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Humanism, Moral Relativism, and Ethical Objectivity

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This chapter considers the status and coherence of modern humanism as a secular and ethical philosophy. As secular, humanism prioritizes the naturalistic worldview, and privileges information from the social and cognitive sciences about human sociality and morality. As ethical, humanism does more than recommend specific moral virtues and rules, by proposing methods to evaluate moralities and recommend ideals of moral progress for all peoples around the world. Humanism is not another moral code to add to the rest. As befits a theoretical 'ism', humanism self-reflectively asks why the world needs yet another moral stance, and it philosophically defends its ethical position that better moralities can be discriminated from worse.

Although morality is relative in the sense that it serves human needs and varies somewhat depending on social circumstances, it would be a mistake to categorize humanism as a kind of moral relativism. Moral relativism is one of most talked-about yet least understood notions around today. Despite what one might hear, morality is neither a matter of taste nor preference, it is not arbitrary or immune from criticism, and we don't have to tolerate just anybody's moral opinions. No moral code of just one person, one culture, or even one civilization is objectively worthy enough to be imposed universally upon humanity. But it does not follow that human intelligence is not worthy of all humanity. Morality can be objectively studied, morality can be rationally debated and evaluated, there are justifiable ways to determine better and worse moral norms, and important moral norms can be reasonably recommended for all peoples. Systems of philosophical ethics take advantage of these intellectual opportunities, and their efforts have enriched the life of our species. Embracing simplistic moral relativism just to avoid unwise moral universalism rashly abandons the noble striving for the ethical improvement of humanity.

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Contemporary humanism fundamentally relies on plenty of objectivity – the established objectivity of scientific naturalism, the discernible objective reality of morality, and the prospect of universal objectivity for ethics. All three modes of objectivity – natural, moral, and ethical – are jointly necessary for ensuring that contemporary humanism can justify its ambitious ethics. If supernaturalism were admitted, religion's offer of divinely approved morality can seem more objective than anything human. If morality were only subjective, humanism would dissolve into just the interests and lifestyle choices of certain people, who couldn't use any reasoned way to persuade others to agree. Even if morality had some objective status greater than personal choice, morality might yet remain culture-bound, and humanism couldn't pretend that its ethical ideals deserve adoption by all humanity. All three of these challenges – from divine morality, moral subjectivism, and cultural relativism – must be addressed by humanism since it aspires to ethical objectivity. After handling those alternatives, this chapter recommends how to frame humanism to maximize its universal reasonableness and global relevance.

The Lure of Absolutism

Many religions insist that humanity requires a god's assistance to be moral. How does a typical explanation for this religious claim proceed? Perhaps this version sounds familiar:

> Starting off, humanity came into existence through a process guided by a god. This god also made humanity aware of morality. While humanity understands the expectations of morality, humanity also sees how it usually fails to fulfil those expectations. Unfortunately, because humanity came into existence the way it did, humanity lacks essential abilities for fulfilling the expectations of morality. For example, humanity lacks sufficient impulses to be altruistic, lacks enough wilful control to be responsibly moral, and can't see enough reward for behaving morally. Furthermore, humanity has no other resources of its own to culturally develop methods for fulfilling the expectations of morality. Therefore, religion's account concludes, humanity requires additional assistance from a god to become moral.

Naturally, in order to guarantee that humanity is powerless to generate the conditions for moral conduct on its own, the debilitating factors (humanity's lack of this or that) turn out to be unnatural factors utterly beyond humanity's control. Sure, this narrative goes, humanity could have been moral, if only our core driving impulses weren't so uncontrollably selfish and depraved, and if we didn't have this unnatural free will constantly letting us choose evil for no good reason, and if we could somehow build a paradise on earth from our good deeds. But no, no luck with any of those things. Humanity simply wasn't 'built'

that way, this religious account says, and there's nothing we can do about it, except to turn to divine aid.

Humanism's naturalistic reaction to this narrative is that there is nothing unnatural about humanity, and nothing for a god to do. That's not to say that humanity is easily moral on its own – as natural beings, we aren't as moral as we like to think – but humanism does say that there's no point to seeking a god's assistance. There are no such things as immortal souls to save, unnatural free wills to sway, or heavenly paradises to savour, so the gods are useless. The nonbeliever's life can have fulfilling meaning and firm values without religion.[1]

Many religions still insist that humanity couldn't objectively know what morality is without a god's guidance. That claim can be refuted. The 'Euthyphro' dilemma (in Plato's dialogue of that title) provokes the question of whether (1) something is morally right *because* god declares it so, or (2) god says it is right *because* it is moral. Many religions can pick the first option, as their gods are anthropomorphically fickle anyway, but in doing so they actually reinforce relativism instead of a universal morality for humanity. The second option sets morality independently apart from god, sustaining other religions' hopes for an unchanging morality, but it also opens up a way for humanity to know morality without god. In any case, religious peoples do appear to be deciding morality on their own when they try to understand their god's will. For example, when Christians select certain biblical passages as those containing a god's moral law, while ignoring other commanding passages, these 'interpreters' are applying their own standard of morality (replete with local cultural prejudices) to the Bible. Religious people similarly select from the vast cacophony of alleged divine revelations only those fitting their all-too-human standards. A religion's claim that its worldview elevates morality to a supreme status unavailable to any secular worldview is exposed as hollow and unsatisfying. The spectacle of the world's religions getting into disagreements over so many ethical matters – mostly cultural issues, as befits their diverse cultural origins – yields no credit to religion either.

In fact, one of the fastest routes to moral relativism is to suppose that religion has sources for moral knowledge. Where religions happen to converge on more civilized moral norms, that progress cannot be attributed to anything strictly divine or religious, since those religions are following (hesitantly and haltingly) gradual cultural progress towards moral ideals. Religions naturally want to take credit for those moral ideals, but curiously they are only willing to take credit after cultures have had to fight their way towards prioritizing them. The vital need for radical prophets, civic reformers, and heretical freethinkers exposes how religion itself is built for conservatism, but religion must yield in the long run – the old gods eventually appear barbarously immoral, and they must adapt or perish.[2] For example, nowhere in the Bible is mass democracy viewed positively, yet few Christians anywhere in the world today endorse autocracy.

