

A Moral Ontology

The definition of human nature that I develop in this essay has been informed by my study of the western philosophical tradition. That tradition has long been plagued with an irreconcilable split between the inquiry into how we know about material objects on the one hand and the study of morality on the other. My exposition challenges that division by creating a sophisticated account of how we experience the world. My intention is twofold. First it is to spell out in definite terms how it is that individual humans comport themselves towards the people and things around them. The second is to give morality a permanent foothold within this understanding of human nature. This means demonstrating that morality is developed not only by our interactions with one another but with the material world around us as well.

My exposition is not a research paper but is more the culmination of years of personal studies. Accordingly, I have decided to exclude any philosophical jargon except where it is important to introduce a concept or understanding, choosing instead a more popular style of writing. This paper is more about my understanding and my interpretation of these ideas, though I do try to be faithful to the sources. I also chose to exclude any references to other philosophers. This I did in part to focus more closely on the ideas themselves and to avoid a debate over the reputation of my sources. The authors that inform my opinion are greatly misunderstood and bringing up their names might actually distract from the intent of this paper.

Part One: A Preliminary Inquiry

My essay begins with an assumption that is common throughout western culture. This is the assumption that looking at animal behavior gives us a way of addressing questions regarding human nature. If for instance, we compare two household pets, cats and dogs, we know that while there may be similarities between the two, we none the less judge the cat's nature according to those behavior patterns in the cat that fall outside of a dog's abilities and vice versa. In other words, we judge them comparatively according to what they can and cannot do.

When we use this method on ourselves, however, we usually intend to measure our own nature against that of other humans. This commits us to a category mistake. When we judge cat behavior in certain situations, we also remember what the dog might do in such a situation and compare the two. When we use this method to judge our own abilities, we proceed along similar lines having in mind what we can and cannot do and then define our nature accordingly. This method, however, fails to distinguish between ability and possibility. When a cat acts in a non-dog like manner, it does not have the dog-like nature in mind in order to judge the difference. Rather, it assimilates the dog behavior into its own understanding of cat behavior. When a human being decides that his abilities are different from that of other human beings, he possesses the same potential to think and act as the person he is comparing himself to. And even if he cannot do what the other person can do, that understanding allows him the possibility to make the attempt.

In our efforts to define our own personal natures, we need to recognize all possibilities to be available to us. The problem is that when we are inspired by the ability of others, we cannot at the same time understand the work and effort that went into developing that skill. What's more, when we try to develop that skill in ourselves, we don't necessarily know how to deal with the difficulty. We risk frustration and possibly giving up quickly. The mistake occurs when we presume the difficulty to be due to our animal nature. It is easy to imagine that it's just not in our nature to be able to possess that ability. If, for example, I want to learn to play the piano, I might think that I am one kind of animal – the kind that cannot play the piano – and that a professional piano player is a different kind of animal – the kind

who can play the piano. If other people tell me that it's not in my nature to learn to play the piano, their words can be especially demoralizing. When I'm told such things, I am a victim of a certain kind of coercion. When I tell myself these things I am no less a victim only this time I have internalized the coercion.

It is possible that I come to the conclusion that I cannot be something. But, because everything that is in my understanding is already a possibility for me, I suggest that this "cannot" should be interpreted as a "should not", and submit that the "should not" belongs to, not the study of human nature, but to morality. When someone tells me that I cannot learn to become a piano player, what they are saying is that I should not make any attempt to learn how to play the piano. This "cannot" is contradictory because my understanding of what I cannot become already indicates my ability to become it. If I truly wish to become something, this "cannot" risks complicating matters given that learning a skill takes a long time and a lot of perseverance and a lot of making mistakes. Even if I practice all of my life and never reach a desired level of professionalism, once I begin practicing then it is only a matter of time before I gain some skill, and if I learn even a bit, then it already precludes the possibility that I can learn more. Any level of learning therefore will necessarily indicate to me my ability to become a professional. The "cannot" of morality short circuits this process by arresting my attempt before I even begin. This "cannot" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If I practice, I will learn and thereby demonstrate my ability to improve. If I don't practice then I don't learn thereby giving license to the belief that I can never learn.

Knowledge-how and Knowledge-that

I wish to introduce a distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge that, because, even though this distinction has no immediate bearing on what's been said so far, it is an essential distinction that I use throughout. Knowledge-how is practical knowledge. Playing tennis and playing the piano are examples of knowledge-how. These actions immerse us into the practice, so much so that we forget ourselves while we are doing them. While immersed, there is really no distinguishing us from the activity. But knowledge-how can be tricky to understand partly because we have been learning our knowledge-how ever since we were born and therefore take for granted just how big an importance it plays in our lives. For instance, knowing how to hold a fork or turn a door knob are part of our knowledge-how. They need to be learned. Yet because we had learned these activities so long ago, we presume them to be obvious.

