

# From Biology to Social Experience to Morality: Reflections on the Naturalization of Morality

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*Placing Goodenough and Deacon's "From Biology to Consciousness to Morality" against the background of the ethical naturalism of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British moral theory, Yeager highlights the contribution the authors make to the moral sense tradition as well as indicating the limitations of such accounts of moral agency, judgment, and conduct. Yeager also identifies two strands of the essay that seem to open toward a more comprehensive account than the authors actually give. The first concerns the "interplay between self-interest and pro-sociality," and the other concerns the ethical implications of coevolution. On the latter point, the work of G. H. Mead is offered as an illuminating contrast.*

"From Biology to Consciousness to Morality" undertakes "the project of naturalizing morality" (20). Working from a lucid and fascinating account of "biological emergence . . . undergirded by semiotic (encoding) systems," Goodenough and Deacon extend their empirical approach in support of the thesis that primates equipped with language become aware of their "pro-social" capacities and that this self-awareness—characterized as "awareness of what it feels like to be moral" or as "moral experience" (16)—makes possible an amplification of these capacities to such an extent as to constitute "experiences and imaginings and modes of action that are no longer constrained by evolutionary precedents and classes of phylotypic stimuli" (16). They not only explore the grounding of morals but also make some normative judgments that they take to follow from the understanding of morality that they propose.

As the authors rightly indicate (18), their treatment of the phenomenon of moral judgment has affinities with that developed by the British seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moral theorists Shaftesbury and David Hume (though technically, Francis Hutcheson and Hume might be the more appropriate lineage). Known by convention as "moral sense theory," and extended through Adam Smith into the utilitarian school so prominent in nineteenth-century English moral thought, this account of moral behavior and judgment grounds morality in human nature (thus dispensing with both ecclesial and social authorities as arbiters of right behavior). It is a predominantly psychological account of the moral (giving central place to mental states, specifically the feelings, of the agent), and it tends toward intuitionism. It presupposes an empiricist epistemology, and the representative theorists in this movement all link moral with aesthetic judgments. Probably reflecting Protestant religious influences, these theorists reserve moral approbation for intentions or motives rather than deeds *per se*, and this, together with the emphasis placed upon feelings of pleasure and approbation, provides the bridge to utilitarianism. Moral sense theory developed in opposition to the received rationalistic accounts of morality as a rational achievement and was thought by many to be superior to such theories because the moral sense account seemed to close the gap between moral knowledge and moral action that had been so troublesome to the rationalists. It is equally important to note that moral sense theory also developed in opposition to the (at the time) shocking work of Thomas Hobbes, who also closed the gap between knowledge and action, essentially by dispensing with "the moral" altogether. He had painted a powerful but very unattractive picture of human

action and human collective arrangements as a field of unrelenting self-seeking and ego-interest conflicts. The authors' current naturalization project, like many contributions by contemporary sociobiologists, has the virtue of counterbalancing accounts of human behavior—whether they arise from Hobbesian pessimism, Spencerian theories of evolution, depth psychology, or economic rational choice models—that reduce human motivation to individual self-interest driven by indelible and invariant desires to survive, possess, and dominate.

## Brief Summary

Out of their consideration of the range and development of biological life, Goodenough and Deacon identify four “organizing principles” of the group life of primates: “robust attention to *social hierarchy*,” “preoccupation with the *nurture* of the young,” “skillful engagement in *strategic reciprocity*,” and “a hostility towards outgroups (*xenophobia*) and an endowment of the pro-social capacity we can generically call *empathy*” (12). These characteristics, together with self-interest and “such ‘negative’ capacities as aggression” (12) are, I take it, what the authors have in mind when they later refer to “our primate minds” (16, subhead) or, rather differently, “a primate brain that remains very much a primate brain” (p. 16, text). To develop the “something more” emergent from this “nothing but,” the authors point out that humans are unique in having developed abstract, symbolic, syntactical languages which make possible a kind of niche construction that is not open to any other creatures. Once this power emerged, somewhere, in the incomprehensibly distant past of our hardly recognizable ancestors, it set in motion the complex and marvelous process of “the co-evolution of language, culture, and symbolic human minds” (13), an evolutionary process that presumably continues today. In addition to making it possible for us to construct and inhabit what the authors call “a virtual reality” (15), this co-evolutionary process makes possible the emergence of the self and the possibility of self-awareness and self-reference. Stressing their belief that the nature of this emergent self does not “[set] us apart in some disconnected realm” (15) and that it would be incorrect to conclude that the human mind “somehow [has] the wherewithal to transcend these [our primate] antecedents and operate in a set-apart matrix of human-specific truths” (16), they insist that what language makes possible is the reflexive experience of what is already present in all primate minds rather than the appearance of something not present before. All primates have mental experience of an “intensely social” sort; in the authors' somewhat troublesome language, all primates experience their minds (16). Humans, equipped with symbolic language, experience the same sort of mind, but experience it differently. The process of representing features of our mental experience to ourselves “radically transforms” that mental experience, “augmenting” and “amplifying” it, and permitting “conceptual blending” (16). Presumably this hypothesis could be discussed in terms of any of a wide number of mental experiences, but the authors have a special interest in “moral experience.” Accordingly, they return to the four characteristics of cooperative primate life (hierarchy, reciprocity, nurture, and empathy) in order to show how each, having been altered and extended as it became subject to reflexive self-awareness, provides the natural grounding of one or more moral virtues.

