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The Moral Realism of Pragmatic Naturalism[*]

Abstract: In his *The Ethical Project*, Philip Kitcher offers a pragmatic naturalistic account of moral progress, rejecting a moral realist one. I suggest a moral realist account of moral progress that embraces Kitcher's pragmatic naturalism and calls on moral realism to show how the pragmatic account is successful. To do so I invoke a hypothesis about moral affordances and make use of a cognitive account of emotions.

1. Introduction

In his *The Ethical Project* (2011) Philip Kitcher offers us a genealogy of morality and its progress, a substantively and methodologically naturalistic metaethical account of that progress, and a normative theory of progressive ethical practice. His proposal not only outlines a powerfully persuasive account of the nature of human ethical practice but also a rich philosophical research program, one that can bring insight and unification to ethics in a way that grounds it firmly in the sciences and is also true to the phenomena. *The Ethical Project* marks firmly the successful 'return of the naturalists' in the field of ethics (Kitcher 1992). Moreover, given the centrality of the ethical project to the human prospect, the book embodies the call of the classical pragmatists, James and Dewey, for focusing philosophy on major human problems and represents a major achievement in the integration of pragmatism and naturalism.

I support Kitcher's approach to and account of the ethical project. I hope these comments will lend further reasons for pursuing it. My comments focus on the metaethical portion of Kitcher's program. In particular, I shall examine the relationships between moral realism and pragmatic naturalism. To do so, I take up two central claims that Kitcher makes concerning moral realism and moral progress. First, moral realism fails to account for moral progress. Second, delineating what is ethically progressive does not require any prior concept of ethical truth or of preexisting moral properties. I argue that pragmatic naturalism implicitly requires both, thereby incorporating a version of moral realism. But this moral realism does not require pragmatic naturalism to surrender its pragmatic credentials.

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2. Ethical Progress, Moral Subjectivism and Moral Realism

Kitcher makes the case for moral progress by examining in some detail three historical cases of apparent moral progress: the abolition of chattel slavery, the recognition of women's rights, and the rights of homosexuals. He also discusses briefly three other historical cases: the rejection of *lex talionis*, the move from the Homeric honor code to the ethic of concern for the common good of the polis, and the Christian extension of sympathy and concern to outsiders. In addition, Kitcher hypothesizes that there were other progressive steps in human prehistory, such as those concerning the division of labor, extension of peaceful relationships to outside groups, and the development of roles, rules and institutions, all leading in some way both to the better provision of basic needs as well as to the development and fulfillment of more enhanced forms of individual and social well-being. These presumptively progressive steps also had, in Kitcher's view, their negative aspects and set the stage for conflicts between the basic function of the ethical project, the remedying of altruism failures, and advanced functions of that project, the achieving of enhanced forms of individual and social well-being.

I maintain, though I cannot argue for it here, that there are good reasons to accept both Kitcher's account of the history of the phenomenon and his assessment that it is progressive. I differ with him to the extent that I find an explanatory role for a version of moral realism, modest moral realism, in accounting for ethical progress.

In answering the question about whether the ethical project has been genuinely progressive, Kitcher first addresses the issue of what would constitute progress. A subjectivist account explains progress in terms of *preferences* that would endure in the limit. However, this subjectivist account proves unsatisfactory. For Kitcher can find no non-circular way to identify progressive preferences. Thus Kitcher concludes that the subjective criterion of desire or preference satisfaction cannot be the primary criterion for ethical progress. It must be something about the transitions themselves that is progressive.

Turning to possible objectivist explanations in terms of an enduring increase of ethical truths, Kitcher places three constraints on successful objectivist accounts, none of which he finds are met. First, since moral innovators make use of ordinary perception and reasoning, objectivism must reflect this. Second, it must identify external factors that determine moral claims. Third, it must close the justificatory gap between the input of these cognitive means and the purported true progressive ethical claims.

However, I note that Kitcher's first criterion rules out only non-naturalist moral realism (whether objectivist or subjectivist) since it requires that moral truths be arrived at by a priori means. This leaves naturalistic objectivist moral realism, which agrees with Kitcher in his rejection of both substantive non-naturalism and a priori cognitive processes.

Kitcher considers one naturalistically based objectivist moral realist view that has parallels with the sciences and finds that it fails to meet the external

criterion constraint. In making his case, he examines the well-known interchange between Nicholas Sturgeon and Gilbert Harman. Sturgeon argues that moral facts play an explanatory role in judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions. Harman, however, maintains that such facts are explanatorily inert and that facts about socialization are sufficient to explain the judgments in question. Kitcher finds Harman's account persuasive (*EP*, 182–183).