We are always immersed in our knowledge-how but not always in our knowledge-that. This is because knowledge-how constitutes our first learning. What's more there are many things that we know how to do like playing tennis or playing the piano which we none-the-less cannot express in words unless we have been taught to do so. Knowledge-that requires some knowledge-how to have already been learned in order to give substance to our thoughts as a result, one's knowledge-that is always trailing behind their knowledge-how. Finally, it is the case that for many activities, knowledge-that interferes with our successful deployment of our knowledge-how. With many activities, if while performing them I try to think about what I'm doing, my thinking it through will grip me up. If, for example, I'm riding a bike and try to think about what my legs are doing. I'll probably fall.

A brief look at Freud's distinction between the conscious and the subconscious might help us to understand the relationship between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. Knowledge-that is comparable to the conscious and knowledge-how to the subconscious. Freud's formulation, however, commits an error that this formulation, that I'm resenting here, does not. The concept of the subconscious is, in essence, knowledge which one possesses but which is none the less hidden from them. This formulation amounts to knowledge which one both has and does not have. Knowledge-how

corrects this problem by placing this unknown known – our subconscious – not in ones mind but in ones actions.

The history of western philosophy is fixated on knowledge-that to the detriment of our understanding of knowledge-how so much so that philosophers make the kind of mistakes that people that have not studied philosophy do not make. The most absurd theory in western philosophy is that my ability to remember things as images or through words falls second behind my ability to do things.

Part Two: The Call

The kind of activities that one populates ones life with are cultural practices that one is called to. A calling is a peculiar thing because it occurs before one knows that they are being called to it. A calling is not a choice. If the calling were dependent on me choosing it, then I could just as soon not choose it, and the value which the call confers onto me would fall flat. Rather, it is the case that the calling chooses me. And in being called, I am drawn into the lifestyle that it awakens me to.

The world around me becomes knowable, not by thinking about it but by being involved with it. A calling is merely the event through which the world around me becomes known. The call prioritizes certain activities over others and therefore determines the style by which the world around me is learned. If for instance I am called to be a carpenter then the world becomes knowable to me differently than if I were called to be an illustrator.

The call precedes language and therein supplies me with what I learn to speak about and how I speak about it. To be sure, it's not long before my linguistic abilities come to have an influencing hand on my practices. But, because the development of language comes after and as a result of the call, it has no way of penetrating to the other side of the call where it might otherwise encounter my true animal nature. Instead I must be content with understanding my own nature through those practices made available by the call.

A calling is any relation in my life that defines who I am. Callings show themselves most pronouncedly in our personal passions. Personal passions are the practices in our lives that we continually return to. We define ourselves by these practices and while they usually involve a lot of hard work, actually make up our leisure time. In turning to them, we in part strive to deepen our understanding of them so that we may better practice them. When a practice is not a personal calling, we usually see the hardship involved as reason not to practice it.

Personal passions are empowering. They put our future self into focus, and give meaning to our lives. Let us imagine that I decided to become a piano player. The task of learning to play the piano involves a process of becoming and not a state of being because the desire alone is not enough to confer the needed skills onto me. I must learn to play and therefore put myself on the course towards mastery over it. Everything humans do is a process, and not a state. This means not only that we must learn the skill but also that we must do it regularly. It would be strange for me to master the piano, quit playing and still call myself a piano player. Besides, piano playing is a life long endeavor that always allows room for improvement, even after I've mastered it. This is a common structure to all passions for, if my own existence is perceived as having a future, then so must my passions or they will fade. Incidentally, all this is true also for prodigies, though it takes them only days or weeks to master what it would take everyone else a lifetime to learn.

Callings seem to be bound up, not with a natural propensity but with the culture in which we were raised. There would otherwise be no reasonable explanation as to why my callings coincide with the

possibilities that my culture furnished me with. Consider, for instance, the two cultural practices of being either a sumo wrestler or a roman gladiator. Both could arguably be “natural” propensities for me. Yet as it turns out, I am not called to practice either since doing so would appear absurd to me. Gladiators no longer exist in the world. So even though they are part of my cultural tradition, that practice belongs to a time long gone. Sumo wrestling is of my time, but it is the wrong culture. The likelihood of my choosing a cultural practice that I am not immersed in is slim. Curiously, we stand in an unconventional relationship regarding the as of yet unforeseeable practices of future cultures. It’s absurd to consider one of then natural propensities for me given that there’s no way of me ever learning about them.

