Taking Responsibility for Our Common Morality

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Scholars in all fields should hold themselves morally responsible for what they publish and teach. One would think that everyone would take this for granted, but Hilary Putnam, for one, has earnestly warned that we dare not. As he writes, "To-day, as we face the twenty-first century, our task is not to repeat the mistakes of the twentieth century."[1] He sounded this warning at the conclusion of his analysis of Jacques Derrida's philosophical works. Putnam regrets that philosophers reside among the all too numerous scholars whose publications and instruction aided and abetted the development of the "political tragedy" exemplified by the regimes of Hitler and Stalin. Derrida the philosopher counts among current scholars whose thinking raises the specter of repeating those mistakes of the twentieth century and their horrendous aftermath. Taking the renewal of philosophy as the theme for his Gifford Lectures of 1990, Putnam characterized the writings of Derrida as not only philosophically unsound, but also as dangerous and irresponsible.[2]

Why does Putnam sound the alarm at the thinking of Derrida? For one thing, as Putnam observes, "[T]he thrust of Derrida's work is so negative, so lacking in any sense of what and how we should construct, politically or otherwise, that it is difficult to exonerate him completely from the effect of his teaching."[3] When Derrida, for example, treats the notions of "justification," "good reason," and warrant as "primarily repressive gestures," Putnam regards that as dangerous because, "it provides aid and comfort for extremists (especially extremists of a romantic bent) of all kinds, both left and right."[4] Derrida's left-wing followers include those who call for freeing ourselves from the very concepts of rightness and truth.

[1]Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 132.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid., 131.
[4]Ibid., 132.

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Putnam knows that others hold Derrida responsible for the diverse and unfortunate ways in which people receive his scholarship. Derrida has spoken of his desire to write as "the desire to perfect a program on a matrix having the greatest potential variability, plurivocality, et cetera, so that each time something returns it will be as different as possible," and that, as Richard Bernstein writes, makes him responsible for the "divergent and incompatible ways in which [his] texts are read and heard."[5] Thus some view Derrida as a nihilist; others see him as one who respects the irreducibly other. According to Putnam, such a "double reading" results, not because Derrida wants to appear "irresponsible," but because he "problematizes" the notions of reason and truth by claiming that they remain indispensable while, at the same time, speaking of them as "collapsed" in a manner that leads to the interpretation that he has dispensed with them.

Putnam does not regard Derrida as a political extremist but rather as one whose philosophical writings lend support to political extremists. While viewing Derrida's own political pronouncements as "generally admirable," Putnam's fear of Derrida's philosophical influence on political thought remains unabated. As he says:

> The philosophical irresponsibility of one decade can become the real-world political tragedy of a few decades later. And deconstruction without reconstruction is irresponsibility.[6]

Putnam does not in the least exaggerate his concerns. That some scholars cast doubt on our commitments to truth and rightness, that others lay aside the quest to augment our knowledge of them, while still others deny that scholars can even attain such knowledge, must surely cause alarm. As I shall illustrate in this essay, this philosophical trend threatens the purpose of higher education.

I refer in the first instance, to the purpose that motivated and shaped the founding of our institutions of higher learning and characterize this purpose as the maintenance and strengthening of the moral and spiritual character of individuals and the communities in which they live and work. Harvard College, the first college in the colony that was to play a major role in the intellectual formation of the United States of America, had as its stated purpose the creation and sustenance of a learned ministry. That education aimed at the moral and spiritual welfare of its students and the communities that they would, and indeed did, lead. By contrast, Julie Reuben refers to a modern transformation in education, which has separated morality from knowledge. In a carefully argued and abundantly documented book, she traces the development of modern universities and how that has resulted in what she refers to in her subtitle as the "Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality."[7] In her conclusion, she states that,

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 133

[7]Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 1996).

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> Universities never renounced their traditional moral aims. Educators continued to believe that universities should prepare their students to live "properly" and contribute to the betterment of society. Contemporary interest in multicultural education indicates that this is still an important imperative in universities today. But universities no longer have a basis from which to judge moral claims.[8]

Take moral judgments out of the realm of knowledge, and you exempt scholars from teaching the moral alphabet, which means the shared moral requisites for sustaining individual and communal life and even the possibility of obtaining and using knowledge as such. The current situation, however, has become much worse than that of a pervasive neglect of explicit moral instruction within much of higher education. First, the existence of a shared, common morality, that lends substance to advocating and protecting universal human rights, has come under question, and any quest for such morality has come under attack. Second, the numerous courses being taught seldom state as an explicit goal the idea that moral instruction and moral development constitute the primary purpose of higher education. Many scholars accept neutrality as the official norm. Others at best would consign instruction in ethics to specialized courses for that purpose, while still others see no place in academics for courses that explicitly aim at moral development. Of course, liberal arts colleges and Christian colleges and universities often do set the moral development of their students as a significant goal. Even so, in these settings as well, a constant struggle ensues over how to embody that goal within the various introductory and specialized courses viewed as essential to an institution of higher learning. In reading a number of admirable books on this subject, I did not encounter any overt discussion of a shared, common morality or why knowing and adhering to such a morality may prove essential to progress in every field of knowledge and its implementation.[9] This essay will proceed in three steps:

> 1) It will examine sample scholarly writings that reject moral universals and elevate skepticism as a primary purpose of higher education;

[8]Ibid., 268–69.

[9]Examples of excellent works that are concerned that higher education have as a goal the moral and spiritual development of students include: Robert Benne, *Quality With Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001); Andrea Sterk, ed., *Religion Scholarship, and Higher Education: Perspectives, Models, and Future Prospects* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Robert E. Sullivan, ed., *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). Mary Ann Glendon's essay (in Sullivan, *Higher Learning*), "Catholic Thought and Dilemmas of Human Rights," the universality of certain human rights is affirmed and the need to articulate a common morality is addressed. See also, Douglas Sloan, "The Teaching of Ethics in the American Undergraduate Curriculum," *The Hastings Center Report* 9.6 (December 1979) 21–41. In this article, Sloan traces the marginalization of moral instruction in higher education as did Reuben. However, he finds signs that Reuben's desire for a concerted effort to find ways to assume a place for moral instruction is beginning to take place, even as he is studying its nearly complete demise in colleges and universities.

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2) It will examine the naturally occurring shared morality requisite to the existence and sustenance of individuals and communities;

3) It will indicate how and why this same shared morality belongs to the realm of discovering, transmitting, and applying knowledge.

All of these steps intend to undergird the moral basis for advocating and protecting universal moral rights as well as the urgency of scholarly support for and active instruction in them. Unless aware of our moral responsibilities and committed to carrying them out, we can neither actualize nor sustain human rights. The essay wishes to take part in a widespread effort of scholars everywhere to avoid as much as possible the mistakes of the twentieth century and the massive violations of human rights resulting from them.

Abandoning Responsibility For Our Common Morality: Some Contemporary Instances

Richard Rorty, a widely read and highly regarded American philosopher, has abandoned any endeavor to provide an intellectual defense of a common morality. Indeed, he regards the effort to justify a common morality as futile and misguided. This stance has led Rorty to change his views of himself and his goals as an instructor and a scholar. Rorty describes his vocational transformation as follows:

> Like a lot of people who wind up teaching philosophy, I too got into the business because, having read some Plato, I thought I could use my budding dialectical talents to *demonstrate* that the bad guys were bad and the good guys good – to do to contemporary bad guys . . . what Socrates thought he was doing to Thrasymachus, Gorgias, and others. But some twenty years back, I finally decided that this project was not going to pan out—that "demonstration" was just not available in this area, that a theoretically sophisticated bully and I would always reach an argumentative standoff.[10]

Rorty replies to those who urge him to retain the Socratic project that he chooses to redescribe his job as that of "picking and choosing among the elements in our culture, playing up some and playing down others."[11]

One should not interpret this shift in Rorty's thinking about his task as a philosopher as a loss of concern about morality and democratic ideals. He speaks positively of "intellectual and moral progress" and identifies conditions essential to such progress. These conditions include good luck, political and cultural freedom, and offering concrete suggestions that provide alternatives to ideas targeted for change.[12] One can readily accept this list of conditions as required for making moral progress.

