The Development of Morality

Philosophical and Psychoanalytic Reflections on Ethics

By
Robin Gordon Brown

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Preface

This is a book of moral philosophy, and it has been written to be of interest to anyone with an interest in the moral dimension of human life. So while the hope is that undergraduate and postgraduate students of philosophy, and professional philosophers, will find it relevant to their ethical studies, it is the reader without a place in academic philosophy who has been most in mind in the writing of the book. I have tried to keep to everyday concepts when possible, and to give clear descriptions of more technical terms when they have been unavoidable. If the reader from academic philosophy feels I have made insufficient references and links to the tradition of moral philosophy, I would reply that this is because I have prioritised the non-academic philosophy reader in my mind.

This prompts an immediate clarification. The word 'Ethics' is taken to mean the same thing as the noun phrase 'Moral Philosophy', that being an area of philosophical inquiry. The two expressions are interchangeable, and I have sometimes chosen to use one rather the other, and this has largely been on stylistic grounds. The same may be said of the adjectives 'ethical' and 'moral'.

The book has two principal aims and one subsidiary aim. The first principal aim is to show that some human actions can truly be called moral. I understand this to imply that moral acts emerged in the course of the development of life on earth; that is, a qualitatively new kind of phenomenon appeared in the course of time. Morality can therefore be identified as an

emergent, phenomenon, identified here as the Good. The Good that has emerged consists, first, of the set of moral acts, and second, the phenomenon of moral consciousness, which is the basic mental element in the motivation underlying all moral acts. Furthermore, the intention is to demonstrate this in the context of a purely naturalistic understanding of reality. No reference is made to an agency beyond human beings, such as a deity, that could serve as a source of morality.

The second principal aim is to provide a general analytic framework which allows us to give a context to the moral dimension of human life; that is, to provide a framework in which a person's inner moral life, of thoughts, deliberations and feelings, and outer moral life of action and attitudes, can be described and understood as a distinct element in the living of their life.

The first aim is dependent on the exposition comprising the second aim. So the analysis of a moral act is finally reached in Chapter Six, following on from the analysis given in Chapters Three and Four of the general framework. In the title of Chapter Six supervenient morality is named the Good.

Chapters One and Two deal with preliminary matters. Moral Philosophy naturally falls into two quite distinct strands, Analytic Ethics and Moral Psychology, and Chapter One makes the case for the analysis offered here beginning with Moral Psychology.

While containing extensive ethical commentary, the primary task of Chapter Two is to state the philosophical foundations upon which the subsequent analysis in the book stands. It is

not the intention to defend the perspectives offered here. They are, in essence, the elements of a naturalistic metaphysics, with the addition of contemporary perspectives in physicalism that license the use of psychological terms understood as referring to real things. Put another way, it is possible to be a physicalist, and to deny the existence of the soul, the deity and other spiritual entities, while believing thoughts and feelings do really exist.

Chapter Two is long, and in places, despite best efforts, quite dense. It feels necessary to include all the detail of Chapter Two for completeness, but it is also true that to follow all the detail of Chapter Two is not necessary prior to approaching the rest of the book. For this reason the introductory section of the chapter concludes with a brief summary outlining the rest of the chapter. This will suffice to let the reader know what philosophical foundations the ethical analysis that follows rests on. Of course, the reader may wish to return Chapter Two at some point or points in the course of reading Parts Two and Three, or perhaps at the conclusion of the book.

Chapter Five has not been mentioned so far, and this is because it is something of a detour from the main line of argument. In it the work of two contemporary thinkers working outside academic moral philosophy is critically assessed. Their importance stems from their efforts, quite distinct from each other, to provide scientific foundations for ethics. If successful this would of course issue in the same outcome as the first principal aim here – true statements about moral phenomena. Both works demonstrate considerable scholarship and original thought, and both offer many useful perspectives on the moral life, but it is argued that both ultimately fail in their aims.

Part Three of the book comprises four chapters in which the analysis offered in Part Two is put to work in consideration of moral dilemmas and problems encountered in the lives of human beings. About twelve circumstances have been selected from a variety of sources, including fiction, biography, the moral philosophy seminar, and issues in contemporary life. While making no claim to a comprehensive survey – that would be absurd – it is hoped that the reader may engage in a personal way with the kinds of deliberations, problems and decisions described. This is the third, subsidiary, aim of the book: for the reader to use the material, throughout, but particularly in Part Three, to reflect on the growth of their own moral sense through the course of their life, and to engage in an empathic identification with the persons introduced in the circumstances described. While the precise circumstances may never be faced, many of the examples display characteristics that are regularly encountered in the moral life. It was for that reason they were chosen for inclusion here. For some readers it may be that the subsidiary aim proves to be more important than the other two.

