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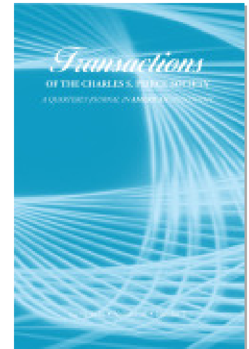

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S. Joshua Thomas

Abstract

Steady engagement, over the last decade or so, with the classical pragmatists has led Philip Kitcher to develop a position he calls "ethical pragmatic naturalism." Ethical pragmatic naturalism has three legs: an analytic history, a metaethical stance, and a normative position. The first two of these extend and expand pragmatist, especially Deweyan, insights in novel and illuminating, if not entirely unproblematic, ways. In particular, we are offered a plausible, naturalistic account of how our species moved from its pre-ethical state to where it is today, as well as a metaethical account that takes *progress*, rather than *truth*, to be primary. The normative position, developed on the basis of the analytic history and metaethical stance, attempts to combine a refined version of Adam Smith's theory of "social mirroring" with Deweyan moral experimentalism. I contend that Kitcher's focus here falls too heavily on the cognitive dimensions of the ethical project, overemphasizing efforts of rule-formation, the alleged construction of an internalized "impartial spectator," and an experimentalism construed primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of thought experiments. Consequently, Kitcher's position hews far more closely to the traditional picture he is ciritcal of than it does to the revolutionary Dewey he claims as inspiration. I suggest that Kitcher's position would be strengthened by a more robust construal of experimentalism, grounded in Deweyan habit, that puts greater emphasis on reconstruction of environing conditions as a crucial part of our toolkit for progressive change.

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Over the course of a decade or so, Philip Kitcher has gradually come to embrace classical pragmatism, particularly John Dewey's iteration of it, hailing it in his latest volume, *Preludes to Pragmatism: Towards a Reconstruction of Philosophy*, as "not only America's most important contribution to philosophy, but also one of the most significant developments in the history of the subject, comparable in its potential for intellectual change to the celebrated turning points in the seventeenth century and in the wake of Kant" (Kitcher 2012, xi). By Kitcher's own account, this represents quite a turnabout, and so it is unsurprising that some have viewed Kitcher's transformation warily. Philosophers are not immune to tribal instincts, after all. Particularly given Kitcher's philosophical background, there appears to be an impulse, expressed differently in different quarters, to ask if he genuinely has made the pragmatic turn. Some members of the pragmatist tribe may be concerned, for reasons both benign and malign, to determine whether Kitcher is truly "one of *us*." The tendency, as I have heard it expressed in more than one conversation, is to see Kitcher as a Johnny Come Lately whose latter day professions of authentic conversion only reinforce for the "faithful" the fact that his pragmatist pedigree is less than pure, and therefore his bona fides deserving of suspicion. One is reminded of the atmosphere surrounding Saul of Tarsus, following his conversion on the road to Damascus; even an angelic visitation did not disabuse Ananias of his deep misgivings. From the perspective of a rival tribe, the question, uttered in a tone of lament, is: has he finally become "one of *them*?" Kitcher himself recounts an episode of this very sort in his introduction (Kitcher 2012, xi-xii). The tribalists would do well to set aside their petty prejudices, however, for Kitcher is doing interesting and important work, worthy of being treated on its own merits, without being run through the tribal gauntlet.

Preludes offers a collection of essays, ranging over a variety of topics, "intended to supply motivation for the 'reconstruction in philosophy' Dewey envisaged" and presented "in the spirit of the would-be pragmatist revolution" rather than as analyses of the classical pragmatists themselves (Kitcher 2012, xiii). My focus here will be on Kitcher's self-described "pragmatic naturalist" treatment of ethics. In this, I am concerned to treat Kitcher fairly, according to the spirit of what he purports to be doing in *Preludes*. In the first place, that means recognizing that the essays therein are not intended to be more than preludes. Detail and complexity pervade the essays, yet they are nevertheless introductory in nature, a fact that should not be unfairly exploited. Secondly, treating

Kitcher fairly means not engaging in disputes about what Dewey (or Peirce or James) *really* meant. In more than one respect, in the ethics chapters in particular, Kitcher insightfully expands on Deweyan themes, yet he is engaged in a constructive project of his own, albeit one deeply indebted to Dewey. Kitcher's express goal is to offer motivation for a reconstruction in philosophy along the lines suggested by Dewey. However, thirdly, without bogging down in interpretive arguments, it is nevertheless fair to ask how well this expressed goal of Kitcher's ethical pragmatic naturalism is advanced by the understanding of Dewey operative in the development of Kitcher's position.

Even taken as a preliminary project Kitcher's ethical pragmatic naturalism misses, or at least inadequately thematizes, crucial aspects that differentiate Dewey's ethical view. Kitcher's normative account remains far too cognitive and psychological, and as a result, for an account that claims inspiration from the "revolutionary" Dewey, it hews far too closely to the traditional ethical picture that Dewey rejected. What is offered is a lopsided account that overemphasizes the "internal" dimensions of the ethical project and, consequently, underemphasizes the ethical significance of environing conditions. The stress falls too heavily on rule formation and following, rooted in our deep evolutionary past, and sedimented over millennia through cultural embedding, and the role of the "imaginary ideal spectator" and our processes of social mirroring. In and of themselves, none of these features of ethical pragmatic naturalism is especially problematic, although, as shall be shown below, they are not devoid of difficulties themselves. The primary problem in Kitcher's account is the insufficient attention given to habit, or the interaction between "internal" capacities and environing conditions. I will proceed in two steps. First, I will present Kitcher's ethical pragmatic naturalism, paying attention both to what it valuably adds to Dewey's broad ethical picture, as well as to some of its internal difficulties. Having presented Kitcher's position, I will then conclude by suggesting how it could be strengthened by a more adequate understanding and incorporation of habit, in the Deweyan sense of the term.

