MINORITIES OF ONE
SKEPTICAL NATURALISM IN ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to provide an alternative way to look at morality. This means changing the traditional division of labour in metaethics between moral semantics and moral psychology. This gives grounds for disconnecting morality from moral judgments and strengthening the connection to human well-being. Finally, in at least one area of applied ethics, in business ethics, this means acknowledging the minorities of one, the unique individuals as the vital actors whose very individuality is the most valuable resource for promoting our wealth and well-being. It also means organising our society in a way that allows the widest possible individual liberty.

Concentrating on moral psychology means following the thought expressed by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that we study how actual human beings make moral judgments. This has been done in many areas outside philosophy. It appears that our moral judgments are mostly driven by their possible consequences to us, not any thoughts about judging in a coherent manner the deeds done. Our actual morality thus appears to mostly concern our own well-being. Also, the moral judgments appear to be consequences or *post hoc* rationalisations of the preceding choices, decisions, or judgments made subconsciously and under framing and priming effects. In other words, we are guided more by our instincts and situational factors than any theoretical deliberations. This accumulated knowledge conflicts with our philosophical tradition about normative human nature. Skeptical naturalism in ethics means acknowledging the obvious: a lot of people believe in objective moral facts and some construct elaborate arguments to defend this belief, but so far there is no empirical evidence to support either the belief or the arguments. A different approach is recommendable.

As Smith puts it, we have a propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another, which means that we are ultra-social animals. We constantly observe our conspecifics and interpret their actions as intentional behaviour. We also instinctively care for their well-being, and these prosocial actions of ours are more dependent on our prosocial emotions than our prosocial judgments. Our social coherence thus depends more on our inhibitions than our prohibitions. It depends mostly on our generally decent behaviour which is most probably produced by the biological, not the cultural evolution.

We can use the effects of the biological evolution on the level of cultural evolution by designing our commercial and social institutions accordingly. We can acknowledge that our wealth and well-being depend on our individuality, our different ways of seeing life and world and thus our different aspirations, desires, and evaluations that make possible our division of labour. This drives voluntary exchange and innovation which produce our wealth and well-being.
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CONTENTS

Abstract......................................................................................................................... 3
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 4
Contents......................................................................................................................... 5

1 Ethics and ethical life ................................................................................................. 8

2 Hidden deviants......................................................................................................... 23
  2.1 Beware of the armchair ...................................................................................... 23
     2.1.1 From individual to social moralities ........................................................... 28
     2.1.2 Moral intuitionism and moral skepticisms ................................................. 36
     2.1.3 Moral intuitions of the embodied mind ..................................................... 43
     2.1.4 Cognitivism and non-cognitivism ............................................................... 55
     2.1.5 Real people ................................................................................................. 59
  2.2 On the difficulty of being consistent ................................................................... 61
     2.2.1 They say they are evolutionists ................................................................. 62
     2.2.2 On Berlin, rational self-direction, and pluralism ....................................... 63
     2.2.3 On Spencer and evolutionary thought ....................................................... 69
     2.2.4 Complexity and inconsistency .................................................................... 73
     2.2.5 Constructal law – connecting physics and biology ..................................... 76
  2.3 On examined vs unexamined life ......................................................................... 81
  2.4 Beware of the laboratory .................................................................................. 90
  2.5 Contingent, continuous, and unintentional ....................................................... 99

3 Messy morality, greater good, and sacrifice ......................................................... 109
  3.1 Beware of moralism .......................................................................................... 109
     3.1.1 Snow business ............................................................................................ 111
     3.1.2 Morality of the marketplace ....................................................................... 117
3.1.3 Resilient beliefs .............................................................. 124

3.2 Beware of the community ................................................. 130
  3.2.1 Greater good................................................................. 130
  3.2.2 Community against markets ...................................... 135
  3.2.3 Leaders without ethics ................................................ 139
  3.2.4 Bad leader – or bad followers? ................................. 146

4 Conclusion ........................................................................... 153

References ............................................................................... 155
With love to my wife Jaana and our sons Jere, Aki and Iiro
1 ETHICS AND ETHICAL LIFE

Bernard Williams’ opening words in the Preface to his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* are the point of departure for this dissertation.

This book is principally about how things are in moral philosophy, not about how they might be, and since I do not think that they are as they should be, some of it consists of criticism of present philosophy. Some of it, further, raises the question of how far any philosophy could help us to recreate ethical life. As I shall try to show, it can at least help us to understand it. In the course of saying what the present state of affairs is, and complaining about it, I hope to introduce a picture of ethical thought and a set of ideas that apply to it, which could also help us to think about how it might be (Williams 2006, vii).

The present study is principally about how things should be in one area of moral philosophy, the division of labour between moral psychology and moral semantics. A change in this theoretical question about the division of labour between parts of moral philosophy aims to provide an alternative way to look at ethics, a way that is based on philosophical ideas that have been ignored by the current mainstream, and it will produce some practical consequences in one area of applied ethics, in business ethics. The practical question is how far any philosophy can help us to recreate ethical life in business, and the proposed answer of this study is that not far enough to be worth a try. Rather, based on the answer given to the theoretical question, philosophy can help us to understand ethical life, and this could be its task. The reason for giving this answer is also based on Williams’ book, especially on his treatment of Socrates’ question.

*It is not a trivial question, Socrates said: what we are talking about is how one should live. Or so Plato reports him, in one of the first books written about this subject. Plato thought that philosophy could answer the question. Like Socrates, he hoped that one could direct one’s life, if necessary redirect it, through an understanding that was distinctively philosophical – that is to say, general, and abstract, rationally reflective, and concerned with what can be known through different kinds of inquiry (ibid, 1).*

The question is not trivial; neither is Williams’ treatment of it. First, he makes explicit the generality of the question, and the implications of this generality.

“How should one live?” – the generality of one already stakes a claim. The Greek language does not even give us one: the formula is impersonal. The implication is that something relevant or useful can
be said to anyone, in general, and this implies that something general can be said, something that embraces or shapes the individual ambitions each person may bring to the question “how should I live?” [...] This is one way in which Socrates’ question goes beyond the everyday “what shall I do?” Another is that it is not immediate; it is not about what I should do now, or next. It is about a manner of life (ibid, 4).

To ignore the obvious human diversity and ask what useful can be said to every human individual cannot be based on anything else than an assumption of human unity. To further ask about manner of life means that one assumes life cycle unity. Actually, to reasonably ask such a question one must assume not only that all human individuals are basically the same, but also that they are basically the same throughout their life. “That seems to ask for the reasons we all share for living one way rather than another. It seems to ask for the conditions of the good life – the right life, perhaps, for human beings as such” (ibid, 20). To take this thought to its logical conclusion means that to live a good life every human being should live an identical life. Since this is obviously impossible, and it is absurd to claim that either Williams or Plato’s Socrates suggests it, ‘the reasons we all share’ and ‘human beings as such’ must mean something else. Since Plato’s time the offspring of the Western philosophy – the natural and social sciences – have accumulated knowledge about human beings, and all this knowledge testifies about endless diversity. According to Grant Ramsey it is impossible to fit “the empirically accessible (and thus not based on occult essences) subject of the human (psychological, anthropological, economic, biological, etc.) sciences” with the desired normative human nature, the “eternal ‘human nature’, like a fixed target in Plato’s heaven, that humans can strive for” (Ramsey 2013, 986–7, 992). In short, our best available knowledge is in conflict with our inherited tradition of normative human nature. This is not sustainable, since “in the long run philosophy has never successfully ignored new scientific views of the world nor escaped integrating scientific findings in some form or another into its theoretic schemes” (Walter 2009, 152). Given our knowledge of human diversity, an agent can come to understand “that the agent’s perspective is only one of many that are equally compatible with human nature” (Williams 2006, 52). This accumulated knowledge is the supreme test for any ethical theory: “There are many styles of critique [of existing ethical attitudes and beliefs], and the most potent of them rely, as they always have, not so much on philosophical arguments as on showing up those attitudes as resting on myths, falsehoods about what people are like” (ibid, 71, emphasis added). It may be especially hard for philosophers to get rid of the illusion of a common, normative human nature because this illusion is deeply embedded in the Platonic and Aristotelian roots of Western philosophy – and for the simple reason that it is embedded in folk theories, the soil feeding those roots (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 364–90). Taking seriously the actual human diversity makes ‘the reasons we all share’ quite scarce and ‘human beings as such’ quite
minimal – and trying to answer a question as general as Socrates’ one an exercise in futility. Hence the main title of the present study: *Minorities of One*. This study argues that every one of us is unique and thus a minority of one. This is not the end of it, though, since Socrates’ question is not only general.

Second, Williams states that the question “is also entirely noncommittal, and very fruitfully so, about the kinds of consideration to be applied to” it (ibid, 5). This means that in Socrates’ question “should is simply should and, in itself, is no different in this very general question from what it is in any casual question, ‘what should I do now?’” (ibid, 5, emphasis in the original). Alas, this appears to contradict the previous claim that “Socrates’ question goes beyond the everyday ‘what shall I do?’” (ibid, 4). What is the point of going beyond the everyday question to general and noncommittal question only to end up asking basically the same immediate everyday question? On historical hindsight we can rationalise that asking the general questions and finding them impossible to answer satisfactorily was conducive to asking specific questions which could be answered and accumulating the above-mentioned scientific knowledge – and thus, “at the end of all that, there is the question ‘what should I do, all things considered?’” (ibid, 6). This question is personal, and possibly immediate, and thus not general at all. Moreover, this is a very practical question.

Nevertheless, according to Williams “the aims of moral philosophy, and any hopes that it may have of being worth serious attention, are bound up with the fate of Socrates’ question, even if it is not true that philosophy, itself, can reasonably hope to answer it” (ibid, 1). This study argues that it is more relevant to ask the practical everyday question “what should I do, all things considered?” – and that the aims of moral philosophy, and any hopes that it may have of being worth serious attention, are bound up with its ability to help in answering it. To see why, let us start with Bertrand Russell’s harsh verdict on Plato and all consequent inquiries into ethics.

*Plato is always concerned to advocate views that will make people what he thinks virtuous; he is hardly ever intellectually honest, because he allows himself to judge doctrines by their social consequences. Even about this, he is not honest; he pretends to follow the argument and to be judging by purely theoretical standards, when in fact he is twisting the discussion so as to lead to a virtuous result. He introduced this vice into philosophy, where it has persisted ever since. It was probably largely hostility to the Sophists that gave this character to his dialogues. One of the defects of all philosophers since Plato is that their inquiries into ethics proceed on the assumption that they already know the conclusions to be reached (Russell 1996, 84).*

Such a categorical claim about all philosophers seems like an easy target, a claim to be rejected by a single counterexample, of which there are plenty. Alas, given present knowledge about our thought, quite probably our inquiries...
into *anything* tend to proceed on the assumption that we already know the conclusions to be reached. Unless we are especially cautious, we tend to acknowledge only data that confirms our preconceptions. Therefore, in a study of ethics one is well advised to follow the scientific approach as specified by Alan I. Leshner:

*On the one hand, the purpose of science is to tell us about the nature of the natural world, whether we like the answer or not. On the other hand, only scientists are obliged to accept scientific explanations, again whether they like them or not. The rest of the public is free to disregard or, worse, to distort scientific findings at will, and with rather limited immediate consequences. Scientific understanding is only binding on scientists (Leshner 2011, vi).*

Western philosophy has spawned the sciences, but its connection with its mature offspring has been disturbed. Consequently, philosophers have been accused of spending too much time in their armchairs, while the majority of men apparently spend their time in the real world, and the scientists in their laboratories. Kwame Anthony Appiah responds to this by wanting to challenge the commonplace “that philosophy, in having relinquished those inquiries that now belong to the physical and social sciences, has somehow become more purely itself” (Appiah 2008, 2). He gives an excellent advice to philosophers:

*Though I want the insights and the discoveries of other disciplines to be taken up in mine, I don’t think that, in taking them up, we philosophers are losing a distinctive voice. Philosophy should be open to what it can learn from experiments; it doesn’t need to set up its own laboratories (ibid, 3).*

Moreover, even though philosophers are well advised to leave their armchairs but not set up their own laboratories, they should not head straight to the laboratories of others, either. They should be cautious with the insights and the discoveries coming from those labs. The sciences may have avoided the philosophers’ risk of replacing the real world with the armchair, but now the real world is in danger of being replaced by the laboratory. Actually, the laboratory is presented as the real world by Steven Pinker when he asks whether revenge pays in the real world; he presents results of laboratory tests as if they told about real world.

*So does revenge pay in the real world? Does the credible threat of punishment induce fear in the heart of potential exploiters and deter them from exploiting? The answer from the lab is yes. When people actually act out Prisoner’s Dilemma games in experiments [...] When they play the Trust game [...] In Public Goods games [...] (Pinker 2012, 646–7).*
When claims about the real world are based on games played in the laboratory, there is obviously a demand for critical appraisal. That said, it is reasonable to require that “speculative philosophy should not – out of ignorance – be inconsistent with reliable scientific findings” (Walter 2009, x). Since “the study of morality, once the proprietary domain of philosophers, is increasingly an interdisciplinary endeavor spanning the cognitive, social, and biological sciences”, philosophers’ inquiries, insights, and possible discoveries are judged not just by philosophers but people well versed in natural sciences (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 33). If we want academic moral philosophy to be credible amidst methodologically naturalistic sciences, in the open-ended quest, where means justify ends, then, to use G.E. Moore’s words, “the present enquiry is a most necessary and important part of the science of Ethics” (Moore 2006, 35). Practitioners of the ‘science of ethics’ should accept that it does not really matter what your conclusion is, as far as you follow a proper procedure. Therefore, ‘the present enquiry’ concerning the division of labour between moral psychology and moral semantics aims to subordinate moral semantics to moral psychology that tracks the roots of moral beliefs and motivations and the mechanisms of moral judgment (Haidt & Bjorklund 2008, 181). Trying to understand the origins and mechanisms before semantics is a way to take seriously the ‘interdisciplinary endeavor spanning the cognitive, social, and biological sciences’. This means accepting the possibility that moral philosophy may turn out to be very different from its pre-scientific varieties. To participate in this interdisciplinary quest we should avoid propping up the prevalent values and instead follow Bernard Williams’ sound advice based on his notion of ‘relativism of distance’.

To be confident in trying to make sure that future generations shared our values, we would need, it seems to me, not only to be confident in those values – which, if we can achieve it, is a good thing to be – but also convinced that they were objective, which is a misguided thing to be. If we do not have this conviction, then we have reason to stand back from affecting the future, as we have reason to stand back from judging the past. We should not try to seal determinate values to future society (Williams 2006, 173).

Given the diversity of human beings, the relativism of distance is equally applicable in interpersonal relations. One is entitled to be confident in one’s own values, but not entitled to be convinced of their objectivity. Neither is one entitled to try to seal one’s values to any other human being. To demand academic moral philosophy to be ‘science of ethics’ is not to condemn the prolific variety of moral approaches on offer in popular and religious publications. As noted above by Leshner, they may in the name of the freedom of thought and expression either disregard or deny the scientific knowledge as far as they want. Moreover, there is no need for a crusade against metaphysical beliefs, “since metaphysical ideas are often the forerunners of scientific ones”
Evolutionary biology, which gives us our best understanding of the facts that Aristotle represented in the terms of metaphysical teleology, cannot do better in trying to show that an ethical life is one of well-being for each person. [...] The important point is that evolutionary biology is not at all directly concerned with the well-being of the individual, but with fitness, which is the likelihood of that individual’s leaving offspring. The most that sociobiology might do for ethics lies in a different direction, inasmuch as it might be able to suggest that certain institutions or patterns of behavior are not realistic options for human societies (Williams 2006, 44).

Being realistic about who we are and what kind of institutions and patterns of behaviour suit us is extremely important if we want to avoid recreating fateful utopian theories of the sort that have repeatedly led to destruction of human lives. Applying the evolutionary approach and acknowledging our roots helps us to understand ourselves. If we do not apply evolutionary approach, we risk behaving as if we had climbed the ladder to the attic, kicked the ladder off, closed the hatch, and then claimed that we were actually born in the attic. We do not have to define this evolutionary approach in detail, though. We just have to distinguish it from what it is not. Two philosophers in the tradition of Enlightenment, Adam Smith and Karl Popper, offer a useful guidance by their approach to definitions and distinctions. Smith prefers careful distinctions to precise definitions (Dascal 2006, 87–8). He defines his key concepts “Wonder, Surprise, and Admiration,” but notes that “whether this criticism upon the precise meaning of these words be just, is of little importance” (Smith 1982, 33). Popper exhorts us never to let ourselves “be goaded into taking seriously problems about words and their meanings,” and he is “not at all interested in words and their meanings, but only in problems” because “we cannot define, but we must often distinguish” (Popper 2002b, 15; 2002a, 29; emphasis in the originals). In the same vein, we can distinguish the evolutionary approach from certain unhelpful or erroneous thoughts without defining the approach in detail. After all, “there is room for words on subjects other than last words” (Nozick 2006, xii). This is not in any way to deny the possibility of there being last words given time.

The evolutionary approach proposed by this study is not a belief about any particular end result or goal, not a belief about perfect fit or adaptation, not a belief about ends justifying means. It is what Francois Jacob calls “tinkering”:

Natural selection has no analogy with any aspect of human behavior. However, if one wanted to play with a comparison, one would have to say that natural selection does not work as an engineer works. It works like a tinkerer – a tinkerer who does not know exactly what he is going to produce but uses whatever he finds around him whether it be pieces of string, fragments of wood, or old cardboards; in short it
works like a tinkerer who uses everything at his disposal to produce some kind of workable object (Jacob 1977, 1163).

Like David L. Hull puts it, “in evolution, organisms must make do with what they’ve got” (Hull 1986, 9). Moreover, like Marlene Zuk puts it, “everything about evolution is unintentional” (Zuk 2014, 233). As Jacob notes, comparing evolution to anything human, even a tinkerer, is difficult, because this particular ‘tinkerer’ does not know at all what he is going to produce, or that he is going to produce anything at all – or even that he is at all. Nevertheless, our thought and language depend on our sensorimotor experience of human behaviour, and even an unconscious and unintentional process has to be described by the available means (Lakoff & Johnson 2003). Evolutionary approach is a theory of a process, an open-ended procedure of requisite variation and natural selection, a process producing good enough fit and adaptation in a niche, a theory about means justifying ends. Whatever passes the screen, survives – and survival is the only measure of success. One thus sees human moral thought as just another one of those tinkerer’s objects that have survived so far. Hence the full title of the present study: Minorities of One: Skeptical Naturalism in Ethics. When one takes seriously the evolutionary process we inhabit, one can be called a ‘philosophical naturalist’.

Naturalism is not an uncontroversial term, and it is best defined, first, by just doing it and, second, by entertaining “a healthy portion of distrust in arm chair philosophy and a priori arguments” (Walter 2009, 150–1). However, “this does not mean that logical arguments are of little value. It just means that in the end nature is the instance against which we must test the truth or falsity of our theories and the validity of our arguments, not pure rationality, not even purely logical thinking” (ibid, 151, emphasis in the original). When one thus commits oneself to the evidentiary demands of science, one tends towards epistemological moral skepticism, and in practice is a skeptic or an agnostic about moral reality: one does not believe that moral facts or properties exist unless shown proof (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 9–11). Thus, skeptical naturalism in ethics means that one just acknowledges the obvious: a lot of people believe in objective moral facts and some construct elaborate arguments to defend this belief, but so far there is no scientific proof that the belief is justified and thus no proof that the arguments are valid. (We shall discuss this further in 2.1.2). Our epistemologically most reliable information comes from science and it tells us that we are part of an unconscious and unintentional evolutionary process. Yet, we feel that we quite consciously and intentionally ask, “what should I do, all things considered?” – and our concern is well defined by David E. Bell, Howard Raiffa, and Amos Tversky:

*We do this because much of our concern in this paper addresses the question: “How can real people – as opposed to imaginary, idealized, super-rational people without psyches – make better choices in a way that does not do violence to their deep cognitive concerns?”* (Bell et al 1998, 9).
To be interested in ‘real people’ does not mean that we do not appreciate theoretical and scientific models of human behaviour. It means that we test our theoretical and scientific models against nature. Our models have to be about ‘real people’ in the sense that George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state: “What we mean by ‘real’ is what we need to posit conceptually in order to be realistic, that is, in order to function successfully to survive, to achieve ends, and to arrive at workable understandings of the situations we are in” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 109, emphasis in the original). In behavioural ecology human nature, broadly speaking, encompasses the ways in which people think, feel, and act which combined with our knowledge of human history should make it clear that variation in human nature is immense (Cashdan 2013, 74). Thus, when a particular man is in a particular situation, any moral standard based on an imaginary agent in idealised conditions as “cool, calm and collected” or having “complete and vivid knowledge” is useless (Smith 2013, 65; Railton 1986, 174). Timo Airaksinen puts succinctly what it means to deal with real people: “Moral reasoning and moral commitments shape our lives in many ways that have little to do with ideal morality” (Airaksinen 1988, 3). If one is in trouble, it is not much of a help to imagine what a cool, calm, and collected, fully rational or virtuous being would do in one’s place, because such an imaginarily perfect being would not have ended up in that place – moreover, one’s imagination as part of one’s personality is not immune to the very imperfections that put one in this place (Setiya 2007, 9–11). The usefulness of ideals is best described by the joke about the man who after years of searching finally found the ideal woman – only to find out that she still kept searching for the ideal man. When making our own choices, and especially when judging other people’s choices, we are better off forgetting ideals, and facing the messy morality of endlessly diversified real people. In this study ‘real people’ is shorthand for the immense variety of unique human individuals.

One attempt to understand real people is behavioral ethics. Alas, it is not really an attempt to understand the immense variety of unique individuals, since it only takes a short step from imaginary ideals to almost equally imaginary groups. According to Herbert Gintis, “in behavioral ethics, we recognize that people consider moral statements to have truth values, but we consider these values as being valid only for the specific social group involved, rather than having universal scope” (Gintis 2009, 2, emphasis added). This is quite obviously communitarian morality, which according to Alasdair MacIntyre avoids the problems of the “Enlightenment Project” which “had to fail” in its attempt to justify morality without teleological and theological references (MacIntyre 2003, 51–61). The obvious question concerns relativism.

Moral relativism of the sort suggested by behavioral ethics is widely rejected by moral philosophers because moral relativism appears not to leave a role for a reasoned investigation of morality at all. [...] More important, if we relinquish the notion of a universal morality, then
must we not accept a situation in which there is no real right or wrong, but only differences in what people believe to be right or wrong? Does it not follow from this that since our moral beliefs have no status privileged by our superior expertise, education, or scholarly dedication, are we not obliged to tolerate moral beliefs and practices that we consider vile, abhorrent, and disgusting? (Gintis 2009, 16).

Gintis answers the first question about relativism by referring to David Wong’s solution in his book Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism. Wong’s arguments are worth looking at, even though the content turns out not to be on a par with the title:

*I am among the handful of philosophers who are willing to be associated with relativism. The version I defend constitutes an alternative to universalism and to relativism as these views are usually defined. My alternative agrees with one implication of relativism as it is usually defined: that there is no single true morality. However, it recognizes significant limits on what can count as a true morality. There is a plurality of true moralities, but that plurality does not include all moralities. This theory occupies the territory between universalism – the view that there is a single true morality – and the easy target typically defined as relativism: the view that any morality is as good as any other (Wong 2009, xii).

There hardly exists such a territory for Wong’s theory as ‘relativism’ to occupy. Making absolute claims about relativism is obviously self-defeating, but equally self-defeating is relativism with qualifications. It is like utilitarianism with qualifications; if we start classifying pleasures into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’, we override utility and become utilitarians in name only. In the same vein, if we start classifying moralities into ‘true’ and ‘untrue’, we override relativism and become relativists in name only. We are more appropriately called ‘thresholdists’ – we set a threshold, above which are the acceptable moralities and below which are the unacceptable ones. This is like any other situation where we set minimum requirements and leave the rest of the features open. It is not reasonable to call this relativism.

According to Wong “we cannot show that it is irrational to be amoral or immoral, but we can ask whether it fulfils human needs to be moral” (ibid, xvi). Wong sees morality as only a social phenomenon, and thus a group can label an individual ‘amoral’ or ‘immoral’. However, this study suggests that it is reasonable to assume that every unique human individual has a personal morality, which is not the same as the social morality of her or his social group. This social morality is defined by those ruling the group. They tolerate only limited amount of deviation, and label ‘amoral’ or ‘immoral’ any individual, whose personal morality deviates too much from the prevalent social morality. One description of the individual variation is that “we all find ourselves somewhere on the spectrum between egoism and altruism with some capacity
and opportunity to move toward one or the other” (Sterba 2005, 32). Thus a human being cannot strictly speaking be amoral or immoral, even though her or his unique individual morality may be unacceptable to the reference group. Obviously, the validity of this empirical claim cannot be decided by speculation, but following Appiah’s advice we can speculate and leave empirical research to those better qualified.

The answer to Gintis’ second question – ‘since our moral beliefs have no status privileged by our superior expertise, education, or scholarly dedication, are we not obliged to tolerate moral beliefs and practices that we consider vile, abhorrent, and disgusting’ – depends on who ‘we’ are. If ‘we’ are a religious minority in a secular society, or a secular minority in a theocracy, or otherwise in a subordinate position, we may just have to tolerate. If ‘we’ are a majority or minority in a position of power, we simply quit arguing, because “we find that argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed” (Ayer 1971, 115). If we consider someone else’s moral beliefs and practices ‘vile, abhorrent, and disgusting’, it is quite probable that “we say that it is impossible to argue with him because he has a distorted or undeveloped moral sense; which signifies merely that he employs a different set of values from our own” (ibid). When we run out of arguments, we resort to begging the question (Shafer-Landau 2013, 57). First we beg, then we demand, then we threaten with violence, and finally we resort to violence. Within a state, we curb the deviance by allowing the Leviathan to grow bigger, stronger, and more coercive (Pinker 2012, 145). Between states, we go to war. Instead of the Second World Argument, there was the Second World War, which, because of “the Western powers’ failure to indicate clearly where the limits must be to Soviet craving”, turned into Cold War (Hosking 2012, 510). Puzzlement about the reality which Russian rulers inhabit and the difficulties of arguing comprehensibly with anyone of them has for centuries been a recurring phenomenon in the politics of the Western powers. Nevertheless, the Western powers have been repeatedly obliged to tolerate moral beliefs and practices that they apparently considered ‘vile, abhorrent, and disgusting’ – like the Soviet Socialist habit of hauling political dissidents into prisons, mental asylums, and graveyards, and the equivalent practices of a lot of other authoritarian states too strong to be defeated or too important as allies or trade partners. We learn to tolerate bullies because we are unable to get rid of them.

In practice we respect groups powerful enough to defend themselves, and in our theories we find post hoc justifications for this. Gintis makes an interesting point about treating “ethics in a manner similar to linguistics, where grammaticality and correct usage are important and analytically tractable, yet highly specific to a particular society of speakers” (Gintis 2009, 2, emphasis added). A look at actual human communication, be it casual talk between friends or modern media content tells us that grammaticality and correct usage are not too important – or alternatively, the societies of speakers are very small. In fact, when human “languages constantly fractionate into dialects which very quickly give rise to new, mutually incomprehensible
languages,” the evolutionary point of language seems to be “to create and bond small, exclusive communities” (Dunbar 2014, 271–2). The morality and language of a group serve exclusivity, when a nonconformist can be labelled ‘amoral’, ‘immoral’, or ‘outsider’.

On another level, to treat ethics like linguistics, to focus on the theoretical equivalents of grammaticality and correct usage that have little to do with the actual phenomenon, makes it a stranger to the actual morality. Like language emerged, developed, and survived without conscious grammar or linguistics, so did morality emerge, develop, and survive without conscious morality or ethics. Both linguistics and ethics as descriptions and *post hoc* justifications may be useful for scientific purposes. Neither of them is either necessary or sufficient as a guide for the user. Ethics and linguistics also seem to contain an equivalent conflict between a formal, rationalist model and a more realist, empirical approach.

*Whatever means of expression there is in any language is part of the human language capacity. Where Chomskyan linguistic theory narrows the language capacity to what is true of all languages, cognitive linguistics considers the language capacity in the broadest terms as what is involved in any part of any language* (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 506).

Something may be true of all languages, but according to cognitive linguistics the really important things are true of specific languages. In the same vein, behavioural ethics tries to take seriously the various social moralities. Alas, it still overlooks the immense variety of unique individual moralities – and misses what is involved in ‘any part of any’ individual morality.

According to Gintis “the sort of virtue theory first proposed by Aristotle and revived in recent years […] interacts fruitfully with pluralistic relativism, and thus also complements the scientific findings of behavioral ethics” (Gintis 2009, 16–7). As noted above, this study argues for applying the ‘relativism of distance’. Given the scientific knowledge available to us, it is not advisable to regress to pre-scientific Aristotelian virtues, which are rooted in a teleological biology (Griswold 1999, 4). This is especially important when we turn to the area of applied ethics, where even academic discussion of business ethics is fraught with dubious folk theories of morality. One example suffice here, John Hendry’s choice of words when he describes the tension between two sets of principles he calls ‘traditional morality’ of obligation and ‘market morality’ of self-interest: “Where I use the word ‘moral’, without qualification, or where I refer to morality in the abstract as opposed to a particular, specified morality, I use the words in their everyday sense, as referring to the principles of ‘traditional morality’” (Hendry 2004, 2). If ‘moral’ is limited to mean ‘traditional morality’, any new insight is quite probably impossible.

Gintis’ appreciation of virtue theory and his emphasis on laboratory experiments connect to business ethics, when he claims that “the *Homo
economicus model is known to be invalid because a wide range of experiments based on behavioral game theory have shown that other things besides financial incentives motivate people (Gintis & Khurana 2008, 301). Granting motivational pluralism, opposition to ‘Homo economicus model’ should not obscure the very basis of our modern economy, which was built “within the context of a moral theory that goes wide and deep, a context that carries the message that an economic theory has to be developed within a moral philosophical framework” – the moral philosophical framework of Adam Smith (Broadie 2006, 165). Virtues appear in this framework, too (Hope 1989, Griswold 1999, Shaver 2006). Nevertheless, this framework is not ruled by ancient beliefs about virtue but rather by a Newtonian naturalist approach (Griswold 1999, 11; Evensky 2007, 5). Since our modern market economy – so far the most successful system in giving people what they want – is already embedded into a moral philosophical framework, it is neither necessary nor advisable to try to create another one based on any philosophy that defines exchange and trade ‘unnatural’ and is thus hostile to the very basis of our wealth and well-being (Politics I.9). Moreover, Aristotelian virtue ethics and its modern applications into business ethics appeal to folk psychological ideas about character traits and are thus in conflict with findings in social psychological research (Harman 2002, 5–7).

Gintis’ point of departure that “behavioral ethics develops models of human morality based upon the fact that morality is an emergent property of the evolutionary dynamic that gave rise to our species” certainly offers possibilities (Gintis 2009, 1). Without emphasising this too much we should acknowledge the danger in ignoring Smith’s Newtonian approach and looking at Aristotel, since this makes ‘gave rise to our species’ sound as if man was an end result of a project, the crown of the Aristotelian teleological biology, whereas evolutionary dynamic is an on-going, open-ended process, without end state. We probably have a subconscious tendency to apply a teleological perspective of a final state, of seeing the history as a road to us and our time. Like Marlene Zuk writes, “we cannot assume that evolution has stopped for humans”, but even though “we can acknowledge that evolution is continuous [...] still it seems hard to comprehend that this means each generation can differ infinitesimally from the one before” (Zuk 2013, 6, 8–9). Consequently, even discussions based on our evolution are infested with “talk about how we were ‘meant’ to be” (ibid, 13). Teleological, final-state thinking appears so enticing that even a historian like MacIntyre must occasionally remind himself, which direction in time influences actually go: “Pascal’s striking anticipations of Hume – and since we know that Hume was familiar with Pascal’s writings, it is perhaps plausible to believe that here there is a direct influence” (MacIntyre 2003, 54, emphasis added). There is only influence, not anticipation.

[...] if there is such a thing as growing human knowledge, then we cannot anticipate today what we shall know only tomorrow. [...] no
A scientific predictor—whether a human scientist or a calculating machine—can possibly predict, by scientific methods, its own future results (Popper 2002b, xii–xiii).

Again, our scientific knowledge and our morality resemble each other: we cannot know what kind of morality will serve human population best in the distant future (Stich 2006). Right now most of us reveal our actual preference of decent behaviour by behaving decently most of the time—and we have no reason to suspect that this behavioural feature is produced by anything else than the rest of our features. As Joshua Greene writes, “evolution might favor people who are nice to their neighbors, but it might also favor people with genocidal tendencies, and for the same underlying reason” (Greene 2014, 186). Should evolution change this fact of the psychology of our species, and consequently the majority of people not value decency and acting decently most of the time, neither logical argument on behalf of decency nor cultural education of ideal behaviour would probably be of any help. We better beware overestimating either the need for justifications—as if people were all the time on the verge of rushing into immorality unless curbed by our rational justifications—or the effect of justifications—as if our rational justifications would actually stop the ‘amoral man’ (Williams 2006, 22–6). Our well-being quite probably rests on our wants and inhibitions, not on our obligations and prohibitions (Joyce 2006, 50).

In the applied ethics, especially in business ethics, the above-mentioned concern for the real people making better choices means that we emphasise certain grounds for making conclusions: First, we acknowledge the real diversity of the real individuals. We know that human knowledge is not only what ‘ordinary mortals’ understand; it is also what probably only a handful of experts on a given field ever manage to understand (Popper 2002c, 101–3). Likewise, human morality is not only what ‘ordinary mortals’ accept as they conform to the sometimes very narrow confines of their social group. It is also what very few individuals hold true and practice—even what is considered extreme by the resident majority.

Extreme views certainly require due caution, but we must not forget that extreme views can be appropriate, and that moderate views can be erroneous. During the witchcraft hunts of the Reformation era in Europe, a moderate view would have been to wake up one morning and to decide not to burn too many witches that day. An extreme view would have been to wake up and decide not to burn any witches (Raine 2014, 370–1).

Second, we go beyond acknowledging the real diversity of real individuals, we appreciate it. We do this because we depend on the diversity.

Finally, we should point out that fairness and altruism have their limit. Long-run progress and success of a society need innovation and
change. These in turn require individualism and a willingness to defy social norms and conventional wisdom; selfishness often accompanies these characteristics. We need the right balance between self-regarding and other-regarding behaviors (Dixit & Nalebuff 2008, 57).

This leads us straight to the central problem of ethics in general and business ethics in particular: seeing morality as only a social product. One example gives us the picture: In a meta-analysis of over 30 years of research on ‘unethical choice’ in corporations “unethical behaviour is defined as any organizational member action that violates widely accepted (societal) moral norms” (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010, 2, emphasis in the original). The consequences of this definition are obvious once the authors explain their definition:

Therefore, employee behaviors such as theft, sabotage, lying to customers, and misrepresentation in financial reports are included in our definition. Other negative workplace behaviors, such as lateness, are not included because they do not necessarily violate widely accepted moral norms [...] unethical behavior is not a synonym for workplace deviance or counterproductive work behavior (ibid).

This definition has serious consequences; breaking the rules of the workplace is morally acceptable, because these “behaviors are defined as violating organizational norms [...] rather than widely accepted societal norms” (ibid). Employers better beware. It is possibly fatal to employ people in a community where cheating the employer is socially acceptable. We have a reason to worry when a study based on 30 years of research on ‘unethical choice’ in corporations declares that cheating the employer is not unethical if you happen to live in a community which approves this. At first there is just an economic problem for the employer who gets cheated. This turns into a social problem, when firms start following this reasoning and stop employing people from such communities. Consequently, the honest individuals in those communities suffer because of the dishonest societal moral norms of their community. If the honest are also smart, they relocate in communities with honest societal moral norms. Of course, if the employers are smart, they forget the societal moral norms and focus on finding the individuals with honest personal moral norms. This is actually taking the appreciation of minorities to its logical conclusion, to the ultimate perceivable human minority, the minority of one – the unique individual. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “individuals, like groups, vary in their priorities and in the ways they define what is good or virtuous to them. In this sense, they are subgroups of one” (Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 24). Since we have no way to know in advance which ‘subgroups of one’ turn out to be the drivers of innovation and change vital for the long-run progress and success of society, it is a wise policy to respect the individual and appreciate the diversity.
In this study we shall proceed as follows: We start with theoretical questions, applying Appiah's advice and walking the tightrope between armchair and laboratory, discarding the imaginary people traditionally employed by philosophers in armchairs and staying clear from the laboratories by expressing doubt on conclusions based on groups of students playing games. Then we proceed to more practical questions by taking a look at business and evaluating critically some conclusions made by social scientists on business and markets. Finally, we make conclusions about how to proceed in business and social life.
2 HIDDEN DEVIANTS

This part is an attempt to apply Appiah’s above-mentioned advice: we get off the traditional armchair of the philosopher, because in it real human individuals tend to be replaced by imaginary and idealized beings; yet, we stay clear of the laboratory of the scientist, because in it real human individuals tend to be replaced by aggregate level models. This helps us to acknowledge the endless variation of individual human moralities and to see that we are all deviants – no two of us are alike and every one of us deviates from all the others.

2.1 BEWARE OF THE ARMCHAIR

In this chapter (2.1) I shall follow G. E. M. Anscombe and argue for reversal of the traditional methodological priority in metaethics; we should prefer the explanatory priority by making sense of moral psychology before making claims about moral semantics. I shall argue that social moralities are built on individual moralities, and that we can understand them by using Adam Smith’s distinction between two alternative approaches, which I shall call ‘begging’ and ‘bargaining’. I shall also introduce the concept of ‘moral connectome’ to argue that our personal moralities are not only unique but also in constant flux. I shall present Walter Sinnott-Armstrong’s criticism of moral intuitionism. Finally, I shall argue for methodologically naturalist ethics that takes seriously the modern scientific knowledge of the connection of human anatomy, physiology, and cognition.

As noted above, Herbert Gintis, while discussing behavioural ethics, refers to G. E. M. Anscombe, and two of her three theses in her ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ offer us direction (Anscombe 2001).

*The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation, and duty – moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say – and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of “ought”, ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it (Anscombe 2001, 381).*

Quite probably our philosophy of psychology still is, decades after Anscombe’s original article, inadequate, and we should therefore do moral philosophy very cautiously, trying to avoid seriously violating our present
scientific understanding of real people. It is reasonable to interpret ‘not prof-
it able’ as referring to scientific understanding of man and ‘us’ to academic
philosophers. Obviously, there is no point to argue that it is not profitable in
the sense of monetary gain for both academic and non-academic philosophers
to do moral philosophy of whatever kind for which there exists a lively
demand. Quite possibly several philosophers have joined those profitably
riding the wave of populist moral righteousness ever since the accounting
scandals of early 2000s and especially during the present economic downturn.

Anscombe’s claim that academic moral philosophy should jettison the
concepts of moral obligation and moral duty – if this is psychologically
possible – needs no explanation. Her reservation is reasonable, since whether
we are actually able to argue without referring to ‘moral’ reasons, remains to
be seen. Nevertheless, there is an alternative to the mainstream philosophy
and its concepts. The mainstream moral philosophy could have taken a
different route a quarter of a millennium ago. Ronald H. Coase asked in the
bicentenary of Adam Smith’s An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The
Wealth of Nations in 1976: “What have we been doing in the last two hundred
years? Our analysis has certainly become more sophisticated, but we display
no greater insight into the working of the economic system and, in some ways,
our approach is inferior to that of Adam Smith” (Coase 1995, 94). Mutatis
mutandis, this appears to apply also to Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sen-
timents. Moral philosophy has undoubtedly become ever more sophisticated
but does it actually display greater insight into the working of morality than
Smith’s theory does? Moreover, from a scientific point of view, is its approach
possibly even inferior to his? It may be that academic moral philosophy, to be
‘sience of ethics’ has reason to discard – actually has had a reason to discard
for over 250 years – “the hunt for a universally normative doctrine, a theory of
what is right or good for humanity as such”, even though “it is commonly
backed up by meta-ethical ideas of moral judgment which presuppose such a
view of philosophical ethics” (Haakonssen 2002, vii). Smith mentions the
basis of his alternative approach in a note to The Theory of Moral Sentiments,
originally published in 1759:

\[
\text{Let it be considered too, that the present inquiry is not concerning a \textit{matter of right, if I may say so, but concerning a matter of fact. We are not at present examining upon what principles a perfect being would approve of the punishment of bad actions; but upon what principles so weak and imperfect a creature as man actually and in fact approves of it (Smith 2002, 90).}
\]

Obviously, Smith does not intend to justify morality but to understand it.
Quite as obviously, compared to the prevailing approach to moral philosophy
“Smith’s idea of moral philosophy was very different, and that is one good
reason for studying him; he is a challenge to our common ways of thinking”
(Haakonssen 2002, vii). It tells a lot about our present common ways of
thinking about moral philosophy that a philosopher long gone actually
provides a challenge in the 21st century, even though his approach is the very tenet of scientific inquiry.

For Smith the most basic task of moral philosophy is one of explanation; it is to provide an understanding of those practices which traditionally are called moral. Like his close friend and mentor, David Hume, Smith saw moral philosophy as central to a new science of human nature (ibid).

This study shares Smith’s stated interest in the inquiry ‘concerning a matter of fact’ and discarding the point of view of ‘a perfect being’ in favour of ‘so weak and imperfect a creature as man actually and in fact’. However, we are not ‘studying him’, since finding out the historical details of what Smith actually said or meant is beyond the scope of the present study. This is not to deny that any text produced by a human being is necessarily influenced by myriad factors in the particular individual and the context, some of which may be very interesting, but just to apply hermeneutical charity and focus on benefiting from any insight available in the text (Griswold 1999, 26–9). This approach is possibly untypical in ethics. After all, “ethics appears to be unlike other areas of inquiry,” since we cannot find contemporary defenders of Ptolemy’s, Copernicus’, or Newton’s theories of celestial motion, but we can find contemporary defenders of Aristotle’s, Kant’s and Mill’s theories of ethics, probably because “there is little or nothing that can really be established in ethics” (Sterba 2005, 1). As noted above, the ambitious goal of this study is to be of at least some help for real, contemporary people in making better choices – and discarding the elusive ‘morally’ better choices of imaginary fully rational or fully informed people. Ethics might benefit from the example of the physicists who do not focus on what their predecessors really said or meant, but instead on the present to build the future. Nevertheless, we can pick up one important tool for our job, an important distinction, from a well-known excerpt which connects Adam Smith’s moral philosophy and economics: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages” (Smith 1976, 26–7, emphasis added). To begin with, we are talking about voluntary exchange, and coercion is out of question here. We do not force or demand, we expect. We expect a dinner, and the butcher, the brewer, and the baker deliver it. They serve us by providing us what we want. On what grounds do we expect others to serve us? Smith distinguishes between two alternative approaches that we shall call ‘begging’ and ‘bargaining’. By begging we shall refer to focusing on our needs, our own necessities; by bargaining we shall refer to focusing on other people’s benefits, their advantages. We can beg others to grant us what we want and expect them to fulfil our needs simply because we have needs; alternatively, we can bargain with them by offering them something they want in exchange
of what we want and expect them to take care of their own advantage. For Smith the latter one is preferable to get the service one expects.