Anxiety and Death

My knowledge of death is a permanent condition of being alive and therefore transcends any particular experience of learning. As such, it has an influencing hand on everything else that I learn about. The permanence of my knowledge of death is realized by being an implicit part of the emotion of anxiety. Were this not the case, then my understanding of death would depend upon my knowledge-that and would therefore be bound up with the expression of my culture. Anxiety however is an emotion and therefore experienced implicitly. It precedes our knowledge-that but is, however, not a part of our knowledge-how. Instead, anxiety is woven into the very fabric of what it means to be a human being and acquires its cultural definition out of self reflection.

My self awareness grows out of and is dependent upon my knowledge of the world and my knowledge of the world could not exist unless I engaged the world through my cultural practices. The attempt to take from me those cultural practices that I most personally relate to disarms me of my manner of being in the world. It leaves me defenseless to the whims of the world. This in turn risks placing all possibilities on the same level, including those that risk my death. Conversely, my personal practices repel all other practices regardless of whether I know what they are or not.

The risk of death is signaled by anxiety and must be so because I need to, of necessity, be warned of possibilities that I have not yet been made aware of. Potential risks are hidden from view for two reasons. First, there are always personal potentials that have not yet been ever explored. Second, the world becomes illuminated through our practices and therefore can’t do other than reflect those practices back to us. Anything that threatens us for falling outside of these practices cannot be signaled to us by way of a voice or an understanding without reflecting back our knowledge-that.

Our knowledge of death runs contrary to our usual way of knowing things. It is when I am alive that I am aware of death even though death means the absolute cessation of life and by extension the cessation of knowledge. Anxiety signals the possibility of the greatest loss, the possibility that I may cease to exist within the world. This effectively means that I know something that I can never experience – my own absence. This foreknowledge of death breaks with the empiricist premise that seeing is believing and instead demonstrates an aspect of my spirituality. Whether or not there is, in fact, a heaven for me to go to after I die is irrelevant. For, even if heaven does exist, my understanding of heaven is couched in my experience of perception, and therefore resembles being alive.

I want to point out that my discussion of death does not commit me to the premise that anxiety is the human condition. I am equally defined by the fact that I engage in my cultural practices as I am by the fact that I am threatened by their removal. My cultural practices illuminate the world to me which in turn brings me joy. A philosophy about anxiety, in order to be complete, needs likewise to be a philosophy about joy.

In real terms, anxiety indicates to us that there are things in the world which, if we experience them, will cause our death. Unfortunately, there is no determining the proof of the threat without dying. Anxiety succeeds in averting death by driving us to avoid the perceived threats. The experience of anxiety causes us to postpone the threat so far into the future that its possibility falls from view. This in turn prevents us from ever proving the risk to be real to believe that a practice is one that risks our death is to never confirm our belief. When expressed in terms of identity, those practices which call us are distinguished from other practices in that they remove the threat from view.

Material philosophies miss the fact that this double signification away from the anxiety of death and toward the joy of practice defines our perception of the world. They invite us to level out meaning by placing any practice that is favorable to human life on the same level as those that would extinguish it. Conversely, I argue that our interaction with the physical world is a moral one which counters materialism not by recoiling from this overabundance of possibilities but by transcending it. And this is accomplished through the acknowledgement that I am capable of detrimental practices. This acknowledgement has two very different implications. The first is that even the most abhorrent acts are always and necessarily possibilities for me. My ethical obligation toward my culture includes not only choosing what I am to become but also choosing what I can never express. This means that while culture provides me with more possibilities than I can ever engage in, it is my responsibility to judge which obligations are appropriate for me. But, secondly, anxiety does not contain within itself the ability to determine whether I am actually being threatened or not. It can only choose against the leveling of value. This means that the ethics of choosing has a built in ambiguity. My ability to judge my own actions is always trailing behind my cultural commitments. My ethical obligation is enacted through my personal history with my own indigenous culture and not any foreknowledge of what is safe or dangerous. As a result, evaluating my commitments adequately requires gaining enough familiarity with the practice before I can bring to voice the broader implications.

Part Three: Our Infinite Nature

Our moral orientation, even while limiting our possibilities, still manages to demonstrate our infinite potential. Quite contrary to the case of personal callings, human possibility is infinite. In defining my nature, it is not enough to inventory all the possibilities made available by my culture. Not even a hypothetical inventory of all cultures, past, present and future, from everywhere that they occur could define human nature. Every act ever taken by any human ever is a possibility for me and therefore part of my nature.

We can never actually inventory our true potential since we can only speak about what we know. Rather we are infinite because each person possesses possibilities that he is not yet aware of. And because this is true for every person in every culture at every time, then one's possibilities will always exceed one's own knowledge of them.