Overview of Ethical Pragmatic Naturalism

In "Naturalistic Ethics Without Fallacies," the first of two chapters in *Preludes* devoted to ethics, Kitcher observes that "[n]aturalism about ethics is a notoriously problematic position, possibly the worst of all, except for its available rivals" (Kitcher 2012, 303). "Naturalism" is a thorny term, and Kitcher is keen to avoid two common and problematic renderings of it. On the one hand, there are those, like E. O. Wilson and Sam Harris, who take naturalism "as a claim about the omnicompetence of their favorite science, and have concluded that ethical statements are derivable from the principles of that science—evolutionary biology or neuroscience, say" (Kitcher 2012, 303). On the other hand,

fundamental ethical properties, like goodness, are treated as explicable in straightforwardly naturalistic terms or, barring that, are held to be nevertheless readily accessible by normal human faculties. According to Kitcher, the first rendering is the source of many of the allegations that naturalism is fallacious, whereas the second rendering avoids those charges, but must propagate epistemological and metaphysical mysteries in order to do so (Kitcher 2012, 304).

Ethical pragmatic naturalism seeks a naturalistic ethics that steers clear of these two types of error, and its development comes in three parts. The first follows the thread of two guiding ideas, one Deweyan the other Darwinian. Kitcher is much taken with Dewey's hypothesis that "*Moral conceptions and processes grow naturally out of the very conditions of human life*" (Dewey *LW* 7: 308; Kitcher 2012, 305; italics original). Similarly, he finds the Darwinian strategy of "explaining facets of the *contemporary* organic world in terms of the *history* of life" to be the proper point of inspiration to be taken from the great naturalist (Kitcher 2012, 304; italics original). Accordingly, ethical pragmatic naturalism begins with an analytic history that seeks to plausibly explain how ethics may have emerged from the primitive pre-ethical context of our evolutionary predecessors. "To arrive at a clear, nonspooky, view of what we have been up to," Kitcher contends, "we can do no better than to try to identify the route that has led from the pre-ethical condition of our ancestors to our complex contemporary ethical practices" (Kitcher 2012, 305). The history Kitcher develops aims to show that we can be "relatively confident about the starting point, and even about some of the transitions that have occurred," while also providing a "naturalistically approved" means of explaining all the necessary steps in between, in which the current state of our evidence is lacking (Kitcher 2012, 305). Two important consequences fall out of this first move. First, a plausible, sound analytic history helps us see more readily that ethics is a project that has been going on for millennia, rather than some mysterious dispensation of Reason or the Divine. Second, in light of the first observation, it becomes clear that the ethical project has developed and evolved in diverse ways, relative to a variety of contexts. Thus, ethics is, and has always been, fundamentally pluralistic.

Going in the other direction, the analytic history with which ethical pragmatic naturalism begins serves to ground "a warranted naturalistic metaethical stance" (Kitcher 2012, 305). This is the second part of ethical pragmatic naturalism. The metaethical picture that emerges, once we have done away with spookiness and "the *fictitious* histories: those in which ethical truth is conveyed on large pieces of granite, or in which a brilliantly innovative thinker discerns the Moral Law Within, or in which ordinary people ordinarily perceive some New Moral Fact," takes progress, rather than truth, as the fundamental ethical concept (Kitcher 2012, 305). Ethical progress amounts to fulfilling functions

more adequately. According to the analytic history, the original function of ethics was to compensate for the altruism-failures that made precarious the social lives of our pre-ethical ancestors. This is not to eschew ethical truth, however. Precepts that emerge in the course of progressive transitions and manage to remain more or less stable across multiple transitions might reasonably be construed as truths (Kitcher 2012, xxix fn 12).

With the analytic history and metaethical stance in the background, the third part of the account of ethical pragmatic naturalism offers a normative stance for present conduct. Here, the groundwork done in the two preceding parts is crucial. We, like our pre-ethical ancestors, must assume the ongoing task of pursuing the ethical project. This means we must work together to refine and modify the ethical tools we find ourselves having inherited, primarily, according to what Kitcher provides, through ongoing conversation guided by the ideal of mutual engagement. Kitcher models his account of mutual engagement, which he argues is a prerequisite of ideal ethical discussion, on Adam Smith's suggestion that we socially "mirror" one another's experiences and feelings, and attempts to combine this with Dewey's emphasis on ethical experimentalism. The normative dimension of ethical pragmatic naturalism presented turns out to pay too little and not careful enough attention to habit. This yields a depiction of Deweyan experimentalism that largely ignores the importance of environmental operations while overemphasizing the role of thought experiments and the "impartial spectator" central to Smith's account. Consequently, the resulting normative picture is dominated by a cognitive-psychological focus far more traditional, and far less revolutionary or Deweyan than what Kitcher claims to be after.

The Analytic History

Relying on available archaeological and primatological evidence, Kitcher's analytic history proposes a "how-possibly" story of our development from pre-ethical animals to *homo ethicus*. The archeological record suggests that our pre-ethical hominid ancestors lived in small bands of between thirty and one hundred fifty members, in a social arrangement resembling, in this respect at least, that of contemporary chimps and bonobos. This sort of arrangement requires a capacity for psychological altruism. Psychological altruism is the capacity, in light of one's belief that one's actions will have consequences for others, to adjust one's preferences to align those preferences more closely with those one attributes to others, without expectation that others' subsequent actions will promote one's own wishes (Kitcher 2012, 306). Primatologists have strong evidence suggesting that bonobos and chimps are psychological altruists, and hence, there is reason to suspect that our hominid ancestors were as well. The presence of psychological

altruism in humans is, in all likelihood, an evolutionary inheritance passed on from our hominid forbears. Kitcher hypothesizes that the key evolutionary step that moves pre-ethical, psychologically altruistic hominids to ethical humans is acquisition of the ability to formulate and follow rules (Kitcher 2012, 308). Thus, he asserts, "The ethical project, centered on what I shall call *normative guidance*, liberated us" (Kitcher 2012, 308). According to the analytic history Kitcher develops, rule formulating and following, functioning as a compensatory mechanism for altruism failures, forms the evolutionary backbone of the ethical project. Psychological altruism is the glue holding bonobo and chimpanzee societies together; its regular break down is what keeps them shackled to an evolutionarily primitive stage. The liberating value of normative guidance is that it covers for altruism failure by providing a mechanism for achieving at least *behavioral* altruism when one is tempted to bail on altruism altogether. Normative guidance is the glue that holds the glue together, in other words.