What should be more surprising than religious confusion and conflict over allegedly 'absolute' morality is the way that some nonbelievers jump to the

opposite stance that morality cannot be objective at all. Having accepted a simplistic dichotomy of 'religious-objective vs. natural-subjective', it is not uncommon to hear these nonbelievers happily classify morality as just a subjective matter of individual judgement or preference, and a few nonbelievers even become 'moral nihilists' who say that morality is as illusory as the gods. These are hasty conclusions, since other sounder options are still available, such as humanist ethics. Humanism is not any sort of moral subjectivism or moral nihilism.

There are kinds of humanist thinking that have reached for an absolutist morality, but they have fallen out of favour with the rise of scientific naturalism. British 'common sense' philosophies of the eighteenth century left much of the medieval worldview behind, raising confidence in people's capacity for freely choosing good over evil, and inspiring visionary constitutions for secular republics.[3] Kant's ethical system falls within a broad view of humanism as well, but its reliance on non-naturalistic conceptions of Reason and Free Will suggests that Kant's demand for universally reasonable moral principles should have a non-dualistic framework. Later humanism incorporated aspects of Kantian deontology, such as equal respect for the dignity of all persons and rules of justice that can be reasonable for anyone to accept.[4] Neo-Hegelian personalism is another example of an absolutist humanist morality; before its demise in the First World War, social progressivism was infused with its humanistic vision of the ethical community of equal persons.[5] Although these three humanistic ethics did not rely on a transcendent god's edicts, they still relied on something about us that transcends the natural world. Generally speaking, the naturalistic worldview cannot harbour an absolutist morality, for the universe(s) cannot be a setting or grounding for anything so eternally unchangeable.

Other kinds of humanism seek objectivity not in absolutism's combination of eternality plus universality, but in universality alone. A universal morality is a morality valid for all humanity during some period of time. A universal morality can be comprehensive, or not; and it could be revisable, or not. A universal morality need not be comprehensive: a limited number of moral norms (some virtues, a few rules, etc.) could be universal for everyone, while additional moral norms varying from culture to culture coherently supplement those few universal norms. Moralities have to be culturally complex and socially nuanced, so a comprehensive universal morality is an unlikely prospect. Regarding revisability, a universal morality could be modified in light of learning and deliberation, or else it could be rigidly based on something unchanging about humanity so that the duration of its validity coincides with humanity's existence. Permitting a universal morality to be revisable is not necessarily a way to make morality relative. For example, as civilized cultures came to humanistically agree during the nineteenth century that slavery was a universal moral evil, this judgement was not 'Slavery is immoral now, but it wasn't in past centuries', but rather, 'Slavery is now and has always been a moral evil'. When a universal morality is revised, that new morality is still applied to all of humanity's past as well. Slavery has always been immoral,

even during times when few understood. Tough moral issues now crowd our own horizon. Better information and further careful thinking may justify expanding the set of recognized universal moral norms, and so on into the future, for as long as humanity (or transitional species from *Homo sapiens*) may exist.

A naturalistic humanism offering a rigid universal morality has to justify that rigidity by appealing to something about humanity that has never changed and could never change in order to ground moral norms. The Enlightenment's concern for 'human nature' and its 'common sense', 'human reason', and 'natural rights' (bestowed by the Christian god, according to all but the most sceptical Enlightenment thinkers) is a transition towards this kind of naturalistic humanism. Later humanists retained a concern for human rights, but soon had to look elsewhere for their justification. Darwinian evolution is not favourable towards biological essences, so identifying an unchanging feature or trait of a species that carries specific normative implications is a dubious matter. That *Homo sapiens* relies on some morality or another for sociality is accurate, and it is interesting how nearly all of humanity utilizes a few modes of social life and basic moral norms among all of its cultural differences. A human consensus on some common moral norms would mean something important, to be sure, but neither comprehensive nor rigid universality follows, since that consensus could be quite limited and gradually changing over millennia, and future changes to civilizations might require departures from that common morality.

Humanism should resist the lure of transcendent absolutism and its heir, the fruitless quest for humanity's natural moral essence and a rigid universal morality. In accord with naturalism, the humanism under consideration in this chapter only seeks a limited and revisably universal morality, what can be called a 'fallibly objective' morality: a set of moral norms for all humanity justified by the best information and careful thinking available. Can humanism's naturalistic worldview further guide this search?

Moral Naturalism

A closer, naturalistic examination of morality is evidently required. What is morality, from a naturalistic standpoint, and what does morality actually commit people to? With answers to these questions in hand, we can further ask how people fulfil moral expectations.

Any naturalistic examination of morality must first confirm that morality is itself real, lest there be nothing to examine. Scientific naturalism itself might deny morality's existence.[6] Justification for such extreme scepticism can be expressed by something like this narrative:

> Starting off, humanity came into existence through a process guided by blind natural evolution. This result also made humanity aware of morality. While humanity understands the expectations of morality, humanity also

> sees how it usually fails to fulfil those expectations. Unfortunately, because humanity came into existence the way it did, humanity lacks essential abilities for fulfilling the expectations of morality. For example, humanity lacks sufficient impulses to be altruistic, lacks enough wilful control to be responsibly moral, and can't see enough reward for behaving morally. Furthermore, humanity has no other resources of its own to culturally develop methods for fulfilling the expectations of morality. Therefore, evolution's account concludes, humanity can never fulfil the expectations of morality.

Naturalistic scepticism towards morality and humanity's capacity for moral conduct has become a vibrant issue among biologists, social scientists, cognitive neuroscientists, and philosophers. We are largely programmed by our selfish genes to be self-centred agents, say some sociobiologists. We are mostly under the control of our brain's unconscious emotional centres, say some cognitive neuroscientists. We are primarily seeking to satisfy certain fundamental drives towards self-actualization and higher meaning, say some psychologists. There are three curious features to this general evolutionary narrative, however, which indicate that its sceptical conclusion is not justified.

First, the narrative presumes that we have some conception of morality and what it demands of people. Did *Homo sapiens* arrive at such conceptions by observing and tracking the natural world around us? Presumably not, since there's no model of morality there, and we rarely imitate the social habits of other animals. We could only have generated conceptions of morality from noticing and reflecting on our own social world of human conduct. Yet, according to this narrative, no humans have ever been behaving morally in the least degree. We do have the cognitive capacity to imaginatively idealize what we now see ourselves doing only partially and haltingly, so at least we are doing something similar already before we idealize it. Morality, however, cannot be an idealization from anything in the natural or human world, at least according to this naturalistic narrative, which leaves the origin of our conception of morality a complete mystery.