The human propensity for knowledge is intimately tied to the development of an internal moral compass. The ability to learn factual information can be viewed as the empirical aspect of learning. New knowledge is added to old simply by having another experience or by experiencing something differently. The increase in moral capacity is possible because the newly acquired knowledge does not rest inert amongst the previously acquired knowledge but is immediately assimilated with existing knowledge. This then allows the individual to better judge the whole. This is a crucial development in my philosophy because it demonstrates a secondary effect that occurs alongside the more obvious one of accumulating facts. As I learn facts, the number of newly created connections between them increases in knowledge – a quantitative increase – I likewise undergo a qualitative transformation in my ability to make better judgments. Quantitative learning occurs linearly while qualitative learning occurs

exponentially. The difference in growth between these two co-ordinations is what allows for an internal dialogue to develop, which then makes for the possibility of morality and self regulation.

Disruptive Learning

Disruptive learning is the name that I give to the manner by which my ability transforms relative to the manner by which my learning accumulates. This difference is especially pronounced if I train a specific skill given that there is usually a deliberate attempt to train for regularly lengthened time periods with regularly length intervals in between. What becomes apparent under such circumstances is that, while the time spent training increases linearly over a given length of time, increases in ability tend to occur in sudden jumps separated by seemingly long periods of stagnancy. Where the disruption occurs is between that which I expect of myself; knowledge-that, and that which I've become; knowledge-how. When I first discover the change, the disjunction makes it seem as though my body has become lighter, easier to maneuver, almost super powered. Those barriers which I now overstep with ease had been hidden from my sight. I had taken them for granted because I had been acclimatized to those conditions. Suddenly they've been removed, and though I've been training to remove them, the change comes without warning. Now, through my knowledge-that, I have to do the work to re-acclimatize myself until gradually these new conditions are the expected ones.

Disruptive learning is an exemplar, an outlier experience that teaches how we are to view all our other experiences. The infinite nature of my being means that I possess possibilities that are so far removed from my daily life that I cannot even imagine what they might be. Let's consider for a moment, the practice of playing the violin. This is a possibility which is available to me but which is not within my ability since I have never trained the violin. But a culture that existed thousands of years ago, which has never seen anything that even resembles a violin could not even imagine this possibility even though by virtue of their being human, had an equivalent possibility of learning to play it. I can extrapolate from this example that there are likewise possibilities for me which I cannot even begin to imagine. Explanations like the one just given, however, restrict my understanding of these possibilities to theory because they commit their conclusion to thinking. And within those confines I cannot possibly both know something and not know it. Disruptive learning, by showing me the difference between my abilities and my self understanding, gives me the unique chance of actually allowing those possibilities that are mine but that are none-the-less outside of my understanding to enter into my experiences.

Language and The Other

The following section on language moves away from the discussion so far, but is essential to know if we're going to understand how new words are created. Human beings have a natural inclination to learn language. While language makes theoretical thinking possible, it belongs to our knowledge-how. This is evident by the fact that I can know how to produce a well structured sentence but, unless I've been taught grammar, I probably don't know what went into producing that sentence. Yet at the same time, language is necessary for formulating my ideas, by giving something a name, I can transform what would otherwise be an abstract aspect of my actions into a concrete object which I can then think of independently of the action. This process is necessary if I am to fix form myself any personal problem that I might have.

While it is the case that language is a function of what makes me human and of how I perceive the world, my language – the language that I speak – originates in the other and is a function of my social nature. In deed, language needs others who speak it for it to exist and then transforms relative to how my community speaks it. To be able to understand something that someone else tells me is to enter without protection into the field of signification that the other presents me with this makes understanding

synonymous with believing. This lack of protection originates within that openness to the other that I have from birth. I am naturally drawn to the other and am already from my earliest experiences observing him for my first social indoctrination. To question or doubt is a secondary impulse that results from having a secondary field of signification from which to question the first.

A word functions by standing within the tension between identifying a singular object or event and being a universal signifier capable of referring to everything. This tension is due to the need to address a particular object or event to a community of speakers who will have experienced analogous objects or event but not necessarily the ones in question. But, a word can neither identify an isolated object or event nor can it reference everything without losing intelligibility. The nature of people's names is telling. Even though I am a particular individual living at a particular time with a particular identity, my name needs to be a stock name used commonly within my culture. Otherwise, the likelihood of others forgetting it will increase. And yet my name cannot be too common otherwise calling out to me in a crowd will yield undesired results. My name needs to be both similar enough and different enough to work. So too is the case with language. A word, like desk or instance, needs to indicate enough objects such that two

People who have never met can find the same object. Beyond those objects that word needs to cease to have any meaning. For, the very nature of words is inclusion and exclusion. But, this tension is never resolved. There is always a grey area where some desk-like objects are desks and others are not. Words never come to have a final definition. They are always in a state of motion, in a state of redefinition, as they are continually being filled in by new meaning or emptied of old, or both.