Some people see a discrepancy between Smith’s moral thought based on sympathy and his economic thought based on self-interest – and call this ‘Adam Smith Problem’. As noted above, Alexander Broadie solves this problem by pointing out how Smith developed his economic theory within his moral philosophical framework (Broadie 2006, 165). As also noted above, this dissertation tries not to get stuck into words and their meanings. For example, ‘sympathy’ has for reasons beyond the scope of this study been replaced by ‘empathy’ (Williams 2006, 91). The same applies to ‘sentiment’ being replaced by ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’. It is reasonable to see such matters of usage as normal change in language and as irrelevant to the content of the phenomenon referred to, unless an author specifically claims otherwise. Broadie explains, how sympathy and self-interest are facets of human beings bargaining with each other and accommodating to each other’s hopes, needs, and emotions.

This account of the contrivance of mutual sympathy is suggestive of Smith’s famous sequence of “truck, barter and exchange” in The Wealth of Nations. Two people meet and disagree about the worth of their goods; they haggle, with each edging the other closer to his own valuation; finally, they reach an agreement and the exchange is effected. Likewise spectator and agent approach each other, with the spectator disagreeing with the agent about the propriety of the agent’s feelings on some matter. Each then modifies his own judgment and consequent feeling in the direction of the other, until the judgments and the consequent feelings are in line with each other. Consensus is achieved, the product of mutual accommodation (Broadie 2006, 178).

Be it an emotional or economic matter, our strategic choices, our ways to get other people to grant us what we want are begging and bargaining. Bargaining based on reciprocal benefits wins in both counts, since begging is a very limited means, and coercion is ruled out by Smith in the beginning. His concern is a civilized society based on voluntary exchange, people willingly interacting with each other for mutual benefit. Following Smith’s thought in human relations, be the provider of service a friend or a professional, be the matter ethics or economics, bargaining is the way to go. It can also be called ‘negotiation of meaning’.

When people who are talking don’t share the same culture, knowledge, values, and assumptions, mutual understanding can be especially difficult. Such understanding is possible through the negotiation of meaning. To negotiate meaning with someone, you have to become aware of and respect both the differences in your backgrounds and when these differences are important. You need enough diversity of cultural and personal experience to be aware that divergent world views exist and what they might be like. You also need patience, a certain flexibility in world view, and a generous tolerance for
mistakes, as well as a talent for finding the right metaphor to communicate the relevant parts of unshared experiences or to highlight the shared experiences while deemphasizing the others. Metaphorical imagination is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience. Problems of mutual understanding are not exotic; they arise in all extended conversations, where understanding is important (Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 231).

The alternative to Smith’s bargaining approach is the present mainstream moral philosophical approach, which is summed up by Antti Kauppinen. This is how philosophers’ hunt for a universally normative doctrine is backed up by meta-ethical ideas of moral judgment:

As it is often put, metaethics asks second-order questions about ethics, not first-order ones. It does not ask whether, for example, bombing civilians is morally wrong but whether it can be objectively true that bombing civilians is morally wrong and what kind of facts, if any, would make it the case that it is so (moral metaphysics), whether the linguistic expressions of the moral judgment in question are in the business of stating facts or (perhaps in addition) conveying attitudes about bombing civilians (moral semantics), how is it that we come to know that bombing civilians is morally wrong (moral epistemology), and finally, what it is to think that bombing civilians is morally wrong and what is distinctive of the psychological processes that lead to such thoughts (moral psychology) (Kauppinen 2007, 25).

Although Kauppinen admits that “moral psychology has a certain limited explanatory priority in metaethics,” he states that “traditionally, and for good reasons, it is moral semantics that has enjoyed this sort of methodological priority” (ibid, 27–8). This traditional methodological priority is challenged by the fact that “the study of morality, once the proprietary domain of philosophers, is increasingly an interdisciplinary endeavor spanning the cognitive, social, and biological sciences” (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 33). Fortunately, Anscombe effectively reverses the traditional methodological priority by preferring the explanatory priority, by denying the relevance of claims about moral semantics that are made without considering moral psychology first. Philosophy can thus approach morality with the help of other sciences that study its evolution, mechanics, and effects. It is reasonable to share Anscombe’s belief that the concepts widely used in moral philosophy are a liability. Methodological naturalism in ethics has to be built ground-up, starting from moral psychology. Making sense of it provides the criteria for whatever concepts may be needed. This approach has the advantage of appreciating human morality for what it actually is worth. The down-side is trouble for the traditional beliefs about morality: the real human morality may not be what we expect – and we may not like what we find. Still, this should not be a problem. Like Richard Joyce puts it, “if uncomfortable truths are out
there, we should seek them and face them like intellectual adults, rather than eschewing open-minded inquiry or fabricating philosophical theories whose only virtue is the promise of providing the soothing news that all our heartfelt beliefs are true" (Joyce 2006, 230).

2.1.1 FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SOCIAL MORALITIES

While describing the roots of war and morality, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides state that “the fact that different moralities privilege different individuals, combined with the fact that there are an unlimited number of possible alternative moralities, creates moral games concerning which moralities should reign in the social community” (Tooby & Cosmides 2010, 218). The unlimited number of possible social moralities is quite naturally built on the unlimited number of possible individual moralities. Acting on any individual morality is, of course, limited by the fact, that “there are many others, and only one self, and others may join to form a powerful coalition (momentary or permanent) against any individual” (ibid, 215). If one wants one’s personal morality to become widely accepted, one has to accept that “as moral projects climb the ladder to broader audiences (being recast and potentially applied to increasingly broad sets of individuals), any given individual will be bombarded with increasing numbers of candidate moral rules” (ibid, 224). Thus, to gain acceptance, any moral project has to persuade countless individuals to accept it, and every one of those individuals has her or his very own reasons either to accept or reject the offered moral project. To be accepted as widely as possible, “ideally, the project should be crafted so that others can see that it is in their interests as well, and can foresee how it will apply” (ibid, 225). One way to describe this process of gaining wider acceptance is ‘Morality as Compromise’ – a compromise between self-interested reasons and altruistic reasons, or between personal flourishing and the good of others, or even “conflicting interests of the self or between conflicting selves or something similar” (Sterba 2005, 30). To survive all these possible and actual conflicts and to diffuse successfully, any moral innovation quite possibly has to fulfil the same basic requirements as any other innovation: it has to be perceived as providing a relative advantage, as compatible with existing values, as not too complex, as permitting trial, and as providing observable results (Rogers 2003, 219–66). This assumption is obviously a hypothesis to be tested empirically and as such beyond the scope of this study, but since human beings have to rely on their species-specific means to process any new information, whether moral or not, it is a reasonable assumption for our purposes. Francis Heylighen, Paul Cilliers, and Carlos Gershenson describe how our need to avoid unnecessary friction in social relations can create a community of mutually adapted agents.

[...] each agent through trial-and-error tries to achieve a situation that maximises its fitness within the environment. However, because the
agent cannot foresee all the consequences, actions will generally collide with the actions of other agents, thus reaping a less than optimal result. This pressures the agent to try out different action patterns, until one is found that reduces the friction with neighbouring agents’ activities, and increases their synergy. This creates a small, relatively stable “community” of mutually adapted agents within the larger collective. Neighbouring agents too will try to adapt to the regime of activity within the community so that the community grows. The larger it becomes, the stronger its influence or “selective pressure” on the remaining agents, so that eventually the whole collective will be assimilated into the new, organized regime (Heylighen et al. 2006, 13).

The authors describe as a natural phenomenon the human individual’s need of approval and support of conspecifics. This means that no matter how high one’s conception of one’s own worth and how low one’s conception of the worth of others, a human being needs the social exchange to survive and thrive. Not everyone acknowledges this; for Plato’s Callicles this was against nature (Gorgias 483b–d). Quite probably it is possible for one to survive and thrive without ever truly acknowledging one’s dependence on other people, on our ‘propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’.

It is reasonable to believe that for a moral project to be started in the first place, for it “to reward the launcher, it must be self-interested” – and to gain acceptance, it must “yet not appear self-interested” (Tooby & Cosmides 2010, 225). Nevertheless, before any moral project is to pass as a social moral project, some rudimentary version of it first has to pass as an individual moral project, “for it is not only in arguments with others that we are reduced so quickly to assertion and counter-assertion; it is also in the arguments that we have within ourselves” (MacIntyre 2003, 8). As noted above, the output of the social process may be very different from the original individual output, but the original input is nevertheless a vital ingredient for the social process lest there be nothing to refine. Many ignore the intrapersonal level, and typically claim that “morality is a set of psychological adaptations that allow otherwise selfish individuals to reap the benefits of cooperation” (Greene 2014, 23). In this definition morality is a characteristic of the group only. It ignores the most basic questions: Where are the roots of the moral ideals of a group if not in the moral ideals of its members? Moreover, where do the moral dissenters appear from, those individuals with moral ideals different from the group they belong to? How do we explain the existence of Sakharov in the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics or Breivik in the Norwegian social democracy? It is more credible to assume that morality is a set of psychological adaptations that allow individuals to survive by making them able to make decisions; these intrapersonal moralities then interact on the interpersonal level and produce the myriad social moralities. Only the interpersonal level of this process of negotiating to make a decision is visible and thus easier to understand. Let us look at time budget models of social animals.
The time budget models are conceptually very simple. They begin from the observation that an animal can survive in a given habitat only if it meets its energy and nutrient requirements and ensures the cohesion of its social group. Nutrient needs are met by allocating time to foraging (which includes both feeding and travel), and social cohesion is satisfied by allocating time to whatever activities enable this — in the case of primates, social grooming (Dunbar 2014, 84).

On the intrapersonal level the time available for ensuring continuous survival is equally constrained and requires managing preferences and setting priorities, a skill learned by the human individual from infancy (Karniol 2010). None of us can survive a day without making decisions about what to do next, how to allocate time and attention to different activities. Fortunately one’s ‘caring organization’ takes care of these most vital decisions — “that anything has value at all and is motivating at all ultimately depends on the very ancient neural organization serving well-being and its maintenance” (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 48, emphasis in the original). The widely accepted principle that the task of social morality is to maintain human well-being ultimately rests on the instinctive individual moralities that maintain individual well-being. Adam Smith acknowledges the ‘caring organization’ in his moral philosophy:

Mankind are endowed with a desire of those ends, and an aversion of the contrary; with a love of life, and a dread of dissolution; with a desire of the continuance and perpetuity of the species, and with an aversion to the thoughts of its entire extinction. But though we are in this manner endowed with a very strong desire of those ends, it has not been intrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason, to find out the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts (Smith 2002, 90).

Indecision kills, as do bad decisions. After all, every day human beings get killed by minor lapses of attention or more serious misjudgements, their own or others’, while ‘foraging’ — while working to earn their living or traveling between home and work. Our intrapersonal arguments that lead to decisions are vital for us to survive and thrive. We decide how we use our time and energy. Like any other primate we have a time budget challenge. We decide how much of our resources we allocate to ourselves, how much to our family, and how much to various wider spheres all the way up to global concerns. Whatever our decisions, we have just 24 hours at our daily disposal. Smith’s contemporary Immanuel Kant also acknowledges the vital role of the ‘caring organization’, but for him this is definitely not morality. Human welfare and happiness are for Kant not morally relevant, neither do they deserve the best human resource, reason, but are instead irrelevant enough to be left to a lesser resource, instinct (Kant 2000, 8–9). Kant’s ideas about morality have been
influential in moral philosophy. Alas, every reasonable interpretation of them is probably incompatible with our present scientific knowledge of human beings (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 5). The moral role due to our ‘caring organization’ in the light of our present knowledge of human beings is obviously very different from Kant’s and later philosophers’ constrained attempts at rationalising arduous duties, obligations, and rules. The morality of the ‘caring organization’ is a natural phenomenon, an individual instinctively taking care of its own well-being. As social animals human beings also instinctively adjust to the fact that their conspecifics take care of their well-being, and ultimately, as ‘ultra-social’ animals, they instinctively take care of each other’s well-being in their social group (Joyce 2006, 40). Being ‘ultra-social’ means that we share with ants, bees, and naked mole-rats the trait of living in highly cooperative groups of hundreds or thousands of individuals with a refined division of labour – even though the ‘individuality’ of ants, bees, and naked mole-rats may be questioned (Høgh-Olesen 2010a, 9). On top of that we are mind readers by nature and infer social intentions in objects, animals, and other human beings on the basis of minimal cues; we attribute intentional mental states to our conspecifics and act accordingly (ibid; Høgh-Olesen 2010b, 246). Being ‘ultra-social’ means that we have ‘the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’ – we bargain, endlessly.

Our anatomy and physiology set natural limits to what our morality can be. Within these limits, the actual variety of conceptions quite probably matches the variety of individuals. No two are alike. Allowed by the imprecise expressions, certain features of human morality are very widespread, possibly found in every human population, but they are not necessary parts of being human, since they are not shared by every human individual and only them (Hull 1986). The Golden Rule in various forms may be one, protection of life, property and contracts another (Miller 2003, 198; Flanagan et al. 2008a, 16). These appear to be applications of reciprocity, of living and letting live. Given the naturalist approach of this study, reciprocity in the personal encounters within group is the core of our social morality.

Given the evolutionary origins of life on Earth, it is reasonable to assume that individual moralities vary as much as any evolutionary product, be it DNA or fingerprints. It is reasonable to acknowledge that every one of us is in fact a minority of one – we are deviants, every one of us deviates from all the others. This endless variation of moral outlooks on individual level is an inevitable part of the evolutionary process of requisite variation and weeding out of the least fit. Since “genetic variation among individuals is the fodder for evolution because it provides a menu of options for natural selection” it is reasonable to assume that every one of us is a unique attempt at living a human life (Zuk 2014, 62). If we were able to measure or model individual moralities, like we measure or model individual fingerprints or DNA, we would most probably find equal variation, and we could identify a person by her or his personal, individual morality. Moreover, these personal preferences are the basis of our present wealth, since they make possible specialisation and division of labour,
Hidden deviants

the key factors driving human cultural evolution. Unfortunately we seem unable to appreciate the individual diversity in moral ideals. On practical level, we only acknowledge diversity when facing a group strong enough to defend its moral ideals by force; on theoretical level, only then do we deem it a lesser evil ‘to tolerate moral beliefs and practices that we consider vile, abhorrent, and disgusting’. We start listening to the arguments made on behalf of those beliefs and practices, because we cannot get rid of them – and, finally, by post hoc rationalisations we come to accept those beliefs and practices. The balance between these rival individual outlooks has produced an ‘evolutionarily stable strategy’ (ESS) that has made us the most influential species on Earth. Some of these individual outlooks – these attempts at living a human life – tend to be more successful than others, but it all depends on the environment – and in this case the environment contains our conspecifics.

In any game there is more than one winning strategy, and that holds true in the game of reproductive fitness. Reciprocal altruism can pay for most, and for a few the psychopathic cheating strategy wins out. [...] Given certain environmental circumstances, whole populations of cheats could evolve, and studies of primitive societies provide some interesting, albeit speculative, clues on the evolution of psychopathic behaviour (Raine 2014, 18).

Unsurprisingly, man as an ultra-social animal is well equipped to evaluate social exchange – our game. Reciprocity seems to be embedded deep in human nature, deeper than culture. We see social exchange as benefits, entitlements, obligations, and perspectives that connect us to each other (Cosmides & Tooby 2008, 72, 88–91). Deviating from reciprocity is detected, be it toward trying to get undue benefit, cheating, or toward fulfilling requirements without receiving due entitlements, altruism. Especially challenging is altruism, because “program designs that cause unconditional helping are not ESSs” (ibid, 102). As is usual with concepts, ESS, an ‘evolutionarily stable strategy’, is slightly ambiguous (Bell 2008, 353–6). The original thought was that there would be just one ESS in a population, but the possibility of two ESSs existing simultaneously is accepted. Given that there can be more than one ESS, it is unclear why there could not be an indefinite number of ESSs, since the usefulness of the original assumption has already been limited in particular by its insufficient grasp of the diversity of human incentives and the apparent irrationality of our actual choices (Dawkins 1999a, 69–86). Since ESS as a concept is ambiguous, it seems equally appropriate to propose either that in a society there exists one ESS which consists of various ‘sub-ESSs’ or that there exists an indefinite amount of ESSs. Either way, the central idea is a balance between various approaches (Dixit & Nalebuff 2008, 57; Raine 2014, 18; Joyce 2006, 41).

Despite the ambiguity of the concept of ESS, altruism – defined as an individual sacrificing its own benefit to the advantage of another individual – seems to tip things off balance, probably because it looks suspicious (Dawkins
Possibly we are so conditioned on detecting cheating that any deviation from strict reciprocity is suspect. Psychological egoism appears to be our default hypothesis, whether it deserves its standing or not. It is a descriptive “theory about motivation that claims that all of our ultimate desires are self-directed,” and has for centuries “exerted a powerful influence in the social sciences and has made large inroads in the thinking of ordinary people” (Sober 2001, 129, 148). Quite probably the influence goes in the opposite direction; the natural intuitions of ordinary people have made large inroads in the social scientific thought, as folk theories tend to do. Suspecting ulterior motives veiled by friendly behaviour does not appear to demand anything more than a basic theory of mind, a second order intentional system (x wants y to believe that x is hungry) with ability to suspect deception (x may not be actually hungry) (Dennett 1983, 345).

The default hypothesis of psychological egoism seems to motivate a lot of moral thought, be it religious or secular. According to Isaiah Berlin the ‘crime’ of Niccolo Machiavelli was “the uncovering of the possibility of more than one system of values, with no criterion common to the systems whereby a rational choice can be made between them,” setting Christian faith side by side with pagan virtues, “with the implicit invitation to men to choose either a good, virtuous, private life, or a good, successful, social existence, but not both” (Berlin 1979, 71). It is good to remember, who Machiavelli presented as an example of successful, social existence.

Pope Julius came afterwards and found the Church strong, possessing all the Romagna, the barons of Rome reduced to impotence, and, through the chastisements of Alexander, the factions wiped out; he also found the way open to accumulate money in a manner such as had never been practised before Alexander's time. Such things Julius not only followed, but improved upon, and he intended to gain Bologna, to ruin the Venetians, and to drive the French out of Italy. All of these enterprises prospered with him, and so much the more to his credit, inasmuch as he did everything to strengthen the Church and not any private person (Machiavelli 2007, 93).

We are well advised to keep this in mind when Catholic Church presents itself as a guardian of Christian faith and as a critic and challenger of business and capitalism (Bowie 2002b, 1–2). A religious organization is more likely to promote its own power and influence, its own variant of good, successful, social existence – not good, virtuous, private life. Berlin is probably right in claiming that there are no general rational criteria to choose sets of values or ends, be they humility and modesty or pursuit of power and plenty; there are only individual instrumentally rational criteria to choose the means to pursue the ends already chosen by other means. Evolution spawns a prolific variety of unique individuals equipped with instrumental rationality. Evolution has used elementary particles which do not have individuality and built human beings who are individual all the way up to their fingertips (Gell-Mann 2002, 8–9). It
is logical to suppose that we are individual in our patterns of thought and
evaluation as well. No two of us are alike in any respect. This cannot be
detected immediately, but neither can individual fingerprints, even though
they are visible with bare eyes unlike DNA and morality. Unsurprisingly, it
took a while to convince the British that fingerprinting actually works as a
means of identifying individuals, even though they had successfully used it in
Colonial India (Sengoopta 2004). The resilient belief in common patterns of
thought and evaluation may be equally misled as would be the belief in
common fingerprints. As noted above, a lot of moral philosophy is built on the
assumption that we are basically the same, that there is an underlying
similarity, that we have the same moral intuitions (Kamm 2008, 8n4). When
this is expressed as the belief that a god has put it into our hearts, it is obviously
a matter of unjustified belief; it is not any less an unjustified belief when
presented as a premise of philosophical argument. Taking gods out of the
equation is not a solution if they are replaced with any factor beyond human
anatomy, physiology, and experience which produce the diversity of our
thoughts, judgments, and behaviour. As Frances Kamm notes, the roots of the
present non-consequentialist normative ethics are in Immanuel Kant’s ethics
(ibid, 12). Kant’s analytic approach derives moral laws “from the universal
concept of a rational being as such” (Kant 2000, 4:392, 4:412). Since this
‘rational being as such’ is just a concept, or possibly a theoretical model, it is
hard to define its relation to the only rational beings we are actually acquainted
with, human beings with rationality depending on physical neural circuitry.
Since modern scientific understanding is not based on belief in rationality
which is independent from human neural circuitry, it is not reasonable to try
to build academic moral philosophy on such an assumption either.

It is not reasonable to assume that all human beings have the same moral
intuitions; on the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that each one of us has
a slightly different rational and moral outlook – ‘moral fingerprints’. Alas,
these individual outlooks cannot be discerned by the questionnaires and
thought experiments that lump people into groups according to the answers
given to questions offering only a limited number of alternatives. More to the
point, there is not even an intention to discern individual outlooks because
groups with ‘similar’ outlooks are perceived as more important than the
individuals. Joshua Greene admits that “identifying the values that we truly
share is harder than it looks, because deep moral differences can be cloaked in
shared moral rhetoric” (Greene 2014, 189). This is plausible, but it is even
more plausible that the ‘deep moral differences’ not only can but necessarily
are cloaked in shared moral rhetoric because of the non-existence of any values
that we truly share. Our communication cloaks our differences not by accident
but by its very structure. When I say ‘red car’, my mental image is one thing,
my chosen words are another, your auditory perception is yet another, and
finally, your mental image is still another. We meet Osmo A. Wiio’s first law of
communication: communication fails, except by accident (ICA 2013). Failure
in communication means my incapability to transport my mental image into
your neural network; this is no failure in cooperation, though. On the contrary, the very vagueness and ambiguity of our communication saves us from a lot of trouble by cloaking our actual differences. Should we have immediate access to each other’s conceptions, we might realise that we had vital differences — and in moral philosophy huge problems with our beliefs in shared values. Our illusion of common values is saved by the imprecision of our communication.

Our knowledge of human communication and of the requisite variation spawned by evolution appear to put the burden of proof on those who deny this necessary cloaking. Why? Because we are individual specimens of a species produced by an evolutionary process — and endless variation appears to be what evolution requires. After all, even though cloning is a simple and cost-effective way of reproduction and found in many places in nature, the large, complex animals reproduce sexually. The reason for this costly way of reproduction to have survived is probably its ability to compensate the high cost by producing more variation and thus better possibility of producing a viable individual than cloning does in the ever-changing environment. “Biologically, first and foremost, the primary function of sex is to increase genetic heterogeneity” (Hull 1986, 10). Basically, in sexual reproduction every individual is built from scratch (Dawkins 1999a, 261; 1999b, 259). It is not hard to understand the evolutionary benefits of this approach especially for species consisting of large, complex, individuals with long intervals between generations — especially species with exceptionally long maturation periods like genus Homo ever since Homo heidelbergensis (Dunbar 2014, 244–9). It is reasonable to think that this elementary part of evolutionary process works also on the level of human thought and verbal communication and spawns variation. Apparently the initial variation was not enough for human survival in evolution, since the individual connectome, “the totality of connections between the neurons in a nervous system” of every individual, is being reweighted, reconnected, rewired, and regenerated continuously — diversified by the four Rs (Seung 2013, xiii, xv).

*Genes alone cannot explain how your brain got to be the way it is. As you lay nestled in your mother’s womb, you already possessed your genome but not yet the memory of your first kiss. Your memories were acquired during your lifetime, not before. [...] Unlike your genome, which is fixed from the moment of conception, your connectome changes throughout life. Neuroscientists have already identified the basic kinds of change. Neurons adjust, or “reweight”, their connections by strengthening or weakening them. Neurons reconnect by creating and eliminating synapses, and they rewire by growing and retracting branches. Finally, entirely new neurons are created and existing ones eliminated, through regeneration (ibid, xiv–xv).*

The four Rs of the connectome make sure that even identical twins are not identical anymore once their experiences differ from each other — they make sure that each human individual is truly unique (ibid, 202–3). Our thoughts
Hidden deviants

diversify, since “individual experiences also play an important role in shaping each person’s brain topography, for example, the individual associations and connotations that are a vital component of most thoughts” (Haynes 2011, 7). Consequently, to convey the right image of the endless variation of our rational and moral outlooks we should discard the preliminary expression ‘moral fingerprints’, which refers to something immutable throughout individual’s life, and replace it with a more appropriate image ‘moral connectome’. This totality of connections between the neurons in an individual’s nervous system is reweighted, reconnected, rewired, and regenerated continuously and changes the individual’s behaviour and morality throughout life. What moral philosophy can usefully do is try to follow Adam Smith’s route and analyse how men actually and in fact make moral evaluations and judgments. This is a way to build methodologically naturalistic ethics.

2.1.2 MORAL INTUITIONISM AND MORAL SKEPTICISMS

As noted above, a lot of moral philosophy is built on the assumption that we have the same moral intuitions. Given all the above-mentioned evidence about human diversity, one is well advised to give up that assumption. Nevertheless, one may still make the weaker claim that at least some intuitions are morally ‘true’ or objectively accurate. Making this claim is understandable, given the role of intuitions in moral argumentation. After all, the choice in moral argumentation is not whether one refers to intuitions or not. The choice is whether one refers to intuitions as a point of departure or as a final test for the theory, because ultimately one is hard-pressed to argue in defence of a moral decision or theory that conflicts with one’s intuitions and causes unbearable unease. A moral choice ultimately has to feel right to be defensible. Given this vital role of intuitions, they are an obvious target when one defends moral skepticism, as Walter Sinnott-Armstrong does. Let us first look at intuitionism and then at versions of skepticism. Nathan Ballantyne and Joshua C. Thurow defend moral intuitionism against what they call the Empirical Defeat Argument (EDA), which they present as Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013). EDA is based on “several types of alleged facts about moral beliefs and the epistemic consequences of those facts for moral beliefs” (ibid, 412, emphasis in the original). These facts are presented as Partiality, Bias, Emotions, and Disagreement. These are admittedly compiled from Sinnott-Armstrong’s texts, but, alas, the list is incomplete and Sinnott-Armstrong writes about principles. For clarity, we shall follow his terminology and concentrate on the most thorough presentations of his argument (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 2006b, 2008). These are not essentially improved upon in the latest text cited by Ballantyne and Thurow (Sinnott-Armstrong 2012).

In two of the references of Ballantyne and Thurow additional two principles are presented: Origins and Togetherness (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 356–8; 2006b, 207–10). In one of them an additional seventh principle, which we shall call Costly Error, is presented (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 346n10).
Moreover, what Ballantyne and Thurow present as *Bias* is actually Sinnott-Armstrong’s *Illusions*. This slight misrepresentation of Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument is unfortunate. Without going into details, Sinnott-Armstrong argues that moral intuitions need confirmation to qualify as justified beliefs. He presents seven principles for judging whether confirmation is needed:

*Principle 1*: confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when the believer is partial. [*Partiality*] [...] *Principle 2*: confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when people disagree with no independent reason to prefer one belief or believer over the other. [*Disagreement*] [...] *Principle 3*: confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when the believer is emotional in a way that clouds judgment. [*Emotion*] [...] *Principle 4*: confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when the circumstances are conducive to illusion. [*Illusions*] [...] *Principle 5*: confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when the belief arises from an unreliable or disreputable source. [*Origins*] [...] Even if not all of these principles apply, the more that do apply, the clearer it will be that there is more need for more confirmation. We might think of this as a sixth principle [*Togetherness*]. [...] One additional principle might claim that confirmation is needed when errors are costly. This principle applies to moral beliefs insofar as moral errors are costly [*Costly Error*] (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 343–6, 346n10).

Especially important for our present discussion is the fifth principle *Origins* which is omitted by Ballantyne and Thurow. In fact, omitting this is the only way to make room for their argument. We shall first look at their argument and then look at the principle of *Origins*. Ballantyne and Thurow claim that Sinnott-Armstrong’s EDA has a fatal defect.

*We think Step Two of Sinnott-Armstrong’s EDA has a fatal, but so far unrecognized, defect. Here is the trouble: it is not necessary, in defeating a defeater for a belief B, to have a reason to think that B was formed in a sufficiently reliable way. Thus, it also isn’t necessary, in defeating a defeater for B, to be committed to a justificatory inferential structure with respect to B (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013, 413).*

If Ballantyne and Thurow claim that once the defeater has itself been defeated, the original belief does not need any extra support, but stands alone as if the defeater had never been presented at all, there is nothing to argue about here. This is exactly what Sinnott-Armstrong wants his theory to allow: “Confirmation need not always be evidence, since I want confirmation to include defeater defeaters, that is, reasons to discount what would otherwise keep a belief from being justified” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 343n9). Since this is agreed, there seems to be only one way to end up in argument: Ballantyne and Thurow actually claim that the original belief B should not be put under scrutiny at all once the defeater has been defeated. To understand,
whether they actually claim this, lets us look at what Ballantyne and Thurow deem to be ‘the trouble with the empirical defeat argument’. They present this by an example they have borrowed from Pollock, an example we shall call the Widget Factory Example (WFE):

Mc Coy visits the local widget factory and sees what seems to be a red widget being carried along a conveyor belt. He believes that the widget is red (call this belief “B”). Soon enough, a stranger approaches McCoy and says that the widgets are actually white but are illuminated by red lights. (Call this event “D”.) Upon seeing this conversation, another stranger—who seems to McCoy to be a factory employee—tells McCoy not to listen to the other stranger: he is a trickster, McCoy is told, who likes to mess around with visitors. (Call this second event “F”.)

/.../Whatever initially made B justifi ed continues to justify B once the defeater has been defeated. McCoy’s belief that the widget is red is justified by his perceptual experience or seeming (perhaps together with the fact that his perception is reliable)—even after D has been defeated by F (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013, 414).

It is not impossible that Ballantyne and Thurow present Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument without the principle of Origins exactly because this principle defeats their own argument. If Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument consisted only of the parts presented by Ballantyne and Thurow – of Partiality, Bias [Illusions], Emotion(s), and Disagreement – Ballantyne and Thurow’s argument would work. Origins is the one principle that defeats their argument by telling why defeator defeaters cannot save just any beliefs. It is true, that “whatever initially made B justified continues to justify B once the defeater has been defeated”, but the principle of Origins requires that this justification is evaluated. Defeator defeaters work only as “reasons to discount what would otherwise keep a belief from being justified”. Defeator defeaters only removes an objection, it does not add to the credibility of the original belief. If the original belief is not justified by its own merits, a defeator defeater does not help, neither is it required to. As noted above, there is no disagreement to be found here. Neither are there grounds for Ballantyne and Thurow to claim, that “according to Sinnott-Armstrong, in order for F to defeat D and restore justification to B, F must provide reason to think that B was formed reliably and, as a result, McCoy must be committed to a justificatory inferential structure in support of B” (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013, 414). Sinnott-Armstrong is not guilty of such confusion. He does not demand F to do anything more than to credibly defeat D; he just demands that B must survive the basic scrutiny that any claim has to survive. After all, even though the one piece of false information concerning illumination has been corrected, there may be other reasons that cause the widgets to appear red even though they are not. The problem here is that WFE represents the popular method of presenting moral intuitions as comparable to visual perception, as if moral
values were perceived like anything else that exists independently from human mind. This misleading practice is touched upon by Sinnott-Armstrong:

One common objection is that, even if some confirmation is needed, that does not show that any inference is needed. If we can confirm color beliefs just by looking again in different light, perhaps we can confirm moral beliefs simply by reflecting on the moral issue again in a different mood without involving any substantive moral principle from which we infer our moral belief (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 358).

Here Sinnott-Armstrong’s Origins comes to rescue, since it “considers the social origins of shared moral beliefs” and specifically “claims that problematic social origins create a need for confirmation” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 356). The problem with applying Origins to Ballantyne and Thurow’s argument is that their argument rests on WFE, which does not contain any moral intuitions at all, just colour perceptions. WFE follows the process: [subject’s sense perception + belief in the accuracy of sense perception (B)] + [defeating claim + doubt (D)] + [defeater defeating claim + belief regained (F)]. This way, the original belief B appears to stand just fine by itself after the defeator defeator has done its job, because McCoy’s belief B considers only colour. This is the crux of the matter: an argument without any connection to moral intuition seems irrelevant when one is discussing moral intuition – and WFE does not offer any way to evaluate the effect of defeator defeator on a moral intuition. Yet we are supposed to be discussing Sinnott-Armstrong’s EDA which is about ‘moral intuitions’, which are ‘strong immediate moral beliefs’ (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008, 47).

An example where moral judgment is nowhere to be found, but is discussed as if it were just another type of sensory perception, makes intuition appear convincing – but is actually misleading (cf. Haidt & Bjorklund 2008, 251–2). How do we make the story consider moral intuition? We have to add a strong immediate moral belief. Let us have McCoy believe that it is immoral to produce widgets in red. Does this sound odd? Let us not forget that Origins ‘considers the social origins of shared moral beliefs’ and various groups of people around the world have shared moral beliefs about colours, for example, that the colour of one’s skin has a connection to one’s worth as a human being, or the treatment one is entitled to in a society. Let us call the following the Enhanced Widget Factory Example (EWFE):

McCoy visits the local widget factory and sees what seems to be a red widget being carried along a conveyor belt. He believes that the widget is red and that a factory producing such widgets is committing an immoral act (call this belief “B*”). Soon enough, a stranger approaches McCoy and says that the widgets are actually white but are illuminated by red lights, and McCoy believes that a factory just illuminating white widgets with red lights is not committing an immoral act. (Call this event “D*”.) Upon seeing this conversation,
another stranger—who seems to McCoy to be a factory employee—tells McCoy not to listen to the other stranger: he is a trickster, McCoy is told, who likes to mess around with visitors, and the factory is thus actually producing red widgets, and McCoy believes a factory producing such widgets is committing an immoral act. (Call this second event “F*”)

/.../Whatever initially made B* justified continues to justify B* once the defeater has been defeated. McCoy’s belief that the widget is red and that it is immoral to produce such widgets is justified by his perceptual experience or seeming and his moral intuition (perhaps together with the fact that his perception and his moral intuition is reliable)—even after D* has been defeated by F*.

Now, this enhanced example with moral intuition follows the enhanced process: [subject’s sense perception + belief in the accuracy of sense perception + a strong immediate moral belief (B*)] + [defeating claim + doubt of sense perception + a strong immediate moral belief (D*)] + [defeater defeating claim + belief in sense perception regained + a strong immediate moral belief (F*)]. This is a more accurate description of the relationship between our sensory perceptions and our moral intuitions (cf. Haidt & Kesebir 2010). Our moral beliefs lead a life of their own, often without any justifiable connection to our sensory perception. Now that we actually have a moral intuition in the game, we can evaluate, whether McCoy’s original moral intuition B* about the immorality of producing red widgets is reliable.

When the defeator defeater has done its job, McCoy’s original belief about the colour of the widget is justified, just like Ballantyne and Thurow claim about their original WFE:

*B is supported by experiences or seemings alone, without any inference to B from reasons indicating that B was reliably formed. These experiences, all by themselves, without an inference, produce justification for B, whereas F, the defeater-defeater, preserves the justification that the experiences produce for B (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013, 414).

This is exactly what Sinnott-Armstrong claims about such beliefs supported by experiences or seemings alone: “If my belief that a pen is in front of me is not subject to disagreement or illusions and has no disreputable sources, and if I am neither partial nor emotional about pens, then I might be justified in holding that non-moral belief without being able to support it with any inference” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a, 363). In other words, there is no need to apply the principles of Partiality, Disagreement, Emotion, Illusions, or Origins, to visual perceptions of pens in front of us or of widgets on conveyor belts, as long as these are simply visual perceptions. How-ever, the moral belief B* in EWFE is not such a belief. It is not supported like B by experiences or seemings alone, and is therefore not exonerated from the
charge of being of disreputable origin simply by the action of the defeator defeator. Neither is it released from scrutiny of whether it is partial, whether people disagree about it, whether the believer is emotional in a way that clouds judgment, whether the believer may have illusions, or whether enough of the previous problems appear together. Moreover, given this dissertation’s secondary focus on business ethics, a mistake in this case might lead to costly error, for example politicians banning the production of red widgets on moral reasons, authorities closing the factory and thus robbing the employees of income, the customers of necessary widgets, and the surrounding society of the positive effects of a lively economy. To be accepted, B* surely needs further support. Therefore, Ballantyne and Thurow’s argument fails as a refutation of Sinnott-Armstrong’s actual argument, the argument consisting of all the principles he presents.

Admittedly, even the enhanced Widget factory is quite a tame case of moral intuition, which is why Ballantyne and Thurow’s choice for a defeater of Sinnott-Armstrong’s principle of Disagreement is interesting (Ballantyne & Thurow 2013, 416–7):

> What sort of belief do we have in mind? Shafer-Landau proposes this (“R-rated”) belief: that “the deliberate humiliation, rape, and torture of a child, for no purpose other than the pleasure of the one inflicting such treatment, is immoral” [...] We say that’s a plausible example of a non-inferentially justified moral belief that would survive a check for disagreement (ibid, n11, 419–20).

We can bypass the motive, because it is impossible for most of us to see any motive that could justify such treatment and because it is improbable that we actually have access to our own motives, let alone those of others. Nevertheless, even this for most of us extremely repulsive example does not defeat Disagreement. It only proves that intuitions vary, since Shafer-Landau’s imaginary example appears to be not that imaginary: according to media reports, the Catholic Church has been extremely reluctant to allow prosecution of its priests in cases of such child abuse which means that both those priests and the Catholic Church employing them believe that what makes most of us nauseous and furious is not wrong at all – they disagree with us (The Economist 2014). Unfortunately, Catholic Church is not alone with its history of torture; human history is peppered with torture of animals for fun and torture of men and women for motives among which fun quite probably is (cf. Pinker 2012).

Shafer-Landau continues with an argument that tells a lot about us and our ethical thought: “If (nearly) everyone agrees on a given belief [...] its credibility is not relevantly in question” (Shafer-Landau 2008, 93, emphasis in the original). It tells that common decency is just that – the resident conception of decency. It also tells that this is just a question of numbers. If through the history different sorts of moral intuitions have existed and led people to torture and mutilate both each other and other animals for whatever reason
and out of whatever motives, these other moral intuitions are resilient. They do survive from generation to generation and as such do have the potential of becoming the standard of common decency, of becoming the dominant moral intuitions – on which (nearly) everyone agrees, and which are not relevantly in question. Maybe burning witches was once not relevantly in question.

To sum up, Ballantyne and Thurow fail in their attempt to defeat Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument against intuitionism. Nevertheless, Sinnott-Armstrong’s use of laboratory experiments as evidence when arguing for moral skepticism and against moral intuitionism is not unproblematic. William Tolhurst and Russ Shafer-Landau point out the problems of testing groups of mostly college or university students and then making claims about the rest of mankind (Tolhurst 2008, 80; Shafer-Landau 2008, 86). We cannot prove that it is impossible for moral values to exist independent from our thought; neither can we prove that it is impossible for some individual to have intuitions that are perceptions of these independent facts. In order not to waste effort on such proof, it is reasonable to admit that there is no way to distinguish the hypothetically not impossible ‘true’ intuitions from the abundance of actual, dubious intuitions. We simply have to evaluate any intuition presented to us by using Sinnott-Armstrong’s seven principles: Partiality, Disagreement, Emotion, Illusions, Origins, Togetherness, and Costly Error – and see whether it survives or not.

Moral intuitions as strong immediate moral beliefs represent the psychologists’ System 1, which is automatic, fast, quite effortless, and beyond voluntary control; moral deliberation represents the other part of human thought, System 2, which demands attention and effort (Kahneman 2013, 20–1). Sinnott-Armstrong’s treatment of intuitionism gives us guidance in subordinating our moral intuitions to careful scrutiny. Alas, after millennia of careful moral deliberation there is little or nothing that can really be established in ethics (Sterba 2005, 1). This seems to give reason for skepticism. Sinnott-Armstrong describes the variants: “Pyrrhonian skeptics about moral knowledge suspend belief about whether or not anyone knows that any substantive moral belief is true” and “Pyrrhonian skeptics about justified moral belief suspend belief about whether or not anyone is justified in holding any moral belief” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b, 10, emphasis in the original). Sinnott-Armstrong himself tends towards this type of skepticism, even though he is criticised for not actually being a moral skeptic at all (ibid, 251). This study also tends towards this type of “non-dogmatic, non-doctrinaire, non-assertive, and non-committed” skepticism which simply does not lower its evidentiary demands in front of morality but applies epistemology to substantive moral beliefs (ibid, 7, 10).

Let us take a look at some stricter skepticism. “Academic skepticism about moral knowledge is the claim that nobody ever knows that any substantive moral belief is true” and “Academic skepticism about justified moral belief is the claim that nobody is ever justified in holding any substantive moral belief” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b, 11, emphasis in the original). Even though
academic skepticism appears to fit our present knowledge about our surroundings and thus seems to be true, this study avoids making so strong a claim, since “the industry, good fortune, or improved sagacity of succeeding generations may reach discoveries unknown to former ages” (Hume 2002, 12). “Skepticism about moral truth” is the claim that no substantive moral belief is true” and thus goes beyond epistemology to either moral language or metaphysics (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b, 11, emphasis in the original). As noted above, this study tries to avoid getting stuck into words and their meanings, and thus discussing moral language is beyond the scope of this study, as is also metaphysics. “Skepticism about moral truth-aptness” is the claim that no substantive moral belief is truth-apt (that is, the right kind of thing to be either true or false)” and “is often described as non-cognitivism” (ibid, emphasis in the original). This study approaches also non-cognitivism epistemologically, as a question about our knowledge instead of the content of the belief. We shall discuss non-cognitivism in 2.1.4.

“Skepticism with moral error” (or moral error theory) is the claim that some substantive moral beliefs are truth-apt, but none is true” and “Skepticism about moral reality” is the claim that no moral facts or properties exist” (ibid, 12, emphasis in the original). Sinnott-Armstrong and this study suspend judgment on error theory, even thought it has been developed very convincingly by Richard Joyce and appears to fit our present scientific knowledge. Joyce argues that we present our endless variety of mutually conflicting moral beliefs as objectively true, and this belief in objective moral truths totally irrespective of their being actually false has been and still is evolutionarily beneficial, and these benefits ensure that there is still an on-going project to vindicate them (Joyce 2001, 104). Nevertheless, there are two reasons for this study to suspend the judgment: First, let us assume that it were empirically true that every moral system so far fulfills Joyce’s definition and is non-institutional and makes non-relative demands (Joyce 2001, 97; 2011, 523). Granting this does not preclude the possibility that a moral system like the previous ones with the exception of making non-objective claims may appear in future. Maybe belief in objective moral truths is a necessary feature of moral systems only by the chosen definition. This brings us to the second reason. Joyce ties morality to moral beliefs and judgments. As noted above, this study presents another way to look at morality, as a function of the ‘caring organisation’ responsible for our well-being. Thus moral beliefs, be they strong and immediate or products of careful deliberation, appear to be consequences of subconscious choices, and moral judgments appear to be post hoc rationalisations while the real work for our well-being is done by the subconscious caring organisation.