I would like to express my thanks to

James Ladyman, my doctoral supervisor, who is a most encouraging and supportive teacher, as well as being an original and creative philosopher. Joint work I have undertaken with him has been immensely productive and rewarding;

Jon Thompson, who has been my friend and philosophical interlocuter for fifty years, and with whom the flame of

Part One
Introduction and Philosophical Perspectives

Chapter One
The Primacy of Moral Psychology

Introduction
The landscape of moral philosophy
Reflections on analytic ethics
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Introduction

In the first section of this chapter I shall describe the landscape of moral philosophy. It will be seen to fall into two specific strands, analytic ethics and moral psychology. In contemporary academic philosophy the former is dominant, but I will argue that it is more appropriate to begin with moral psychology.

The case for the primacy of moral psychology is made in two parts. The first part, in the chapter's third section, consists of four critical comments about analytic ethics, all arising from reflections on the first chapter of Michael Smith's important and influential book, The Moral Problem (Smith 1994). The second, more positive, case for moral psychology is given in the fourth section of the chapter in the form of a critical evaluation of the work of Richard Wollheim.

The final section of the chapter gives an overview of the structure of the entire book in rather more detail than that in the Preface.

The landscape of moral philosophy

The philosophical study of the moral dimension of human life may be seen as consisting of two distinct but related strands. Within one strand, called **Analytic Ethics**, there is a further subdivision into three parts:

AE(i) Practical Ethics   the study of particular moral problems;

AE(ii) Moral Theory   the attempt to develop a theory of morality that offers a general method for answering all the specific moral questions that are raised in *Practical Ethics*;

AE(iii) Meta-ethics   the study of the nature and status of moral thought.

(McNaughton 1988, pp. 15-16)

The primary division distinguishes analytic ethics from **Moral Psychology**.

Moral psychology itself involves a secondary division:

MP(i) Developmental psychology   the study of the growth of the moral sense in human beings;

| ***MP(ii)*** *Moral thought* | the study of the mental processes involved in moral decision-making and addressing moral dilemmas.[1] |

Here are some examples of each part. AE(i) may concern itself with questions such is 'Is capital punishment immoral?', 'Is torture ever justified?', 'Does a pregnant person have an absolute right to abort the foetus?', and, in addition, particular problems like 'How much money should I give to charity', and 'Should I tell the authorities a colleague submitted a false tax return?'

AE(ii), in contrast, may seek to find general precepts in the face of the plethora of problems met in AE(i). A historically famous idea has been to act 'in pursuance of the greatest happiness of the greatest number', while an alternative outlook may be to 'follow the dictates of one's own conscience'.

AE(iii) tends to stand above AE(i) and AE(ii) and explores the meaning of ethical concepts such as 'good', 'bad', 'evil', 'duty', 'right', 'wrong' and 'should'. Further it seeks to clarify ethical statements such as 'It is wrong to do so-and-so', in general any statement with moral content, and inquire after the nature of such statements when compared to other non-moral statements, such as 'The bus is due at 12.30', '2 + 2 = 4' and 'Grass is green'.

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[1] I assume the inclusion in both strands of what has been called Virtue Ethics. Some ethicists may prefer to see this as a third strand.

MP(i) is quite different. It explores the developmental process in the human being which involves the individual being encountering the concepts considered in AE(iii). It concerns itself with how these concepts are understood and incorporated into the individual's sense of themselves and their life, and how they impact on the intellectual and emotional life of the individual.

MP(ii) seeks to address in general terms the psychological processes, possibly unconscious as well as conscious ones, involved in the kind of deliberation an individual may engage in when confronted by the problems and dilemmas that are the topic of AE(i).

In moral psychology, philosophy and psychology are intertwined.

This broad framework can serve to delineate the areas of concern in the entire field of ethics. Each part has an essential role to play in the attempt to create a comprehensive perspective on human morality. Although the boundaries between the different strands may not be particularly clear, and many issues will concern more than one strand, the classification does make clear distinct tasks in ethics. While making no extravagant claim to being a comprehensive analysis, the present work does aspire to address issues in all the five sections described above. Arising then, from the wish to consider both analytic ethics and moral psychology, the first question is, Where to begin?