Another part of this sceptical narrative has problems too. Why would it be the case that humanity has no resources of its own to culturally develop methods for fulfilling expectations of morality? After all, if cultures have conceptions of morality, surely they have also thought of ways to better meet morality's expectations. Religion is an example of a culturally generated method for followers, although religion's capacity to genuinely enhance moral performance has been disputed. If religion has indeed been an overall failure, especially in more civilized times, does that mean that no other cultural method could possibly work either? Interestingly, religion's long dominance over humanity has deposited a thick sediment of moral ideology barring the progress of secular cultural systems. The way that religion defined morality, as involving such unnatural things as an angelic instinct to always be altruistic, a free will to choose autonomously, and an eternal reward for moral conduct,

was strategically designed to forestall any merely human attempt to be moral on our own. On those criteria for morality, it must be admitted that no merely cultural method could make us moral.

Which brings us to the third objection. Why in the world should naturalists retain those sorts of unnatural criteria for morality? Many naturalistic sceptics sound like cynically disappointed heretics, judging by the way they make announcements like, 'There's no free will, so morality is impossible!' or 'Our deepest evolved impulses are far from altruistic, so morality is illusory!' or even, 'Atheists don't believe in heaven, so we live our lives only for ourselves!' These naturalistic sceptics have accepted definitions of morality in terms so exalted that culture could hardly enhance moral conduct. But raising the three objections has now closed a trap on their narrative: they have no way to explain how cultures could conceive of morality, or why cultures would be impotent to bring conduct closer to morality's expectations. Is it really true that no culture, anywhere, has any way to even slightly enhance moral performance even as all cultures talk endlessly about moral duty? Adding to this impossible situation is the fact that many people all around the world put serious efforts into trying to improve the level and frequency of their moral conduct, and that of others as well, especially their children. Are we to believe that none of those efforts have ever succeeded in the slightest, and that all of those people have, all along, been completely deluded about what they are doing? Yes indeed, every single one of them is entirely mistaken, affirms the staunch naturalistic sceptic, now sounding precisely like a moral nihilist. Most naturalists stop short of complete nihilism, instead offering a moral scepticism by holding that people can think that they are moral even though there's no real reason to be. Some naturalists claim that there's no rational justification for morality yet evolution fortunately makes us 'nice' anyway,[7] or suggest that nature can't make us moral but morality can at least be a useful narrative fiction,[8] or propose that our morality can try to reach objectivity but must always fail.[9]

Naturalists have options other than scepticism and nihilism if they take culture more seriously. Culture didn't generate morality originally – only the long biological evolution of hominid species down to our own could do that – but culture is now the process through which morality is inculcated and intentionally improved. By all means eliminate unnatural criteria for moral performance, and set aside what people earnestly but mistakenly say about morality, but eliminating cultural morality's reality or objectivity is not necessarily a result. Eliminating as unrealistic the notion that our morality tracks real facts or values out 'there' in nature, and accepting that morality instead concerns ongoing situations in the human world is not the same thing as making morality illusory. Eliminating as unscientific the notion of a contra-causal free will that can override all natural laws, and accepting the degree of determinism recommended by the sciences, is not the same thing as eliminating personal freedom. Eliminating as unscientific the notion of an executive brain centre that consciously controls most behaviour in real time, and

accepting that conscious control is mostly about monitoring unconscious habits for occasional overrides to get other habits going, is not the same thing as eliminating individual responsibility. What has become incompatible with naturalism, such as 'the power to have done otherwise in that moment' or 'the capacity for purely rational thought', should be eliminated, and any notion of morality dependent on such unnatural things must be eliminated as well. All the same, naturalism need not require denying the existence of core capacities needed for morality, such as volition, freedom, agency, autonomy, and responsibility, since it can consider scientifically acceptable versions of those capacities.[10]

Let 'moral naturalism' stand for the view that there is a kind of natural phenomenon properly called morality (with innumerable local variants about details) observable in human societies and that everything about morality's operations or evaluations is open to scientific scrutiny. Moral naturalism holds that morality can be objectively studied by the several natural, social, and cognitive sciences, and that nothing about morality, including moral cognition, moral judgement, and moral conduct, forever must elude scientific understanding (so that no religious, spiritual, or transcendental hypotheses about such things as a spiritual soul, free will, or pure reason are needed). Since naturalism is too narrowly defined as the eliminativist or reductivist view that the only realities are those describable by a few sciences, or just one science (e.g. subatomic physics), no entanglement with eliminativism or reductivism is intended here. A broad liberal naturalism that takes all the natural, social, and cognitive sciences seriously is more sensible, better able to study morality from all angles, and more hospitable to ethical humanism.[11]

What Morality Is

The several life and social sciences are best positioned to study morality as it actually exists in the human world. Morality is naturally embodied in the ways that individuals voluntarily and habitually conduct themselves in accord with understood norms regulating all social interactions (not just those with kin) and deeds of wide group concern. Individuals fulfil moral expectations not only by regulating their own behaviour, but also by passing moral judgement on the conduct of others, participating in the needed enforcements of moral norms, and by teaching these norms and the modes of enforcement to those who need moral education. On this anthropological definition of morality, morality primarily moderates personal self-interest and inter-personal competition in order to promote group cohesion and co-operation by regulating all social relationships and interactions. This group-oriented account of morality's proper functioning must not be confused with controversial group selection explanations for the evolution of that morality; the mechanisms of morality's origins in biological evolution are not fully understood.

Humanity's reliance on morality and common moral norms is universal in the sense that it is found wherever human societies are found. Morality is now regarded as an empirically well established cultural universal, discernible in every kind of society including the few remaining hunter-gatherer societies.[12] Basic moral norms, those common virtues and rules taught to all, include instructions such as: keep yourself and your surroundings orderly and clean; be helpful and co-operative when you are needed; respect your abilities and try to improve them; honour your kin and family reputation; obey proper authorities looking out for you; be trustworthy about your commitments to others; don't deceive others for your amusement or benefit; don't cause suffering or harm without serious justification; compete fairly and within boundaries; don't betray group efforts for personal gain; prioritize group interests in times of stress and danger; and the like. Moral rules about what a person does in private have their ultimate basis in what society deems unfit: those disgusting, vulgar, disabling, or dishonourable private deeds that offend society because they render a person unfit for proper social relationships and co-operation.