I have argued elsewhere that the exchange between Sturgeon and Harman ends in a stalemate; but that appeals to well-founded findings in moral learning allow one to break that stalemate in favor of a moral realism that is similar to the kinds of realism about nature scientifically understood that is advocated by scientific realists (Rottschaefer 1999). Thus, if I am right, defenders of external constraints can meet Kitcher's second demand.

Harman's (in)famous scenario concerns some young ruffians burning a cat. Suppose you happen on the scene and declare that they are doing something wrong. You see it to be so. On the moral realist's account subscribed to by Sturgeon the moral fact of the wrongness of their action explains your claim. On Harman's account, your social up bringing accounts for your reaction. The external moral fact of the wrongness of the action explains nothing. It is explanatorily inert. In support of their respective positions, Harman and Sturgeon both bring examples of ordinary moral discourse, thought experiments and speculations about the causal efficacy of supervenient properties. Because each brings plausible support for their position using these resources, I contend that their exchange ends in a stalemate. In order to break that stalemate I suggested that we turn to findings in moral developmental psychology. In particular, I contend that findings in the study of the role of parental discipline techniques in bringing about moral internalization—what philosophers often call conscience—lend support to an objectivist moral realism as opposed to the subjectivist moral realism advocated by Harman.

Psychologists who study the moral development fostered by parental discipline have identified three importantly different disciplinary methods by mean of which parents facilitate moral internalization.[1] These are: (1) assertions of power, (2) withdrawal of love, and (3) induction. Assertions of power employ such methods as the use of force, deprivation of privileges, threats and commands. In love withdrawal parents and caregivers express their anger and disapproval of the child and what she is doing. In contrast, parents and caregivers who use inductive techniques point out to the child, either directly or indirectly, the effects of her behavior on others, provide information about moral norms, and communicate their values regarding the consideration of others. The association of a moral norm with both empathic feelings and guilt feelings gives it motivational power. It can thus enter into future considerations as a motivator independently of any concerns about approval or disapproval or fear of punishment.

Both experimental and naturalistic studies since the late 1950's and the early 1960's indicate that the most effective means of moral internalization are induc-

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[1] Here, and in subsequent references to empirical findings, I omit citations of scientific findings because of space limitations. They can be found in my cited work.

tive techniques. They serve to indicate to the child the harmful consequences of her actions. These help to engage the child's empathic capacities and can also lead to feelings of guilt. However, the occasional use of power assertion techniques by nurturing parents who usually employ inductive techniques plays a positive role in moral internalization by, for instance, letting the child know that the parent feels strongly about something or by controlling a child's defiant behavior. Love withdrawal, on the other hand, contributes to the child's inhibition of anger. Both threats of love-withdrawal and punishment can play a role in getting the child's attention (Rottschaefer 1998; 1999).

We can now examine the implications of these findings for the exchange between Sturgeon and Harman. Kitcher is correct in noting that Harman's scenario does not fit the situation of global moral advance. It already presupposes that the witness and the community to which she belongs, as well as her moral instructors, have come to view animal welfare as a moral concern. So, it cannot be used to explain the moral advance that the adoption of a globally progressive view entails. In addition, it presupposes that the witness has adequately learned to recognize a wrong action and to reply to it properly. The witness has developed a conscience and is using her background moral knowledge to make the moral judgment that the action of the ruffians is morally wrong. So, the evidence that we have discussed bears on the role that external factors play in the acquisition and activation of reliable moral responses.

Consider a moral learner, Sonia, to give her a name, at a point when the moral internalization process is beginning under the guidance of her caregiver(s). Although at the beginning of the learning period Sonia is still a moral neophyte, we need not suppose that she is a moral blank slate, especially if the evidence concerning innate empathic capacities is correct. We also assume that no matter what internalization technique her caregiver uses, the caregiver considers the action in question wrong. Suppose the situation is one in which Sonia is doing something wrong, for example, she is hitting her baby brother, Sid, for no very good reason at all. Her caregiver tells her that what she is doing is wrong and that she should stop hitting little Sid. We assume that the above factors are constant with respect to our example. The only relevant difference in the learning situation concerns the internalization techniques used by the caregivers. If her mother uses an inductive technique, she points out to Sonia the harmful nature and consequences of her actions; and Sonia takes note of them. In contrast, if her mother uses love withdrawal techniques, for instance, ignoring Sonia or looking at her with displeasure, Sonia feels the anger and disapproval of her mother. If, however, her mother applies power assertion techniques, Sonia experiences fear of punishment or even bodily coercion. Applying our findings, we conclude that, if Sonia successfully internalizes her mother's norm, the most likely source of that success, and so of Sonia's reliable moral sensibility or background beliefs, is the repetition of learning situations in which her mother uses inductive techniques. Sonia successfully internalizes her mother's norms because in her moral training her mother has repeatedly pointed out the harmful effects of Sonia's actions. This is something that those who use the less effective techniques of power assertion and love withdrawal do not do. These empirical findings allow us

to conclude that the object-side facts of the situation, in particular the harm and distress being suffered by another person, play a causal role in inductively-based learning that they do not in power assertion or love withdrawal modes of learning.