2.1.3 MORAL INTUITIONS OF THE EMBODIED MIND
Given our knowledge of evolution, it is reasonable to believe that the actual human moral intuitions are a somewhat modified version of the familiar, intuitive behaviour of other animals. Frans B. M. de Waal describes it:
Apart from what motivates animals, we may ask whether their altruism is intentional. Do they realize their behavior benefits another? Do we? We show a host of behaviors for which we develop post hoc justifications. [...] We say, “I felt I had to do something,” but, in reality, our behavior was automatic and intuitive, following the common pattern that affect precedes cognition [...] it has been argued that much of our moral decision making is too rapid to be mediated by the cognition and self-reflection often assumed by moral philosophers [...] (de Waal 2008, 64).

This human modification, our ability to develop post hoc justifications, is quite probably an aspect of our ability to conceptualize and verbalize our perceptions and reflections on anything and deliver them to our conspecifics, who are able to respond to our tales. The crux of the matter is that we have no reason to suppose that moral reflection is anything more than afterthought. This afterthought depends on the same anatomical, physiological, social, and environmental conditions that enable all human symbolic thought. Peter Ulric Tse gives one account of the background of moral thought:

The emergence of symbolic thought had profound consequences for human moral cognition. You might say that the birth of symbolic thought gave rise to the possibility of true morality and immorality, of good and evil. Once acts became symbolized, they could now stand for, and be instances of, abstract classes of action such as good, evil, right, or wrong (Tse 2008, 286).

Somewhere in our ancestry there was an individual that began to have symbolic thoughts. This looks of course like presenting “what biologists call a ‘hopeful monster’ theory: the evolutionary theorist’s counterpart to divine intervention, in which a freak mutation just happens to produce a radically different and serendipitously better-equipped organism” (Deacon 1998, 35). Nevertheless, the actual birth of symbolic thought is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Since symbolic thought exists and is thus part of evolution, we can simply assume that there was a first instance of this, too. We can leave exactly when, where, and how to be answered by further research. Because of some new anatomical structure or physiological mechanism, its brain connected things in a different way. Nothing changed in the environment; concepts and values sprouted in the mind, not among the underbrush. The only physical change happened in the connectome, in the neural circuitry of our ancestor. This ancestor of ours just had a symbolic thought, and since this feature survived, thrived, and diversified in the gene pool, some of those symbolic thoughts were later labelled ‘moral’.

An act becomes immoral for us, and we disapprove of it accordingly, because it comes to symbolize or stand for other similar acts and thereby becomes a member of the abstract category “bad”, “wrong”, or “evil”. That is, morality is rooted in both our capacities to symbolize
and to generalize to a level of categorical abstraction. A person, once symbolized, has done more than stolen a particular piece of say, meat. He has become a thief (Tse 2008, 286).

To be exact, ‘stolen’ already implies that taking the meat violates a norm, and symbolic thought as a necessary requirement for morality is a matter of definition. Nevertheless, symbolic thought about instances belonging to abstract classes of action such as good, evil, right, or wrong either gave our ancestor an advantage in the natural selection or at least caused such a little disadvantage that it was not weeded out (Stich 2006, 188). Of course, this is no guarantee that this kind of thought will not be weeded out in the future. Actually, the benefits of this kind of thought are not that obvious any more. We may have gone too far when “to think of something as good or right is to think of it as having a certain quality, or character, namely that of being good or right” (Stratton-Lake 2002, 1). When the evaluations are transferred from our connectome to the object – or ‘projected’ onto it – and turned into its qualities, the symbols have got out of control (Joyce 2006, 125–6). Morality is actually not an exception here. We tend to miss the fact that “true statements made in terms of human categories typically do not predicate properties of objects in themselves but rather interactional properties that make sense only relative to human functioning” (Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 163–4, emphasis in the original). We tend to ignore the fact that our whole approach to life, including our conceptual thought, is moulded by the evolutionary process, and whenever our perception and understanding of our surroundings is accurate and reliable, it is so mostly because being accurate and reliable has been evolutionarily beneficial.

Our embodied system of basic-level concepts has evolved to “fit” the ways in which our bodies, over the course of evolution, have been coupled to our environment, partly for the sake of survival, partly for the sake of human flourishing beyond mere survival, and partly by chance. It is not that every basic-level concept exists because of its survival value, but without such an embodied system coupled to our environment, we would not have survived. The basic level of conceptualization is the cornerstone of embodied realism (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 91).

The ‘embodied realism’ of Lakoff and Johnson means in practice, that whenever our survival, flourishing, or mere chance has favoured available inaccuracy, illusion, or superstition, they have been employed by the evolutionary process. The embodied mind means that our mind is a feature of human neural circuitry, not anything independent from it. The display of the importance of bodily metaphors in our language is impressive (Lakoff & Johnson 2003). The obvious example is that we routinely talk about understanding abstract ideas as ‘grasping’ them or ‘seeing’ what they mean. Our language appears to depend on expressions based on our sensorimotor
experience. This is quite natural, since the above-mentioned transition to symbolic thought was done with the available means – means of non-symbolic thought.

*From a biological perspective, it is eminently plausible that reason has grown out of the sensory and motor systems and that it still uses those systems or structures developed for them. This explains why we have the kinds of concepts we have and why our concepts have the properties they have. It explains why our spatial-relations concepts should be topological and orientational. And it explains why our system for structuring and reasoning about events of all kinds should have the structure of a motor-control system (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 43).*

This is one example of evolution working like a pragmatic tinkerer, using whatever is available to produce whatever works, not trying to find a perfect or objectively accurate solution. The idea of using available means instead of objectively accurate information is familiar to philosophers from Plato’s ‘useful falsehoods’ to Adam Smith’s ‘deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind’ and all the way to Joyce’s “evolutionary advantage for humans to develop a sense of ‘to-be-doneness’ regardless of whether there really is anything answering to that concept in the world” (Republic 414c; Smith 2002, 214; Joyce 2001, 104). It is reasonable to assume that the root of many of our present moral philosophical problems is losing sight of moral intuitions as probably useful falsehoods. Instead of understanding them as the means of a pragmatic tinkerer, we take them seriously as descriptions of reality, as if they could be compared to perceiving colours. While “intuitions are perhaps the most basic kind of evidence philosophers depend on,” unfortunately, “modern moral philosophy is primarily the hunt for a universally normative doctrine, a theory of what is right or good for humanity as such” and philosophers have been accustomed to this hunt, since “it is commonly backed up by meta-ethical ideas of moral judgment which presuppose such a view of philosophical ethics” (Audi 2012, 1; Haakonssen 2002, vii). This means that once philosophers get hold of intuitions, they use them as raw material for discussions on “evidence, justification, rationality, and value” (Audi 2012, 1). Thus philosophers take useful falsehoods at face value and rush into moral semantics, without first making sense of moral psychology to know whether there is anything for moral semantics to work on. Human moral intuitions are detached from their natural habitat of human action, where they perform as possibly useful falsehoods, and inserted into a world foreign and strange to them, the world of prescriptive ethics. This world is inhabited not by actual human beings but by imaginary entities like ‘goodness’ and ‘rightness’. In this world the actual human moral intuitions, a continuance of general features of other animals, are mistreated as reliable perceptions of reality. Ethics has not always been transcendent and complicated. Homeric ethics was still quite straightforward: an X that
performs well in its role R, in other words, succeeds in being an X_R. “I fail to be ἄγαθός if and only if I fail to bring off the requisite performances; and the function of expressions of praise and blame is to invoke and to justify the rewards of success and the penalties of failure” (MacIntyre 2002, 8). Entities have been multiplied by philosophers since then, but from naturalist point of view the simple Homeric usage of ‘good’ still expresses the essential, the core of the matter.

Lakoff and Johnson present their embodied realism as an antidote to ‘disembodied realism’, the illusion that scientific thought is something ‘pure’, something untouched by our bodily existence and experience. This applies to moral philosophy as well.

What disembodied realism (what is sometimes called “metaphysical” or “external” realism) misses is that, as embodied, imaginative creatures, we never were separated or divorced from reality in the first place. What has always made science possible is our embodiment, not our transcendence of it, and our imagination, not our avoidance of it (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 93).

The tension between disembodied and embodied versions of realism has been a challenge for academic thinkers in ethics for centuries. In the 18th century Adam Smith built ethics on emotion and Immanuel Kant on reason, but they both saw self-interest as the core motive to co-operate; Smith’s butcher, brewer, and baker, and Kant’s prudent merchant all cooperate with their customers in voluntary exchange out of self-interest (Smith 1976, 26–7; Kant 2000, 4:397). In the 20th century Richard Dawkins saw something more sinister: “Life as we know it, and probably throughout the universe, means Darwinian life. [...] deep selfishness, pitiless indifference to suffering, ruthless heed to individual success” (Dawkins 1990, vii). Dennis Krebs states that “there are no scholars whom I admire more than Charles Darwin, George Williams, and Richard Dawkins; however, I am quite sure the pessimistic conclusions about human nature implied in the passages I have extracted from their writings are wrong, or at least misleading” (Krebs 2010, 14). Frans B. M. de Waal sums the views of Richard Dawkins, T. H. Huxley and George Williams succinctly: “Like Huxley, these authors generally believe that human behaviour is an evolutionary product, except when it is unselfish” (de Waal 2010, 33). These evolutionary scientists seem to suffer from a wide-spread infection of what could be called ‘academic myopia’, the symptoms of which are over-estimating the impact of theory, logic and culture, and simultaneously underestimating the impact of biology and psychology. An example concerns Isaiah Berlin:

When one starts with the Berlinian approach that universal values are those goods which ‘a great many human beings in the vast majority of places and situations, at almost all times, do in fact hold in common’, one may justifiably arrive only at the weak conclusion reached by
Berlin, that the nexus between pluralism and a liberal commitment to liberty is of a psychological nature. This resolution was labelled by Crowder, elsewhere, as ‘feeble stuff’. Yet in Berlin’s case it is impossible for the stuff to be stronger (Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 299).

If a connection lodged into human psychology so deeply, that it is almost universal, is still ‘feeble’, what would qualify as ‘strong’? It seems that academia prefers a logically binding but psychologically impossible connection to a psychologically binding but logically weak connection. This means ignoring that a psychologically binding connection has actual, practical consequences in everyday life, whereas a logically binding connection mostly stands inert on the conceptual level. As noted above, from naturalist point of view we test our theories and arguments against nature – not against imaginary ‘pure’ rationality, not even purely logical thinking. Twentieth-century philosophy started with rejecting naturalism when “Frege, Moore, and other like-minded thinkers inaugurated a period in which logic and language were the dominant philosophical subjects and confusing conceptual with factual issues was the greatest philosophical sin” (Rachels 2001, 74). Even though philosophy is not any more thought to be independent from sciences, and “naturalistic theories of mind, knowledge, and even logic are once again being defended”, yet “in ethics, naturalism remains under suspicion” (ibid). Let us take a quick look at “two fallacies – Hume and Moore’s”, which ethical naturalism is accused of, concentrating on Moore’s “(purportedly fallacious) metaethical view that came to be known as ‘moral naturalism’” and touching on Hume’s ‘objection’ on the way (Flanagan et al. 2008a, 1; 2008b, 45).

Moore saw ‘Ethics’ as the general enquiry into what is good, and abandoned “the statement that it deals with the question what is good or bad in human conduct” (Moore 2006, 32). According to him, ‘good’ denotes some property that is common to the type of human conduct called ‘good conduct’ and things called ‘good’ – ‘the good’. His central claim was that whereas ‘good conduct’ and ‘the good’ are definable, ‘good’ is indefinable (ibid, 35). He admitted, that “it may be true that all things which are good are also something else,” but “far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good” (ibid, 38, emphasis in the original). Moore accused them of committing the ‘naturalistic fallacy’, since there is always room to question any definition of ‘good’, always an open question about ‘good’. Alexander Miller calls Moore’s argument the ‘classical open-question argument’ (COQA) (Miller 2003, 13). William Frankena objected to Moore’s COQA by pointing out that “the naturalistic fallacy must be proved to be a fallacy” (Frankena 2006, 48). One cannot simply claim it to be a fallacy, just because one rejects even the possibility of a naturalistic definition of ‘good’. Frankena claimed that “it cannot be used to settle the controversy, but can only be asserted to be a fallacy when the smoke of battle has cleared” (ibid). Moore appeared to have no good reply to Frankena’s objection, which left open the question, whether “we can salvage anything
from the COQA,” or whether “Moore’s argument is completely useless as a philosophical tool” (Miller 2003, 18). One attempt to salvage something from Moore’s COQA was a response to Frankena’s objection presented by Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton (ibid, 21). Let us call their response ‘Darwall-Gibbard-Railton argument’ (DGRA). Here we see the ‘academic myopia’ in action, preferring a conceptual link based on the imaginary possibility of ‘clear headed beings’ to the psychological commitment of real people. Besides its being designed to defend Moore’s COQA, it touches on Hume’s objection as well.

Our confidence that the openness of the open question does not depend upon any error or oversight may stem from our seeming ability to imagine, for any naturalistic property R, clear headed beings who would fail to find appropriate reason or motive to action in the mere fact that R obtains (or is seen to be in the offing). Given this imaginative possibility, it has not been logically secured that P [some natural property] is action guiding (even if, as a matter of fact, we all do find R psychologically compelling). And this absence of a logical or conceptual link to action shows us exactly where there is room to ask, intelligibly, whether R really is good (ibid).

The first point of DGRA is, that because we seem to be able to imagine ‘clear headed beings’ that are not bound by the constraints of human psychology, we are to ignore that ‘as a matter of fact, we all do find R psychologically compelling’. Here we meet Moore’s non-naturalism, which is unfounded from naturalist point of view; since R is in DGRA defined as psychologically compelling to all human beings, it is not reasonable to dismiss such a fact, let alone use this dismissal as grounds for any argument. The second point of DGRA is, that ‘it has not been logically secured that P is action guiding’ because of the ‘absence of a logical or conceptual link to action’. Here we meet Hume’s objection, since the logical or conceptual link is not missing only between the imaginary ‘clear headed beings’ and real human action, but also between what human beings perceive (‘is’) and what they find psychologically compelling (‘ought’). Nevertheless, from naturalist point of view the existent psychological link trumps the non-existent logical one; for human beings P is action guiding even without the logical link, because the psychologically compelling R is indistinguishable from good.

Let us look further at imagination. Miller described Frege’s use of ‘sense’ and ‘reference’: “Just as I can grasp the sense of a proper name without knowing which object it refers to, I can grasp the truth-condition of a sentence (what it would be for the sentence to be true) without knowing whether it actually is true” (ibid, 286, emphasis in the original). Miller’s claim about our abilities to imagine sounds plausible, but our imagination is in fact limited. As noted above, if we believe in the growth of human knowledge, we cannot anticipate today what we shall know only tomorrow; there is no scientific way to predict future knowledge (Popper 2002b, xii–xiii). We may assume that we
know ourselves. I think I can imagine how I will react tomorrow to something I have experienced yesterday. This is based on what I know of myself and my reactions to my experiences so far. I should be quite able to imagine – or maybe predict – my own reactions to experiences I have had recently and will have soon, experiences close to me both in past and future. What about something I have never experienced before? I can try, but should the situation really arise tomorrow, my reaction would quite probably not be the one I was able to imagine today. What about distant future? Can I imagine how I will react to something I have experienced yesterday but will experience next time two decades into the future? How could I? I have no access to the experiences that I will have during the next two decades, no access to those things that will shape me and my reactions to anything in the coming years. I cannot anticipate today what I shall know only tomorrow, nor can I anticipate today how I will react tomorrow, for the simple physical reason that my connectome, the neural network responsible for my action and reaction changes continuously and therefore will not be exactly the same tomorrow, let alone two decades later (Seung 2013, 203). Evolution makes sure that what Nicholas Wade states about our ability to understand our ancestors’ life experience also applies to our ability to imagine our descendants’ life experience:

*It is tempting to suppose that our ancestors were just like us except where there is evidence to the contrary. This is a hazardous assumption. The ancestral human population is separated from people today by some 2,000 generations. In evolutionary time, that is not so long, yet is still time enough for very substantial evolutionary change to have taken place (Wade 2006, 70–71).*

If evolution makes our human ancestors and descendants foreign to us, then non-human experience must be even more remote. Since our imagination feeds on our own experience, its range is necessarily limited. If I tried to imagine what it is for a bat to be a bat, I would still be restricted to the resources of my own mind, resources totally inadequate to the task. “I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining segments gradually subtracted from it, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications” (Nagel 2001, 264–5). Of course, I could make plausible guesses about what it is like to be a bat. They probably use “sound information for very much the same kind of purpose as we use our visual information” and “bats ‘see’ in much the same way as we do, even though the physical medium by which the world ‘out there’ is translated into nerve impulses is so different – ultrasound rather than light” (Dawkins 1991, 34, emphasis in the original). Dawkins answers to Nagel by commenting on different physical features and common uses, but he does not solve Nagel’s real problem. His guess about the bat’s experience sounds plausible – which is exactly Nagel’s problem. Our guesses sound plausible to us; we have no access to a point of view from which they would not. Our inability to reach beyond the confines of human mind does not mean that it is
reasonable to deny the possibility that there is a reality beyond our reach. On the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose that “the limits of our minds are just not the limits of reality” (McGinn 2003a, 452). In fact, it is reasonable to claim that “it is deplorably anthropocentric to insist that reality be constrained by what the human mind can conceive” (ibid).

This ‘deplorably anthropocentric’ trait is common in philosophy. Claiming that “logic [...] is an autonomous subject with its own standards of truth and falsity” and that “those standards have nothing to do with how the mind works or with any other natural facts” is one example (Rachels 2001, 74). Talk about ‘possible worlds’ is another. The limits of human imagination are seen as the limits of reality, when claiming that “the statement that 2+2=4 is necessarily true because there are no possible worlds in which it is false (can you imagine one?)” (Miller 2003, 54). Using constructions of human mind, like logic or mathematics, as examples of necessarily true statements is tantamount to claiming that human mind necessarily exists in every possible world. Even though we cannot imagine how mathematics would not apply in any possible world, it is still bold to claim it does, since we are not so far able to explain the existence of human mind even in this present one of ours – the only world we can reasonably claim to know anything about. According to McGinn, it is probable that human mind does not conceive all there is and possible that we will never explain our own ability to explain – our consciousness (McGinn 2003a, 453). We do not have to accept McGinn’s claim outright, but we must face the question: What if? Dawkins does not solve Nagel’s problem about our imagination being limited by our experience. Building DGRA on ‘our seeming ability to imagine [...] clear headed beings’ is not convincing. McGinn does not offer us consolation, but he points the right way to approach what is psychologically compelling. We must see ourselves “as a form of embodied consciousness” (ibid). According to Lakoff and Johnson, “there exists no Kantian radically autonomous person, with absolute freedom and a transcendent reason that correctly dictates what is and isn’t moral” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 5). Reason arises from the body, and does not transcend the body. “What universal aspects of reason there are arise from the commonalities of our bodies and brains and the environments we inhabit” (ibid).

Since reason is shaped by the body, it is not radically free, because the possible human conceptual systems and the possible forms of reason are limited. [...] There is no a priori, purely philosophical basis for a universal concept of morality and no transcendent, universal pure reason that could give rise to universal moral laws (ibid).

The ‘Kantian radically autonomous person’ Lakoff and Johnson so categorically knock out of existence is an expression of the high hopes of the abilities of human reason. Kant tries to “proceed analytically from common cognition to the determination of its supreme principle, and in turn synthetically from the examination of this principle and its sources back to the
common cognition,” thus deriving moral laws “from the universal concept of a rational being as such” (Kant 2000, 4:392, 4:412). DGRA’s ‘clear headed beings’ and Kant’s ‘rational being as such’ are concepts, or possibly theoretical models. Dealing with theoretical models is no problem as such. After all, “thought experiments play a larger role in moral methodology than they do in scientific methodology, at least partly because it is often (correctly) regarded as immoral to assess moral theories by realising the relevant counterfactuals” (Brink 2006, 85). The problem is that we easily forget that whatever may look reasonable in theory is not necessarily applicable in the human reality of embodied consciousness, where the possible human conceptual systems and the possible forms of reason are actually limited. It is very easy, even for someone defending scientific and moral realism and materialism, to slip aside: “It is unlikely that moral properties are identical with physical properties; moral properties could have been realised non-materially. But there is every reason to believe that in the actual world moral properties, like other natural properties, are realised materially” (ibid, 88). Within the framework of methodologically naturalist and materialist scientific thought, where the only known ‘moral properties’ exist in human consciousness, which depends on human anatomy and physiology, it is unreasonable to suppose that any ‘moral properties could have been realised non-materially’, independent from the biology of human beings. This is exactly where the traditional philosophical speculation and reflection collides with the ‘interdisciplinary endeavor spanning the cognitive, social, and biological sciences’ (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 33). It is easy to do thought experiments in theory, ignore human limitations, and then make claims in the real world. We are able to ignore human limitations, but we are not really able to imagine a ‘clear headed being’ without human limitations or a ‘rational being as such’. Sure, we can imagine a being that is quite like us, only a bit different. We can imagine additions to our present experience, segments gradually subtracted from it, and we can even imagine some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications. Nevertheless, our creation will collide with the same obstacles Nagel’s bat does. Our imagination is simply inadequate to the task.

If we take seriously the modern scientific surroundings of our thought experiments, we must respect the dependence of human cognitive abilities on the biological construction of our bodies. Moreover, this dependence must be applied to Kant’s ‘rational being as such’ and DGRA’s ‘clear headed beings’. In other words, when building a theoretical model like ‘rational being as such’ we should be able to imagine its anatomy and physiology, and also its social life – all the engineering details that make a ‘rational being as such’ possible. Since the only ‘rationality’ we know of is the human feature produced by our species-specific neural circuitry and social networks, it is unreasonable to suppose there does or can exist anything to be called ‘rationality’ without human features, any ‘rationality as such’. We are defined by our neural construction. Our anatomy, physiology, and experiences together define what we can imagine. Similarly, our biology and our experiences together (‘is’) define what
can be psychologically compelling to us (‘ought’). Following Hume we can object to deducting ‘ought’ from ‘is’, to claiming that ‘ought’ logically or conceptually follows from ‘is’, when it, in fact, follows psychologically, from what human species is (Flanagan et al. 2008a, 13–4). The link is a contingent feature of human nature defined by human physiology, the species-specific physical construction in interplay with its surroundings, producing also human thought, language, and culture. Thus, to create the theoretical model of DGRA’s ‘clear headed beings’, what should we do? We should describe the beings that are equipped with ‘clear heads’ which contain an equivalent to human brains but with one exception; they do not find psychologically compelling the things that human beings do. We should thus describe the structural change in those brains that would produce ‘clear heads’. Which part of the brains would we restructure? How would we restructure it? How would we make sure that the structural change is permanent and not malleable by experiences or evolution? We are hard-pressed to figure out in the light of available fossils and artefacts what kind of cognitive abilities Neanderthals had – and they have been extinct less than 30 000 years. Because Kant’s ‘rational being as such’ and DGRA’s ‘clear headed beings’ are concepts, or theoretical models, they have never existed, and we do not even have fossils or artefacts – we have nothing to begin with.

As noted above, Miller was inspired by Frege to claim that we “can grasp the truth-condition of a sentence (what it would be for the sentence to be true) without knowing whether it actually is true” (Miller 2003, 286, emphasis in the original). Can we really grasp what it would be for a sentence about a ‘rational being as such’, or ‘clear headed being’, or ‘non-materi ally realised moral properties’ to be true? Most probably we never can. In Frege’s words, “the thought loses value for us as soon as we recognize that the reference of one of its parts is missing” (Frege 2001, 10). Since ‘rational being as such’, ‘clear headed beings’, and ‘non-materi ally realised moral properties’ are non-existent and therefore lack reference, thoughts containing these expressions inevitably lose value. More value is lost when we acknowledge our inability to even imagine them. They are both non-existent and unimaginable, and it is hard to justify fiddling with them, when we are trying to understand the ethics of the real people, the immense variety of actual human beings.

DGRA was meant to rescue Moore’s COQA from Frankena’s criticism. The aim of the present study is not only to show that DGRA does not deliver, but to build the basis for ethical naturalism that is beyond Moore’s non-naturalist criticism. We will approach it via discussion of “the idea that ethics can be understood in the terms of natural science” (Rachels 2001, 75). This idea seems like a natural born winner “given the success of the empirical sciences in providing explanations of various aspects of the world” (Smith 2001, 23). Obviously “we are constrained by our conception of the world in which we live,” which “means, in turn, that we are constrained by the truth of naturalism, the view that the world is amenable to study through empirical science,” but it does not necessarily mean that “it is extremely plausible to hold
that the world is *entirely* amenable to study through empirical science” (ibid, emphasis in the original). This is no small matter. Enlightenment was divided into two “because of the basic and ubiquitous disagreement about whether reason alone reigns supreme in human life or whether philosophy’s scope must be limited and reason reconciled with faith and tradition” (Israel 2006, 10). It is in fact extremely plausible that what is called ‘empirical science’ by a species living on a piece of rock circulating in the vast space will never be able to comprehend, let alone explain the totality of existence. Whether certain parts of our natural environment are in practice explained by human reason or not is not of essence here. What is of essence is that methodological naturalism rules out certain explanations and limits the inquiry to the natural. If the only explanation available would mean claiming a non-natural influence, we rather keep on looking in vain for a natural explanation than settle for a non-natural explanation. Given the limitations, why should we commit ourselves to ethical naturalism? Why not fill the gaps by populations of DGRA’s ‘clear headed beings’, or Rawlsian persons with roughly similar needs and interests, or Moorean non-natural moral properties, or Kantian ‘rational being as such’? We should refrain from such imagining, because disregarding human reality is not a reasonable way to build morality for real human beings. Moreover, scientific knowledge inevitably gnaws at the filling and replaces it with accumulated knowledge; thus scientific research becomes a threat to the enticingly unified world view. Metaethics can have a crucial role in connecting science and ethics via moral psychology. If ethics does not cope with modern scientific, methodologically naturalist picture of human life, ethics is left outside of this scientific picture – ethics is unscientific. Equally, if science does not cope with our morality, our scientific picture of human life is inadequate, lacking ethics. Thus scientific metaethics has to take seriously the results of modern science, the above-mentioned interdisciplinary endeavour spanning the cognitive, social, and biological sciences.

Moore accused ‘many philosophers’ of committing naturalistic fallacy, of not sharing his ontological beliefs that ‘good’ stands for something, that ‘good’ exists as an independent entity without context, and that ‘good’ exists in addition to ‘the good’ (Moore 2006, 37). Moore’s beliefs are non-naturalist’s ontological beliefs. Naturalism is not committed to such beliefs. Naturalists do not need a definition of ‘good’ at all; they can be quite content with things people call ‘good’ – ‘the good’. According to Moore naturalism ends up either to merely psychological positions or verbal discussions, neither of which are ethics (ibid, 39). From his point of view this is a problem for naturalism, since there must be something beyond psychological positions and ‘good’ must be something beyond the usage. None of these assumptions seems justified. Nature seems to consist of particulars. Of course, one can doubt even the existence of particulars, like Descartes tried to do, but, as he notes, “this undertaking is arduous” and “laborious,” since skepticism does not agree with human psychology (Descartes 1974, 117; Ruse 2008, 36). Thus, naturalists can quite confidently, without fear of being seriously contested, commit
themselves to common sense assumptions about the existence of particulars, of not being deceived by Descartes’ fictional evil demon or its modern science fiction variant, the *Matrix* (Gordon 2003, 109). From the naturalist point of view our world consists of particulars, and when we speak of a good axe, of a good watch, or of a good carpenter, ‘good’ does not mean exactly the same thing in each case. The reason for being called ‘good’ may in each case be one of a kind. Our use of one and the same word ‘good’ to express our approval of their respective qualities does not mean that there is some common ‘goodness’ applicable to ‘the good’. Moore admitted that “it may be true that all things which are good are also something else” (Moore 2006, 38, emphasis in the original). The naturalist admits that it may be true that all things which are labelled good have also something else in common, but this is an empirical claim to be evaluated only *a posteriori*, not an assumption accepted *a priori*. We have no reason to discard evidentiary demands here (Harris 2006, 73–9). It is reasonable to demand evidence for the claim that there is some common ‘goodness’ applicable to ‘the good’. Until proven otherwise, it is reasonable to assume that there are just words, our symbolic thought employing ‘good’ indiscriminately in non-moral and moral matters, which suits the product of a frugal tinkerer. From naturalist point of view the subject-matter of ethics need not be ‘good’ at all. Instead, the subject-matter of ethics is exactly what Moore rejected, “the question what is good or bad in human conduct” (Moore 2006, 32). From naturalist point of view all there is appears to be the fact that human beings have ‘moralities’. Whether the origins and workings of these can be fully explained by science remains to be seen. The explanation seems to depend on the explanation of consciousness. If McGinn is right and our consciousness will always be an enigma to us, then morality will probably follow suit.

**2.1.4 COGNITIVISM AND NON-COGNITIVISM**

According to David Hume moral philosophers follow either one of two routes: “one considers man chiefly as born for action; and as influenced in his measures by taste and sentiment” and “the other species of philosophers consider man in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being” (Hume 2002, 5–6). Those on the first route try “to represent the common sense in more beautiful and more engaging colors” (ibid, 7). Those on the second route are not content with common sense; they see new wisdom to be in the offing:

> [...] there is still room to hope, that the industry, good fortune, or improved sagacity of succeeding generations may reach discoveries unknown to former ages [...] it seems impossible, that what has hitherto escaped so many wise and profound philosophers can be very obvious and easy (ibid, 12, 16).
Hidden deviants

This latter group is not intimidated by the lack of new findings in ethical thought through human history – we just have to dig deeper. After all, if the great wisdom has not been found by the wise and the profound, it just serves to show that the answer is neither obvious nor easy. What is obvious is the clash between emotion and reason: one approach emphasises common sense, the wisdom within reach of every man; the other emphasises the knowledge of the wise and profound, the wisdom beyond the reach of most men. The approach emphasising reason was exemplified by Immanuel Kant, a contemporary of David Hume. Likewise, the emphasis on emotion was exemplified by a contemporary of them, Adam Smith. Both Kant and Smith were, naturally, acquainted with the philosophy of Hume. Kant admitted his debt to Hume; Smith referred to his “close friend and mentor, David Hume” as “an ingenious and agreeable philosopher” (Kant 2002, 354; Haakonssen 2002, vii; Smith 2002, 209). Kant and Smith shared a century and some beliefs, but they saw man’s cognitive capacities very differently. Their different approaches appear to live on in the central “battle between cognitivism and non-cognitivism” in present day metaethics (Miller 2003, 3). Miller describes the contestants:

[...] cognitivists, think that a moral judgement [...] expresses a belief. Beliefs can be true or false: they are truth-apt, or apt to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity. So cognitivists think that moral judgements are capable of being true or false. [...] non-cognitivists think that moral judgements express non-cognitive states such as emotions or desires. Desires and emotions are not truth-apt. So moral judgements are not capable of being true or false (ibid).

Miller presents a crucial battle between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. As noted above concerning moral intuitions, there is neither grounds nor need to be dogmatic about moral properties or to try to prove either their existence or non-existence, just evaluate them critically (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b, 45). Although the concept of ‘moral truth’ as a truth of the world independent from us is inconsistent with the world depicted by our best available knowledge, it is beyond the scope of this study to try to prove the impossibility of moral truth; we can simply leave open the possibility that someday men actually perceive moral properties that are independent from human cognition (Greene 2014, 188). After all, “by good luck, the atomists hit on a hypothesis for which, more than two thousand years later, some evidence was found, but their belief, in their day, was none the less destitute of any solid foundation” (Russell 1996, 74). Therefore, let us replace the ontological battle about what judgments are capable of being with an epistemological battle of what men are capable of doing. Thus epistemologically reframed, cognitivism claims that the truth and falsity of moral judgments is within the reach of human reason, and non-cognitivism denies this claim. Non-cognitivism need not deny the truth and falsity of moral judgments, only the ability of human reason to decide it on available means. In practice, ‘moral judgments express non-
cognitive states such as emotions or desires’, because that is the only level we are able to handle moral issues; this does not necessarily mean that moral judgments are not capable of being true or false, we just suspend judgment on that because it is beyond our means so far.

To clarify this epistemologically tuned distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, let us look at Immanuel Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. We can find two different views on the purposefulness of all living creatures, men included. Kant believes in fully adapted beings, which is an unnecessarily strong statement for our present evolutionary approach: “In the natural constitution of an organized being, that is, one constituted purposively for life, we assume as a principle that there will be found in it no instrument for some end other than what is also most appropriate to that end and best adapted to it” (Kant 2000, 8). Smith’s belief is more moderate and more in accordance with our present understanding of evolution as “continuous” but “not goal-oriented” (Zuk 2014, 57). It also contains both of the important aspects of survival, the survival of the individual and the survival of the species as consecutive generations: “Thus self-preservation, and the propagation of the species, are the great ends which Nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals” (Smith 2002, 90; we will return to this in 2.5 below). Both Kant and Smith believe that instincts are our best means of survival – and that reason is of no use here. There is a difference of tone, though. Kant admits the abilities of instincts somewhat grudgingly, almost as a necessary evil, only appropriate for such menial tasks as preservation of life, welfare, or happiness – the territory of the above-mentioned ‘caring organization’.

Now in a being that has reason and a will, if the proper end of nature were its preservation, its welfare, in a word its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. [...] In a word, nature would have taken care that reason should not break forth into practical use and have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself a plan for happiness and for the means of attaining it. Nature would have taken upon itself the choice not only of ends but also of means and, with wise foresight, would have entrusted them both simply to instinct (Kant 2000, 8–9).

Kant sees the jobs that the instincts are best suited for as unworthy of the efforts of such a noble trait as reason. For Kant, human reason is destined for higher purposes, moral purposes to be specific: “[...] where nature has everywhere else gone to work purposively in distributing its capacities, the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps as a means to other purposes, but good in itself, for which reason was absolutely necessary” (ibid, 10, emphasis in the original). For Kant the grapes taste sour, but for Smith the strength and swiftness of instincts in the vital matters of survival is a welcome deliverance from the slowness and uncertainty of reason.
Mankind are endowed with a desire of those ends, and an aversion of the contrary; with a love of life, and a dread of dissolution; with a desire of the continuance and perpetuity of the species, and with an aversion to the thoughts of its extinction. But though we are in this manner endowed with a very strong desire of those ends, it has not been intrusted to the slow and uncertain determinations of our reason, to find out the proper means of bringing them about. Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts (Smith 2002, 90).

Despite quite similar perceptions of the ‘caring organization’ and reason, Kant and Smith differ remarkably in their appreciation of human reason. It carries on to Smith’s definition of praise and blame, but it is not visible on the surface. Smith goes on a long way as if he were Kant.

Whatever praise or blame can be due to any action, must belong either, first, to the intention or affection of the heart, from which it proceeds; or, secondly, to the external action or movement of the body, which this affection gives occasion to; or, lastly, to the good or bad consequences, which actually, and in fact, proceed from it (ibid, 108).

Smith thinks that actions can be evaluated by intention, external action or consequences, but believes that external action and consequences “cannot be the foundation of any praise or blame” (ibid, 109). Instead, praise or blame must be based only on intention. “To the intention or affection of the heart, therefore, to the propriety or impropriety, to the beneficence or hurtfulness of the design, all praise or blame, all approbation or disapprobation, of any kind, which can justly be bestowed upon any action, must ultimately belong” (ibid). Smith and Kant thus share the appreciation of intention as a basis for praise and blame. They are on the same path, but Kant goes further, past the intention, all the way to the principle behind the will. According to Kant, “the purposes we may have for our actions, and their effects as ends and incentives of the will, can give actions no unconditional and moral worth [...] It can lie nowhere else than in the principle of the will without regard for the ends” (Kant 2000, 13, emphasis in the original). On the role of intention Smith and Kant part ways. Instead of following Kant into the principle of the will behind the intention, Smith turns back and defines intention as the sole criterion for praise or blame in theory only. In practice, consequences are the criteria used, because “when we come to particular cases, the actual consequences which happen to proceed from any action, have a very great effect upon our sentiments concerning its merit or demerit” (Smith 2002, 109). Smith’s view about our actual practices of praise and blame seems accurate and evolutionarily sound. What we see as the rightful basis for praise or blame in theory does not help us in practice. As is evident to anyone who has ever attempted serious introspection, we are hard-pressed to understand our own actual intentions – let alone other people’s intentions. When survival is at
stake, the actual consequences of other people’s actions are decisive; detecting those consequences is vital, while detecting their intentions is not. You do not want to pin your survival on an inept performer, no matter how fine her or his intentions. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Kant and Smith start from the same place and go a long way together but end up in totally different conclusions. Kant tries to “proceed analytically from common cognition to the determination of its supreme principle, and in turn synthetically from the examination of this principle and its sources back to the common cognition”, and to derive moral laws “from the universal concept of a rational being as such” – an imaginary, non-existent being (Kant 2000, 5, 23). This rationalist route is as good as a dead end for those who are interested in real people, the immense variety of unique human individuals, “as opposed to imaginary, idealized, super-rational people without psyches” (Bell et al 1998, 9). Smith is also tempted by the rationalist route and acknowledges that in theory deeds should be evaluated by intention, but he accepts that limited human beings – actually and in fact – evaluate primarily by consequences. This means acknowledging that certain judgments are beyond our means and we as real people have to make do with whatever is available to us.

2.1.5 REAL PEOPLE

When we look at matters from the armchair, we may believe that it is not possible for the majority of human beings to have intuitions that differ widely from what we are accustomed to. This may, however, be just one example of our stubborn refusal of certain clear facts:

Why would someone as conspicuously devoid of personal grievances or psychological dysfunction as Osama bin Laden – who is neither poor, uneducated, delusional, nor a prior victim of Western aggression – devote himself to cave-dwelling machinations with the intention of killing innumerable men, women, and children he has never met? The answer to this question is obvious – if only because it has been patiently articulated ad nauseam by bin Laden himself. The answer is that men like bin Laden actually believe what they say they believe. [...] It is rare to find the behaviour of human beings so fully and satisfactorily explained. Why have we been reluctant to accept this explanation? (Harris 2006, 29).

Harris asked the Americans. The same question could probably have been asked the Norwegians after the yearlong trial of Anders Behring Breivik, who admitted the planning and execution of 77 murders in Norway in July 2011, and was eventually sentenced to prison for 21 years in 2012. In a television documentary on Geir Lippestad, Breivik’s defense attorney, there is a statement by professor Mattias Gardell: he describes Breivik as a man with wealth, no personal losses and no violence in his background. Yet, Breivik
decided that he was at war and attacked violently. Paul S. Appelbaum makes an interesting point:

*However, Mr. Breivik’s trial offered the unusual spectacle — apparently without precedent in Norway — of a defendant who insisted that he was sane, while the prosecution argued for a finding of insanity. Two teams of psychiatric experts hired by the court reached differing conclusions as to whether he had been psychotic at the time of the crime. In essence, the prosecution was attempting to have an insanity verdict imposed over the objections of the defendant, in the face of conflicting evidence about Mr. Breivik’s state of mind. How do we explain this odd turn of the tables? (Appelbaum 2012).*

In the television documentary on Geir Lippestad, the central question seemed to be, whether Breivik was alone with his thoughts: if he was, he was insane; if he was not, he was sane. The sanity of his thought was deemed to depend on whether other people shared his thoughts. We are indeed an ultra-social species: whatever a group of people thinks or does is sane, whatever only one individual thinks or does is insane; whatever cultural is accepted, whatever individual is suspected. Numbers matter to us, so much so, that numbers actually justify our moral intuitions. As noted above, Russ Shafer-Landau argues in a way that tells a lot about us and our ethical thought: “If (nearly) everyone agrees on a given belief […] its credibility is not relevantly in question” (Shafer-Landau 2008, 93, emphasis in the original).

Reluctance to accept certain explanations – be it bin Laden’s or Breivik’s – seems to be based on widely held beliefs about what moral, political, or religious beliefs are possible for human beings. When someone goes beyond those boundaries, he or she tends to be labelled amoral, immoral – or insane, which is what Appelbaum’s article warns about: *Never label political crimes, like Breivik’s, acts of insanity.* Essentially the same advice is given by Haidt and Kesebir: *Transcend your own politics!* (Haidt & Kesebir 2010, 824). Labelling someone’s political ideas insane will not make them disappear.

We are part of the evolutionary process based on requisite variation that produces raw material to be selected – or rather to be weeded out. It seems reasonable to suppose that evolution in the case of human moral, political, and religious beliefs as in every other facet of human existence produces endless variation from which the non-viable versions are weeded out by the social and natural environment, in the extreme cases by the Americans hunting down and killing bin Laden and the Norwegians imprisoning Breivik. Writes Ian Morris:

*… consequence of our animalness is that large groups of humans, as opposed to individual humans, are all much the same. If you pluck two random people from a crowd, they may be as different as can be imagined, but if you round up two complete crowds they will tend to mirror each other rather closely. And if you compare groups millions*
Given our present scientific understanding of the common roots of humankind we have every reason to believe this fact which Morris convincingly and patiently emphasises throughout his book (ibid, 51, 61, 73, 559). Nevertheless, as Morris notes, the sameness of large groups hides the actual variation of individuals. We seem to acknowledge cultural differences, because we cannot escape acknowledging them, but we seem to ignore the individual variation beneath those cultural differences, although we know that “a very small change in the distribution of preferences generates a large difference in the outcome” (Granovetter 1978, 1421). If we only treat men on aggregate level, we totally miss the endless individual variation. This individual variation appears to be what evolution requires. We must be minorities of one.

To sum up our route off the armchair, it is reasonable to reverse the traditional methodological priority in metaethics; we have to prefer the explanatory priority and start by making sense of moral psychology, the origins and mechanisms of our morality, before making claims about moral semantics. It is also reasonable to acknowledge the central role of bargaining in our life; our life is intrapersonal and interpersonal preference management, and any realistic theory of ethics has to be built on bargaining. Since the individual’s connectome is reweighted, reconnected, rewired, and regenerated continuously and changes her or his behaviour – and morality – throughout life, it is not reasonable to claim that our moral intuitions would track some immutable moral truth. Any intuitionist claim about ‘moral truth’ is to be scrutinized and evaluated critically. Thus it is reasonable to propose that we build methodologically naturalist ethics that takes seriously the modern scientific knowledge of the connection of human anatomy, physiology, and cognition – moral philosophy should follow Adam Smith’s route and analyse how men actually and in fact make moral evaluations and judgements.

2.2 ON THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING CONSISTENT

In this chapter (2.2) I shall look at our challenges in understanding evolution as an impersonal, unintentional and continuous process, which our metaphorical thought and language struggle to describe. Isaiah Berlin’s pluralism is helpful, because of his acknowledgement of both incompatible concepts and psychological factors. Herbert Spencer’s attempt at being a consistent evolutionist reveals the challenges of both the project and acceptance of its results. Spencer’s overarching systemic thought fits modern ideas about complex adaptive systems, but still retains the distinction between
‘artificial’ and ‘natural’. An attempt at removing this final barrier is Adrian Bejan’s ‘constructal law’, which connects biology and physics.