- Natural primate empathy (a pro-social capacity), symbolically “accessed” in reflexive awareness, is simply extended in its reach. Whereas other primates “are disposed to help one another out in the service of group stability, to be tolerant, to offer forgiveness and consolation and forge reconciliation” (12), they practice such behavior only with respect to a limited group of immediately present companions. In an example of amplification or augmentation, this same attitude in humans is remarkably extended beyond “kin or friends or social group,” even to known enemies and even so far as the inclusive community of “the planet Earth” or “life itself” (17).
- Linguistically mediated self-experience also alters strategic reciprocity (kin altruism). In this case, the

mechanism of transformation seems to be conceptual blending or “symbolic synthesis” rather than amplification. The behaviors and attitudes essential to group formation are “fused” with pro-social empathy to produce “a sense of justice” (18).

- Nurture, symbolically experienced, yields the virtue of care which capaciously enfolds “responsibility, commitment and kindness” (18). The “transfiguration” here is once again extension. Instead of confining the activities of nurture/care to the dependent young of one’s own kin system, one is able to turn one’s capacity for care toward the ecosystem and toward future generations.
- Hierarchy, the mental capacity underlying dominance and subordination, seems to give more trouble, and here the mechanism of transformation is not specified. The impulse to dominance disappears (as xenophobia simply disappears from the discussion of empathy or strategic reciprocity), and the impulse to accept one’s (subordinate) place and role in “contexts that are larger and more important than ourselves” (18) is characterized as reverence on the part of everybody, whether dominant or dominated, powerful or subservient.

This discussion (or, more accurately, the discussion of empathy) then becomes the basis for the authors’ discussion of pleasure in the intuitive apprehension of moral beauty as the only authentic form of properly “moral” motivation, and for their treatment of cultural traditions (including religions) as guides and stimulants to this natural “process of moral self-discovery” (19). What emerges, then, is an account of creatures who are determined by tens of thousands of years of evolution to behave in ways that are advantageous to group life. These behaviors are not, however, presented as inevitable instincts; the authors do assume an intuitive and universal grasp of and appreciation of the “beauty” of behaviors that create and enhance social bonds, but whether an individual will behave in ways that enhance social bonds is less predictable. The latter apparently depends on environmental conditions such as the presentation of moral ideals and the absence of stress.

## **Moral Sense Theories**

Does this biologically based account have any distinct advantages over that of the moral sense school? Eighteenth-century thinkers did not have evolutionary theory, nor did they have a very sophisticated theory of language, yet they developed a very cogent theory of the “sentimental” anchor of all moral action and judgment. They worked directly from the person’s desire for pleasure and aversion for pain, the person’s intuitive sympathy and intuitive admiration. What, if anything, is added or changed by invoking primate evolution, “the coevolution of language, culture, and symbolic human minds” (13), and linguistically-mediated self-awareness of the pro-social and a-social capacities of our primate brains?

To begin with, this account does offer a natural mechanism by means of which such “sentiments” as empathy and kin altruism arise in human beings. By the same token, this account explains intuitive appreciation of the good and involuntary revulsion at cruelty and some forms of violence. The authors suggest how and why there might be neural pathways that ensure an organism’s positive response to behaviors conducive to group life, and physiological systems that produce subjective distress in response to the spectacle of pain in others. One of the principal criticisms of the moral sense account has been that its reliance on direct moral perceptions seems to suggest that there is either some extra organ of sense (favorite proposals were “a moral nose” or “a moral ear”) or some separate mental faculty that is the seat of distinctively moral perceptions and distinctively moral responses. A number of the original moral sense theorists proposed that the intuitive appreciation of the good could only be explained as a contrivance of God. The evolutionary account of the survival value, for many

species, of such hard-wired impulses, together with their linguistically mediated extension and interaction, would therefore seem to represent a worthy and helpful contribution to this tradition, rendering it more empirically plausible and much more attractive to those who reject appeals to divine creation.