Harman contrasts the explanatory power of theories in particle physics and the explanatory inertness of appeals to moral facts. In the former case, physicists correctly refer to the presence of protons to explain the observation of vapor trails in a cloud chamber, while in the latter case appeals to moral facts to explain moral perceptions and beliefs are useless. But, if the studies concerning parental discipline techniques are accurate, the alleged contrast fails. Given Sonia's moral training and psychological set, the wrongness say of Max's action as constituted by or connected with the observable physical harm done to his baby brother, leads her to judge that what she sees Max doing is wrong. Obviously, moral philosophers have not attained the degree of theoretical agreement about the nature of moral value that their colleagues in physics have about elementary particles. Nevertheless, the findings about the relative superiority of inductive techniques allow us to attribute to object-side factors an explanatory role in the formation of Sonia's perception and belief similar to that found in physical explanations. The object-side factors in the *explanans* of the physical case concern the activity of unobservable particles, while in the moral case the *explanans* refers to observable features of the injured child. Not withstanding, one need not assume that no theoretical account of the object-side moral features in the ethical case is in-principle available to the realist. Moreover, since in scientific cases empirical laws are acceptable, though not complete, sources of explanation, the moral realist can legitimately, given the validity of the role of inductive techniques in effecting moral internalization, count references to object-side factors as partially explanatory of moral beliefs and actions.

In addition, inductive techniques work in part because they engage innate empathic capacities. There is substantial evidence that the distress of others evokes an empathetic response, even in those who have not yet received moral training. This provides further evidence that object-side factors play a role in moral learning. In fact, there are good reasons to contend that empathic capacities, in particular, the one for responding to distress, are evolutionarily based (Rottschaefer 1998).

Thus, though Kitcher is surely correct that Harmon's scenario represents one of moral maintenance, not advance, the moral background knowledge involved finds its sources in external factors and identifiable non-mysterious cognitive, emotional and motivational factors. Is Kitcher also accepting Harman's own subjectivist account of moral facts, one that rules out a role for the external constraints? Doing so, it seems, would not be consistent with Kitcher's rejection of the subjectivist approach to understanding progressive ethical change. When later discussing ethical method, Kitcher adopts an ideal observer method for ethical justification. Such a method is often associated with a subjectivist ontological position, it need not be. For it may well be the case that the ideal observer is thought to be responding to moral facts in an ideal fashion. Thus,

the moral realist can identify a role for external factors in the acquisition and maintenance of moral codes.

Turning to the third constraint, Kitcher finds no evidence that realist insight or a priori constructivist processes play a role in cases of ethical advance. Thus there is no evidence that the innovators had access to new ethical truths and their corresponding standards for rightness. Consequently, Kitcher concludes that both realist and a priori constructivist accounts of ethical progress fail, as do non-cognitive accounts. Indeed, they leave a justificatory gap between perceptions of unrelieved suffering, for instance, and claims about the truth that chattel slavery is wrong. He concludes, "As a result, realism is fatally flawed."[2] (*EP*, 201)

The objectivist moral realist should surely agree with Kitcher that determining that chattel slaves are subjected to unrelieved suffering and empathetically responding to that suffering is not sufficient to establish that the practice is wrong and ought to be abolished. Making moral decisions often involves deliberation and the balancing of goods and evils. One would especially think this to be the case in situations of moral progress. Kitcher argues further that what becomes decisive are the results of conversations that Quaker abolitionist John Woolman's 'unease' and his religious reflections provoked in his Quaker community. A moral realist need not deny this either.

To bridge the justificatory gap between negative emotional responses and a judgment of wrongness, Kitcher requires an appeal to a *standard* that is independent of both the individual and society. Non-naturalistic realist standards taking the form of divine commands or eternal moral principles might fill the gap. However, both a naturalist moral realist (like myself) and Kitcher maintain that such standards do not exist. On the other hand, what might naturalistic realist external standards look like? A moral realist will suggest that Woolman's 'unease' is about an external indicator of a possible moral problem. Woolman's empathic capacity serves as a detector of observable moral features, as did Sonia's. But, now his empathic capacity is engaged with situations to which routinely it has not been applied. We might imagine the following realist reflection: "When we see this sort of thing going on with non-slaves, we observe something that is *prima facie* morally problematic. And it is morally problematic because it appears to be a failure of basic altruism with respect to the prevention of violence. Is this also the case with the violence perpetrated on the slaves? If so, there is a genuine good, whatever its exact nature, that our community is failing to achieve. If that hypothesis is correct, something must be done about it." Moreover, the group conversations that Woolman provoked will also pay attention to these observable indicators—probably experienced by other members of his community—in their considerations concerning what if anything they ought to do about the practice of chattel slavery. Of course, these suggestions are empirical ones, subject to confirmation or disconfirmation. But, since there is empirical support for the claim that in situations of acquisition

