

BOOK REVIEW

CHRISTEN, M.; VAN SCHAİK, C.; FISCHER, J.; HUPPENBAUER, M.; TANNER, C. (eds.). 2014. *Empirically Informed Ethics: Morality between Facts and Norms*. London, Springer, 349 p.

Historically, facts and norms have been considered as two separate realms, each one approached by different analytical tools and each one studied with different purpose in mind. *Empirically Informed Ethics: Morality between Facts and Norms* gathers contributions from philosophers, theologians and empirical scientists who, in spite of their firm standings in their own disciplines, see the value of crossing to realms beyond their traditional one and learning how these other realms can inform their own work.

This book is of interest for two main reasons. On the one hand it provides an overview of recent developments in empirical investigations of morality. On the other hand it assesses their importance and impact for ethical thinking. *Empirically Informed Ethics* is suitable for those who are new into cross-disciplinary work, those who want to learn more on the benefits and caveats that come with it, or just to get a picture of empirical investigations within ethics.

The book is organized in *six parts*; each one with the exception of the last one consists in three chapters. *Part I*, entitled 'What is empirically informed ethics?', begins with a chapter (Chapter 1) by M. Christen and M. Alfano outlining the field of empirically informed ethics. They start by presenting the phenomenon that empirically informed ethics investigates, namely moral agency. This chapter continues with some important distinctions in how empirical data is used, e.g. as an indicator of the feasibility of ethical thought, as foundations of normative theory or as framing of an ethical problem. In what follows Christen and Alfano provide an overview of the different kinds of empirical methodologies and data that can inform ethics. The chapter concludes by presenting several problems raised by this approach.

The second chapter by J. Fischer focuses on how understanding of the field affects the role of empirical research on morality for ethics. Fischer provides three arguments in favor of comprehending ethics as a rational justification of moral judgment, the first one rooted in the very essence of morality, the second on its authenticity and the third one on its being necessary to deal with moral conflict. Fischer also argues that empirically informed ethics "can deliver crucial insights into the type of reasons involved in moral reflection" (p. 39) and thus "be better suited in guiding us to the right moral thinking compared to an ethics that purely understands itself as the rational justification of morality" (p. 43).

The final chapter of *Part I* is by A. Naves de Brito (Chapter 3) and deals with moral behavior and moral sentiments. He starts with the hypothesis that "moral values can be understood and their authority explained on the basis of how humans are naturally disposed to behave in groups" (p. 45). He draws a distinction between

universalism and egalitarianism in relation to a theory of value and explains the different problems each of these have in terms of naturalization. For universalism this relates to the search for the natural basis of normativity in morality, whereas in egalitarianism to the natural basis for considering equality as a moral value (p. 57). In his conclusion Naves de Brito puts forward that “universality and equality are to be defended in any tolerable human concept of morality, simply because they are constituent elements of human morality, and not fundamentally because it is rationally plausible to choose them” (p. 62).

Part II, entitled ‘Investigating origins of morality’, starts with a chapter by C. van Schaik and colleagues (Chapter 4). Van Schaik and colleagues’ chapter ‘Morality as a biological adaptation – An evolutionary model based on the lifestyle of human foragers’ offers a departure from the traditional way in which morality is seen as rooted in rational reflection. They present *sympathy, concern with reputation, the wish to conform and the sense of fairness* as the “major components of human moral psychology upon which our reflective morality is built” (p. 77). Furthermore they suggest that these moral emotions arise very early, which suggest an innate moral core.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) by S.F. Brosnan deals with the evidence for moral behaviors in non-human primates. She starts by discussing the evolution of moral behaviors, making clear that the scientific goal of understanding what moral behavior is and the ethicist’s goal of determining what ought to be are not the same. Brosnan describes that behavior that is shared between species due to common descent is known as homology, whereas behavior that may be shared among species due to common environmental pressures, constraints and opportunities is known as convergence. Social interventions, reciprocity, inequity and prosocial behavior are four behaviors put forward by Brosnan as behaviors that uphold social norms. In addition she puts moral emotions as a potential mechanism for moral behavior that is common between humans and other species.

This part ends with a chapter by J.J. Prinz (Chapter 6) entitled ‘Where do morals come from? A plea for a cultural approach’. Prinz argues that such an approach has implications for “how to think about the biological contributions to morality and the processes by which moral values are acquired” (p. 99). In the first part of his chapter he discusses what morality is, including the role of emotion and moral judgment and the content of morality. The second part of the chapter focuses on where moral values come from. Is morality innate or is it influenced by culture and history? Connected to this, Prinz argues that the scientific study of morality should include “fields that track sources of cultural variation” (p. 116). This chapter is a very nice addition to this part of the book as a call for even further expansion of the sources of empirical data used to inform ethics.

Part III of the book is entitled ‘Assessing the moral agent’ and starts with a chapter by C. Tanner and M. Christen on moral intelligence (Chapter 7). They start by defining what moral intelligence is—the agent’s capacity to process and manage moral problems—and then move on to present a model that provides the foundation for the moral intelligence framework, a framework for understanding moral competencies. According to Tanner and Christen, the moral intelligence framework includes: a reference system (moral compass), ability and willingness to prioritize (moral commitment), ability to recognize a moral issue (moral sensitivity), an ability to develop and determine a morally satisfactory course of action (moral problem solving) and the ability to build up moral behavior by acting consistently despite barriers (moral resoluteness) (p. 122).