[10]Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," in *Prospects for a Common Morality* (ed. Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993) 282.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 281.

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However, Rorty rejects, or sets aside, certain other conditions that remain essential to achieving moral progress.

To begin with, Rorty turns his back on key "regulative ideas" for guiding our thinking. These "key" ideas, however, help to avoid the "political tragedy" of which Putnam speaks. Rorty admonishes us to "stick to freedom and forget about truth and rationality."[13] To those who call upon him to prove that the "Nazis are the bad guys," Rorty, in turn, calls upon them to give up their desire to make "this knowledge as clear to *everyone* as it is to us – to exhibit . . . its 'transcultural validity.'"[14] After all, notes Rorty, the "bad guys" make this kind of knowledge claim of transcultural validity for one's moral belief with all the same resources to support their arguments as the "good guys." Instead of thinking of this as a predicament, out of which we have to get, Rorty advises his critics, "that we cease to want something we have learned we cannot have, that we give up on 'transcultural validity.'"[15] Having set aside the notion of a truth by which to test our claims, Rorty nevertheless assures his readers that he does not try to prove or even to assert, "that the idea of truth is 'invalid' or 'untenable,' nor that it deconstructs itself, but simply that for our present purposes there are more useful ideas (for example, freedom)."[16]

In rejecting as pretense the belief that anyone can discover or prove "transcultural validity,'" Rorty carries out his vocation as redescribed and plays up some elements in our culture, such as freedom, while playing down others. Hence, when one of his critics, Thomas McCarty, argues that our culture appears "everywhere structured around" a perceived link between "ideals of political and cultural freedom" and "transcultural validity," Rorty finds an increasingly differently structured culture. "Our culture," says Rorty, "is gradually being structured around the idea of freedom – of leaving people alone to dream and think and live as they please, so long as they do not hurt other people – and that this idea provides as viscous a social glue as that of unconditional validity."[17] As for the invocation of freedom as an idea to advocate, Rorty resists any suggestion that he, or anyone else, should demonstrate its unconditional and intercultural validity:

> The question "Is this value interculturally valid?" fades out in favor of questions like "Do you have any better values to suggest?" The question "How can you be sure your values are unconditionally valid?" fades out in favor of the question "How can you be sure that discussion of alternative values is as free, open, and imaginative as possible?" Social theorists and philosophers deserve a hearing in such discussion, for like everybody else, they may have something imaginative to say. But there is no guarantee that they will, and no reason to regard them as indispensable.[18]

[13]Ibid., 279.
[14]Ibid., 285.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., 281.
[18]Ibid., 288.

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Rorty would reject any admonition on my part to take responsibility for our common morality, which all human beings share. Rather, he accepts responsibility only for what he calls "playing up" certain values "in our culture" and "playing down" others. He engages the values of other cultures by suggesting differing values in his own culture but would not accept any responsibility to prove that other cultures must by reason embrace his values. Indeed, he believes that everyone should drop the idea that everyone else should hold our values as dear as their own. Rorty believes that those who freely advocate the values they regard as the best imaginable fulfill the obligation to contribute to "moral progress". Rorty can find no compelling reasons to commend or to teach a common morality that has intercultural validity.

Presumably, this rejection of any claim to universality for one's values, and of any quest to support such a claim, means that the United Nations has no basis for affirming universal rights. Indeed, which "culture" does it represent in advocating for universal rights? Rorty has left us with no basis as individuals for securing and identifying rights except that of choosing among the values found in "our culture."

I find Rorty's position on moral values quite puzzling and ultimately incoherent. On the one hand, Rorty holds it misguided and futile even to seek intercultural validity for any of our moral convictions. On the other hand, he favors moral progress and posits as the way to work toward achieving it, a "discussion of alternative values [that] is as free, open, and imaginative as possible."[19] If, however, one could hold a discussion of morality as "free, open, and imaginative as possible," on what grounds can Rorty, or anyone else, exclude an imaginative and persuasive argument for one or more universal rights? Furthermore, if one could lay aside the quest for truth in favor of freedom, why doesn't Rorty allow freedom to espouse the ideas that he would have us lay aside? It appears that Rorty treats any claim to a universally valid right, as universally false, or at the very least, as what should be universally regarded as useless.

To add to the confusion, Rorty expects moral progress to result from free, open, and imaginative discussion. Yet Rorty offers us no reason why discussion should not just as well yield moral decline by the injection into the discussion of newly imagined evil ideas that prove persuasive. To anticipate moral progress from human discourse only makes sense, if one can assume that human beings act naturally inclined toward the pursuit of good and the avoidance of evil, as Aquinas, among others, has described them. If free and open discussions can take place in any society, the society must widely and effectively share the restraints against evil and against harms to one another. Otherwise, as history demonstrates, they cannot enforce the laws. Rorty has asserted that people who would hurt others should not enjoy the freedom to think and act as they please, and in fact the denial of freedom to those

[19]Ibid.

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who harm others, a practice not limited to "our culture," occurs in every known society. For example, such societies enforce prohibitions against killing innocent individuals and curtail or utterly deny the freedom to threaten or take human life under a variety of circumstances. I find in Rorty no reason or rationale for rejecting this kind of universal. In fact, we have widespread, cross-cultural acceptance of international laws, which identify crimes against humanity, and newly established mechanisms for enforcing these laws. Despite these obvious facts, we find that Rorty rules out any efforts to strive for the validation of any universal values as hopeless and an utter waste of time.

What Rorty teaches, however, does have untoward effects. One student in particular came to me distressed and enlisted my assistance both to understand more clearly what Rorty asserts and to defend certain of her moral universals. She rightly understood Rorty's position as an attack on her claiming them as validly assertable. I do consider as subtle Rorty's position with regard to moral values and cannot accuse him of intentional moral irresponsibility. At the same time, however, as my account of our common morality should reveal, Rorty does not take responsibility, at least not expressly, for sustaining and enhancing the common morality that undergirds universal human rights. I shall further clarify and support that contention below in a description of our common morality.

The potentially tragic failure to take responsibility for our common morality extends beyond segments of current philosophical scholarship and instruction. Recently, the Department of Religion Studies in the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa published a symposium with the purpose, as stated by its chairperson, of providing an occasion that would prompt members of the department to reflect on "the goal of our curriculum, and the rationale behind our own teaching styles."[20] I characterize the theme, strongly endorsed and emphasized by the featured lecturer and four of the five responses to the lecture by members of this religious studies department, as follows: a public university and its religion department should take as its mission the promotion of *skepticism*. They portrayed skepticism as *the* mission of higher education rather than as one of the methodological tools used to discover and authenticate knowledge. None of the published works of participants in this symposium spoke of moral development as a mission at all or even as one mission among others. In addition, like deconstructionists who do not engage in reconstruction, these scholars applied skepticism to all claims of knowledge without giving any indication as to what truths or knowledge students should glean from the study of religion. Clearly these scholars wanted their students to increase their ability to criticize their own beliefs and assumptions as well as all claims to knowledge. They left unclear and difficult concretely to discern, however, to what end.