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[2] Kitcher finds a dispositional understanding of moral reality the most plausible of objectivist realist views. I think that the dispositional account is best classified as a subjectivist realist view.

and maintenance external factors play a role in moral judgment and action, the case for a role for such factors in situations of moral advancement is *prima facie* plausible.

3. Ethical Progress and Pragmatic Naturalism

Given the failure of truth accounts of ethical progress to fit either the historical data of ethical progress or plausible suggestions about pre-historical ethical progress, Kitcher turns to his own positive proposal. He suggests that ethical progress has priority over ethical truth (*EP*, 210). He argues that an understanding of ethical progress presupposes that some choices be objectively better than others. Thus, a progressive ethical code must be objectively morally better than its predecessor (*EP*, 211).

Moral realists should agree that progress be characterized in terms of increase in moral value rather than moral truth. To do so is to claim that across unrecorded and recorded history, and across human pre-history objectively better moral agents have arisen and moral value has increased in the world. If the goal of ethical practice is moral value, then the result of progressive ethical practice is the advancement of the moral values. Moral truth marks the success of the cognitive capacities engaged in that advancement. It does not *constitute* that success. Or, to put it in Kitcher's words, "The ethical project can be understood as a series of ventures in dynamic consequentialism. Participants in it respond to their problems by trying to produce a better world." (*EP*, 288)

But for an adequate description of the phenomenon to be explained, a more specific characterization is required. Kitcher has characterized the initial ethical project as that of solving altruism failures. Subsequent ethical projects continue and refine the original project and extend to enhanced forms of individual and social well-being. Some, though not of all of these extensions, are instances of expanding the circle of altruism. Using these characterizations of ethical progress, Kitcher offers a functional description of the ethical project. Its job is to maintain and enhance human social living. The social mechanism of that function is socially embedded normative guidance.

Socially embedded normative guidance provides a proximate explanation of moral progress. By its means objectively better moral codes are created. Kitcher maintains, given natural environmental and biological pre-conditions, that ultimate explanations of ethical practice will be in terms social/cultural selective factors, though, it is not the case that all selected for features of either biological or cultural evolution are in the moral realm nor, if they are, that they are morally progressive. In some social/cultural environments there will be selection for capacities for socially embedded normative guidance that will lead to objectively better moral codes. Moderate moral realism finds this functional characterization of the ethical project completely congenial and accords a place for socially embedded normative guidance within an account of moral agency as a proximal explanation of moral action and progress. That account is also founded in

an ultimate explanation of moral agency primarily in terms of social/cultural evolution.

Given this explanatory framework, Kitcher maintains that a pragmatic naturalist can make justified claims about local ethical progress.[3] However, Kitcher raises the concern that the justificatory gap that sunk moral realism will also bring down his own account. We have seen that, on Kitcher's view, there is a justificatory gap, for example, between the feeling of unease concerning the suffering of chattel slaves and the purportedly true claim that their unrelieved suffering is morally wrong. There appears to be a similar gap between a successful ethical practice and the psychological components that constitute the supposed means to its achievement. There is a gap between feelings of unease over the plight of chattel slaves and the constitution of the progressive moral code that determines it morally wrong. The concern is that the pragmatic naturalist has left a functional opening between the psychological processes involved in socially embedded normative guidance and progressive ethical practice. Thus, he cannot justifiedly claim that use of socially embedded moral guidance reliably leads to moral progress. Earlier, in support of the moral realist, I suggested how a moral realist might bridge the gap through an appeal to moral emotions including empathy. Interestingly, Kitcher makes the same move and argues that an examination of some of the cases that appear to be *prima facie* progressive seem to involve agents making use of empathetic capacities (*EP*, 250).

To see how this might work, we need to consider Kitcher's views on emotions. The accommodation of desires and emotions is central to Kitcher's explanation of the solution of ethical problems and to ethical progress. Though Kitcher leaves open a detailed account of emotions, he maintains that they are not mere feelings, lacking cognitive content. Yet, they are not propositionally cognitive like beliefs and desires. Moreover, on Kitcher's view, such emotional states enable the perception of the states of others and motivate actions. Thus, he argues for an alignment of an agent's emotions with those of others, one that parallels the alignment of desires that occurs in altruistic desires. This alignment of emotions occurs through what Kitcher calls simple or complex mirroring processes. The former are sufficient for refinements of ethical practice and local progress. The latter are required for revolutionary ethical practice and global progress. A first concern is then met because the emotions, in particular, empathy, can align themselves with the emotions of others. And this can reliably lead to an objectively better moral code that requires actions that help to bring about the objects of those emotions and their associated desires.