Reflections on analytic ethics

Within philosophy, perhaps unsurprisingly, analytic ethics is usually taken to be the appropriate staring point. In its self-conception, philosophy sees itself as foundational, and, in an area such as ethics, the foundational task is understood to be the exploration of the meaning of the concepts underlying ethical discourse, and of the relations between those concepts. From such a perspective, it is assumed that practical and empirical matters, such as facts about human beings, in particular human psychology, will come after the foundational work.

McNaughton adopts this position in the work cited above. Having described the tripartite division, he states that his concern is with AE(iii), Meta-Ethics. The more recent, and highly influential, book by Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (1994), takes a similar stance. Smith distinguishes what he calls Normative Ethics, AE(i) and AE(ii), from Meta-Ethics, AE(iii), and 'unashamedly' devotes the book to meta-ethics. He suggests the primacy of exploring what 'should' means in a question such as 'Should I give to famine relief?' before addressing the question directly. He also asks, 'What is the standard against which a good moral argument is to be measured?' (p. 2)

I am going to state four critical comments about analytic ethics, all based on a critical reading of the first chapter of *The Moral Problem*. Interestingly, one of the remarks is stated by Smith himself, and he and I clearly share the opinion that the psychology assumed in analytic ethics is in need of a thoroughgoing review.

Comment One: Analytic ethics is in a state of theoretical and conceptual confusion.

Smith acknowledges that a dizzying array of answers to the central questions of meta-ethics is offered by ethicists. Mentioning virtually every major ethicist in the tradition of analytic philosophy of the last hundred and more years, he says that we are told:

- that engaging in moral practice presupposes that there exist moral facts, and that this is an error or mistake akin to the error of presupposition made by someone who engages in a religious practice when there is in fact no God….And we are told that moral commitment involves no such error or presupposition; that moral talk happens inside a perfectly kosher practice…

- that moral facts exist, and that these facts are ordinary facts, not different in kind from those that are the subject matter of science….And we are told that moral facts exist, and that these facts are *sui generis…*

- that moral facts exist and are part of the causal explanatory network….And we are told not just that moral facts play no role in the causal explanatory network, but that there are no moral facts at all…

- that there is an internal or necessary connection between moral judgement and the will….And we are told that there is no such connection, that the connection between moral judgement and the will is altogether external and contingent…

- that moral requirements are requirements of reason….And we are told that it is not necessarily irrational to act immorally, that moral evaluation is different in kind from the evaluation of people as rational or irrational…

- that morality is objective, that there is a single 'true' morality….And we are told that morality is not objective, that there is not a single true morality. (pp. 3-4)

Smith mentions that the authors of a comprehensive review of a century of meta-ethics have remarked that the 'scene is remarkably rich and diverse'. Smith himself thinks we must question the assumption that these theorists are all talking about the same thing.

Smith is surely correct about this. 'Rich and diverse' is one description, but 'a complete conceptual mess' is another. There would appear to be very little that constitutes any kind of common ground for philosophers working in this field. They do indeed seem to be talking at cross purposes.

Smith sets about the formidable task of trying to bring some order to this chaos, and he does this by describing what he calls 'The Moral Problem'. It is not relevant to present purposes to discuss Smith's moral problem in detail, but certain features of Smith's argument point to the wisdom of putting meta-ethics aside at the beginning and starting instead with moral psychology.

In formulating the Moral Problem, Smith identifies 'two distinctive features of morality…that are manifest in ordinary moral practice' and:

The philosopher's task is to make sense of a practice having these features. Surprisingly, however, these two features pull against each other, so threatening to make the very idea of morality altogether incoherent. (pp. 4-5)

The first of these features is what Smith calls the *objectivity of moral judgement*:

To begin…it is a distinctive feature of engaging in moral practice that the participants are concerned to get the answers to moral questions *right*. And this concern itself seems to force certain meta-ethical conclusions. Such concern presupposes, for example, that there are correct answers to moral questions to be had. And the natural interpretation of that presupposition is that there exists a domain of moral facts; facts about which we can form beliefs and about which we may be mistaken.