2.2.1 THEY SAY THEY ARE EVOLUTIONISTS

As noted above, “the purpose of science is to tell us about the nature of the natural world, whether we like the answer or not” (Leshner 2011, vi;). In the same vein, when arguing in academic philosophy one should be loyal to one’s commitments and follow them wherever they may lead. One should not be intimidated by unpleasant conclusions or stoop to “fabricating philosophical theories whose only virtue is the promise of providing the soothing news that all our heartfelt beliefs are true” (Joyce 2006, 230). If one cannot be consistent, it should be admitted honestly. Isaiah Berlin once said that he would never forget John Austin’s question: “I know they say they are determinists, but have you ever met one?” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 120). In the quantum-mechanical universe of modern science determinism is not exactly what classical physics presented (Gell-Mann 2002, 24). Nevertheless, let us rephrase Austin on determinists: I know they say they are evolutionists, but have you ever met one? As noted above, even the most vocal propagandists of evolutionary theory find it hard to be consistent, and allow their political convictions or some other normative considerations mess with the scientific evidence.

Questions about consistency, determinism, and freedom connect Isaiah Berlin to Herbert Spencer. Spencer created an overarching philosophical approach to the development of the Earth, life upon its surface, society, government, manufactures, commerce, language, literature, science, and art (Spencer 1891b, 10). Austin’s question got Berlin thinking about the implications of taking determinism seriously, and he put the problem succinctly: “Since we are not, in fact, free, but could not live without the conviction that we are, what are we to do?” (Berlin 2013, 35). Berlin is known best for his writings on liberty and on the history of ideas (Coady 2005, 94; Hausheer 1999, 85; Williams 2005, 105). He is reported to have said that everything else he wrote was a footnote to his essay “Two Concepts of Liberty” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 119). Therefore it is not totally uninteresting, that C. B. Macpherson claims that Berlin owes one of his central concepts, the concept of negative freedom, to Herbert Spencer. Macpherson sees Berlin’s criticism of laissez-faire as unsparing and as a far cry from Spencer, but cannot help wondering, whether it is self-consistent (Macpherson 1973, 103).

Spencer ends his essay ‘The Development Hypothesis’ with a demand for logical consistency: “And why, after rejecting all the rest of the story, he should strenuously defend this last remnant of it, as though he had received it on valid authority, he would be puzzled to say” (Spencer 1891a, 7). He claims, that those who hang on to remnants of ancient religious beliefs, when they have already
rejected the bulk of them, do not even themselves know why they behave the way they do.

What do we have here? First, we have an advocate of inescapable inconsistency, who is known for “his view that values necessarily conflict,” who was “depressed by the thought of life as a mechanism or even a biological organism,” who did not “want the universe to be too tidy,” and who resisted laissez-faire policies (Williams 2005, 105; Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 124–5, 156). Second, we have an advocate of consistency, a system-builder, an evolutionist, who “was not consistent in all he wrote,” but who “managed to remain remarkably constant throughout his long life even in his inconsistencies,” and who was an ardent defender of laissez-faire policies (Macrae 1969, 25). They seem to have little in common. Why connect them?

Macpherson’s choice of words – Berlin is “so uncomfortably close to Herbert Spencer on this” – betrays a bias: being close to Spencer is inherently damaging (Macpherson 1973, 103). This bias against Spencer is interesting as such, but let us look at it just as an example of inconsistency. We start from Berlin’s thoughts about determinism, free will, and pluralism; then we look at two inconsistencies, one evident in how Spencer is seen by others, and another in how Spencer and the rest of the evolutionists see human beings and nature.

2.2.2 ON BERLIN, RATIONAL SELF-DIRECTION, AND PLURALISM

As noted above, at the root of Western philosophy is the belief that “one could direct one’s life, if necessary redirect it, through an understanding that was distinctively philosophical – that is to say, general, and abstract, rationally reflective, and concerned with what can be known through different kinds of inquiry” (Williams 2006, 1). In reality we appear to follow heuristics that “are highly economical and usually effective, but they lead to systematic and predictable errors” (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1131). Moreover, these logical errors survive education, experience, and training; they are committed by amateurs and experts alike – experts just tend to be more overconfident and thus more reluctant to admit their errors (Kahneman 2013, 124, 219, 224, 263). Alas, in modern societies the ‘rational’ experts tend to get in positions of power, where they can influence the lives of millions. Isaiah Berlin’s defence of liberty and pluralism offers a philosophical antidote to over-confident rationalism, and also suggests that certain institutions or patterns of behaviour are not realistic options for human societies (Williams 2006, 44).

Coincidentally, Beata Polanowska-Sygulska published the article ‘One More Voice on Berlin’s Doctrine of Liberty’ by the time the Berlin Wall fell down, signalling the end of one totalitarian experiment and with implications on political liberty (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 235–40). She contributes to the “long and complex discussion” inspired by Isaiah Berlin, who in “Two Concepts of Liberty” describes the tragic slide leading from positive liberty to totalitarian control:
Hidden deviants

[...] first, that all men have one true purpose, and one only, that of rational self-direction; that the ends of all rational beings must of necessity fit into a single universal harmonious pattern, which some men may be able to discern more clearly than others; third, that all conflict, and consequently all tragedy, is due solely to the clash of reason with the irrational or the insufficiently rational – the immature and underdeveloped elements in life, whether individual or communal – and that such clashes are, in principle, avoidable, and for wholly rational beings impossible; finally, that when all men have been made rational, they will obey the rational laws of their own natures, which are one and the same in them all, and so be at once wholly law-abiding and wholly free (Berlin 1969, 154).

Macpherson objects that the first belief, “that all men have one true purpose, and one only, that of rational self-direction,” does not logically entail the rest (Macpherson 1973, 111). Polanowska-Sygulska asked Berlin about this criticism, and Berlin rejected it on historical grounds, because “rational philosophers always believed it” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 141–3). It is important to note that Berlin did not reject Macpherson’s criticism on logical grounds. He did not object to the criticism that there is no logical connection. He simply referred to the historical connection. As noted above, he appeared to understand the strength of psychological connections which in real life override logical connections, like our frugal heuristics override our deliberation. In her article Polanowska-Sygulska focuses on what Macpherson calls “essential to the concept of positive liberty” (Macpherson 1973, 112).

[...] believing that if the chief impediments to men’s developmental powers were removed, if, that is to say, they were allowed equal freedom, there would emerge not a pattern but a proliferation of many ways and styles of life which could not be prescribed and which would not necessarily conflict (ibid, 111–2).

Polanowska-Sygulska points out that removing chief impediments requires an authority, which in the process of providing “equal conditions for self-realisation” also necessarily defines what these ‘equal conditions for self-realisation’ in practice are. When the authority defines both the scope and the content of freedom, this “is bound to produce a limited range of patterns (if not one), rather than a proliferation of many ways and styles of life” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 240). Macpherson focuses on democracy so keenly, that he has trouble distinguishing democracy from liberty. He claims that he is able to distinguish in Berlin’s text three different concepts of positive liberty: basic, Idealist and democratic. The basic means individual self-direction or self-mastery; the Idealist or metaphysical rationalist transformation of the basic means coercion by the fully rational or by those who say they know the truth, of all those who do not (yet) know it; the democratic means a share in the controlling authority (Macpherson 1973,
He claims that to realise the basic positive liberty we only need “the stipulation that the ways of life would not necessarily conflict,” not any preordained harmonious pattern (ibid, 112). Alas, his “society of non-conflicting but non-prescribed ends” means “the non-opposition of the use of essentially human capacities” (ibid, 74–5, 112). The ‘essentially human capacities’ have to be separated from the ‘non-essential’ ones by an authority, the existence of which necessarily turns the basic positive liberty into the Idealist one, and Macpherson’s positive liberty in “a fully democratic society” into a travesty of liberty (ibid, 74). This trap is not a novelty. On the contrary, John Stuart Mill’s describes it in the 19th century Continental liberalism.

The nation did not need to be protected against its own will. There was no fear of its tyrannising over itself. Let the rulers be effectually responsible to it, promptly removable by it, and it could afford to trust them with power of which it could itself dictate the use to be made. Their power was but the nation’s own power, concentrated, and in a form convenient for exercise. This mode of thought, or rather perhaps of feeling, was common among the last generation of European liberalism, in the Continental section of which it still apparently predominates. Those who admit any limit to what a government may do, except in the case of such governments as they think ought not exist, stand out as brilliant exceptions among the political thinkers of the Continent (Mill 1992, 6–7).

Macpherson himself recognises the trap but still holds on to his dream (Macpherson 1973, 105–7). Moreover, his utopia requires “the ending of scarcity and of class conflict,” a goal unattainable in every socialist experiment so far and likely to stay that way in Macpherson’s one (ibid, 112). Once again, Mill makes a credible point: “In many cases, an individual, in pursuing a legitimate object, necessarily and therefore legitimately causes pain or loss to others, or intercepts a good which they had a reasonable hope of obtaining” (ibid, 90). In other words, collisions of interest happen necessarily in a world of possibly incompatible wants, in a world of inescapable scarcity. Like in lottery, winners get paid by money collected from losers: “Whoever succeeds in an overcrowded profession, or in a competitive examination; whoever is preferred to another in any contest for an object which both desire, reaps benefit from the loss of others, from their wasted exertion and their disappointment” (ibid). In every human situation someone gets the upper hand – even in situations most of us do not see as competitive at all. Losing hurts, be it in sports, where everyone apparently competes to win, or in everyday life, where not everyone competes for the same rewards. Talking about ‘essentially human capacities’ does not make ‘the ending of scarcity’ any less improbable. Essential and inessential capacities are mutually indistinguishable. Human beings are apparently able to generate an endless variety of scarcities with very deep roots. There is empirical evidence that we have a fundamental desire for status independent from our culture, gender,
age, and personality (Anderson et al. 2015). We crave ‘positional goods’, the value of which depends not just on one’s absolute possession but also on one’s relative possession in the reference group, one’s ‘place in the pile’ (Frank & Knight 2010, 41; Nettle 2005, 38). None of us is immune to these desires, since even the very epitome of our rationality, science, is just another game of rewards (Kealey 2008, 307–11). We are thus positively obsessed to impress our chosen reference group; the groups and the relevant rewards vary but the rivalry stays. When all this striving is probably ‘costly signalling’, a display of one’s suitability as a sexual mate, the process is driven by such a fundamental evolutionary force that it seems futile to expect it to change (Miller 2008).

We are understandably hard-pressed to find the roots of our desires. Berlin and Macpherson accept only conscious purposes within rational self-direction. This leaves out most of our neural activity, a lot of which is very finely tuned and extremely effective, and quite probably directs our desires and choices (Cosmides & Tooby 2008, 53–119). This “cognitive unconscious” covers “the variety of mental processes and functions that take place largely independently of consciousness or awareness” (Reber & Reber 2001, 129). Since our conscious thought consists of short flashes lasting 2–15 seconds amidst a black sea of unconscious neural activity, using only our conscious activity would mean making do with quite a limited instrument (Donald 2002, 15). Still, this limited instrument has made it possible for some of us to acquire and accumulate previously unattainable knowledge about things like the elementary particles of our universe – and about the limited conscious activity of our neural system. The knowledge we have so far acquired of life on our planet and the consequences of that knowledge are described by Peter Singer:

When we reject belief in a god we must give up the idea that life on this planet has some preordained meaning. Life as a whole has no meaning. Life began, as best available theories tell us, in a chance combination of gases; it then evolved through random mutations and natural selection. All this just happened; it did not happen for any overall purpose. Now that it has resulted in the existence of beings who prefer some states of affairs to others, however, it may be possible for particular lives to be meaningful. In this sense atheists can find meaning in life (Singer 1982, 216–7).

When our ‘best available theories’ tell us that ‘life as a whole has no meaning’ the logical conclusion for us would be to end life; there is no apparent reason for anyone to care whether atheists or anyone else finds life meaningful. This same gap makes Kant’s attempt at deducting morality from ‘rational being as such’ so implausible: “Indeed, it is rather hard to explain why the reflective self, if it is conceived as uncommitted to all particular desires, should have a concern that any of them be satisfied” (Williams 2006, 69). One may claim “that the goal of life is life itself” (Berlin 1956, 25). Logically this would mean that even though you were paralysed with no way to communicate, no way to
move and no hope of ever recovering you would still see *staying alive* as your primary goal. This is improbable.

Instead of following logic, our rationality tends to focus on finding *incentives*, since “we are compulsive meaning-seekers” (Gat 2010, 182). There has to be something more interesting than just staying alive. There has to be something to pursue. Incentives can be many, almost any, since we are extremely innovative. It is not impossible that someone assigns meaning to the project of knocking down as many icicles as one can before they melt (Kraut 2009, 317). Moreover, if one can turn this project to something akin to professional sports, one can make a nice living doing what one would do anyway. After all, some people get paid handsomely for running and jumping, others for throwing, hitting or kicking balls or other objects, and still others for punching each other. One’s project of knocking down icicles just needs wide enough social approval. Alas, even a naturalist with relativist leanings is tempted to equip his moral theory with additional constraints on acceptable meanings and moralities.

A distinctive feature of my naturalistic account is that it generates significant constraints on what could count as an adequate morality, given its functions and given human nature. Consider the intrapersonal function of morality that has to do with shaping character and specification of worthwhile lives. [...] Commanding character ideals and conceptions of worthwhile lives center on interests that are deeply rooted in human nature such that they can be identified as what human beings really want, that have powerful motivational force in overriding other interests, and whose satisfaction or frustration widely ramifies throughout a person’s character and life (Wong 2009, 44-5).

Phrases like ‘adequate morality’, ‘worthwhile lives’, and ‘what human beings really want’ reveal the same contempt of men’s actual lives and actual wants as the ‘essentially human capacities’ – and the ambition to replace them with ideal lives and ideal wants. Fortunately, the real diversity of human rational and moral outlooks is endless, as Berlin presents in his *Russian Thinkers* (Berlin 1978a). No two outlooks are alike, and “no theories can possibly fit the immense variety of possible human behaviour, the vast multiplicity of minute, undiscoverable causes and effects which form that interplay of men and nature which history purports to record” (Berlin 1978b, 35). This actual diversity is concealed from us by the tendency of social scientists not to make the fine distinctions. As noted above, in social sciences we prefer broad definitions, lumps of apparently identical things – the aggregate level. To understand the serious limitations of focus on aggregate level, imagine detectives on a murder scene doing the same, saying, ‘Look, everyone’s got ten fingers. Who cares about fingerprints?’ But they do not think about human beings in general. They focus on identifying the one whose fingerprints are on the murder weapon. A human being trying to find a
meaning for her or his life is equally focused, since the alternative is death by despair. The world presented by Singer leads Jacques Monod to present the existentialist challenge, which shows one alone in the universe’s unfeeling immensity, out of which one emerged only by chance, and neither one’s destiny nor one’s duty is nowhere spelled out, but is for one to choose (Monod 1970, 180).

A scientist who defines our world as a network of complex adaptive systems may believe in “the human race evolving ways of living in greater harmony with itself and with the other organisms that share the planet Earth” (Gell-Mann 2002, 9). Despite many claiming the opposite, there is evidence about this (Pinker 2012, 228–455). Individual happiness and social harmony may in the language of game theory form part of an evolutionarily stable strategy (ESS), “which has the property that, if almost all members of the population adopt it, no alternative, mutant, strategy can invade” (Maynard Smith 1985, 446). Nevertheless, individual happiness and social harmony may not be necessary, not even very conducive to human evolutionary success, which may be the reason why they do not appear to be the sole or even the main ingredient of the balancing act of an ESS. It appears rather that constant dissatisfaction and rivalry, the useful deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind, are more defining ingredients (Nettle 2005; Smith 2002, 214).

Macpherson’s utopia of removing ‘the chief impediments to men’s developmental powers’ and the emergence of ‘a proliferation of many ways and styles of life’ is not only impossible, it is also unnecessary. The proliferation of many ways and styles of life is here already – it rules the world despite all sorts of impediments. As Berlin puts ‘life has no universal purpose, only individual purposes – happiness, justice, kindness, freedom, knowledge, beauty, art, love, self-expression, pleasure, amusement. All these are purposes; a general purpose of life does not exist” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2206, 109). Without general purpose there is no logical basis for conformity. There is neither logical reason for society to demand conformity nor logical reason for men to conform. Actually, in a humankind of prolific variety of individual moral and rational outlooks there is nothing to conform to. There is only endless bargaining, negotiating, and accommodating between competing and conflicting moral approaches – both intrapersonal and interpersonal.

Individual purposes are logically in the area of liberty in J. S. Mill’s sense, which “is principally concerned with the area of control” (Berlin 1969, 129). Given the small amount of our conscious neural activity compared to our total amount of neural activity, arguing about the actual freedom of our will seems futile. Nevertheless, human ultra-sociality means that we are in Adam Smith’s words ‘at all times in need of cooperation and assistance of great multitudes’. For cooperation to work, certain expected standard of behaviour has to be enforced, and unsurprisingly we have a psychological need of retaliation for breaking social rules (Walter 2009, 36, 305). One example of such ground rules are the minimal socially sanctioned demands of not being inflicted
physical injury and not being deceived, which P. F. Strawson sees as based on fundamental and general human interests (Strawson 2008, 40–2). We accept that human species now has certain psychological and social characteristics. This does not mean that we can necessarily justify our chosen rules, let alone the norms behind them. They are just the result of either hierarchy or democracy deciding common rules and regulations. Scientifically one can justify demystification of both morality and law, but politically one can oppose demystifying the ‘useful falsehoods’ in morality and law. There are just two different realms: one considers mostly intellectual arguments, the other mostly practical arguments (Walter 2009, 62, 66). For our present purposes it is enough to define liberty as absence of coercion, which is what political, individual, and economic freedom actually is (ibid, 38). Nevertheless, proliferation resists even the most totalitarian attempts to coerce men into conformity. The existence of dissenters even in systems specifically designed to exterminate dissenters, be the coercive system national socialist, soviet socialist or any other type, is an empirical proof that individual morality is a matter of personal preferences, not a social product – or that an individual can somehow transfer the responsibility for his actions to the society around him. Yet, this inalienable individual responsibility does not justify raising the personal price of dissenting into such for most of us unacceptable heights as have been seen through human history, be the coercive ideology political or religious. Our modern scientific knowledge can help us by suggesting that certain institutions or patterns of behaviour are unrealistic options for human societies, and by confirming Berlin’s advice for any individual burdened by such unrealistic institutions: “You’re perfectly entitled to cheat. You appear to conform when you don’t conform” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 195). The realistic institutions and patterns of behaviour will be discussed in 2.5.

2.2.3 ON SPENCER AND EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT

We started from Isaiah Berlin’s emphasis on an inescapable inconsistency – our not being actually free but still being able to live only by acting as if we were. Without claiming any way to escape all inconsistencies, let us look at two problematic ones. The first problem concerns the way “the evolution of the theory of evolution” is seen (Birx 1984, 4). Charles Darwin is praised, whereas Herbert Spencer is condemned for overextending the implications of Darwin’s principle, for grounding his sociology too directly in biology (ibid, 169, 173–5). The evolution of the theory of evolution seems to be limited to Darwin. He had his own limits: “Within the sweeping structure of his theory of evolution, Charles Darwin had not included the human animal” (ibid, 133). Whether this claim about Darwin is justified or not, Spencer acknowledged such limits, when he wrote that “during each stage of progress men must think in such terms of thought as they possess” (Spencer 1867, 116). Given Macpherson’s thought that being close to Spencer is damaging, perhaps Spencer possessed such terms of thought that they go beyond our stage of progress even today.
The second problem is, why we believe that “in organic evolution, survival is the exception and extinction is the rule” and that nature is “an ongoing theatre of birth, change, struggle, and death,” but nevertheless we see as a problem that the archipelago of Galapagos is “being exploited for personal gain and profit” (Birx 1984, 118, 120). If extinction is the rule, why is exploitation practised by one particular species deemed problematic? The reason appears to be no other than the inconsistency in the mind of a scientist who explicitly defines human species as part of nature, but still cannot help referring to human action as ‘artificial’ (ibid, 125–6).

These two problematic inconsistencies seem to be connected to each other. Spencer is still today suspect because he was too consistent in his evolutionary thought. Western evolutionary thought can be traced back to the Presocratics; the idea of evolution seems to rise into the human mind once mere opinions and traditional beliefs are rejected (Birx 1984, 9–11). Evolutionary speculation and scientific thought seem to go together (ibid, 42–3). Pluralistic evolutionary speculation started by the Presocratics was stopped by the Aristotelian static worldview, and turning away from the mechanistic questions to teleological questions led science up a blind alley for about 18 centuries, until it was challenged by the Renaissance – and the evolution theory reawakened by the Enlightenment (Popper 2002a, 1–2, 23; Russell 1996, 47, 73–4, 78–9, 157). No matter how ridiculous it sounds for outsiders, ‘priority’ is important for scientists. So important, that over a century after the fact someone did bother to suggest “that Hooker and Lyell had plotted together against Wallace in order to establish for their friend Darwin a clear victory as regards to the question of priority concerning the theory of evolution by means of natural selection” (Birx 1984, 130). Quite obviously, “the evolutionist perspective did not have its origin with the writings of Charles Darwin” (ibid, 42). Since one might get misled by all the publicity even today, it is not surprising that Spencer’s preface to the fourth edition of his First Principles in 1880 states that “there has been very generally uttered and accepted the belief that this work, and the works following it, originated after, and resulted from, the special doctrine contained in Mr. Darwin’s Origin of Species” and reminds that “as the first edition of The Origin of Species did not make its appearance till October, 1859, it is manifest that the theory set forth in this work and its successors, had an origin independent of, and prior to, that which is commonly assumed to have initiated it” (Spencer 1904, vii–viii).

It is uncontroversial that “Spencer was an evolutionist before Darwin. As early as 1850, in his Social Statics, he maintained that all social systems develop and change by natural process that results in a maximization of individual welfare” (Fusfeld 1994, 69). He “had adhered to the idea of evolution since 1852” (Birx 1984, 136). “In 1858, the year preceding that of the publication of Darwin’s The Origin of Species, Herbert Spencer mapped out a plan for a system which was to be based on the law of evolution or, as he expressed it, the law of progress” (Copleston 1966, 121). Spencer’s priority is beyond doubt. Nevertheless, Spencer is treated as a follower, and a bad one,
too. While “today, no competent person has any doubts about the truth of the mutability of species and human evolution” and “both anthropologists and sociologists have extended the evolutionary framework to incorporate cultural development”, Spencer is typically accused of “the mistaken overextension of the Darwinian concept of natural selection” (Birx, 145, 174). The rule seems to be that you can extend the evolutionary framework as far as you want – unless your name happens to be Herbert Spencer.

In fact, “Spencerianism [...] is separate from and ante-dates Darwinism” and “it would almost be just to refer to Darwinism as a more truly scientific biological Spencerianism” (Macrae 1969, 46). Despite all this, Darwin gets priority, because “following biological Darwinism came social Darwinism”, and he also gets appreciation, because “Darwin himself always restricted his explanatory principle of natural selection to the nonhuman biological realm” (Birx 1984, 141). Spencer’s convictions did not allow him to restrict his thought:

Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. Let him remember that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself, and that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency – is a unit of force constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give utterance to his innermost conviction: leaving it to produce what effect it may (Spencer 1867, 123).

Spencer was sowing his thoughts like Dawkinsian “memes” (Dawkins 1999a, 189–201). The grand old man of evolutionary biology Ernst Mayr writes in his “last survey of controversial concepts in biology” that “this word [meme] is nothing but an unnecessary synonym of the term ‘concept’” (Mayr 2004, ix, 153–4). His opinion had not stopped the new word from spreading and ending up in dictionaries (Dawkins 1999a, 322). We can only guess what would have happened, if Mayr had followed Macpherson’s example and insinuated that Dawkins is ‘so uncomfortably close to Herbert Spencer on this’. Is being close to Spencer still today enough to tarnish an idea to death?

Spencer was actually a rare British philosopher: he built a comprehensive philosophical system and acquired a world-wide reputation while still alive (Copleston 1966, 121). His “philosophy had a greater impact in the United States than in his own country”, mainly via William Sumner, who “became the most vigorous and influential of the Social Darwinists and taught that competition is the law of nature while the survival of the fittest is the law of civilization” (Fusfeld 1994, 69; Birx 1984, 176). Half a century of legislation, law, and folklore followed. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, Spencer’s thought was only “hangover from a bygone outlook” (Copleston 1966, 135). Richard Dawkins summed it up:
Hidden deviants

Social Darwinism flourished at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century with people like Herbert Spencer and John D. Rockefeller. [...] What I am saying, along with many other people, among them T. H. Huxley, is that in our political and social life we are entitled to throw out Darwinism, to say we don’t want to live in a Darwinian world. We may want to live in, say, a socialist world which is very un-Darwinian (Segerstråhle 2000, 375).

Dawkins, an articulate Darwinist, quite obviously rejects Spencer only on political, not on scientific grounds, even though he admits the problem caused by his own habit of mixing politics into science (Dawkins 1999a, 268). As noted above, this can mess up one’s scientific thought. Dawkins is not alone, though, when his dislike of the American Gilded Age leads to disapproving Spencer (Birx 1984, 181; Copleston 1966, 135; Fusfeld 1994, 75–7). In fact, by presenting socialism as an un-Darwinian system, he just commits the same “serious as well as common mistake” Joseph Schumpeter warns about, “to compare the reality of capitalism with an ideal picture of bureaucratic socialism” (Schumpeter 2004a, 207, emphasis in the original). For Dawkins it apparently was possible even in the 1990s to identify capitalism with the American Gilded Age, and yet with all the knowledge about the horrors of socialist dictatorships to distinguish socialism from Cuban Fidelism, Chinese Maoism, German National Socialism, and Russian Soviet Socialism – these actual socialist systems invariably designed to allow survival only for those deemed fit by the rulers. Moreover, Dawkins’ ideal socialism as an attempt to throw Darwinism out of social and political life totally misses the core of Spencer’s thought. Survival of the fittest just happens, be the sphere terrestrial or celestial (Birx 1984, 175).

Now, we propose in the first place to show, that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress. Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout (Spencer 1891b, 10).

We may claim that we throw out the law of the survival of the fittest by opposing for example the notorious policies of laissez-faire or eugenics. Socialism is a failure in the first. An example of a failure in the second may have happened, if Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner are right about the defence of a woman’s right to control her own body turning into state-controlled eugenics (Levitt & Dubner 2006, 3–4). Abortion was legalised in the United States in Roe v. Wade, a case of “a poor, uneducated, unskilled, alcoholic, drug-using twenty-one-year-old woman” wanting an abortion, and it triggered “a generation later, the greatest crime drop in recorded history”, because the children, who “if born, would have been much more likely than
average to become criminals”, were not born (ibid). “This powerful cause would have a drastic, distant effect: years later, just as these unborn children would have entered their criminal primes, the rate of crime began to plummet” (ibid, 4). If Levitt and Dubner are right, the implication is obvious. We have an example of Spencer’s claim that, like it or not, with all our efforts we can change only the conditions, not the law of the survival of the fittest – or more accurately, the law of the weeding out the least fit. On the other hand, maybe Levitt and Dubner are wrong, and Pinker is right, maybe “Leviathan got bigger, smarter, and more effective” or “the Civilizing Process, which the counterculture had tried to reverse in the 1960s, was restored to its forward direction” (Pinker 2012, 145). This has no effect on Spencer’s general argument that changing the rules of the game only changes the criteria of fitness, without altering the underlying law of the survival of the fittest.

2.2.4 COMPLEXITY AND INCONSISTENCY

If we follow Spencer’s above-mentioned thought in ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’, we come very close to what Murray Gell-Mann thinks:

> Complex adaptive systems include a human child learning his or her native language, a strain of bacteria becoming resistant to an antibiotic, the scientific community testing out new theories, an artist getting a creative idea, a society developing new customs or adopting a new set of superstitions, a computer programmed to evolve new strategies for winning at chess, and the human race evolving ways of living in greater harmony with itself and with the other organisms that share the planet Earth (Gell-Mann 2002, 9).

Spencer and Gell-Mann share the optimism about the direction of the complex adaptive systems, and yet Gell-Mann makes a point of rejecting social Darwinism (ibid, 366). It seems that Plato is not alone when he is ‘always concerned to advocate views that will make people what he thinks virtuous’, or when ‘he is hardly ever intellectually honest, because he allows himself to judge doctrines by their social consequences’, or when ‘he pretends to follow the argument and to be judging by purely theoretical standards, when in fact he is twisting the discussion so as to lead to a virtuous result’ (Russell 1996, 84). It is a pity, if political correctness makes us unable to see the core of Spencer’s thought, which is tantamount to what researchers do when they approach human brain as a system following avalanche dynamics. None of them claims that human brain is snow or that it ought to act like an avalanche. They simply compare theoretical models of avalanche dynamics with observations made of actual human brains, and if the patterns correlate, avalanche dynamics may be an appropriate description of actual brain activity (Poil et al. 2008; Kitzbichler et al. 2009). Distinguishing scientific models from ontological claims seems to be difficult. Equally difficult is practising logical consistency. Spencer was no exception:
Obviously, in this resolute attack ‘on the coming slavery’ Spencer could not appeal simply to the automatic working-out of any law of evolution. His words are clearly inspired by a passionate conviction in the value of liberty and initiative, a conviction which reflected the character and temperament of a man who had never at any period of his life been inclined to bow before constituted authority simply because it was authority (Copleston 1966, 134).

Spencer was not a consistent evolutionist. Had he been, he would not have hung to the old distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’. If we are part of nature, our manufactures are equally natural as volcanic activity and weather conditions. If we are part of nature, ‘artificially enforced’ is indistinguishable from ‘natural necessity’ (Spencer 1885a, 19). Ironically, Spencer’s popularity was in inverted ratio to his logical consistency. He “was in his day acceptable in that he was able to retain so many attitudes, values and precepts from his ancestral faith and yet reject in his agnosticism both the revelation and the theology of that faith” (Macrae 1969, 37). He was acceptable, because he committed the very sin he condemned in others; after rejecting all the rest of the ancient religion, he strenuously defended last remnants of it (Spencer 1891a, 7). On the other hand, he was unacceptable, because he did not commit this inconsistency often enough. He believed in “the open secret, that there can be no social phenomena but what, if we analyse them to the bottom, bring us down to the laws of life” (Spencer 1885c, 95). If society is not a ‘manufacture’ but a ‘growth’, it follows the laws of life, one of which is “the law that a creature not energetic enough to maintain itself must die” (Spencer 1885a, 19; 1885b, 74).

The beneficial results of the survival of the fittest, prove to be immeasurably greater than those above [quoted from Social Statics] indicated. The process of “natural selection,” as Mr Darwin called it, cooperating with a tendency to variation and to inheritance of variations, he has shown to be a chief cause [...] of that evolution through which all living things, beginning with the lowest and diverging and rediverging as they evolved, have reached their present degrees of organization and adaptation to their modes of life (Spencer 1885b, 68–9).

Quite obviously, then, interfering with these laws is tampering with nature – unless, of course, human beings are part of nature and whatever we do is as natural as wind and rain. A human society may decide to do all it can “to further survival of the unfittest” (ibid, 69). By Spencer’s own standards this will just change what is deemed fittest. If human beings and their societies are part of nature, whatever human beings and their societies do is natural. They are part of the environment, the surroundings, the circumstances in which the adaptation happens. The fittest in those particular circumstances will survive. If the circumstances partially created by us in our societies are unsustainable,
they will either change or perish – like they did in the European socialist
countries and appear to be doing, albeit slowly, in Cuba, and metamorphosing
into something new in China. Our present age of globalisation is an excellent
test of a variety of human societies. We have Anglo-Saxon liberal democracies,
European welfare-states, transition economies in former developing and
socialist countries, and developing countries in an emerging competition.
Time will tell which societies will be the most adaptive ones.

If we apply Spencer’s phrase about the survival of the fittest as a description
of everything that actually happens in the world, it is irrelevant and
meaningless, whether Spencerianism preceded Darwinism in the history of
science. If Darwin was on the whole more acceptable than Spencer, if he was
better adapted to the scientific and social environment by being more
palatable to his contemporaries and successors, he was duly given priority. He
deserved priority by being fitter. As a scientific model that focuses on the
actual world and its workings Spencerianism seems very applicable. A good
scientific model contains the relevant features of the reality so framed that they
enable description and possibly prediction of what is empirically observed. As
noted above, the human brain may not in fact follow avalanche dynamics, but
if avalanche dynamics is the best available description of the observed
phenomena and offers best possibilities for predicting future phenomena,
average dynamics deserves to be the model applied in brain research.

Nevertheless, science is a human endeavour, and the models applied are
chosen by the scientists, who, as noted above, are just human beings with all
sorts of non-scientific preferences. If they feel constant unease with a model,
be it because it appears ‘inhuman’ or ‘politically incorrect’ or for any other
reason, they will quite probably look for another model instead. Moreover,
what the general public thinks about the models applied in scientific research
may in the future be ever more relevant. Science has an ever-changing relation
with the general public, be it funded by private people, or business, or by
government.

Let us repeat our question: I know they say they are evolutionists, but have
you ever met one? In evolutionary theory survival is by definition the only
criterion of success. The point, amount, and nature of inconsistency is relevant
and to be evaluated only according to its effect on the survival of the individual
practising it. Spencer may have been inconsistent in his opposition to slavery
and defence of liberty, but he was probably aware of his inconsistency: “The
highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come
of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world – knowing that if he can
effect the change he aims at – well; if not – well also; though not so well”
(Spencer 1867, 123, emphasis in the original). He spread his ‘memes’ around
and believed that every action has several influences, many of them
unanticipated and unintended. Survival of the fittest may have little to do with
logical abilities and everything to do with finding an incentive to do anything
at all, with finding a reason to continue life – ‘that anything has value at all
and is motivating at all’ (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 48, emphasis in the
2.2.5 CONSTRUCTAL LAW – CONNECTING PHYSICS AND BIOLOGY

As noted above, Herbert Spencer is not a consistent evolutionist, since he distinguishes ‘natural’ from ‘artificial.’ Adrian Bejan’s constructal law eliminates this distinction, since “the broad evolutionary tendencies we observe in living creatures also shape inanimate phenomena that do not possess DNA subject to random mutation, such as rivers, global weather patterns, and everything else that moves” (Bejan & Zane 2013, 22). To understand Bejan’s thought, let us first look at different ways to build a comprehensive theory about life. Francois Jacob compares the world view of science and the world view of myth.

In the words of Peter Medawar, the scientific investigation begins by the “invention of a possible world or of a tiny fraction of that world”. So also begins mythical thought. But it stops there. Having constructed what it considers as the only possible world, it easily fits reality into its own scheme (Jacob 1977, 1161).

Jacob’s mythical thought seems to rule our world. We are prone to follow Kaplan’s ‘law of the instrument’, the unconscious belief that our expertise on one area is enough and qualifies as expertise on other areas as well. This tendency is described by the saying that one knows two things better than anyone else: one’s own job and the jobs of all the others.

The danger is that problems will be formulated to suit these means, rather than means adapted to the demands of the problem. I have called this inversion the law of the instrument: give a small boy a hammer and it will turn out that everything he runs into needs pounding […] A related inversion is the drunkard’s search: he hunts for his house key, not where it was dropped, but under the street lamp, because it’s lighter there […] (Kaplan 1984, 26–7).

We all tend to overreach and start “pushing and shoving things to fit into some fixed perimeter of specified shape” (Nozick 2006, xiii). Science is our best effort to avoid being ruled by individual biases and collective myths.

For scientific thought, instead, imagination is only a part of the game. At every step, it has to meet with experimentation and criticism. The best world is the one that exists and has proven to work already for a long time. Science attempts to confront the possible with the actual (Jacob 1977, 1161).
As noted above, the present study is a philosopher’s attempt at confronting the possible with the actual – at doing moral philosophy while keeping in touch with the real world. Confronting the real world comes with a price, though.

The price to be paid for this outlook, however, turned out to be high. It was, and is perhaps more than ever, renouncing a unified world view. This results from the very way science proceeds. Most other systems of explanation – mythic, magic, or religious – generally encompass everything. They apply to every domain. They answer any possible question. They account for the origin, the present, and the end of the universe. Science proceeds differently. It operates by detailed experimentation with nature and thus appears less ambitious, at least at first glance (ibid).

This less ambitious approach is not fascinating enough for everyone. According to Paul Rozin, “it seems that psychologists have wished to achieve the accomplishments of physics and biology without doing the patient groundwork that scientists in those fields did before the 20th century” (Rozin 2006, 369). A sign of this attitude is that “the empirical findings that were the foundation for the Watson-Crick model of DNA were what psychologists would call ‘just description’” (ibid, 370). Philosophers are not that different; as noted above, 20th century philosophy started with rejecting naturalism when ‘Frege, Moore, and other like-minded thinkers inaugurated a period in which logic and language were the dominant philosophical subjects and confusing conceptual with factual issues was the greatest philosophical sin’, and ‘in ethics, naturalism remains under suspicion’ (Rachels 2001, 74). Alas, for science patient groundwork is necessary.

It does not aim at reaching at once a complete and definitive explanation of the whole universe, its beginning, and its present form. Instead, it looks for partial and provisional answers about those phenomena that can be isolated and well defined. Actually, the beginning of modern science can be dated from the time when such general questions as, “How was the universe created? What is matter made of? What is the essence of life?” were replaced by such limited questions as “How does a stone fall? How does water flow in a tube? How does blood circulate in vessels?” This substitution had an amazing result. While asking general questions led to limited answers, asking limited questions turned out to provide more and more general answers (Jacob 1977, 1161–2).

Bejan’s constructal law is a prime example of asking questions about water flowing in a tube and blood circulating in vessels and ending up providing more and more general answers. This transition from concrete questions to general answers is not automatic, though, as Bejan explains.
Because scientists have focused on ever-smaller questions, and ever-smaller dimensions, most have failed to see the big picture. This has prevented even those who are aware of the overarching tendencies of design in nature from taking the imaginative leap to see that the broad evolutionary tendencies we observe in living creatures also shape inanimate phenomena that do not possess DNA subject to random mutation, such as rivers, global weather patterns, and everything else that moves (Bejan & Zane 2013, 22).

Bejan is experienced in focusing on small scale, like solving theoretical problems “to cool a solid block of circuits so small that it had no space for coolant coils or air” (ibid, 58–9). Sometimes a different background turns out to be an advantage.

One reason that I was able to discover the constructal law is that I was not immersed in the language and history of Darwinism. My field is thermodynamics, and it is from here that my language and insights developed. Through it I identified the principle that generates design in nature (ibid, 36).

The title of the book Design in Nature: How the costructal law governs evolution in biology, physics, technology, and social organization by Bejan and J. Peder Zane tells about the scope of the law, which is presented as a scientific first principle, comparable to Galileo’s principle of gravitational fall and the laws of thermodynamics (ibid, 14, 40–53, 55). When using the word ‘design’ one has to be careful. Bejan is.

To preempt any confusion, let me make this perfectly clear: The constructal law is not headed toward a creationist argument, and in no way does it support the claims of those who promulgate the fantasy of intelligent design. Anyone who takes excerpts from this book to suggest that I am arguing for a spiritual sense of “designedness” is engaging in an intentional act of dishonesty (Bejan & Zane 2013, 14).

Bejan is not content with demarcation, though. He wants to regain ‘design’ for impersonal use, and detach it from ‘designer’. In this sense ‘design’ is used quite like ‘structure’.

The verb “to design” has been monumentally unproductive in our quest to understand design in nature for three main reasons. First, it has led to the common view that the things humans design are “artificial”, in contrast to the “natural” designs that surround us. This is wrong, because we are part of nature and our designs are governed by the same principle as everything else, the constructal law. Second, it has led some of us to search for “the designer” – God, or an individual, who must be behind every design. Science is not and never was the search for “the designer.” The name for that much older search is religion. Finally, it has led other, more scientifically minded people to reject the
idea of design in nature as part of a broader repudiation of the traditional idea of a designer (Bejan & Zane 2013, 56).

As noted above, even an evolutionist as ardent as Spencer tends to call our manufactures ‘artificial’ in contrast to the ‘natural’. This may be an equally resilient habit as referring to ‘moral’ reasons. Bejan does his best to get rid of the distinction between ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ (ibid, 56, 66, 94, 115, 238, 256–7).

This fundamental division between physics and biology is false. It does not result from a broad view of how the world works but from an ancient adage: Your answers are only as good as the assumptions underlying your questions. Darwin and his followers heroically helped remove God from the scientific equation. And, to the discomfort of many, they took human beings down a peg or two when it comes to our place in the cosmos. But they couldn’t completely break from the past, couldn’t see beyond the idea that biological life is special (ibid, 21).

As noted above, one of those followers of Darwin who ‘took human beings down a peg or two when it comes to our place in the cosmos’ but ‘couldn’t completely break from the past’ is Richard Dawkins with his refreshing gene’s-eye view on evolution but strange fascination with socialism. Bejan wants to offer a physical basis to the evolution of both animate and inanimate processes. As noted above, Western evolutionary thought has long roots, which can be traced back to the Presocratics.

Evolution has long been in search of a principle. A concept as old as science itself – Aristotle, for example, suggested that nature was ruled by a desire to move from lower to higher forms – “evolution” has been invoked through the millennia to describe change over time. Nowadays, this single word encapsulates Darwin’s work about biological life and the subsequent research that has refined and elaborated his insights. It is also employed much more loosely to describe the development of just about everything (ibid, 199).

Bejan presents his law as also ‘a way of seeing’ in three steps: First, “even things that seem to just sit there are, in fact, flow systems,” second, “all flow systems have the tendency to endow themselves with a characteristic that was not recognized until the constructal law – design,” third, “flow systems configure and reconfigure themselves over time [...] in one direction: Flow systems get measurably better, moving more easily and farther if possible” (ibid, 7–9). The important point is “if possible”, which means “given freedom” (ibid, 16). Flow systems work within constraints, and “each particular flow is unique” (ibid, 47).
It [constructal law] claims no more and no less than this: Everything that moves is a flow system that evolves over time; design generation and evolution are universal phenomena. The changes we witness in animals, plants, rivers, and steaming pots of rice represent a clear improvement over the configuration that had been flowing before. This is the direction of evolution, creating flows that move more easily, better, farther, etc. The design we see in nature – the shape and structure of rivers, animals, cities, etc. – is a manifestation of this tendency in nature to generate shape and structure to facilitate flow access (ibid, 31).

Bejan presents applications of constructal law to flying, running, and swimming, to structure of trees and forests, to airport construction, and to the structure of academia – the results of painstaking detailed experimentation (ibid, 79, 85, 89, 90, 144, 187, 199). Besides this, reflection and speculation are important in producing theory, which is familiar to philosophers (ibid, 234–5). For those of us who try to build as unified a world view as possible without conflicting established scientific results, the constructal law offers a physical principle, which is independent from our intentions, but nevertheless gives evolution a direction. Moreover, understanding world as a hierarchy of flow systems within flow systems reminds us of Heraclitus’ reassuringly familiar flux (ibid, 143, 148–74; Copleston 1985, 39). Moreover, “the constructal law also teaches us that evolution can be observed at all timescales, including during our own lifetime” (Bejan & Zane 2013, 11). The fact that “humans were hunter-gatherers during most of the time in which our species evolved” has led some people to claim that human biology is not evolving anymore, but this claim is in conflict with research findings and makes it necessary to remind that “our modern skulls do not house stone-age minds” anymore (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008, 209; Byars et al. 2010; Stearns et al. 2010; Stearns et al. 2012; Zuk 2014; Haidt & Kesebir 2010, 817). It is interesting that even evolution can be turned into an argument of human exceptionalism. We appear to have serious problems coming to terms with the fact that we are not exempt from the evolutionary flow. Taking ‘human beings down a peg or two when it comes to our place in the cosmos’ is obviously just a good start.