But, as Kitcher notes, this way of bridging the justificatory gap raises a second concern because it fails to identify any objective constraints on the innovators' constructive activities. It advocates only the fulfilling of aligned desires and emotions. Thus it collapses into subjectivism. And, as we have seen, subjectivism offers no promising account of moral progress. Kitcher's response is to maintain that the desires and emotions to which the empathy of the innovators

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[3] Though Kitcher concedes that no judgments can be made concerning the occurrence of global ethical progress, he claims that such judgments are not necessary for ethical practice (*EP*, 242–245). I shall not examine this issue.

aligns itself are not arbitrary. These desires and emotions arise from common human problems due to objective features of the social situation and they are "felt by virtually all members of our species" (*EP*, 251). Because of that objectivity is retained.

Though Kitcher finds the subjective/objective dichotomy 'too blunt', he does not attempt to refine the bluntness of the distinction. But, in rejecting subjectivism, he is committed to the view that moral goods are not constituted by the fact that they are desired. On Kitcher's account, psychological altruism does not reliably enough fulfill the basic needs for food, shelter, and protection from violence, needs that are the objects of *endorsable* desires. In situations of altruism failure, socially embedded normative guidance is called upon to fulfill them. But these needs are, in their most basic form, independent of the rules stemming from socially embedded normative guidance that make them required. According to Kitcher, socially embedded normative guidance is a transforming evolutionary accomplishment that turns hominids into humans. But that accomplishment does not create the factors selecting for it. It responds to these factors. These factors are objective in the sense of being independent of the capacities that it shapes and selects for. In this way, biological evolution constrains social/cultural evolution (*EP*, 213). Thus, both the objects of the socially embedded normative guidance addressed to altruism failures and the sources for the capacities for such guidance have an objective character. Moreover, Kitcher's functional account of ethical practice implies that the criteria for success are independent of the beliefs, desires, and emotional responses about success, whether that success is one of moral maintenance or of moral advance. Believing or desiring that a moral code is successful does not make it so. So too for the opportunities for moral advance: either the objective features of the situation (Dewey's "conditions of life", Kitcher suggests) offer these opportunities or they do not. Beliefs, desires, and emotions that do not or cannot track success and failure or opportunities for it or obstacles to it, and do not properly motivate will not be part of a successful moral practice, one that maintains current advances or attains new ones.

Yet, at the same time, since a moral practice is itself the result of socially embedded normative guidance, human agents, using their cognitive and motivational capacities, construct it. Thus, to that extent, some conditions of life that set up possibilities and obstacles, as well as playing a role in successful or unsuccessful practices, are themselves the constructions of human agents exercising their cognitive and motivational capacities.

A pragmatic naturalist and a modest moral realist should be in agreement about this account of the role and interaction of subjective and objective factors. Biological and social environments select for both biological and cultural traits, including ethical capacities, but some of these environments are themselves shaped by individuals and groups. This interplay of internal and external factors and their consequences can be tracked and assessed in a methodologically objective fashion.

So far, I have argued that Kitcher's critique of the prospects for a moral realist account of ethical progress has not eliminated modest moral realism. I have also suggested that Kitcher's own pragmatic naturalist account shares and

requires key features of the moral realism. To fill in this suggestion, I next lay out more systematically the account of moral realism that I am advocating, along with a scientifically based realist theory of moral emotions that is explained by it and offers empirical support for it.

4. The Ontology and Epistemology of Modest Moral Realism

I propose an objectivist moral realism where moral values are relative to kinds of agents or subjects. Specifically, some kinds of things are morally good for human moral agents. Moral values are relational properties of a complex of moral agents and the objects of their moral actions, that is, other moral agents, natural objects, situations and events. On this view, the objects of moral value are valuable because their instantiation constitutes something of value for the agents that bring them about. Their valuableness invokes a response in moral agents. In contrast with this account of values as *response invoking*, subjectivist moral realists maintain that values are *response-dependent*. Response-dependent values are such because a certain sort of appropriate response constitutes their objects as valuable, for instance, appropriate higher-level desires or preferences. Thus, to understand the ontology of moral values we need to understand their constitutive elements: the subjects, objects, and relations that unite them. This, in turn, will enable us to understand the response-invoking character of the objects of moral action.

On the subject side we have the moral agent and her moral capacities. Adopting social cognitive psychologist, Albert Bandura's model of agency, I propose four functionally described capacities operating at different levels (Rottschaefer 1998; 2009).