Anxiety and The Other

My preliminary inquiry into the structure of death has omitted my encounter with the other because my discussion was still confined to the nature of personal callings. Yet my intuitive understanding of my demise is radicalized by the other because I likewise intuit the other to be capable of anything even from my first encounter.

In a sense, everything is implicitly language. Language here means not only the ability to express something through sounds or symbols but the ability to judge the intent of the other through their engagement with the culture. The way one dresses, talks or moves creates a distance through which we can judge whether or not they pose a threat. As before, once we've established empirically the truth of the threat, it's already too late to respond to it. The threat needs to be surmised from a distance. And even in cases where we judge incorrectly, anxiety dictates that we shut out that risk from our lives rather than negotiate with it. Our ability to observe the other engage us through culturally determined norms creates the medium by which to judge.

Yet, if we have to be properly indoctrinated into the culture from birth, then we lack the ability to judge adequately. Our parents or guardians have a moral responsibility to lead us into enculturation. This they can do only by treating us with kindness and dignity. Children learn to be treated with dignity best through concrete events where others habitually treat them with dignity. Failure to do so fails to teach them how to ask for proper treatment or what it even looks like. This then short circuits the process of enculturation and leaves children increasingly vulnerable to their need for fair treatment.

Unlike for children, adults are perceived by others as having already been indoctrinated into the culture. Adults who have not adequately indoctrinated tend to miss those behavioral cues that make them approachable to others. For them, an invitation into adequate indoctrination is as close as a good friend. However, if no one engages with them, then their attempts to make friends fail and feed even more

strongly into their need. What's more, this need lends the victim ever more vulnerable to committing inappropriate or even dangerous behaviors which in turn causes others to alienate him even more. It is this double edged sword of being culturally determined from outside and of having our limitations sustained by anxiety which causes stagnation in our growth and gives our practices the appearance of being automatic or animal like.

Basic Indoctrination versus Personal Enculturation

The distinction between early social indoctrination and personal enculturation is that the first happens automatically while the second is done intentionally by the learner. Basic enculturation relies upon a certain contagiousness of simple expressions so as to initiate the process of primary language acquisition. Here, the word 'gesture' is meant to denote anything from facial expressions to posture to the use of tools or instruments or anything that humans do. The process by which infants acquire language cannot be summed up by the interaction of the parent and the world that those interactions bring to light. For this link is continually being intersected by the agency of the infant, and that intersection radicalizes the process into an intricate web of cross references. Yet one necessary requisite for primary language acquisition is that the baby's body tunes in to the bodies of the adults around him so as to acquire the gestures. Adults receiving training can expect their instructor to use language to help correct any mistakes they are making. With infants, prior to the development of language, no such option is available. Instead, it is the infant's body that does the thinking as it adapts to what others are doing. The gestures that the infant acquires however are not mere mimics of the adult's but are already filled with signification. In order for a mere gesture to have signification, the infant must already be connected to full enculturation, even if no enculturation has taken place. What language does is it renders any abstract aspect of our abilities and of our perception into a concrete object of our experience so that, in times of difficulty, we can prescribe onto ourselves the solution. When we are infants, it is the other in the form of parent or guardian who supplies us with the correct manner of behavior. When we are adults it is we ourselves who, by way of language, serves as the other to ourselves so as to fulfill that need.

Guilt and Shame

The same distinction between social indoctrination and personal enculturation can be seen in the difference between shame and guilt. The comparison of guilt and shame with social indoctrination and personal enculturation is instructive in that both sets possess similarities that help to better explicate the difference between infancy and adulthood. Both guilt and shame are emotions. Both indicate to the person experiencing it that he is doing something wrong. Shame, however, originates within the glance of the other. It is because someone has caught me doing something unfavorable that I experience shame. Guilt occurs because I have caught myself doing something wrong. Two very important characteristics of human nature are observed in the distinction. Firstly, in the case of shame, it need not be necessary that I be doing something wrong in order to experience shame. I can be shamed for anything, even the most inane action, association or physical characteristic. Guilt on the other hand is something that originates from my own gaze. This means that, at the least, there needs to be a development of the self in order for there to be a someone to assign guilt. Shame is the more basic of the two because it can happen at any stage of life. Guilt is the more derived one as it requires personal development.

But, what is perhaps the most important distinction is that while shame cannot be transcended, guilt can. Guilt forces me to reevaluate my previous actions. It forces the action back into memory even though the event had passed, and it forces me to be on the lookout for when I might engage in the action again so as to prescribe a new action in its place. As the new behavior pattern becomes part of my identity, the guilt fades. With shame, because it is controlled by the other, no such possibility of transcendence exists.

Shame is confrontational and it is coercive. The more the other tries to shame me, the more I need to stand in defiance. Yet while I can be shamed at any stage of life, guilt fortifies me against shame by utilizing an internal dialogue through which I can evaluate my actions.