To sum up, Herbert Spencer exemplifies the challenges of consistent evolutionism, both internal and external, since despite his efforts he is not a consistent evolutionist. Finding a consistent evolutionist is actually hard, since we all appear to have our own inconsistencies. This is evident in Lakoff and Johnson’s use of ‘intrinsic value’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 533). After all their argument and evidence for values as mind-dependent and as products of human neural circuitry, they discuss education, and seem to forget all their evidence. Education is understandably dear to these two professors, and thus has internal value for them, but they go beyond evidence and claim that it has intrinsic value. If it had ‘intrinsic value’ it would be valuable as such, independent from its content and consequences, be it religious dogma, racist hate, exclusive snobbery, or anything else. I doubt that Lakoff and Johnson
really mean that. They just use ‘intrinsic value’ like Moore uses ‘naturalistic fallacy’ as a conversation-stopper that allows no further questions. We can only hope that the constructal law can help us overcome the distinction between biology and physics and become more consistent evolutionists.

2.3 ON EXAMINED VS UNEXAMINED LIFE

In philosophy good life, or human flourishing tends to be dependent on examining one’s life, or on contemplation, either as one criterion among many, or even as the sole criterion (Sterba 2005, 29). Unsurprisingly, traditional philosophy is still inspired by Plato’s Socrates pushing this thought on his fellow-citizens by quizzing them on the nature and justification of their lives. However, the present study of morality is increasingly an interdisciplinary endeavour, and the traditional philosophical picture of morality appears to be psychologically highly unrealistic, at odds with a substantial body of scientific research (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 33, 51). As noted above, our well-being quite probably rests on our wants and inhibitions, not on our obligations and prohibitions – even though philosophers keep emphasising moral obligations, prohibitions and judgments (Joyce 2006, 50). To understand the problems of the traditional philosophical approach we should try to see the philosophical tradition of contemplation, examination, and obligation through non-philosophers’ eyes – the point of view of the majority of human beings.

In his introduction to Ten Great Works of Philosophy, a collection of important contributions to the evolution of philosophy from ancient Greece to our time, Robert Paul Wolff draws our attention to what philosophy is about: “Man is a speculative being. […] Man is also a reflective being. […] From these two impulses, speculation and reflection, there has developed in our civilization an extensive tradition of precise, systematic, sophisticated thought which is called philosophy,” and in twenty-five centuries since Socrates, although externally our world has changed almost beyond recognition, internally “men are still speculative, still reflective” (Wolff 2002, vii–viii, emphasis in the original).

Because of this continuity in man’s nature over more than two millennia, philosophy has never forgotten its past. [...] we find speculative and reflective insight in the Dialogues of Plato, the treatises of Aristotle, and all the great philosophical works which have since made their appearance in western civilization (ibid, viii).

Speculation and reflection are quite obviously part of human nature; philosophers are a living proof of that. Still, it may not be part of every human being’s nature either to speculate and reflect like we do or speculate and reflect at all. Maybe what we see as essential, belonging necessarily to every human being, is only an idiosyncrasy of ours, of a minority. Maybe philosophy is not at all necessary for living a full, happy, contented and moral human life – it
may even be harmful. Roger Scruton presents a criticism every bit as harsh as the above-mentioned Bertrand Russell’s view.

But philosophers, like other human beings, have a tendency to represent their own way of life as the best way – perhaps as the sole way to redemption. Freeing themselves from one set of illusions, they fall prey to others, every bit as self-interested, and with the added advantage of ennobling the person who promotes them. They extol the ‘dispassionate’ and ‘contemplating’ life, since it is the life that they have chosen. They tell us, like Plato, that this life leads to a vision of higher world, or like Spinoza, that it shows our world in another light, ‘under the aspect of eternity’. They reproach us for our sensuous ways, and gently remind us, in the words of Socrates, that ‘the unexamined life is not a life for a human being’. It is tempting to agree with Nietzsche, that the philosopher is not interested in truth, but only in my truth, and that the thing which masquerades as truth for him, is no more than the residue of his own emotions.

The judgment is not fair: none of Nietzsche’s are. But it has a point (Scruton 2000, 13–4).

Wolff has a more positive view on the traditional philosophical approach. He states that one of Plato’s texts, Socrates’ speech “preserved in the Dialogue called Apology, remains to this day the finest justification ever voiced of the philosophical life” (Wolff 2002, 2). Let us see what Plato’s Socrates says.

Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul? (Apology 29d–e).

From Socrates’ own words, delivered in court, emerges a picture of him going about practicing philosophy – by insulting his neighbours. Still, we are taught to admire his bold speech before the court that later sentenced him to death. He apparently expected the Athenians to listen to his insults and start living according to his advice, even though he seemed to give them no reason to, showed them no advantage to be gained from that transition, and aroused no interest of theirs to do so. As noted above, according to Bernard Williams ‘Socrates’ question is the best place for moral philosophy to start’ and that excellent question is: ‘How should one live?’ (Williams 2006, 4). The Athenians obviously disagreed. Socrates appeared weird “to his
contemporaries as he walked through the public squares of Athens, quizzing his fellow-citizens on the nature and justification of their lives” (Wolff 2002, 1).

*Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things. I shall treat in this way anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger, and more so the citizens because you are more kindred to me (Apology 29e–30a).*

Suppose you are busy working, trying to make a living, minding your own business, wondering how to pay the mortgage for your house because the municipality and state have just issued tax raises to get by in the economic downturn. Then along comes someone who interrupts your work and demands you to start speculating and reflecting your life’s choices, on the nature and justification of your life. You kindly ask him to leave. Does he do that? No, he replies: “It is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men” (ibid, 38a).

Of course, you could quit working, ignore your customers, neglect your business, and start speculating and reflecting your life, since ‘the unexamined life is not worth living for men’. More probably, though, you grab the gadfly by the neck and escort him to continue his philosophical life elsewhere – the Athenians did. Socrates’ version of ‘the philosophical life’ took him to the court. He tried to explain the reasons for his reputation that had brought him there: “What has caused my reputation is none other than a certain kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom? Human wisdom, perhaps. [...] I shall call upon the god at Delphi as witness to the existence and nature of my wisdom, if it be such” (ibid, 20d–e). Socrates appears humble. After all, it was not he himself but the god at Delphi who claimed he was wise. He had asked himself: “Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so” (ibid, 21b). If someone calls you the wisest man in town, the sensible choice is to ignore such a claim and concentrate on something useful. Not so with Socrates. He had to show he was even wiser than the god at Delphi by refuting the oracle. “For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: “This man is wiser than I, but you said I was”’ (ibid, 21b–c). Socrates appears to be the source of the sure recipe for popularity: I once thought I was wrong – but then I realised I was mistaken. He went on his mission. “Then, when I examined
Hidden deviants

this man – there is no need for me to tell his name, he was one of our public men – my experience was something like: I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not” (ibid, 21c–d). There was probably no need to tell the court the name of the man in a town the size of ancient Athens. Everybody knew anyway.

*I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me, and so did many of the bystanders. [...] After this I approached another man, one of those thought to be wiser than he, and I thought the same thing, and so I came to be disliked both by him and by many others* (ibid, 21d–e).

After having shown all the politicians to be stupid, Socrates continued his mission by showing both poets and craftsmen to be stupid, too (ibid, 22a–e). To no one’s surprise, “as a result of this investigation” he “acquired much unpopularity” (ibid, 23a). Still, there are always those who enjoy seeing others humiliated, be the battering physical or mental. “Why then do some people enjoy spending considerable time in my company? You have heard why, men of Athens; I have told you the whole truth. They enjoy hearing those being questioned who think they are wise, but are not. And this is not unpleasant” (ibid, 33c). How did Socrates justify his not unpleasant philosophical life which amounted to publicly humiliating his neighbours? He claimed that he was “a better man” and “god’s gift” to Athens, indeed, “a good man” (ibid, 30d–e, 41d). Surely, we must allow such a good man to insult others at will, since it is obvious that the others are ‘not living in the right way’ and their ‘unexamined life is not worth living for men’ (ibid, 39d, 38a). Alas, Socrates’ contemporaries in Athens saw his behaviour as inexcusably rude.

There may be matters more important than the daily livelihood, matters worth serious examination, matters every man should think. “The keynote of Socrates’ faith is the belief that the unexamined life is not worth living. [...] Can I respect myself – can I ask others to respect me – if I do not continually reflect upon the principles which guide my life” (Wolff 2002, 2). Suppose you are busy helping your neighbour trying to save his family from a burning house and making your best to stop the fire from spreading and burning up the whole neighbourhood. Then along comes someone who, instead of asking how he could be of help in what you are engaged in, demands you to start speculating and reflecting your life’s choices, on the nature and justification of your life. You kindly ask him to help or hit the road but he insists that you speculate and reflect with him, since, so he says, the unexamined life, the unreflective life, is not worth living. What will you do? Of course, you could simply stop bothering yourself with saving the neighbour’s family and start to speculate and reflect your life. More probably, though, you grab the gadfly by the neck and haul him away to allow you to concentrate on what you deem truly urgent. Principles guiding one’s life may be pondered when there is ample time. According to Aristotle “speculation of this kind began with a view to recreation and pastime,
at a time when practically all the necessities of life were already supplied” (Metaphysics 982b 19–24). This is exactly what Rene Descartes did.

[...] I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences. [...] To-day, then, since I have opportunely freed my mind from all cares [and am happily disturbed by no passions], and since I am in the secure possession of leisure in a peaceable retirement, I will at length apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions (Descartes 1974, 112).

What did Descartes’ speculation and reflection amount to? “In the two hundred years which followed his dramatic challenge, many philosophers were to question Descartes’ easy acceptance of the old truths” (Wolff 2002, 119). In other words, after serious speculation and reflection Descartes ended up accepting what he had already believed before. This is no surprise, since Descartes departed from his original beliefs in favour of quite an implausible assumption.

I will suppose, then, not that Deity, who is sovereignly good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity [...] (Descartes 1974, 116–7).

This assumption reminds us of the “experience machine” from Robert Nozick’s Anarchy, State and Utopia and the “virtual vacations” in the science fiction movie Total Recall – with one important difference; in both cases the person entering the virtual reality makes a conscious choice (Nozick 2006, 42–5). Descartes supposed the choice was made by a ‘malignant demon’; for the person living in the virtual reality it is the only reality. This assumption was given a magnificent visual presentation in another science fiction movie, The Matrix, where human beings were grown in tubes and fooled with powerful illusions that were fed straight into their nervous system.

Fans of The Matrix will realize that in the movie, the machines correspond to Descartes’s “evil genius.” Therefore, Descartes’s question is our own. How do we know that The Matrix is not based on reality – that we are not really asleep in a simulated world run by machines, just as in the movie? (Zynda 2003, 46).

When asking this, we can go even further, like in yet another science fiction movie, The Thirteenth Floor, where the lead character finds out he himself
does exist only in virtual reality. There is no human being to be fooled, just program code in a computer – *I think, nevertheless, I am not*. All this imaginative fiction makes popular entertainment, but does spending time pondering these extremely complicated and implausible alternative explanations for our experiences have any value in our everyday life? Why did Descartes make his incredulous assumption?

*And in truth, as I have no ground for believing that Deity is deceitful, and as, indeed, I have not even considered the reasons by which the existence of a Deity of any kind is established, the ground of doubt that rests only on this supposition is very slight, and, so to speak, metaphysical* (*Descartes 1974, 130*).

Descartes made the strong assumption to justify doubt for which he could find no ground in human experience. We can doubt any statement, only we cannot doubt all of them at once. We cannot persist in doubt of all of our senses and our natural way of making sense of our surroundings; skepticism just does not agree with human psychology (*Ruse 2008, 36*). The plausible is simply what is plausible to us, what we are prone to accept. The only way to justify doubt of the plausible is to suppose someone very powerful is deceiving us. It is not a reasonable supposition. It is the only one making skepticism plausible, though, and it is a hard one to hold.

*But this undertaking is arduous, and a certain indolence insensibly leads me back to my ordinary course of life [... so I, of my own accord, fall back into the train of my former beliefs, and fear to arouse myself from my slumber, lest the time of laborious wakefulness that would succeed this quiet rest, in place of bringing any light of day, should prove inadequate to dispel the darkness that will arise from the difficulties that have now been raised* (*Descartes 1974, 117*).

Quite probably most people see Descartes’ arduous enterprise that eventually led him to believe what he had believed before as a prime example of waste of time and ample proof that such examination is futile. A philosopher thinks differently. He is like a man who lives in a house and every once in a while goes outside to try and shake the foundations of the house just to see that they still stand solidly – he speculates and reflects because he cannot help speculating and reflecting; meanwhile his neighbour, a non-philosopher, lives happily in her house, because it has so far shown no sign of collapsing. The neighbours, the philosopher and the non-philosopher, may outwardly lead quite similar lives; they may believe in similar things, value similar things, and choose similar things. The only difference may be that the philosopher has ended up in this way of life after spending considerable amount of time and energy speculating and reflecting on possible but very laborious, complicated, and implausible alternatives for this chosen life – speculating and reflecting things that the non-philosopher simply accepts as given. We can undoubtedly
follow the tradition of despising the non-philosopher on account of her unexamined life and respecting the philosopher, a better human being, on account of his carefully examined life. We can also define morality as the tendency to make moral judgments, tying together morality and language, since as far as we know, moral judgments and moral language are unique to human species (Joyce 2006, 82–4, 93–4, 134). We can thus choose to despise the non-philosopher who helps her neighbour out of prosocial emotions of love, sympathy, or altruism, which are not unique to human species, and respect the philosopher, who helps his neighbour only after examining the situation and making a moral judgment, which is unique to human species. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to see well-being as the central point of the morality, even though it is unreasonable to define lives worth living; this definition is best left to the individual whose well-being is in question (Williams 2006, 34). As noted above, well-being is the domain of our caring organization, which is not unique to human species. On the contrary, this is common to all the surviving species, because it is vital for their survival. The importance of the caring organization is acknowledged by the scientific research on human morality. If we in moral philosophy choose to ignore this interdisciplinary approach and emphasise the supremacy of moral judgments, it may be difficult for us to sell this approach to scientifically civilized non-philosophers – just like it was difficult for Socrates to sell his idea of the supremacy of examined life to his fellow Athenians. Of course, we may think this is quite appropriate, since philosophy is not for the uneducated. After all, there is a strong trait of exclusivity running through the history of philosophy. 

“We should not then think so much of what the majority will say about us, but what he will say who understands justice and injustice” (Crito 48a). Obviously, this claim is based on the suspect belief that there is a select minority who understand justice and injustice – and that there are unequivocal ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ to be understood in the first place. Accordingly, Descartes expected only few to understand his writings: “[...] I would advise none to read this work, unless such as are able and willing to meditate with me in earnest, to detach their minds from commerce with the senses, and likewise to deliver themselves from all prejudice; and individuals of this character are, I well know, remarkably rare” (Descartes 1974, 106).

By assuming that examined life is somehow better than an unexamined one, that philosophy is necessary for a good life, an error is committed similar to the one Socrates accused his neighbours of: “The good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets; each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of them overshadowed the wisdom they had” (Apology, 22e). Plato’s Socrates seems to run – quite literally – to a dead end. The tendency he notices in others but not in his own behaviour causes his unpopularity, and ultimately his death. Nietzsche’s judgment above is, after all, not unfair – a philosopher is not necessarily an exception to Kaplan’s ‘law of the instrument’. Neither is an examined life necessarily superior to an unexamined one. While developing
one’s expert intuition one should also develop an intuition of the limits of one’s expert intuition (Kahneman 2013, 11). This is a matter of respecting other people’s intelligence, expertise, and point of view. This is closely connected to reciprocity, which is expressed in the Golden rule – do unto others as you would have them to do unto you – a rule that “is easily one of the most familiar and morally inspiring precepts of western culture” (Thomas 2001, 153). However, Immanuel Kant disagrees; he considers the familiar and inspiring Golden Rule as trivial, and wants to replace it with his Categorical Imperative, a much superior principle (Kant 2000, 38; Feldman 1978, 105). Why does Kant not accept Golden Rule?

It can be no universal law because it contains the ground neither of duties to oneself nor no duties of love to others (for many a man would gladly agree that others should not benefit him if only he might be excused from showing them beneficence), and finally it does not contain the ground of duties owed to others; for a criminal would argue on this ground against the judge punishing him, and so forth (Kant 2000, 38).

Kant seems to be looking for a moral principle capable of being enforced as a law. For this use Golden Rule as an expression of simple reciprocity is obviously unsuitable. Law is impersonal; the Golden Rule is up close and very personal. It is a principle for any human being who asks how to treat others; it is a principle for any human being honestly asking how to act. It may be possible to formulate a moral principle every person feels obliged to accept but so far such a principle has not appeared despite thousands of years of human thought. Unsurprisingly, the Golden Rule in various forms appears to be one of the most widely spread moral principles (Miller 2003, 198; Flanagan et al. 2008a, 16). For those who honestly ask how to act, the Golden Rule suffices – or does it? “Can I call myself fully human if I go from day to day blindly, sheeplike, failing to subject my life and my acts to rigorous critical examination? Socrates answers no, [...] he was prepared to die for his belief” (Wolff 2002, 2). Going ‘from day to day blindly, sheeplike’ sounds quite bad. Still, what is the use of following Descartes’ route: subjecting one’s life and acts to rigorous critical examination – and ending up accepting the same beliefs all over again? If, on the other hand, anyone could invariably, in every human encounter, simply and honestly ask herself or himself, how he or she would like to be treated and then act accordingly towards the other person involved, what examination would be necessary? In fact, most people in a civilized society unconsciously apply this rule most of the time by following their prosocial emotions and their propensity to truck, barter, and exchange – we get along quite well, even though we have widely different aspirations and objectives.

As noted above, Socrates was a dissenter and a social critic who accused his neighbours of their ‘eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and
honors as possible’. Adam Smith shared Socrates’ view of the futility of accumulating excessive wealth:

*How many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility? [...] some of which may sometimes be of some little use, but all of which might at all times be very well spared, and of which the whole utility is certainly not worth the fatigue of bearing the burden (Smith 2002, 211).*

With equal clarity Smith expresses his view of the futility of excessive ambition. As noted above, our ‘place in the pile’ is of utmost interest to us. Curiously this ambitious chase of wealth in its futility closely resembles Descartes’ pursuit of knowledge.

*The poor man’s son, whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition, when he begins to look around him, admires the condition of the rich. [...] He thinks if he had attained all these, he would sit still contentedly, and be quiet, enjoying himself in the thought of the happiness and tranquillity of his situation. [...] It appears in his fancy like the life of some superior rank of beings, and, in order to arrive at it, he devotes himself for ever to the pursuit of wealth and greatness. [...] Through the whole of his life he pursues the idea of a certain artificial and elegant repose which he may never arrive at, for which he sacrifices a real tranquillity that is at all times in his power, and which, if in the extremity of old age he should at last attain to it, he will find to be in no respect preferable to that humble security and contentment which he had abandoned for it (ibid, 211–2).*

We may seriously doubt whether ‘real tranquillity’ was readily available to the poor man’s son in the 18th century England, but this question is beyond the scope of this study. The point here is, that even though Smith does in a way follow Socrates’ view on wealth and ambition, he does not follow his example of wandering around insulting his neighbours by showing their stupidity and judging their ambitions or choices. Besides sharing Socrates’ view of the private futility of excessive ambition and accumulation of wealth, Smith also sees the public utility of these phenomena in the Mandevillean spirit:

*It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build the houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invest and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life [...] (ibid, 214–5).*

Adam Smith was well versed in the classics of philosophy; he had a “formidable grounding in the classics,” which was “not at all exceptional for the period and environment in which he moved,” and “in all his writings, without exception, one can recognize the lasting impression made by this early
classical education, even if filtered through the stimulating cultural experiences which abounded in the age and the milieu in which he lived” (Vivenza 2001, 1). Smith follows the classical, philosophical tradition of speculation and reflection to understand the reality as we perceive it. “According to Smith, the most desirable element in a philosophical system is the ability to provide an explanation that reduces to a small number of simple ‘principles’ the various discordant aspects of reality” (ibid, 10). Despite his own values and choices Smith seems to be immune to the Socratic frenzy of pushing philosophical speculation and reflection and its results on everyone. Perhaps his appreciation of division of labour makes it possible for him to avoid seeing his own idiosyncrasies as something universal to be forced on other people. To build his system Smith went to his birthplace, the small fishing village of Kirkcaldy in Scotland, where he almost apologetically wrote in a letter to David Hume on 7 June 1767:

*My Business here is Study in which I have been very deeply engaged for about a Month past. My Amusements are long, solitary walks by the Sea side. You may judge how I spend my time. I feel myself, however, extremely happy, comfortable and contented. I never was, perhaps, more so in all my life (Smith 1987, 125).*

Smith follows the aforementioned Aristotelian principle of seeing philosophy, not as a necessity but as a luxury of life, the same principle that was followed by Descartes when he undertook once in his life to rid himself of all the opinions he had adopted, since he was “in the secure possession of leisure in a peaceable retirement” (Descartes 2002, 112). Smith uses his ‘extremely happy, comfortable, and contented’ time in Kirkcaldy to write a book that changes the way the social reality is perceived. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* has been studied by scientists, philosophers and sociologists ever since (Griswold 1999, 7–8).

To sum up, the Socratic approach of wandering around rebuking and insulting one’s neighbours is neither the only nor the best way to live a philosophical life. Adam Smith’s example shows us that it is possible to live a philosophical life without submitting to ‘the law of the instrument’ – one just has to respect human diversity and other people’s interests.

### 2.4 BEWARE OF THE LABORATORY

Since this is a philosophical study, we have spent a lot of time looking at the dangers of the philosophers’ traditional armchairs. I have argued for taking moral psychology seriously, but on this chapter (2.4) I shall argue that we have to be careful with the claims of psychologists, too. We are well advised to stay off the laboratories, which are equally prone to missing the endless individual variation. In laboratories human beings tend to be treated on aggregate level only. Moreover, the research subjects tend to represent a peculiar minority
while the claims about human nature tend to be unduly universal. Equally problematic is playing games and manipulating models, and then drawing conclusions about real world. Alas, philosophy may have contributed in the creation of these problems. Let us start with the debate on the lack of internationalism in psychology. The problem is obvious.

This article proposes that psychological research published in APA [American Psychological Association] journals focuses too narrowly on Americans, who comprise less than 5% of the world’s population. The result is an understanding of psychology that is incomplete and does not adequately represent humanity (Arnett 2008, 602).

What is even more revealing, is that the very researchers who in this debate lament the obvious problem that “the available database does not reflect the full breadth of human diversity” fail to see the underlying problem in their own choice to “avoid the vast psychopathology literature [...] because this work focuses on individual-level (and unusual) variations in psychological functioning” (Henrich et al. 2010, 2–3, emphasis added). By their own choices they make sure that the database has no chance of reflecting the full breadth of human diversity, which is only revealed by focusing on individual-level variation. Moreover, they claim that “one could make an argument that as long as one’s samples were drawn from near the centre of the human distribution, then it would not be overly problematic to generalize across the distribution more broadly – at least the inferred pattern would be in the vicinity of the central tendency of our species” (ibid, 4). If these “universal features of psychology” are looked for ‘in the vicinity of the central tendency of our species’ the findings will quite probably please a lot of men (ibid, 3–4). Even an exceptional person who “likes to be rebellious and shock people” – and whose life success stems from his very exceptionality – can learn that it is “the centre, where the people are” in politics (Schwarzenegger 2012, 404, 556). Yet, politically popular does not qualify as universal – not even in politics, let alone in science. What kind of people can commit such obvious logical blunders that they mistake the average for the universal? They are WEIRD people, i.e. Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic people (Henrich et al. 2010; Haidt 2013, 111–30). Haidt refers to them as ‘liberals’, which in this case represents the American political use of the term; it does not refer to John Stuart Mill, the British classical liberals, and the American libertarians who see individual liberty as something to be protected from government interference; it rather refers to European Continental and American liberals, who consider freedom as something to be arranged by government action (Haidt 2013, 350; Mill 1992, 6–7; Friedman 2002a, 5–6). These American liberals resemble European social democrats.

It is impossible to avoid the impression that WEIRD people believe themselves to be representatives of the human race in its purest form, since they study people like themselves – exactly like themselves, since an overwhelming majority (67–80%) of the research subjects are undergraduate
Hidden deviants

psychology students (Arnett 2008, 604). What kind of ideology can drive such an obviously flawed quest? Quite probably one part of the answer is the tendency of human beings to consider only things available to them; another part the above-mentioned ‘law of the instrument’ – the tendency of the small boy with a hammer to find out that everything he runs into needs pounding, the tendency of the drunkard to hunt for his lost key under the street light, and the tendency of the philosopher to claim that unexamined life is not worth living for a man; and the final part of the answer is the history of psychology.

From its beginnings, psychology has modeled itself mainly after the natural sciences [...] The primary method was experimental [...] In the experimental setting, studying phenomena such as sensory perception and reaction times, it did not matter who the research participants were or how they lived outside of the laboratory. The goal was to identify human universals, the fundamental processes and principles that comprise human psychological functioning (Arnett 2008, 609–10).

There are four important points to emphasise. First, as noted above, elementary particles lack individuality, human beings do not, which limits the usefulness of laboratory experiments (Gell-Mann 2002, 8–9). Second, as noted above, the experimental setting seems to have displaced the real world – and is in fact presented as the real world by Steven Pinker in his treatment of revenge:

So does revenge pay in the real world? Does the credible threat of punishment induce fear in the heart of potential exploiters and deter them from exploiting? The answer from the lab is yes. When people actually act out Prisoner’s Dilemma games in experiments [...] When they play the Trust game [...] In Public Goods games [...] (Pinker 2012, 646–7).

Third, the belief in ‘human universals’ fits the WEIRD values, and they fit the philosophers’ general approach to human beings. Alas, what is now referred to as ‘human universals’ are just a “set of aptitudes and tastes that all cultures have in common,” and they are thus neither the above-mentioned ‘human universals, the fundamental processes and principles that comprise human psychological functioning’ nor true human universals which all human individuals and only they have in common (Pinker 2003, 55; Hull 1986). These cultural ‘human universals’ are just another way to say what Morris says above: ‘large groups of humans, as opposed to individual humans, are all much the same’. Despite this conceptual confusion, the whole organization of psychological research appears to have been geared for hunting universals, a feature possibly derived from the philosophical quest for the same.

It seems likely (though further research is called for) that early psychology’s focus on mental organization or processes derived from...
the British empirical philosophers, who emphasized laws of thought, and association in particular, and who assumed that these laws were general, not domain-specific (Rozin 2006, 367).

Even though the belief in ‘human universals’ fits the WEIRD values both in psychology and philosophy, not even the most basic processes of human psychology, like visual perception and spatial cognition, are immune to variation on population level, let alone on individual level (Henrich et al. 2010, 4–9). Nevertheless, the ‘human universals’ are assumed not to be limited to these cultural aptitudes and tastes but are extended to moral ideals by assuming morality to exist only on aggregate level; this extension quite obviously does not fit even the findings of WEIRD researchers, let alone the everyday experience of a lot of people even among the Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic peoples. This is evident in Jonathan Haidt’s Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) and Moral Foundations Theory, which make clear that even as groups many of our conspecifics acknowledge a whole lot of other moral principles besides those dear to WEIRD people, in other words, people acknowledge a lot of moral principles beyond individual liberty and avoiding harm to others (Haidt 2013, 55–6, 144–8). The problem is that even Haidt focuses on groups of people, treats people on aggregate level only and misses the diversity of individual moralities. Finally, as noted above, ecological validity of laboratory results is a serious question (Donald 2002, 24; Kauppinen 2008, 92; Suhler & Churchland 2011, 38). Even a basic, coarsely classified binary decision – lie detection – is not immune to the impact of artificial environment of laboratory, and the results are not transferable to real world, as John-Dylan Haynes points out:

Detection of artificial laboratory lies gives no clear indication as to whether a lie could be detected during a criminal investigation. The laboratory situations differ from the real world in a number of important parameters, such as the motivation of the subjects, the personality characteristics of the study sample, and the reward/punishment value of the anticipated consequences (Haynes 2011, 9).

It is interesting that one of the most popular game-theoretical models, the Prisoner’s Dilemma, is located just in the world of criminal investigation. When making conclusions based on Prisoner’s Dilemma, it is wise to remember the advice given by game theorists: “You may be thinking you are playing one game, but it is only part of a larger game. There is always a larger game” (Dixit & Nalebuff 2008, 28). The experiment may be nicely framed from the point of view of the researchers but it is not safe from influence outside the frame; some participants may not be misled and limited by the defined frame.

As noted above, some vocal Darwinists see the existence of altruism as hard to explain. Still, “the emergence of cooperative and altruistic stances is not a mere armchair speculation” but “can be supplemented by both theoretical and
empirical studies” (Blackburn 2013, 56). One of the popular naturalist answers to this problem of altruism is Robert Axelrod’s computer tournament (ibid, 4914; Dawkins 1990, vii; Rachels 2001, 84–5). Axelrod’s tournament “began with a simple question: When should a person cooperate, and when should a person be selfish, in an ongoing interaction with another person” (Axelrod 1990, xi, emphasis added). The first problem is that there are no grounds for defining ‘cooperation’ and ‘selfishness’ as mutually exclusive opposites; their relation is more credibly described by Adam Smith, who connects them in ‘bargaining’.

> [...] man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want (Smith 1976, 26).

According to Smith this bargaining to satisfy the various individual wants is driven by “a certain propensity in human nature [...] the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (ibid, 25). Smith is careful not to make any strong claim about the roots of this propensity in human nature, but proposes that it is “the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech” (ibid). The roots are beyond the scope of this study, too. Still, according to Rachel Karniol we engage into this bargaining early in our infancy.

> There are many occasions when we cannot attain our preferences without someone else’s intervention or help. As infants and children, we rely on socialization agents, especially parents, to help us attain our preferences. As adults, we may also need others’ help to do so. In such cases, we need to know how to get others to behave in ways that will facilitate the actualization of our own preferences. We develop strategies of getting others to help us satisfy our preferences, doing so while keeping in mind that they also have preferences, and figuring out the implications of such preferences for the pursuit of our own preferences. Managing one’s own preferences and managing those of others are often intertwined (Karniol 2010, 4).

To sum up, in their normal sense ‘cooperation’ and ‘selfishness’ are not mutually exclusive opposites. Nevertheless, to understand the strange world of Axelrod’s tournament, we have to accept that in this case ‘cooperation’ and ‘selfishness’ are mutually exclusive opposites. Otherwise, it would be incomprehensible to try to find out “under what conditions will cooperation emerge in a world of egoists without central authority” by asking “how to play the Prisoner’s Dilemma well” (Axelrod 1990, 3, 29).
The social theorist Robert Axelrod investigated this question by setting up an Iterated Prisoner’s Dilemma tournament in which players had to decide repeatedly whether to cooperate. [...] The winning program, called Tit-for-Tat [...] was surprisingly simple. It contained only two instructions: On the first move, cooperate. On each subsequent move, do whatever the other player did on the previous move (Rachels 2001, 84).

Axelrod’s tournament has at least three major problems. First, in the Prisoner’s Dilemma, “there is no need to assume that the players are rational” or “trying to maximize their rewards” (Axelrod 1990, 18, emphasis added). How do these players qualify as ‘egoists’? As noted above, egoism is a “theory about motivation that claims that all of our ultimate desires are self-directed” (Sober 2001, 129). Egoism is a theory about our motivation, about the motivation of instrumentally rational human beings, which satisfy their ultimate desires through purposive action. There is no egoism without some perceived interest or utility, pursuit of which ignites the motivation. Reproduction of something of no perceived value does not fulfil this demand (Dawkins 1991, 134). If the value is zero, multiplying this non-existent value is of no use. Egoism is understandable in connection to our anatomy and physiology, but it is incomprehensible and impossible without it. A program surviving for the next round in Axelrod’s tournament does not qualify as an egoist, because there is neither trying nor reward. Nevertheless, for the argument’s sake, let us call them ‘egoists’.

Second, Axelrod’s tournament started from “an evolutionary perspective: a consideration of how cooperation can emerge in a world of egoists without central authority [...] how can a potentially cooperative strategy get an initial foothold in an environment which is predominantly noncooperative” (Axelrod 1990, xii). Alas, there was neither emergence nor world of egoists even by Axelrod’s standards, but instead something very much akin to central authority. The very thing supposed to emerge, co-operation, was introduced into the tournament from outside in the first move of the winning strategy TIT FOR TAT (ibid, 20). Therefore, there is no emergence. By Axelrod’s own standards the world of ‘egoists’ would have been a population consisting entirely of noncooperative players “following the policy of always defecting (ALL D)” because only “a population of players using ALL D” would have created “a world of unconditional defection” (ibid, 3, 13, 21, 63). When the world is defined by a binary decision – cooperation against defection – and all the players follow the unconditional policy of always choosing defection (ALL D), cooperation is a logical impossibility. Alas, since TIT FOR TAT was beforehand “known to elicit a good degree of co-operation when played with humans” and “in addition, TIT FOR TAT was known to be a powerful competitor [...] not surprisingly, many of them [people designing programs] used the TIT FOR TAT principle and tried to improve upon it” (ibid, 31–2). Consequently, over half of the contestants co-operated on the first move (ibid, 43). Thus in Axelrod’s tournament there never was a world of ‘egoists’, who
always defect; there was never even the milder version, ‘an environment which is predominantly noncooperative’, but instead a predominantly cooperative environment from the start. Moreover, since the cooperative programs were modified versions of TIT FOR TAT, there was the nearest equivalent to a ‘central authority’, a majority policy of cooperating on the first move. To sum up, there were no egoists, there was no emergence, there was a built-in majority policy of cooperation – yet, this tournament is used as an explanation of the evolution of cooperation among egoists.

Third, instead of emergence there was actually disappearance. This answers in the negative Axelrod’s third evolutionary question – “under what conditions can such a strategy, once fully established among a group of people, resist invasion by a less cooperative strategy” (Axelrod 1990, xiii). Curiously enough, Axelrod’s third question mixes the computer tournament with human life by referring to ‘a group of people’. Like TIT FOR TAT, all its modifications had “the property of being nice, which is to say never being the first to defect” (ibid, 33, emphasis in the original). As noted above, they cooperated on the first move. They did well but only continued “cooperating until virtually the end of the game” – ‘until virtually’, not ‘until’ – so, in a world where “more than half of the entries were nice” even the nice ones quit being nice in the end (ibid, 35, 43). Thus, even though the strategy of cooperation was imported to the game from the beginning and created a predominantly cooperative environment, the strategy fell apart before the end of the game.

One may claim that “it is remarkable how these instructions [of TIT FOR TAT] correspond to common moral feelings” (Rachels 2001, 84). In fact, it would be more remarkable, if they did not, since, as noted above, TIT FOR TAT was “known to elicit a good degree of cooperation when played with humans” (Axelrod 1990, 31). Despite its obvious problem’s Axelrod’s tournament found an enthusiastic audience, and serves as an example of misusing laboratory experiments to make claims of the real world. Moreover, it is an example of the practice Bertrand Russell traces to Plato, that one is always concerned to advocate views that will make people what one thinks virtuous; one is hardly ever intellectually honest, because one allows oneself to judge doctrines by their social consequences. No argument or experiment is too weak to be used for a good cause. Unsurprisingly, Prisoner’s Dilemma tournaments have later turned into a veritable industry (Pinker 2012, 644). The phenomenon of drawing unwarranted conclusions about real world based on theoretical models is also exemplified by an article that describes models juggling dots of varying colours, and then concludes that “clearly, peacekeeping forces can avert genocide” (Epstein 2002, 7249). Decades ago Ronald Coase made a valid point: “Unable or unwilling to analyze the real economic systems, we invent imaginary ones that we can study with the techniques we have at our disposal” (Parkin 1994, 204). The ‘law of the instrument’ rules.

When we look at Axelrod’s tournament, much more informative than the dubious results are the assumptions behind it. If we follow Richard Dawkins
and define self-interest as ‘deep selfishness, pitiless indifference to suffering, ruthless heed to individual success’ and an opposite of cooperation, then lack of benevolence and simple self-interest are assumed to be worse than they are, malevolence (Dawkins 1990, vii). More importantly, pure malevolence is mistaken for self-interest. We miss the difference between intentional and unintentional harm to others. We also miss the real self-interest, the one that makes us cooperate to overcome our individual restrictions by using each other’s abilities in voluntary exchange. Moreover, we miss the fair competition, where both the winner and the loser followed the rules but only one could win, and thus both the winner and the loser got what they deserved. It is equivalent to concentrating single-mindedly on resulting distribution at the expense of fair procedures for maintaining entitlement (Frohlich & Oppenheimer 1992, 5). Axelrod’s tournament fascinated Dawkins, whose Darwinian world is full of malevolent enemies. His basic assumptions are so strong that it really is a source of surprise if “from such warped beginnings, something that is in effect [...] close to amicable brotherhood and sisterhood can come” (Dawkins 1990, vii). Given the assumptions, it is understandable that in Axelrod’s tournament “a common error of the contestants was to expect that gains could be made from being relatively less forgiving than TIT FOR TAT, whereas in fact there were big gains to be made from being even more forgiving” (Axelrod 1990, 39). The contestants obviously thought that “program designs that cause unconditional helping are not ESSs [evolutionarily stable strategies]” (Cosmides & Tooby 2008, 71). It was a false assumption in the virtual reality. Unfortunately, it seems to tell precious little of our reality – which seems to be quite usual when it comes to game theoretical claims.

Avinash K. Dixit and Barry J. Nalebuff make three important points about Prisoner’s Dilemma: First, while the paradigm model of game theory is known as ‘prisoner’s dilemma’, they “prefer the plural [prisoners’ dilemma], because unless there are two or more prisoners involved, there is no dilemma” (Dixit & Nalebuff 2008, 17). Second, “you must not assume that other people will have the same preferences as you do, or as a hypothetical ‘rational person’ does, but must genuinely think about their situation” (ibid, 48). Third, “there is always a larger game” (ibid, 28). These are excellent points but, alas, when they try to apply this framework of ‘prisoners’ dilemma’ into real life, even they lose sight of the variety of preferences and the larger game – or just mention it in footnotes (ibid, 64–71).

Two examples of forgetting the larger game are most illuminating: First, the prisoners are put into the situation of either lying in unison and getting unjust leniency or betraying each other’s trust and getting due punishment “for a crime they did, in fact, commit” (Frank & Knight 2010, 126). Since the setup is obviously a society ruled by law, there is no dilemma; it is best for everyone – arguably even for the guilty criminals – that they ‘betray’ each other and get due punishment. This larger game is systematically left out of prisoners’ dilemma by determining the payoffs according to the unnaturally
limited game. Second, what is more important, Dixit and Nalebuff unjustly accuse Adam Smith of forgetting the larger game, too. While they discuss two firms not being able to fix prices – to illegally agree about ripping off the customers – they claim that “each firm pursuing its own self-interest does not lead to an outcome that is best for them all, in stark contrast to what conventional theories of economics from Adam Smith onward have taught us” (ibid, 71). This claim is in such a stark contrast with Adam Smith’s writings that it cannot be overlooked. The claim is all the more incomprehensible, because Dixit and Nalebuff themselves cite the very evidence that destroys their claim, Smith’s worry about firms conspiring against public interest: “People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices” (ibid, 91). It is clear that Smith is interested specifically in the larger game, in the public interest, which is best served exactly by those measures seen as problematic in prisoners’ dilemma, by firms pursuing their self-interest and not settling for dividing market shares and fixing prices. Obviously, Smith cannot care less, whether competition does or does not “lead to an outcome that is best for them [firms] all”. He is not worried about the interests of the firms at all. He sees the larger game, invariably.

To widen the market and to narrow the competition, is always the interest of the dealers. To widen the market may frequently be agreeable enough to the interest of the publick; but to narrow the competition must always be against it, and can serve only to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens (Smith 1976, 267).

Moreover, it is not even in the best interest of the firms to settle for a status quo of dividing markets and fixing prices to acquire above normal profit. It leads to complacency, taking too much for granted, which the American car industry found out in the 1980s (Halberstam 1987, 54, 78, 490, 608). In the Western Europe companies helped build the social structures that even now resist reform, decades after the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed and China joined the global marketplace and changed the game fundamentally.

To sum up, it is important for philosophers to try to understand moral psychology. Yet, claims about moral psychology based on playing games in laboratories or manipulating formal models in computers should be treated with caution. It is wise to remember the ‘real people’, the immense variety of unique human individuals, and scrutinize carefully any claims about ‘universal human nature’.
2.5 CONTINGENT, CONTINUOUS, AND UNINTENTIONAL

In this chapter (2.5) I shall argue viewing the human body as an ecosystem or a society and then proceed to the actual human society. The urge to organize and cooperate is driven from the microbes all the way to human societies by a drive that is described on the level of human individuals as ‘self-interest’. We are good at inventing other explanations for our behaviour, but we should beware of believing them. I shall not argue for inventing anything totally new in philosophy; I shall rather argue for the use of some threads of our philosophical tradition that have been unduly ignored or rejected.

To understand the difficulties of looking at the human body as an ecosystem, let us first look at Adam Smith’s above-mentioned (2.1.4) view that contains the important aspects of survival, the survival of the individual and the survival of the species as consecutive generations: “Thus self-preservation, and the propagation of the species, are the great ends which Nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals” (Smith 2002, 90). This common sense description of the individuals surviving only for a while to produce the next generation of the species was presented 250 years ago. It appears conceptually more appropriate than Richard Dawkins’ biologically informed one 35 years ago. Dawkins advocates a “replicator or ‘gene’s-eye’ view of evolution”, according to which “adaptations to survival [...] are adapted to ensure” the survival of “not the group, nor the individual organism, but the relevant replicators” (Dawkins 1999b, 84, 93). Yet, it is unclear how the replicators ‘survive’ any more than the group or the individual organism, when “at any level, if a vehicle [individual] is destroyed, all the replicators inside it will be destroyed” (ibid, 114). The replicators do not survive the death of the individual carrying them, but only “survive in the form of copies” (ibid). Dawkins presents an odd interpretation of ‘immortality’ when he states that “a replicator [...] is potentially immortal, or at least very long-lived in the form of copies” (ibid, 87). When both the replicators and the species carrying them survive only in the form of consecutive generations, it is odd to advocate a “doctrine of a rigid separation between an immortal germ-line and the succession of mortal bodies which house it” (ibid, 164, 302, emphasis added).

Obviously, Dawkins struggles with his “unabashed advocacy” of “a particular way of looking at animals and plants” (ibid, 1). Our concepts are quite fit for describing a common sense view of anything, but are at odds with describing anything deviating from common sense – like the human body as an ecosystem. Despite the difficulties, arguing for a view that deviates from common sense may produce an informative point of view and raise fruitful questions. Dawkins ‘gene’s-eye’ view raises the question, why there are multicellular organisms with complex organs and behaviour patterns, “why replicators chose to organize their phenotypes into functional units,” into “mutually compatible sets of successful replicators, replicators that get on well together” (Dawkins 1999b, 251–2, 264). In economics the equivalent question
is, why there are firms, these “islands of conscious power in this ocean of unconscious co-operation,” in other words, “why the allocation of resources is not done directly by the price mechanism” between individuals in the market (Coase 1937, 388, 393). In both cases some sort of evolutionary advantage has led to specialisation and division of labour – the key elements of Adam Smith’s economics.