Then they introduce the elements and moral competences that they deem as essential for moral agents, and conclude by presenting some ideas on how to improve moral intelligence.

The next chapter (Chapter 8) is on 'Moral brains – possibilities and limits of the neuroscience of ethics'. K. Prehen and H.R. Heekeren start this chapter by providing a brief overview of traditional recent psychological models on moral judgment and behavior. Then they introduce the neuroscientific approach and the methods applied to the study of the 'moral brain', such as examination of brain damaged patients and neurostimulation. They move on to present major lines of research while at the same time offering a critical overview of these. They end by presenting their own empirical findings on the influence of individual differences in moral judgment competences based on neuroimaging studies (p. 138).

The last chapter of this part (Chapter 9) focuses on using experiments in ethics. Here S. Nichols, M. Timmons and T. Lopez start by introducing ethical conservatism. They move on to highlight the problem of moral luck and two different epistemic accounts of luck-blame judgments: the rational inference account and the epistemic bias account. Nichols and colleagues then discuss psychological research on moral luck, as well as luck in the context of control and negligence.

Part IV of *Empirically Informed Ethics*, entitled 'Justification between rational reflection and intuitions', starts with a chapter on intuitions in moral reasoning by G.J.M.W. van Thiel and J.J.M van Delden. The authors discuss normative empirical reflective equilibrium as a model for substantial justification of moral claims. Van Thiel and van Delden argue that this model differs from the traditional reflective equilibrium approach in two main respects: (i) moral intuitions of agents other than the thinker are included and (ii) empirical research is used to obtain information about these intuitions (p. 179). In this chapter van Thiel and van Delden also discuss four types of coherence in moral justification: explanatory, deductive, deliberative and analogical coherence, as well as durability, transcendence and experienced perception as ways to assess the justificatory power of moral intuitions.

Chapter 11 by M. Musschenga touches on issues of moral expertise. In this chapter Musschenga argues that in order to strengthen the quality of reflective equilibrium the initial judgments should come from moral experts. According to the author, "a moral expert is someone who, by virtue of his knowledge, training, experience, and other skills [...] is competent enough to make justifiable judgments on issues in his particular moral domain" (p. 200). In terms of the limits of moral expertise, Musschenga argues that "[f]or moral experts the ultimate source of moral beliefs and values that guide their judgment and decisions are not their own moral views, but the views of society at large which are embodied in the relevant documents and policies" (p. 207).

The final chapter of this part (Chapter 12) touches on issues of social variability in moral judgments. In this chapter E.H. Witte and T. Gollan introduce the prescriptive attribution concept by its formal analysis, report two extensions of the model, present empirical measurement of the justification and conclude by offering some empirical results on determinants of prescriptive attributions.

Part V, 'Practicing ethics in the real world', starts with a chapter (Chapter 13) by D. Narvaez and D. Lapsley on becoming a moral person. In particular they emphasize moral development and moral character as a result of social interactions.

In the next chapter (Chapter 14), M. Huppenbauer and C. Tanner write about ethical leadership with a focus on how to integrate empirical and ethical aspects for promoting moral decision-making in business practice. In doing so, the core of their argument is based on the idea that "empirical research without normative reflection is 'blind' [...] similarly normative reflection is 'empty' without empirical insights" (p. 240). I find this chapter in particular to truly speak about the goals of the book.

The last chapter of this part (Chapter 15), 'The empirical turn in bioethics', by T. Krones, emphasizes the benefits of transdisciplinary work within bioethics, namely to "improve theory and practice of medicine and health care" (p. 256).

Part VI, 'Critical Postscript', ends with the chapter by A. Kauppinen entitled 'Ethics and empirical psychology – Critical remarks to empirically informed ethics'. Kauppinen starts by presenting two main theses of empirical facts within armchair traditionalism and then presents how these theses are seen under what he calls ethical empiricism. In both the bold and modest claims of empirical empiricism what is key is that armchair traditionalism is rejected. Kauppinen then charts various ways in which empirical results might be or have been claimed to be important to metaethics and normative ethics, and closes the chapter by suggesting that "while armchair reflection will and ought to continue to be central to ethical inquiry, findings about what, why, and how we judge may stimulate and even challenge its results at several important junctures" (p. 305).

Overall the book is clear and covers a wide range of important aspects for those aiming to make the contributions of ethics more valuable and relevant for society. In particular, I enjoyed reading the opening chapter, the chapter by Prinz and the one by Huppenbauer and Tanner. This book deserves to be read by anyone interested in stepping out of their traditional norms and facts boundaries or by those who have never found the world of facts and norms as mutually exclusive realms, and particularly by anyone new to this field. For those already familiar with some (if not all) of the topics that the book covers, there is still some benefit to be gained from reading about some recent empirical investigations in areas in which they may not have such detailed knowledge or using different approaches from the ones they are familiar with.

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