The relationship between the transition from an externally originating voice to an internal one on the one hand and the transition from shame to guilt on the other is threefold. There is a shallow relationship, a profound relationship, and a reciprocal relationship. The shallow relationship is simply that both pairs proceed from an externally originating relation to an internally originating one. This means that our internal voice requires at the same time both concrete relations with others and material experience with the world for it to develop. There is a second more profound relationship in that the development of an internal voice is dependent upon the acquisition of experience so as to develop the interconnectivity necessary to make judgments. This means that the development of the internal voice is dependent on learning. There is a third reciprocating relationship between the development of skill and the development of morality. The voice that speaks ones guilt is silent. It does not have a language equivalent to the one that is learned through primary language acquisition. And yet, when one feels guilt, one is inclined to use language so as to resolve ones personal conflicts. And just as my ability to play the piano needs to be trained so too must the ability to use language.

Guilt shares many similarities with disruptive learning. Both result in an increase in awareness. Both are relevant to the external world. Both come upon us without warning. Both speak yet have neither voice nor language. Both inspire language in order to codify the message that they deliver.

Both the development of language and the development of an internal compass answer to a pre-existing potential, a personal need that defines our humanness ahead of our ever acquiring it. This need however has no material equivalent, no physical representation or particular set of experiences to fulfill it. Our need only has the potential of not being met and therefore suggests a possible arrangement of circumstances such that they fail us. Our need to develop language and an internal compass however remains. Only those circumstances that fulfill this need have the qualities necessary to be considered a culture. Just as in the case that when the child mimics adults, he is learning the meaning of words and not empty gestures because he is already connected to the culture as a whole, so to is he learning to be an ethical participant of a community through his development of personal skills. On this account, morality itself cannot be taught directly but needs to be enacted through teaching. Cultivation of the self accomplishes this by firstly allowing a concrete relationship between the learner and the parent, teacher, or guardian and second by realizing our personal potential which in turn, illuminates that of others.

Moral philosophy displays characteristics of cultural relativism because the same truth can be expressed through the practices of different cultures. Those same truths then get tested through that cross cultural experience. What results from the test however is not merely an affirmation of those truths, but a deeper understanding of how those truths get expressed through the particulars of my culture expresses those truths. The greater the cross cultural community grows, the more abstract my understanding of those truths becomes. Where a moral ontology deviates from cultural relativism is in where it locates its morality. A moral ontology places its morality in it's striving for personal excellence, and in so doing, develops its internal compass. Relativism places its morality on its one maxim that things are different for different people, personal development be damned.

Horizontal thinking

In philosophy, the horizon serves as a metaphor to introduce a new concept. But, before the use of this metaphor, there was no word to express what these philosophers wanted to say and therefore no way of teaching others to reflect upon this concept. Before anyone had the means of understanding or even

considering what this concept addresses, someone had to invent an adequate word to express it. Its creation came about by way of a poetic element, in this case the metaphor, wherein one thing comes to mean something else. Ironically, this term was created in the service of understanding how it is that a new word comes into being.

The literal meaning of the horizon is the place at which the earth seems to end and the sky begins. The horizon can be blocked from view, but where it's visible, it is always at a great distance and the things on the horizon are not clearly visible. The only way to make something on the horizon visible is to bring it in close. The philosophical meaning of a horizon is the set of thoughts, meanings, and significations that are within conceptual reach but not yet formulated. They too are not clearly visible. And just as is the case with the real horizon, anything in our lives that is only vaguely visible can be brought in close. This is accomplished by naming it.

The case of grammar is instrumental in demonstrating how something is only vaguely visible. The primary function of language is to share experiences and events with other people. When we speak, we pay little attention to the words themselves. If we did we would trip up our tongues. This renders what I am actually doing producing well composed sentences, invisible for the same of that which I intend to do, indicate the content of my discussion. If for some reason I was forced to consider what my tongue was doing, I would be hard pressed to actually succeed in seeing it since every time I tried, I would fail to do that which I intended to do. And yet, it is the case that every speaker knows how to form a well structured sentence. On that level, everyone knows the grammar of their language. It is likewise for all theoretical knowledge that, because my knowledge-how precedes my knowledge-that, there is always something that I know how to do but do not know how to explain. When circumstances occur such that I am forced to try and see, now for the first time, how it is that I conduct myself, I am left with the difficult task of performing in two competing knowledge bases at the same time. Language solves this problem by leaving behind an artifact that had been created by my actions and which now remains as a concrete object of my experience.

Contextuality

The meaning of a word does not stand in isolation from the meaning of other words. This interconnectedness is a necessary requisite for the creation of metaphors and can be easily demonstrated by how a dictionary or a thesaurus works. Whenever you look up a word, its definition is comprised of other words.