Human beings are best understood as part of a contingent, continuous, and unintentional process. Any phase in the process is contingent, a possible but nonnecessary situation which depends on how the preceding situations turn out. The process stops for nobody, because the physical principles running the process are insensitive to our wants and desires. “Everything about evolution is unintentional” – and the most important lesson about human evolution is that “we did not evolve to be in perfect harmony with our environment” (Zuk 2014, 233, 234). Bejan’s constructal law gives evolution a principle in terms of physics and makes it easier for us to accept that evolution cannot be stopped, no matter what we want to believe. It just happens, whether we like it or not.

Morality is not independent from this process but a part of it. As noted above, seeing only the aggregate level leads to half-truths like the claim that “morality is a set of psychological adaptations that allow otherwise selfish individuals to reap the benefits of cooperation” (Greene 2014, 23). As noted above, morality is understood not only as an interpersonal phenomenon, but also as an intrapersonal phenomenon, because arguments about what we should do rise not only between individuals but also within individuals (MacIntyre 2003, 8). Still, one may claim that “a morality that governs interpersonal relations seems natural and necessary, while a ‘morality’ that has nothing to do with interpersonal relations (if such a thing is possible) is outlandish and cries out for explanation” (Joyce 2006, 66). Nevertheless, one may feel a moral obligation to take care of one’s well-being by proper food, physical exercise, and adequate sleep – not because one owes anything to any other individual or social group but simply because one’s caring organization makes not taking proper care of one’s health feel morally wrong (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 48). The feeling and idea that one has a duty to make maximal use of one’s talent, to fulfil one’s potential, or ‘be all one can be’ are probably quite common – and independent from any obligation to any other individual or group. The religious idea of one’s body being “a temple of the Holy Spirit” and Kant’s above-mentioned duties to oneself are ways to express this intrapersonal moral obligation (1 Co 6:19; Kant 2000, 38). This is hardly outlandish; on the contrary, it is so common that it may be ignored. To make it easier to appreciate this intrapersonal level, morality as a feature of unique individuals, we can perceive individuals as societies. Cognitive scientists have applied the concept of society of mind since the 1960s to understand how our mind emerges from mindless agents performing minuscule operations (Minsky 1988, 20, 29). In fact, we are societies – not just conceptually, but actually. Our 40 trillion human cells and about 22,000 human genes are a minority in our bodies, since our microbiota consists of 100 trillion microbial
cells and our metagenome of 2 million microbial genes, and they may be critically important to our behaviour (Ravel et al. 2014, 1). Since probably the largest and most important microbial community lives in our intestines, there is a growing interest in the research on ‘the microbiome-gut-brain axis’, the effects of our intestinal microbes on our brains and our behaviour, including our sociality – and it is described as a ‘paradigm shift in neuroscience’ (Lyte 2013, 1; Stilling et al. 2014, 1; Mayer et al. 2014, 15490). The society of mind seems to proceed from conceptual level to reality. Given all the evidence of diversity, it should be no surprise that diversity rules in the microbiome: “individual humans are about 99.9 % identical to one another in terms of their host genome, but can be 80–90 % different from one another in terms of the microbiome of their hand or gut” (Ursell et al. 2012, 2). Thus “the human body can be viewed as an ecosystem, and human health as a product of ecosystem services delivered, in part, by the microbiota” (Costello et al. 2012, 1). This ecosystem seems to present a finely tuned cooperation, specialisation, and division of labour without anything to be labelled consciousness. This division of labour can be understood as flow access enhancement, like Bejan does. As noted above, both animals and human beings benefit others unintentionally ‘following the common pattern that affect precedes cognition’, and quite probably ‘much of our moral decision making is too rapid to be mediated by the cognition and self-reflection often assumed by moral philosophers’ (de Waal 2008, 64). If morality is understood not as a set of moral judgments but instead as a set of adaptations that allow reaping the benefits of cooperation, the cooperation of human and microbial genes precedes and lays the ground for the cooperation of human individuals. Morality thus emerges from a continuous and unintentional process as a vital feature of human life. Our ultra-social cooperation is driven by self-interest; we do not have to invent an altruistic explanation. As also noted above, both Adam Smith’s butcher, brewer, and baker, and Immanuel Kant’s prudent merchant all cooperate with their customers in voluntary exchange out of self-interest; we need each other’s abilities and benefit from voluntary exchange, and so we bargain, negotiate, and accommodate (Smith 1976, 26–7; Kant 2000, 4:397). The constructal law states essentially the same that “the urge to organize is selfish” (Bejan & Zane 2013, 165, 190). Certain kind of order, certain design, benefits us, and we are moulded by it and go with the flow. Human social organisation just happens, whether we like it or not. Bejan differentiates his view from both Darwin and Spencer, but constructal law does fit Spencer’s thought that society is a growth and not a manufacture (Spencer 1885b, 74). This gives us good reasons to relax. We are not on the verge of rushing into immorality unless curbed by our rational justifications. The world is not a battlefield of good and evil where we have to be vigilantly fighting any suspicious threat to our sacred moral order. We can quit trying to seal our values to the future society. We are part of a process that carries us, whether we like it or not.

We have reasons to re-evaluate both our moral and our social ideas. We do not necessarily have to find totally new ideas. We can get a long way by re-
evaluating old ideas familiar to us in the philosophical tradition. Many of them have been unduly rejected or overlooked for all sorts of reasons. We also have to pay attention to certain psychological phenomena. ‘Framing’ means that “people tend to reach conclusions based on the ‘framework’ within which the situation is presented; e.g. people are more likely to recommend the use of a new procedure if it is described as having a ‘50% success rate’ than a ‘50% failure rate’” (Reber & Reber 2001, 285). Framing effects thus mean that our choices and judgments are influenced by the ways of presenting equivalent information, like the words or the order chosen to present dilemmas. ‘Priming’ means “the triggering of specific memories by a specific cue; e.g. river will prime one meaning of bank and money will prime another”, and “this priming can take place outside of consciousness: one can fail to recall or even recognize words previously presented yet respond with them when ‘primed’ by something, such as the first three letters” (ibid). Priming effects have been studied a lot and they mean that all our choices and judgements are influenced by situational factors, surroundings of the moment, like the activities done before being presented a dilemma (Kahneman 2012, 52–8). We have evidence that human moral intuition is, unsurprisingly, not exempt from the framing and priming effects, which becomes evident when people are asked to make judgments on verbally described situations, be they about runaway trolleys or anything else (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008). Research on human behaviour has also revealed our ‘moral confabulation’, our readiness to construct stories about why we did things, even though we do not have access to the unconscious processes that guided our actions. We probably have “an ‘interpreter module’ that is always on, always working to generate plausible rather than veridical explanations” of our actions (Haidt & Kesebir 2010, 811). We unconsciously invent stories that keep up the appearance of logical and consistent behaviour. We are ‘intuitive politicians’.

[...] for an intuitive politician, the interpreter module is a necessity. It is like a press secretary for a secretive president, working to put the best possible spin on the administration’s recent actions. The press secretary has no access to the truth (he or she was not present during the deliberations that led to the recent actions) and no particular interest in knowing what really happened [...] The secretary’s job is to make the administration look good. From this perspective it is not surprising that – like politicians – people believe that they will act more ethically than the average person, whereas their predictions for others are usually more accurate [...] (ibid).

The press secretary’s palm print was identified by Adam Smith in his observation about how ready and able we are to criticise others and how reluctant and inaccurate in criticising ourselves, when “our first moral criticisms are exercised upon the characters and conduct of other people; and we are all very forward to observe how each of these affects us. But we soon learn, that other people are equally frank with regard to our own” (Smith 2002,
130). Our ‘press secretaries’ make us look good, but we are hypocrites – merciless critics of other people’s faults and blind worshippers of own virtues. We need the ‘mirror’ we provide to each other (ibid, 129). It teaches us to anticipate the probable reactions of others to our actions, and this information teaches us to accommodate, bargain, and negotiate our way through the jungle of our conflicting individual goals, interests, and wants. The hypocrisy stays, though. It is just hidden better. “The ease with which people can justify or ‘spin’ their own bad behaviour means that, like politicians, people are almost certain to practice some degree of hypocrisy” (Haidt & Kesebir 2010, 812).

We also have evidence that human culture produces strange beliefs of disreputable origin (Harris 2006; 2007). Moreover, as noted above, moral intuitionism quite possibly cannot be justified (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a; 2006b; 2008). What we do not have evidence for is that human moral intuition as such is defective. Our intuitions are produced by the emotive centres of our hypothalamic-limbic systems, which are products of biological adaptation (Wilson 1975, 563). As noted above, evolution as a tinkerer uses everything at his disposal to produce some kind of workable object, and we have no reason to doubt that this applies to human moral intuition, too. Since philosophers in the premodern times did not have at their disposal this knowledge about evolution, we have good grounds to question whether what has been presented as human moral intuition by them is the real thing. Rather, human moral intuition is reasonably good in its job in its natural habitat, even though “some of the activity is likely to be outdated, a relic of adjustment to the most primitive form of tribal organization” (ibid). Most importantly, the natural habitat of our moral intuition is not the laboratory. There is evidence about both other animals and human beings, that what works just fine in its habitat, does not work at all in a foreign environment (Donald 2002, 24).

Given that, the ability of thought experiments and questionnaires to extract our intuitive responses in a form that makes their accurate evaluation possible is not unproblematic, neither is their ecological validity (Kauppinen 2008, 92; Suhler & Churchland 2011, 38). Even though we are able to develop post hoc justifications for our actions, and conceptualize and verbalize our perceptions and deliver them to our conspecifics, we may not be able to handle adequately these necessarily simplified verbal descriptions of situations. Existentialism can be a guide here: “Whereas for existentialism, it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself” (de Beauvoir 1976, 17–8). Let us contrast human action with prescriptive ethics.

What is human action? My action as a particular man in a particular context is unique. In my action I make use of every resource available: I have my particular structure and my particular history of experience. They make me what I am. Into my nervous system I have accumulated tacit knowledge, of which I am not aware. If I am a piano player concentrating on my performance in a concert, I do not try to concentrate separately on my each finger, lest my
performance be paralysed. If I am a soldier in combat, I make use of every resource in my body to survive and succeed. Whatever I am, my particular situation is my own; I am in this particular situation at this particular moment because of my past life as the particular person that I am – and through my life experience continuously become.

What is prescriptive ethics? It is the critic evaluating my performance as a piano player; it is the court-martial evaluating my performance as a soldier. The evaluations made by the critic or the court are based on available or admissible evidence, respectively. They judge what can be proved. It is casuistry. It does not matter, which absolute standards are to be applied to evaluate my actions as a particular man in a particular situation, be they the standards of divine law or any of the various standards of an imaginary agent in idealised conditions as “cool, calm and collected” or having “complete and vivid knowledge” (Smith 2013, 65; Railton 1986, 174). Any general moral rules are equally out of place in our world that just happened, in an intrinsically meaningless world, where any meaning as far as we now is defined by individual men. Isaiah Berlin puts it succinctly: “Life has no universal purpose, only individual purposes – happiness, justice, kindness, freedom, knowledge, beauty, art, love, self-expression, pleasure, amusement. All these are purposes; a general purpose of life does not exist” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 109).

It is not reasonable to discard, disregard, or discredit moral intuition; it is reasonable to examine and understand the actual intuition, not the imagined intuition of ideal or imaginary beings. We are well advised to listen to Berlin: “You can’t show that an answer is correct, because in ethics there is nothing correct or incorrect. People believe what they believe, they want what they want, they pursue what they pursue” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 205). So, we just suspend the attempt to justify. Consequently, this naturalist approach quite probably provokes an objection like the one by Kathleen Wallace.

Such a view is unsatisfying to the philosopher, who is interested in justification, and, I suspect, to most ordinary people, who want to know which responses are in fact morally justified and which are not; who want to know how they ought to behave, not only how and why they and others do behave as they do (Wallace 2008, 310).

Russ Shafer-Landau presents the resilient belief in the possibility and consequent demand to justify. His demand represents the long Socratic tradition of moral thought, the non-naturalist approach:

Moral principles and facts aren’t meant to explain behavior, or anticipate our actions, but rather to prescribe how we ought to behave, or evaluate states or events. They don’t cite the causes of outcomes, but rather indicate what sort of conduct would merit approval, or justify
our gratitude, or legitimate some result. Science can’t tell us such things (Shafer-Landau 2013, 60).

Against this non-naturalist non-descriptive ethics this study aims to present naturalist descriptive ethics. (Admittedly, staying descriptive and avoiding prescriptive is hard, since ‘should’ slithers in so easily.) The object of legal philosophy is “the prediction of the incidence of the public force through the instrumentality of the courts. [...] The prophecies of what the courts will do in fact” (Holmes 1999, 1, 5) In the same vein moral philosophy “shows that the rule does not give us a reason for acting so much as an indication of the probable actions of others, which helps us to find out what would be our own most rational course of action” (Smart 2013, 427). It is possible to have ‘ethical knowledge’ in the sense of knowledge about the probable reactions of others to one’s actions; whereas reflection and its scientific applications by accumulating knowledge have inescapably led to the conclusion that ‘ethical knowledge’, in the sense of factual knowledge about the world independent from our thoughts, is an illusion – a conclusion unimaginable to Socrates (Williams 2006, 148, 167–8). When people are aware of other people’s probable reactions to their decisions, they can make better decisions. There is no guarantee, though. Neither law nor morality can make sure that people actually make good decisions. Naturalist ethics describes and explains our moral evaluations. It also predicts and anticipates our moral judgments, our reactions to each other’s behaviour (Hauser et al. 2008; Mallon 2008). More to the point, approval, gratitude, and legitimacy are human psychological phenomena, which quite naturally belong to the things science can tell.

Another negative response to essentially the same non-naturalist objection “is simply that the ‘traditional’ philosophical picture of morality is psychologically highly unrealistic, at odds with what a substantial body of scientific research reveals” and another positive response is that “moral behaviors, sentiments, motives, judgments, and so forth [...] are completely real, not lacking in moral worth merely because they have a neurobiological mechanism or because that mechanism has an evolutionary history” (Suhler & Churchland 2011, 51). We are well advised to accept the fact that the only morality we have any hope of understanding is the one we are equipped with, the endless diversity of individual moralities produced by the endless diversity of individual human connectomes.

To require of “real morality” that our moral behavior be autonomous with respect to our evolutionary history and our brains’ portfolio of oxytocin, vasopressin, endorphins, and their receptors, as well as the activity of systems for pain, pleasure, emotion, and reward, is to put morality out of reach entirely (ibid, 52).

Once again, a philosopher need not be at odds with this morality at all. Were Adam Smith able to make himself acquainted with the results of the present interdisciplinary research, he would quite probably recognize it as
Hidden deviants

welcome Newtonian progress in moral philosophy. As noted above, sorting our desires and their roots is a formidable task, like Isaiah Berlin says.

[...] all desires are stimulated by something, whether the depths of one’s own character or one’s experience – some unexpected physical, moral, emotional or intellectual event in one’s mind, heart, soul. [...] I take a crudely empiricist position – what one desires, one desires [...] I think desires are desires, some good, some bad, i.e. leading to harmful consequences, and what causes them one can never quite tell [...] (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 70).

Most of us probably consider moral intuitions as an example of what Berlin describes as good desires, as desires not leading to harmful consequences. After all, the Golden Rule is based on our theory of mind; the belief that other human beings have beliefs, feelings and thoughts like we do – and then behaving accordingly in our relationships with each other.

The evidence suggests that human nature in general is malleable, our individual connectome is being reweighted, reconnected, rewired, and regenerated continuously throughout our life, and as a consequence our individual and social moralities are in continuous flux. As noted above, this knowledge is important for us as we try to understand what kind of institutions and patterns of behaviour are realistic options for human societies and what are not (Williams 2006, 44). We actually ask an enhanced Rawlsian question behind a veil of ignorance: If I did not know my own preferences, what kind of society would I prefer? Or rather, if I know that I shall during my life go through several different ethical outlooks with diverse, incompatible, and thus necessarily conflicting ideals and preferences, what kind of society do I prefer?

What will be the attitude of one who experiences sympathy with a variety of conflicting ideals of life? It seems that he will be most at home in a liberal society, in a society in which there are variant moral environments but in which no ideal endeavours to engross, and determine the character of, the common morality. He will not argue in favour of such a society that it gives the best chance for the truth about life to prevail, for he will not consistently believe that there is such a thing as the truth about life. Nor will he argue in its favour that it has the best chance of producing a harmonious kingdom of ends, for he will not think of ends as necessarily capable of being harmonized. He will simply welcome the ethical diversity which the society makes possible, and in proportion as he values that diversity he will note that he is the natural, though perhaps the sympathetic, enemy of all those whose single intense vision of the ends of life drives them to try to make the requirements of the ideal coextensive with those of common social morality (Strawson 2008, 48–9).

P. F. Strawson’s liberal society is based on the minimal socially sanctioned demands of not being inflicted physical injury and not being deceived, the
demands that he sees as based on fundamental and general human interests (Strawson 2008, 40–2). These minimal constraints allow maximal choice of individual approaches to social life.

There would be nothing self-contradictory about the idea of one who recognized his interest in the system of moral demands and resolved merely to profit by it as much as he could, fulfilling its demands on himself only in so far as his interest calculably required it. He might get away with it successfully if he were subtle enough in his practice of the hypocrisy which this process would necessarily involve. But it is an important fact that hypocrisy would be necessary. It is connected with the further fact, a fact of human nature which can probably be explained in a number of ways, that quite thoroughgoing egotism of this kind is rare (Strawson 2008, 40).

Strawson offers a philosopher’s description of a conscious and logical choice of one’s approach to social life. It sounds plausible – but is it accurate? First, let us consider the necessary hypocrisy. As noted above, research on human behaviour has revealed our ‘moral confabulation’, our readiness to construct stories about why we did things, even though we do not have access to the subconscious processes that guided our actions, our being ‘intuitive politicians’. We are thus subtle enough in our practice of the hypocrisy. We are not even aware of it, because our cognitive subconscious takes care of it. Second, let us consider egoism. According to Strawson thoroughgoing egoism is rare. This is a reasonable claim, if ‘egoism’ is understood like in “Ayn Rand’s theory of rational egoism,” according to which we do not have any “built-in, automatic code of values, i.e. instincts” but are instead “born tabula rasa” as “rational, volitional” beings, and have to choose our own “goals, in the form of conscious purposes” (Locke & Woiceshyn 1995, 408). Moreover, “unethical decisions harm the decision makers themselves as well as others, whereas ethical decisions have the opposite effect” (Woiceshyn 2011, 311). ‘Rational egoism’ appears to be based on undue belief in a necessary connection between intention and consequence, since it is a cliché, that the best intentions and methods can cause serious harm and dubious motives and methods can bring benefits. “Poetic justice is, after all, so called not because it does, but because it does not, as a rule, occur in the prose of ordinary life” (Berlin 1979, 72). Actually, in ‘rational egoism’ consequences are not so much proof of equivalent intention as criteria for evaluating the ‘ethicality’ of intention and method, since “the good” is “that which enhances or benefits human life” (Woiceshyn 2011, 316). This brings us back to Machiavelli’s “uncovering of the possibility of more than one system of values, with no criterion common to the systems whereby a rational choice can be made between them” and calling “the bluff [...] of the kind of foundationalism which Machiavelli [...] championed in his political philosophy” (Berlin 1979, 71). Since we can reasonably disagree on ‘what enhances or benefits human life’, it is sadly not true that “such actions can be objectively determined through
observation and logic” (Woiceshyn 2011, 316). Moreover, this study argues against our being born tabula rasa and our directing our life only by conscious choices, and thus also ‘egoism’ looks a bit different. Our daily social life consists of choices that may concern doing something or leaving it for others to do, allowing or hindering other people’s actions, doing a favour or leaving it undone. We make trade-offs between our own welfare and that of others. This bargaining is possibly done by an evolved circuitry that handles “welfare trade-off ratios” (WTR), which index “the degree to which one’s valuation of another’s welfare is expressed in choice and behavior,” and leads to decisions about the extent to which we are disposed to trade-off our own welfare against another person’s welfare when we take action (Petersen et al. 2010, 78–9). Moreover, “the WTR is a person-specific variable, which sets the threshold for acceptable cost-benefit transactions between the relevant person and the self – i.e., the threshold at which willingness becomes unwillingness with respect to the particular person” (ibid, 79, emphasis added). This is quite obviously not an impartial evaluation. A specific person’s WTR affects our judgment of this person’s behaviour, and we calculate the costs and benefits of our reactions to specific person’s transgressions, and calibrate them according to the probable consequences of our judgments to ourselves, not according to the deed done (ibid, 115–6). Another feature of our egoism is our apparently fundamental desire for status independent from our culture, gender, age, and personality (Anderson et al. 2015). As noted above, the groups and the relevant rewards vary but the rivalry stays. Even our ‘happiness’ appears to depend on ‘positional goods’, the value of which depends not on the absolute amount possessed but on one’s relative possession in the reference group, in short, one’s ‘place in the pile’ (Nettle 2005, 38). The evidence suggests that we strive for superiority, not equality, within our reference group. Oddly enough, we pay homage to ‘equality’ in our theoretical ideals, while we appear to pay no attention to it in our practical choices and judgements.

To sum up, my cognitive unconscious employs a vigilant ‘press secretary’ always ready for the most advantageous spin on my behaviour and an equally vigilant ‘welfare trade-off ratio accountant’ always ready for the most advantageous cost-benefit analysis in my relations with you, which spare me the cost of being consciously and deliberately egoistic. I can agree with Strawson that ‘thoroughgoing egotism of this kind is rare’ – and enjoy being a happily unassuming egoistic hypocrite. Ignorance is bliss.
3  MESSY MORALITY, GREATER GOOD, AND SACRIFICE

As an attempt at not getting stuck in words and their meanings this study uses throughout ‘morality’ as a neutral description of a human characteristic. However, Bernard Williams uses ‘morality’ to describe a problem. This is caused by “the domination of morality, which is disposed to class all the relevant – that is to say, ‘moral’ – reactions under headings such as judgment, assessment, and approval or disapproval” (Williams 2006, 37, emphasis in the original). This domination leads to expansion. “The justice that is the aim of morality reaches further than the question of what your reactions should be called, to the issue of what reactions you may justly have, so that it comes to demand first a voice, then supremacy, and at last ubiquity” (ibid, 38). Instead of analysing the reactions you ‘actually and in fact’ have like Adam Smith suggests, this ‘morality’ takes the position of a judge who can decide what reactions you are allowed to have, and eventually the position of a dictator who can decide what reactions and only them you are obliged to have. This process is not logical, no more than is the domination of one goal turning into totalitarian control, like MacPherson objected to Berlin’s criticism of positive liberty, but we are not a logically behaving species by nature. This is evident in the framing and priming effects mentioned above. We are products of a tinkering process, which builds anything workable from whatever is available. We are equipped with fast and frugal heuristics, which are highly economical and usually effective, but produce systematic and predictable deviations from statistical principles and the axiomatic theory of rational choice, as shown in decades of research by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (Tversky & Kahneman 1973; 1974; Kahneman & Tversky 2013). We should not be surprised that fast and frugal heuristics combined with moralistic overconfidence produce messy moralities with weird ideas about greater good and individual sacrifice.

3.1 BEWARE OF MORALISM

In this chapter (3.1) I shall argue against ‘moralism of scope’ which tends to unduly treat all sorts of things as moral issues and overmoralize universe. I shall also present some issues in real business and describe the resident morality of business, ‘the morality of the marketplace’. Finally, I shall argue against certain beliefs that have roots all the way to the ancient Greece, but which are given undue respect, since they contradict our present knowledge.

As noted above, in our morality we are ‘intuitive politicians.’ Unsurprisingly, C. A. J. Coady’s Messy Morality: The Challenge of Politics meets Williams’ Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy in our discussion of
ethics. Coady argues against the tradition of realism in politics, “the complex intellectual tradition that seems to deny any relevance of morality to politics, especially international politics” (Coady 2008, vii). According to him “the realist target is, or should be, not morality but certain distortions of morality, distortions that deserve the name moralism” (ibid, 14). This way realism can “caution us against the dangers of moralism in thinking about politics and particularly foreign affairs” (ibid, vii). His use of ‘morality’ and ‘moralism’ differs from Williams’ use but fits the use of these terms in this study.

According to Coady, “in broad terms, we can say that the vice of moralism often involves an inappropriate set of emotions or attitudes in making or acting upon moral judgements, or in judging others in the light of moral considerations” (ibid, 17). We have already touched upon the issue of appropriateness of moral emotions and attitudes, and can ignore the question whether there actually is any way to define ‘appropriate’ in this case. Coady further classifies a variety of moralisms into “six types of moralism: moralism of scope, moralism of unbalanced focus, moralism of imposition or interference, moralism of abstraction, absolutist moralism, and moralism of deluded power” (ibid). The first of these describes essentially what Williams calls ‘domination of morality’.

*Moralism of scope involves seeing things as moral issues that aren’t, and thereby overmoralizing universe. A variation on this is the tendency to see minor moral matters as major ones or to collapse certain pertinent spheres of morality into other, more demanding ones, so that the morally advisable becomes morally obligatory, or the somewhat morally preferable becomes a stern duty (Coady 2008, 17).*

This coincides with what Williams calls ‘morality, the peculiar institution’ which deals “with considerations that seemingly do not yield obligation” by trying “to make as many as possible into obligations” (Williams 2006, 179). As noted above, Immanuel Kant seeks a principle that could be enforced as a law. He is not alone. “Modern moralists are not likely to use those words [sense of reverence for the moral law], but they do not find it hard to recognize what Kant was describing” (ibid, 190). Modern moralists tend to use ‘ethics’ instead of ‘morality’ but the content is still what Williams calls ‘morality, the peculiar institution’ and Coady calls ‘moralism of scope’. Modern moralists are as eager as moralists ever have been to burden others with their pet obligations and responsibilities, and calling the disobedient ‘unethical’.

This study starts with Williams asking “the question of how far any philosophy could help us to recreate ethical life” (Williams 2006, vii). Williams defines his own approach in opposition to both positive and negative ethical theories. The positive ones combine “views on what ethical thought is and how it should be conducted, with substantive consequences of conducting it in that way” (ibid, 74). The negative ones basically deny the possibility of there being “a general test for correctness of basic ethical beliefs and principles” (ibid, 72). Williams himself wants “to say that we can think in ethics, and in all sorts of
ways, unless our historical and cultural circumstances have made it impossible – but that *philosophy can do little to determine how we should do so*” (ibid, 74, emphasis added).

### 3.1.1 SNOW BUSINESS

To illustrate Williams’ point, let us look at a case based on personal experience years ago. The winters in the Finnish capital area have brought less snow lately, but there are a lot places where even moderate amounts of snow cause problems. Therefore, it is a usual practice of anyone responsible for maintaining real estate especially in central Helsinki to employ a contractor to pick up the snow and deliver it to places designated for dumping it.

The contractors’ billing is generally based on the amount of snow hauled, which is announced in cubic metres. The amount of cubic metres is estimated, not measured. Generally the lorries used for picking up snow carry 15–25 cubic metres per load. Naturally, the contractors know the real volume that their lorries are able to carry per load. This knowledge is not necessarily shared with the customers for a definite reason. The price for service is announced in euros per cubic metre of snow. Those maintaining real estate and employing contractors usually choose the contractor offering the lowest price per cubic metre. If the contractor serves as agreed and no one comes around with a better offer, which generally means just lower price per cubic metre, the contractor usually serves the same customer for years. Since the price is the only concrete criterion for choosing the contractor, the prices of different contractors tend to be both very close to each other and very low. In fact, they are so low that if one multiplies the amount of snow in cubic metres per load with the price paid per cubic metre of snow it will usually cover only the costs of the lorry for picking up the load. There will be no money left for the costs of the driver, let alone profit. The contractors have traditionally solved the problem simply: since the customers only concentrate on bargaining the price per cubic metre but know neither the volume of snow per load nor the total amount of snow, the contractors cover the costs of the driver and get the profit by systematically overestimating the amount of snow, by billing for more cubic metres than they actually pick up.

In maintaining real estate snow is usually a small matter, even smaller than waste management, which amounts to some percents of the maintenance costs. This means that the costs from snow are negligible in an average winter. It is not reasonable for the one maintaining real estate to use any more time than is absolutely necessary to choose a contractor, negotiate the price, or check the billing, let alone complicate the system by adding exact data about the amount of snow actually picked up. The real estate is served, that is the most important thing. Even if the customer knows the contractor is overestimating the amount of snow, he or she may not want to discuss it, because controlling the price per cubic metre may appear a sufficient means to keep the costs reasonable. After all, the contractor knows that the customer
can always demand more information about the amount of snow, should there be any reason to suspect gross overestimation. Moreover, since the customer gets the service first and is billed only afterwards, the contractor does not want to bill unreasonably much lest the customer delay payment or change contractor.

From the point of view of the contractor the situation is complicated. The problem is caused by knowing that the amount of snow picked up is smaller than the amount of snow billed for, which means producing deliberately a document containing false information. The contractor does not know for sure, whether the client knows about the practices in the business, let alone accepts them. Legally this is obviously wrong, but morally this can be seen as a problematic situation. Of course, asymmetry of knowledge is a given in business, and in the burgeoning information business asymmetry of information is the sole reason for there being business. In our snow business case the usual asymmetry is complemented with stating false information. A contractor feeling uneasy with the situation has several options to consider.

The contractor can, of course, not participate in overestimating the amount of snow and simply set the price per cubic metre of snow to the level where it would be, were the cubic metres measured, not estimated. That option would most probably leave the contractor without this business, because the price would be too high.

The contractor can also raise the price and tell the customers about the usual practices in the business and offer a more open and honest way of doing business. This might secure some contracts, but will probably cause trouble with the other contractors who may not appreciate the policy of telling the customers about their practices. Moreover, since any contractor is usually in need of assistance from the fellow competitors in emergencies like lorries breaking down or drivers getting sick, the disagreement about transparency in pricing would most probably mean losing this vital assistance, and possibly the ability to guarantee the reliability of service to the customers. Again there would be the risk of losing the business.

The contractor can also try to strike a deal with his competitors about raising the prices to a realistic level that covers all the costs without overestimating the amount. That would be a cartel, which would be revealed by a sudden raise in every contractors’ prices. A gradual raising would possibly go unnoticed by the customers, but it would still be a case of fixing prices, a cartel. These systems are both illegal and, to the benefit of the customers and the society, notoriously difficult to keep secret. Again there would be the risk of losing the business, and on top of that, getting a penalty for illegal business practices.

The contractor can also quit the business, if it appears as both unethical and beyond remedy. The market will be left to the less scrupulous. The contractor will lose only a small fraction of revenue, and although transportation is a heavily competitive business, there may be possibilities of getting enough business elsewhere. The snow contracts would be lost for good.
Finally, the contractor can rationalise about the situation: The customers and contractors are doing voluntary exchange. The business causes a negligible part of the maintenance costs of real estate and brings a negligible part of the contractors’ revenues. It is not reasonable for any of the participants, be it customer or contractor, to use any more time than is presently used for arranging the matter. If the prices per cubic metre were raised and the amounts of snow measured the total cost for the real estate and the billing for the contractors would most probably end up on the same level as it is under present arrangements. Therefore, billing is actually just, only the amount of units is false. Since the provided service is valuable to the customers in the price defined in the market, there are far more important things to consider.

Let us assume that the contractor seeks help for decision-making from ethical theories. To start from the consequences, a prudential approach might accept the rationalisation despite the dubious practices in the process, because the inputs in the system are in line with the output and, most importantly, the consequences satisfy both parties in the voluntary exchange. Of course, clearing the market from these dubious practices and especially of the most unscrupulous contractors might in the long run bring more utility, but the contractor is in no position to clear the market. More importantly, even the task of actually calculating the utilities of one’s individual options appears hopeless. Maybe the contractor should not look at the consequences but concentrate instead on the principle. ‘A Kantian approach to business ethics’ might offer a solution, since the problem discussed is equivalent to the one our contractor faces – bribery as a necessary condition for doing business (Bowie 2002a, 14). Alas, there is no solution to the company, only a discussion on the higher level of the country about institutional reform (ibid, 15). This is not surprising, because in trying to apply Kant’s ethics “the problem stems from the notorious difficulty of specifying the maxim of an action” (Hill 2000, 41). Kant emphasises our duties, our need to obey moral laws, and the correct criteria for maxims to be followed, but still “comments on the casuistry with conventional hostility, labelling it both jesuitical and hair-splitting” and thus “clearly we should not expect to be offered an algorithm or even a recipe for practical judgement that could resolve moral conflict” (O’Neill 2002, 344). Unsurprisingly, an attempt at applying Kant’s ethics quickly turns from particular real-life problems into unhelpful comments on “unjust institutions” (ibid, 345). Since the contractor finds help from neither consequences nor principles, maybe it is time to look at the mirror. From ‘Free Enterprise, Sympathy, and Virtue’ the contractor learns that “what I want for myself is your approval, and to get it I will most likely do what you think I should do” (Solomon 2008, 24). The contractor is comfortably back in the rationalisation of the market as a fair voluntary exchange, where both parties satisfy their respective self-interests. Nevertheless, the confusion returns, when the contractor is told the exact opposite that “other-interest, not self-interest, is the engine of a healthy free market system” (ibid, 34). The contractor has no reason to disagree with the claim “that traditional theories of ethics, be they
Messy morality, greater good, and sacrifice

Aristotelian, Kantian, Millian, or whatever, have come to be revised and reformed in such a way that, at least in their most morally defensible formulations, they no longer differ in the practical requirements they endorse” (Sterba 2005, 1). These common practical requirements are first and foremost elusive, since they are repeatedly overrun by discussions about the institutions. Alas, institutional reform remains beyond the reach of the snow contractor, who just has to cope with the present marketplace. The contractor is understandably tempted to take the advice given to individuals under coercion to conform: “You're perfectly entitled to cheat. You appear to conform when you don’t conform” (Berlin & Polanowska-Sygulska 2006, 195). The only certain gain from consulting the theories is further understanding of the complexities that make it impossible to decide what would be ‘morally’ right or wrong in the contractor’s situation. One thing is certain, though; there is no way to stay in the snow business without participating in its practices. If the contractor feels guilt for participating, it is advisable not to participate. Generally, it is not recommendable to act against one’s moral emotions. It causes unnecessary mental stress and may eventually corrupt one’s conscience, which may lead to other problems. It does not mean that one has to do anything to stop the other participants from continuing the practices. Losing this particular business is just the price one pays for doing what one feels right. Being moral by following one’s conscience may incur costs. There is nothing wrong in that. Doing ‘right’ is not necessarily doing well.

Let us now move from the small business of wintry Finland to the American corporate business that appears to be the favourite target of modern moralism and is thus the main focus of the discussion in business ethics. As noted above, in ethics there is a conflict between ‘begging’ and ‘bargaining’, and this can be recognized in John Hendry’s description of our ‘bimoral society’, where the traditional, premodern beliefs override deliberation in discussions of business ethics (Hendry 2004).

In what follows, I shall refer to these two sets of principles as constituting a ‘traditional morality’ of obligation and a ‘market morality’ of self-interest, using the term ‘morality’ here in a sociological sense, much as Weber and others have used the term ‘ethic’. A particular ‘morality’, in other words, is a particular set of principles of right conduct by which people are observed to live their lives, with no implications as to the absolute truth or correctness of those principles. Where I use the word ‘moral’, without qualification, or where I refer to morality in the abstract as opposed to a particular, specified morality, I use the words in their everyday sense, as referring to the principles of ‘traditional morality’ (ibid, 2).

Referring to ‘traditional morality’ as simply ‘morality’, and to behaviour that conforms to ‘traditional morality’ as ‘moral’ behaviour characterises discussions in business ethics. It leads to seeing any other morality as false and the compatible behaviour as immoral. The characteristic problems in business
ethics unexpectedly stem from this simplistic approach. Colin Fisher, Alan Lovell and Néstor Valero-Silva provide a typical example by writing as if not going beyond the requirement of law were equivalent to cutting corners and behaving badly.

Should private, profit-seeking organisations behave in a socially responsible and moral way, beyond the requirement of the law, because it is the right thing to do or because it pays them to do so? This might be seen as a moral dilemma; indeed in many ways it is the central issue in business ethics. If it is true that corporations that behave in a responsible and ethical manner do in fact make better returns for their owners than do those organisations that cut corners or behave badly, then the philosophical question of whether organisations ought to behave well is a redundant question (Fisher et al., 2013, 11–2).

They totally omit the ordinary law-abiding corporation, that does not go ‘beyond the requirement of the law’ but does not ‘cut corners or behave badly’, either. This dismissal of the decent middle-ground to the benefit of strict dichotomy resembles Richard Dawkins’ above-mentioned interpretation of simple self-interest as malevolence (Dawkins 1990, vii). In the discussions of business ethics there appear to be only saints and sinners; the average corporation that simply follows the rules and regulations is in these discussions equivalent to the criminal corporation that cuts corners or behaves badly. The use of religious vocabulary is not a coincidence. Business ethicists have an odd habit of grounding their claims in religious beliefs (Dunfee & Donaldson 2002, 70; Fisher et al. 2013, 513). It is interesting that ‘the central issue in business ethics’ is not whether to ‘behave in a socially responsible and moral way’, but whether to justify this going ‘beyond the requirement of the law’ by the imaginary notion of ‘the right thing to do’ or the actual self-interest. Essentially, the central issue is whether one can justify turning a necessity into a virtue. Milton Friedman famously claims that even though a corporation publicly states that the justification is ‘the right thing to do’, the real justification is self-interest: “Of course, in practice the doctrine of social responsibility is frequently a cloak for actions that are justified on other grounds rather than a reason for those actions” (Friedman 2002b, 36).

Friedman’s view on the responsibilities of corporate officials is possibly the most controversial claim in business ethics: “Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible. This is a fundamentally subversive doctrine” (Friedman 2002a, 133). Friedman’s claim seems like a sound rational interpretation of the responsibility of the agent in the American free democracy to take care of the principal’s property according to the interests expressed by the principal – in this case expressed by the principal’s action of investing in corporate business which according to the law exists to advance
the monetary interest of the investor. We can, of course, discuss the semantics of ‘ownership’ in the case of a corporation which is a ‘legal person’ – the stockholders own the stock of the corporation, and the corporation owns the assets – like Sumantra Ghoshal does (Ghoshal 2005, 79–80). Nevertheless, Ghoshal does not give us any reason to see the stockholders as anything less than the principals or the corporate officials anything else than agents of the principals, as far as we respect private ownership. The grounds for respecting private ownership as a necessary condition for freedom is put lucidly by John Stuart Mill:

*If the roads, the railways, the banks, the insurance offices, the great joint-stock companies, the universities, and the public charities, were all of them branches of the government; if, in addition, the municipal corporations and local boards, with all that now devolves on them, became departments of the central government; if all the employés of all these different enterprises were appointed and paid by the government, and looked to the government for every rise in life; not all the freedom of the press and popular constitution of the legislature would make this or any other country free otherwise than in name* (Mill 1992, 106).

Mill also expresses inspiringly the classical liberal principle of individual sphere of control, within which every individual is free to make choices in her or his life unrestrained by anything else than harm on other individuals. This means acknowledging pragmatic ethical pluralism.

*That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others* (ibid, 12).

As mentioned above, staying descriptive is hard, since ‘should’ is so familiar to us. Mill’s ‘warranted’ is not what philosophical speculation requires. It is rather what political life requires, if pragmatic ethical pluralism is to be made a viable reality. Here we can just hypothesize that if we all followed these few principles of value pluralism, individual freedom and avoidance of harm to others, we would live in Strawson’s above-mentioned liberal society and our discussion of (business) ethics would mostly concern defining what constitutes harm to others. More importantly, if we all acknowledged Friedman’s rationalist interpretation of the classical liberal principles, decision making in business would be very straightforward and open – just choosing options according to their presumed effectiveness on furthering the interest of the owner, which means maximizing shareholder value, whatever the shareholders choose the maximizable value to be. Since there is evidence of the correlation between high IQ and acceptance of classical liberalism and also
of the rising IQ of humankind, the Flynn Effect, it is not unthinkable that capitalism will eventually become more popular (Pinker 2012, 800–2). Alas, at present all of us do not follow the above-mentioned principles. Few corporate employees are motivated in their daily work to simply further the interest of the owner in accordance with the rationalist interpretation of classical liberal principles. In fact, a large majority of corporate employees may actively resist those principles and especially their application in making decisions. Here is then the dilemma of business ethics: the ones making decisions in today’s globally competitive business have to acknowledge the basis of our present capitalist affluence, the best available system for giving people what they want, but because of its unpopularity, they are wary of acknowledging it in public. Instead, the decision makers try to sell their decisions to their subordinates by making them appear to be made on some other basis – be it furthering employment or anything else under the guise of ‘social responsibility’. It is giving others what they want in exchange of getting what you want – bargaining – which is a common sense way to solve the dilemma. Unfortunately, this solution gives grounds to blame the decision-makers of insincerity and white-washing, and further undermines the credibility of capitalism. As noted above, this is Friedman’s concern.

Of course, in practice the doctrine of social responsibility is frequently a cloak for actions that are justified on other grounds rather than a reason for those actions. [...] It would be inconsistent of me to call on corporate executives to refrain from this hypocritical window-dressing because it harms the foundations of a free society. That would be to call them to exercise a “social responsibility”! If our institutions, and the attitudes of the public make it in their self-interest to cloak their actions in this way, I cannot summon much indignation to renounce them. [...] Whether blameworthy or not, the use of the cloak of social responsibility, and the nonsense spoken in its name by influential and prestigious businessmen, does clearly harm the foundations of a free society (Friedman 2002b, 36–7).

The snow business contractor faces the dilemma of the entrepreneur; the corporate official faces the dilemma of the agent – and in the massive corporate scale. Nevertheless, the core problem is the same: there appears to be no way to be employed in the corporate business without participating in its dubious practices – the hypocritical window-dressing, the ‘corporate social responsibility’ which harms the foundations of a free society. Also the answer for the individual corporate official is the same; if one feels guilt for participating, it is advisable not to participate.

3.1.2 MORALITY OF THE MARKETPLACE

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, manager is “the dominant figure of the contemporary scene” (MacIntyre 2003, 74). The contemporary scene of
MacIntyre’s original text is the early 1980s. In our contemporary business jargon in the 2010s ‘manager’ sounds like ‘bureaucrat’, something to be avoided in business. This avoidance may be a consequence of the notorious problems of the large American corporate bureaucracies, especially the auto manufacturers that had replaced the entrepreneurial firms during the first three quarters of the 20th century (Chernow 2001; Halberstam 1987; Jackall 1989). The average size of the Fortune 500 industrials peaked at about 3,000 employees in 1979 (Perrow 2002, 1). Today the business jargon is full of agility, change, downsizing, flexibility – and leadership. Besides avoiding anything that sounds like bureaucracy, ‘manager’ may have been replaced by ‘leader’ because there actually are no grounds for claims of ‘managerial expertise’; maybe it is really true that “the realm of managerial expertise is one in which what purport to be objectively-grounded claims function in fact as expressions of arbitrary, but disguised, will and preference” (MacIntyre 2003, 107). Then one cannot credibly claim expertise in management, but one can credibly claim possession of will and preference – and if others consider the claim credible, one can be a leader. Nevertheless, not many people lead but a whole lot of people manage business.