Moreover, the way in which we conduct ourselves in living the moral life seems to presuppose that these facts are in principle available to all; that no one in particular is better placed to discover them than anyone else….We are all in the same boat…

To put the point another way, we seem to think that the only relevant determinant of the rightness of an act is the circumstances in which the action takes place. If agents in the same circumstances act in the same

way then either they both act rightly or they both act wrongly….A careful mustering and assessment of the reasons for and against our particular moral opinions about such dilemmas and issues is therefore the best way to discover what the moral facts really are. (p. 5)

From 'the objectivity of moral judgement' Smith believes he has established this proposition:

(P1) Moral judgements of the form 'It is right that I φ' express a subject's belief about an objective matter of fact, a fact about what it is right for them to do.

Comment Two: Leading analytic ethicists are capable of reaching conclusions on the basis of highly questionable psychological assumptions.

Surely this analysis of 'ordinary moral practice' is highly questionable. When a person is confronted with a situation in which they feel they should do something, and they come to a conclusion that they should do a particular thing x, they may well be of a mind to think they have got the answer to a moral question right, and that this suggests agreement with (P1).

However, I suspect that a rather large proportion of people who are of this mind will prove to be students of academic philosophy. If we adopted a more realistic perspective about human psychology we would quickly realise that this has no claim to be the 'natural interpretation' of what is going on.

First, many people would be unable to make any intellectual connection with the idea of a domain of moral facts. That includes me for one. Many people would not see the moral dilemma faced as having much to do with true and false statements or beliefs at all. Rather the feeling of the agent may be better expressed by this proposition:

(P2) I should do x in the prevailing circumstances.

And this statement can be interpreted as having little to do with the truth or falsity of beliefs or statements. Rather it is better understood as expressing an opinion about how an existing, internal state of emotional disharmony may be alleviated – by performing action x.

In addition, many people in circumstances of the kind under consideration will have no opinions with regard to how other people should act, whatever 'being in the same boat' may mean. Many people, seemingly unbeknownst to Smith, see statements (1) and (2) as expressing a situation experienced within their mind, a confrontation between the self and the conscience. The latter is often experienced as the voice of truth about what should and shouldn't be done, but the person's acceptance of the dictates of conscience does not thereby commit them to a belief that the voice of conscience *actually is* the voice of truth.

The domain of moral facts would seem to be a very odd place. Smith suggests that 'these facts are in principle available to all; that no one in particular is better placed to discover them than

anyone else….We are all in the same boat….' Do I have access to the whole domain, including what one should do in some circumstances or other? Do people of an indigenous tribe in the Amazon rain forest have similar access? Do people with severe cognitive disability have equal access? Am I in the same boat as a medieval jailer?

The suggestion is bizarre. Surely, if Smith wants to talk about moral facts, the ones that I have access to must surely be the ones to do with what I should do. And that gives the game away. These 'facts' are not facts; they are the injunctions of my conscience presented to me as facts.

Smith's position gains some force by being posed as being about getting the answer to the moral question 'right'. Starting with this perspective, we are already on the path to things that are true or not true. But moral contexts are not nearly as transparent in their meaning as Smith suggests. Getting the moral question right is qualitatively different from getting the geography question right about whether Portugal or Ireland has the most westerly point in Europe. Many people may happily concur with the idea of wishing to get the answer right without thereby signing up to an ontology of objective facts. 'Getting it right' should be understood as responding in accordance with the dictates of the person's individual conscience; the person is not thereby committed to anything like objective moral truth.

But leaving that to one side, the second feature of ordinary moral practice that Smith identifies in the process of posing

the moral problem is this: in contrast to the objectivity of moral judgement, there is also the *practicality of moral judgement*.

Smith imagines a situation in which World Vision is out collecting for famine relief, and he is debating with some people the pros and cons of giving money to famine relief and:

> …after some discussion, you convince me that I should contribute. There is a knock on the door. What would you expect? I take it that you would expect me to answer the door and give the collector my donation. But suppose I say instead 'But wait! I know I *should* give to famine relief. But what I haven't been convinced of is that I *have any reason* to do so!' And let's suppose that I therefore refuse to donate. What would your reaction be? (p. 6)

Smith argues persuasively that the extreme puzzlement that would follow arises from the fact that:

> …moral judgements seem to be, or imply, opinions about the reasons we have for behaving in certain ways, and, other things being equal, having such opinions is a matter of finding ourselves with a corresponding motivation to act. (p. 7)

From 'the practicality of moral judgement' Smith establishes the following proposition:

(P3) If someone judges that it is right that she φs then, ceteris paribus, she is motivated to φ.