[20]Russell T. McCutcheon, "Reinventing the Study of Religion in Alabama: A Symposium," *Bulletin/Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (CSSR)* 33 (2004) 28.

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To be fair, Martin Jaffee, in his lecture, the focus of the symposium, refers to the role of skepticism in research and discovery. The overall context in which this reference occurs, however, expresses his discomfort at seeing the university as a place in which "knowledge is stored and disseminated." As he says,

> For my vision of the university has always been that it ought to be the place where what passes for knowledge is taken apart. What after all, are our academic fields and disciplines but convenient conceptual and bureaucratic boxes within which to organize skepticism into programs of research and discovery? And in the Humanities, generally speaking since the incorporation of the post-modern movement into our conceptual tool-box, we add to this the organized skepticism about the very methods we have devised to lead us beyond opinion to knowledge. That is, skepticism is itself a fitting subject of skeptical critique.[21]

Jaffee regards religious studies departments in public universities as the most productive places in which to explore skepticism about skepticism. Again he writes,

> This is because, historically speaking, the field of Religious Studies has made its business to be the persistent critique of the most comprehensive systems of ideological construction human beings have produced. These systems number among the religions, most obviously. But we have come to recognize that they include as well cultural systems of all sorts that make claims to universal validity. And this includes the Cult of the definite accumulation of Universal Knowledge of which the modern university serves as the principle sacrificial shrine, of which its faculty serves as the priesthood, and of which its students serve as proselytes. . . . If religion is subject to critical contextualization, so too is the critique of religion a candidate for historicization and deconstruction.[22]

At the very end of his lecture, Jaffee characterizes "our own cultural moment" as "epistemologically more humble than pre-modern religion or modern criticism could ever be."[23]

He claims that this humility embodies his pedagogical method of sharing some of his religious convictions, criticizing them with the use of theory, and, in turn, showing how that theory "falls apart." He muses, "Where that leaves us all epistemologically I leave for philosophers to consider," but offers his students "an opportunity [to] bring their whole educations and their whole selves into the drama of the examined life."[24]

While skepticism has unquestionably a role to play in research and discovery, the unqualified embrace of skepticism as depicted by Jaffee actually undercuts

[21]Martin Jaffee, "Personal Self-Disclosure, Religious Studies Pedagogy, and the Skeptical Mission of the Public University," *Bulletin/CSSR* 33 (2004) 33.

[22]Ibid., 33–34.

[23]Ibid., 34.

[24]Ibid.

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any consistently positive role for skepticism in obtaining knowledge. Jaffee's resort to the skepticism utilized in the study of religion puts one in mind of an experience William James once had while lecturing. Someone in the audience bent upon correcting him interrupted James with the comment, "The earth rests on the back of a turtle." To this James adroitly replied, "On what then does the turtle rest?" Swiftly, the answer came back, "On the back of another turtle." James persisted in asking what held up this second turtle. Without flinching, the critic retorted, "It's no use, Professor James, it's turtles all the way down." Similarly, the logic of Jaffee's use of skepticism lies in the fact that its epistemological claims to know something rely and rest upon skepticism itself. He gives us no reason to limit skepticism. To paraphrase Jaffee's argument: Our scholarly method employs skepticism; our scholarly mission aims at skepticism; and our scholarship reflects skepticism "all the way down."

In effect, then, Jaffee uses skepticism in such a way that it no longer predictably serves in the process of attaining knowledge. Anything anyone claims to have learned from skepticism collapses, in turn, due to skeptical rejection. Indeed, Jaffee gives no hint, as to what one can affirm as knowledge, and on what basis to warrant any such affirmation. Jaffee shows some awareness of this quandary in professing his ignorance as to where his pedagogical method leaves us epistemologically. He asserts a willingness to let philosophers untangle or at least address this epistemological problem. One cannot expect philosophers who share Rorty's outlook, however, to undertake that task.

In fact, Tim Murphy, a member of Alabama's department of religious studies, invokes Rorty and Derrida in chiding Jaffee for claiming to possess a postmodern pedagogical scheme while framing it in terms of a positivistic skepticism and epistemology. Contrasting his view of postmodernism with that of Jaffee, Murphy argues, "that the critical dimensions to postmodernism are its *abolition*, destruction, or deconstruction of epistemology."[25] As Murphy continues, if we apply postmodernist theory to Religious Studies, "There would not be much left of what we have been doing for the last hundred years. I, for one would see that as a very good thing."[26] Murphy also takes issue with Jaffee's desire that students emerge from the critical study of religion as "whole selves," and as beneficiaries of the "examined life." For Murphy,

> To ask after the meaning our discipline's content has for the lives of our students is to confuse the goals and norms of the non-religious study of religion with a religious understanding of religion. . . . I would adamantly argue the confusion between these two *different* things has been the longest, most injurious problem our discipline has faced. All the retardation of Religious

[25]Tim Murphy, "Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Religious Studies," *Bulletin/CSSR* 33 (2004) 48.

[26]Ibid., 49.

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> Studies, when compared to the other human sciences, all the shortcomings of our discipline *qua* discipline, can virtually be traced back to that move.[27]

Tim Murphy's scholarship and pedagogy offer no place for the moral development of students as a goal. In his brief essay, he does not articulate any specific goals for the study of religion or the instruction of his students other than the destruction or deconstruction of most of such scholarship for the past hundred years.

In summary, then, the symposium of Alabama's religion department at Tuscaloosa, organized to reflect upon instruction in religious studies, did not even mention the moral development of students or express any responsibility for our common morality and the protection of human rights. Given the seriousness of religious and ethnic conflict over the past centuries and at the present time, religious traditions clearly shape, at least in part, major social, political and moral issues. The articles resulting from this symposium, however, provide no discernable references to the way in which current events heighten the significance of studying the world's religions. Instead, the study of religion sets forth the mission of skepticism, deconstruction, and criticism of all claims to universals. Our imagination must decide what counts as knowledge and how to obtain it. None of the symposium's articles mention that religious traditions offer moral instruction worth knowing and pondering. Again, we learn almost exclusively to take all religions, as a whole, as candidates for skeptical scrutiny and deconstruction. Rorty has at least professed a desire for moral progress, though without any predictable prospect that any universals shall emerge. To try for such appears futile to Rorty, and that implies an equally fruitless search for a common morality.

If, then, one can make a case that scholars have a responsibility for sustaining and enhancing our common morality, I shall have to substantiate and describe first its existence and nature. What now follows takes up that challenge.

Our Common Morality: The Moral Requisites of Human Agency and Community

Some philosophers do take on the responsibility to identify and advocate for a common morality. Alan Gewirth, for one, stoutly defends the existence and protection of natural, universal rights.[28] He believes that basic, universal human rights have a demonstrated rational basis and that he has demonstrated it. Gewirth's argument on behalf of certain universal rights, some of them absolute, appears indeed powerful. With some alterations, it identifies the nature and content of our common morality.

[27]Ibid., 48.

[28]See Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Human Rights: Essays on Justification and Application* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *The Community of Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

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Gewirth's argument begins with his observation that morality deals with actions. He bases moral claims upon reason and not upon utility or contingent desire. To that end, he poses this question: What do human agents logically need to have the opportunity to obtain by their actions any of their purposes? He answers that question by stating that human agents require freedom and well-being, including life itself, as the procedural and substantive conditions necessary to pursue and achieve the goods they seek. One has a right, not to the goods sought, but rather to the freedom and well-being required as conditions of this pursuit and any chance to obtain them. A valid moral principle establishes these rights as moral and justifiable.