In the beginning of this study we asked how far any philosophy could help us to recreate ethical life in business and answered that not far enough to be worth a try. The reason for this answer is put somewhat provocatively but also very lucidly by a former vice president of a large firm: “What is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man’s home or in his church. What is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you. That’s what morality is in the corporation” (Jackall 1989, 6, emphasis in the original). These corporate “managers’ experiences are by no means unique,” on the contrary, they “have a deep resonance with those of a great many other white-collar occupational groups […] in the academy, in medicine, in science, and in politics” (ibid, 12). This is a consequence of “the enduring genius of the organizational form” which “allows individuals to retain bewilderingly diverse private motives and meanings for action as long as they adhere publicly to agreed-upon rules” (ibid, 6, emphasis added). The organization is a community with an explicit hierarchy, and it “causes people to bracket, while at work, the moralities that they might hold outside the workplace or that they might adhere to privately and to follow instead the prevailing morality of their particular organizational situation” (ibid, emphasis added). That values vary among occupational groups is part of the basics of organizational behaviour (Robbins 2003, 64–5). To understand what this means in practice, let us state a few reasonable assumptions concerning competition for high positions in hierarchies in general and in corporate hierarchies in a free market economy in particular. First, as noted above, human beings tend to be very conscious about their personal ‘place in the pile’, their position in the hierarchy, and they compete hard – not necessarily fairly – for high positions in any hierarchy. Thus, also a corporate manager has won her or his position in a serious competition. Second, since human beings win in any tough competition only
by giving up other things to focus on winning the competition – by prioritising – also a corporate manager has given up other things to focus on this particular competition – he or she has prioritised. Third, since human beings give up things they value less for something they – actually, by preferring it in a choice – value more, also a corporate manager values her or his position relatively highly. These three points appear uncontroversial, if we make the reasonable assumption that actual choices are more reliable indicators of people’s preferences than their possibly contradictory verbal statements.

Since it has been questioned, whether we want any person, who is ready to do all that is necessary to rise to the top in politics, to actually rise to the top in politics, the next two points are obviously controversial. Fourth, since human beings value highly only things that they consider valuable or ‘good’, a corporate manager sees her or his position as valuable, as good. Fifth, since human beings in high positions in a hierarchy have sacrificed so much to get to their respective positions, they have by their choices shown that they value the hierarchy as good, and also a corporate manager values the corporate hierarchy as good. It is still a valid question, whether it is “true that if we want something and purposively pursue it, then we think of our getting that thing as good” (Williams 2006, 58). This “traditional doctrine, advanced in Plato’s Meno and hallowed in a saying of scholastic philosophy […] everything pursued is being pursued as something good” seems to Williams not true (ibid). If this can be presented as an empirical question to individuals concerning their actual evaluations, it has to be presented to the corporate managers. The timing of the question is crucial, though. Aristotle’s advice on the right moment to adjust the exchange rate between a shoemaker’s and a husbandman’s work – prices in a voluntary exchange – is useful here.

*But this adjustment must be made, not at the time of exchange (for then one of the two parties would get both the advantages), but while they are still in possession of their own wares; if this be done, they are put on equal footing and can make an exchange, because this kind of equality can be established between them (Nic. Eth. V.5, 12).*

Since the buyer’s remorse is a usual phenomenon, the question should be presented to corporate managers in an active phase of career building. Alas, at least in Finland, where downplaying ambition is considered a virtue, the typical interviewee in a trade magazine has already achieved her or his new position, which is the very moment the buyer’s remorse hits. Unsurprisingly, her or his most important achievement is something politically correct, like getting married or becoming a parent. The balanced and sober-minded answer may be sincere at the moment, but it does not necessarily give a true picture of the ambition that *preceded* the success. An equal variation could possibly be found by comparing the priorities of the marathon run gold medallist in the Olympics 30 minutes before and 30 minutes after crossing the finish line. If we had access to the actual evaluations of a career-oriented professional or professional athlete in the fierce hunt of a long-sought goal, we would quite
probably find evidence that he or she considers achieving the goal extremely good and right.

Corporate hierarchies follow the ‘morality of the marketplace’ (Bowie 2002a, 14–5). Even in the fair play version of this competition “in many cases, an individual, in pursuing a legitimate object, necessarily and therefore legitimately causes pain or loss to others, or intercepts a good which they had a reasonable hope of obtaining” (Mill 1992, 90). In the competition for scarce positions collisions of interest are inevitable. Someone wins, someone loses. “Whoever succeeds in an overcrowded profession, or in a competitive examination; whoever is preferred to another in any contest for an object which both desire, reaps benefit from the loss of others, from their wasted exertion and their disappointment” (ibid). Many people have yearned for a job more glamorous than the one they now have. They can look at their situation in two ways: either the market is unfair and they did not get what they were entitled to or the market is fair and they got what they were entitled to.

In the global free market competition winners take all (Frank & Knight 2010). Michael Jordan in his final season 1997 in the professional basketball league NBA earned almost 300 times the amount earned by his least paid teammate – Jordan was paid roughly $80,000,000 and his team mate the NBA minimum $272,250 (Friedman 2000, 313). A wide salary gap between two professional athletes may not disturb us at all, since the NBA minimum is not a bad salary. Did it disturb the team mate earning the minimum? Not at all.

[...] he understood very well the principle of winner take all. As he put it: “Salaries have been moving forward in this league for everyone, but the superstars have made a great leap. In my case, though, I chose to come here and play for the minimum. That was my choice, so I can’t resent it” (ibid, 314).

Professional sports, especially a league like NBA, where salaries have been moving forward for everyone may appear to be far removed from the everyday life of most men. It is not. The general wealth in the world has increased enormously and winners have taken an ever increasing portion (Baumol et al, 1, 19–20). A lot of wealth was destroyed in 1914–45 because of the two World Wars, but wealth tends to reproduce itself and in the early 2010s global wealth appears to be distributed as unequally as it was in Europe in 1900–1910 just before the extreme destruction – once again the wealthiest 0.1 percent owns nearly 20 percent of total global wealth (Piketty 2014, 368, 438, 440). Winner-take-all logic is described excellently by former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, who is “a huge fan of differentiation,” because he has “seen it transform companies from mediocre to outstanding, and it is as morally sound as a management system can be” (Welch 2007, 37). Its moral soundness is a result of its performance: “It works” (ibid).

Basically, differentiation in business is “just resource allocation, which is what good leaders do and, in fact, is one of the chief jobs they are paid to do”
Betting on winners and cutting losses is basic business, but it confuses many. An excellent example was Nokia’s decision to close a factory in Germany in 2007 and move the production elsewhere. Germany is a ‘social democracy’ with “the 1976 codetermination law, which expanded labor’s representation from one-third of the supervisory boards of large firms to one-half” (Roe 2003, 24, 32). In such a political and social environment closing a factory and moving the production to another country is bound to cause uproar, no matter how sound the business principles behind the decision. It is interesting to see what happens, once the business principles disappear totally – a case in point is Volkswagen’s preparing to pay simultaneously both €16.2 billion as compensation for cheating in the emission tests and €63.24 million as bonuses for the top corporate managers responsible for the firm’s record annual loss (The Economist 2016; Reuters 2016).

If differentiation among businesses – cutting out worst performers and rewarding best performers – confuses us, differentiation among employees within a corporation is bound to. Managers practising differentiation “assess their employees and separate them into three categories in terms of performance: top 20, middle 70, and bottom 10” and “act on that distinction” (Welch 2007, 41).

When people differentiation is real, the top 20 percent of employees are showered with bonuses, stock options, praise, love, training, and a variety of rewards to their pocketbooks and souls. There can be no mistaking the stars at a company that differentiates. They are the best and are treated that way (ibid).

Obviously, the managers themselves belong to that 20 percent of employees, the stars at the company. Quite probably they share Welch’s belief that instead of being “cruel and Darwinian” differentiation is “fair and effective” (ibid, 37). Welch believes that so do even the bottom 10 percent, who “usually leave before you ask them to” (ibid, 42).

No one wants to be in an organization where they aren’t wanted. One of the best things about differentiation is that people in the bottom 10 percent of organizations very often go on to successful careers at companies and in pursuits where they truly belong and where they can excel (ibid).

Differentiation says essentially that if you are good at what you are doing, keep on doing it; if you are fairly good at what you are doing, try to get better; if you are bad at what you are doing and cannot get better, try something else instead to be all you can be. It is not a coincidence that winners take all in professional sports; differentiation was taught to Welch in his childhood playground. “When we were making a baseball team, the best players always got picked first, the fair players were put in the easy positions, usually second
base or right field, and the least athletic ones had to watch from the sidelines” and in this system “everyone knew where he stood” (ibid).

The top kids wanted desperately to stay there, and got the reward of respect and the thrill of winning. The kids in the middle worked their tails off to get better, and sometimes they did, bringing up the quality of play for everyone. And the kids who couldn’t make the cut usually found other pursuits, sports and otherwise, that they enjoyed and excelled at. Not everyone can be a great ballplayer, and not every great ballplayer can be a great doctor, computer programmer, carpenter, musician, or poet. Each one of us is good at something, and I just believe we are happiest and the most fulfilled when we’re doing that.

It’s true on the playground, and it’s true in business (ibid, 42–3).

Differentiation apparent in children’s play and business seems like a truly universal feature of human social behaviour. Besides appearing to have a strong biological basis it also has very strong and long cultural roots, apparent in every human hierarchy. As noted above, it is also apparent in the Homeric use of ‘good’ in the meaning of ‘good at something’.

[…] “I fail to be ἀγαθός if and only if I fail to bring off the requisite performances”; and the function of expressions of praise and blame is to invoke and to justify the rewards of success and the penalties of failure. […] A man who performs his socially allotted function possesses ἄρετή. The ἄρετή of one function or role is quite different from that of another (MacIntyre 2002, 8).

In Homeric thought man is judged by his actual performance in fulfilling his social role. If one is good, one performs well. One fulfils the requirements of one’s position, role, or occupation. If one stops performing well, one is not good anymore. One is not up to the requirements of one’s position, role, or occupation anymore. It is not a matter of talent, potential, or intention; it is a matter of positional performance, of actual and perceptible results in a role. Of course, the social judgement on the goodness of one’s positional performance is neither impartial nor objective, but instead subject to all the vagaries of human judgement, like the ‘welfare trade-off ratios’ discussed above and also the “informal opinions […] the ones that really count in determining people’s fates” (Jackall 1989, 24).

Differentiation is one of the natural human processes which, given freedom, produce the morality of the marketplace that rules the free market economy. A corporate manager has won in this competition by giving up less important things, by valuing the hard-earned position relatively highly, by valuing both being a manager and the corporate hierarchy granting the position, by seeing them as right and good. Given that the participants in the morality of the marketplace see it as a common sense morality, one is hard-
pressed to understand how some business theorists see as their calling “to convince managers that being good at their job doesn’t mean they have to be a-, or im-moral” (Jones et al. 2002, 26). Since there is no logical connection between ‘being good at’ a job and having ‘to be a-, or im-moral’, this claim deserves a closer look. To understand what they really want to convince the managers, we have to rephrase their thought. It is unnecessary to convince managers that being good at their job (by the moral standards of the marketplace) doesn’t mean they have to be a-, or im-moral (by the moral standards of the marketplace); there is no need to convince anyone of such a self-evident fact. Therefore, we have to suppose that they “consider the shareholder-centered corporation to be morally unacceptable” (Boatright 2002, 38). Given this, they want to convince managers that being good at their job (by the moral standards of the marketplace) doesn’t mean they have to be a-, or im-moral (by the moral standards of Jones et al.). Maybe they feel the urge to convince other people that being good at their job is not enough – like Socrates did. The central question concerning business is, who actually needs to be convinced – and about what. Maybe these practitioners imagine what it would be for them to be in such a job. Since they are not corporate managers they do not understand the thinking of those who are. Maybe such theorists look at corporate managers’ jobs, and find them uninteresting, even distasteful. Maybe they think that there should be something more to these jobs, something nobler that would make them meaningful for them. The above-mentioned law of the instrument makes them search for tasks applicable to their instruments. They appear incapable to understand that the actual corporate managers have competed hard to get exactly their actual jobs and are quite amply motivated by them.

The philosophers and ‘intellectuals’ have not been the happiest bunch in human history. In fact, “the happiness pessimists are amongst the greatest minds of modern thought” and “high in the personality trait of neuroticism” (Nettle 2005, 58). When a person prone to neuroticism looks at other people’s lives, he probably sees no point in their toil and trouble. Nevertheless, one can come to understand that “philosophy leads to skepticism, but psychology puts it all right again” (Ruse 2008, 36). Then one can see other people’s ‘futile’ efforts as products of human psychology, and understand their usefulness, because “it is this deception which rouses and keeps in motion the industry of mankind” (Smith 2002, 214). One can even understand, that “we may have our views about which lives are better, but they remain, so far as others are concerned, in the realm of advice and suggestion, not of prescriptive requirement” (Narveson 2001, 307). In the worst case one is unable to live and let live. Instead, one goes about pestering one’s neighbours and showing them how stupid they are – or starts to convince managers that being good at their job (by the moral standards of the marketplace) doesn’t mean they have to be a-, or im-moral (by one’s superior moral standards).

To sum up, it is apparently difficult to accept that as a result of endless human diversity individuals can be motivated by an endless variety of things.
Herein lies the core problem in discussions of business ethics: many practitioners of business ethics simply cannot accept and understand the morality of the marketplace as a domain separate from the ‘traditional morality’, the one easily referred to as simply ‘morality’, and try desperately to import into this domain the recreation of their own ethical life, an ethical life alien to the domain. Moreover, there is a resident social morality in any bureaucracy, corporate or otherwise (Jackall 1989, 6). Apparently, this is equally incomprehensible to the practitioners of the ‘big business’ of business ethics in the 2010s as it was in the 1980s, unless the practitioners spend enough time inside the corporations to understand the resident social morality (ibid, 4–5, 13–16).

3.1.3 RESILIENT BELIEFS

As noted above, behind our modern market economy is Adam Smith’s economic theory which was created 240 years ago “within the context of a moral theory that goes wide and deep, a context that carries the message that an economic theory has to be developed within a moral philosophical framework” (Broadie 2006, 165). He presented it in An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations in March 1776 – while the American patriots took Boston and George Washington took his troops to New York (Buchan 2007, 90; Nevins et al. 1986, 80). Smith’s philosophy “arose out of the long-standing controversy over the role of Christian morality in holding society together” and was part of his “project of seeking to find a basis on which people could live together when Church no longer provided an unquestioned set of answers to questions about how society should be organized” (Backhouse 2002, 130, 132). This Enlightenment project of replacing unquestioning obedience with individual deliberation was in direct opposition to the Catholic Church’s medieval supremacy. “The key event” of the Middle Ages had been “the adoption of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire” (ibid, 29). Given the nature of the Christian faith and the consequences of the adoption, the key event was the key mistake. “Christian ethics is essentially theological ethics. […] The ethical teaching was not propounded to form the moral basis of secular society” (Guthrie 1985, 896). In other words, it was not a problem that “the emperor Constantine (c. 272/3–337) was converted to Christianity in 312”, as far as it was his own choice; the problem was that “under Theodosius (c. 346–95) Christianity became the official religion, with non-Christians and heretics being persecuted” (Backhouse 2002, 29). In philosophy Theodosius’ decision spawned a strange creature, a combination of two omissions: Aristotle’s break with the Greek tradition of distinguishing between divine knowledge and human guesswork got united with a break with the Christian tradition of distinguishing between God’s kingdom in spiritual world and political power in this world. This Scholastic philosophy, known after Thomas Aquinas as Thomism, claims “to offer a comprehensive, non-sceptical and realist response based on a synthesis
of Greek thought – in particular that of Aristotle – and Judaeo-Christian religious doctrine” although “the application of true principles to all spheres of philosophy was certainly not completed in the Middle Ages” (Haldane 2005, 1017; Copleston 1985, vi, 2). Thomism is still to be applied ever more categorically.

Thomism, an ongoing enterprise with its own schools and disputes is particularly associated with the Catholic Church, although much of his [Thomas Aquinas’] theology has proved acceptable to Christians of a wide variety of denominations and his theological teachings are by no means peculiar to the Catholic Church (Broadie 2005, 917).

The Roman Emperor’s mistake of adopting Christianity ‘to form the moral basis of secular society’ was not a unique event. It was repeated “in the social gospel movement during the early part of the twentieth century” (Guthrie 1985, 895). Movement failed, because “neither personal ethics nor social involvement in a way consistent with the teaching of Jesus was possible without the spiritual dynamic which a future hope [of the coming of Jesus] gives” (ibid). Still, belief in the need to turn the essentially personal Christian commitment into a socially binding ‘moral basis of secular society’ is not a dead issue. It is most visible in the Catholic institutions, but was brought along to the colonial America; “the fundamental reason for the Puritan migration to Massachusetts was to establish a church-state and not to find religious freedom” (Nevins et al. 1986, 20). Since the Declaration of Rights, religious toleration and ultimately freedom became the basis of the independent American society (ibid, 94–5). This was another blow to Catholic supremacy, an embodiment of Smith’s above-mentioned philosophical ambition to replace Church as the basis of society. Unsurprisingly, the Counter-Enlightenment blamed philosophers for triggering the revolutions of 1770s–90s by “propagating the concepts of toleration, equality, democracy, republicanism, individual freedom, and liberty of expression and the press” (Israel 2008, vii). Naturally, the 1970s reaction against the American market economy, the Business Ethics school of thought, has deep roots in Catholic institutions (Bowie 2002b, 1–2). Besides Smith, the tradition of capitalism and commerce as positive influences, even as vehicles of world peace, was supported by such philosophers as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and J. S. Mill (Bowie 2002a, 14–5). Opposing this enlightenment tradition is the resilient belief in business as inherently unethical, supported by such philosophers as Aristotle, Plato, and Karl Marx, reaching from the ancient Greece through the Medieval Scholasticism to Business Ethics movement (Frederick 2002, xiii; Jones et al. 2002, 21–2). This tradition essentially demands “that citizens should aim at a good life” – a life defined by the few for the rest (Backhouse 2002, 23).

We are offered beliefs that may be resilient for a variety of reasons. They may be resilient because they tell something about the world we live in, or they may just please people. We are well advised to evaluate critically the beliefs that different traditions offer, especially traditions as old as the ones from
ancient Greece. Clayton M. Christensen makes a valid point about taking lessons from our accumulated scientific knowledge, not ancient attempts at fighting the laws of nature.

*Flight became possible only after people came to understand the relevant natural laws and principles that defined how the world worked: the law of gravity, Bernoulli’s principle, and the concepts of lift, drag, and resistance. When people then designed flying systems that recognised or harnessed the power of these laws and principles, rather than fighting them, they were finally able to fly to heights and distances that were previously unimaginable (Christensen 2011, xxii).*

We should beware taking lessons from the premodern ancients in such matters that we know better due to the vast knowledge offered by modern science. One lesson offered by both biology and history is that it is unreasonable to reduce unique human individuals to representatives of a group, if we want to avoid serious trouble to human life. It is more reasonable to take the protection of minorities to its logical conclusion and protect the smallest perceivable minorities, minorities of one, unique human individuals. This is unfortunately impossible in politics, which by definition is doing things in groups where individuality cannot be respected. It is possible in the business, when it follows the morality of the marketplace, and differentiates individuals. The most natural basis for business ethics is the moral theory within which our modern market economy was sketched, Adam Smith’s moral philosophy based on bargaining. This is not to suggest that we should stare at Smith’s philosophy in awe or try to emulate it. It is to acknowledge Smith’s approach, studying human beings ‘actually and in fact’, the method he called ‘Newtonian’, as the right point of departure for studying morality as it is for studying anything (Smith 1985, 145–6). It is encouraging that “moral psychology has experienced a ‘renaissance’ in recent years, generating a large empirical literature emphasizing the intuitive and emotional aspects of moral judgment” (Clifford et al 2015, 1). Hopefully this interest can overcome the resilient tendency of focusing on aggregate level only.

As unique individuals with unique interests we bargain our way through the maze of conflicting demands, expectations, suggestions, and temptations. Those conflicts are both intrapersonal and interpersonal. A fruitful approach to understanding human life is seeing it as preference management. As noted above, “we develop strategies of getting others to help us satisfy our preferences, doing so while keeping in mind that they also have preferences, and figuring out the implications of such preferences for the pursuit of our own preferences” (Karniol 2010, 4). One has to solve the conflicts between one’s own personal preferences, because not all of them are compatible; one also has to participate in solving conflicts between one’s own preferences and other people’s preferences, because not all of them are compatible, either. Since there is no reason to expect a tinkering process of evolution to produce only compatible preferences, and since there is no reason to expect human thought
as part of this on-going tinkering process to produce only compatible concepts, and above all, since following logically our best available knowledge would mean ending one’s life as meaningless, practising logical consistency is not an overriding priority.

In science the priority is following the evolutionary principle of an open-ended quest, where means justify ends. When the proper procedure is followed, one should follow Herbert Spencer’s advice and not hesitate to utter what one thinks is “the highest truth,” even though it were “too much in advance of the time” (Spencer 1867, 123). Time may make it more palatable – in the same vein as “there is still room to hope, that the industry, good fortune, or improved sagacity of succeeding generations may reach discoveries unknown to former ages” (Hume 2002, 12). Meanwhile, we are part of evolution, an unconscious and unintentional tinkering process that carries us all. We can trust the overarching process of evolution, whether defined as a system of flow access enhancement or some other way, exactly because it is an unconscious and unintentional process and thus insensitive to our irrelevant idiosyncrasies. It will eventually weed out anything unfit. We might as well relax, go with the flow, and enjoy the ride. This is a challenge to us, since “the danger of being a philosopher is that you become all brain; you need an antidote to this over-cerebralization” (McGinn 2003b, 233).

As noted above, Coady argues against political realism which claims that “expecting nations to put morality ahead of national interest is, in some sense, expecting the impossible” (Coady 2008, 20). According to Coady the realist target should not be morality but moralism. Moreover, Coady’s moralism of scope and William’s morality, the peculiar institution fit together nicely, and describe the process of turning life into endless stream of moral obligations and duties. We can thus rephrase for our present purposes: expecting unique human individuals to put morality, the peculiar institution ahead of personal interest is, in some sense, expecting the impossible. Fortunately, real people by their actual choices show that they see these peculiar considerations as just one type of considerations; they are evaluated like any other aspect but do not have any overruling authority. As noted above, human beings bargain with each other handling ‘welfare trade-off ratios’ about their own welfare against the other particular person’s welfare according to the probable consequences of their judgments to themselves (Petersen et al. 2010, 78–9, 115–6). Anyone of us is occasionally like Joyce’s reluctant gladiator who has been dragged against his will into a game, the rules of which he has not chosen (Joyce 2001, 35). Thus the question we really ask is not ‘how should one live’ but ‘what should I do, all things considered’. What considering ‘all things’ means, varies endlessly like anything human does. Acknowledging this real question as the only relevant question is the key to better choices; it is wise not to fight but instead harness the laws of nature. We are part of a tinkering process, and true to its nature we mostly tinker and seldom engineer – even though we cannot help living according to the illusion that we always engineer and never tinker. Moreover, whether our choices are good or bad is to be seen only afterwards,
and it is unreasonable to demand people to waste time in useless considerations of ideals and theories while making choices. This is especially true in risky decisions made with scant information in ever-changing, competitive environment – like business.

As noted above, there is a resident social morality in any organization, corporate or any other, and understanding it usually requires enough time spent within the organization (Jackall 1989, 5–6, 13–6). One may argue about the strengths and weaknesses of any morality, but labelling any of them ‘amoral’ or ‘immoral’ simply because it conflicts with the ‘traditional morality’ or one’s own morality is not an argument. It is a futile attempt at ending the discussion. Equally futile are the attempts at recreating in business versions of ethical life that may follow ethical theories but are alien to the world of business, like the demands to change the curriculum of colleges or business schools (Ghoshal 2005, Marglin 2008, Podolny 2009). These are attempts at solving a non-existent problem. In fact, even vocal practitioners cannot help admitting that they are barking at the wrong tree: “The widespread reliance on the *Homo economicus* model cannot be said to have definitely caused the serious problems of observed managerial malfeasance, but it may well have, and, in any case, it surely does not act as a healthy influence on managerial morality” (Gintis & Khurana 2008, 323, emphasis in the original). We may have our reasons to dislike the ambition that drives people or the amount of economic liberty that allows the winner-take-all logic work (Loukola 1999, Frank & Knight 2010). Still, mere dislike of ambition or desire for social conformity is no justification for a claim that a competitive field lacks morality. In business the resident morality is the one of the marketplace based on bargaining – the very same preference management we perform throughout our life, and for which there is ample evidence in psychology and everyday experience, but a vocal opposition in politics and moral philosophy. The puzzlement of social scientists in front of bargaining resembles the recurrent themes in Martin Cruz Smith’s novel series spanning decades of Arkady Renko, the policeman of tradition and principle, travelling from the Soviet era to the present Russia – puzzled by the change. In the Red Square set against the historical events in the August of 1991, that ultimately led to the collapse of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, Arkady has an interesting discussion with Rudy Rosen, a Jew who describes himself as Switzerland, a neutral everybody’s banker, needed by everyone, representing the only economy that actually works in Russia. Arkady represents the official economy:

‘The official rate is thirty rubles for a dollar.’

‘Yes, and the universe revolves around Lenin’s arsehole. No disrespect. It’s funny. I deal with men who would slit their mother’s throat and are embarrassed by the concept of profit.’ Rudy became serious. ‘Arkady, if you can just imagine profit apart from crime, then you have busi-
ness. What we’re doing right now is normal and legal in the rest of the world’ (Smith 1992, 10).

For many the change from socialism to markets is hard to accept, for some the unequal distribution of benefits from the change is simply unacceptable. Yet, the issue is still just decoupling concepts. There are no necessary connections between concepts. They are in our mind. We couple and decouple them. The ease with which we couple or decouple concepts varies. The stage behind Arkady is Russia but his worries are, of course, American. Arkady’s pain of letting go of the remains of Soviet socialism is actually the Americans’ pain of letting go of the remains of the of the New Deal, the pain visible in Robert D. Putnam’s pining for the past community (Putnam 2000). Michael J. Sandel laments the era of market triumphalism started in the 1980s and hopes that the financial crisis ends it (Sandel 2013, 6). He wants more moral arguments into politics, and denies that in politics “too many people believe too deeply, too stridently, in their own convictions and want to impose them on everyone else” (ibid, 13). He admits that “part of the appeal of markets is that they don’t pass judgment on the preferences they satisfy” (ibid, 14). Nevertheless, he sees as fateful “the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don’t belong,” since “some of the good things in life are corrupted or degraded if turned into commodities” (ibid, 7, 10). Oddly, trading tickets to Pope’s stadium masses is wrong, because “turning sacred goods into instruments of profit values them in the wrong way” – even though Catholic Church appears to have been in the same business ever since the “indulgences, the monetary payments sinners paid the medieval church to offset their transgressions” (ibid, 37, 77). Naturally Sandel dislikes Gary S. Becker’s extension of the domain of microeconomic analysis to a wide range of human behaviour and interaction (ibid, 49–51; Glaeser & Schleifer 2014). Becker’s approach is “a method of analysis, not an assumption about particular motivations [...] analysis assumes that individuals maximize welfare as they conceive it, whether they be selfish, altruistic, loyal, spiteful, or masochistic” (Becker 1993, 385–6, emphasis in the original). He further assumes our behaviour to be forward-looking and consistent over time, and thus preferences to be stable, although households can be irrational and market still rational (ibid, Becker 1991, x; 1962, 8). Given that our connectomes change and situational factors influence us, stable preferences appear improbable, but Becker’s method of analysis is obviously a success.

To sum up, it is not a big problem if philosophers and social scientists make demands on business. The problem is that business people yield to these demands, which are based on ignorance of the resident social morality in business, the morality of the marketplace. If we want to avoid this problem, philosophers and social scientists have to acquaint themselves with business and the morality of the marketplace, and business people have to defend their ground.
3.2 BEWARE OF THE COMMUNITY

In this chapter (3.2) I shall argue against seeing individualism as a disease and community as a cure. I shall discuss the problems caused by arguing from ‘the greater good’ and seeing the individual as something to be sacrificed. The most serious problems start when unique individuals are reduced into representatives of a group. Recent financial crisis inspired claims about ‘corporate psychopaths’ creating problems. This is just another instance of the popular tendency to blame a few bad apples, while the real problem is the madness of the crowds.

As noted above we should all beware of being ruled by the law of the instrument – the tendency of the small boy with a hammer to find out that everything he runs into needs pounding, the tendency of the drunkard to hunt for his lost key under the street light, and the tendency of the philosopher to claim that unexamined life is not worth living for a man. To continue the list, social scientists should beware of allowing social overrun individual, and social policy overrun social interaction. When in Finland a kid takes a gun to school and shoots his schoolmates, it is interpreted as a social problem to be solved by ‘more sense of community’; when in USA people mind their own business instead of enthusing about politics, the community is claimed to be lost – and everywhere the reason is thinking like an economist (Putnam 2000, Marglin 2008, Stout 2008, Gintis & Khurana 2008, Sandel 2012). There is no reason to even try denying the necessity of social exchange for an ultra-social animal like us, but it is not reasonable to label individualism ‘the problem’ and collectivism ‘the solution’. Since requisite variation produces the raw material for natural selection and this process of evolution carries us all, individualism is vital. The communities consist of real people, actual individuals.

3.2.1 GREATER GOOD

Joshua Greene claims that in all his years “as a trolleyologist” he has “never encountered anyone who was not aware of the utilitarian rationale for pushing the man off the footbridge” (Greene 2014, 128). Technically, Greene’s rationale is pseudo-utilitarian or prudential, but since Greene presents it as ‘utilitarian rationale’ and in this study we only discuss his argument, there is no risk of confusion and we can stick to his terminology. Greene’s ‘trolleyology’, of course, refers to widespread experimental use of the ‘trolley problem’ (Foot 2013). Among other things this problem puts the life of one man against the lives of five men. It asks us to judge whether it is morally permissible to direct the runaway trolley on one track and kill the one man on that track, in order to divert it from its present track where it will kill the five men there. In another version of the problem diverting the trolley is replaced by pushing a heavy man off the footbridge onto the track to stop the trolley and save those five men. The crux of the matter in the various versions of ‘trolleyology’ is the framing of the problem: unique persons are reduced into impersonal, interchangeable
Referring to this footbridge scenario, Greene states that “no one’s ever said: ‘Try to save more lives? Why, that never occurred to me!” (Greene 2014, 128). This is odd, since I recall my first reaction, which has only been strengthened with further discussion: Why should anyone’s life be sacrificed for anyone else’s life or any group’s life? Nevertheless, for the sake of the argument, let us assume that everyone thinks like Greene claims, and let us assume that these problems elicit ‘utilitarian rationale’ from the respondents as a necessary human characteristic – a true universal actually shared by every human individual and only them – and then ponder some implications.

Let us hypothesise that our common ‘utilitarian rationale’ is based on our common subconscious memory, an inherited behavioural feature from a situation 200,000 years ago when our ancestors consisted of a group of 5000 breeding females (Dunbar 2014, 14). Such a small population could have been wiped out of existence by an efficient pact of predators, an effective virus, or a local natural disaster – at that moment Homo sapiens was an endangered species. Then the rationale of preserving as many individuals as possible is clear: as ultra-social animals dependent on our conspecifics we are trying to prevent our own death by avoiding the extinction of our group – and ultimately we are in effect avoiding the extinction of our species. Our present situation is, of course, entirely different. We are a ubiquitous mass the reduction of which is seen by many of us as the only way to prevent the extinction of – first a whole lot of other species we depend on and then ultimately – our species. Could we then write off the ‘utilitarian rationale’ as a remainder of our past as a scarce species fighting for its survival, as an intuition that has survived its usefulness and relevance? We possibly could, if there were no evidence that the ‘utilitarian rationale’ is actually counter-intuitive. We cannot discard it as an intuition, because it is not an intuition; it is reasoning, since there is evidence “that people who generally favor effortful thinking over intuitive thinking are more likely to make utilitarian judgments” (Greene 2014, 126). The driving force of Greene’s argument for the utilitarian rationale is the promotion of his theory of human dual-process morality where emotional intuition collides with essentially utilitarian cost-benefit reasoning (ibid, 172). This is based on the above-mentioned division of systems of thought: System 1 is automatic, fast, quite effortless, and beyond voluntary control; System 2 demands attention and effort (Kahneman 2013, 20–1). Why do we then effortfully reason that the death of one man is preferable to the deaths of five men, even though we know that there are too many of us around for our own good?

As noted above, our non-moral and moral intuitions and reasoning are equally subject to framing and priming effects, which means that they are affected by the ways of presenting equivalent information, like the words chosen, and by the environment of the moment, like the activities done or the scents smelled. In the cases where framing consists of reducing human individuals into anonymous numbers, why do we choose to reduce them into amounts of individual human beings? Why not count, say, the weight of
human tissue involved? Why not ask whether one extremely heavy man is worth more than five extremely light men? We could start with the fact that there appear to be too many of our conspecifics around for the Earth to support, because we have grown to capture too much energy (Morris 2011, 83–4). Therefore, energy efficiency is to be preferred. In general bigger animals are more energy efficient than smaller ones (Bejan & Zane 2013, 96). This applies to human individuals in sports, where bigger and taller means faster (ibid, 104). Let us assume that in general bigger individuals are more energy efficient vehicles of human body mass than smaller ones. Therefore, to stop one big man from being overrun by a runaway trolley, you should drop five smaller men on the track, you should sacrifice the tissue of five less energy efficient specimens for the benefit of the tissue of one more energy efficient specimen. Now we see what actually happens in ‘utilitarian rationale.’ Even though Greene suggests that our emotional intuition is myopic to side effects, it is more probable that both our emotional and rational approach is actually myopic to our real goal. While we consider the trolley problem, we are not saving the five, we are sacrificing the one in the name of the ‘greater good’. In fact, after all the fine philosophy about greater good Greene eventually states as much: “Life grew increasingly complex, finding again and again the magic corner in which individual sacrifice buys collective success, from bees to bonobos” (Greene 2014, 347, emphasis added). When unique individuals are turned into interchangeable blobs of human tissue they are easier to sacrifice in the name of the community, which Green’s ‘utilitarian rationale’ in practice requires. This rationale has been applied to the full in chasing utopian ideologies (Pinker 2012, 395). Timothy Snyder sums up his body count of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Europe with some sobering comments on humanity: “Each of the living bore a name. [...] Each of the dead became a number” (Snyder 2011, 379, 391–4).

To dismiss the Nazis or the Soviets as beyond human concern or historical understanding is to fall into their moral trap. The safer route is to realize that their motives for mass killing, however revolting to us, made sense to them. [...] it was an instance, albeit an extreme one, of a Nazi value that is not entirely alien to us: the sacrifice of the individual in the name of the community (ibid, 400).

Sacrificing or ‘scapegoat mechanism’ is not alien to us, on the contrary, it is all too familiar and has even been assigned a vital role in the evolution of human culture (Girard et al. 2010, 65, 67, 102, 117). As noted above, even today with the full benefit of hindsight we may ask whether we would “not have killed Hitler in 1933 to save the lives of 6 million Jews and 60 million German, British, Russian, American, and other international civilians and soldiers” (Raine 2014, 364). If we actually believe that Gavrilo Princip ignited the First World War and Adolf Hitler the Second World War and that the ‘utilitarian rationale’ works, then we can reason that it would have been better to kill Princip and Hitler. We can reason that one man would have been killed instead
of 15 million or 66 million, respectively. This deduction does not differ in any meaningful way from the widely held belief that “God accepted the torture-sacrifice of an innocent man in exchange for not visiting a worse fate on the rest of humanity” or from the claim that “it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (Pinker 2012, 251–2, 162; John 11:50).

Sacrificing men and other living things in the name of a community appears to be a recurrent theme in human history, be the reasoning behind it an ideology with or without a god. Maybe we as an ultra-social species are prone to worshipping the community and reasoning that it is not only sometimes unavoidable but actually right and good to kill in the name of the community – and that dying in the name of the community is the duty of the individual, a just desert. As noted above, our history testifies of our propensity to enjoy sacrificing and watching the suffering of other living things (Pinker 2012). This is also visible in modern entertainment populated with serial killers and torturers of all sorts – and modern violent ideologies. As quoted by Pinker, Alexander Solzhenitsyn recognizes the necessity of ideology as a means to really horrendous atrocities (Pinker 2012, 355). Large scale atrocities have to be justified by a social morality of suitable calibre.

**Stalinism, too, was a moral as well as a political system, in which innocent and guilty were psychic as well as legal categories, and moral thinking was ubiquitous. A young Ukrainian communist party activist who took food from the starving was sure that he was contributing to the triumph of socialism: “I believed because I wanted to believe” (Snyder 2011, 401).**

During the latest hundred years from the Russian revolution to present day we have seen what happens when the justification goes from end to means, and the end is the greater good, the triumph of a community consisting of a social class, a race, a nation, or a religious group – the ‘utilitarian rationale.’ Snyder makes a valid point about the reduction of individuals into numbers, and the importance of opposing that reduction.

**The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers, some of which we can only estimate, some of which we can reconstruct with fair precision. It is for us scholars to seek these numbers and to put them into perspective. It is for us humanists to turn the numbers back into people. If we cannot do that, then Hitler and Stalin have shaped not only our world, but our humanity (ibid, 408).**

Turning numbers back into people is especially important because the obsession with numbers in the case of casualties has led to bizarre competition about the biggest loser. The nations that have since the Second World War made most noise about the number of their casualties have rationally speaking competed to show how incompetent they were in defending their citizens.
Incomprehensibly, this evidence of the incompetence has not been used against the rulers, but instead they have been allowed to use it against others to demand compensation – as if the individuals who lost their lives were property of the rulers who should then be compensated for the loss of their proprietary subordinates. Unique individual victims are thus reduced into representatives of their respective nations and further into mere numbers to be used by the political leaders for their arguments.

It seems that the worst atrocities have been enabled by the reduction of unique individuals into representatives of a group, be it class, race, religion, or anything else. “The cognitive habit of treating people as instances of a category gets truly dangerous when people come into conflict” (Pinker 2012, 390). The problem is that even those who apparently oppose these dangers stoop to the same measures, which under the euphemisms of “remedial discrimination” or “affirmative action [...] have been riding a wave of popularity throughout the world” (ibid, 469). Thus they only strengthen the already toxic tendency to reduce unique individuals into representatives of a group, a stereotypic mass, and at the same time strengthen the equally toxic mindless adherence to one’s own group. “The overall problem is that groups take on an identity of their own, and individual’s desire to be accepted within a group, and to promote its standing in comparison to other groups, can override their better judgment” (ibid, 673). An extreme case of the madness of the crowds is a group of people mutilating themselves in religious fervour (Canetti 1973, 146–54). Even in its less extreme forms the problem of groupthink is so obvious that it quite probably has not escaped detection in any culture; in Finland it is expressed by a saying which can mean either that stupidity gets condensed in a group, or more appropriately that a group is condensed stupidity. Pinker asks how we can “explain extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of the crowds”, and lists some “pathologies of thought” that groups can breed: polarization, obtuseness, and animosity between groups (Pinker 2012, 672).

If an individual is important, then he or she has to be important as a unique individual. How do we measure unique individuals? Despite our obsession with counting these unique individuals as representatives of a species or a nation they are not interchangeable. This is as obvious to a parent thinking about her or his children as to a supervisor thinking about her or his closest subordinates. It does not matter how passionately we insist on equality, individuals are unique and perceived as such by us. Effortful thinking may lead us to ‘utilitarian rationale’ and to treating individuals simply as numbers but it is not a benefit.

The problem with ‘trolleyology’, thought experiments, and utopias is the ease of twisting and turning them around endlessly without any need of personal commitment. One can assume that the five men standing on one trolley track have intentionally put the one man on the other track trusting on your intuitive preference of rather killing the one than the five (Thomson 1985, 1398). Or one can assume all the six men to be so far innocent, but borrow Hitler – who is even today employed in these games – from J. J. C. Smart;
instead of being in danger of drowning, Hitler is now among the five men on the track in Berchtesgaden in 1938 (Smart 2013, 424). If we kill the five, we wipe out one potentially very bad man and allegedly prevent the Second World War. Or one can assume that the lonely man on the track has just invented the cure for cancer without having done any notes yet – and then we wipe out him and the cure just to save the five men on the other track who happen to be Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler, accompanied by two destructive individuals of your choice.

3.2.2 COMMUNITY AGAINST MARKETS

Stephen A. Marglin emphasises the benefits of community. The title of his book tells the story: *The Dismal Science: How Thinking like an Economist Undermines Community* (Marglin 2008). If thinking like an economist really is a threat to the community, then the community is surely losing, since the IQ of humankind is on the rise and “smarter people tend to think more like economists” (Pinker 2012, 800–2). Marglin starts by claiming that “what is lost as economic development proceeds […] is community,” and in the loss of community “economics is the enabler; economics provides the justification for building a world based on markets,” a world that “has no place for community” (Marglin 2008, ix). He ends his criticism by blaming Amartya Sen’s conception of cultural freedom for being hostile to parental choice, an indispensable part of community (ibid, 261).

In Sen’s hands the argument for cultural freedom easily slides into an argument against parental choice, especially if the parents are likely to opt for faith-based education. Indeed, Sen is sharply critical of British government policies extending the support given Christian schools to the schools of other faiths […] The test for Sen is “what would best enhance the capability of the children to live ‘examined lives’ as they grow up” […] and faith-based schools do not pass muster (ibid).

Marglin shares “Sen’s doubts about education that reduces identity to the single dimension of religion” but parts “company at the point where the argument turns into one against parental choice” because “no culture – other than the dominant national culture – will long survive unless parents are empowered to instill in their children their own values, customs, traditions, and expectations,” and parental choice is good, even when their chosen education “reduces identity to the single dimension of religion” and does not “enhance the capability of the children to live ‘examined lives’ as they grow up” (ibid, 261–2). His toleration of single-minded education is limited, though. In the question of teaching economics to students in colleges Marglin takes exactly the opposite stance. He criticises the elementary textbooks for reducing economics to the single dimension of praise to markets, since “a
perusal of leading texts leaves no doubt as to the core message: markets are good for people” (ibid, 5).

To sum it up, Marglin defends the parental choice in the case of faith-based education of under-age children, because “parents never have full control over their children’s upbringing” – there are always other influences (Marglin 2008, 262). There is no arguing against that. Nevertheless, this claim applies all the more to adult college students, who are under full control of neither their parents nor their teachers. One is hard-pressed to understand why Marglin accepts single-minded education in the faith-based schools for small children but not in colleges for grown-up students of economics. Whatever the reason, it is connected to community and the impact of economics on community. Marglin presents the market view of community, according to which it should “be a matter of personal choice, no less than which flavor of ice cream one consumes [...] if people want community, they will have it; if not, they won’t” (Marglin 2008, 32). He rejects this point of view, though, basically because human preferences are not immutable.