Children all around the world acquire these common moral norms through their socialization in about the same way, with about the same results. We do see children roughly follow a 'bell curve' of conformity where many obey fairly frequently, and some will never conform much at all (personality and temperament, along with any psychopathologies, duly affect moral training). What we don't see is some cultures easily inculcating high moral conformity in their children while others fail entirely. Moral training is evidently working with infants and small children prepared by evolution for picking up moral habits, akin to our 'innate' facility for acquiring language. Imaginatively relocate a socialized child at age 6 into any other human society, a present-day society or one from thousands of years ago (a cruel experiment, but it is just a thought experiment): this child would soon get along well enough with others by already understanding many expected virtues and rules. Obviously, dislocating a young child into a very different culture has serious psychological and social consequences, but having to entirely relearn basic morals and virtues won't be one of the obstacles. *Homo sapiens* does basic morality about the same way, so our species has probably been using morality for a very long time and for valuable evolutionary benefits.[13] Morality would be quite useful for maintaining social cohesion in larger clan- and tribe-sized groups where the kinship bonds of extended families aren't sufficient. Perhaps morality is as old as our species' experiments with social groups larger than the family, and earlier *Homo* species may have had proto-moralities as well.[14]

This common morality is humanly universal, but it is not ethically universal in the way that humanism's ethics is seeking. We have not discovered a set of rules adequate for all of humanity's social problems. First, the common moral norms are incomplete or inconclusive, since even a very long list of moral rules could never guarantee that every possible social situation corresponds with just one moral rule to say what the right course action must be. Second, common

moral norms can easily get into conflict with each other when people find themselves in complex situations where multiple applicable norms indicate conflicting duties. Although societies build some degree of prioritization into their instruction in moral norms (e.g. avoiding physical harm to others is more important than avoiding disappointment to one's friends), no firm prioritization gets taught to everyone in the same way. People occasionally have to figure out their moral priorities, and further consulting of the common moral norms won't suffice. Third, the common moral norms don't mean much on their own, torn away from some particular cultural context – something like 'play by the rules' is too vague for applying to serious ethical issues. Trying to inflate common morality into a universal ethics produces 'ethical platitudes', such as 'Be more empathetic', 'Have more concern for others' lives', and 'Treat others as you would have them treat you'. Those ethical platitudes aren't meaningless, they should have broad appeal across most if not all cultures, and ethical systems like humanism should accommodate them (recent notable advocates are Rifkin[15] and Epstein[16]). However, these platitudes again frequently fail to directly point out one's duty in a complex moral problem. Fourth, the common moral norms are strongly motivating, but their motivational strength can vary, especially depending on your current emotional state and whether you are interacting with people near you, who look like you and are already familiar to you. It is an unfortunate feature of common morality that people feel far less motivated to be altruistic and dutifully virtuous regarding people far outside their normal social sphere. The way that morality is taught is responsible for the way that moral motivation typically varies with familiarity: children are taught moral conduct in relation to the people that they actually meet and see during their childhood, so the resulting moral habits are more strongly triggered by situations involving those kinds of people, and it is easier for acquired prejudice and xenophobia to override weak moral motivations. There are further features of common morality that reflect its emotional and local origins, but these four suffice to expose its limitations. Common morality remains too incomplete, incoherent, vague, and situational to directly serve as humanity's universal morality.

Because human societies can promulgate a wide variety of moral norms and habits (a fact about morality that moral relativism gets right), we may say that in a sense morality is a matter of social convention, but only in one sense. While morality persists in human cultures largely because humans do the training, that does not mean that humans must themselves regard their moralities as conventional. A well-trained moral individual is not likely to regard moral duty as based merely on what some authority wants or what her society happens to prefer – the moral individual is more likely to regard what is morally right as enjoying a firm status independent of people (a fact about moral people that simplistic moral relativism gets wrong). Similarly, although the practices of mathematics persist because human societies promulgate them, mathematics practitioners are unlikely to regard the truths of mathematics as dependent on what society

happens to promulgate. Socially designed morality is functioning well for people precisely when they do not regard it merely as locally and conventionally declared. Put another way, even children know the difference between what is 'really' right or wrong and what any adult happens to say is right or wrong.

Human cultures are sufficiently complex that the basic common morality taught to children cannot suffice for all social needs. That is why an intense period of further culturalization into the roles of the adult world begins to dominate the instruction of youth after age 8 or so. While morality promotes fair competition and nice co-operation, any culture further specifies what forms of co-operation, power-sharing, and governing authority are appropriate. Cultural norms about kinship structures, power and authority hierarchies, class and status distinctions, useful trades and professions, the distribution of material and social goods, and key social institutions all serve to add a highly complex layer of further norms regulating the adult world. What a culture regards as morally correct is a combination of the basic common morality and its own cultural ways of life.

Having a simple moral code, expectations of basic virtues, and complex cultural norms don't appear to be optional for humans – with only a couple of controversial exceptions, every known human society, historical and present-day, uses common and cultural morality. It would be an error to depict the moral views of cultures as quite static, since cultural norms do gradually drift and change over hundreds of years. It must also be recognized that cultures are hardly the isolated and self-contained units often depicted by older versions of cultural relativism, since cultures overlap, communicate, borrow, and share ways of life with their geographical neighbours to a high degree, explaining why a large amount of commonality can be found in cross-cultural morality as well.

By regarding humans as entirely natural entities with biological and cultural capacities, the social and cognitive sciences have plenty of morality within view for study. Only naturalistic conceptions of agency, responsibility, and morality are involved in this account, and the actual cognitive abilities of humans are neither overlooked nor exaggerated. Since the contemporary humanism explored in this chapter seeks a limited and fallibly universal morality, this goal is compatible with the anthropological perspective outlined here. There are no anthropological facts about human cultures and their complex moralities that forbid the possibility of a limited and fallibly universal morality from the outset.

Moral Naturalism and Moral Relativism

Moral naturalism as defined at the conclusion of the previous section is distinct from both ethical naturalism and moral realism. Ethics is the philosophical domain that deals with meta-level issues about ways for determining the meanings and applicability of moral norms and terms, questions about the appropriate methods for judging and answering moral problems, and concerns over

whether better moralities, or even one correct morality, can be determined. Ethical naturalism therefore goes much further than moral naturalism, by not only agreeing that actual morality should be studied naturalistically, but additionally claiming that all those meta-level issues are questions to be answered by empirical sciences as well.[17] If successful, ethical naturalism would render moral nihilism, scepticism, subjectivism, and relativism all obsolete. Ethical naturalism typically includes views that moral rightness and personal goodness are reducible to non-moral features or properties of natural things and events, or that things like moral values and moral facts refer only to features of social living comprehensible by the sciences, or that there are propositions of morality that are made objectively true by nature's way alone regardless of any human cognition or consensus. Some versions of ethical naturalism even propose a unified 'science of ethics' which will scientifically determine what is truly moral for humanity. No moral naturalist needs to first decide whether any part of ethical naturalism is valid. Indeed, moral naturalism remains useful even if the entire project of ethical naturalism remains inconclusive.