Curiously, however, the authors seem determined to reinstate the gap between motivation and action that moral sense theory is usually considered to have closed. In the moral sense tradition, the responsive feeling is generally considered to be the motivation that compels the action. If I behold someone who is in pain because she is being humiliated by someone else, I experience, by empathy, her humiliation and pain. This experience of distress compels me to act to remove the source of the distress in a manner hardly different from the involuntary act of dropping a hot cookie sheet if I happen to pick it up without a mitt. There is, so to speak, no logical space for the rationalist's question, "Yes, I know that would be the moral thing to do, but why should I be moral and inconvenience myself to bring it about?" Yet the authors here are quite explicit in insisting that "[t]o have moral experience is, of course, quite a different matter from acting in a moral way, particularly when it is against one's self-interest to do so" (18). Action, they claim, requires motivation that is somehow quite separate from "see[ing] what is right" (18). I take it that the authors feel they must introduce this separation in order to safeguard their claim that people do not "just act on their 'moral instincts'" (17), and in order to acknowledge the appalling degree of moral misbehavior of which human beings are guilty. Nevertheless, their disjunction between moral apprehension (or intuition) and action is puzzling and does not seem consistent with other features of their argument. "Moral experience" had earlier been defined as that which "undergirds and *motivates* the actions of a moral person" (16, my italics), and when the authors go on to specify what it is that does actually provide the motivation for action, they offer, well, a moral experience or intuitive appreciation of what is right—"the heart-warming sense of gladness that we experience when we encounter moral beauty" (19).

This oddity in the argument brings to mind one of the perennial complaints about moral sense accounts of moral judgment and moral agency. Critics have frequently pointed out that if the moral sense theory were true, everyone ought to be good nearly all of the time *and* there ought to be near universal agreement about moral right and moral wrong—neither of which seems actually to obtain. Hutcheson tried to deal with this by saying that the moral sense could be defective, and Hume held that differences in experience and education explained the discrepancies. Neither of these strategies proved convincing to the critics, and, to my mind, this constitutes the gravest weakness of this type of account of morality. I cannot see that Goodenough and Deacon have any convincing answer to this. The strategy of Hutcheson is evident in the summary dismissal of the psychopath as not "fully" human, but this seems like a very strange judgment from authors committed to grounding their account biologically. There seems to me to be a fundamental error involved in excluding from the category of the human certain inconvenient instances when what one is proposing is an account of the moral that is presumed to be based on the primate brain symbolically accessed through command of symbolic language. If one wants, on the other hand, to avoid the problem by pursuing a Humean strategy, then I would think that culture (for what else are experience and education?) would have to play quite a large role in one's account, far larger than the present article admits.

Moral sense or moral experience accounts are also criticized for being inherently relativistic because they base morality in feelings, and, empirically speaking, feelings seem to vary remarkably from one person to another. The people who criticize moral sense theories on this ground are those who take it for granted that if there were universal moral sentiments that all shared, the world would be different from the world that we inhabit. If all have moral sentiments but the sentiments are manifestly not the same, then moral action and judgment will be relative to the sentiments of the agent or groups of agents in question. Action that pleases me, I regard as

virtuous. Action that pleases you, you regard as virtuous. Concerning taste, there can be no disputing. Perhaps what pleases you (that is, what presents itself to you as morally beautiful) is flexible and tolerant whereas what pleases me is principled and demanding. Or perhaps what pleases you is the spectacle of a person sacrificing immediate and local goods for the sake of some future good whereas what pleases me is the spectacle of a person seizing present opportunities with committed abandon and saying “the future be damned!” Or perhaps what pleases you is a well-appointed, comfortable, and experientially rich life whereas what pleases me is the discipline of ascetic self-denial. The authors’ current contribution is too brief, of course, to advance to such a level of specificity, but it is precisely at this level of specificity that the problems always arise, and I do not see any indications that grounding the account in the primate mind now become linguistically self-aware is going to help much with this difficulty. We may all have pro-social capacities, but “on the ground,” in the world we know, these capacities cash out in remarkably different ways, and these differences seem to me to be more obviously indexes of the variability of human sensibility than simple mistakes or psychic underdevelopment.