A moral principle identifies the categorically obligatory nature of certain requirements of action. All actual or prospective agents share these requirements equally, and all persons equally share and serve highly valued interests. Anyone who claims these rights from others must by logic grant that others can, on the same basis, claims these rights from them.

But Gewirth has not given us a complete and consistent account of what his method of explicating the logically necessary, universal conditions for human agency can and should reveal about the natural, shared basis for our common morality. He takes autonomous individuals as his starting point. In so doing, Gewirth has not considered the logically and functionally necessary, conditions for the actions of agents at all. His depiction of agents ignores the significant fact that agents cease and come into existence. Agents can neither come into existence nor survive on their own. The existence of human agents depends upon the cooperative behavior of other human agents.

To begin with, then, human beings come into existence through the procreative and nurturant behavior of others. These natural proclivities to procreate and nurture make human life possible. The continuation of human life, its development, its sustenance, and its protection also depend on this proclivity to nurture. Certain inhibitions also inhere in the continuation of a human life. These include the inhibition against killing, against taking away, or failing to provide the necessities of life, and against lying, which, when practiced, undermines the whole commercial, social, legal, and educational network, that protects human life. The actualization of human freedom also requires all of these proclivities and inhibitions. Clearly a lack of nurture and instruction, or lying, or stealing, or ultimately, assaults upon innocent life—threatened or actual—can compromise or thwart the freedom of individuals and groups. All human cultures and all communities exhibit these universal proclivities and inhibitions. Obviously no culture or community can come into existence and maintain itself without the behavior and practices that bring human beings into being and sustain them. No culture and no community can continue to exist without some procreation and nurturing of life and without behavior that accords with the inhibitions against killing, lying, and stealing.

These behaviors and behavioral constraints constitute morally significant relations between and among individuals and groups. They lie at the basis of all

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cooperative behavior of the kind necessary—friendships, families, commerce, contracts, treaties, businesses, voluntary associations, governments, enforceable laws, and those specific agencies and groups that protect individual and communal life, such as the police, firefighters, and armed forces; they constitute the moral requisites of individuals and communities.[29] We owe one another these moral requisites of individual and communal life. They are concrete demands of justice. Meeting these moral responsibilities actualizes and protects human rights. After all, we owe these rights, these expectations and claims to justice, to one another as human beings.[30]

Governments worldwide legally enforce these most basic demands of justice, which they deem essential to individual and communal life. Laws against stealing, fraud, and breach of contract, all of which are instances of lying and promise-breaking, protect rights to property. Homicide law, laws against various kinds of assaults and interferences, and specific provisions in constitutional law protect rights to freedom and life.[31] Specific laws and the criminal justice systems of governing bodies may vary widely, but governing bodies, and those under their jurisdictions, cannot long survive, if they fail sufficiently to restrain violations of the moral requisites of communities and thus fail to prevent gross violations of human rights.[32] History amply documents the rise and fall of corrupt, cruel, and tyrannical regimes. Societies require laws and governments, because the proclivities and inhibitions of human beings not only express themselves in carrying out the moral responsibilities we have named, but also in their proclivities to seek power, property, luxurious wealth, special privileges, and the like. Such ways overcome their inhibitions against harming others by robbing them of their fair share of goods, or their freedom to participate, socially and politically, in their communities. Governments, however, may also violate the requisites of community in these ways. Democratic institutions and polity appear to work as the best means that we have so far devised for minimizing failures to actualize and to protect human rights. I have developed the argument for that claim at length elsewhere.[33]

[29]I have defined the term "community" as follows: "A community is an affiliated and mutually beneficial network of interdependent human beings who, as human beings, share what is requisite for forming and sustaining such a network." See Arthur J. Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities: The Moral Bonds of Community* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 95. A community can be a group as small as a married couple or two friends, or as large as any existing nation. Each term of this definition is explained on pp. 95 and 96.

[30]See Ibid, 114–21, for a discussion of the relation between justice and rights.

[31]Procreation is a requisite of community but its relation to law differs from others. See Arthur J. Dyck, "Ethics" in *International Encyclopedia of Population* (ed. John A. Ross; New York: Free Press, 1982) 1:183–88.

[32]Calvin is among those who have noted that governments universally have laws forbidding killing, stealing, lying, and in his day, adultery, and that these laws are different in their specific content and modes of punishment. See *Institutes* 4.20.16.

[33]See Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities*, 201–15.

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Human beings have the capacity and willingness to act in the morally responsible ways specified above. Whenever communities exist, however diverse—whether as small as friendship circles and families, or as large as nation states, ethnic groups, and religions traditions—such communities have sufficiently initiated and presently perpetuate these same moral responsibilities. For that to happen, the members of these communities must have the cognitive abilities to identify what constitutes morally responsible actions or restraints upon actions in a wide array of circumstances.

The evidence for the shared human abilities to perceive and imagine how our behavior affects, or would affect others if pursued, has accumulated now rapidly in the behavioral and neurosciences. In this research, the concept of empathy describes the ability accurately to perceive the experiences of others and to take another's viewpoint.[34] Empathic behavior occurs in newborns, and when eighteen months old, a child already can discern approval and disapproval, preverbally, as expressed by its parents, and adjust its behavior accordingly.[35] All of this occurs in the normal development of the brain. Research has demonstrated that the loss of the regions that make empathy possible will result in the loss of morally responsible behavior.[36] Persons who lose certain areas of their prefrontal cortex cannot empathically imagine how their behavior harms or will harm others, nor do they experience the characteristic remorse felt when they injure or harm others in some way. In short, "prosocial behavior" requires empathy in order to take place, and scientists often employ the term "prosocial" to describe the behavior I refer to as "morally responsible."

This essay cannot provide a detailed account of the scientific research in this area already completed and ongoing. In a recent work, however, the psychologist Martin Hoffman has compiled and analyzed a great deal of research, his own and that of many others, on empathic, moral behavior.[37] His analysis, and the data on which he bases it, identifies a common morality of the sort I have described. Empathic, prosocial behavior manifests itself in compassion and justice; it forms the basis for perceiving, and doing, that which we owe one another as human beings. Furthermore, since the capacity for empathy resides in our brains, empathy can occur as a universal, cross-cultural phenomenon. Hoffman rejects moral

[34]For an overview of how empathy is being defined, see Robert W. Levenson and Anna M. Ruef, "Empathy: A Physiological Substrate," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (1992) 234–46.

[35]This is documented by Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994) 349–53.

[36]For these studies and their implications, see Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

[37]Martin L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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relativism.[38] At the same time, normal development of the brain requires nurture and compassionate care, and that means, that culturally diverse expressions of such care partially influence what we think and how we act morally. All cultures draw upon neurologically based empathy to express this nurture and the other modes of behaving requisite for the existence and continuity of any culture whatsoever.

The Common Morality as Requisite for Drawing Upon and Disseminating Knowledge

If human beings could not know what constitutes morally responsible behavior, and had no inclination toward moral responsibility, we, as human beings, could not discover and disseminate knowledge. If the belief that morality lies outside the realm of knowledge were in fact true, modern science and its widespread technical applications, would never have come to fruition. And if the moral responsibilities requisite to the successes of the scientific endeavor and technological innovation did not, and could not, cross the boundaries of cultural differences, neither would science and technology. If one spoke of the scientific community as a culture, then one could say of such a culture, that otherwise diverse cultures can and do adopt it. That can only happen if these cultures share the moral bases to make that possible. Diverse cultures can and do share knowledge cross-culturally, because they also share the moral responsibilities requisite to its dissemination and assimilation.