Both moral naturalism and ethical naturalism are distinct from moral realism. Let 'moral realism' label the view that there is a morality enabling people who understand its rules to objectively and correctly state moral propositions about people's conduct. (Moral realism is akin to scientific realism, which analogously holds that science permits people knowing its confirmed theories to objectively and correctly state factual propositions about how nature works.) Moral naturalism does not have to agree with moral realism. Moral naturalism takes morality to be a real feature of human societies, but that morality turns out to be mostly fragmented by culture, and somewhat relativistic even where common morality is concerned. Ethical naturalism, for its part, seeks to scientifically establish where morality can be objectively true. That search may conclude that several moralities get matters fairly right, in the sense that some particularly moral societies enjoy excellent grounds for their moralities, but those societies and their moralities are quite different from each other and none of them are 'correct'. There may not be just one unique way of life for optimal human flourishing, or excellence, or happiness (or whatever the valid scientific criterion turns out to be). Neither moral naturalism nor ethical naturalism needs to be committed to moral realism from the outset.

This chapter cannot discuss ethical naturalism in detail. Although the project of ethical naturalism can appear quite tempting for a naturalistic humanism, it is an underdeveloped scientific project and it soon runs into severe philosophical puzzles, such as: (a) How can moral norms be scientifically inferred from non-normative natural facts (Hume's 'is-ought' gap problem)? (b) If scientific inference isn't needed because moral people can directly know the moral features and properties of the world by observation, what 'odd' sort of natural moral facts would those be? (c) Returning to science, which non-normative natural facts will be selected as relevant to scientific ethics – those of many sciences, or few – especially when philosophical naturalism has tended to denigrate the

social sciences in favour of neuroscience and chemistry/physics? (d) If bridging norms are used to cross from natural facts to moral oughts (e.g. 'humans are right to want happiness', or 'excellence'), how can the scientific method determine which bridging norms are valid? (e) Since scientific ethics at any stage must rely on incomplete knowledge of life in general and human living in particular, there is a chance that some 'accepted' biological or social 'law' sounds convincing as a bridging norm but only cultural interests are actually involved (cf. the debacle of 'survival of the fittest' and social Darwinism). (f) If science does openly consult culture to supply some needed bridging norms (e.g. humans are right to want more 'freedom' or 'power'), wouldn't that infect scientific ethics with cultural relativity too? (g) If scientific ethics ultimately had no choice but to rely on some cultural norms, this magnifies the risk that scientific ethics might devolve into promulgating gender or class prejudice, ethnocentricity, or cultural imperialism. (h) Since scientific ethics is prone to perversion by incomplete scientific knowledge or infecting cultural norms, it would be wise to continually make some independent ethical checks upon this project's conclusions, but then scientific ethics could never pretend to be complete.

There are good reasons for moral naturalism to prefer a broad liberal naturalism of all sciences, step around ethical naturalism, avoid moral realism, and instead embrace moral relativism. In fact, that route turns out to be the wiser path towards the kind of universal morality that humanism seeks. Moral relativism is not the view that there are no moral norms common to all humanity – that view stands refuted by anthropological fact that all of humanity uses the social institution of morality in some form or another, and there are basic moral norms found in all human moralities. The better way to express moral relativism is this: morality's existence is dependent on the lives and pursuits of humans in their different cultures, and hence the specific norms of morality vary somewhat across human circumstances and needs. The position of 'descriptive' cultural relativism cannot be denied, as morality evidently has much variation across different cultures. Moral relativism is inadequate where it suggests either that (a) there is nothing common to morality across all cultures; or (b) people themselves regard morality as 'up to them'; or (c) people regard morality as 'what we happen to agree about', or 'what happens to be socially conventional'.

Setting aside what moral relativism should not imply, we are left with what may be labelled as 'cultural objectivism': different human cultures socialize their peoples into varying internalized moralities, although people within a culture regard their culture's morality as objectively binding on everyone (not just on those in the same culture). While anthropologically accurate about humanity's use of morality, cultural objectivism contains a sort of practical internal incoherence: if cultural objectivism is factually right, no moral person should fully agree with it. After all, a moral person will not agree that some other culture's quite different social norm is genuinely 'moral' if it violates one's own moral norms. At the most, a moral person will only say that some other culture's immoral norm is what those people happen to think is moral

(but this person would quickly add that it really isn't moral). Descriptive cultural relativism does not harbour this internal incoherence, since its strict scientific neutrality about what may be 'really' moral has no normative implications. Only when cultural objectivism adds its normative judgement, that people within a culture rightly regard its morality as binding on everyone, does the practical incoherence emerge.

This practical incoherence within cultural objectivism has to be satisfactorily handled, or it must be abandoned as unsatisfying to all except those unmotivated by morality (and those sorts of people shouldn't be trusted on morality anyway). There is another version of moral relativism that could resolve cultural objectivism's internal tensions: social constructivism. For social constructivism, morality should be those social norms preferred by an aggregate of individuals who find those conventional norms to be in their rational self-interest. Social constructivism emphasizes a degree of voluntarism, rationality, and transparency left undeveloped by cultural objectivism: each individual voluntarily assents to a set of social norms that fit her internal motivating reasons, and could publicly agree to obey those norms (although actual public declarations need not be required) precisely under those personal conditions. Cultural objectivism, by contrast, involves the thorough inculcation and enforcement of moral norms regardless of personal consent, private satisfaction, or public agreement. In a way, social constructivism is mostly cultural objectivism with one crucial amendment: people within a culture rightly regard its morality as binding on everyone who can voluntarily and rationally accept that morality. With that amendment, the practical incoherence disappears, for a moral person in one society can understand how another person in a quite different society can have a genuine morality too, even though the two moralities contain contradictory norms.