Once this practice of rule formulating becomes socially embedded and culturally transmitted, the evolutionary gap widens dramatically. Among the earliest texts we possess are codicils to more elaborate legal codes, and from this it is evident that complex practices of rule formulating have been going on for tens of thousands of years. Moreover, pre-literate hunter-gatherer societies living in present day conditions most closely resembling those of our pre-ethical ancestors exhibit rule formulating practices "they work out together in discussions among the adult members of the band around the campfire" that compensate for altruism failures and thereby ease social tensions (Kitcher 2012, 308). As evidence, the practice of the !Kung is offered, according to which, "adult members gather, typically during the 'cool hour,' and they work out the framework that governs their social lives. They do so together, on terms of relative equality—and their framework often introduces intricate strategies for preserving that equality" (Kitcher 2012, 309). Given the similarities in living conditions, by observing how normative guidance gets socially embedded in present day hunter-gatherer societies such as the !Kung, we can make the reasonable, if fallible, conjecture that our evolutionary cousins pursued the ethical project in not dissimilar ways. Of course, there is no straight line to be drawn here connecting !Kung practices to those of our shared prehistory, but taken together with the evidence from the archeological record and from primatology, the broader hypothesis about our pre-ethical roots is certainly strengthened. Accordingly, "[p]ragmatic naturalism supposes that normative guidance has been socially embedded in this way for tens of thousands of years, and that it may well have emerged as human beings acquired full linguistic capacities—in other words, at least fifty thousand years before the present. If so, approximately 80 percent of the history of the ethical project has taken the form of discussions

among members of small groups, all of whom were intimately familiar with each other" (Kitcher 2012, 309–310).

Doubtless, there is a good deal of truth in this picture, so far as it goes. Yet while Kitcher's analytic history does not purport to be conclusive, nor the !Kung example definitive, it nevertheless needs further nuance. The sketch given settles too readily on an egalitarian tableau as the model of pre-literate, pre-ethical societies.[1] Just as we have grounds for making a reasonable conjecture that something like the !Kung model of establishing normative guidance existed in our pre-ethical evolutionary past, by the same token, there is compelling evidence that non-egalitarian social configurations were far from being outlier cases. Limiting consideration just to Native American societies during the so-called contact period, we know that a wide range of social configurations existed, many of them resembling the roughly egalitarian structure taken for granted in Kitcher's analytic history, but a great many besides that were highly stratified, and possessed firm social divisions precluding certain classes of adult members from participation in the kind of rule formulating and rule modifying discussions offered as the forerunner of mutually engaged ideal ethical conversation. If, as Kitcher avows, ethical pragmatic naturalism is to avoid "fictitious histories," then it needs to engage with the implications of concrete cases of this sort. For even if the range of diversity among social configurations was less extensive in the distant evolutionary past, it seems highly unlikely that it was as uniform as the analytic history appears to suggest. If some relatively sizable cross-section of pre-ethical societies were non-egalitarian—and it seems sensible to assume so—the implications of this for Kitcher's analytic history, and all that follows from it, are worth considering more carefully. Indeed, not even the codicils invoked as archeological evidence are suggestive of such widespread egalitarianism. Not just fictitious, but overly simplistic histories, as well, ought to be avoided.

Nevertheless, while the analytic history would benefit from a more fine-grained depiction consistent with a more broadly representative range of the available evidence, its lack of subtlety does not appear to threaten the basic hypothesis that the acquisition of normative guidance represented an important evolutionary shift by providing a more or less reliable remedy for altruism failures. This claim is what Kitcher is really committed to. If we nuance his sketch by filling out the range of social organizations to include various non-egalitarian arrangements that we have good archeological and anthropological evidence to believe also existed in our pre-ethical past, nothing is taken away from his hypothesis. It is not difficult to see that social stratification is one way normative guidance might be manifested. Any scenario in which a division of labor exists resulting in the uneven distribution of group responsibilities—some members hunt, while others gather; some war, while

others safeguard the livestock and communal stores, for instance—is bound to have some set of asymmetrical rules whose social embedding and cultural transmission take the form of social stratification. Normative guidance need not be "right" by some later standard in order to successfully tamp down altruism failures in the present.

Actions always bring with them "collateral ends," and, not surprisingly, as early rules succeeded in averting altruism failure, the social benefits that accrued reconfigured existential conditions that in turn engendered new difficulties to be overcome. The success of the original function of ethics in maintaining social cohesion by remedying altruism failure has the collateral effect of giving rise to questions and concerns of flourishing and the good life. In response, derived functions of ethics are developed to meet these collateral difficulties. This, in turn, inevitably leads to conflicts between various ethical functions also requiring sorting out, what Kitcher refers to as "functional conflict." Thus, even early on, this account turns out to be "entangled with a normative stance" (Kitcher 2012, 317).

It is worth briefly noting a few important upshots of this "how-possibly" story. First, as has been suggested already, the ethical project is precisely that: a *project*—one that we, and our evolutionary ancestors, have been steadily, if not always self-consciously (or successfully) engaged in from our very earliest days. Put differently, and to modify James' gloss on truth, the analytic history shows that ethics, too, has its paleontology. Second, this account helps illuminate why assertions of the sudden emergence of the "ethical point of view"—and indeed the very notion of *an* ethical point of view—is misbegotten. *It's concrete, situational problem solving all the way down*; there is no view from nowhere, ethical or otherwise, no "Big Other," to borrow Zizek's phrase. Third, this "how-possibly" story undercuts the plausibility of realist truth talk, while simultaneously pointing to the virtue and primacy of ethical *progress*, the central concept of pragmatic naturalism's metaethical stance. Fourth, from the point of view of the analytic history, it is evident that ethics is a *social technology* (Kitcher 2012, 315), a point Hickman (1990) has shown to be at the heart of Dewey's view.