These claims, however, fly in the face of two strongly and widely entrenched convictions. In the first instance, many scholars distinguish knowledge from morality. Second, many scientists and humanists alike consider it a virtual truism, that the methods for gleaning knowledge, especially the scientific method, have neutral value. Both of these convictions need substantial qualification. In that task, the astute reflections of eminent scientists on their disciplines and their methods can help us greatly.

Jacob Bronowski, like Putnam, wants scholars to consider how they contributed to the horrific events of the twentieth century and how to make explicit efforts to help avoid similar events in the future. Bronowski's widely acclaimed work, *Science and Human Values*, begins with his shocked reaction to the utter ruin and desolation of Nagasaki, something he witnessed in 1945, after the end of World War II. In view of the 40,000 inhabitants killed in a few seconds and the incredible destruction, he notes that weaponry has killed before, but this event changed the scale of what he refers to as our indifference to our fellow human beings. It presents an instance of "civilization face to face with its own implications."[39]

Bronowski believes, that scientists and humanists alike have the responsibility to thwart such inhumane behavior. He rejects any efforts by humanists to blame scientists exclusively for what happened at Nagasaki. One can ask of humanists as

[38]Ibid., ch. 12.

[39]J. Bronowski, *Science And Human Values* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 4.

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well, what they were and are "doing to help direct society."[40] Bronowski implicates humanists in what the scientists did and do. Many scientists, including Bronowksi, learned indispensable mathematics from the books of G. H. Hardy. Yet Bronowski cannot accept that Hardy tried to justify his "great life work on the ground that it could do no one the least harm—or the least good."[41] The example reminds me of the late Willard Quine's remark in his class on logic, that it surprised him that those who were perfecting computers had quickly adopted his discovery as to how to simplify complex sentences. Need I add that computers may serve good or ill and have a robust role in contemporary warfare?

Given the permanence of science and all of our other scholarly activities, Bronowski takes as the purpose of his book to show that the parts of civilization make a whole. As he writes,

> to display the links which give society its coherence and, more, which give it life. In particular, I want to show the place of science in the canons of conduct, which it has still to perfect.[42]

As we shall observe from what follows, Bronowski will describe and advocate some of the moral requisites of community, which I have discussed in the previous section of this essay. These he will portray as requisite to the successful use of the scientific method and integral to the very process of gaining knowledge. Bronowski says of "the conditions for the success of science" that he finds in them values that "science would have had to invent afresh," if human beings had not already known them.[43] Bronowski affirms both the necessity of certain values for the possibility of accomplishing anything scientifically and the known and knowable qualities of these values.

Bronowski begins his discussion of the moral concept of duty by comparing it to the concept of mass. We do not have either of these concepts at birth, but by the combination of our inborn senses and our education, these concepts grow out of our experiences and those of others.[44] Empirically we observe that human beings know what they ought and ought not to do in order to flourish. He points to the fate of Hitler and that of Mussolini as evidence that tyrannies do not outlive their "meeker rivals."[45] Furthermore, societies "cannot remain lawful when many members break the laws." A counterfeiter can only succeed, if he does not destroy confidence in the value of money and only as long as "good money remains the norm."[46] At this point, Bronowski uses the fact that societies exist, and their laws

[40]Ibid., 5.

[41]Ibid.,

[42]Ibid., 6.

[43]Ibid..

[44]Ibid., 53. Since Bronowski published, we know considerably more about three "inborn senses". empathy being the most important as a source of our moral thinking.

[45]Ibid., 54.

[46]Ibid. See also Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities*, 142–47.

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manage to suppress evil, as evidence that people do know and do practice the values requisite for communal existence. As he puts it, the "duties . . . which alone hold a society together."[47]

As a communal effort, the methods of scholarship cannot remain morally neutral. Positivists and analysts mistakenly believe that sentences containing "is" can be verified but not those containing "ought." Bronowski argues that all of our knowledge, in the humanities and the sciences, has been built up communally."[48] For the verification of facts, he asserts, we need the help of others. We have to be able to trust the word of others. For that one needs the principle of truthfulness. This principle "binds society together, because without it the individual would be helpless to tell the true from the false."[49] Verifying truth takes place, not individually, but in the context of a social nexus. As Bronowski writes,

> This nexus is held together by the obligation to tell the truth. Thus it follows that there is a social injunction implied in the positivist and analyst methods. This social axiom is that *We OUGHT to act in such a way that what IS true can be verified to be so*.[50]

What characterizes scholarship, namely virtue, also enables science to function as a community. Scholars practice virtue in that they avoid making wild claims, cheating, making undue attempts to persuade, and making appeals to prejudice or authority. Furthermore, scholars admit to their ignorance and keep disputes civil; they listen patiently to the young and the old and do not confuse issues being debated with race, politics, sex, or age.[51]

Turning his focus on scientists, Bronowski stresses the necessity to make no distinction between means and ends. Citing the work of W. K. Clifford, a mathematician and philosopher, Bronowski draws a parallel between the wrongness of stealing and the wrongness of violating the scientific method. He writes,

> The terrible wrong of stealing, is that I make myself dishonest. What hurts society is not that it should lose its property but that it should become a den of thieves; for then it must cease to be a society. That is why we ought not to do evil that good may come; for at any rate this great evil has come, that we have done evil and are made wicked thereby.[52]

What applies in the case of stealing, applies to the practice of science:

> In like manner, if I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all . . . . But I cannot help doing this great wrong . . . that I make myself credulous. The

[47]Ibid., 55.
[48]Ibid., 57.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid., 58.
[51]Ibid., 59.
[52]Ibid., 65.

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> danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things but that it should become credulous.[53]

Bronowski concludes that the scientist must test truth by known factual evidence and nothing can justify the smallest self-deception in that respect. If, Bronowski says, "we silence our scruple about our means; we infect ourselves and our ends together. The scientist derives this ethic from his method."[54] The scientific method, indeed any scholarly method, cannot persist in a morally neutral sphere. Communal life requires the same moral responsibilities required to contribute to knowledge.

Bronowski has company among notable scientists who identify science as a community, dependent for its success upon practicing the moral responsibilities requisite for the existence and flourishing of all human communities. Michael Polanyi also takes a similar view.[55] Polanyi's account adds to what we have gleaned from Bronowski.

When Polanyi characterizes the scientific method, he does not confine it to observations, experiments, and rules embodied in practice. In the process of discovery, he depicts scientists as being of two minds. One part of their minds make new, imaginative claims; another part opposes those claims. Science always skirts with the danger of relying too much on intuitive speculations that become wish fulfillments, or too much on rules that paralyze discovery. This conflict between "intuitive speculation" and "critical rules" requires "a judicial decision by a third party standing above the contestants." That third party, a "scientific conscience," transcends impulse and creation within a scientist's mind. Scientists take personal, ultimate responsibility for their affirmation. This, says Polanyi, "indicates the presence of a moral element in the foundations of science."[56]

Science as a tradition derives its authority from its community of consciences. Scientific tradition subjects itself to constant reinterpretation. Polanyi compares the scientist's relation to scientific tradition to the Protestant's relation to Christian scripture. Scripture serves as a creative tradition because, while remaining authoritative, individual consciences constantly reinterpret it in new situations. Both science and Protestantism nurture processes of creative renewal based on "an appeal from a tradition as it *is* to a tradition as it *ought to be*."[57]

Polanyi knows that the ideal conditions for cognition cannot occur in isolation from the conditions obtaining in the very societies to which particular scientific communities belong. Of necessity, then, gaining scientific knowledge requires the same ideals requisite for communities more inclusive than those of science. Science

[53]Ibid., 66.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society: A Searching Examination of the Meaning and Nature of Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[56]Ibid., 41.