Social constructivism exemplifies what is sometimes called 'inter-subjectivity' as an intermediate position between universal objectivity on one side and personal subjectivity on the other. From the perspective of social constructivism, universal objectivity is unrealistic and unreasonable – why should we expect all humanity to voluntarily live under the same social norms? On the other side, personal subjectivity risks anarchy and irrationality – people should not be encouraged to suppose that morality could be whatever they may wish it to be. On the contrary, intellectual deliberation (it is argued by social constructivism) can objectively show that certain important moral norms are rationally preferable for everyone involved, so that this minimal conventional morality must be more than what any single individual may happen to suppose morality is. Social constructivism elevates ethical subjectivism into strategic inter-subjective agreement on regulatory social norms. However, social constructivism doesn't really make it sound like we are still talking about natural morality. In fact, social constructivism, especially in its Enlightenment manifestations of social contract theory and early utilitarianism, sounds more like an abandonment of common and cultural morality in favour of changing the

subject to discerning artificial conventional rules for holding together a nation-state despite internal moral disagreement. Some Enlightenment humanists relied on social constructivism, but we should be sceptical towards those forms, since that strategy actually reduces humanism to a sub-ethical level of mutual negotiation over non-moral interests. The humanism sought here must bypass that conventionally relativistic dead end.

Let us return to cultural objectivism and its version of moral relativism. In a way, cultural objectivism can explain why moral realism seems so tempting: an encultured person committed to some morality takes a morally realistic stance when pronouncing moral judgements. Morality only works when people are sincerely committed to reporting objective moral matters factually; morality certainly doesn't feel subjective when you are expressing your moral convictions. However, it can't be the case that all of morality across humanity objectively and correctly reports moral truths; that cacophony of contradictory moral pronouncements only signals an inability to identify moral truth. Nor can it be the case that just one single morality is actually correctly reporting moral truths – that would amount to the position that some privileged culture is actually doing morality as designed, and all other cultures, to the extent that their moralities diverge, must be in deep error. Even if that somehow were the case, the naturalistic approach to morality could never discern such a situation.

Moral realism, it appears, must be rejected in order to make room for naturalistically studying morality. Moral naturalism, it could be said, means the 'end' of moral realism. Moral realism is dubious, but morality remains quite real, and people themselves take their morality in a quite realistic fashion. The naturalistic study of morality must be able to account for the way that morality works well when people themselves stay committed to moral realism. Moral realism, for people practising morality, is essential to the very point, the proper functioning, of morality. Moral realism is the 'end', one might say, of natural morality. We have already pointed to the way that cultural objectivism contains a sort of practical internal incoherence: if cultural objectivism were factually correct, no moral person should fully agree with it. We have now reached another practical incoherence within the naturalistic study of morality: a naturalistic study of morality fails to explain morality unless it avoids adopting moral realism, and its explanation of morality must account for people's adopted stance of moral realism.

These two practical incoherences can be reconciled with each other, in effect cancelling each other out. The theory of cultural objectivism is the culmination of moral naturalism, by finding that 'local' moral realism (the way that a person views one's own culture as largely morally right) is the key sign that morality is properly functioning in that culture. Cultural objectivism only needs to recognize this local moral realism, and does not additionally adopt 'universal' moral realism's view that there is just one correct morality for humanity. Because cultural objectivism neither foolishly declares that there is one correct morality, nor dangerously recommends that cultures try to impose their moral views on

all of humanity, it avoids any internal incoherence. However, achieving that intellectual coherence comes at a price: anyone who accepts cultural objectivism must themselves adopt the stance of only local moral realism, and not universal moral realism. Cultural objectivism is an ethical theory about the proper functioning of morality, not a way to justify one moral theory for all of humanity. In the realm of ethics, one must acquire some degree of intellectual humility and moral toleration: a cultural objectivist still can believe that one's own morality is preferable, but must also understand how people of other cultures can disagree. If you remain utterly committed to righteously imposing your culture's morality on all humanity, you don't want cultural objectivism – what you want is an absolutist ethical theory justifying the one true morality combined with some theory of morality describing how most of humanity is lost in ignorant immoral darkness.

Let us summarize the naturalistic theories of morality considered so far. Moral nihilism is just a hasty aversion to religion's absolutism or an ill-considered response to naturalism's repudiation of religious notions. Moral scepticism is similarly hasty, since it is culture, and not nature alone, that is responsible for sustaining moral practices and supplying the objects of moral judgement. Moral subjectivism also makes a poor fit with the way that humans are socialized into moral practices and make moral judgements. Social constructivist theories make a fine fit with the way societies design conventional laws and politics to surmount deep moral disagreements, but they don't fit the way humans do morality either. Cultural objectivism makes a much better fit with naturalistic accounts of why humanity evolved into the use of morality, how cultures socialize children into habits of morality, why socialized people view their morality quite objectively and realistically, and why those 'ethical platitudes' have serious appeal across most cultures.

Ethical theorizing could stop at this point, content with cultural objectivism, its overall relativistic stance on morality, and its preference for those ethical platitudes from common morality. Much of modern political theorizing in effect asks ethical theory to halt here, so that the independent work of constructing a political framework of rational rights and laws for all humanity can proceed. This is a modern Western strategy; most civilizations assume a deep entanglement between the moral life and the political realm, since the strength of moral conformity among a population affects the amount of political authority required for social order.[18] On the whole, that 'cultural ethics–politics of rights' combination is characteristic of most of twentieth-century humanism. It is a philosophically unsatisfying place for humanism to halt, however. Humanism's greatest contribution to global ethics might end up consisting only of ethical platitudes, which feel so thick yet get stretched to the breaking point when applied to the weightiest problems. It doesn't help that those ethical platitudes are pretty easy to follow when you live in a rich, stable country, but aren't so useful for those barely surviving in politically chaotic locales. Rationalized politics stands ready to sharply adjudicate the world's issues with

its structurally rigid rights and laws, yet we should wonder whether that artificial framework can wisely and justly rule over the world's diverse cultures without the sage advice of morality's counsel.

Humanism has the resources within its heritage to accomplish more than piously affirming ethical platitudes and endorsing the eighteenth century's list of political rights. Humanism achieved its impressive stature by emphasizing the critical evaluation and intellectual reformation of our social structures and cultural ways. Why should that hard ethical work come to an end?