Known as contextuality, this interconnectedness originates without our perception of things. Contrary to materialist philosophy, we never encounter a merely material object. Everything I encounter is already understood in relation to something else. A pencil, for instance, cannot be a pencil unless it has a surface to write upon, and the two cannot function together unless there is a reason for using them. The pencil fits into a world that renders it useful. And when I see the pencil, I see in it this usefulness even if I don't know that I am seeing it. Were my first experience of the pencil to be in isolation from the things that make it significant, then the pencil itself would fail to have any signification. The pencil can simultaneously fit into a number of different contexts. Students use pencils to take notes, artists to draw, golfers to keep score, and so on. These contexts constitute different worlds of signification, but ultimately, contribute to the totality of my understanding.

Just as knowledge-how precedes knowledge-that, so to does contextuality precede the two and connect them. The implication is that my ability to remember things as images or as words falls behind my ability to do things. My understanding of what things are resides primarily in my interaction with them and not in my head. When for instance I prepare to go to work, the front door is seen not as an inert

object with properties but as the way to the car. My intended end is the manner in which the door comes into perception and the properties of the door get illuminated as allowing for the possibility of that end. As I approach the door, I can also see the wall and the adjacent window. But, I don't really notice them because their properties don't allow me to easily exit the house. What's more, because opening the door, walking through it and closing it again occurs in time, then so to is my experience of time likewise an aspect of my perception which is experienced outside of me through my intended ends.

When I learn, I am not merely creating an inventory of experiences or events but in deed transforming my perception of things by allowing for increasingly sophisticated intentions to be brought to bear upon those things. This increase, then, allows for my ability to detect finer and finer details in the world. Accordingly, knowledge is the power to discriminate between one thing or event and another. And learning is an increase in that power. Thus, what must be getting transformed is the number of links which allow for an increase in discriminatory power. What an infant's first experience must then be is the entirety of experience as an undifferentiated mass. The first experiences by extension create a connected distance between one experience or event and another.

One's personal ethics is an ever growing endeavor. Our abilities reveal themselves to us according to the material conditions that allow for those abilities to come out. The ability to play the piano, for instance, amounts to nothing if there are no such things in the world as pianos. Our identity is dependent on circumstances and life is always marching us into new circumstances. Our response to those circumstances can often surprise us and force us to rethink our position in the world. But, self transformation requires language so that we may lean the process. And sometimes, the right words are lacking. This deficit is rectified by a poetic reordering of the language. It is no surprise then that we find this same interconnectedness that we find in the world also in our language. When a new meaning or signification is needed, existing language provides a word through a poetic device which takes advantage of existing significations. The intention behind this discussion is to describe what we already do as much as it is to prescribe a new method. In deed, past instances of newly created words through such poetic devices are preserved in the language. For instance, the Latin root '-fer', as in such words as refer, confer or prefer, is connected in meaning to the English word carry. Yet none of these derived words preserve the original meaning of the root.

Part Four: Reflections on Theology

I'd like to explore some interesting similarities between my definition of human nature and the philosophical definition of god. These similarities, I believe, will help to deepen the understanding of what I intend by human nature. As humans, we all possess the same human potential as each other. This includes every human expression from the past to the future. This totalization of human potential can be characterized by the attributes of god; omniscience because human potential is knowledge, omnipotence because human potential provides us with ability, and omnipresence because human potential follows us into every circumstance we inhabit.

The western concept of god, however, is plagued with an internal contradiction between his immanence and his transcendence. God is immanent in his ability to speak directly to us as individuals. This allows the individual direct evidence of God's existence. Yet god's immanence cannot be communicated from one individual to another because of the personal nature of the message. God is transcendent in that he stands outside of creation. This station is necessary in order to explain his omnipotence and so on. From this distance, the cycle of having a created being as the creator of another created being ends. But, as transcendent, god the creator is completely absent from the world. The philosophy that I am presenting here, reconciles these two concepts. God's transcendence is exemplified by the totalization of my possibilities. As such, god always presents me with possibilities that are outside of my awareness. As

immanent, god is, through always greater than me, never anything other than me. The difference between my identity and that of god is that I am the realized ability – which is limited, while god's is the potential ability – which is infinite. Communication between the two occurs by way of my every growing knowledge of the world. This makes god's creative power manifest through my ever increasing ability to discriminate differences. God, then, speaks to me his presence through the disruptive nature of my learning. Like an immanent god's message, the experience of disruptive learning calls to us to see the world differently.

God is not some independent being who created the world at the beginning of time. God is not a separate being at all. But nor is god a private voice that reveals itself to one individual at a time independently from what anyone else is doing. God is my abilities projected onto the face of world, ever growing and ever greater than me. The mythical creation of the world is a metaphor for my ever deepening understanding of the world around me. And while any particular transformation in understanding is revealed to me as an individual, that which is revealed gets expressed in the public realm where others are present to witness it and even try to reproduce the ability.