[57]Ibid., 56.

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requires for its success the conditions necessary for free discussion. Those conditions, as Polanyi posits, exist in democracies and its institutions.

Polyani asserts two conditions essential to the existence of free discussion: (1) commitments to fairness and tolerance and (2) institutions that shelter and nurture free discussion. Fairness consists in laying out one's position to an opponent, including known biases and limitations, while at the same time acknowledging true points in the position of an opponent. Tolerance entails listening to an opponent's unfair and hostile statement and looking not only for sources of error but for any sound claims as well. As for the institutions that sustain free discussion, Polanyi notes examples in Great Britain: Houses of Parliament, courts of law, churches, media, local governments, and numerous voluntary associations and their private governances. Custom and law enforce the rules and practices of fairness and tolerance found in these bodies. For all this to happen, certain moral ideals must prevail.

Those willing to argue, and do so fairly and tolerantly, presuppose a disposition toward truth in others such as they find in themselves. With respect to truth as a requisite of this kind of free discussion, Polanyi maintains that,

> a community which effectively practices free discussion is therefore dedicated to the fourfold proposition (1) that there is such a thing as truth; (2) that all members love it: (3) that they feel obliged and (4) are in fact capable of pursuing it.[58]

Free societies have traditions and institutions, which teach and practice these premises and the free discussion embodying them. Confidence that the truth exists constitutes, for Polanyi, a faith: This faith expresses itself in according "validity to science—or to any of the other of the great domains of mind;" it exemplifies "a faith which can be upheld only within a community."[59]

This faith, on which the quest for knowledge depends, requires democratic societies for its nurture. Polanyi, therefore, has understandably deep concerns about what would undermine democratic societies and institutions. False doctrines of what liberty requires to sustain itself and to flourish seriously threaten science as well as democracy.

Polanyi takes as examples of such threats the apologists for Nazi and Stalinist regimes, who denied the reality of equity and reason. These regimes could only succeed on the basis of hidden spiritual resources. How does Polanyi reach that conclusion? Logically one cannot deny truth without creating a falsehood, because that assertion would rely on a realizable truth. But truth, as well as justice and charity, and the aspirations to attain them, have imperishable realities. When a philosopher alleges these ideals to have no reality—although the interests and power of particular groups remain real—the aspiration for truth, justice, and love become attached to

[58]Ibid., 71.
[59]Ibid., 73.

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the struggle of a particular party for power, and ultimate reliance and all love and devotion become attached to the power of the chosen party. From this analysis, Polanyi derives a theory of totalitarian government, noting that "both Bolshevik and Fascist actions were based on theories of unlimited violence."[60]

Polanyi does not believe in the inevitability of totalitarianism. In reality, it has, as Polanyi observes, "never been fully established in any place; as in fact no society could continue to exist for one day if the radical denial of spiritual reality were actually put into effect."[61] People can only live what Polanyi refers to as "an intellectually and morally acceptable life," in a society whose members value certain transcendent obligations such as the ideals of truth, justice, and charity. Such a society can leave a great deal for individual consciences to decide. The intellectual processes essential to acquiring and accumulating knowledge require just such a society and its requisite world ideals.

Polanyi, like Bronowski, has recognized that the methods of science and all scholarly pursuits depend not on moral neutrality but rather upon fulfilling the moral responsibilities requisite for discovering and disseminating knowledge. These moral requisites of successfully finding, accumulating, and applying knowledge make up, at the same time, the moral requisites of communal life. Polanyi and Bronowski both assert the importance of these moral requisites for restraining violence and actualizing the freedom that allows for, and encourages, intellectual inquiries. Both of these scientists share the concern voiced by Putnam, that undermining the belief in truth and truthfulness threatens not only scholarship but also democracy and ultimately the possibility of sustaining communal life of any sort.

Rorty alleges that one could more usefully pursue the idea of freedom rather than the idea of truth but fails to grasp that the actualization of freedom and democratic institutions depends upon a vigorous commitment to truth and truthfulness. In fact, one can only take Rorty's works seriously in a social context that presumes that he truthfully conveys what he actually believes and that his nonfiction does indeed count as true nonfiction. Furthermore, his attempts at persuasion can only have a chance at succeeding, if scholars and other readers generally seek truly to convey to one another and others what Rorty actually advocates. What use can freedoms of expression have, if no one has any interest in what others have to say, and if no one cares about love or justice, or has an interest in learning the truth in order to grow in knowledge? How shall we actualize any of our freedoms, unless strong and persuasive inhibitions against killing, stealing, and lying allow the laws to restrain such practices effectively? These natural inhibitions serve as requisites of freedom and of all the cooperative actions that sustain communal life.

The scholars Bronowski and Polanyi provide other scholars and teachers with specific texts and ways of thinking that instructors in higher education can draw upon to point their students to the common morality that makes scholarship at all

[60]Ibid., 77.
[61]Ibid., 80.

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possible and fruitful. No untrustworthy person can qualify as a scholar. Character matters. In a discussion of cheating in doing research and of publishing contrived or otherwise false results, one scientist remarked that some people do not act as truthful as others. I replied that some people, namely those prone to deceiving themselves as well as others, cannot qualify as scientists or scholars. If we want to protect human rights and avoid violations of them, we must enforce the common morality. Given the power that knowledge confers, scholars must teach and enforce our common morality and exclude from their ranks those who lie or cheat in order to gain recognition, rather than contenting themselves to find the truth, whether from their own research, the criticisms of their work by others, or by attending to the contributions of their colleagues. To add to knowledge demands virtue. Hence, scholars can and should help sustain the common morality by the example they set through conscientiously practicing their vocation.

The quest for truth lies at the core of the aspirations fueling the major, enduring religious traditions. Sacred texts, commentaries on such texts, and theological reflection all attest to the past and continuing search for truth. As observed in scholarly disciplines of every kind, one can only attain knowledge of the truth by living rightly. Religions express that explicitly.

The staying power of religious traditions provides in itself evidence that the moral requisites of community lie embedded in their practices and institutions. Furthermore, communities founded on religious faith specifically offer moral instruction. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other centers of worship and learning, such as monasteries and schools, exist to teach individuals, groups, and communities the moral way, and to motivate them toward actualizing visualized moral goals for all human beings. Such religious communities generate moral exemplars, oral and written moral exhortation and education , moral activism ranging from setting an example to organized efforts at social change, and a moral vision of what perfect peace and justice should look like.

The major, enduring religious traditions teach moral responsibilities as part of our common morality. Students in my classes sometimes challenge me to document this with respect to the Buddhist tradition. For that reason, I will briefly do that.

Texts dedicated to the teachings of Buddha clearly state that the true path to "Enlightenment" includes "right speech," which includes the avoidance of lying, and "right behavior," which includes the avoidance of killing, stealing, and committing adultery.[62] Similarly, if we pay proper respect to the "six directions of truth," by achieving the proper relations between parents and children, teachers and pupils, husbands and wives, and friends, we shall need to remove ourselves from the defilement of four deeds: killing, stealing, committing adultery, and falsehood. These moral practices characterize "the way of the disciples of Buddha."[63]

[62]Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Kosaido Printing Co, 1985) 166–67.