The Metaethical Stance

The key lesson of the analytic history for the second part of ethical pragmatic naturalism, its metaethical stance, is that progress, rather than truth, is the fundamental ethical concept. Taking the long view, it is clear that normative guidance did not appear all of the sudden, fully formed. Not only has it not always been with us, it has not always taken the same form across various contexts. The analytic history suggests that early forays into rule making focused on suitable (I refrain from saying *equitable*) distribution of resources, compliance being secured, in all likelihood, out of fear of punishment. As these earliest rules

successfully performed the function of maintaining social cohesion through the remedying of altruism failure, gradually, society stabilized, as the rules became socially embedded. More refined functions aimed at concerns beyond basic necessities, concerns of harmony, flourishing, and the like, would have emerged only at much later stages of the ethical project. If we look at the arc running from there to where we are today, it is difficult to imagine the concept of truth doing so much work, particularly at the crucial earliest stages. By contrast, it is not difficult to imagine how concern with progress could move the venture forward. The claim, made earlier, that ethics is a social technology is important in this connection. Kitcher holds that technological progress "consists in fulfilling functions we previously did not know how to fulfill, or fulfilling them more thoroughly or more efficiently" (Kitcher 2012, 315). Technological developments are not made at large, but rather are introduced in response to particular problematic situations. Solving the particular problem in question constitutes a given technology's function. The original function of the technological development of rule formulating was to cover for altruism failure. One does not need a theory either of technology or of progress to be capable of judging whether a particular response meets a new problematic situation adequately, or more thoroughly fulfills a given function than some preexisting rule.

Moreover, an examination of history reveals episodes that, in Kitcher's estimation, are difficult not to view as constituting ethical progress. "Scrutinizing the transition from the acceptance of chattel slavery in the New World colonies to the abolition of the 'peculiar institution,'" he contends, "we feel a pull to regard the change as asymmetrical: getting rid of slavery is progressive; reinstituting it is regressive" (Kitcher 2012, 311). Examples of progressive change may be found as far back in history as one cares to investigate, though the rate of change seems to be slower the farther back one's examination goes, and the details less plentiful. As we approach the present, facts about the conditions under which progressive changes occur become more plentiful and yet, even in relatively recent cases, "it is very hard to endorse any conception of ethical *discovery*" (Kitcher 2012, 311). Both realist strategies and attempts to ground a conception of ethical discovery in emotional responses inevitably rely on "spooks" of one sort or another (Kitcher 2102, 312–313). Kitcher summarizes thus:

> "There are, I contend, no moments of sudden insight in the history of ethics. Since I also maintain that there is no useful notion of truth without some explanation of how truth . . . is apprehended, and that we who come later in the unfolding of the ethical project have no special ways of apprehending ethical truth that were unavailable to our predecessors, out of whose efforts what we take as ethical truth emerged, I conclude that appeals to ethical truths, sometimes

> discovered in human history, should be abandoned. If you take the historical record seriously, the thought that individual people have successfully discovered ethical truths their forebears did not know has to go." (Kitcher 2012, 314–315)

The claim is not that ethical truth does not exist, but rather that it does not exist independently of our activity. Kitcher's position here is Jamesian: truth is not discovered; it gets made in the course of human conduct. More specifically, ethical truth is brought about as a byproduct of ethical progress. If ethical progress "consists in fulfilling the functions of ethics, original or derived, more thoroughly and more efficiently," then "truth is what you generate when you make progress" (Kitcher 2012, 317; 315). Rather than thinking of progress as dependent upon truth for its measure, we should think of truth as consolidating advances made in progressive changes. On this view, ethical truths are "the descriptive counterparts of prescriptions that would be stable under progressive conditions" (Kitcher, 2012, 318).

The Normative Stance

This metaethical account raises the question: "How then do we—should we—go on from where we are?" (Kitcher 2012, 323). In response, Kitcher presents his normative stance, and this comes largely in the chapter entitled, "The Hall of Mirrors." The reference is a play on the notion central to Adam Smith's moral phenomenology, borrowed from Hume, that, in society, we function as mirrors of one another. Kitcher develops the normative dimension of ethical pragmatic naturalism by attempting to combine a refined version of Smith's "hall of mirrors" with Dewey's stress on experimentalism. As I have already indicated, Kitcher's normative account suffers from an inadequate appreciation of habit, and consequently, the depiction of experimentalism given is heavily cognitive in nature. One could be forgiven for having the impression that the normative part of the ethical project gets carried out primarily, if not entirely in one's head; it's not clear how ethical agents ever get outside the hall of mirrors, into the open air of the out of doors. This is problematic for Kitcher's account, grounded as it is in the idea that progress is the fundamental ethical concept.

Smith believed that the way we assess the morality of our actions and attitudes is to consider them from multiple viewpoints. In isolation, Smith thinks, it would never occur to the individual to reflect on the quality of her character or the propriety of her actions. The fact that individuals do exhibit concern for these things is a function of being socially located. The perspectives of others, expressed in reactions to our conduct and attitudes that later come to be internalized by the individual, effectively serve as mirrors in which we are able to see ourselves as others do, or as they are likely to. "Each of us is a mirror in a

hall of mirrors" (Kitcher 2012, 327). Smith was not so naïve as to think our mutual mirrorings are perfect, however. This presents a problem, since it is allegedly only through others' mirroring of us that we are able to achieve the moral viewpoint. If others are as prone to distortion as we are, how can we rely on their mirroring to save us from error? Smith postulates that the way around this problem is through the construction of an "impartial spectator," a kind of ideal composite image of the reflections in the hall of mirrors. However, the impartial spectator runs into problems as well (Kitcher 2012, 227–232). It is unclear how, starting from a position surrounded by distortions in the hall of mirrors, one is able to construct a genuinely *impartial* spectator. At best, we can only expect to be able to adjust for those biases we are capable of identifying, but given that distortions are ambient both in individual psychology and our cultures, there is good reason to doubt our ability to detect all relevant biases, and hence our ability to construct a truly impartial spectator.