Faith

Having established a philosophical definition of god, I wish to now expand my concept of human nature by exploring the function of faith. Man's faith in god is really the relationship between my finite capacity and my infinite potential. The role that faith has in this relationship can best be explained by juxtaposing it with materialist philosophy, with its slogan that seeing is believing. In our discussion, there is no seeing my ability to play the piano if I have not yet learned to do so. By failing this fact, materialism denies the fact that humans are learning beings. What's more, without a clear understanding of human nature, materialist philosophy risks derailing the learning process. Imagine I was a smoker and that I wanted to quit. Imagine that for my first attempt, I tried quitting cold turkey but that I soon gave in to temptation and started up again. Such failures are demoralizing and easily lead me to the conclusion that it's somehow not in my nature to quit smoking. The proof of my failure is immediately obvious. What is not immediately obvious is whether or not there is more than one way of quitting or whether there is more than one factor to be considered when quitting. These possibilities are hidden from me and the "cannot" that results from the failure prevents me from searching for them. These possibilities are blocked from view by the practices that furnish my life and cannot be revealed to me unless I have, from the outset, a completely different idea of what is possible for me. This new self image would be proven correct not by past events but by future ones. For that reason, my self image as a non smoker would never be derived from my self image as a smoker. The new self image can only be assumed by making a clean break from the old self image. And this can only be achieved by way of a leap toward a possibility that is as of yet unproven, a leap of faith. This new self image, only once the leap is made, can lead the way in training me to become a non-smoker.

In philosophy, this leap is expressed as non-rationalism, not irrationalism – that's a rejection of rationalism. Logic is the use of rules to demonstrate the internal workings of an assertion and is necessary so as to organize one's thoughts. Rationalist philosophy however zeroes in on these rules to the exclusion of life's complexities. It omits the complexity of life because this complexity can only be expressed as narrative and proven true only by being lived. By denying life philosophy, rationalism creates a closed system of understanding that does not allow for self discovery.

Non-rationalism, on the other hand, is merely the decentralization of rationalism. Once decentralized, rationalism becomes merely a tool to be used and not the driving purpose of philosophy. What would occupy the center of philosophy is the constant drive to better oneself. But what's more, life philosophy

actually relies upon rationalism in order to assimilate new self discoveries into its already existing moral obligation.

I have from the outset made a distinction between ability and possibility. The underlying theme being that ones possibilities not only exceed ones abilities but that any theory of human nature that tries to limit these possibilities immediately betrays itself by, at the same time, inviting us to cultivate these possibilities. This line of argument in effect spells out the logical proof of how our potential exceeds our realized abilities. This argument however fails to address the emotional aspect and the demoralization that accompanies failure. At the vanguard of this emotional support is faith. My discussion on faith serves as a provocation to convince the reader to take charge of their own identity. My intention is to present the difference between ability and possibility as the crisis to which this leap of faith responds to. Once having come across a self criticism, it is one's moral obligation to try to correct it. When a personal limitation is discovered, three possible courses of action are available. Do nothing and accept the limitation. Do something and risk failure, or do something and succeed. The first and second actions are identical in their outcome while the second and third are the same in agency. The key to understanding the difference between the first and third option is the second; do something and risk failure. The act of defiance in the face of the possible failure stands in vigil against the leveling of meaning. For, even if failure is inevitable, it is the attempt to rectify the situation that expresses what it means to be human. To fail is to die a death in the face of what is possible. To merely accept my fate is to surrender to failure and to in effect die a second death alongside the first.

Conclusion

This essay takes a long detour through key aspects of human experience in order to demonstrate a simple premise, that human morality is couched in the manner by which we experience the material world. It is our unique human ability that allows for the workings of our mind to be revealed. But those abilities cannot reveal themselves unless we place ourselves on a course of self fulfillment. The more I learn, the more the ownership of my learning is conferred away from the world and onto me, and the more it is my responsibility to either direct my own learning or otherwise allow the world around me to tug me along in a random direction. The high degree to which humans learn, which is unique within the animal kingdom, sets the conditions for our moral orientation. It is this orientation which dictates that I embrace the responsibility of directing my identity.

Animals are limited, relative to humans, not because they don't use tools or because they don't use language or don't have opposable thumbs or don't stand upright. For as it turns out, there are examples of animals who display these traits throughout nature. Humans are different from other animals because the level of learning that is natural for humans, which is considerably more, carries with it a qualitative difference in how humans do things. The comparison of humans to animals, then, becomes an act of coercion and of manipulation. This is not to say that humans are not animals. But it is to say that when defining oneself, it is the humanness that needs to take precedence over the animality.