There is an important point at stake here, perhaps the central point of this book: to the extent that the issue of community is one of preferences, and preferences are, as economists are accustomed to insist, grounded in human nature, a concern for community does not lead to criticism of economics. It would truly be blaming the messenger for the message to fault economics for the content of immutable preferences. If, however, as this book argues, preferences are not immutable, and the apparatus of economics itself influences the kinds of choice both individuals and societies make, then economics, at least as presently constituted, is part of the problem and is unlikely to be part of the solution (ibid).

The central point of Marglin’s book is that denying the immutability of human preferences serves as an argument against economics. Why? This depends on the role of ‘given preferences’ in economics.

Given preferences. This assumption is in some sense the hallmark of economics. Descriptive economics can get along very well without assuming that preferences are given once and for all, but the normative and constructive agenda of demonstrating the virtue of a market system requires given preferences. Without this assumption, we can’t take preference satisfaction as a measure of well-being (ibid, 62).

Marglin denies the immutability of human preferences; he denies the assumption about given preferences. Given this, there are no more immutable preferences, no more normative or constructive agenda, no more myths to praise the markets for. “A central contention of this book is that the foundational assumptions of economics are not eternal truths about human nature but rather the distillation of complex myths – myths that emerged from
cultural changes in Europe and North America over the last four hundred years” (ibid, 80). When Marglin has cleared the field of all these myths, what comes instead? Community does. Under the title The Argument So Far the first theme is: “Community is important to a good and meaningful life” (ibid, 56). To appreciate the weight of this apparently innocent primary premise of Marglin’s argument, we have to understand his strict requirements for ‘community’. According to Marglin ‘community’ provides a kind of social glue, binding people together in relationships that give form and flavour to life – but your everyday association does not qualify because it makes little claim on your loyalties, does not define your being, and is not central to who you are (ibid, 20). Marglin’s ‘community’ thus means something totally different from the above-mentioned ‘ultra-social’ trait of living in highly cooperative groups of hundreds or thousands of individuals with a refined division of labour and attributing intentional mental states to our conspecifics and acting accordingly. Marglin’s ‘community’ demands commitment and defines your identity, its bonds and identities are not freely chosen by you, and leaving it involves cost (ibid, 21). A ‘community’ thus subordinates you, defines your identity, and effectively reduces you to its representative, stripping away your individuality. Unsurprisingly, when Marglin presented his book in a seminar in the Helsinki School of Economics in March 2009, a participant pointed out that to understand the suffocating atmosphere of such a ‘community’ one would have to grow up in one of the strictly religious rural villages in the Northern Finland. To claim that such a ‘community’ is important to good and meaningful life is thus an exceptionally heavy statement. It is also a categorical claim without any uncertainty or qualifications, which means that it is a claim about every human being. Moreover, it is a claim about ‘a good and meaningful life’, which is a controversial subject to the extreme. Finally, it is an empirical claim that by its very nature can be evaluated only a posteriori, when all the evidence is in, after every individual specimen of the species Homo sapiens has passed away – and in that point of time there is no one left to evaluate the claim. To sum up, it is a claim about an immutable human nature consisting of the importance of ‘community’ to a good and meaningful life, without exceptions or qualifications – in a word, a myth. Since Marglin’s stated purpose is to do away with myths about immutable human preferences, he was asked about this apparent contradiction in the above-mentioned seminar. He answered that he would not call his premise ‘immutable human preferences’. He said it is rather what we are as human beings. One is hard-pressed to understand how what we are as human beings differs from an immutable human nature or a set of immutable human preferences. That “in economics the individual is no more than a set of preferences, coupled with the capacity to act on them” does not seem any more faulty or mythical than the claim that the commitment-demanding, identity-defining, suffocating “community is important to a good and meaningful life” (ibid, 62, 56). Marglin does not in fact deny immutable human nature at all. He only denies the version presented by (mainstream) economics, his own field of expertise. He then offers in
exchange another version of immutable human preferences. This human nature is every bit as immutable as the one presented by its opponent, the mainstream economics. Consequently, the issue is not whether human nature is immutable or not; neither is the issue in the case against Sen, whether education can reduce identity to a single dimension. According to Marglin the issue is, respectively, what constitutes the immutable human nature, and what is the single dimension to which the education is allowed to reduce identity.

Questions about human nature, and its mutability or immutability are central to both economics and ethics. Any theory of morality compatible with our present scientific knowledge has to acknowledge at least two things. First, it has to cope with the limited malleability of human nature. Especially thinkers with socialist leanings appear unable to cope with the fact that people do not want the things that these thinkers see as worth wanting. They are unable to accept the fact that a lot of people have risked their lives to escape any of the actual socialist societies throughout history, no matter how enchanting the ideal of socialism has been designed to appear. History has shown that designing a society ignoring salient features of human nature and then coercing men to change in order to fit into the design, is no success. Human nature is obviously malleable only within limits.

Second, the theory has to cope with the limited stability of human nature. Especially thinkers with conservative leanings appear unable to cope with the fact that human beings today desire things the previous generations did not even know and reject things the previous generations saw as worth wanting. For example, women’s attitude to marriage has changed dramatically first in the Western countries and now in the growing Eastern economies (The Economist 2011). The Asian values are evidently quite as vulnerable to the effects of rising wealth as have been the Western values. Human nature is obviously malleable.

This reluctance to accept either the fact that human nature is not to be changed at will or the fact that it is not to be barred from changing at will seems to be connected with political, religious, and ethical traditions. Marglin and others who defend community as an intrinsic good appear to believe in an immutable human nature. For Robert D. Putnam this human nature seems to have found its fullest expression in United States in the 1950s–60s, when all sorts of ‘social capital’ indicators peaked – association memberships, Parent-Teacher Associations, church attendance, trade union memberships, professional association memberships, and card games (Putnam 2000, 54, 57, 71, 81, 84, 105). Of course, it might just be that Americans were for a while the only affluent nation – under “the threat of leisure” (ibid, 16). They enjoyed the exceptional luxury of having time for all sorts of hobbies and activities until other nations had risen from the ruins of the Second World War and started competing with American companies. Stiff competition naturally allows people less leisure, because it demands them to work harder – a situation described by Putnam as “overwork” (ibid, 27, 86). One is hard-pressed to see an exceptionally affluent society amidst devastated nations in the aftermath of
the most deadly achievement of humankind with 66 million casualties and cities levelled to rubble as anything else than a historical anomaly. It is not reasonable to see it as a standard for community to be copied or emulated – which is actually visible in Putnam’s various examples of generational replacement and his summary: “Yet again we see evidence of generational differences underlying the transformation of social customs in contemporary America” (ibid, 62, 72, 108). As noted above, even though scientists widely accept evolution, some of them still find it “hard to comprehend that this means each generation can differ infinitesimally from the one before”, and many of us just cannot abandon “talk about how we were ‘meant’ to be” (Zuk 2013, 6, 8–9, 13). The teleological illusion of there being something we are meant to be, or a way we are meant to live, or a society we are meant to live in is a resilient parasite that seems to feed as well on secular as on religious ideologies. As noted above, Bernard Williams gives us a wise advice to respect the relativism of distance; we can be confident in our values but not convinced of their being objective, so that we avoid the mistake of trying to seal determinate values to future society (Williams 2006, 173). Even though “to our immediate successors, to our children at least, we have reason to try to transmit more: it is a mark of our having ethical values that we aim to reproduce them,” to remoter generations we should not go “beyond sending them, if we can, free inquiry and reflection, a legacy we can see as created by our knowledge” (ibid). Doing otherwise contradicts the whole point of generational replacement, the engine of evolution – only an adequate amount of funerals will make anything new possible.

Every society has an establishment that only changes via generational replacement. In Finland the establishment appears now set on conserving the welfare state by sealing a determinate structure built in a particular historical situation for eternity – or at least for as long as the generations who built it can benefit from it. The popular saying about the generals always preparing the army for the previous war is just another version of the law of the instrument and applies to all sorts of activities; quite possibly our advice to our immediate successors is closer to the advice given to us by our immediate predecessors than anything actually prescient. Free inquiry and reflection are quite possibly the most useful legacy, even though conservatives and traditionalists attack it because “they fear the uncertainty that seems to follow from it, the situation in which the best lack all conviction” (ibid, 168–9). As noted above, this fear is based on overestimating the need for justifications – as if people were all the time on the verge of rushing into immorality unless curbed by our rational justifications – and the effect of justifications – as if our rational justifications would actually stop the ‘amoral man’.

### 3.2.3 LEADERS WITHOUT ETHICS

Steven Pinker makes an important point about modern approach to business: “All leaders, of course, must have a generous dose of confidence to have
Messy morality, greater good, and sacrifice

become leaders, and in this age of psychology pundits often diagnose leaders they don’t like with narcissistic personality disorder” (Pinker 2012, 628, emphasis added). Our ancestors expressed their dislike by labels like ‘sorcerer’, ‘pagan’, ‘witch’, ‘heretic’, ‘enemy of the people’, or ‘under man’; now the preferred label is ‘narcissist’ or ‘psychopath’. Since leaders by definition do not make up the mass of people, the public opinion on them easily follows these psychology pundits and eventually “in popular fiction evil takes the form of [...] corporate executive” (ibid, 597). There are different approaches, though. They are visible in the titles of articles. In business discussion the negative examples are still ‘leaders’: ‘Bad Leaders: How They Get That Way and What to Do about Them’ (Allio 2007). In public affairs discussion corporate leaders get a tougher treatment: ‘Leaders Without Ethics in Global Business: Corporate Psychopaths’ (Boddy et al 2010). Finally, in business ethics discussion the choice of words is simplified and strict: ‘Successful Psychopaths: Are They Unethical Decision-Makers and Why?’ (Stevens et al 2012). Given the use of ‘unethical’ without any definition, one is misled to think that it is an unequivocal expression in ethics; as noted above, even when ‘unethical’ is defined, the definition is dubious.

Clive R. Boddy appears to fit Pinker’s description of a psychology pundit. Boddy claims that “when presented to management academics in discussion, the Corporate Psychopaths Theory of the Global Financial Crisis is accepted as being plausible and highly relevant” (Boddy 2011, 258). Such a theory surely deserves a look. There are two conflicting strains in Boddy’s article: First, there is the ‘business ethics’ approach of presenting the values of the writer as the unequivocal, universally accepted and eternally valid ‘ethical’, according to which every person and every action is to be evaluated, and, second, there is the analytical approach of trying to understand how certain brain structure or activity is expressed in behaviour and how people behaving in a certain way fit into social structures. Let us look at these two sides of the article in the order they are presented.

Boddy introduces his theory by referring to quite a puzzling article. ‘Impostors Masquerading as Leaders: Can the Contagion be Contained’ is a compilation of strong claims without any cited evidence, only fierce moral indignation against “the peculiarly Indian phenomenon of rich industrialists getting richer running ‘sick’ companies” (Singh 2008, 733). The author sees problems especially in family-owned companies, but the relevance of these Indian issues for any theory of leadership is unclear (ibid, 736). The only reference to actual research concerns enduring companies, as if longevity as such were a goal in business (ibid, 743). The Indian business environment, which Singh refers to, surely has its own unique characteristics, but mistaking longevity for a goal in business is a recurring phenomenon among the practitioners of ‘business ethics’ in liberal market economies with modern corporate business, the focus of Boddy’s theory. In such an economy the purpose of any private business enterprise is generally to make a profit, and any other reason to continue business should be justified by argument.
Longevity is a consequence, not a goal as such – unless the focus is not to make a profit but instead to build an empire. This is usually seen as a sure sign of corporate management gone astray, one of those self-serving practices Singh so vehemently opposes. Moreover, longevity may not always be a good sign at all. A vigorous competition produces creative destruction, competitive selection, which quite probably is more important for industry evolution than individual firm adaptation (Hannan & Freeman 1997). This is the standard evolutionary model of variation and selection, or requisite variation and ruthlessly weeding out the worst performers. As noted above, only an adequate amount of funerals will make room for anything new. Nevertheless, when “companies are dying younger because they are failing to adapt to increasing complexity,” the conclusion can be that “rising corporate mortality is an increasing threat” (Reeves et al. 2016, 49, 55).

If Singh’s article seems quite irrelevant to the discussion of corporate business in a liberal market economy, the next reference brings us straight to the crux of the matter. According to Robert J. Allio, “one need not be a trained psychiatrist to recognize the manifestation of personality disorder in many leaders” (Allio 2007, 13). That may not be impossible, but there is evidence of the contrary.

* Lay ratings of psychopathy were much higher than scientific population estimates. These results question the use of approaches that purposefully or inadvertently encourage the perception that psychopaths are common in workplaces, and provide formal diagnostic criteria of psychopathy for use by lay persons. They further question the wisdom of any approach to unacceptable behaviour at work that labels or stigmatises individuals (for example, ‘bullies’, ‘monsters’, or ‘snakes’) (Caponecchia et al 2012, 406).

Our history testifies about our propensity to spot not only real but also imagined threats and suspect foul play in any unfortunate situation. As noted above, we have never been shy of using labels like ‘sorcerer’, ‘pagan’, ‘witch’, ‘heretic’, ‘enemy of the people’, or ‘under man’. Moving from labels claimed to be justified by religion to labels claimed to be justified by science has not changed the basic pattern. This propensity is possibly residue in our evolutionary history from a time when hair-triggered response to any potential threat has been essential for survival (Atran & Norenzayan 2004, 718–20). A primate with an overactive tendency to detect hostile agency – getting alarmed by wind-rustled leaves – may have paid little extra cost for false positives, whereas a conspecific with less acute tendency may have paid for the false negative with its life. In our present, peaceful existence this overactive agency detection may be counterproductive. Since we are all too eager to spot all sorts of deficiencies in each other, it is not advisable to encourage people to think that their co-workers might be psychopaths harbouring hostile intentions.

Boddy does not appear to worry about the effects of labelling. In his article he goes on to refer to his own previous articles on the matter, which is
understandable since he is propagating his own theory. He further claims that “the Global Financial Crisis has hastened an already changing climate in business research” but these possible changes in disciplinary focus are beyond the scope of this text, although there apparently is an interest in “dark managers,” the ones he labels “Corporate Psychopaths” (Boddy 2011, 255). His agenda is simple: he wants to blame someone for the financial turmoil. It is of course disconcerting that he first cites Singh’s tirade and then goes on one himself, furious about the behaviour and benefits of the alleged “corporate psychopaths” – without noticing that he has just touched the crux of the matter: the people he accuses have a clean conscience and lack any regrets.

In watching these events unfold it often appears that the senior directors involved walk away with a clean conscience and huge amounts of money. Further, they seem to be unaffected by the corporate collapses they have created. They present themselves as glibly unbothered by the chaos around them, unconcerned about those who have lost their jobs, savings, and investments, and as lacking any regrets about what they have done. They cheerfully lie about their involvement in events, are very persuasive in blaming others for what has happened and have no doubts about their own continued worth and value. They are happy to walk away from the economic disaster that they have managed to bring about, with huge payoffs and with new roles advising governments how to prevent such economic disasters (ibid, 256).

Since Boddy identifies none of those he accuses, there is no proof of their creating corporate collapses, lying about their involvement in events or blaming others without justification. Therefore it is quite possible that they have a clean conscience and lack any regrets simply because they have actually done nothing wrong. Boddy’s unspecified standards do not give us any reason to suspect that huge payoffs as such are wrong. Taking a risk and failing is business as usual, unless a crime has been committed. Boddy gives us no reason to suspect a crime, let alone convincing us with evidence of one. The unidentified individuals that Boddy accuses quite obviously do not share Boddy’s moral approach. That is no reason to blame them. Since Boddy offers no evidence to support his accusations, this part of the article has nothing to offer as a scientific or theoretical approach. The claims of this type usually travel under the various acronyms connected to ‘corporate social responsibility’. This ‘Business Ethics’ approach typically makes claims about ‘ethical practices’, ‘unethical choices’, and ‘moral choices’ without any definition of either ‘ethical’ or ‘moral’ (Boddy, Ladyshewsky & Galvin 2010). Fortunately, Boddy is not contented just to vent his anger. He also makes empirical claims.

Many of these people display several of the characteristics of psychopaths and some of them are undoubtedly true psychopaths. Psychopaths are the 1% of people who have no conscience or empathy and who do not care for anyone other than themselves. Some
Psychopaths are violent and end up in jail, others forge careers in corporations. The latter group who forge successful corporate careers is called Corporate Psychopaths (ibid, 256).

Boddy actually claims that some psychopaths are violent and end up in jail, others forge careers in corporations. If you are a psychopath, you are either in jail or on a corporate career, nowhere else. Such a strong claim should have a solid background. From the article one can sum up Boddy’s analytical approach into five assumptions about why psychopaths seek leadership positions (incentive), how they seek them (action), why they succeed in it (talent), what mechanisms make it possible (environment), and what are the consequences (result).

First, the incentive for Corporate Psychopaths to seek leadership positions is to gain prestige, power, control over others, and financial rewards (ibid, 257). Boddy offers no explanation, why psychopaths would especially concentrate on corporations when areas like politics, religion, research, and professional sports offer similar positions of power and prestige, and quite possibly much less scrutiny than publicly owned corporations. Neither does he offer any explanation, why he “marries the terms ‘psychopath’ from the psychological literature with the term ‘corporate’ from the area of business to denote a psychopath who works and operates in the organisational area” when “these people have also been called Executive Psychopaths, Industrial Psychopaths, Organisational Psychopaths, and Organisational Sociopaths by other researchers in this emerging area of research” (ibid, 256).

Second, the action that makes Corporate Psychopaths rise in hierarchies is being charismatic, charming, determined, decisive, ruthless, and ideal leaders (ibid, 257). This assumption about psychopaths rising in corporate hierarchies sounds odd, since even Boddy states that psychopaths “should theoretically be almost wholly destructive to the organizations that they work for” and they “are also poorly organized managers who adversely affect productivity and have a negative impact on many different areas of organizational effectiveness” (ibid, 256).

Third, the talents that give Corporate Psychopaths the edge are intelligence and social skills. Psychopaths having these talents is dubious, since empirical findings not only “do not support the assumption that psychopathic personality traits contribute beneficially to a successful life” but actually “cast doubt on the existence of the successful psychopath” (Ullrich, Farrington & Coid 2008, 1170). It is, of course, a matter of definition. When “psychopaths are impulsive and unreliable – they only rarely hold down a permanent job” one can recalibrate; in Adrian Raine’s research on temporary-employment agencies “those without a conviction [of an offense] were the ‘successful’ psychopaths” (Raine 2014, 123). The bar of ‘success’ is put quite low. “It’s not surprising, then, that psychopaths make bad decisions and mess up their own lives as well as those unfortunate enough to be within their social circle” (ibid, 142).
Fourth, the environment suits Corporate Psychopaths, these “charming individuals who have been able to enter modern corporations and other organisations and rise quickly and relatively unnoticed within them because of the chaotic nature of the modern corporation” (ibid, 257). Since this is a theory about corporate psychopaths causing a global financial crisis, it is improbable that many people actually could rise quickly and relatively unnoticed to a position powerful enough to have influence in world economy. It is possible that modern “corporate nature is characterized by rapid change, constant renewal and quite a rapid turnover of key personnel” (ibid). Nevertheless, this widely spread claim is still an empirical claim that should be justified by evidence, especially because of our ‘historical myopia’, our known tendency to overemphasise the available, usually the most recent events (Tversky & Kahneman 1973, 208; 1974, 1127). Without evidence of the contrary, it is quite possible that we simply imagine that modern corporation is more than the earlier ones ‘characterized by rapid change, constant renewal and quite a rapid turnover of key personnel’, because that is all we know and that is how we feel. It is also unclear, what Boddy means by the claim that “these changing conditions make Corporate Psychopaths hard to spot” when he simultaneously claims that they have been spotted well enough – to be promoted (ibid, 257). Should we really suspect every person, who is advancing quickly on her or his corporate career, of being a psychopath?

Fifth, “rising to key senior positions within modern financial corporations, where they are able to influence the moral climate of the whole organisation and yield considerable power, have largely caused the crisis” (ibid, 257). Since Boddy’s original estimate of “corporate psychopaths” is not available, let us look at the article ‘Leaders without Ethics in Global Business: Corporate Psychopaths’ where it is estimated that in senior management levels there are 3.5 percent “corporate psychopaths” when the estimate for the whole population is 1 percent (Boddy, Ladyshewsky & Galvin 2010, 127). Psychopaths’ concentrating on the top is implausible, given their above-mentioned limited ability to hold down a permanent job and the extremely vague conclusion of the only study of actual corporate employees “that a high level of psychopathic traits does not necessarily impede progress and advancement in corporate organizations” (Babiak, Neumann & Hare 2010, 192). Moreover, even the high estimate of 3.5 percent of psychopaths on senior management level would hardly amount to a power to mess up the world economy.

Boddy’s urge to blame ‘corporate psychopaths’ is the standard approach of a few bad men causing all the trouble. “Ever since the rise of Hitler, a debate has raged between two positions that seem equally unacceptable: that Hitler single-handedly duped an innocent nation, and that the Germans would have carried out the Holocaust without him” (Pinker 2012, 677). Let us ignore the odd reduction of humankind’s deadliest achievement into the Holocaust, and focus on the tendency to blame “a few bad apples who do all the damage” when actually most of us “are wired for violence, even if in all likelihood we will never
have an occasion to use it” and “evil in fact is perpetrated by people who are mostly ordinary, and who respond to their circumstances, including provocations by the victim, in ways they feel are reasonable and just” (ibid, 251–2, 581–2, 597). Bad things do happen because of the 1 percent of psychopaths, but most of it happens because the 99 percent of ordinary people are ready to “hurt a stranger against their own inclinations if they see it as part of a legitimate project in a society” and believe that everyone else thinks it is a good idea (ibid, 676–7). A few bad apples can do nothing so bad that social conformity could not make it even worse.

Also for the financial crisis there are plausible explanations that do not employ just a few bad apples. Simple observations about human behaviour suffice: “Homebuyers take on a mortgage, rather than rent, because they are confident houses will rise in price” (Coggan 2012, 1). Most people like to feel wealthy, but “how do you make poor people feel wealthy when wages are stagnant? You give them cheap loans” (Lewis 2011, 14). Consequently, “what appeared to be economic growth was activity fuelled by people borrowing money they probably couldn’t afford to pay” (Lewis 2012, xi). When credit is expanded, the extra money may be used productively but “it is just as likely that the new credit will be poured into the property market” (Coggan 2012, 48). Quite simply, there was a lot of money available for investing but not enough promising investment opportunities, as if the world was following the “theory of Vanishing Investment Opportunity” and too much money went into real estate, which grew disproportionately expensive (Schumpeter 2004b, 178). On top of that, while evaluating data for economic forecasts, the unique features of the situation were lost even by the experts, who ignored that “there had never before been such a widespread increase in U.S housing prices [...] the ratings agencies had never before rated securities as novel and complex as credit default options [...] the financial system had probably never been so highly leveraged, and it had certainly never made so many side bets on housing before” (Silver 2013, 43). “Far too many houses were bought with little or no money down, often for speculative purposes or on the hope that property values would keep rising” (Paulson 2010, 65). With such improbable assumptions about home prices “they didn’t need to collapse; they merely needed to stop rising so fast” (Lewis 2011, 80, emphasis in the original). So, there was an “open crowd” which “exists so long as it grows; it disintegrates as soon as it stops growing” (Canetti 1973, 16). All the gullible ones had already joined the crowd, and the rest of the people understood that “eventually, a house will be just a place to live and not the basis for an investment strategy” (Coggan 2012, 251). It is not reasonable to suspect a powerful group of successful psychopaths making a mess when all you need is a large human group, any of which is “likely to have very similar proportions of energetic, fertile, curious, creative, clever, talkative, and practical people” and any of which is quite capable of making a horrible mess when given opportunity (Morris 2011, 27).
Let us give Boddy’s theory the benefit of the doubt and not label it just a psychology pundit’s attempt to indiscriminately label corporate directors psychopaths. If there turns out to be some substance in the theory, it can have practical applications: it might be used to create tools for choosing able leaders. The ‘Business Ethics’ approach is useless, though. There is no reason to deviate from describing and analyzing incentives, actions, talents, environment, and results to prescribing ethical aspects. The analytical approach should cover the ‘ethical’ as well.

3.2.4 BAD LEADER – OR BAD FOLLOWERS?

As noted above, let us assume that MacIntyre is right in claiming “that the realm of managerial expertise is one in which what purport to be objectively-grounded claims function in fact as expressions of arbitrary, but disguised, will and preference” (MacIntyre 2003, 107). Given that, one cannot credibly claim expertise in management, but one can credibly claim to possess will and preference – and if others buy the argument, one can be a leader. Business Ethics school appears to follow this assumption in its focus on problems in leadership. The above-mentioned article ‘Bad Leaders: How They Get That Way and What to Do about Them’ is a case in point (Allio 2007). How do we define ‘bad leader’? Is it a question of bad intentions, bad methods, or bad consequences? Let us put it in another way: who would you name as the worst leader in known human history by intentions, methods, or consequences? Would you name Adolf Hitler? If you did, it would be no surprise. Steven Pinker quotes historians and researchers claiming that the Second World War was caused by Adolf Hitler’s personality and aims – and that he was the only European really wanting a war (Pinker 2012, 251–2). Matthew White ranks the Second World War 1939–45 with its 66 million casualties as number one among the deadliest achievements of humanity (White 2012, 529). As noted above, when the average person even imagines dealing with the most destructive person in human history, resorting to violence to stop him appears justified. Accordingly, Adrian Raine asks us whether we would “not have killed Hitler in 1933 to save the lives of 6 million Jews and 60 million German, British, Russian, American, and other international civilians and soldiers” (Raine 2014, 364). Surely the man credited as single-handedly leading humankind into its deadliest disaster so far must be the embodiment of bad leadership.

So, let us start with a preliminary definition of ‘bad leader’ as a leader who has bad intentions (extermination), uses bad methods (mass murder), and produces bad results (66 million deaths). Given the destruction and the consequences we still live with, it is understandable that the discussion of the Second World War continues, and we also get information not previously disclosed. Some of it brings back to discussion views that have not been sanitized by decades of hindsight. The over-simplified interpretation of humankind’s deadliest achievement gets more nuanced when the Second
World War is put into its historical connection. This is done by historians who show the war years 1939–45 as part of a social catastrophe that started a quarter of a century earlier.

_The names of Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler will forever be linked to the tragic course of European history in the first half of the twentieth century. [...] The Soviet and Nazi dictators were themselves products of the structural changes generated by the Great War. Before 1914 they were marginal figures and would not have had the slightest hope of entering political life. Only in their dreams could they have imagined themselves as powerful rulers and leaders of mass movements (Gellately 2008, 3)._  

While Matthew White counts the 20 million victims of Stalin separately from the 66 million of the Second World War, Timothy Snyder sums up the bodycount of an especially deadly era 1933–45 and an especially deadly area covering the Baltic states, Belarussia, Poland, and Ukraine.

_Molotov-Ribbentrop Europe was a joint production of the Soviets and the Nazis. [...] The use of the term Molotov-Ribbentrop line, though it may seem awkward at first, allows us to see a very special zone of Europe, whose peoples suffered three rounds of occupation during the Second World War: first Soviet, then German, then Soviet again (Snyder 2011, 379, 410)._  

The extent of the Soviet occupation is explained further by Keith Lowe: “Some Poles contend that the Second World War did not really end until even more recently: since the conflict officially began with the invasion of their country by both the Nazis and the Soviets, it was not over until the last Soviet tank left the country in 1989” (Lowe 2012, xv). Antony Beevor sums it up.

_Europe did not stumble into war on 1 September 1939. Some historians talk of a ‘thirty years’ war’ from 1914 to 1945, with the First World War as ‘the original catastrophe’. Others maintain that the ‘long war’, which began with the Bolshevik coup d’etat of 1917, continued as a ‘European Civil War’ until 1945, or even lasted until the fall of communism in 1989 (Beevor 2012, 1)._  

Obviously, claims about one individual’s personality and aims having caused the deadliest conflict of mankind are simplistic and unconvincing. The impact of any leader is defined by the actions of willing followers. In 1930s a lot of people on the Northern Hemisphere followed the leadership of two men obsessed with retribution: The first one gathered 89.9–99 percent of the popular vote in elections and “even if the voting was rigged, there was no question that most of the country embraced” his policy with its racism – and there also was “genuine national enthusiasm” and “real consensus” and identification with him “over broad segments of society” (Gellately 2008, 310–
The second one secured “60 percent of the popular vote” by attacking “the ‘despotism’ of those he denounced as ‘economic royalists’ and privileged princes of these new economic dynasties (was he not a privileged dynastic prince himself?)” and succeeded in his policy of “revenge on business” and scapegoating the wealthy and using government power to hunt down his critics and destroy their reputations (Cannadine 2006, 520, 546–8; Olson 2014, 108–13). The first one, Adolf Hitler, made a pact that paved the road to the official Second World War in 1939, and the second one, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, confirmed it: “At the international conferences of Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam in 1945 the Soviet Union’s allies recognized its primary interest in those countries, and thus de facto confirmed the otherwise defunct Nazi-Soviet Pact” and effectively endorsed “the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939” (Hosking 2012, 510; Lowe 2012, 220). Even though “it finally occurred to Churchill that he might be helping to consign millions to Communist rule,” he and Roosevelt had by their choices already saved a totalitarian regime – an enemy to wage the Cold War against (Gellately 2008, 555). The embarrassing naïveté of US government is evident, when after decades of bloodshed, man-made famine, and bullying of neighbouring countries by Lenin and Stalin, Roosevelt’s war-time “diplomats and advisers were talking of their worries that the USSR might become a bully” (Snyder 2010; Gellately 2008, 557).

Characteristically, the American debate on whether to enter another European war coincided with the alliance of Hitler and Stalin, 1939–41, but the debate focused on stopping Hitler, not Stalin; obviously, destroying Eastern Europe was alright but occupying Paris was too much (Moorhouse 2016; Olson 2014, 130). Given our interest in the real people making decisions in real situations, it is unfortunate that even the losers have had several decades to cloak their actions with politically correct interpretations. The need to cloak is understandable, but fortunately we have access to the uncensored thought of the major contestants, Americans and Germans, two powers emerging from national unifications in the 1860s.

The end of the German and American civil wars in the mid-1860s left the European and global scene utterly transformed by two great national unifications. [...] The question of which of these two great-power centres would prevail in Europe and across the world was not to be decided until the middle of the following century (Simms 2014, 236–7).

The uncensored German thought is presented by Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer in the form of discussions of German prisoners of war at the time when the outcome of the Second World War was not visible (Neitzel & Welzer 2013). When the future was open, there was no need for them to hide their attitudes or pretend being politically correct. There was no advantage of hindsight, either. Apparently, they were oblivious of the possibility that their discussions were recorded – and would someday surface in a totally different world. These recordings tell about willing followers and ready participants, and make the
claims about the role of one leading individual’s personality and aims even less convincing. According to Neitzel and Welzer “soldiers were extremely prone to violence right from the start of the World War II” (ibid, 45). The words of a bomber pilot tell it all.

On the second day of the Polish war I had to drop bombs on a station at Posen. Eight of the 16 bombs fell on the town, among the houses, I did not like that. On the third day I did not care a hoot, and on the fourth day I was enjoying it. It was our before-breakfast amusement to chase single soldiers over the fields with M.G. [machine gun] fire and to leave them lying there with a few bullets in the back (ibid).

There appears to be “the chronic potential for violence and even homicide among perfectly normal people” (ibid, 51). It appears that they “enjoyed doing things they would never have been allowed to under normal circumstances” and “they didn’t need to be acclimatized” (ibid, 137, 142). This resembles the American supremacist approach expressed for decades, lately in “the 2003 invasion of Iraq by a coalition led (and dominated) by the United States” when “the most salient public justifications for this were indeed couched in terms that have a moral overtone” (Coady 2008, 1). In Chris Kyle’s recent autobiography the moral justification of the invasion of Iraq is straightforward. There is no need to be acclimatized. Evil people deserve to be killed.

I’ve already described what it felt like to take my first sniper shot; there may have been some hesitation in the back of my mind, an almost unconscious question: Can I kill this person? [...] After the first kill, the others come easy. [...] Growing up, I wanted to be in the military. But I wondered, how would I feel about killing someone? Now I know. It’s no big deal. I did it a lot more than any American sniper before me. But I also witnessed the evil my targets committed and wanted to commit, and by killing them, I protected the lives of many fellow soldiers (Kyle 2014, 342, 429).

The resilience of this moralist approach is interesting. Even those who admit that going to the Iraqi War II in 2003 was based on lies, do not question going to the World War II in 1941, but only “the firebombing of Dresden and Hamburg and dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Sterba 2003, 150, 154, 193). Nevertheless, the lies appear quite similar in both cases: George W. Bush repeated false information on Iraq and the British helpfully produced a deceptive report; Franklin Delano Roosevelt was looking “for an incident which would justify him in opening hostilities” and the British were helpfully “fabricating letters and other documents” about “Nazi conspiracies in South America” (ibid, 148–9; Olson 2014, 400, 403;). Of course, Americans differ and disagree on this – quite possibly more vocally than any other nation. They also appear to see that also American soldiers have ‘enjoyed doing things
they would never have been allowed to under normal circumstances’ and that ‘they didn’t need to be acclimatized’.

For some reason, a lot of people back home – not all people – didn’t accept that we were at war. They didn’t accept that war means death, violent death most times. A lot of people, not just politicians, wanted to impose ridiculous fantasies on us, hold us to some standard of behavior that no human being could maintain.

I’m not saying war crimes should be committed. I am saying that warriors need to be let loose to fight war without their hands tied behind their backs (Kyle 2014, 342).

Actually, Americans debate endlessly the decisions made in the line of fire and the critique of them from the safety of the affluent home front secured by action in the line of fire, about means and ends of war. There is an even more relevant debate in Kyle’s autobiography, his internal debate whether to go abroad and kill people or work at home in a civilian profession: “Serving in the Teams is serving greater good. As a civilian, I’d just be serving my own good” (Kyle 2014, 369, emphasis in the original). It is interesting, that in a society, which quite probably embodies the social benefits of division of labour and voluntary exchange more fully than any other society, a man can be totally blind to these social benefits of markets. He does not see a ‘greater good’ being served by his staying home, raising his children, working to support his family, serving customers directly or through the organization employing him, paying for services produced by other people and thus helping employ them, paying taxes and thus helping pay for public services – living as a citizen.

To ask whether to altruistically go abroad and kill people or selfishly stay at home and serve people appears bizarre, but it can help us to understand what Clive R. Boddy’s above-mentioned theory actually means. Boddy thinks that we should screen the aspiring leaders and block the ascent of the psychopaths. Could we do it? And if we could, should we? Let us look at a couple of actual leaders to see how their professional practices were described in their biographies. Leader A first shot down his subordinates’ ideas and then stole them, he shouted and swore to his subordinates, tore them down and lifted them up, found their weaknesses and took advantage of them, appeared to lack the capacity for empathy, and behaved as if normal rules did not apply to him – and one of his ex-girlfriends actually claimed that he met the criteria of Narcissistic Personality Disorder described in a psychiatric manual (Isaacson 2011, 120, 124, 142, 184, 264, 266). Leader B rarely gave orders, and instead managed to communicate his desires very easily and naturally, without ever dictating, but instead bringing out the best in his subordinates, who in his presence became more intelligent, more vocal, more intense, more prescient, and more poetic (Bird & Sherwin 2009, 218). What were the results of their respective leaderships? The ‘psychopathic’ leader A was Steve Jobs, who gave us iMac, iPod, iPhone, iPad, and Toy Story. The ‘inspiring’ leader B was J.
Robert Oppenheimer, who gave us nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Just to add flavour to this comparison of leaders, let us note that ‘psychopathic’ Jobs claimed that ‘inspiring’ Oppenheimer was his role model especially in recruiting personnel (Isaacson 2011, 363).

Given that the biography is a reasonably accurate account of Jobs’ life and deeds, it would be understandable if only very few people would ever have wanted personal contact with him. So repulsive is the picture. Nevertheless, if one actually was caught into his ‘reality distortion field’ things might look totally different. The truth is that a huge amount of people are immensely enthusiastic about the products he made to appear, and his personal magnetism made a lot of people willingly tolerate all his quirks and make every effort to be part of the phenomenon producing revolutionary changes in several businesses. It is highly unlikely that many people would actually prefer a world where people like Jobs – focused, driven, and visionary, albeit intolerable for possibly most of us – were blocked from drawing others within their ‘reality distortion field’ – as long as these people live in a liberal market economy where they are free to choose their profession and employer without coercion. That is the wonder of the liberal market economy: a civilian staying at home and serving one’s own good is also serving the good of other people. Moreover, if he or she innovates, over 97 percent of the benefits are captured by consumers, and the innovator captures only a minuscule part (Nordhaus 2004; 2005). The innovator and innovations are footing the bill when the servants of greater good on taxpayers’ money go abroad and kill people.

Working for the gentle Oppenheimer may have been quite pleasant – if one was able to accept the mission of developing weapons of mass destruction and working for one of those “self-concious and daring intellectuals” who opposed National Socialism and yet worshipped Soviet Socialism so eagerly that the unprovoked attack into Finland in 1939 was no problem (Bird & Sherwin 2009, 143–4, 171–6). The naïveté of Oppenheimer and his fellow intellectuals in the 1930s is quite incredible. Yet, if one belonged to his social circle of American intellectuals far away from the European and especially Soviet Russian reality, one was quite probably fooled by the same utopian beliefs. That is the wonder of political ideology: serving the ‘greater good’ justifies spending taxpayers’ money on building nuclear bombs to be sent abroad to kill people.

As noted above, groupthink is easy and present-day intellectuals can be equally naïve. This is visible in the belief that serving the greater good justifies demanding that business enterprises screen their managers according to the dictates of moralistic business ethicists. What we have here, is a practical example of the risks of the belief in ideals: we are advised to block those with possibly psychopathic traits from being employed in private business enterprises and especially from climbing the stairs of hierarchy because they might end up being ‘unfit’ for a future job of theirs. This means that we evaluate real persons according to ideal requirements and terminate their careers because they do not fulfill these theoretical ideals and because our
theory states that they might possibly turn out to be ‘unfit’ for another job in the future. How sure are we about these ideals? How sure should we be to justify the consequences of our actions to the real people we are targeting?

The visionary and focused people who draw others within their reality distortion field, and make things happen, may look intolerable from a distance, as Jobs does based solely on the biography. Possibly they can be understood only at the close range, by the people who take the risk of treading in their reality distortion field. We should consider seriously whether we really want to label as psychopaths or narcissists those very people who most probably make innovations happen, the benefits of which are almost totally captured by the consumers. By innovations we do not mean just tangible products like iPods, iPads, and iPhones, but all those innovative approaches to all sorts of problems in manufacturing, transport, finance, organization, or any other human activity (Conner 2005; Mead 2007, 126–44). We all benefit from individual diversity. A society needs people who think differently – and turning this different thought into reality may require a somewhat non-conforming personality, not always the most pleasant one to be close to.
4 CONCLUSION

This dissertation quite obviously aims for an alternative way to look at morality by starting from the metaethics and running all the way to applied ethics. In metaethics the traditional division of labour between moral semantics and moral psychology deserves to be reversed as G. E. M. Anscombe suggested. Concentrating on moral psychology means following the thought expressed by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that we study how actual human beings make moral judgments. Research done in many areas outside philosophy show that our moral judgments are driven mostly by their possible consequences to us, not any thoughts about judging in a coherent manner the deeds done. Our actual morality thus appears to concern mostly our own well-being. The moral judgments thus appear to be consequences or post hoc rationalisations of the preceding choices, decisions, or judgments made subconsciously and under framing and priming effects. In other words, we are guided more by our instincts and situational factors than any theoretical deliberations. This accumulated knowledge gives grounds to doubt our philosophical tradition about normative human nature. Skeptical naturalism in ethics means acknowledging the obvious: a lot of people believe in objective moral facts and some construct elaborate arguments to defend this belief, but so far there is no scientific proof that the belief is justified and thus no proof that the arguments are valid. We have reasons to search for an alternative approach, since “in the long run philosophy has never successfully ignored new scientific views of the world nor escaped integrating scientific findings in some form or another into its theoretic schemes” (Walter 2009, 152). All this is theoretical and only serves philosophy.

To think about practice and serve our well-being, this dissertation proposes that we acknowledge that we all benefit from individual diversity and design of our commercial and social institutions accordingly. A society needs people who think differently – and turning this different thought into reality may require a somewhat non-conforming personality, not always the most pleasant one to be close to. To make sure we reap the benefits, it is reasonable to forget all abstract ideals and instead evaluate every minority of one, every unique individual as he or she actually is. In society this means building a Strawsonian liberal society that gives the individuals room for change and growth, a liberal market economy with the widest possibly individual liberty.

In a liberal market economy the business ethics side of the change would be best left to the markets. Any sane employer with a job to be done focuses on the available individuals and tries to find the right person for the job by assessing any particular employee’s strengths and weaknesses. Alas, ‘diversity’ at the workplace means the exact opposite, because ‘remedial discrimination’ and ‘affirmative action’ have been riding ‘a wave of popularity throughout the world’ (Pinker 2012, 469). Thus, under the title ‘Increasing Diversity in the
Work Force’ unique individuals are reduced to mere representatives of imaginary groups defined according to age, gender, ethnicity or any other feature that can be used to pigeonhole them (Fisher et al. 2006, 24–5). This is logical, since the American “diversity management approach” does not care about the individuals at all; it “seeks to give equal opportunity to all groups” (Rollinson 2005, 50, emphasis added). The British “equal opportunities approach” does not see the individuals, either, because it fights against “unfair discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion or ethnic origin and, to some extent, physical disability” (ibid, 51). These views offered as lessons to those responsible for human resource management in organisations follow the above-mentioned tendency to respect only groups strong enough to defend their views – individual moralities and opinions are ignored simply because they can be ignored.

Characteristically, even the rare philosopher willing to be associated with relativism is not immune to this tendency, but demands us to “become more vigilant about some specific dangers that come with judging other cultures” (Wong 2009, xii, 103, emphasis added). There appears to be not a worry in the world for the specific dangers that come with judging other individuals. Maybe these views seem defensible in American and British cultures with their slave-trading colonial and imperialist past and accompanying guilt (Sterba 2005, 110–32). However, when the views are exported globally and eventually imported to countries like Finland, their absurdity is obvious, since when comparing “groups millions strong […] they are likely to have very similar proportions of energetic, fertile, curious, creative, clever, talkative, and practical people” (Morris 2011, 27). All the diversity we can ever hope for is available to us if we simply respect the immense variety of unique human individuals and avoid the specific dangers that come with judging other individuals.

Any real employer has to ask, what role would enhance the impact of the particular person’s strengths and reduce the impact of these weaknesses – and not how the person might be pigeonholed to be treated as a representative of an imaginary group. The employer has to ask, what training would help the individual make the most of these strengths and reduce the negative effects of these weaknesses, and decide whether it can afford to provide the necessary training or has to advise the individual to acquire it independently. This is a matter of leadership, human resource management and just general business management – reaping the benefits of individual talent by matching people with the jobs to get them done. An employer in the real world cannot afford to forget that real individuals work, ideals do not.
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