Comment Three: Analytic Ethics is unnecessarily and unhelpfully preoccupied with the concept of 'reasons for action'.

I think one of the major sources of confusion in analytic ethics is its preoccupation with the notion of 'reason for action'. A lot is heard in analytic ethics about reasons, but it seems to me that the concept only muddies the waters. Speaking ontologically, by which I mean using concepts about things that exist in reality, we can speak of beliefs, desires and other mental phenomena without recourse to the concept of a 'reason' in the effort to explain why some action was performed. It would seem that the concept 'reason' has a purported role in providing an explanation of what happened, and it clearly has a place in everyday discourse that seeks to account for why someone did something, or did one thing and not another. But there is no obvious role for it to play in a formal, scientific analysis, because the description of the agent's mental state prior to performing the action, particularly the statement of their beliefs about the circumstances in which they find themselves, and their desires at the time, is all that is needed to account for what happened. There is no additional thing, called 'the reason', over and above these mental phenomena and actions. Apart from the explanations we seek in ordinary life, it is a purely academic and unnecessary task to try to identify particular features of the initial state that may be identified as the reason for the action.[2]

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[1] Incidentally, similar remarks may be made concerning the search for *the* cause of some event or other. While people want to know the cause of the fire, or the cause of the landslip, there is no essential role for the concept of 'cause' in science; one situation at a moment in time evolves into a new situation at the next moment. Equally, in a given psychological situation, the total mental

To return to the main line of discussion, Smith's plan is to show that the two features of moral judgement he has identified - its objectivity and its practicality - 'pull against each other', so 'threatening to make the very idea of morality altogether incoherent'. We can see where he is heading – he contrasts doing something because of a belief in the truth of a moral fact with doing something in response to a desire to change something in the world. To reach his intended destination he has to turn to psychology. He writes:

> According to the standard picture of human psychology – a picture we owe to Hume (1888) – there are two main kinds of psychological state. On the one hand there are beliefs, states that purport to represent the way the world is….They are assessable in terms of truth and falsehood….And on the other hand there are desires, states that represent how the world is to be…. They do not even purport to represent the way the world is. They are therefore not assessable in terms of truth and falsehood. Hume concludes that belief and desires are distinct existences: that is we can always pull belief and desire apart, at least modally….

> According to the standard picture, then, there are two kinds of psychological state – beliefs and desires

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state of the agent, including their emotions and virtues as well as their beliefs and desires, prior to performing an action, primes the agent to act. If a reason is demanded, the total mental and physical state of the agent may be identified as the reason for the action being performed, but the addition of the concept 'reason' in fact brings nothing further to the task of explanation. See Price and Corry (2007).

– *utterly distinct and different from each other*. (pp. 7-8;
italics mine)

Smith names the theorising of an admittedly great philosopher about psychology dating from the eighteenth century 'the standard picture of human psychology', an expression repeated no less than six times in as many pages.

But for whom is this a 'standard picture'? What unfortunate body of theorists addressing crucial matters of human life is feeding on such paltry crumbs of basic psychological concepts? Whatever a benighted group of philosophers may take as a standard picture of psychology, surely there is no psychologist, in an academic or clinical situation, in the last fifty years and more, who would seriously identify the last quotation as expressing any such 'standard picture'. Furthermore, what possible hope is there for a psychologically-informed study of ethics if the psychology is restricted to considering the dispositions belief and desire, and has nothing to say about emotions and virtues?

Comment Four: Analytic Ethics uses a wholly inadequate 'standard picture' of human psychology.

It would seem glaringly obvious that the problem that Smith formulates, on the basis of the features of moral judgement 'pulling against each other', must have its roots, at least in part, in the doctrines arising from the 'standard picture': that the 'objectivity' of moral judgement commits the agent to the existence of objective moral facts; that belief and desire are

separate existences and that there is no 'necessary connection' between moral belief and desire. It brings some relief to learn that Smith's solution to the problem revolves around a revision of this standard picture.

The philosophical confusion is hidden in these seemingly innocuous expressions, 'necessary connection' and 'distinct existences' supposedly pertaining between beliefs and desires. These are, we are told, 'utterly distinct and different from each other' (p. 8). Well, belief and desire are different, of course, but utterly distinct?