As I have already indicated, moral sense accounts, which root morality in the capacities, sensibility or responses of individual subjects, tend to be particularly well received in times of notable resistance to traditional moral authorities (clerical or otherwise). Such theories also tend to rise to prominence as a kind of conceptual antidote when second-order moral discourse has been for some time excessively or narrowly preoccupied by deeds or conduct, at the expense of attention to motive and character. The weak side of this strength shows itself in the authors’ attack on rewards and punishments (18), and their claims about “real morality” (17). The idea that there are right and wrong reasons for doing what is right is a fairly reliable feature of most second order discourse about morality. Still, there are some anomalies here that point to the difficulties of accounts that concentrate so heavily on subjective dispositions and motivations to the neglect of deeds. The authors do, after all, purport to be developing an account of desire for and commitment to justice. Unfortunately, as a matter of fact, injustice abounds. Now what does the moral experience of someone who is “really” moral suggest should be done with those whose actions are unjust? Does moral experience prompt us to punish injustice? Or does moral experience prompt us to allow virtue to be its own reward? If moral experience prompts us to punish the unjust and compensate (so far as we can) the victim, how is that to be reconciled with the authors’ rejection of rewards and punishments as destructive commodification—“one of the most dangerous things that we do” (18)? Perhaps the real objection to rewards and punishments has to do with the moral education of the young, but it is not clear to me how the Aristotelian habituation to virtue (or how the education of the as yet unformed moral sensibilities) is to be accomplished without employing prudential concerns. On the other hand, perhaps the underlying concern here is that an expectation of external and social rewards turns moral behavior into a selfish (pro-me) enterprise when the authors, in their emphasis on pro-social empathy, have defined it otherwise, placing morality and self-interest in opposition. Yet the authors build in a natural mental reward: the pleasure in the beauty of the good. While a case can be made that they are holding out for a reward that is intrinsic to the act, rather than allowing the sympathetic or self-sacrificing act to be treated as instrumental to some other, extrinsic (and likely selfish) good, a question can be raised whether they have not been arbitrary in supposing that private sentimental rewards of an internal sort are somehow superior to social and public and evolutionary success. What preoccupation with attitudes, dispositions, sensibilities, and mental capacities tends to overlook is that deeds have consequences. If they don’t, their very meaning as deeds vanishes. That good deeds are at least sometimes received with praise and honor and perhaps even compensated is what sustains the virtuous person through all the moments when good deeds are misunderstood, overlooked, and exploited. To describe this as “commodification” is to miss the social dimension of the moral life.

## Gestures Toward A More Comprehensive Account

That moral sense theories persist and persistently find renewing advocates is a testimony to their bearing on reality. The equally persistent criticisms (often said to be fatal to the theories) provides equally impressive testimony to the limits and inadequacies of such accounts when they are made to stand alone. What is needed is an account of moral agency and moral judgment that preserves the insights of moral sense theories but places them within a more comprehensive framework. This analysis by Goodenough and Deacon actually provides some suggestive hints as to how this might be attempted, but in neither case is it clear that they fully grasp the significance of the points they have made. Let me close, then, by identifying what I take to be two missed opportunities.

### *The interplay of human capacities*

Moral sense theories are also often criticized for concentrating on benevolent traits and ignoring or even denying the darker side of human nature. Depth psychology has made it almost impossible for us to carry on with the view of human nature that seemed so congenial to thinkers in the eighteenth century. The picture that emerges from the work of Sigmund Freud, Eric Neumann, and Ernst Becker (to name only a few) is a picture of an exceedingly dangerous creature for whom even morality itself can become a weapon. Fyodor Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* offers a formidable number of characters who deliberately inflict pain, and there are a number of characters who find a deep aesthetic satisfaction in the spectacle of pain. We are a far cry here from the eighteenth-century confidence that it is human nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain and that the human psyche is intricately formed to find virtue satisfying and goodness beautiful. Goodenough and Deacon go some way toward acknowledging this problem in their final section on "A-Sociality." Here, however, we come upon what I take to be one of the two missed opportunities in their effort to move from biology through consciousness to an account of morality. The authors observe that "[a] full consideration of the *interplay between self-interest and pro-sociality* . . . is well beyond the scope of this essay" (20, my italics). They are right to say that a complete analysis of this sort would be a very demanding task, and I do not fault them for not accomplishing in an essay what could only be done in a book. The missed opportunity seems to me to lie in not having started by setting up the account of moral agency and moral judgment in terms of this interplay. Like moral sense theorists, the authors identify the moral with certain limited features of human sensibility (what they call the "pro-social" features). Realizing that these features of human sensibility are inadequate to account for human behavior, they are left with the "problems" of self-interest, xenophobia, unresponsiveness, aggression, and so on. To preserve their hope for a spontaneously "moral" world and their picture of the mature moral agent inspired by moral beauty, they end up making a utopian proposal that identifies moral behavior with behavior that, it appears, can only occur in the absence of all the known stresses that structure most of human experience. Why not start from the beginning with the proposal that "morality" is a matter of negotiating the "interplay between self-interest and pro-sociality"? Why not mine biology for what it can tell us about this interplay—about, for example, how closely connected altruism and xenophobia actually are in "the primate brain"?