Cultural Objectivism and Cosmopolitan Humanism

Cultural objectivism provides the soundest foundation in ethics by finding that morality consists of those habitual commitments of encultured peoples to follow a common moral code, expectations of basic virtues, and some set of complex cultural norms. Moral relativism has not been surpassed yet, of course. Many civilizations can enjoy their own specific ethics, since each civilization fills in the cultural variables needed for a concrete ethical theory. We are still in the realm of moral relativism in a double sense: morality exists because humanity exists; and variations to morality are caused by differing cultural conditions for human living. However, cultural objectivism adds a third component: cultures can intelligently re-evaluate and experimentally revise their moralities in light of their ideals of the social good. Since the contemporary humanism explored in this chapter seeks a limited and fallibly universal morality, this goal remains compatible not only with the naturalistic understanding of morality, but also with the ethical theorizing about intelligently modifying morality. There is nothing about how human cultures perpetuate and revise their moralities that forbids the possibility of a limited and fallibly universal morality from the outset. The reality of cultural objectivism is the best place to begin erecting a universal morality.

As we affirmed in our second section, encultured humans possess intelligent capacities to cognitively reflect on their cultures, including the moralities embedded in those cultures. Indeed, ethnic and cultural identities could not be constructed, deliberately managed, and carefully sustained against hegemonic and assimilationist pressures unless ethnic and cultural identity could be objects of reflective evaluation and comparison.[19] Humanity redesigns its moralities, just as it gradually modifies all social technologies. The opportunities for deliberate modification of morality are everywhere, since individuals can acquire some intelligent control over their conduct, even much of their habitual conduct, if they can consider their conduct as something controllable and modifiable over time. The story of the evolution of culture is essentially the story of the increased capacity of humans to regard some of their habitual conduct as modifiable with attention and practice, and as teachable through instruction. The story of the evolution of morality, as a mode of enculturation,

is essentially the story of the increased capacity of humans to regard and enforce some social norms as worthy of everyone's willing conformity. As objects of intelligent attention in their own right, many among humanity gradually came to regard such moral norms as deliberately modifiable, and proceeded to experimentally redesign the many moralities now embodied in diverse human cultures.

People are always encultured, yet they can be thoughtful and creative individuals who can contribute to cultural comparison and change. This view of philosophical anthropology suggests some principled treatments of sociality and enculturalization that bridge the transition from how humans are successfully social to ways in which they should continue to be social. For example, humans are properly encultured to permit opportunities for their flourishing, yet cultural essentialism is unsound, so we should be suspicious of social groups preventing individuals from changing their self-identities, dictating the identities of its members, aggressively assimilating new members, or denying their members' efforts to learn and think about the ways of their culture and those of other cultures. Ethnocentrism is similarly unsound, so we should be suspicious of any society claiming to exemplify the 'correct' way of life. Along these lines, we can see why excessive cultural elitism is unsound, since no society/culture is so elite or correct that it can reasonably classify the members of other societies as subhuman or less worthy of respect or dignity. Cultures still permit people to pass moral judgements on others (that's the point of having a morality), but individuals in other cultures are still to be regarded as worthy candidates for moral regard. Following this train of thought, excessive nationalism looks unsound as well. While citizenship can be a valuable status for people, no country should presume that a person's identity or loyalty is primarily characterized by their current domicile or citizenship, and people should not automatically prioritize their own nation's interests.

A reminder of how we have reached these kinds of normative evaluations is in order. The project of moral naturalism does not merely describe how humans are social and moral within cultures. It also comprehends how cultures are capable of providing conditions for successful human understanding and improvement of their own cultures. Cultures that foster such inappropriate conditions are not fulfilling their proper function, basically by failing to enhance intelligent human flourishing, which is the entire point of being encultured humans. The universality of the use of culture across humanity supplies the key to locating universal cultural norms to encourage for all humanity to use in their cultures. There is no need to independently specify separate criteria for what will count as a culture's moral progress – no ethnocentrism, rationalism, or absolutism is involved here. Only any culture's own capacity for properly sustaining itself is involved. Inappropriate cultural conditions are hence specifiable: obstructing knowledge about how sociality and morality works; preventing people from intelligently questioning and creatively modifying their social structures and moralities; isolating people to keep them ignorant about other

cultures; promoting an ideology that one's own culture must be uniquely correct; encouraging people to demean and demonize those in other cultures; and generally stunting the human capacity (such as it is) for empathy, trust, and co-operation with others.

A rather substantial list of cultural/moral norms is assembling: respect individuals valuing their identities and changing their self-identities; provide opportunities for people to acquire capacities for flourishing and learning; protect individuals from cultural insulation, isolation, assimilation, and ignorance; deny that any society has exclusively correct norms; disdain any effort to cast some peoples outside the circle of full humanity; and value people for themselves and not just with regard for their heritage, citizenship, or political status generally.

One tradition of ethical philosophy highly prioritizes all of these recommendations: humanism. Humanism is that ethical philosophy which regards humans and their moralities naturalistically; understands the proper functioning of morality and culture for their contributions to human flourishing in this life; regards every human being as equally worthy of moral treatment and protection; respects how people are highly social and need communal encouragement and support; promotes the capacity of intelligence for evaluating and modifying morality and wider cultural ways; privileges individual dignity and autonomy over the necessary but subordinate goals of cultural or political groups; and encourages ethical ideals promoting human intelligence and flourishing that all cultures can reasonably support.

Historically, as already mentioned, humanism relied on an alliance with the political liberalism of social contract theory to frame a political philosophy. It was a natural fit during the Enlightenment, since humanism's emphasis on individual autonomy was shared by political constructivism, and the resulting theory of human rights protected by democratic nation-states was incorporated into nineteenth-century humanism. By the late twentieth century, however, rising scepticism towards the ability of nation-states to respect multiculturalism and self-determination, or to advance humanistic ideals in the arena of international relations, has renewed interest in the tradition of cosmopolitanism.

Humanist in its ethics, liberally democratic in its attention to civil rights, and secular in its politics, cosmopolitanism has long supported ethnic toleration, cultural pluralism, equal rights, liberal democracy, civil liberties, global co-operation, and international peace.[20] A modest cosmopolitanism, compatible with typical moral performance, hospitable to people enjoying ethnic diversity and democratic self-determination, and workable with contemporary political structures such as nations, international bodies, and global accords, makes a good fit with humanism (paradigms include Appiah,[21] Benhabib,[22] Van Hooft,[23] and Delanty[24]). Judging the appropriate political frameworks for realizing cosmopolitanism's visions, or deciding whether and when primary citizenship could be transferred from a country to a world polis, is well beyond the purview of this chapter. All the same, a principled cosmopolitan ethics can be involved

with offering universal recommendations for intercultural deliberation about crucial issues such as guaranteeing everyone's basic freedoms, protecting everyone from severe harms, respecting cultural and ethnic diversity, promoting material and social opportunities for all, preserving people's capacities for self-governance, establishing civil liberties guaranteeing legal equality, and encouraging global solutions for planetary problems. The most comprehensive advocates for humanism systematically cover this broad ethical and political territory (recent prominent examples are Singer,[25] Kurtz,[26] and Tremblay[27]).