Despite its flaws, one important feature Smith's account has going for it is that, in its basic outlines at least, it is a naturalistically acceptable picture. It is not reliant on some sort of moral "black box" or other; no "spooks" haunt its premises. This is presumably one reason why Kitcher is keen to retain and refurbish it. Though this is not the place to pursue the issue, it is worth pausing briefly to question why Kitcher develops the first leg of his normative account around Smith. Even if we grant the intriguing suggestion that Smith was "arguably, like Mill, a pragmatist *avant la lettre*" (Kitcher 2012, xxix), George Herbert Mead seems to be a more natural choice, providing a version (a better one, I believe) of the naturalistic account of "mirroring" that Kitcher finds appealing, while being more consistent with Dewey's emphasis on progressive experimentalism. According to Kitcher, another shortcoming of Smith's account is that, while Smith believes the construction of the ideal impartial spectator will lead to a justified morality, ultimately, this means that "the individual submits to the general judgment" (Kitcher 2012, 336). The unsatisfying upshot, and the reason Kitcher turns at this point to Dewey, is that Smith lacks satisfactory resources for explaining progressive revisions. The image of social mirroring does not leave enough room for creative individual action; convention dominates, and "[c]onventional morality is a drab morality, in which the only fatal thing is to be conspicuous" (Dewey *MW* 14: 6). This inevitability is something that Mead's view, as I read it, avoids.

Mead is also concerned to develop a naturalistic account, and the internalization of the attitude of the generalized other begins in what Mead refers to as the "conversation of gestures," or the back-and-forth that occurs when one organism gestures to another in order to call out a response from that other, and the other gestures in return, calling out in the first organism a response, and so on. Mead's example is the

barking-snarling-lunging-crouching exchange typical of encounters between dogs. When the conversation of gestures has been internalized, the organism's gesture, rather than serving to stimulate a response in the other only, also serves as a stimulus to itself. When the organism utilizes this internalization to direct and modify its own conduct, it exhibits selfhood. Insofar as the self is the internalization of the attitude of the generalized other, there is a certain kind of mirroring going on. However, in Mead's hands the "mirroring" is a far less passive, far more active and experimental affair than the picture Smith offers. Even at the level of the conversation of gestures, each crouch, growl, or vocable is a kind of experimental endeavor to generate observable data, in the same way that tentatively poking the unfamiliar object with a paw, or pushing the sippy-cup off the high chair is.

Consider the key features of Mead's formulation. Neither the "generalization" nor the "internalization" involved represents a blank mirroring of the attitudes of others. Neither of these processes is carried out for the individual by the social group. For starters, to suggest otherwise would be to make the mistake of reifying the social group. Rather, these are creative activities, novel and at some level unpredictable, precisely because they are experimental, of the "I"—or subject phase of the self—accruing to and thereby filling out the "me"—or object phase of the self. Of course, even here the individual's actions will reflect, to some degree, patterns of generalization and internalization common to her social group. But just as we would not deny the creative originality of a painting on the grounds that all the materials involved in its production—brushes, pigments, thinner, canvas, stretchers, even techniques of application and composition—were not also original creations of the artist, so, too, these social patterns are better thought of as the materials with which the individual works to create herself, than as mirrors determining the product. Moreover, on Mead's view, the "attitudes" of others that get generalized and internalized are not present as givens, but instead are actively constituted by the organism, according to the nature of the organism's sensitivity.[2] Mead conceives of the individual as a moral agent, whereas Smith's conceives of the individual as a moral patient.

In an attempt to address the shortcomings of conventionalism engendered by Smith's moral patient, trapped in the hall of mirrors, Kitcher shifts his focus to Dewey, for whom, Kitcher rightly notes, habit is central. By the time we are morally aware individuals, we find ourselves already outfitted with an extensive, socially inherited moral toolkit—"vocabulary, paradigms of conduct, explicit rules, and so forth"—and with a working network of "moral habits," also formed and acquired through social interaction (Kitcher 2012, 334). As we put these things to use, we inevitably encounter problematic situations that demand changes in our equipment. It is not just that a great many

of the conflicts we encounter are experienced inconsistencies between established goods, Dewey maintains that genuine moral dilemmas are always of this sort. "All of the serious perplexities of life come back to the genuine difficulty of forming a judgment as to the values of the situation; they come back to a conflict of goods. Only dogmatism can suppose that serious moral conflict is between something clearly bad and something known to be good . . . Most conflicts of importance are conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and evil" (Dewey, *LW* 4: 212). This is one good reason why reliance on "submission to the general judgment" is unsatisfactory. Another good reason is that the moral materials at our disposal are far from comprehensive. "Stretch ten commandments or any other number as far as you will by ingenious exegesis," observes Dewey, "yet acts unprovided for them will occur. No elaboration of statute law can forestall variant cases and the need of interpretation *ad hoc*" (Dewey *MW* 14: 74; Kitcher 2012, 334–335). Problematic situations that expose the inconsistency or incompleteness of our inherited moral toolkit are especially useful in producing moral growth, though they are no less problematic for that, and though they may produce moral catastrophe just as well. Such situations force on us the realization that we must adapt our habits to meet new conditions; they call for "reflective morality." In most cases, our individual successful resolutions of problematic situations do not influence the "general judgment" of society. Those whose lives are in close proximity to ours, especially those whose nurturance may be under our care, may reflect and carry on lessons learned from the challenges we have faced, but, for the most part, our influence does not extend to broad social patterns. There are, however, occasions in which a widespread sense exists that the "general judgment" warrants rethinking, and in which the possibility for moral revision is live. By Kitcher's reckoning, the key adjustment Dewey makes is "[i]n allowing for revisionary versions of reflective morality" (Kitcher 2012, 336). Dewey doesn't abandon the impartial spectator; he "replaces the idea of *correcting for bias* with that of *progressive adjustment*—where the notion of progress is understood in terms of problem-solving" (Kitcher 2012, 336).