### *The implications of coevolution*

What we might call the field of power of moral sense theories is fairly limited. The more we focus on interpersonal relations, the more adequate they seem; the more we focus on systemic, technological, impersonal, structural, and policy problems, the less they offer in the way of explanatory power or helpful guidance. I cannot

empathize with a statistic, and it is now fairly widely recognized that although a week of media images of large-eyed, impoverished, and emaciated African children will awaken a wave of charitable impulses, a month or a year of such images produces numb indifference. Empathy may lead people to give money to the homeless person begging on the sidewalk (an action which, experts suggest, is rarely good for the homeless person herself), but it does not produce social reform addressing the absence of affordable housing in our cities or the mental health policies that have abandoned thousands of mentally ill patients to haunted lives on lonely streets. Moral sense theories seem remarkably useless in deciding whether and where a government should buy or simply seize land for a light rail line or a highway bypass or a halfway house. It is probably because we have been paying much too much attention to expressions of personal distress that we have not been able to enact the kind of gasoline taxes that are in the best long-term interest of the nation. Neither empathy nor a personal sense of justice nor a capacity for care seem to contribute much to public considerations of the massive problems that afflict the American health-care delivery system, nor do they do much to help address the choices (not the least of which have to do with the use of bio-engineered crops) that confront us as a result of the industrialization of farming.

More deeply still, my forays into the sociology of knowledge have brought me to believe that moral sense and moral experience and moral perception, insofar as we can isolate them at all, are very largely social artifacts. While it is true that all six billion of us have a good deal in common because we have remarkably similar bodies and operate with “primate brains,” from the time we are born, and probably before, we are subject to the shaping powers and the conditions of possibility unique to our social locations and communal frameworks. We are individuals with families, friends, teachers, employers, associates, and so on—the whole range of actual persons with whom we interact—but we are also inhabitants of vast, anonymous, unspecifiably complex structural systems: languages, industries, educational systems, law, professions, cities, power grids, food and health delivery systems, and so on. Some part of our moral responsibility concerns direct familial and interpersonal interaction, but much of it arises in relation to this “world” beyond the faces, the “world” from which these recognizable faces emerge for me as the domain of my particularity, the province of “care” recognized by my “primate brain.” Yet, as the authors point out, our species is utterly different from the other primates because we have made that “world,” that “virtual reality,” in an intricate and strangely miraculous process of coevolution. Our species has built and continually restructures the self-created niches of our various cultures, which would not exist apart from our linguistically-mediated activities. We perpetually reconstruct ourselves by our habitation of the world we have made. Having laid hold of this insight, the authors then let it fade, turning all their moral attention to individual subjects whose biologically-based capacities for constructive interpersonal relations they envision as enlarged and extended—so that the subject comes to care for the ecosystem as she cares for her offspring.

As a useful contrast, let me commend to your attention *Mind, Self, and Society* by George Herbert Mead, a book published in 1934 (from lectures given earlier) but still in print. He comes to mind as a theoretician—a social psychologist or, as he somewhat misleadingly identifies himself, a social behaviorist—whose work has many affinities with the approach of Goodenough and Deacon. He believes that we must begin our account of “mind, self, and society” with attention to evolution; the notion of emergence is central to his analysis of consciousness; he, too, underlines the reciprocal relations of the organism and the environment; and he discusses the emergence of the distinctively human mind in connection with the passage from the “conversation of gestures” common throughout the animal kingdom to the powerful liberation worked by the acquisition of the communicative power of “significant symbols.” He, too, identifies the moral and the “pro-social.” However, there are important and pivotal differences as well. Mead focuses on conduct rather than on dispositions and motivations. In Mead’s view, symbolic language does not just extend and transform pre-existing sociality; it