Suppose a person is walking with a friend and an assailant approaches with the intention of harming the friend. The person has a desire to intervene in the world to prevent the assault occurring. They believe the best way to be successful in realising this desire is to strike the assailant. The person has in one hand a stick and in the other a stick of celery. The person believes that acting to fulfil the desire will be better served by striking the assailant with the stick rather than with the stick of celery. Is this problematic? Has an illicit 'necessary connection' between belief and desire been postulated, or have 'distinct existences' been mixed up? It is not clear where this account is lacking because it does without objective moral facts, and it does without the concept 'reason for action'.

Thinking in terms of developmental psychology, it does sound bizarre to think of beliefs and desires to be characterised as 'utterly distinct'. Most everyone knows that the evolution and development of beliefs and desires over time go hand in hand,

and beliefs and desires often conceive together new beliefs and desires. Smith and Hume no doubt know this, and would object that they are being misunderstood – they are making a logical claim, a claim about the modal difference between belief and desire. Perhaps here is the root of the difference between the analytic ethicist and the moral psychologist –the latter discounts the significance of the logical distinction in the analysis of moral decision-making made in the course of living a life. In such real-world contexts belief and desire have important features in common, shared also with other mental phenomena such as emotions and virtues – all these features of the mind are in flux, influencing one another, changing, moving between harmony and disharmony. In the heightened state typical of major moral dilemmas, the agent may be unable to articulate clearly what they believe, what they want, or what they feel. It's messier than Smith's words convey.

Notwithstanding these last remarks, we part company with Smith at this point on a note of agreement. He recognises that to solve the moral problem that he has described, he is obliged to examine critically his underlying psychological assumptions. Of that there can be little doubt, and here the approach will be to take the critical examination a step further on – or, rather, a step further back, and to look in more detail at human psychology without reference to the psychological thought of Hume.

Wollheim on moral psychology

If the conclusion drawn from this report on Smith's position is that, *pace* Smith, the discussion indicates the analysis should

begin with moral psychology, this view is strengthened by two discussions in this area given by Wollheim. Wollheim is a leading advocate for the primacy of moral psychology, but his own stance is also not without its difficulties.

The discussions occur in different contexts – the first in the course of his account of Bradley's theory of morality in his book on that philosopher (Wollheim 1969), and the second, given over a decade later, in the course of his lectures on what it is to lead the life of a person – the William James lectures at Harvard delivered in 1982 (Wollheim 1983).

Taking the discussions in chronological order, Wollheim describes the contrast of psychological and philosophical approaches to ethics (Wollheim 1969). 'Typical psychological inquiries', he writes

> are those which raise such questions as why particular people hold the moral beliefs that they do; what is the strength of their convictions; how these views develop; and how they are related to the instinctual conflicts of, say, early childhood and adolescence. By contrast, philosophy is concerned solely with the actual beliefs themselves, and even then not with their truth or falsity, but only with their significance and meaning; the task of moral philosophy is exclusively the analysis of moral concepts and judgements. (p.251)

This cannot be right. Philosophical approaches to ethics do not need to be so restrictive as suggested here – indeed, the

question of the ascription of a truth-value to moral statements is a core part of AE(iii), and this may well lead to a discussion of the ascription of truth-values to particular moral statements. This notwithstanding, the justification for the separation from psychology is this: in being separated from the empirical issues of psychology, we are able to ascribe to philosophical ethics these key distinctive marks: necessity and universality:

> Any study of meaning is bound to issue in necessary propositions: for concepts could not but have the significance and the analysis and the implications that they have. Again, the analysis of moral utterances in contrast to any study of the origin and development or character of moral opinions is invariably an inquiry possessed of universality: for whereas people may think different things right or wrong, or when they think the same things right and wrong may do so for very different reasons, yet in delivering themselves of such moral opinions as they hold, they mean the same thing by the formulae 'x is right' and 'x is wrong'. (p.252)

Wollheim draws attention to two crucial weaknesses in this position. First, there is the questionable assumption that there is 'a universal form of moral assertion into which different people can pour different contents…' The concept of universality has a central place in ethical studies, and a central feature of that universality should be a concern with all mankind. But then it is surely fanciful to think that the meanings of 'right' and 'wrong' are stable across time and different human cultures,