    I. A *base level* consists of evolutionarily acquired and behaviorally learned capacities and tendencies that incline the agent to act in a substantively moral way in given situations;

    II. a *behavioral level* is made up of a set of cognitive and motivational capacities (including moral emotions) that are the immediate sources of moral actions and that are influenced by both base level and higher level components;

    III. a *reflective level* is comprised of higher level cognitive and motivational capacities that influence the behavioral level capacities, and

    IV. a *self-referential level* is constituted by conceptions of the self, including the self as moral agent, that motivate the use of reflective capacities and, indirectly, moral action.

On the object-side we have the relevant dispositional properties of the persons, objects, and situations that are the objects of the activities of these component capacities of a moral agent. These are, I suggest, Dewey's life conditions. I

understand these significant features of the environment as action affordances (Scarantino 2002). That is to say, they furnish an opportunity for action. Affordances are organism-relevant dispositional properties of the environment. In particular, they are relevant to an organism's action in the environment. Some of these affordances are goal-oriented in the sense that they enable the organism to act in ways that achieve goals or functionally described ends. I propose that the object-side moral properties—those that are the sources of moral cognition and motivation—have the character of being moral action affordances. These dispositions are actualized by morally motivated action. And their actualization is the achievement of moral value.

Explanations of the acquisition and operation of these moral capacities reveal the causal interactions that constitute the relations between subject-side moral capacities and object-side moral affordances. Such accounts fall under the category of selection theories as used in biology and psychology. Selection theories invoke object-side factors in the explanation of the acquisition and maintenance of subject-side capacities. The object- and subject-side elements are related in a complex fashion exemplified by the form of a selection theory as follows:

(1) Capacity C (e.g., empathy) in organism O (e.g., a human) tends to bring about effect E (e.g., helping) in situation S (e.g. when someone is hurt). (Causal clause)

(2) C is there in O because in the past C has often been successful in bringing about E in S. (Goal Clause)

(3) Having C and bringing about E in S allowed O-1's to do better than O-2's that had trait C* (e.g., a tendency to react in an indifferent manner) rather than C, or better than O-1s themselves would have done, if they had had C** (a tendency to feel a lot of personal distress) rather than C. That is, relative to C* and C**, C's were more plentiful in subsequent generations. (Benefit Clause)

(4) When Es are in the moral realm, O-1's doing better than O-2 means doing better morally. (Moral Benefit Clause)

Clauses (3) and (4) show us that normative requirement is a feature of selection explanations. For, as the third clause of the selection schema makes clear, such selection accounts enable one to understand normativity as a feature of the benefit of the object-side factor (the actualized potential of the affordance) for the selected for capacity. This benefit, as the third clause also makes clear, is relative to benefits accruing from other alternatives within a pool of candidate capacities and with respect to a given external or internal environment. The potential benefit of the object-side factor functions as an objective source of motivation. Thus, the object-side factors are response-invoking. Explanations in terms of motivationally potent moral properties, then, are just a sub-type of explanation as it occurs in selection theories. In the case of organisms with relevant heritable genetic differences, the selection is biological. With respect to organisms that differ because of non-genetically-based (non-cognitive or cognitive) capacities,

the selection is due to various learning environments, natural, social, cultural or intentional.

Thus, we can explain the *origin, maintenance and enhancement* of the component capacities of moral agency by appealing to environmental factors that select for capacities that detect affordances, are motivated by them, and enable actions that bring about the moral goods that are their actualization. In some environments those agents that seek to satisfy moral ends will tend to do better than those that do not or who do not do so to the same extent. Because of this relative difference in success, the capacities that produce the more successful actions will be relatively more plentiful in the next generation.

Implicit in this selection schema is also an account of the *operation* of the acquired capacity for it is through the interaction of agent and environment that the agent not only acquires and maintains her capacities but also uses them. The environment affords the opportunity for the operation of the capacity and is in potentiality to the operation of the capacity upon it. The successful operation of the capacity actuates that potentiality. That actualization is the realization of a property of the environment that stands relative to the agent as something of moral value for the agent. For example, as regards the capacity for empathy, the situation affords an opportunity for effecting something morally valuable, is indicative of what needs to be done and motivates its doing. One discerns a hurt child in need of help and is motivated to help. Successful performance thus results in the actualization of the potentiality of the environment—the helped child.

On Kitcher's pragmatic naturalist account, an ethical practice is constituted by a set of moral codes. These codes are features of groups and, derivately, of individuals. I suggest that Kitcher's account of ethical practice as a group phenomenon provides a social/cultural context for helping to explain the origin, maintenance, enhancement, and operation of the individual moral agency that my modest moral realism is attempting to understand.