makes possible the emergence of a new and distinctive kind of sociality, a sociality that rests on linguistic communication. Communication is essential “so that individuals can put themselves into the attitudes of those whom they affect” (328); this changes everything because it is the foundation of the mutual self-adjustment and the source of meaning (76-77). What language gives the organism is not only the awareness that constitutes the self, but unprecedented degrees of social management, directed development, functional cooperation, and complexity in aspiration and achievement. While Mead, like the authors, regards the possibility of “taking the attitude of the other” as a breakthrough of astonishing power, he locates that power neither in the creation or extension of sympathetic bonds nor in the enhancement of fellow feeling or the feeling of “reverence.” It is a breakthrough because it makes possible “the development of [the social] process into much more complex forms of social interactions among the component individuals” than had ever been possible before (226).

Accordingly, Mead gets from biology to ethics much less directly than Goodenough and Deacon do. Between “biology” and “morality,” he puts 250 pages of social science. In his view, the bridge is not consciousness (which he thinks most people misconstrue anyway) but social experience. The connection of biology and morality involves a long analytical study of the nature of the complicated worlds that biologic individuals, equipped with thumbs and language, are able to create and inhabit—and of the relations of biologic individuals to those worlds. Mead believes that our sense of the moral is thoroughly sociological:

The sense which the individual self has of his dependence upon the organized society or social community to which he belongs is the basis and origin, in short, of his sense of duty (and in general of his ethical consciousness); and ethical and unethical behavior can be defined essentially in social terms: the former as behavior which is socially beneficial or conducive to the well-being of [his particular] society, the latter as behavior which is socially harmful or conducive to the disruption of [his particular] society (320-21).

It is his view that what makes behavior pro-social or socially harmful is the structure or order of the social world, not the human capacity out of which the behavior arises. Some empathetic responses might be, in certain social circumstances, quite disruptive. Ethical behavior is a matter of successfully “integrating” oneself “with the pattern of organized social behavior [say, urbanized, industrial, capitalist, Christian representative democracy] which, as reflected or prehended in the structure of his self, makes him a self-conscious personality” (320). The self and the social world cohere because the self “owes its existence” to the social group—a view that takes with utmost seriousness the insight of Goodenough and Deacon concerning the power of linguistically equipped primates to create a fluid, changing “virtual reality” to which they then adapt themselves through successive generations.

Mead makes a telling distinction between moral ideals and moral problems. In any given cultural world, moral ideals or ethical ideas, instantiated in individual ethical consciousness or conscience, express the requirements for or conditions of possibility of “unity, co-operation, and identification” without which that world cannot be sustained. What is moral at any given time and place is what “co-operation and social interdependence” (321) demand. It will vary with culture because social life and the socially-inflected self vary with culture. Ethical problems, on the other hand, arise in social situations in which there is pronounced tension between the “socially-derived” self and “other members of the social group to which it belongs” (321). Such situations usually occur when the person is trying to act simultaneously as a member of multiple social groups “whose respective social purposes or interests are antagonistic or conflicting or widely separated” (322). Ethical problems are distinct from the immoralities constituted by failures on the part of the biologic individual to behave



in ways that support and enhance group life or that establish her as “an organic part of the life of the community” (324). Ethical problems arise because social spheres (capital and labor, producers and consumers, the developed world and the third world, for example) collide, not because biological traits conflict. While ethical ideals represent shared social interests, ethical problems reflect the contradictions, fissures, conflicts, complexity, and variety of the overlapping social relations born of multiple common or group endeavors in which 6 billion human beings engage.

Having begun with an evolutionary analysis very like that of Goodenough and Deacon, Mead probes and unfolds the notions of coevolution, emergence, and cultural construction more fully and, I think, more radically. This changed understanding of culture, consciousness, and the self brings him, at the end of his book, to a treatment of the grounds of morality quite different from that of Goodenough and Deacon and the moral sense theorists who are their predecessors. For him, the true “naturalization” of ethics lies in an appreciation of ethics as a social construction rather than in any account of moral behavior in terms of an intensification or transformation of capabilities or predispositions already present in the primate brain. The understanding of the moral to which his work tends, because it begins with structures and systems and shared experience, is more comprehensive, more adequate to the challenges that cannot be inscribed within the circle of my personal compassion, kindness, commitment, or reverence. Moral conduct, Mead asserts, is the point of intersection where self and social systems “answer to each other” (386).

## References

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## WWW Polanyi Resources

**The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the “Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi” which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi; (7) five essays by Michael Polanyi.**