasons', p. 107; also in Kovesi, *Values and Evaluations*, pp. 48–49.

philosophers of diverse interests and orientations. One of these is Alasdair MacIntyre, who describes *Moral Notions* as making 'a remarkable contribution both to the philosophy of language and to moral philosophy', despite its short-lived fame. He adds:

> What was its importance? A good deal of debate among moral philosophers at that time [around 1967] focused upon the issue of whether or not Hume had been right in declaring that all inferences from factual premises to evaluative or normative conclusions were illegitimate. Kovesi argued that both sides in this debate had failed to take account of a set of crucial distinctions, distinctions that are still for the most part ignored. Examples of such distinctions are that between the features of a thing that enable us to recognize it and the criteria for the use of a word to refer to that thing[23] and that between the reason why the door ought to be shut and the reason that I may have for saying that the door ought to be shut.[24] Careful attention to these and other distinctions makes it clear that it is the relevant facts of a situation that provide agents with reasons for their moral and other evaluative judgments and that the thinking that issues in moral judgment is carried out in considering and deciding whether this or that fact is relevant.[25] Kovesi in his further work made it clear how failure to mark such distinctions is not only a source of philosophical error, but also of confusion in our everyday thinking, something that may make us vulnerable to ideologically motivated misuses of language.[26]

Bernard Harrison has noted that Kovesi wrote at a time that did not suit his message. There was, he says,

> [a] relatively sudden turn in philosophy, in the late 60's and early 70's, away from the generally anti-metaphysical outlook promoted by Wittgenstein and Austin to the renewed interest in metaphysics—in very various forms, including [W. V. O.] Quine's semantic holism, [Sir Peter] Strawson's neo-Kantianism, [John] McDowell's neo-Hegelianism, [Michael] Dummett's anti-Realism, [Hilary] Putnam and [Saul] Kripke's essentialism, and so on and so forth—which has dominated the scene more or less ever since.[27]

Philosophy turned away from conceptual analysis and towards the problems of metaphysics and cognitive science, and a large section of moral philosophy tended to disintegrate into 'applied ethics' and 'meta-ethics'.[28]

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[23] *Moral Notions*, 1967, p. 40; 2004, p. 32.
[24] *Moral Notions*, 1967, p. 90; 2004, p. 66.
[25] *Moral Notions*, 1967, p. 122; 2004, p. 88.
[26] Personal communication to the editors of this book.
[27] Personal communication to Alan Tapper, 6th November 2009.
[28] On this breakdown, see further Ewin and Tapper, 'Afterword', *Moral Notions*, 2004, pp. 143–74.

MacIntyre has also commented on the unlucky fate of *Moral Notions*.

> Why did Kovesi's book fail to attract the attention that it deserved? In part perhaps because Western Australia, where he taught, was too far from the major centres of philosophical discussion. More importantly, his principal target for criticism was R. M. Hare and moral philosophers were already rejecting Hare for other reasons, so that Kovesi may have seemed to be flogging a dead horse. As importantly, Kovesi's prose is not easy to read. It can only be read with profit slowly and attentively. The influence of his teacher, J. L. Austin needs to be identified and Austin is now out of fashion. Plato and Aristotle are sometimes in the background as interlocutors—as they also were with Austin. For these latter two reasons it would not be enough simply to republish *Moral Notions*. Kovesi will find the new readers that he deserves only if he is introduced to them by lucid expositors and critics.[29]

The contributors to this book have all taken on this task enthusiastically. The collection brings together papers by philosophers who in their own work have recognised Kovesi as an important thinker. All but one of the papers is new. The exception is Jean Bethke Elshtain's 2004 essay, 'What's Morality Got To Do With It?', which is included because of its strong adherence to Kovesi's way of doing moral philosophy, well indicated by the second part of her paper's title: 'Making the Right Distinctions'.[30] All the authors share the conviction that Kovesi's arguments are important and that they remain fresh and challenging. However, the aim of the book is not merely to go again over ground already covered by Kovesi, but to develop and advance his arguments, both constructively and critically.

The book ranges over three main fields of philosophy, general moral philosophy, applied ethics, and the theory of meaning and concepts. Kovesi's position is that these three domains are very closely interconnected, and the authors in this book treat them as interconnected. Another way to 'place' Kovesi is to say that he was writing about 'meta-ethics' (a term not then in use), though with the aim of showing that meta-ethical questions are not separable from questions of ordinary meaning and of ordinary practical ethics. In Kovesi's view, the task of moral philosophy is to demonstrate this. Again, the authors here are largely following Kovesi's lead. Although these papers cover a wide territory, we think there is still more of interest to be found in Kovesi's work. In any case, his ideas deserve to be debated in full. In his writings and his career, Kovesi had a 'passion

[29] Personal communication to the editors of this book.

[30] Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'What's Morality Got To Do With It? Making the Right Distinctions', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 21 (2004), pp. 1–19.

for argument' and liked to quote the advice of Plato's Parmenides to the young Socrates:

> Believe me, there is something noble and inspired in your passion for argument; but you must make an effort and submit yourself, while you are still young, to a severer training in what the world calls idle talk and condemns as useless. Otherwise, the truth will escape you.[31]

[31] Plato, *Parmenides*, 135c.