We are now ready to focus on the second functional level of moral agency, in particular, a moral agent's empathetic capacities, capacities of central concern to both pragmatic naturalists and moral realists.

5. A Modest Moral Realist Account of Moral Emotions

Recall that on Kitcher's account empathy is a means by which an agent can align her desires and emotions with the endorsable emotions and desires of others. I shall focus on emotions and apply the above account of objective moral values to the role of emotions in detecting moral values and motivating action aimed at their actualization. Guilt, shame, pride, compassion, and anger usually find their way onto a list of moral emotions (Haidt 2003). Compassion comes closest to the examples of empathy that we have been discussing. I shall speak generally of moral emotions and emotional capacities; but I believe what I say will apply to compassion, *mutatis mutandis*. My contention is that emotional capacities generally have the sort of operational structure that in the case of moral emotions

presupposes objective moral values understood as relative to the kind of agent involved. In the case of compassion, as I have indicated earlier, there is evidence that supports this contention deriving from work on effective parental discipline. Moral emotions enable the recognition of moral affordances and the motivation to actualize these affordances, thereby bringing moral value into the world.

There is a scientifically based account of emotions that helps explain the above evidence and supports the view that moral emotions are detectors of objective moral values that motivate moral action. I follow Jesse Prinz (2004) who updates and extends the James-Lang theory that emotions are perceptions of bodily feelings and links it with Lazarus' theory that emotions are about core relational themes between the agent and others. For instance, anger is about an offense to me and mine. Thus, I contend that emotions are feelings of bodily change that represent core relational themes: central ways in which the social and natural environments are affecting one's well-being. I take these core-relational themes to be the affordances that constitute, along with their actualizations, the object-side features that are one pole of the relational complex that is constitutive of objective moral values.

Emotions represent these core-relational themes by means of representing the bodily states that these affordances produce in the agent. They are reliably caused by both bodily changes and core relational themes. We have them by means of either biological evolution or social/cultural learning because their function is to track core-relational themes. The objects of emotions are response-invoking properties that in the course of evolutionary history—or social or individual learning history—have been set up by those histories to invoke certain responses. The responses themselves are due to capacities that have been selected for because of the consequences of the actions that constitute the responses of these capacities.

But emotions are not only cognitive; they are also motivational. Motivation and the valence of emotions (their positive or negative hedonic tone) are intimately linked. Emotions are valenced embodied appraisals. Unlike Prinz, I understand the core-relational themes to have *objective* motivational features that are represented by valences. The rejection of a response-dependent view of emotions fits with the view that both external stimuli and internal states are reinforcers. The valence of an emotion understood as its 'do or don't do it' side (to use Prinz's apt description) has its ultimate source in the objects of an emotion. Thus, the situations, events, and objects that are the material objects of emotions, together with those of their features that constitute their formal objects, the core relational themes, are the external reinforcers that serve as stimuli for the activation of emotions. The response-invoking character of the objects of emotion is represented by their particular valence, the cognitivized reinforcer. Consequently, emotions represent core-relational themes and their motivating power resides in a representation that has both indicative and prescriptive content (Scarantino 2010).

Thus, the objects of emotions are *response invoking*. I feel empathically toward someone who has been harmed. The emotion is about the harm, something that affects me negatively. The harm is a relational property in a two-fold sense.

What is harmful to the person harmed is relative to the kind of subject she is and what is harmful to the one feeling empathy is relative to both this first sense and to the degree of relationship between the two—broadly construed. The harm does not depend upon me representing it as such. It is a real relation independently of my reaction to it. Consequently, the harm is not a response-dependent property. Moreover, the emotion is present because it reports on something that affects a person's well being.

Prinz also argues that emotions constitute a perceptual system in so far as they are dedicated input systems. Input systems have the function of "receiving information from the body or the world via some priority class of transducers and internal representations" (Prinz 2004, 222). Emotions are input systems that have the function of detecting bodily changes that serve as the nominal content for the core relational themes that are its real content. However, in the face of the objection that emotions are not perceptual systems because they are motivating and perceptions are not, Prinz concedes that valence introduces a non-perceptual element into his account (Prinz 2004, 229). Prinz's reason why valence is non-perceptual—namely that its representational content is imperative—assumes that input devices can have no imperative content. However, there is sufficient empirically based work to argue that emotions as input devices have both indicative and imperative content. In this respect, they are like sensory systems. The representations of these systems have a functional relational content relevant to an agent's potential actions. For instance, Kathleen Akins (1996) presents sensory systems as subjective in the sense of being self-centered, narcissistic. To illustrate and support this claim she examines in detail the human thermal-receptive system. She shows clearly that this system tracks neither the current ambient temperature of the skin of various parts of the body nor changes in that temperature at the surface of the skin. Rather it keeps track of changes in temperature that are likely to affect the body negatively. Her more general claim is that all sensory systems are designed to solve problems affecting an organism's evolutionary fitness. Thus, she argues that investigations of sensory systems are better served by questions concerning what is the system doing for the organism than what is the system detecting, where she intends by the term 'detecting' the cognition of *non-relational* objective properties. Though I cannot argue for it here, I maintain that her account applies also to emotions, including moral emotions.