In conclusion, contemporary humanism is grounded on objectivity – the objectivity of scientific naturalism, the objective reality of morality, and a universal objectivity for ethics. All three modes of objectivity – natural, moral, and ethical – are jointly necessary for ensuring that contemporary humanism can justify its ambitious global ethics. Humanism's limited and revisable moral universalism can handle the major challenges from divine morality, moral subjectivism, and cultural relativism. Humanism must embrace moral naturalism, decline assistance from ethical naturalism, and respect the 'local moral realism' of cultural objectivism. Humanism can then aspire to the cosmopolitanism now appealing to the world's reasonable cultures starting to take global problems more seriously. On that planetary stage, humanist cosmopolitanism stands as a viable and realistic approach to global ethics.

Notes

1 Michael Martin, *Atheism, Morality, and Meaning* (Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus Books, 2002).
2 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), and also Robert Wright, *The Evolution of God* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009).
3 Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
4 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).
5 David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
6 See Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
7 Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).
8 Mark Eli Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
9 J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977).
10 Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Adina Roskies, 'How Does Neuroscience Affect Our Concept of Volition?', Annual Review of Neuroscience 33 (2010), pp. 109–130.
11 John Shook, 'Varieties of Twentieth Century American Naturalism', The Pluralist 6 (2011), pp. 1–17.

12 Dennis Krebs, *The Origins of Morality: An Evolutionary Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
13 Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), and also Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, *SuperCooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed* (New York: Free Press, 2011).
14 John Shook, 'The Design of Morality', in Liz Swan (ed.), *Origin(s) of Design in Nature* (New York: Springer, 2012).
15 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Penguin, 2009)
16 Greg M. Epstein, *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).
17 Consult overviews in Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay (ed.), *Ethical Naturalism: Current Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
18 See John Shook, 'Comparative Political Philosophy: Categorizing Political Philosophies Using Twelve Archetypes', Metaphilosophy 40 (2009), pp. 633–655.
19 See Stephan Fuchs, *Against Essentialism: A Theory of Culture and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2005), and Maykel Verkuyten, *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity* (London: Routledge, 2005).
20 See Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2007), and Richard Beardsworth, *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).
21 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
22 Seyla Benhabib, 'Another Cosmopolitanism', in R. Post (ed.), *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 13–80.
23 Stan Van Hooft, *Cosmopolitanism: A Philosophy for Global Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).
24 Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
25 Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), and id., *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress*, rev. edn. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
26 Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism* (Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus Books, 2008).
27 Rodrigue Tremblay, *The Code for Global Ethics: The Humanist Principles* (Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus Books, 2010).

Further Reading

The literature on humanism as an ethical theory, and metaethical issues for humanism, is still thin and unsystematic. Besides the works cited above, a few more deserve mention. Humanism's philosophical treatises typically select and prioritize its moral principles, and adjudicate among candidates from Aristotle and Epicurus to J. S. Mill and Nietzsche for status as exemplary humanist thinkers. Works about humanism therefore

look very much like surveys of naturalistic and secular freethought; consult major treatises such as Karl Pearson, *The Ethic of Freethought* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901); J. M. Robertson, *A History of Freethought*, 4th edn. (London: Watts, 1936); Georges Minois, *Histoire de l'athéisme: Les Incroyants dans le monde occidental des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

Among twentieth-century works tackling philosophical foundations of humanism, four comprehensive efforts by leading thinkers stand out: Julian Huxley, *Essays of a Humanist* (Harper & Row, 1964), repr. as *Evolutionary Humanism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992); Paul Kurtz, *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1983); Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 7th edn. (London: Continuum, 1993); and Antony Flew, *Atheistic Humanism* (Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus Books, 1993). Additional perspectives on the philosophy of humanism are presented by Gardner Williams, *Humanistic Ethics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951); Richard Robinson, *An Atheist's Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1997); and William Murry, *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Skinner House, 2007). Notable collections of essays about humanism include Julian Huxley (ed.), *The Humanist Frame* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), and Tony Pinn (ed.), *What Is Humanism, and Why Does It Matter?* (Durham: Acumen, 2013). Philip Kitcher's *The Ethical Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011) is a major fresh contribution. For a highly critical examination of humanism, see Norman Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005).

Humanism's reliance on naturalistic approaches to moral psychology and ethical responsibility, which can stand independently from religiosity and supernaturalism, is discussed by Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (London: Routledge 2003), Steve Stewart-Williams, *Darwin, God, and the Meaning of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004). Prominent primatologist Frans de Waal has enthusiastically joined the effort to locate human morality on a natural continuum with primate behaviour. See his books *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Random House, 2009) and *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013).

While several behavioural sciences are more accommodating towards a natural and basic morality (with innumerable local variations) displayed across humanity, the brain sciences and neurophilosophy are not. Put simply, why should a practice evolved for human survival, and a brain capacity to conform to that practice, deliver sufficient reasons to be moral today? Being told that the authority behind moral rules lies in the way ancestors benefited from them is to be told either an irrelevant fable or an unpleasant secret. Does morality really seem to be only for reproductive fitness and/or group survival, and if that were actually true, wouldn't we want no one to really believe it? The more our cognitive capacity to conduct ourselves morally is naturalized, strengthening the grip of a past beyond our control upon responsible 'choices', the less we seem to be actually behaving morally. Richard Joyce concludes that moral naturalism eliminates

morality in *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), contravening the view that morality as a practical matter can survive its naturalization, as Derk Pereboom proposes in *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This debate continues in Manuel Vargas, *Building Better Beings: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Morality as a cultural and intercultural matter has long had humanism's attention. George Kateb's *Human Dignity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011) and Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012) are highly recommended. Also consult Robert B. Tapp (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Humanist Perspectives* (Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus Books, 2000); Will Kymlicka and William Sullivan, *The Globalization of Ethics: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Richard Madsen and Tracy Strong, *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Jorn Rusen and Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009). Additional international perspectives include Lenn Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Daisaku Ikeda and Tu Weiming, *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism and the Quest for Global Peace* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010); and Junjie Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010).