[63]Ibid., 212–13.

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Those familiar with Judaism and Christianity know that the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, also forbids these same four behaviors that Buddhist writings exhort their readers to shun.

As indicated earlier in the preceding section of this essay, empathy occurs as a natural, universal aspect of morality. Empathy not only expresses itself in compassion and justice but also acts as a guide to moral behavior as a capacity found in certain structures of the brain. Religious traditions have recognized this natural capacity in their advocacy of living in accord with the Golden Rule. Gewirth calls the Golden Rule, "the common denominator of all the world's major religions."[64]

The various formulations of the Golden Rule, cited below, all rest on the same assumption that human beings have the ability to perceive and imagine how actions directed at others can or would affect them. We know how our own actions affect, or would affect others, because we know how those same actions affect, or would affect us.

> Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you would find hurtful." (Udana Varga)
>
> Christianity: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7:12)
>
> Confucianism: "Is there one word that will keep us on the path to the end of our days? Yes, Reciprocity. What you do not wish yourself, do not unto others." (The Analects)
>
> Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you." (The Mahabharata)
>
> Islam: "None of us has faith unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (Hadith [Bukhari 2:6])
>
> Judaism: "What is hateful to you; do not to your fellowman. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary." (The Talmud)

We can see from this list that religious traditions, embedded in cultures that vary considerably, manifest not only our common morality but also a significant cognitive guide for making moral decisions.

Scholars have subjected the Golden Rule to criticism, most notably, because of its apparent dependence on contingent desires and emotions. Contingency means that what we wish for ourselves may turn out evil, what we hate may turn into something we should love, what pains us may transform into something good for us, and what we experience as a hurt could rather help us as a benefit.[65] These

[64]Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 128.

[65]See Gewirth, ibid., 128–41 for his discussion of criticisms of the Golden Rule and his own response to them.

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criticisms overlook the context in which the Golden Rule serves as a guide to moral decision-making.

Take, for example, the Christian formulation of the Golden Rule. In both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, an affirmation of the law and the prophets forms the immediate context, and the Sermon on the Mount constitutes the larger context. The Sermon stresses the important theme of loving every individual, friend and foe alike. It presents God, a parent to every human being, as the model for such love. Matthew's account (7:7–12) states this theme most clearly. At this point Matthew invites listeners to ask and to expect good things of God (vv. 7–8). He then articulates the Golden Rule in the context of divine and human parenthood and explicitly links it to the law and the prophets as follows:

> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Matt. 7:4–12, NRSV)

The law includes what I am calling the moral requisites of community. In turn, the prophets warned their people that widespread departures from the law would bring dire consequences. One should view the appeal to the law as an appeal to empathy. Parents know the distress that would result from failures to properly nourish their children and to act accordingly to avoid such distress. Empathy arises from a natural capacity to know, and to do, the teaching of the law and by the prophets. Furthermore, parents, like everyone else, know the pain they feel, when others fail to meet their moral responsibilities toward them and violate their rights. Thus they know how to behave toward others and to strive empathically to meet their responsibilities, which in this case, means providing their children with their entitled right to nurture.

The Golden Rule can serve as a moral guide. First, because those acts that we do not wish to have inflicted upon us do not simply thwart our contingent desires or tastes, but rather violate our basic rights; they destroy human agency and communal life. Second, because human beings share a common morality and the empathic ability to discern how to relate in a morally responsible way toward others. Bronowski, Polanyi, and the religious traditions all treat being virtuous as a requisite of communal life. The religious traditions instruct individuals and communities in the nature of virtue and in ways of gaining knowledge of how to live virtuously and seek to motivate people to act in morally responsible ways.

Religious traditions, therefore, have given, and continue to give, important assistance to the whole scholarly endeavor. In holding up an ideal of perfect virtue, whether in theistic or non-theistic traditions, the link between increasing virtue and knowledge becomes ever more explicit. For example, when a Buddhist seeks perfection, the literature describes it as a quest for enlightenment that culminates

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in a combination of wisdom and compassion. Kenneth Inada characterizes such a perfected being as follows:

> An all-knowing person must necessarily be an all-loving person, an all-loving person, must necessarily be an all-knowing person. This fact shows that intelligence and practice ideally must coincide at all times . . . an intelligent act is not only intensive but extensive . . . it goes beyond individual (limited) designs. In fact the act . . . must always be open for the involvement of others.[66]

This depiction of an ideal or perfected self as a condition for moral knowledge and practice, requires the ability to love all humans (animals also) in order to gain knowledge. Thus, religious traditions add an important dimension to the relationship between virtue and knowledge. Beyond the information of one's colleagues, scholars have to place themselves under the guidance and judgment of the whole of humanity.[67]

Scholarly methods reside under the discipline of virtue, but virtue resides under the discipline of those communities and traditions that specifically concern themselves to increase our knowledge of virtue and our inclinations toward virtuous behavior.

Religions, however, like political parties or groups or movements, remain in constant danger of fanaticism and authoritarian tendencies. That occurs when individuals or groups do not want to acknowledge our common morality and humanity and fail to look for guidance from the whole human community, which includes women and men, diverse ethnic groups, cultures, political parties, nations, and religious traditions. Whenever a community regards some class or group of persons as inferior, as in some way outside the community, which observes the moral requisites toward its members, atrocities, even genocide, can occur and have occurred in the name of Nazism, Marxism, some tribes or ethnic groups, and by some groups invoking religious authority for their actions.

Like all claims to knowledge, one should subject religious claims to skepticism and moral scrutiny. The scholarly reflections, demonstrations of compassion, and moral instruction found in religious traditions, however, also merit careful analysis and supportive arguments, where the offering of such arguments would bolster the common morality. Scholars owe their students exposure to the gains of moral knowledge by the various disciplines and particularly by those of theological and philosophical ethics. Yet Murphy of Alabama's religion department at Tuscaloosa, cited in the first section of this essay, believes that scholars of religion should not ask what meaning the discipline's content has for the lives of students. He thinks that doing so confuses "the goals and norms of the non-religious study of religion with religious understanding of religion."[68] Murphy has overlooked the empirical

[66]Cited in Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities*, 196.

[67]See H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) for a similar view.

[68]Murphy, "Postmodernism, Pedagogy, and Religious Studies," 48.

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and rational bases for the moral requisites of community as articulated in this essay and within the various religious traditions as well.[69] Murphy does not have to subscribe to or to advocate any religious tradition in order to learn from them. As this essay has contended, any method he uses to study religion will succeed, only if he accepts appropriate moral responsibility. At the very least, he owes his students a proper understanding of the virtues requisite to discovery. Skepticism and deconstruction of false notions will make up only a part of what the search for truth will demand of them and of him.

Conclusions

The twentieth century has matched enormous increases of knowledge with massive violations of human rights that are destructive of human lives and property on a scale hitherto scarcely imaginable. Knowledge creates power. We should feel no surprise, therefore, that some scholars have observed links between what scholars write and teach and the social and political climate that allows for, and fosters, wide scale atrocities and totalitarian regimes. Scholars who raise doubts about any basis in reason or truth for affirming moral claims, scholars like Derrida, threaten to help perpetuate in the twenty-first century the mistakes of the twentieth. Furthermore, the rise of the modern university in the twentieth century brought with it intellectual changes that marginalized morality in the academic setting by separating knowledge from morality.