I conclude that this realist account of emotions explains the role that Kitcher's pragmatic naturalist requires it to play, if it is, along with socially embedded normative guidance, to account for ethical progress.

Nevertheless, on my view, moral emotions, though cognitive, are merely perceptual. Thus, I maintain that they are not sufficient for knowing moral kinds. They may provide fallible data about such kinds, but attaining knowledge of moral kinds requires something more than the perceptual attainments of our moral emotions. Knowledge of moral kinds requires some theoretical knowledge. However, observational data provided by moral emotions can provide a fallible link to these unobservable moral kinds and to ethical progress. This limitation on the input of moral emotions enables one to understand (1) the

justificatory gap that reliable empathetic responses seem to leave, (2) why, on Kitcher's pragmatic naturalistic account, further conversation is needed in situations of ethical advancement and (3) why Kitcher argues that justified genuine moral advancement is the result of ideal conversation occurring in a situation of mutual engagement.

6. Modest Moral Realism and Pragmatic Naturalism

Modest moral realism and pragmatic naturalism both put moral reality first and moral truth second. The moral realist agrees with the pragmatic naturalist: 'truth happens to an idea'. For instance, the true claim that honesty is a morally good thing acquires its truth because acting and speaking honestly instantiates a moral value. What modest moral realism makes explicit in this account is the fact that the situations (Dewey's life conditions) in which early and later moral agents operate provide the ontological possibilities for the actualization of the moral value of honest interactions. They provide the moral affordances that are reliably picked up on by moral agents by means of their emotional capacities. Many of these moral affordances are themselves constructed by moral agents individually and jointly. Yet, others may be affordances provided by non-human entities and some may be the joint creation of both biological and social/cultural evolution.

The necessary role of moral affordances in this account requires that we modify Kitcher's claim about the priority of progress to truth and the absence of independent moral properties to which moral agents respond (*EP*, 246). If moral agents create moral reality, as both pragmatic naturalist and modest moral realist should agree, then moral reality precedes moral truth. And moral progress understood as an increase in moral value precedes moral progress understood as an increase in moral truths. But if, as Kitcher requires, creating moral reality requires cognitive means for it's making, then success in the endeavor requires accuracy in the capacities used to produce it. Accurately represented moral affordances constitute moral truths that precede true claims about the moral success constituted by the actualization of these affordances. And dispositional properties of moral situations, Dewey's conditions of life, are moral properties that exist prior to their actualization by the capacities of socially embedded normative guidance.

Modest moral realism also offers to pragmatic naturalism a model of moral agency that gives scientifically based psychological substance to Kitcher's linguistic distinction between the prescriptive and descriptive aspects of the moral code. On the level of moral emotional capacities, it provides a way to understand both cognitive and motivational aspects of emotionally fostered moral action in terms of two directions of fit: world to word and word to world. The latter instantiates their success both in picking up on the perceptible cues for achieving moral value present in moral affordances and marking the achievement of moral value. The former represents the motivational power of these affordances

and their ability to invoke responses in moral agents that make the world fit the representation.

Finally, modest moral realism and pragmatic naturalism find various sorts of constructive processes involved in progressive ethical practice. Human agents construct moral worth by performing morally good actions and moral value by achieving the moral good. They, thereby, create moral reality. This enables the formation of moral truths. And in successfully creating moral reality, humans both acquire the capacities to do so and construct the conditions that enable it. These results are no less real because of their human origins, maintenance and extension. Nor does the fact that humans are presented with some non-constructed moral opportunities and morally relevant capacities render the two views incompatible. For both accounts are set in the same broadly Darwinian based model of the social/cultural origins, maintenance, and advancement of moral values that finds its bases in the biological origins of the human species.[4]

I conclude that modest moral realism and pragmatic naturalism offer explanations of moral progress that have much in common. I also contend that modest moral realism offers to pragmatic naturalism explanatory features that enhance the latter's explanatory power. On the other hand, pragmatic naturalism emphasizes the constructed nature of moral reality, something that is too often only implicit in moral realism. Thus, though I have focused on moral realism's contribution to pragmatic naturalism, I could just as well have emphasized pragmatic naturalism's contribution to moral realism.

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[4] However, in the end there may be a deeper disagreement between the two concerning the existence of objective natural and social/cultural kinds (Kitcher 2001; Rottschaefer 2004).