On the Deweyan view, however, the impartial spectator is but one tool for intelligent resolution, potentially leading to revisionary change, among many at our disposal. Recall that Kitcher's aim is to combine the "hall of mirrors" at the center of Smith's moral phenomenology with Deweyan experimentalism. The impartial spectator, particularly as modified in terms of progressive adjustment, is an experimental tool, of course, but more needs to be said about Deweyan experimentalism than this. Unhappily, Kitcher's treatment here is unsatisfying. Moral experiments proceed along the same lines as scientific experiments. In the case of the latter, we proceed by trying to produce particular changes in the world and observe to see if the changes we expect to result from

our operations in fact occur. Similarly, "moral experiments consist in changing the social world, possibly just by acting contrary to the orthodoxies of prevailing practice, possibly by altering the institutions of the surrounding society. We judge the outcome of these changes by trying to live with them, checking whether their consequences fit with our other habits and impulses, leaving us in a situation that is less problematic for us than that in which we began" (Kitcher 2012, 337). This is one of the only places where the important Deweyan experimentalist theme of operating on environing conditions receives any attention.[3] As a result, the thrust of Kitcher's account is overwhelmingly concerned with the "mentalism" involved in Dewey's experimentalism.

In a representative passage, Kitcher offers that, "Dewey develops the experimental account of moral inquiry in terms of *thought-experiments*, making these central to his treatment of deliberation. We deliberate on those occasions when we find ourselves drawn to conflicting goals. We must explore the possibilities for action, *imagining what our psychological responses* to the outcomes are likely to be" (Kitcher, 2012, 337; emphasis added). At the point that Kitcher makes explicit the relationship he envisions between Smith and Dewey we find the following. "Smith envisages each of us constructing the impartial spectator—solving the problem of the hall of mirrors—and using our construction to ground moral principles and conceptions of virtue. Dewey effectively changes the rules. We inherit from our society a conception of the impartial spectator, and our task is both to put the conception to work and to improve it to the extent we can" (Kitcher 2012, 339). Earlier, Dewey's reconception of the problem of the hall of mirrors is characterized as abandoning the attempt to construct an image that will "compensate for the distortions and special situations of the mirrors" and instead regards "the divergences among the images they reflect as the opportunity for moving and reshaping them, as an occasion for making better mirrors" (Kitcher 2012, 336). This emphasis is deeply misleading. We might forgive the metaphor; all metaphors break down at some point, after all. Nonetheless, the metaphor is consistent with the clear emphasis of Kitcher's account. I don't take Dewey to be content making better mirrors, because I don't take Dewey to be content lingering in the hall of mirrors. Rather than an opportunity for making better mirrors, an endeavor overly concerned with "the obscurities and privacies of an inner life," I think Dewey takes Smith's problem as a cue to exit the hall of mirrors, into the "public open out-of-doors and light of day" (Dewey *MW* 14: 9). This becomes evident with a clearer understanding of Dewey's notion of habit.

Habit and Ethical Experimentalism

Early in *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey offers a diagnosis of a fundamental problem confronting moral science, as he saw it. The problem was that moralists (as he often pejoratively referred to them) had

bought into the idea of a basic split between human nature and the rest of nature, and, hence, between the moral universe and the physical universe. As a result, "men come to live in two worlds, one the actual, the other the ideal" (Dewey *MW* 14: 8). In perpetuating this split, whether wittingly or not, traditional moral theories perpetuate what we might call, following Dewey's description, the Two-Worlds View. How to explain the relation of these two worlds we may usefully refer to as the Two-Worlds Problem. Dewey's estimation of the pervasiveness of the Two-Worlds Problem was such that, in *The Quest for Certainty*, he declared, "The problem of restoring integration and cooperation between man's beliefs about the world in which he lives and his beliefs about the values and purposes that should direct his conduct is the deepest problem of modern life" (Dewey 1929, 204).

Two basic ethical orientations naturally fall out of the Two-Worlds View—call them the "internalist" orientation and the "externalist" orientation. Internalists, which, I fear, Kitcher's normative account is too easily mistaken for, put the moral chips on the side of internal capacities, on the assumption that if you change hearts and minds, changes in environing conditions will follow; externalists put the moral chips on the side of external factors, on the opposite assumption, that if you want a systematic change of hearts and minds, environing conditions must first be altered.[4] Both sides are correct and both are incorrect in Dewey's estimation. The internalist is correct in noting the necessity of individual capacities and abilities in moral advancement. The externalist is correct in pointing out that individual capacities don't much matter unless environing conditions provide opportunities for their establishment and expression. Both are wrong, however, in the wholesale nature of their positions. For, by buying into the Two-Worlds view, both positions forfeit effective and intelligent levers for progressive change. Both are haphazard, thrown back upon accident disguised, in the first case, as private, inner rectitude or freedom, and in the second case, as necessary law of history or evolutionary advance (Dewey *MW* 14: 9). Both views effectively sabotage the possibility for experimental inquiry and advance. Not surprisingly, Dewey explicitly rejected this "hard and fast difference between ideal goods on one side and material goods on the other" (Dewey *MW* 12: 177), arguing instead that human nature is continuous with the rest of nature, and moral goods continuous with material goods, rather than categorically distinct, as Kitcher's analytic history helpfully elaborates. In other words, Dewey sidesteps the internalist–externalist debate, rejecting the Two-Worlds View outright. Precisely because he is concerned with promoting effective means of progressive, melioristic change, his response to the Two-Worlds Problem is to show it to be a false problem. He does this by focusing on *interactions* between individual capacities and environing conditions in the one world in which we actually find ourselves. This interaction is what Dewey refers to as *habits*.