With widespread acceptance of this disparagement of morality as knowledge, the vocation of discovering and teaching the known and knowable does not, in the view of many instructors, call upon them to provide moral instruction to their students. So higher education does not now, as it did in the past, generally regard the moral and spiritual development of students as its primary mission and has eroded the intellectual basis for carrying out such a mission. Even traditional liberal arts colleges and church-related colleges struggle to fulfill this mission.[70] The education that scholars receive in graduate schools contributes to the difficulty of assuming that moral instruction will take place in the various courses of a typical college and university curriculum. If we want to accept and protect universal rights, our educational institutions have to make known and knowable to all human beings the moral responsibilities necessary to realize those goals and to support, rather than undermine, them. Broadly stated, this essay responds to these issues. In conclusion, I wish to identify and emphasize five propositions, which I have sought to justify.

[69]For example, Calvin (*Institutes* 4,20.16) bases his claim, that the common, natural morality is found in the laws of all societies, on empirical observation.

[70]This struggle is well documented by Robert Benne, *Quality With Soul*. Despite the difficulties, the schools Benne has studied do retain among their primary goals, the moral and spiritual development of their students. This they pursue with some success, according to Benne.

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1. *Scholars need to take responsibility for the common morality in that which they publish and teach.* From the outset and throughout this essay, I have cited scholars who warn that raising doubts about the possibility of justifying the distinctions we make between the true and the false, and the right and the wrong, have led to egregious violations of human rights in the past and will do so in the future. When we lose moral credibility, because we do not predictably practice and teach truthfulness as a universal norm, oppressive totalitarian regimes result and undermine or utterly thwart the discovery and dissemination of knowledge. I have cited Putnam, a philosopher, and the scientists, Bronowski and Polanyi in making the case. Also, in the first section of the essay, I indicate the reality of these threats to human rights and productive scholarship. Someone like Rorty regards it as useless to try to demonstrate the existence of moral values shared cross-culturally. If everyone followed such advice, no one could offer a defense for calling upon all of us to be morally responsible in the ways that actualize and protect universal human rights. Those who deny that they have any responsibility to offer moral instruction and to do so for the sake of sustaining the shared morality essential to sustaining human rights and scholarship constitute another threat to human rights and scholarship. Murphy, for example, considers it wrong to find and convey what meaning the content of the religions his discipline studies has for the lives of his students. Thus, instead of stimulating students to consider what they can glean for their moral development from centuries of moral practice and reflection, Murphy sets aside any consideration of the bases within the various religions, which aid us in making the argument for rights as the universal rights of human beings.

2. *Human beings share a common morality.* Gewirth has shown that one can derive the moral by asking about the categorically obligatory conditions that make it possible to pursue one's goals with any chance of success. Using that method of analysis, I asked what human relations do agents and communities require to come into being and to persist. Without proclivities to procreate and nurture, and without inhibitions against killing, stealing, lying, and sexual infidelity, no individuals or communities could at all exist and function. Without these proclivities and inhibitions, freedom to act could not actualize. Individual and communal life must act on these moral proclivities and inhibitions. All existing communities have policies and laws that protect and encourage these moral responsibilities and punish deviations from them as deemed necessary. These means protect human rights. Without a sufficient level of compliance with the responsibilities represented by these universal moral requisites of community , no culture, no community, and no religious tradition can or does exist.

Recent and continuing research in the neurosciences attests to the universality of empathy. We express this capacity to recognize how our actions affect others and the inclinations to react with compassion toward others in our proclivities to nurture and in our inhibitions against causing harm. Empathy resides within

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the human brain and, therefore, all human beings share it as a natural ability and characteristic.

3. *We know and can make knowable the common morality.* That we know the moral requisites of individual and communal life and can make them knowable to others derives logically from the fact that individuals and communities have existed and persisted over time. Furthermore, these requisites inform the rules, policies, and laws of social and political entities, wherever one finds them. As with all things known and knowable, however, the boundaries of what one can know or will come to know about morality change constantly. Ethical reflection relies upon the moral requisites, just as the sciences depend on the table of elements. By themselves, they do not provide us with the knowledge we need to act responsibly in the light of newly discovered knowledge and technologies, and changes in culture, customs, behavioral patterns, or political policies. In morality as in other areas of knowledge, much room remains for discovery, and many reasons exist for making the effort. In short, one cannot defend the all too commonly assumed separation of morality and ethics from knowledge.

4. *Common morality grounds the discovery and dissemination of knowledge*. Scholarly methods, even in the so-called "hard sciences," have no moral neutrality. As the scientists Bronowski and Polanyi cogently argue and illustrate, science represents a community in which the verification of truth cannot take place without a commitment to truth as a value and to truthfulness as an absolute obligation that admits of no exceptions in pursuing, confirming, and conveying facts. The entire array of scholarly communities has the same moral requisites of community. Scholars, therefore, have a moral responsibility to identify and teach the moral imperatives that make it possible to have any success at all in adding to the storehouse of knowledge. Those who draw on existing knowledge rely on the trustworthiness of those who vouch for it and honestly communicate it to their students and the larger community.

5. *Religious traditions provide moral knowledge*. Philosophers like Putnam, and scientists like Bronowski and Polanyi teach students in what ways, and to what extent, scholarship depends upon adherence to, and the practice of, particular basic moral responsibilities. The religious traditions, however, more completely identify, reflect upon, and teach these moral responsibilities. For the most part, religious institutions and their leadership apply and adapt the common morality to the ever-changing circumstances of life for the welfare of their members and their larger communities. Higher education should now engage itself in the common morality more predictably and extensively, as it had originally. We should by now have a clear understanding of the reasons for moral instruction as a primary mission. The application of technical innovation and new knowledge, the protection of individual and communal life, and the possibility of freedom and of enjoying basic human rights all demand moral instruction.

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If we want to utilize fully the valuable contribution of the accumulated moral insight of the various religious traditions, colleges and universities should adequately represent philosophy, theology, and the study of the major religions in their curricula.[71] At the same time, all disciplines should teach, at the very least, the moral requisites most germane to their disciplines, and should accept the responsibility to support, not disparage, the common morality in their teaching and research.

For those who have serious reservations about including the metaphysical and epistemological pursuits of philosophy and theology, and the content of religious instruction, I wish to add a word in conclusion. The human urge to seek perfection, and to try to understand what a perfectly virtuous world and being would look like, has found continuous expression in philosophy, theology, and a variety of secular and religious literature. In philosophical as well as theological ethics, theories of moral decision-making, based upon conceptions of ideal persons and communities, have developed.[72] Atheists, non-theists, and individuals of whatever religious persuasion, can only benefit from their own efforts and the efforts of others, scholars and non-scholars alike, who ask what kind of persons human beings ought to exemplify individually and communally. As imperfect creatures, we shall never know perfectly this side of eternity. Yet, at least, we have the opportunity to ask about our moral responsibilities before, rather than after, we take up our chosen vocations.

Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and supervisor of slave labor, asked himself how he had walked among those starving, overworked, captives, and failed to see in their gaunt faces, the face of the regime.[73] Alas, Speer asked this question in prison, too late to prevent actions that he came deeply to regret. Tragically, many people died as a result. May we never say that same thing about ourselves.

[71]Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/JohnKnox Press, 1991) ch. 8, has argued persuasively for including theology in the offerings of colleges and universities, and for viewing it as a vital part of the multidisciplinary study of religion.

[72]Contemporary examples are to be found in Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952) 317–45; Charles Reynolds, "Elements of a Decision Procedure for Christian Social Ethics," *HTR* 65 (1972) 509–30; Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities*, chs. 8 and 9.

[73]Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theology and Ethical Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2 (1974) 99–118.

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