According to Dewey, habits are "working adaptations of personal capacities with environing forces," comparable in this respect to physiological functions like breathing and digesting (Dewey, *MW* 14: 16; 15). There is a tendency to think of habits as dispositions internal to individuals, overlooking the fact that the cooperative support of environing conditions is requisite for both the initial acquisition and later expression of those dispositions. Habits "are ways of using and incorporating the environment in which the latter has its say as surely as the former" (Dewey *MW* 14: 15). This is no less true of ideational habits. Genuine social moral change comes progressively, as Kitcher convincingly argues, but not merely or even primarily from rearranging or rebuilding the "hall of mirrors," but rather, from intelligently changing *habits*. Doing that requires understanding the interaction of the cognitive tools at our disposal with the institutions, mechanisms, and obstacles of daily life, as that plays out in lived environments.[5] By way of heading off a potential misconception, it is worth making it explicit that concern with understanding the interaction of our cognitive tools with environing conditions is not limited to the ways our thought life influences the environment, but also concerns itself with the ways in which the environment influences our cognitive activities. We talk a good game about the value of equality, developing elaborate theories and cognitive devices to promote it, yet honor and emulate those whose accumulation of wealth is predicated upon the disenfranchisement of others. "Men hoist the banner of the ideal, and then march in the direction that concrete conditions suggest and reward" (Dewey *LW* 4: 224). The problem with the overemphasis on the "hall of mirrors," impartial spectators, and "experimentalism" construed in terms of thought experiments, is that this focus leaves environing conditions largely ignored and unaltered. For Dewey, intelligent reconstruction of environing conditions, both social and physical, is central to the ethical project, not, it should be emphasized, as an "externalist" obsession, but, rather, as thinking's interactive counterpart. Disability theorists have been uniquely helpful in bringing our attention to this point, particularly the ethics implicit, and often explicit in our construction of the lived environment. Philosophy's ethical role, therefore, extends beyond thought experiments conducted in the hall of mirrors to include hands-on reconfiguration of the environment. Change in environing conditions can and does trigger progressive change, in part because our thinking always occurs in and because of an environmental context. Thus, we limit considerably our moral toolkit if we fail to recognize, or fully appreciate, the moral office of intelligent, experimental hands-on modification of existential conditions.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey distinguishes between what he calls the physical question and the moral question. Both "questions" are concerned with change. The physical question has to do with change that is already "in the books" as it were; the moral question has

to do with change that lies ahead of us, that we might yet be able to intelligently and melioristically direct. As completed and final, the physical question is not moral. Yet the physical question is, Dewey stresses, indispensible to the moral question. For if we are to intelligently and melioristically direct the change that lies ahead of us, we must first possess a firm understanding of how changes that have already occurred came to pass. Not only do we need to know the goods we desire to bring about in their connections and interactions so as to be able to detect the collateral ends likely to follow in their train and thereby intelligently evaluate them in light of the conditions of their appearance, we also need to understand processes of change more generally if we are to properly understand the causal channels most relevant to our desired ends, precisely because change does not come conveniently pre-packaged as moral or mundane. This is why Deweyan moral experimentalism cannot be construed as primarily some form of "mentalism." To achieve the progressive change Kitcher endorses, not only do we need to refine and reconstruct our cognitive tools on an ongoing basis, additionally "we have to alter [the] objective conditions which enter into . . . habits" (Dewey *MW* 14: 18). Dewey's moral vision has at its core dirty hands and skinned knees, and hefty construction bills. This is, in good part, why Dewey thinks that moral systems banking on declarations of praise and blame are bereft of genuine force: if you want satisfactory moral progress, you do not rely primarily on thought experiments or constructions of impartial spectators—you get your hands muddy and test out your proposals in the "public open out-of-doors air and light of day" by reconfiguring relevant environing conditions.

I think Kitcher would agree. Though *Preludes* only gestures in this direction, Kitcher offers a better, though still somewhat imbalanced, picture in *The Ethical Project*. Discussing the prospects for instituting greater social equality, Kitcher observes "any combination of laboratory and field studies would be inadequate to the full range of possibilities for realizing an egalitarian ideal. If that is so, the only chance of replacing our—ethically crucial—ignorance about consequences is to bring about the conditions egalitarians envisage and see what happens. Rational ethical debate may require further experiments of living" (Kitcher 2011, 351). There are occasions in which conversation breaks down, or when our limited cognitive arsenal seriously impairs even "Deweyan conversation." Especially, *but not only* on those occasions, we see the need to engage environing conditions directly, on the basis of our best hypotheses at the time. We ought to recognize sooner rather than later the limitations of our cognitive abilities alone to scout, in advance of acting, all the pertinent consequences of various possible procedures, and, in light of that recognition, display the courage to commit to "experiments of living."[6] It bears noting that moral experimentalism needn't be construed as necessarily having to be carried out on a global

or international scale. We can begin our ameliorative projects with more localized experiments. I take the Affordable Care Act to be one such experiment. More locally still, various of Vienna's districts have been intelligently reconfiguring public spaces as part of an experiment in "gender mainstreaming," apparently to great success.

It is telling that so many of our most pressing moral concerns—poverty, economic inequality, various forms of institutional bias, lack of access to healthcare—have received so much intellectual analysis, yet remain largely unchanged. The severance of morals from a robust experimentalism effected by the Two-Worlds View has had pernicious effects in both directions. On the one hand, our morals remain largely detached from our scientific understanding of the world, and hence largely rhetorical, while on the other side, science is continually remaking the world, driven by a perilously uncritical technological imperative, increasingly governed by market concerns uncoupled from all but the most perfunctory, minimalist, and ad hoc moral guidance. We find ourselves in virtually the same place we were nearly a century ago when Dewey wrote that "[t]he narrow scope which moralists often give to morals, their isolation of some conduct as virtuous and vicious from other large ranges of conduct, those having to do with health and vigor, business, education, with all the affairs in which desires and affection are implicated, is perpetuated by this habit of exclusion of the subject-matter of natural science from a role in formation of moral standards and ideals" (Dewey *LW* 4: 219). The interactionist view Dewey proposed as a remedy stresses the continuity of moral science with the other sciences, and in so doing puts a hearty, well-rounded understanding of habit at the center of the ethical project. Crucially, in the recovery of their integration, morality becomes robustly experimental and gains levers of genuine agency, while on the other side science reclaims its moral calling—morality is no longer trapped inside the "hall of mirrors," nor is science crudely instrumental. In a particularly powerful passage from *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey draws out the implications of his view. There seems to me a fair distance between the moral experimentalism of this Dewey and that of Kitcher's more cognitive Dewey, overly content to gaze at his own image in the hall of mirrors:

> in doing away once for all with the traditional distinction between moral goods, like the virtues, and natural goods like health, economic security . . . and the like [. . .] experimental logic when carried into morals makes every quality that is judged to be good according as it contributes to the amelioration of existing ills. And in so doing, it enforces the moral meaning of natural science. When all is said and done in criticism of present social deficiencies, one may well wonder whether the root difficulty does not lie in the separation of natural and moral science. When physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, contribute to the detection of concrete human woes and

> to the development of plans for remedying them and relieving the human estate, they become moral; they become part of the apparatus of moral inquiry or science. The latter then loses its peculiar flavor of the didactic and pedantic; its ultra-moralistic and hortatory tone. It loses its thinness and shrillness as well as its vagueness. It gains agencies that are efficacious. But the gain is not confined to the side of moral science. Natural science loses its divorce from humanity; it becomes itself humanistic in quality. It is something to be pursued not in a technical and specialized way for what is called truth for its own sake, but with the sense of its social bearing, its intellectual indispensableness. (Dewey *MW* 12: 178–9)

Summary

Kitcher's pragmatic naturalism offers an ethical account in three parts. The analytic history, while too simplistic at times, nevertheless usefully fills out Dewey's suggestion that ethics grows "naturally out of the very conditions of human life." It provides a naturalistic hypothesis about the origins of the ethical project in terms of pre-ethical efforts at remedying altruism failure for the sake of preserving social cohesion that grows into socially embedded practices of normative guidance, and in doing so it dispenses with "spooky" moral categories. Ethical pragmatic naturalism then develops a metaethical stance on the basis of the analytic history. According to the metaethical account, progress, construed in terms of meeting ethical functions, original or derived, more thoroughly and efficiently, is the fundamental ethical category. The third part, the normative position, attempts to combine a refined version of the impartial spectator at the center of Adam Smith's moral phenomenology with Deweyan ethical experimentalism. However, Kitcher's account at this level fails to treat Deweyan habit evenhandedly, overestimating the importance of the cognitive dimension and underestimating the significance of environing conditions as the field of cognitive interaction. The result is an undue focus on the "mentalism" in experimentalism that leaves Kitcher's position open to the misinterpretation that it reiterates the Two-Worlds View that Dewey rejects.

Kitcher's analytic history and metaethical stance clearly reject the Two-Worlds View. There aren't two worlds, one natural the other moral. Rather, like Dewey, Kitcher's view suggests the natural world *is* the moral world, because the fundamental task of ethics is the progressive amelioration of concrete existing ills and the securing of goods. In light of that, Kitcher's normative position would benefit greatly from taking more closely to heart Dewey's observation that "no amount of preaching good will or the golden rule or cultivation of sentiments of love and equity will accomplish the results. There must be change in objective arrangements and institutions. We must work on the environment, not merely on the hearts of men. To think otherwise is to

suppose that flowers can be raised in a desert or motor cars run in a jungle. Both things can happen and without a miracle. But only by first changing the jungle and desert" (Dewey *MW* 14:20). The place for Kitcher begin is with a closer consideration of Deweyan habit.

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NOTES

1. I'm grateful to Judith Green for suggesting this point to me.

2. See Mead 245–250; 347–353.

3. The only other mention it receives comes in a passage in which Kitcher suggests that "Deweyan conversation," typically "involves exploring the consequences of various procedures, and it may be necessary to do considerable empirical work to decide what consequences will indeed occur" (Kitcher, 2012, 340). It is unclear how best to interpret this claim. Doing empirical work is not the same as doing *experimental* work. Though Kitcher uses the former term, the passage seems to suggest he intends the latter. If, in fact, he means the work to be done in such conversational cases is careful observation of existing conditions, then we are indeed talking about empirical work. If, however, what Kitcher has in mind is that we perform operations on existing conditions to observe whether the changes that occur support our hypotheses regarding the outcome of various procedures, then he is really talking about experimental work.

4. In making his case, Dewey's stress tends to fall more on the importance of external forces than on the role of internal capacities. It would be mistaken to conclude from this that he is in fact a closet "externalist." Rather, his emphasis should be taken as a function of the fact that the overwhelming weight of the Western philosophical and theological traditions has been on the "internalist"

side of the Two-Worlds divide. That even as sympathetic an interpreter as Kitcher overemphasizes the internal dimension may be taken as evidence of the "internalist" influence.

5. In this connection especially, Mead seems a far more apt companion to Dewey than Smith. For a concise expression of Mead's view of the mind-environment relationship, see (Mead 233, especially fn. 25)

6. Gun control serves as a useful example in this connection. In the United States, we appear determined not to act to intelligently control firearms unless and until all the relevant facts can be ascertained in advance, and with certainty point to the need for stricter controls. Since the facts cannot possibly be known in advance, debate carries on endlessly, while more and more of our fellow citizens lose their lives to preventable gun violence. Meanwhile, nearly twenty years ago, Australia's conservative government, under conditions of "debate" much like those currently in the U.S., bravely enacted a strict gun control law. The difference in gun death statistics between the two countries speaks for itself.